

Upper Bann U3A Convenors' Reports for April 2015 - April 2016

Bridge

(Convenor, Gordon Lunn)

Upper Bann U3A bridge group meet each Friday morning at 10 am in Portadown Golf Club. We normally have 8 or 9 tables playing duplicate. We are fortunate to have good instruction from Tom Young ably assisted by Des Rawlings and Tom Horridge. We are able to offer one to one tuition for beginners and its nice to see our 2015 beginners now fully integrated into the group.

If you would like more information please email gordonlunn@talktalk.net

Chess

(Convenor, Des Rawlings)

The chess group has had an awkward year but has survived.

Over the summer John Whittaker our founder, convenor and strongest player moved back to England. In the autumn Brownlow library no longer was able to host us on Thursday mornings due to cuts. Other days proved to be unsuitable for players.

Cycling

Easy Riders

(Convenor, Tom Young)

The Easy Riders cycle group meets every Wednesday morning. There are currently 10 'lycra-clad' enthusiasts who regularly turn up to take part in a cycle into the unknown. We vary our start between Cascades, Scarva and Loughgall and usually cover between 15 and 25 miles along minor roads that at times can be undulating.

Built into each week's session is an essential coffee and scone stop, which greatly adds to the social craic. The aim of this group is to ensure fun while improving our fitness.

We have enjoyed the apple blossom in full bloom, a visit to Dan Winter's cottage, a cycle along the Green way to Carlingford and the challenges of Claire hill to name but a few.

The group would like to thank Mike, John and Gary for stepping in and leading the Easy Riders (not an easy thing to do) on the Wednesdays I could not make.

Let's hope the weather continues to behave over the next year and we continue to have many wonderful cycles.

Tuesday Cycling Group

(Convenor, Mike Taggart)

The Tuesday cycling group was formed in October 2013 and currently has fifteen members; usually about ten cyclists participate on a regular basis. The group now has four trained cycle leaders who were trained by CTC - The National Cycling Charity. Cyclists meet at Cascades Leisure Centre at 10.00 am and the cycle normally lasts about four hours, with a coffee break en route. We regularly cycle between 20 – 25 miles per session (eg to Loughbrickland, The Lagan Towpath, Oxford Island, Newry via the Canal towpath) but on occasions we venture further afield.

With the help of N. Ireland Railways we had an enjoyable day in June cycling from Belfast to Mahee Island in Strangford Lough. Last May we completed a 2 day trip around Lough Neagh (the 113 mile Lough Shore Trail), and in September we travelled by ferry to Scotland and cycled from Cairnryan to Portpatrick and back (approx.30 miles) returning home that evening. The trip was so successful that we hope to repeat it this year.

If you would like to join the group please email me at taggartmfg@hotmail.com

Recycled

(Convenor, John Trimble)

Recycled was formed primarily to provide a way back into cycling for those who don't feel fit or confident enough to join the existing successful groups run by Mike and Tom. These groups usually cycle on quiet country roads, sometimes involving hilly terrain whereas **Recycled** sticks firmly to the towpath along the Bann, cycling from Cascades Swimming Pool in Portadown to the Tea Rooms Scarva for a welcome cuppa and chat before heading back again. It's a great afternoon out and, for those not sure they are ready for Scarva, it is planned to run some additional shorter taster sessions in April 2016. Bikes and helmets are provided. All are welcome.

Dancing with Maureen

(Convenor, Maureen McLoughlin)

15 fledglings, under the watchful eye of Jeremy Johnston, are in the group. We meet weekly on Thursday from 2.15pm to 3.15pm in Portadown Golf Club.

The group originated from a desire to 'pass ourselves' on a dance floor, whether on holiday, a wedding reception or any other social occasion, and step out dancing Waltz, Quickstep, Foxtrot, Jive (fine tuned for our young age!) Old Time Waltz etc. Jeremy's aim is to observe his group dancing elegantly, with good posture, in step, in time and recognising the correct dance for specific music, all without looking at our feet. He is such an optimist! Jeremy demonstrates, we copy, we cross the dance floor and he announces 'back to the beginning'. This is open ended but slowly and surely we find we can do it. Jeremy begins each class with

his music compilation linked to the above dances so we do not forget our steps and we can move smoothly from one dance to another. We then move to Tango, Rumba and more. Partners are not essential as we constantly move about, either to help someone, to receive help or simply to dance with the person nearest, whether male or female. The one thing which stands out is dancing is quite hard work and, if you want some enjoyable exercise to keep fit, dancing certainly is way up there. It did not take us long to realise one hour is as much as we can sustain. By the way, lots of laughter as you can imagine as we try to master our steps but, even to our surprise, we think we might yet become dancers! What about you?

French Group Report

(Convenor, Helen Rawlings)

The French group has met for two hours each Wednesday. Currently there are 11 names on the roll and attendance remains high.

Gardening Group

(Convenor, Norman Pearson)

The Gardening Group met for the first time in September 2015, around 20 U3A members expressed their interest in having a formal group.

The members agreed to meet on the second Tuesday of each month at 2pm using Brownlow Library, Craigavon as a home base.

To date a group of 8-10 members have attended the meetings.

At start up some members travelled to Newry where the Newry U3A members gave a tour of their allotment and provided information relevant to forming a gardening group, this was followed by generous hospitality.

There have been visits to garden centres in both Cookstown and Warrenpoint incorporating workshops to demonstrate various planting techniques with question and answer sessions on gardening issues.

The Christmas meeting featured a talk by Mr. Alan Chambers on a diverse range of topics including Christmas plant displays, candle making and baking pavlovas!!!

All our meetings end with tea/coffee etc allowing time for friendship and garden chat!

As Spring /Summer rolls in more talks and garden visits are planned.

Discussions are also ongoing with the Council Parks Dept. re involving the U3A Gardening Group in community gardening projects.

As always suggestions and topics for future meetings are most welcome.

Genealogy Group

(Convenor, Geraldine McIvor)

The Genealogy Group meets once per month in the Meeting Room in Portadown Library. The purpose of the meetings is to familiarize members with the records which are available and take them through how to access them. These include Government sponsored sites such as PRONI Online and GRONI. They're also shown how to use the Subscription Free sites, as well as take advantage of the arrangement which Northern Ireland Libraries has with Ancestry.co.uk for free access to their site from the Library.

More and more records are becoming available online but it is still necessary to visit research centres such as the Public Record Office Northern Ireland for manual or microfilm searches and the General Register Office (for more *relatively* recent records). Visits are arranged in accordance with members' identified needs. For those who can't make the scheduled meetings but would like to start researching their family history and aren't sure how to go about it, please email me at geraldine.mcivor@gmail.com

Luncheon club

(Convenor, Norma Galway)

The luncheon club meets on the last Thursday of each month excepting the summer months when people seem to disappear, A different venue each month is chosen. Numbers vary - we have had as many as 20. This year we visited Lurgan Golf Club, Brownlow House, Seagoe Hotel, Sally McNallys, Zio, and various others chosen by the group. All are welcome. We try to prebook meals to save waiting about. Craic is good and we even managed to burst into song at Portadown Golf Club, without even one drop of the hard stuff. Ring Norma to book venues advertised on the web site.

Nature Group

(Convenor, Pat Flowerday)

A nucleus of 5 to 7 regularly participate in the Nature group outings with others joining in as they wish. Most trips were local and some further afield, the most notable being Copeland and Rathlin Islands. Bad weather curtailed some winter outings, but now Spring has arrived we look forward to visiting mainly National Trust houses and gardens and, if there is enough interest, Rathlin and Copeland again.

Poetry Group

(Convenor, Maureen McLoughlin)

Fifteen members meet on the first Monday of each month from 2.00pm to 4.00pm in Lurgan Library. We are a happy lot reading and discussing poetry, reaching many amazing conclusions and we have fun.

We make our own programme at the beginning of the year by selecting poets we either love, know nothing about, are mildly curious of or we simply indulge in nostalgia. The diversity of

views our members bring to each session is bountiful and views often cause surprise and laughter, but always received with sensitivity and respect. This is borne out by the fact that we often have to wait our turn to speak (doesn't always work!) and we share poetry induced snapshots of our personal lives. We have felt happiness and sadness and everything in between, our testimony to the strength and power of poetry. In this current year we have studied American poets, Irish poets and modern poets as part of our programme. Three sessions are still outstanding, earmarked for Lord Byron, poems to/ from childhood and finishing with a celebratory free choice session.

We love our sessions, we enjoy each other, we often surprise ourselves by being indifferent to a poet and coming away with a different view but most of all, poetry has brought learning, pleasure and friendship and we leave each session knowing it was worthwhile. We may feel tired due to thinking, learning, laughing, sharing opinions but, heady stuff? HEADY POETRY!

Singalong

(Convenor, Diane Hillis)

The Singalong Group, formed in January, held its inaugural session on February 9, 2016 with 19 members. By March we had grown to 21, with several more registering an interest. The group meets in Portadown Golf Club from 10 am until noon on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month.

We sing Irish and Scottish melodies, songs from the shows, folk songs and popular music from the 60s, 70s and earlier. Our repertoire is currently being expanded and, hopefully, our membership too. The group doesn't have the formality of a choir, rather it exists for those who simply enjoy music and the sense of well-being engendered by singing. So, even if you think you can only sing in the shower, please come and sing along with us, release those endorphins and have coffee and a chat half way through!

We meet next on April 2016 and hope to see you there.

Theatre Group

Convenors Ruth McKinley / Edith Davies

This season has been a very successful time for the theatre group.

In September, 17 members went to the Opera House to see Lord of the Flies

October was The Night Alive - 26 attended at the Lyric and also, beamed in live to Craigavon Omniplex, was the Importance of Being Ernest with David Suchet in the lead role.

November saw 25 members go to the Opera House to see Swan Lake.

Our annual trip to Dublin was at the end of January and 25 of us went to the Abbey Theatre to see the Bernard Shaw play You Never Can Tell.

Portadown Drama Festival in March was well attended by U3a members

Next on the agenda will be the 39 Steps at the Lyric in April.

This season we have tried to bring to the attention of the members LIVE performances of plays, ballet and opera that were beamed into Craigavon Omniplex, Queens's Film Theatre and the Movie House on the Dublin Road in Belfast. Hopefully we can continue to do that through the monthly newsletter – watch this space!!!

We are now looking at various plays etc. coming up in September and I'm sure some members may find that a little too soon to think about but all popular performances get booked up really early so have your diaries handy.

Thanks to all members for their support throughout the season.

Monday Walking Group

(Convenor, Bob Anderson)

Walks recommenced in September and continued till the end of June every Monday apart from Christmas and Easter. Walks vary between 3 and 6 miles and generally are on quiet country roads, tow-paths and pedestrian pathways.

Some examples of walk venues are Armagh Palace grounds, Dungannon Park, Oxford Island, Craigavon Lakes, Newry Canal, Lagan Canal, Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park, Clare Glen, Tartaraghan, Lurgan Park and Gosford Park.

Attendance varies between 10 and 20 walkers. We generally start at 10am except when we are taking the train when we go at 9 45am. We generally finish off the year by taking the train to Helen's Bay, walking the North Down Coastal Path to Holywood where we have lunch.

I am grateful to Tom Young and Des Rawlings for leading the walk when I have been indisposed.

Watercolour Art Group

(Convenor, Anne McMinn)

The watercolour art group are going strong and continue to get new members, having completed another 10 weeks. After our Easter break we will reconvene on the 18th April and run until 27 June. We recently relocated to Brownlow Library and this has proven to be very successful.

We had a couple of outings, the first one to the Ulster Museum to see Colin Davidson's exhibition 'Silent Testimony', a series of powerful works which show large scale and hugely intimate portraits and the way that tragedy and misfortune tell on our faces.

The Exhibition shows 18 new works exploring the suffering and loss caused to ordinary people by the period known as 'The Troubles'.

The next outing was to the Seacourt centre in Bangor for contemporary print making. Here we learned to etch and print our designs - a departure from our usual watercolour but nevertheless enjoyed by all.

Any enquiries about the art group, please ring Anne on [02838325001](tel:02838325001)