

u3a in Scotland Newsletter

Autumn 2024



Photo by Irene McCrystal, West Lothian u3a

Welcome to this latest newsletter.

Autumn Members' meeting

The u3a in Scotland Autumn Members Meeting will take place on Zoom on Tuesday 12th November. The new CEO of the Trust will be one of our speakers. Iain Cassiday officially took up his post following the Trust's AGM on 16th October.

Invitations to sign up for the event will be sent to all member u3as shortly.

News from the chair

Sadly, we have recently lost 2 of our island u3as. The biggest issue seems to be getting new people to come forward to stand for the committee. If someone from your u3a approaches you and asks you to consider being on the committee, please, think about it and if you can, say "yes". Without a committee, a u3a can't run. Sharing our time and skills is what the u3a is about. We are a membership organisation, not a service provider.

I attended the Trust's Festival 24 in July and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I was interviewed by someone who was doing a Podcast. I haven't heard it but I must search on the Trust website.

In August I was part of the team organising Summer School and there'll be more about that within the newsletter.

Later in August I attended the inaugural meeting of our newest u3a, Cowal, where the main town is Dunoon. Although it is on a peninsula, it was easier for me to go by ferry and on my first trip there in April for the launch, I had the ferry all to myself.

In September I attended the Trust's Pilot Council meeting in London. That was an interesting experience.

Anne Walsh, Chairperson u3a in Scotland

AGM 2024

The u3a in Scotland AGM was held at the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh on 11th June



with guest speakers from Dementia Research, NHS Tayside and Liz Thackray, then chair of the Trust, who spoke on Fit for the Future, which was recently passed at the Trust's AGM. This was a hybrid meeting and members joined online from all parts of the country.

A committee of 6 was elected. There is capacity for 7 so if anyone would like to find out more about being on the committee, please, contact me and you can attend as a guest at the next

Liz Thackray and Liz Ervine

online meeting with a view to taking up that vacancy. All committee meetings are held online so it doesn't matter where you live. Even without an internet connection, you can join by phone.

The 2023-24 committee are as follows:

Anne Walsh, West Lothian u3a, chairperson;

Gail Donaldson, Glasgow West End u3a, vice-chairperson;

Margaret Moffat, Dumfries u3a, treasurer;

Jenny Brogden, Dingwall u3a, secretary;

Linda Matheson, Ayr u3a, webmistress;

Bob Batty, Oban u3a, membership secretary.

Promoting the u3a



East Lothian u3a borrowed a banner, some bunting a table cover from u3a in Scotland for their stall which was held in September at Haddington Farmers' Market.

On the day, they signed up five new members and many more visitors took away leaflets, so hopefully, a few more will eventually join. They plan to be there again in November so if you are in Haddington on the last Saturday of November, why not pay them a visit and say "hello!"

Tony Reeves, East Lothian u3a

Items for the next newsletter should be sent to the newsletter.u3ainscotland@gmail.com (or if you have problems with that email address send to the chairperson) by 28th February 2025.

From the Corran Halls to Zoom all over Scotland

In September 2023 one of the Oban u3a members, Donald Shell, formerly Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Bristol, started a series of five monthly discussions on Post-War British Politics. His talks were about 40 minutes long and there followed animated discussion between him and a group of 30-40 members.

After the first enormously successful talk, a committee member commented that this was the sort of thing which could be recorded and, perhaps, used online for other groups. "I'll see what Online Across Scotland thinks," I heard myself say. And this is an example of how the committee is another learning group!

With a bit of trial and error, we found a member whose camera didn't need a changeover to another card half way through the talk - a heart stopping moment the first time it happened! I then taught myself how to create a YouTube channel and save our talks there, taking care that they weren't yet public. That was all quite easy, thanks to Google.

Then came the subtitling! YouTube generates fantastic automatic subtitles, but in one long sentence of US English. The names Gaitskell, Thatcher, Home, Callaghan et al are beyond its capabilities. Our wonderful committee members took turns to edit them into meaningful sentences - quite a lengthy task - and then load them into the YouTube Channel video - another learning curve.

We're delighted with the result and we've learned new skills along the way!

Donald's talks are now being presented as a series on OAS; the first was attended by members from all over Scotland and was well received.

We hope you enjoy the presentations and discussions as much as we did here in Oban.
Penny Earle, chair Oban u3a

Sonnet – dedicated to us all!

"When forty winters shall besiege thy brow ..."
Come off it, Shakespeare, forty's just a start.
I would suggest if thou wert living now
Eighty summers would scarcely hit the mark.
We know that, after forty, looks will fade;
And, yes, smooth skin, bright eyes and glossy hair
(Such bliss to touch, to see, to love) persuade
Us all that's all there is in life. Not fair!
That's not the end of life. Just look again,
See past the lumps and lines and slower walk;
We guys have lived, known love and joy and pain,
And still can live, not merely talk the talk.
But if you need a light to show the way
I'd recommend your local u3a

Roma Crampin, Glasgow West End Creative Writing Group

A Summer of u3a Activities.

Ian and Linda Matheson have enjoyed some interesting activities outside Ayr u3a this summer.

In July we travelled to York to the u3a festival. This was held at the university over three days with accommodation on or off site. Arranged largely by u3a volunteers, the festival consisted of a range of learning and social activities including performances from a number of u3a choirs, competitive matches between teams of pickleball, walking football and walking cricket teams and a chance to learn how to make a variety of crafts, learn about specific events and of course meet new acquaintances. Historical walks around York were also led by u3a members.

Over 600 u3a members from across the U.K. attended this festival. Ian attended a session on Spanish board games and a talk called York's brushstrokes with history, which looked at the contribution of art to various eras in the city's history. He also heard superb performances by the Wetherby guitar group and another guitar group called Bandura from Pocklington, also from Yorkshire. Before leaving for home on the Saturday he also had his first experience of playing pétanque and to his astonishment threw a toucher and found himself on the winning team in his game.



Linda learnt how to make corn dollies and floral wreaths and we both joined an astronomy session and were reminded of our youth with a Juke Box Jury hour. Needless to say, we both went to the evening quiz, not running it this time but taking part. Our team won!

It was great fun and lovely to meet people I had only met before on zoom. You can still see the programme of events here

[https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/festival-](https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/festival-2024/festival-programme)

[2024/festival-programme](https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/festival-2024/festival-programme)

Our second trip was to the Scottish summer school. This was held at Stirling University. This was a much smaller event with around 60 people. The summer school in Scotland is held every two years and organised by a u3a in Scotland sub-committee. The format was different, with each person choosing an activity stretching over five sessions as well as a shorter optional one. Ian took part in a playwriting workshop which turned out much more interesting than he expected, while Linda (trust her) took part in an IT class learning how to programme a microbot to carry out instructions such as playing Do-Re-Mi or send messages to another microbot. Ian also delivered a talk on the origins of the American Revolution to a small but enthusiastic audience. Oh, and we were in the winning quiz team again!



u3aS organises a variety of events and you might like to keep an eye on the website for something that would interest you <https://scotland.u3asite.uk>.

A message from the Trustee

By the time you read this autumn will be well upon us. A curious summer in Glasgow weather wise!

As Trustee I have been involved in supporting Cowal u3a get started /affiliated. Helensburgh u3a were very supportive in this venture.

It is very satisfying seeing more u3as start.

Sadly this season marked the closure of Coll u3a as well as Mull and Iona. Numbers small in both, hard to get committee members etc. but a real shame. One of my aims is to work out how best to support smaller, rural u3as.

On a more positive note I have held a number of Zoom meetings, one on policies which was well attended and hopefully proved informative.

The other was a special one for Highland and Island Communities in October.

I had a fascinating chat with Barry Claydon AI advisor for the u3a. As a result. I have invited him to host a u3a Scotland Zoom on the 8th November. There are a team helping Barry in the UK though none from Scotland....you don't have to be an expert on A1.

Raising the profile of the u3a has been a priority for the Trust.

The suggestion from Lenzie u3a to use Boom Radio has been taken up. Another 12 weeks in the pipe line starting in October (involved a wee bit of time but great).

Voting for different posts in the u3a has been concentrating our minds as well as the whole FFTF which was passed at the AGM.

The CEO, Sam Mauger and Chair of the Board, Liz Thackray stood down this year. Change is always a challenge..

The reality is that whatever happens the u3a movement in Scotland is strong; it has its challenges e.g committee members, accommodation etc. but many people enjoy meeting new friends and learning together in the u3a.

Anne Walsh was the Scotland rep at the last so called pilot council. The council should be established by April 2025. Judging by the comments of those attending it was deemed a success and views of the members were listened to.

Thanks as ever for your support

Liz Ervine

Trustee for Scotland

Online Across Scotland is free and open to all members of a Scottish u3a, You will find details on the u3a Scotland website <https://scotland.u3asite.uk>

The Trust also run a lot of online talks and training sessions and you can also ask them to arrange an online session for your u3a or a group of local u3as. Check out the Trust website,

U3a in Scotland's private **Facebook** is called **u3as based in Scotland** and there is a public one which is much less used.

Penicuik and Summer School

My wife and I named and formed a Nature Appreciation Group within Penicuik and District u3a. We were former members of the walking group but couldn't maintain the distance and pace. Also, rather than just walking, we wanted time to 'appreciate' the views, fauna, flora etc. Many members joined our group (now 25) and mostly from walking groups or those who just enjoyed outdoor activities.

When arranging the programme for 2024 Summer School in Stirling, Anne Walsh looked for 'unusual' u3a groups, noticed ours and asked if we could lead a group.



We had a small group to work with in Stirling. The first 'session' was indoors when we discussed what attracted the delegates to this course and then demonstrated some of the many smartphone Apps which identify plants/birds/insects etc.

All other sessions were conducted outdoors teaching observation skills and thankfully the weather was benign.

I suppose the acid test of this course will be to determine how many

delegates manage to start similar groups to ours.

Hugh and Mamie Munro

Buns in The Botanics

Once again, the sun gods favoured us and we had a lovely afternoon for our annual picnic on 24 August 2024 at the University of Dundee Botanic Gardens. Of course, we had our obligatory games afterwards: egg and spoon, putting, tug o'war and, of course, our infamous kung fu kaos.

Hilde Barrie, Dundee u3a Committee



Summer “Barbecue”

In June this year the Glasgow Network of u3as held a “Barbecue” in a Glasgow pub/restaurant. Unfortunately - as has been the case for most of this “summer”, the weather let us down and the decision had to be taken early in the week not to barbecue but instead to have a buffet.

We believe that this was the largest social gathering of u3a members in Scotland (though maybe you know different). We had 190 members from six u3as in the Greater Glasgow area - Bearsden and Milngavie, Glasgow West End, Glasgow South Side, East Renfrewshire, Helensburgh and Lenzie.



It was a great opportunity to mix with other u3as and we hope this will be the first of many joint events.



Enrolment

Forth Valley u3a held their enrolment events in Sauchie and Bridge of Allan in August. A fairly large number of new members have joined, and membership is now over 600. New groups are forming for Canasta, Creative Writing, Culture Vultures, and a new Wednesday Coffee Club. New ideas are also being explored to add to our 80+ activities around the Forth Valley.

Barbara Ann Easton, Forth Valley u3a



What's on in the South West

Greetings from the very beautiful, if rather remote, far South West of Scotland. Our thriving u3a is based in Stranraer and is expanding year on year, having suffered a slight slump due to Covid, it now has more members than ever.

Our most popular regular event is our monthly get together, when we enjoy a catch up with friends old and new over a coffee or tea. This is followed by any announcements made by the Chairman and Secretary on behalf of the committee. There then follows a talk by a guest speaker. These have been very varied and unfailingly interesting, from novelists to army veterans by way of animal rescue experts and Folk singers!

Very popular is our "Explorers" group, visiting places of interest and enjoying a meal on the way back constitutes a perfect day out. The venues are varied and have included an Adult Panto at Oran Mor in Glasgow, a guided tour of the subterranean world of Glasgow Central Station and most recently Threave House and gardens. These trips usually attract enough members to fill a large coach and are greatly enjoyed by all.

Another favourite event is "Ladies' Day at Ascot" which involves a local restaurant who provide a large screen television and a buffet. While we sip our Buck's Fizz and nibble canapes, the races are on screen to be cheered on by all of us, wearing our poshest frocks and largest hats - all great fun!

Other groups include a lively book group, a craft group, a Scrabble group and a gardening group. These are joined by a Film club, showing a monthly film during the winter months; there is something that feels truly decadent in watching a good movie on a rainy Friday morning. We also have a "World Foods" group which has been sampling the cuisines of the world alphabetically every month, with some interesting menus (X was designated a "guess the country" offering, before anybody asks!) Walking and Strolling groups are also well attended, the post walk coffee usually being most welcome too.



The Local History group is run by a popular local historian who is truly passionate about her subject and stimulates much discussion and many memories amongst the group. The Writers group have published a novel jointly written by the group and are working on a second book. Photography for Fun group travel locally to fulfil a challenge set by the group leader every month, with some very impressive results.

We always encourage the formation of new groups and fresh ideas in our membership, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. We have quite a large number of newcomers to the area and this helps to expose us to new ideas to absorb. Altogether, West Galloway u3a has a very positive input to the local community and is invaluable in preventing isolation and loneliness which are proven to have a huge effect on both mental and physical health.

Liz Stewart, West Galloway u3a

The Power o Omertà

Omertà : weel kent in fifties
Scottish Presbyterian hames.
A conspiracy o silence
first coded in the DNA,
and absorbed fae amniotic fluid.
Transmitted tae through milky teet
at bottle or breest.
Then topped up when supped
wi a spoonful o sugar
in the tea aroon the table.
Never named but
a system normatively weel framed.
As a bairnie ye kent yer place
tae accept fit ye are tellt.
Ower feart tae ask or answer
even tae an anaesthetist
as ye ging under!
Losing consciousness,
ye kent ye mustna let on.
Nae tae brak the omertà,
dinna spik aboot yer da!
Two doors up,
folk must hae kent.
Nithin was said.
Some comfort in that,
the communal omertà.
Until it aa blew up.
An exploding grenade intae
the family brigade.
Five folk bade in that hoose
only een a male,
a husband and a da.
Possession o a prized china doll
lit the fuse
and truth stood
efter the smoke an flames.
Nae mair complex mental games.
Aa hid tae be reframed.
Mither, daughter, sister, aunt,
nae langer the same as hid been named.
The older quine left for London.
Relationships were literally scattered.

This omertà wis truly shattered.
Only the da wis unaffected,

his pride maybe but
his role remained unchanged.
It wis said he set up,
demanded even the omertà.
It hid been aa aboot the da!
Sicily and Scotland ,
nae much atween us
in the silence stakes .
But tae be fair,
mair bloodied words an psyches
than body counts
fan truth got spoken
and omertà wis being broken.
Jean Marshall, Glasgow West End u3a

SHELL HUNTERS WALK AT CARDONESS



Pelican's Foot, Venus, Purple Top, Baltic Tellin, Rayed Trough – these are just some of the shells we found on our beach walk with Jim and Pauline Logan on Monday 15th July. It was a perfect morning, so rare this summer, when we gathered at Cardoness Beach. The sun was shining, a light breeze and the low tide provided a beautiful sweep of beach for us to search.

Jim gave us a great insight into the marine life of the Solway coast at our March meeting and our beach combing morning built on our knowledge and understanding of the subject.

In recent years DNA has cast light on the taxonomy of marine life and has caused the Latin names of many species to change – but the English common names persist and although the origin of these names is a mystery, they are far more memorable!



We are so grateful to Jim and Pauline for sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm with us, our beach walks will never be quite the same again!

Extract from Stewartry u3a, July newsletter

Items for the next newsletter should be sent to the newsletter.u3ainscotland@gmail.com (or if you have problems with that email address send to the chairperson) by 28th February 2025.