

## **Chairman's address for AGM 28th April 2016**

### **Steering Group and how it all started**

I was thinking about the developments in our U3A over the year and began to reflect on how it all started. So I shall include a summary as I go along. In 2012, when Malling U3A could not take any more members in the hall where they meet, as we cannot close membership or have a waiting list, it was decided to open a second U3A in the area. The process to start another U3A began and a public meeting was held to gauge interest.

Margaret Knock (who became our Business Secretary) and I saw the advert in our local magazine. I knew nothing about this organisation but as I was between jobs, I thought it might give me something to do with my spare time until I get another job.

Around 80 people turned up at the meeting and there were different speakers from Kent and the South East Region, telling us all about U3A. The information captured my interest so I filled in a questionnaire stating my thoughts on a group subject or two. I also put down that I would be happy to help on the Committee.....

A couple of weeks ago all those other interested people sat round a table to decide roles. I agreed to be Chairman until our first AGM in May 2015.

Where do we hold our Steering Group meetings? There were quite a few of us so our homes couldn't cope too well. We had no members yet, so no funds to pay for a meeting venue for the Steering Group. Asda were very keen to support local activities and offered their 'community' room to use whenever we wanted and free of charge. They even provided refreshments. For each meeting this newly formed bunch of U3A enthusiasts were met by security and led in single file up the escalator through the back of the stock room to a secure room just past the staff canteen. Then the same process to get out to the shop floor.

We met fortnightly in those early days. Our arrangement with Asda continued until one day, they asked us to change our meeting day at very short notice. They told us they had to hold a disciplinary interview. I could see that this arrangement was becoming inconvenient for Asda. We soon found other free accommodation in the Golf Club. Aren't we so lucky and we tell them so! For the price of a coffee or other beverage we ask attendees to purchase, the manager lets us use their wonderful space. The Committee has continued to meet there ever since. Our usage has grown as SIGs like Floristry, Ukulele, Play Reading, Bridge and Mah-Jong have been meeting there.

We started with around 100 members in October 2012 with around 20 groups. Here we are now after nearly 4 years, grown to 310 members to 53 SIGs. Out of interest 116 members live in Kings Hill.

By May 2013 the Steering Group was into their stride and at our first AGM that year, our Constitution was adopted and I was duly elected as Chairman for 3 years as were the majority of the Steering Group.

## **Committee, Activities and Thank-Yous**

I will let you know as we go along, which Committee Members are standing down. There are 6 of us who were there from the beginning and who are all standing down and I will let you know who they are as I go along.

**Officers:** I have worked with Joyce as Treasurer and Margaret as Business Secretary since the very beginning in 2012. It has been a real pleasure working you both. Joyce has agreed to stay on for a second term, as she has this option under the Constitution. **I would like to thank her for keeping our finances in good order and being of great support to me.**

Margaret has been our Secretary since 2012 and has done a huge amount behind the scenes as well as getting SIGs off the ground. **Margaret will be standing down today so a big thank you** for all your enthusiasm and your hard work.

**SIGs:** We started with a number of groups for members to join and Conveners at the ready to take names of interested members. Now we have grown to 53 SIGs and I am sure will grow even more as we are never short of members coming forward with ideas for groups, and offering to convene the meetings. As a result there is a real diverse choice of subjects and activities and something for everyone. New this year are Hill Walking, Bake and Taste, Quilting and Sewing, Don't Get Me Started and Ukulele. The only problem we face is how we can fit in all the SIGs we want to join as there are so many. Jan Atkins has been the Groups Co-ordinator for a while now, previously leading the Hospitality Team. Jan will be **standing down from the Committee today so thanks to Jan** for all her hard work. June Rose will be replacing Jan.

**Conveners:** We started with around 20 conveners to get groups off the ground at the beginning. Now we have around 40?, some of whom convene 2 groups. Conveners give up their time to ensure we all enjoy attending our groups. You are really appreciated and I know your members appreciate all that you do. **Thank you.**

**Monthly Meetings:** We have had a Tiller Girl, Rudyard Kipling, Pam Ayres, Dame Edna Everidge and just last month a personal friend of the Mafia whom she called The Godfather! **Thanks to John Russell for being our Speakers Co-ordinator and arranging a good variety of Speakers over the past three and a half years. John will be standing down today.**

To stop third age hecklers, who sat at the back at our monthly meetings, and let's face it none of us has the hearing we used to, we introduced a wonderful roving microphone in the form of Kay. Now everyone can hear what everyone is saying. Kay is the force behind Mark who joins him at our meetings to take names and welcome you all. **Thank you Kay.**

Our U3A has now purchased the quality of equipment to improve your experience and enjoyment.

**Over the past year Barry has been managing our monthly meetings and I would like to thank him for all his hard work.**

**Hospitality Team:** Over the years members have volunteered to help make us teas and coffees as well as give us a warm welcome. Some were very new to our U3A and felt it was a good way of getting to know people. Thanks to all those who have been and are currently involved in the Hospitality Team. Now they have progressed to afternoon tea for over 100 members today!

**Many thanks to Margaret, June, Jan, Barbara and Joyce for arranging our afternoon tea and making today a success. Barbara White** will take June Rose's place as co-ordinator for hospitality.

**Newsletter:** You may not know that we are the envy of some U3As. Can anyone guess what it is? Our wonderful newsletter. Each month I proof read it, I always end up laughing at the final word. Our newsletter gets longer thanks to our members adding articles and photos. It is so good, there are very few notices at monthly meetings! Julian is **standing down from the Committee today but has agreed to continue as Editor for the near future. Thanks to Julian for spending so much time producing a wonderful newsletter.**

**Welcome Meetings:** I have had the pleasure of meeting new members at our welcome meetings over a cup of coffee. We hold around 4 a year and once again the Golf Club has provided their impressive facilities for these meetings. Holding these meetings reinforces the friendliness that we are known for at our U3A. Most found out about us by word of mouth and had heard about our U3A being a friendly group. This is a credit to you all here today. **Thank you to Ron who is our Welcome** representative on the Committee. He will be standing down today.

Our **MOTO** Group (Members On Their Own) are going from strength to strength in numbers. They have an amazing number of events organized by each member of the group. **Thanks to Elaine** for making sure there is a great programme.

We now have a Luncheon Club and organise Christmas Lunch. All these are open to every member. **Luncheon Club:** Each month, a group of our members visit a local pub/restaurant for lunch and conversation. **Thanks to John Mourné for getting this off the ground and to June for ensuring it continues.**

**Christmas lunch:** All these events take a lot of organizing, thanks to all those who have been involved the past two successful events – Margaret, June, Mark and John Mourné. Around 100 members come along and there is another coming up in December so watch this space.

**Trips:** We have extended our offering to trips organized by Mark. The Globe, Bletchley, Theatre Trips to The Marlowe in Canterbury, Law Courts to name a few.

**Events:** It was decided that it shouldn't be the Committee to decide on events so SIGs were invited to organize them. We are now holding our 3<sup>rd</sup> games evening which is being organized by the Board Games SIG (on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June), following in the footsteps of the Play-Reading SIG who put on a Murder Mystery with a Thai meal, the Wine Appreciation who organized a wine tasting quiz. Recently our MOTO (members on their own) group ran a quiz too.

Finally **thanks to Mark.** What can I say. Does this man never sleep? He took on Membership Secretary in 2012, setting up a database from the application forms he designed. If this wasn't

enough to occupy him, he agreed to produce the handbook; he taught himself how to build a website and is responsible for our wonderful website; he then started to organize a trip or two. Originally we thought 3 per year might be good, but we are going to 2 in August alone this year and now a trip to France! Mark has been instrumental in finding PA equipment for our meetings, and the new system is I am sure you will agree, far superior. Mark volunteered to be part of the trial for the new U3A Beacon management system for the administration of our U3A. There was to be some lead in time to get us up and running so the Committee agreed to ask Mark to stay on the Committee for another year to see all the Beacon work through. Of course, knowing how Mark works, we are up and running in no time and training workshops for Conveners have taken place. The plan now is that he will gradually hand over Membership Secretary over this coming year. **Enormous appreciation and thanks from me and on behalf of all the members and thank you for agreeing to stay on the Committee for a bit longer.**

**Volunteering:** Most Chairmen I speak to have told me it is very difficult to get volunteers as well as members to stand on the Committee. I feel we are very lucky here at Kings Hill and District. Our Committee will be up to full strength with those members who are nominated today. This means there are voices that represent our members' views. It is not just the Committee and Conveners who give their time. A number of you host meetings, provide refreshments and resources, give other members lifts or take it in turns to present the topic each month. This is what U3A is about rather than a few members doing it all only to burn out. Volunteers are always welcome, so please feel free to offer support. **Thank you for making our U3A what it is**, a friendly and vibrant organisation that cares about its members.

**Finally:** I feel that our U3A is in very good shape to hand over. Comments like 'Why didn't I find you 3 years ago when I gave up work, I have been climbing the walls.' 'U3A at Kings Hill has been a life line to me since I lost my husband' make it all worthwhile. There will still be work for the new Committee to do, but the foundations are there set in place over the last 4 years. New team, fresh ideas and our U3A will continue to progress. Changes will inevitably mean things will be different. New technology will make life easier. U3A is a wonderful organization and I have thoroughly enjoyed the privilege and experience of being your first Chairman at Kings Hill and District. Good luck to the new Chairman and the Committee.

**Karen Usher, Chairman, Kings Hill & District U3A**

**28th April 2016**