

u3a

Alnwick

learn, laugh, live



The First 21 Years

Editorial Team

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The Editorial Team are grateful to the u3a members who have submitted contributions to this Booklet

Alnwick u3a Chairpersons

2000 - Steering Group - Maureen Stephenson	2011 - Hazel Shell
2001 - Maureen Stephenson	2012 - Peter Carter
2002 - Maureen Stephenson	2013 - Peter Carter
2003 - Bryan Gardner	2014 - Joy Taylor
2004 - Eileen Peckham	2015 - Joy Taylor (resigned) Steve Ridpath
2005 - Eileen Peckham	2016 - Jean Findlay
2006 - Dilys Carter	2017 - Jean Findlay
2007 - Dilys Carter	2018 - Meryl McConnell
2008 - Jean Brigstock	2019 - Meryl McConnell
2009 - Jean Brigstock	2020 - Kathy Platt
2010 - Hazel Shell	

Alnwick u3a is 21 this year

As current Chairperson of Alnwick u3a, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the Booklet which has been produced in celebration of the organisation's twenty-one years presence in Alnwick.

Last year the committee was in the process of arranging a party for members to celebrate twenty years of u3a activity in Alnwick.

Then, as we all know, Covid struck and the arrangements were postponed for a year but sadly, as things have transpired, a party was not going to be possible this year either.

It was decided instead, therefore, to create a small Booklet charting the beginnings of the u3a in Alnwick and a selection of the many and varied activities of the movement since the

year 2000. Obviously, such a small memento can only document a small proportion all of the wonderful things that have taken place over the years.

It is my hope, however, that the following articles, memories, and photographs, shared by some of the current members with you, will inspire you all to make the most of your years as members of Alnwick u3a.

As you will read below, there has been a good amount of learning, laughing, and living over the years and long may it continue.

Kathy Platt

Our founder, long-standing Secretary and now Honorary President, Maureen Stephenson, tells us how it all began:

From Small Beginnings ...

In August 2000, twenty-one people met in the Lindisfarne Centre and decided to start a u3a in Alnwick. Many suggestions were put forward for group activities and several people volunteered to be group conveners. A Steering Group was formed to move things forward and our Inaugural Meeting was held on 16th October.



This was very well attended by 60 people, including members of Morpeth, Wooler, Ponteland, Tynedale and Whickham u3as, who came to lend their support and tell us about aspects of their own u3as (or U3As as they were then known). John Lloyd from Wearside u3a spoke about the national structure of the Third Age Trust and how we fitted in.

The suggested group activities were used to compile wall posters to be displayed at the Inaugural Meeting, so that others could add their names and

further ideas. By the end of the first monthly meeting in November, there were 45 paid-up members and dates had been agreed for various interest groups — singing, theatre, gardening, read-a-book, poetry, bird watching, discussion, philosophy, and genealogy — and the first u3a walk had already taken place. It was agreed that the December meeting should take the form of a Christmas social occasion. Patterns were already being established for our future development.

The first year was a very busy one. The Steering Group found themselves involved in a great deal of boring stuff, like agreeing on a constitution and applying for formal membership of the Third Age Trust, who provide us with advice and regular information about what is happening nationally. A programme of speakers for the monthly meetings had to be arranged, new ideas had to be taken on board and, most importantly, members and prospective members had to be kept informed of these new developments.

As quickly as membership subscriptions were coming in, they were being used up in postage, photocopying, room hire and supplies of paper, envelopes, and stamps, as we became increasingly expert at using computers to produce regular newsletters. Communication with members has always been a high priority. Our membership is drawn from

such a wide geographical area that it would be easy to lose contact with people, especially as the monthly meetings, which provide the opportunity to circulate up to-date information, are attended by only about half our members.

Despite the cost, therefore, we have always thought it important to produce newsletters to keep all members informed and involved in what is happening. As patterns of group activities have become more established, it has been possible to send information by email, but there are still members who can only receive it by post.

In October 2001 we had our first Annual General Meeting, formally elected our first committee, and adopted the constitution. By the end of that year, we had produced the first Yellow Booklet, with a programme of monthly speakers for the year and details of group activities. However, there were still so many new developments and events to tell members about and the newsletters kept on coming!

There were the theatre trips and other outings, there were opportunities to join other u3as in the region, either at large regional events or joint activities with neighbouring u3as, there were new groups forming, there was information about national conferences and requests for us to consider motions for the National AGM.

We began to be invited to take part in consultation exercises by other organisations, such as the Alnwick Garden and

Willowburn Leisure Centre, who wanted to involve older people in their planning, and Sunderland University, who were carrying out research into why u3a works.

It was our determination from the outset that u3a activities should continue throughout the year and not be governed by school closure dates. That led to the practice of having an "Awayday" each summer, usually in July, to replace the monthly meeting. Our first venture was in Craster, followed in subsequent years by Rock, Howick, Druridge Bay and Morpeth.

In the first year we also organised a Tyne cruise as the August monthly gathering, and this seemed to establish the practice of an outing each August, many incorporating a river or canal cruise.

There have been visits to art exhibitions in places as far afield as Edinburgh, and members have organised holidays in this country and abroad to the gardens of Cornwall, the cities of Prague, Budapest and Vienna, a language trip to Spain and a holiday in Venice.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the development of Alnwick u3a is that it has maintained the original principles of the u3a movement, that members come together to enjoy learning from one another. We now have over a hundred and sixty members sharing their interests, making new friends, and learning something new all the time.

Long may it continue.

Maureen Stephenson

Our Groups

The mainstays of all u3as are their Groups. Over the years, groups have arisen, and some have fallen by the wayside. Group co-ordinators also come and go as personal circumstances change, though many are long-standing stalwarts. The reports which follow are strictly in alphabetical order.

Architecture Group



In May 2006, our members seem to have taken over the Waterside Bistro in Haddington

At the end of 2003, a small number of us got together to start an Architecture Group. We decided to spend the winter months sharing our knowledge of buildings and, in the summer, to visit places of interest. This has happened until joint activities ended in March 2020 because of Covid. Our initial outings were by car, but our April 2005 outing was so popular that we hired a minibus. But it wasn't big enough, so we had to take a car as well. Since then, we have usually had a coach.

Where have we been in these sixteen years of outings? There have been 82 outings and we have travelled south to

County Durham and Yorkshire, west to Cumbria and north to Scotland. We have been as far as Stirling and Falkland in the north and Nostell Priory (near Wakefield) in the south.

We have been to some places more than once enabling us to explore different parts of cities such as Edinburgh, Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham, and York. By popular demand we have been to Rosslyn Chapel three times.

We have visited buildings of all periods from Roman camps to modern buildings like the Sage. In between we have seen Saxon churches, Norman castles, Gothic

Halls and Georgian houses. We have been to most of the houses open to the public, and some only open to groups, within reach of Alnwick.



Linlithgow & Hopetoun House, west of Edinburgh - September 2016

An advantage of many stately homes is that they usually have catering facilities. Planning an outing usually begins with finding somewhere for lunch! However, this has had the advantage that we visited some smaller towns and villages which we might not otherwise have seen, so discovering buildings we would otherwise have missed.

Have the outings always gone to plan? Overall, yes. But one sticks in my mind. Our proposed visit to Rievaulx Abbey and Helmsley in July 2005 was a problem. Two days before we went, heavy flooding in Yorkshire left the Abbey under water and it was closed.

We went instead to the National Trust property, Rievaulx Terraces, which is on the hill overlooking the Abbey. We got there, just. The coach kept breaking down – four or five times when going up Sutton Bank!

While we were enjoying Helmsley, our driver took the coach to a garage. We

set off back on time, but the problem soon recurred.

When we reached Middlesbrough, we were stopped by the police and not allowed to carry on. But we were allowed to go a little way, and park outside a pub.

As luck would have it, the pub was offering two meals for the price of one – an offer which our members were not slow to take advantage of. However, we arrived back in Alnwick some hours later than planned.

Then, of course, we have had meetings. Every November we have met to review the year and plan for the following year. In the other winter months, we have had presentations from some of the members, or we have watched and discussed a DVD.



Waiting for our guide to show us around Durham Castle in April 2005

In recent years, we have held a meeting when a group of members have talked about a favourite building, a building they would like to visit, or a building of a particular period. These meetings introduced a variety of often quite different buildings.

At our last face to face meeting in February 2020, we saw the third part of John Betjeman's television series on Victorian Architects and Architecture. The March meeting was scheduled to have individual members talk about a Victorian building, but lockdown interfered.

We began again in May on Zoom, and there been meetings twice a month

since then, with around 30 participants. During the remainder of 2020, we continued with our explorations of Victorian buildings, and this year we have moved on to more recent buildings. Still, plenty to see and lots of architecture to discuss!

Peter Carter

Art Appreciation Group

Some years ago, the Art Appreciation Group visited the Sunderland Art Gallery, situated next to Mowbray Park. The reason for the visit was that there was a small exhibition of work by Lowrie, and the group had decided to go to see it.

After viewing the exhibition, which was a little smaller than we had anticipated, we wandered around the gallery and came upon a lovely display of Maling and Sunderland Lustre Ceramics which was delightful.

A few members, who were not from the North-east, were really thrilled at the lovely displays and did not realise that the ceramics were produced in the area. After having lunch and walking around the impressive atrium, we decided to view the Grayson Perry exhibition.

On the wall was a tapestry he had put together and, at first, we didn't think much of it, in fact we thought it was a bit tatty! However, we were given a guided

tour by a truly knowledgeable young man who was, obviously, a fan of Perry.



When he had taken us around the exhibition room and explained the theme of each of the tapestries, we were quite captivated and realised what an impressive artist Perry was.

There were also several of his paintings on show. The whole visit was extremely interesting and worth the journey.

Another memorable visit, made by several of the Art Appreciation group, was to the Granary Art Gallery in Shoe Lane, Berwick Upon Tweed where there was an exhibition of the work of JMW Turner.

The gallery was in an old building which had been restored without losing too much of its atmosphere. The exhibition was quite different from what we had expected, showing a unique aspect of Turner's art, more than we had anticipated in fact. The pictures, or drafts of pictures, were amazing and were drafts of several of the paintings which hang in various art galleries all over in the country.

Turner built up each picture, experimenting with the light, clouds, and other aspects of a good painting. We could see each picture being built up

and improved upon or altered until the artist was satisfied with the effect. There was a miniature of each of the actual paintings he had built up, which showed his draughtsmanship qualities.

We were also lucky that day as there was an Art teacher at the exhibition, who was very knowledgeable about Turner, and he explained to us the salient points of Turner's drafts.

It was a fantastic exhibition which shed new light on the artist, illustrating the care and attention he applied to each of his paintings. The visit was a complete success and those of the group who had joined us at the Granary were extremely impressed and thoroughly enjoyed the visit.

Barbara Wood

Book Group

"So many books, so little time"

This is attributed to Frank Zappa, and it makes sense to many. One of the delights of a more leisured life is that there is now more time to read widely, almost perhaps indiscriminately, as eye or ear are caught by others' comments and recommendations.

Retirement and joining u3a eleven years ago provided my stimulus to get on with it. Not that I hadn't always had one or two books in tow before but just that there wasn't now the demand to put it down quite so frequently!

I joined the already well-established Alnwick u3a Book Group and immediately found myself among a congenial group of fellow readers. We follow the same patterns now as then. We meet monthly (when possible) in one another's homes.

Our numbers are such that we mostly get to propose a book of our own choice annually – and it's become a rule that we must have read it ourselves before recommending it to others (there has been an occasional 'blind booboo') and with choices available in advance most

of us excel at finding a copy in good time by fair means or



Novels – biography – non-fiction of a variety of sorts – even once a Shakespeare play (though there were a curious number of absentees that month): all is grist to our mill, and we often comment that we’re led to read something of stimulus we’d be unlikely to choose on our own.

A book will be introduced by the chooser, and everyone has their opportunity to comment, with lots of discussion back and forth. After a time, it’s possible to guess from what angle many of our members will approach it – plot, language, characterisation, psychological perception – and we never expect all to agree but the greatest accolade of a

Discussion Group

As an attendee at the first get-together of people looking to set up a local u3a, many matters were discussed. I was keen to start a Discussion Group, as many members would be living alone, with no one to converse with about national and local matters on a regular

choice is ‘Well, I’ll look out for other things they’ve written’. Occasionally we go for an added extra: always in August, the group shares what else it’s been reading, and people scribble down titles!

Once several took turns in describing the books that helped to lead them into this lifetime’s enjoyment and, more recently we’ve shared our version of ‘private passions’ with one another – speaking briefly about an all-consuming hobby and mentioning an introductory title that others could try if they choose.

A meal together is not unknown and once Durham University Library received us on an official visit, for which they’d retrieved and displayed several significant texts about our area.

We have occasionally been able to welcome new members to the circle, but the demand was greater than we could manage so happily, a second Book Group has existed for several years and has a life of its own. A third Book Group began in 2020. We are a faithful bunch and attendance is high: a sure sign that we value belonging to it.

Colin Gough

basis. We started up almost twenty years ago, and the monthly meetings were held at my home.

Initially, other attendees offered their homes and conservatories, but eventually my house became the regular

venue. The first participants agreed that we would meet in the evenings so that the Group did not clash with other day-time activities.

We also agreed that attendees could bring with them any topics on which they wanted opinions, but that they did not want to have speakers “for” and “against”. Each person just wanted to feel free to join in as they wished.

Over the years we have discussed many topics; people have attended regularly, some obviously have resigned but usually attendance has been about 6/8

people of both sexes, which has provided balance.

I have always had a list of possible subjects, should none be forthcoming from the group members. As we tried to put the world to rights the two hours from 7pm to 9pm has usually passed quickly.

Then it was coffee time and relaxation encouraged as we chatted away until all attendees left for home.

Eileen Peckham

Geology Group

What happens when a group of members are interested in a topic, but none have sufficient knowledge to feel confident about leading it?

This was the case with Geology. A meeting was held of interested members, but almost all were completely new to geology. Fortunately, Kate Winckler, very apprehensive, volunteered to act as co-ordinator. They started by watching the geological BBC Christmas lectures. But outings to see the rocks in situ were necessary.

These were provided in the book “Northumberland Rocks and Landscape”. But using it was easier said than done, as working with it required a pre-meeting: we read the text, looking up the (many!) unknown words. Still in a bit of fog, we would set off, hoping that

it would all become clear when we arrived.

This all changed when Kate and Val Taylor met Professor Colin Scrutton at a talk he gave, and he kindly offered to lead some trips.



Professor Colin Scrutton (with arm raised) discussing the Dun Sandstone at Spittal

By 2006, the group had learnt a lot, and was feeling much more confident. In that year, Harry and Anne Bagley hosted our first 3-day trip, to the Lake District.

Other holidays followed led by Jen Hannon.

In 2008, we stayed at Middleton-in-Teesdale, and went to High Force, and down the gully, a bit hairy. Low Force and Killhope lead mine were much easier!

In 2009 we stayed at Saltburn, and memorably spent several hours on Marsk beach with bent backs looking for fossils. There were lots of “Devil’s Toenails”, but I wanted to find an ammonite. I had nearly given up, and picked up a “last” stone, turned it over – and there it was! My first ammonite ever!

2010 saw us in the Dales to study limestone scenery. Looking at the photo below you could be forgiven for thinking that studying geology is just an excuse to get out of doors and see some wonderful scenery.

During this time, some of us decided to work through the 1st year Open University geology course together. We took our time, knowing there would be no exams at the end!

Then, in 2011, Jen Hannon became co-ordinator. Another member, Helen Page, had a project in mind, which gave the group something to do for several years! She had a book in mind, which required help from other group members, and the professional guidance of geologist Ian Kille. A few years later, in 2015, the first edition of “Northumberland Coast Rocks!” was produced.



Mike helping out with “Berwickshire Coast Rocks!” at Burnmouth monocline

With a target audience of families and their children, the book contains coastal walks with notes on the local geology, in simple language that non-geologists can understand. It has sold extremely well since publication and is now in its 3rd edition.



Harry Bagley enjoying a well-earned rest at Malham

Helen moved to the Scottish Borders, and immediately set to work on the Scottish coast, between Cove and Cocklawburn.



Helen discussing the geology at Cauldron Snout with Dilys, Margaret and Roger with Peter looking on.

Alnwick u3a members joined her, with extra help from her new Scottish

geologist friends and “Berwickshire Coast Rocks!” was published in 2018.

When Jen retired as co-ordinator in 2016, Sheila Abercrombie became co-ordinator, and the group’s members have been joining with Wooler or Berwick u3as on their trips.

Dilys Carter

History Group

The early days of the setting-up of the Alnwick u3a and its subject groups were quite exciting. Some of us, myself included, did not know much about the u3a movement, except that it aimed to “pursue learning for sheer enjoyment and for its own sake”. This would be through the setting-up of wide-range subject groups.

Sheets of A3 paper each bearing the name of a subject were tacked up on the walls and we were invited to sign our names for any subject which interested us. My greatest interest has always been History and so I signed up for that (in addition to some others which interested me).

The first meeting of the History Group took place soon after this initial meeting. We were a small group of enthusiasts. I found myself agreeing to be Co-ordinator of the group – not that I considered myself to be more knowledgeable than others in the group but that nobody else wanted to do it!

Our aim was to cover a wide range of topics, local, national, and international. Surrounded by so much history in Alnwick, it seemed obvious to begin our research with the history of the Percy family.



Alnwick Castle – Home of the Percy Family

We each undertook to research a different era, researched it, then gave a talk to the rest of the group at subsequent meetings.

Later the pattern of our meetings became talks given by our members covering historical subjects of interest, or occasionally given by visiting speakers. A favourite was always Andy Griffin, and we were also fortunate to have Barbara Harbottle talk to us about St. Kilda.

In the summer months we had coach trips to places of local interest, castles, stately homes, churches, museums etc. I remember outings to Castle Howard, Bowhill, Manderston, Mellerstain, Floors Castle, Paxton House, Traquair (where we saw a priest's hiding place).

We visited the Great North Museum in Newcastle and Berwick Barracks. Churches we visited included Ellington, Old Bewick, Rothbury, Eglington, Corbridge, St. Michael's in Alnwick and Chillingham – where Barbara Harbottle gave us a talk about the Grey Tomb.

Of course, we did not ignore the Roman Wall – I remember an interesting talk at the Roman Army Museum where we were treated to a demonstration of weapons used by the army – nasty!



Hadrian's Wall, near to the Roman Army Museum

Hartlepool and a tour of HMS Trincomalee was interesting too. Built in 1817 and “the oldest warship still

afloat” we were struck at how much smaller most people must have been then.

One never-to-be-forgotten visit was to Edinburgh which included a tour of the Parliament building. When the time came for the coach to leave for Alnwick there were two members of the group missing. One hour later, they had still not appeared, so the coach had reluctantly to return to Alnwick without them.

Later that evening I had an apologetic phone call to say that they had waited at the wrong place for the coach and so had got a train home instead. At the drop-off point one of our number had laughingly said that if anyone got lost there was a train home at 9pm. She never expected this to be taken literally! However, no harm done, and we all learnt some lessons from the occasion, such as never to go on an outing without a mobile phone!

As coaches became more expensive to hire, we sometimes combined outings with Peter Carter's Architecture Group.

I look back to happy memories of my 10 years as Co-ordinator of the History Group and am pleased that it continues to thrive under very good leadership.

Pat Straker

Poetry Group

"A poem should not mean but be" - Archibald MacLeish



The study of thought put into words in poetic form increases knowledge and understanding. It also prompts questions, but these do not always receive answers. Yet, in the search, there are tears and laughter. It is the reflective nature of the quest which is so satisfying!

I have been a member of the Poetry Group since moving to Alnwick 20 years ago. Sharing and discussing poets and their works has been challenging and enjoyable.

Alnwick u3a now has two Poetry Groups.

Mary Atkinson

Walking Group



The Pilgrim's Way to Holy Island

The walking group started in the earliest days of the Alnwick u3a. A small group of members joined in whenever and wherever they chose to walk. The lovely coast of Northumberland has been walked and the stunning countryside has been explored but there is still much more to discover.

We began by walking the Tyne to Tweed in several stages, admiring the wonderful coast-line of Northumberland along the way. We have supported the roof of Cuddy's Cave with our walking poles, struggled (some of us) up the sharp end of Simonside, ascended the Cheviot and wandered round the many

hill forts or searched for the cup and ring engravings dotted all over this county.



Budle Bay

Some of our walks included a magical walk from Hartside Farm in Ingram Valley, a breath-taking Roman and Reivers walk from Alwinton, beautiful scenic walks along St Cuthberts Way, (the Scottish stretch was excellently maintained) and we received a certificate for completing the Way.



St Cuthbert's Cave Walk

A seascape walk from Coldingham Bay and, by contrast, some of us remember a very wet and boggy walk to Blawearie (perhaps we read the directions incorrectly). St Oswald's Way was also followed.



A successful conclusion to St Oswald's Way

Members browsed the rock formations, admired the many wildflowers, and wished we could recognise more of the birds and their calls that we came across.



Hauxley

This has been a most enjoyable, interesting, and purposeful group.

Hilary Whitlam

Ad Hoc Groups/Research Projects

Over the years, there have been some groups meeting for short periods for a specific purpose. These include "The Museum of My Life" and "RITA" (see below). There were also some short "courses", such as "A Brief History of Economic Thought", followed by a few presentations on the "History of Mathematics". Later, Carol Burnett started up a group looking at the healing properties of plants.

Museum of My Life



In 2007, we were invited by New Writing North to take part in a project in which they had been funded to work with six museums, each museum to involve two groups of people from different walks of life. We were paired up with home educating families.

The underlying premise of project was that we all have a history to tell. It was quite a commitment, as it lasted for the whole of that year. Eleven of us met in Bailiffgate Museum every Wednesday, spending nine weeks working with the professional writer, Ann Coburn, undertaking a variety of writing tasks inspired by objects and exhibits in the museum.

We then spent nine weeks with the artist, Emma Holliday, to work on a display for the museum, to be open to the public. Although museum sessions ended in July, we had to work on our exhibits during the summer, ready for a

meeting in September with Emma and a display artist, who helped us to put our exhibition together.



Anne had been selecting pieces of our work to go into an anthology of contributions from all twelve groups, and she had produced post-cards featuring collages of our artwork.

At the opening of the exhibition in October, we met our partner group for the first time, although we had communicated with them throughout the project.

The exhibition was in the museum for a month and then, in December, all twelve groups gathered in the Winter Gardens in Sunderland for the launch of the anthology. Those who had taken part later gave a presentation about the project at a monthly meeting.

Maureen Stephenson

RITA

Growing up in World War II

In 2012, Northumbria Region u3a formed a compact with local universities, with the aim of encouraging them to involve older people in their research.

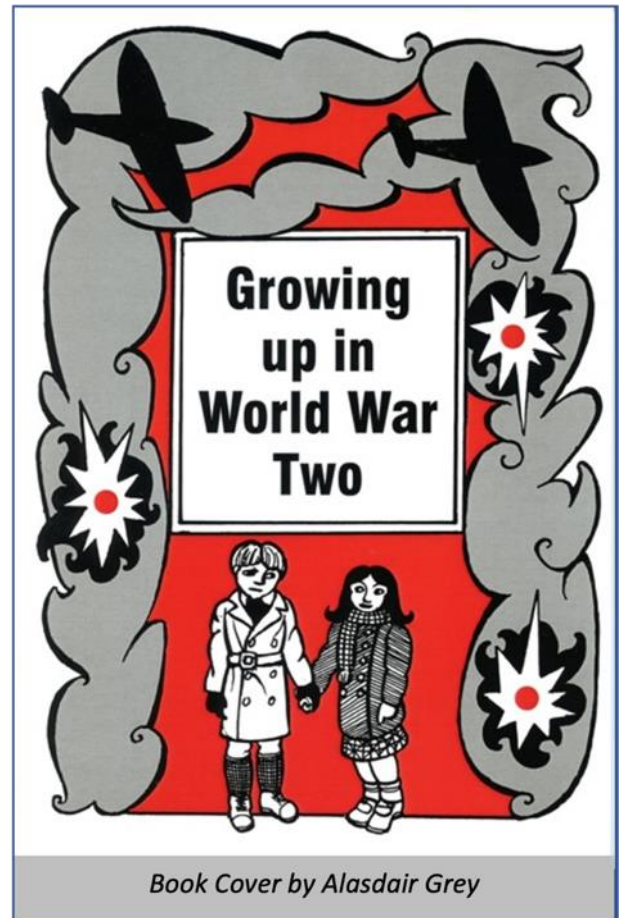
As a first step, the universities agreed to fund a competition, known as RITA (Research in the Third Age), in which u3a members were asked to submit research proposals.

The idea was that winning entries might be taken up by research students in the universities.

Two of our members - Maureen Stephenson and Kate Winckler - were prize winners, but sadly their proposals were not followed up. Wanting to use some of the prize money for a specific project, Maureen invited members to share memories of growing up during the war, with an emphasis on the effect of the war on the lives of women and children.

This led to the publication of a booklet in 2014, sales of which covered the costs of production, leaving the original source of the funding as a reminder that there was still research to be done.

In 2017/18 a group of members devised and carried out a research project to investigate the positive contribution



that older people make to society, the topic of Maureen's original submission to the RITA project.

Copies of the Research Report were sent to National and Regional committees and a presentation about the project and its findings was given to Alnwick u3a members.

Maureen Stephenson

Holidays

Whilst there were lots of holidays in the UK over the years, we also went abroad several times:

Venice	May 2005	Paris	October 2010
Rhodes	May 2007	Florence	May 2012
Cracow	May 2008	Berlin	April 2013
Malta	October 2008	Isle of Man	September 2016
Netherlands	April 2009		



Waiting for the railway at Snaefell, Isle of Man

Venice was the first holiday abroad that the Alnwick u3a organized. We stayed on one of the outer islands but getting to the centre by both bus and boat was uncomplicated. We met together at the hotel every evening and at the suggestion of our organizer, Jean Watson, we joined different people for our meal, which worked extremely well.

The Venice holiday was a week-long as were our visits to Rhodes and Malta. The others were city breaks lasting 3 or 4 days.

Another of Jean's ideas was to circulate a notebook in which we commented on our day. On our return, an edited version was printed in our Newsletter, Profiles.



A break for tea in Malta

Hazel Shell went on many of our holidays, and these are her recollections:

Over the years I have attended several u3a holiday breaks – at least eight - and thoroughly enjoyed all of them. My very first was to Malta in 2008. I took a single room cancellation booking just a few days before leaving.

I was rather nervous as I had never been on holiday without my husband or a close friend and I felt I may be lonely, have no one to sit with during meals, coffee breaks or visits.

I need not have worried! There was always a friendly group to join, someone to go with you to visit a place of special interest or even opportunities to go off on your own if you so wished. There was nothing strictly formal, all were friendly and helpful.

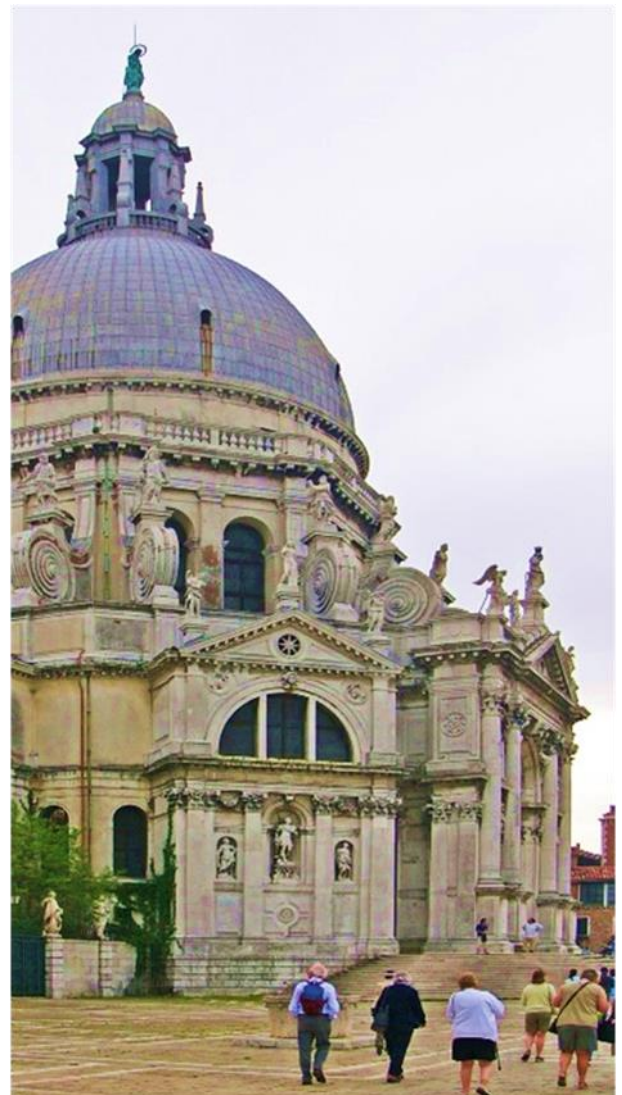
None of this would have been possible without the care and expertise of brilliant organizers. On my trips the organizers were usually Joan Johnson and Jean Brigstock. The travel arrangements were always good. ‘Pick ups’ from airports or stations, hotel rooms and facilities were excellent.

Of course, it was not always ‘plain sailing’ for them! I am sure they will remember the time when a member in a wheelchair was temporarily ‘lost’ in an airport!

Also, when a member was late for the bus and left behind - the head count was correct, but a member of the public thought it was a service bus! Joan and

Jean realised what had happened very quickly, the member was found, so no one was left behind. Jean once spent the night in a hospital with a member who had fallen in the bathroom.

The organizers were always there with friendship, help and encouragement. I do not know of the actual booking of the holiday - it always seemed trouble free and simple. I am sure this was probably not the case!



*Our group about to enter Venice's
St Maria del Salute*

I have many personal memories of these holidays, especially the holiday in Amsterdam where tulips in the Keukenhof gardens were so beautiful. My 'cabin mate' and I became good friends and had so many laughs. We enjoyed the canal journey on the way to Antwerp.

Paris, by Eurostar, was also memorable – particularly the sight of the Eiffel Tower floodlit at night. Although I had been to Paris several times the u3a holiday, led by our organizers, showed me places of great interest which were completely new to me.

Liverpool was another surprise. I had never thought of it as a holiday destination, but we enjoyed a super, few days on a u3a city break. The guided city bus tour was a great help.

After we had glimpsed the main sights, a small group or even an individual, if they so wished, could go back and visit places which were of particular interest. I liked the art galleries on the Albert Docks and the old and new cathedrals.



u3a group at Potsdam, outside Berlin

When in Berlin six of us, after visiting all the usual places - The Wall, Checkpoint Charlie, Brandenburg Gate, to name but a few - took the train to Potsdam. We had a tour of the island and a very interesting and informative day.

I went on the first Cairngorms trip in 2014, which was so popular it was repeated the following year. We stayed in an excellent hotel where we enjoyed entertainment every night and good food.



We had our own bus and driver who took us to a different place of interest every day. Those who wished could stay behind and visit somewhere appealing to their own interest.

I have many happy holiday memories; I am sure other members have too. u3a holidays gave me a great deal of friendship, interest and laughter taking me to hitherto unknown places. I encourage you to take up the opportunity to join in whenever it arises.

Hazel Shell

Summer Outings

Having had an indoor summer garden party for our August monthly meeting in 2001, we decided the following year to arrange a boat trip on the River Tyne. This was so popular that it began the annual practice of trying to find other venues which involved a river trip. With very few exceptions, we managed to do so most years.

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2002 Newcastle | 2009 Skipton | 2014 Durham |
| 2003 Durham | 2010 Newcastle | 2015 Tyne - quay to sea |
| 2004 York | 2011 Seahouses and | 2016 Skipton |
| 2005 Tynemouth Tall Ships | the Farne Islands | 2017 Carlisle |
| 2006 Edinburgh | 2012 Firth of Forth and | 2018 Falkirk Wheel and |
| 2007 Kielder | Inchcombe Abbey | Kelpies |
| 2008 Beamish | 2013 Keswick | 2019 Edinburgh |

A Selection of Summer Outing Photos



The Durham 2014 Outing



The Beamish Outing



The Falkirk Wheel and Kelpies Outing



The Keswick Outing

10th Anniversary Celebrations

To mark the 10th Anniversary of Alnwick u3a in 2010, there were some special events:

In **March** we held an Exhibition in Alnwick Gardens. At that time, the Pavilion Hall at Alnwick Garden was available free of charge for voluntary organisations and so we took advantage of a funding grant from National u3a to put on an exhibition.



At Alnwick Gardens

Our committee and group co-ordinators worked extremely hard to produce an attractive exhibition of displays of group activities, workshops and general information.

In **May** we held a Family Ceilidh. The Amble Coquet High School Ceilidh Band provided the music, and a very enjoyable evening was had by all.

A Family Walk took place in **June**. This was a sponsored walk along the beach

from Boulmer, the money raised being given to the hospice.

In **July**, we went on a trip down the Tyne. As the first summer outing had been to the Tyne, it seemed fitting to return for our tenth birthday.

Finally, in **October** there was a Dinner and a Buffet Lunch. We had a formal dinner with an after-dinner speaker at the White Swan in Alnwick. The following week, we had a buffet lunch after our AGM, with a celebratory cake.



Dinner at the White Swan

Maureen Stephenson

Awaydays

Awaydays started to enable us to continue to meet through the summer months when it was more difficult to use the educational premises at Lindisfarne.

The idea was to find a venue, not too far from Alnwick, and arrange a programme of activities for members to join in throughout the day. There were always opportunities for walks, painting, photography, music, geology, local

history and bird watching, and in recent years a photographic quiz organised by Peter Carter.

To give a flavour of these quizzes, Peter has prepared an Alnwick quiz especially for this booklet. This is on the inside back cover.

Each year, we tried to find at least one activity that was appropriate to that venue.

The venues over the years were:

2001 Craster

We met in Margaret Kilvington's garden, but foot and mouth disease prevented our planned activities.



2002 Rock

Bill Devonshire's new garden was the meeting place and highlights included a rare chance to hear the old church organ and explore the farm trail.

2003 Howick

The Long Walk to the beach was then open to the general public and several members went to Howick Gardens.

2004 Druridge Bay

The country park was ideal for walks, bird watching and photography.

2005 Morpeth

An opportunity to explore Carlisle Park, the riverside, and the Town Trail.

2006 Druridge Bay

Back to the country park because it had proved a more attractive venue than Morpeth.

2007 Woodhorn

We had arranged to see some of the archive materials in the museum. The Park and lake were good for walks and watching birds.

2008 Howick

By request, we went back to Howick. Although the weather was mostly fine, we had torrential rain and gave shelter to a German cyclist.

2009 Bamburgh

The Cricket Pavilion was a good venue, but we probably should not have used their pitch for boules.

2010 Hartlepool

A visit to the Tall Ships Race instead of a usual awayday.

2011 Rothbury

Lots of opportunities for walks along the river, art exhibitions, painting, and photography - and cafes for lunch

2012 Alnmouth

A guided tour of the village given by a local resident followed by a picnic or café lunch.

2012 Walbottle

u3a Regional Big Event attended by many of our members.

2013 Warkworth

The first year we had one of Peter Carter's picture quizzes around the village.

2014 Amble

An interesting talk at the Lifeboat Station and another of Peter's quizzes.



In Amble Town Square

2015 Morpeth

A member of Morpeth u3a gave a guided tour of the Turner Garden after we had completed another quiz from Peter.



2016 Berwick

A guided tour by a member of Berwick u3a and a food festival.

2017 Rothbury

A talk by a member of Coquetdale u3a, a long walk by some members and a picture quiz.

2018 Beadnell

A poppy exhibition in the church, a village trail, a picture quiz and a performance from Alnwick u3a ukulele group.



The Ukulele Group at Beadnell

Maureen Stephenson

Northumbria Region

Northumbria Region encompasses u3as from the Scottish border to North Yorkshire and now has over fifty u3as as members.

It started small, with about six of the first u3as in the region wanting to find a way of getting together to share ideas and offer mutual support.

Two or three people from each u3a started to meet in a pub outside Durham, where they could discuss matters of interest before enjoying a pub lunch.

As more u3as formed, the initial purpose was maintained, but a more structured approach became necessary. Inevitably, progress could not be made without financial support for hiring larger premises and producing newsletters to keep members informed of developments - no email in those days. u3as were asked to make an annual contribution, based on the size of their membership.

Where money was involved, a committee had to be established to monitor it. For many years, the committee was concerned solely with arranging regular quarterly meetings, putting on training events to meet the

expressed needs of members and helping new u3as to get started.

All the training was carried out by members for members, sharing ideas, good practice and trying to find solutions to common problems.

There were occasional bigger events, such as a study day at New College Durham, where many u3as led workshops on a variety of topics, a two-day residential course in Sunderland to study Romans and Religions, and the (very) Big Event at Walbottle School campus to celebrate u3a's 30th Anniversary.

Many of our members have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the Region over the years. Most popular have been the science-based days at the Centre for Life and the art lectures at the Laing Gallery.

Although some of the initial responsibilities of the Regional Committee are now more regulated by National standards, the underlying philosophy of the Region is still to give all members of affiliated u3as opportunities to meet and learn together.

Regional Study Day at Alnwick Castle and Garden

In 2011, we offered to arrange a Regional study day, based around what was on offer at Alnwick Castle and The Alnwick Garden. Several meetings took place with representatives of the Castle and Garden, and we eventually came up with a programme of possible activities for the day.

That was the easy part! Then came weeks of information going out to all u3as in the Northumbria Region, bookings and choices of workshop being taken, cheques being banked, endless lists being drawn up of workshop participants, members being sent confirmation and badges to enable entry to the car park. There was also continuous liaison with Castle and Garden representatives to arrange the logistics of making sure that over a hundred u3a members were more or less in the right place at the right time.

There were 10 mini-workshops organised by members of the Castle and Garden Staff, organised into three sessions, at 10.30am, 11.45 am and 2pm. We could choose one workshop per session.

Poison Garden Tour
The Origins of The Alnwick Garden
Roots and Shoots in the Garden
Battleaxe to Broomstix Tour
Specialist Tour - The First Duchess
The Art Collection

There was coffee on arrival, and lunch comprising soup, sandwiches, a cream scone and tea or coffee, and refreshments at 3.15pm before departure – the whole day costing £21.

The day ran surprisingly smoothly. There were, of course, minor problems, the first being that the Garden person on duty that day had not been told that participants would not have to pay for car parking if they had a badge.

Several people decided to change their choice of workshop (even though their original choice was written on their badge!) and we had a stray visitor from somewhere else in the country, who was a u3a member and thought this was something laid on especially for u3a members visiting the Garden! As it happened, it didn't matter, as a few people didn't turn up, and she could just fill one of the places.

Organising such an event was certainly a learning experience. In the end, all the hard work paid off, and everyone seemed to enjoy the day. The workshops were:

The Story of the Treehouse
The Ornamental Garden
The Architecture of Alnwick Castle
The Poison Garden
Medieval Soap Making

Maureen Stephenson

Science at the Centre for Life

Alnwick u3a members have also visited the Centre for Life to attend science lectures and workshops. Memories of two of these visits are described below:

In October 2019, fourteen members of Alnwick u3a attended a workshop and masterclass entitled 'Genes in a Bottle and Forensic DNA', held at The Centre for Life, Times Square, Newcastle.

The Centre for Life is a science village where scientists, clinicians, educationalists and business people work to promote the advancement of the Life Sciences. It is a charity with no public funding, opened by Her Majesty the Queen in May 2000. One of its partners is Newcastle University.

We were shown to one of the laboratories, gowned up in white lab coats and given a short talk on laboratory protocol before we began 'The Genes in a Bottle' session.

This involved extracting our own DNA from our cheek cells. We were given a practical demonstration first as to how to do this task, then very carefully we had to do the same. Each person was given a small phial on a cord in which to place their extracted DNA. We were allowed to take home our 'necklaces' if we wished to keep them.



The second session entitled 'Forensic DNA', was also conducted in the laboratory.

We turned detective to find the 'culprit' in a fake crime, using test tubes, reactive agents, electric currents, and looking at the results under ultraviolet light in a covered area.

Altogether, this was an enjoyable and enlightening day.

Julia Grieveson

I have been involved with the Centre for Life from its beginnings. As a biology teacher I was invited to become part of a team that met regularly to discuss our ideas with other professionals, including those from Newcastle University who were doing research in Genetics.

We wanted schoolchildren to be involved as well as the public, so we hoped that exhibitions, laboratories, and talks would be available. I was privileged to be at the 'Topping Off' ceremony.

When I joined Alnwick u3a I was delighted to learn that I could attend a variety of educational days organised at the Centre for the Regional u3a. One of these days was entitled 'The Plastinated Bodies'. These bodies were developed by Gunter von Hagens in Germany in 1977.

It was explained to us that the water and fat from the body were replaced by certain plastics yielding specimens which could be touched but did not smell or decay. They could be useful in anatomy, including in medical and dental schools.

Bodies were donated by individuals, and on the day of my visit, several people made enquiries about how to do so. The bodies could be arranged into a variety of positions for exhibitions, such as 'The Runner', and some exposed only blood vessels whereas others showed the organs of the body, including any of the donor's defects.



At the exhibition, there was also a display of fetuses in various stages of development. Prior to the ability to use this technique, specimens had to be preserved in formaldehyde in a sealed glass container, which made it virtually impossible to see the 'whole' body.

The other techniques were embalming, drying, and freezing but this only offered limited details to be seen without dissecting the donated body. I found the exhibition fascinating and informative. Overall, it was an unforgettable day.

Doris Hinshaw

More Learning

Learning does not stop at local level. There are lots of mini-courses available on the internet, as Jean Findlay explains:

A Love Of MOOCS

Just got 10 minutes – ideal to just have a quick view of the next section of my current Future Learn course.

How can one not become hooked on exploring new topics, learning more about part remembered history or looking at the latest research on so many different subjects.

For anyone not familiar with MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) these are courses prepared by Universities, Industry, and other organisations. Most are free although some are also available as a qualification for a certificate.

They are divided into bite-size videos or articles of 3 – 15 mins adding up to 3-4 hours a week for a pre-set number of weeks. There are discussion groups if wanted but it is easy to dip in and out of a course, just follow sections of particular interest or to move onto an alternative.

I was introduced to MOOCs in 2016 at a u3a conference in Nottingham where there was a choice of workshops and I've been hooked ever since.

There are numerous websites available, but I have found Futurelearn, and Coursera offer more than enough choice and variety.

Subjects I have followed have been Food as Medicine, Diabetes, Obesity, Food and Feasts of Royalty, Mountains, The American South (covered history, film, music, and environment), Fraud and theft in Archaeology, Economics and Public Speaking, to name but a few.

The whole concept fits perfectly with the u3a in encouraging continued learning, exploring new and familiar topics.

Sharing what we learn and recommending courses to others or acting as an aid to a talk for the u3a are to be encouraged, so have a browse of available subjects – there is nothing to lose and so much to gain.

Oh dear, I now need to decide if it will be Exploring the Ocean, History of Royal Fashion or The Black Tudors that I will sign up for next.

Jean Findlay

Alnwick Picture Quiz

As mentioned in the Awaydays section, in recent years Peter Carter has prepared a picture quiz based on the place being visited. For this 21st Anniversary Booklet, he has prepared a special quiz, below, with photos of various things that can be seen in Alnwick.



Where are they?

All of these can be seen in Alnwick's central triangle formed by Market Street, Fenkle Street and Narrowgate/Bondgate Within.



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