

U3A THAMES VALLEY NETWORK

Representatives' meeting held at the Sports Hall, Watlington, courtesy of Ridgeway U3A,
on Friday 25th July 2016

Present:

Committee: Mike Price Chairman (Greater Thame), Susie Berry Vice-Chairman (Ridgeway), Agnes Budagowska Treasurer (Swindon), Len Smith (Wokingham), Anthony Burdall Events Team (Faringdon), Avis Furness (Reading), Gillian Le Du (Henley), Anne Hales (Didcot)

Pam Jones - (Witney) Trustee South East Region

Representatives: Joan Nesbit (Abingdon), Geoff and Val Young (Aylesbury Vale), Norman and Esme Dutton (Banbury), Peggy Penfold, (Bicester), Theresa Doherty (Bracknell Forest), Peter Metcalf (Chiltern), Diane Carver, Dorrie Oliver (Chinnor & District), Liz Sweet (Didcot and District), Ann Walsh (Goring Gap), Carole Baker, Pam Feltblower (Greater Thame), Carol Mason (Haddenham), Anne Partridge (Headington), Mike Davies and Brian Humphrey (Marlow & District), Clive Dray (Newbury), Margaret Lipscomb (Oxford), Jane Sellwood (Reading), Margaret Wiggall (Ridgeway), Sandra Stuary, Liz McDowell, Colin O'Rourke (South Bucks), Derek Randall, Peter Grout (Thame & District), Neil Kelly (Thameside), Gill Pittock (Thatcham), Margaret Edmondson, Hermione Whitehouse (Wallingford), Ian Battersby (West Oxford), Jane Standley (Windsor), Jane Clark, Valerie Palmer (Witney), Patsy Thornton (Wokingham).

1. Apologies

Committee: Anne Marie Lord Secretary (Chinnor & District),

Representatives: Shirley Stokes (Aylesbury Vale), John Haywood (Banbury), Pam Palmer (Bracknell Forest), Ian Wright (Carterton), Roy Coates (Chipping Norton), Peter Foot (Faringdon), Sylvia Bowley (Faringdon) Elaine Parkes (Haddenham) Margaret Graham (High Wycombe), Harry Burnham (Maidenhead), Mary Blake (Newbury), Malcolm Barker (Princes Risborough), Pat Fewell (Ridgeway), Glenys Bettley (Swindon), Thia Brereton (Wantage & Grove), Margaret Sherrington (West Oxford), Edward Miles (Wokingham)

2. Minutes of the last meeting (9/5/2014)

These were agreed to and signed

3. Matters arising.

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report

Mike welcomed everyone to the meeting and commented on how full the hall was. He said that Greater Thame U3A had produced a Group Leaders Handbook and a copy would be available for representatives to look at after the meeting. Anyone who would like a copy should provide their email address and it would be sent to them – please acknowledge the source if used in your own U3A

The Railway study day at Didcot had been a fantastic success. The Ashmolean study day had also gone very well and it was hoped that we might do something similar at other Oxford museums. The Historic Pathways project was going strong, with lots of walks organised.

Mike reflected that in view of all the things going on in the world, how lucky we were to be able to enjoy our retirement in safety.

5. Treasurer's Report

Agnes circulated copies of the TVN Account Summary for the period 1st Jan 2014 – 30th June 2014.

She reported that there had been a decrease in committee expenses, as more meetings were being held in people's houses and the Events Team had been incorporated into the general committee.

All events this year had paid for themselves, with some small surpluses paid back into the kitty, with the six-month surplus standing at £1361.23. At the beginning of the year the surplus had been £2,806.49. The balance in the bank is £4,167.72.

The available surplus of £2236.67 was a little less than at this time last year. Some money is due to be returned for events at Benson for which an advance deposit is required in case of breakages.

A question was asked about whether there was a policy that events should cover their costs; Agnes said that there was, but that funds were available in case a study day did not break even. Anthony explained how the budgeting for study days was worked out and said that it was not always possible to know in advance whether a day would be over or under subscribed. It was agreed that although most events should be made as popular as possible, there was also a case for organising events with a minority interest. Pam Jones pointed out that in eight years of organising events there had only been one very small loss.

A query was raised about the difference on the Account Summary between “catering & hospitality” and “refreshments”, and this was explained. It depended on whether the venue had included catering, such as tea and coffee in the hire cost, or whether the catering, such as lunch, had been invoiced separately. The accounts would be available on request if a representative wished to inspect them.

6. Report from Regional Trustee

Pam reported that there was a new updated version of “The U3A Story” available and that every U3A can have one free copy – information on how to get this has been sent to U3As in the most recent mailing. The book “Time to Learn” has been updated and the new version “More Time to Learn” will be launched at the annual conference in September.

In her final year as Chairman, Barbara Lewis wants to get out and visit as many U3As as possible, and Pam said that people should ask if they would like her to attend an event.

The U3A was being well used, and not just as a source of documents. Various suggestions were made about how to improve the general mailings to U3As, possibly by sending them electronically (which are available on the website) and Pam said she would take these up with Lin Jonas. It was also suggested that secretaries could inform members when a mailing was received so that they could look at it on the website.

Pam stressed that it was a good idea to check the website regularly for updates, and also mentioned that the Committee Packs, which were handed out at the last conference, were also available on the website. In addition, a Reference File for committees would be available online after the summer.

317 people have so far applied for the Annual Conference, with 175 residents. There were no contested elections for posts for the NEC, and so Pam would be Vice-Chairman from September. No resolutions had been put down for the Conference to consider.

“Communications Technology in our U3As” is the title of the event at Benson on 31st October – a flyer and application form would be available shortly. There is no fee for this event. Initially there would be a limit of four people from each U3A in the network.

There was some discussion of the technical issues involved in communicating electronically, and Pam mentioned that national office will shortly be asking all U3As to set up generic email addresses for their committee members if they have not already done so. It was agreed that this was a subject best dealt with at the Communications Technology day in October at Benson.

7. Network Activities

7.1 Study Days

Anthony said that draft programmes for future events were available on the TVN website, and would be updated soon.

In 2014 we have had three study days and there were three more to come.. The first Ashmolean day was hugely oversubscribed and yet the second one was not full, which was puzzling. As had already been mentioned, the Railways day was very successful and oversubscribed.

For upcoming events in 2014, there were places available on the Local History day and 10 places left on the Poetry day. So far there had been 70 applications for the Photography day.

For 2015, there were ten events planned, including Cosmology (February/March), English Painting (14th April), National Trust at Waddington, Forensic Science, Gardens of the Thames Valley, Oxford Botanical Gardens (volunteers are needed to organise this event), Books, Philosophy, and Opera. Among other ideas for 2016, another wine study day had been requested. There was also an outline list for 2017.

Anthony said that ideas and feedback would always be welcome and asked for more people to offer to organise a study day.

A long discussion ensued about how best to inform U3As of who was attending a study day from their area, so that lifts could be arranged. No conclusion was reached, and a decision was made that the Committee would consider the matter and come up with a proposal to put before the next Representatives Meeting.

7.2 Historic Pathways

Patsy reported on two events, a pilgrimage walk from Churn Knob to Dorchester, in the footsteps of St Birinus, which was held on a glorious Sunday in July, followed by tea and an evening service at the Abbey. At Aston Rowant there was the official opening, attended by 40-50 people of the Aston Rowant Discovery Trail. Information about this trail is available on the website (see the link on the Walks Calendar).

Patsy said that it would be good if more U3As in the network were involved in the project. Any member of the team would be happy to go and give a short talk and/or PowerPoint presentation to any U3A meeting. Photographs and descriptions of all the walks are in the blog on the TVN website. A study day would take place on 18th September; places are still available. In 2015 a three-day residential event would take place at Wellington College.

It was suggested that it would be useful to have a short paragraph outlining the ethos of the project which could be cut and pasted into newsletters and websites. Susie and Avis offered to draft a suitable piece.

8. Network Information

8.1 Contacts List

Mike was in the process of updating the Contacts List and it would be circulated shortly. He asked to be kept informed of any changes. Phone numbers are no longer listed on the contacts list.

8.2 Database of Speakers

Avis has updated the Speakers Database and that would be circulated shortly.

Any changes or additions to the list should be sent to Mike or Avis. If a speaker proves to be unsuitable, a note will be made, but the speaker will not be removed from the list until there are two complaints.

It had been suggested at the AGM that a separate list be set up of U3A members who would be happy to give a talk to another U3A. (It should be noted that U3A members must not ask for a fee for speaking to another U3A, although reasonable travelling expenses may be paid.) Avis asked that Representatives should enquire among their membership to see if there were any people who would like to be on this list. It was pointed out that some people on the existing list are in fact U3A members, and some way would have to be found of identifying them and moving them to the second list.

8.3 Network Website – www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk

Len reported that there had been 401 hits on the website in May and 405 in June, with 317 so far in July. He encouraged members to use the website as there was a great deal of useful information held on it, regularly updated, including a contacts page.

9. New or Different Groups

This was a new item on the agenda where Representatives were invited to tell the meeting about new or different ideas for groups.

- Norman Dutton from Banbury spoke about the way in which meetings and groups had been reorganised, which ideas were successful and which were not.
- Wantage U3A has a group based on an idea from the BBC Radio 4 programme “In Our Time”.
- Derek Randall from Greater Thame spoke about their “Any-ology” group, where each month someone would speak about a different “ology”. So far they had not repeated a subject. The group had 40-50 members.
- Patsy Thornton from Wokingham spoke about a group called “What the Papers Say” where members purchased a newspaper (not the one they usually read) on a specific day, and discussed a major story, looking at the different viewpoints expressed. Carol Mason pointed out that the way a paper wrote the story could also be influenced by the target readership they aimed at. This could also be a discussion area.
- Peter Metcalf from Chiltern spoke about their New Technology group, which had over 60 members. Students from a local school took part in meetings about new computers and gadgets. Jane Sellwood mentioned that there was a similar group in Reading which had use of a computer suite provided by the local football club.
- Pam Jones spoke about the Latin group in Witney – a group of eight who had been meeting for about two years, starting Latin from scratch. They were using the Cambridge Latin Course. The original aim was to be able to read inscriptions on tombstones, and visits to churches had been organised.

- Avis Furness from Reading spoke about the Coffee Morning and Quiz group which had been running for some years. As well as being a popular group, it was an excellent opportunity for new members to meet people. Avis offered to share her questions with anyone wanting to set up a similar group. It was suggested that a database of questions could be set up, with the proviso that anyone using it should also contribute. Avis said she would look into ways of doing this.
- Jane Clark from Witney said that there was a Groups Table at meetings, with sign-up lists for possible new groups. If an idea gained sufficient signatures she would organise a planning meeting, and several new groups had been set up in this way.
- Pam Feltblower from Greater Thame said that their U3A had lost a few groups, although they still had ten eating and drinking groups, and that they were also using a system of sign-up sheets to gauge interest in new ideas. They now had a Current Affairs and an I-Pad Users group.

10. Any Other Business

Gillian Le Du from Henley said that she was organising a visit to Stonehenge, including the new visitor centre there, and would be interested in hearing from anyone who would like to join them.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Friday 3rd October, 2014 at the Sports Hall, Watlington, courtesy of Ridgeway U3A

Mike thanked everyone for coming and thanked Susie for providing lunch.

The meeting ended at 12.54