

From the Editor Helen McGlinchey

Welcome to the Jan/Feb newsletter. A very happy new year. Thank you to all those who contributed to this edition. My thanks also to the Chair, Jim Livingstone, Barbara McDermott, Ann Hayes, June Martin & Noreen Caffrey for their support & advice.

Contacts

For security reasons, we are no longer publishing the personal email addresses of *Committee Members* or the *Newsletter Editor* on the public website. Contact details for all are in the *Convenors Directory*. Or you may email the relevant person directly through the *Contact Tab* on the *Belfast u3a website* <https://u3asites.org.uk/belfast>. Go to the *Group tab*, find the group page, and click the pigeon icon.

Committee News

I hope you all had good times over the Xmas period, with family or friends, at home or away.

Since we had the usual break in December, the Executive Committee met last on 20 November. Then it dealt with a packed agenda, steered very efficiently by Jim Livingstone to completion in just under two hours! We spent some time on regional/national matters, one item being recent news from the Third Age Trust. Do you know that a small number of u3as are now over 40 years old? But more importantly, Belfast u3a will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2025-6. So, we are starting to think of a large programme of events to celebrate this achievement and would be very grateful for any ideas and offers of help. There must be many talented people out there with a little time on their hands, who might like to join the Committee. Potential new members would go forward for election at the next AGM, to be held in May. If you would like to consider this, please talk to any of the current Committee members at the General Meeting or make contact through the website.

The Xmas party held at Shorts Sports and Recreation Club was the social event of December. Over one hundred members enjoyed a tasty buffet lunch and then a range of performances from poetry to popular music, both classics and contemporary. As organisers, of course, we thought it hit the spot for getting into the festive mood. It is only what others have said

which really matters. "It was great to see so many people there, chatting, eating the great food, and enjoying the entertainment." "Just wanted to say that we had a lovely time at the Christmas Get-together this afternoon. The food, entertainment and company were most enjoyable. I know it takes a lot of time and effort to pull these events together." A special thanks goes to John McQuillan, who masterminded it all.

A number of new groups have been established over the past few months. The Folk Singing in Harmony Group meets fortnightly on a Wednesday in The American Bar in Dock Street. The Ukulele Group gets together in 2 Royal Avenue on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. The Pickleball Group play on Mondays in the Shankill Leisure Centre and maybe Friday in Lisnasharragh. Fuller information will be available soon on the website. Another Book Group is being considered, running from January in the Lisburn Road Library. And, if you have the enthusiasm for any other venture, please bear in mind that start-up money within reasonable limits is available for setting up new groups.

At the last General Meeting held at end of November, Dr Mike Blair, introduced by his brother David, presented a selection of his award-winning photographic work. From sunset at the Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi to wildlife adventures in Africa, and covering his travels over other continents too, the spellbinding images and narrative held the audience throughout. David has organised a fine line-up of speakers for the next six months and the first of these will take place on 25 January. Tony Ferguson will be speaking about his book 'Andy Symington - Tyrone's most wanted man'. This is a fascinating story which takes us from the trenches in the Somme to an extraordinary coincidence happening in the present day. Then on 29 February, Bronagh McAstney from Northern Ireland Screen - Digital Archive will be showing a selection of short films of local interest. We are pleased to have seen record attendances at the last two meetings of 2023 and expect to see a good number of you there as another year gets underway. And in 2024, it is anticipated that a significant milestone for Belfast u3a will be reached; currently the total membership is just three short of 1000!

And lastly, it remains to wish everyone a Happy New Year, with lots of energy to enjoy everything that u3a can offer to interest you in 2024.

Information on Monthly Meetings

Monthly Meetings in the *Balmoral Hotel*, Blacks Road, Dunmurry, Belfast BT10 ONF.

Please note that monthly meetings are normally held on the last Thursday of the month (tea & coffee from 10.30). The speakers are listed above. Reminders will be sent a week before the meetings.

Group News

Art Appreciation Group – from Sandra Foster



In October 2023 one of our members gave a very interesting presentation to the group - Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon: *The Famous Friendship Between Rivals*. It was pointed out that many famous artists had flourishing relationships with other artists in their field. However, there were also intense rivalries and an unaccountable number of insults shared between artists. This was the story of Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon.

Following Francis Bacon's death, the contents of his studio were given to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. The artist had Irish connections. All the contents were painstakingly catalogued and photographed and then reassembled in the gallery for all to see. In late November 2023 some members of the group visited the gallery to see the studio and a small number of Bacon's paintings. The picture below is his studio.

Earlier in November 2023 members of the group paid an informal visit to the Ulster Museum to see the Colin Middleton exhibition. He was born in Belfast in 1910. After leaving school he worked in the linen industry, but in 1948 he became a full-time painter. He established a reputation as arguably the most progressive artist working in Belfast and quickly came to be regarded as one of the leading Irish painters of his generation and one of the major figures of the twentieth century in Ireland.

To round off 2023 the group visited the Ulster Museum, in December, to see the Royal Ulster Academy's Annual Exhibition. We were delighted to be accompanied by Dan Dowling, President of the Academy. He identified a number of paintings ranging from landscapes, portraits, abstracts, to charcoal and pencil drawings. With his artist's knowledge he was able to give an insight into the painters' thinking and the techniques behind their work.

The group is looking forward to 2024, and learning more about the world of art.





Wine Tasting Groups -from David Blair

If you came to one of David's Wine Tasting groups in previous years and don't want to keep the tasting glasses you bought, please let me know by sending an email to wineu3abelfast@gmail.com. I will buy them back from you or if members are feeling generous, they could donate them for new members!

The group starting on Jan 10 is already full, but you can go on a waiting list for the future - use the above email or click the pigeon on the website.

Poetry Reading Group -from Kristin Martin

The Poetry Reading Group meets in Finaghy Community Centre on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month from 2pm until 3:30 pm. We decide as a group on topics or poets to discuss at our meetings.



Book Group 1 – From Anne McGovern

We continue to meet on the first Monday of every month in the afternoon. December's read was John Boyne's *All The Broken Places* which had a mixed response. In January we will discuss the Booker prize winner *Prophet Song*.

Book Group 4 -from Anna Carragher

It is hoped the proposed new book group will begin in February in South Belfast and will possibly be the third Tuesday of the month.

Informal Bridge Group – from Pat McNamee

Informal Bridge group is meeting again on Monday and Friday at 2.00pm in the convenor's home. New members welcome. Contact details available in the convenors' directory. New members with some knowledge of Bridge who wish to practise their play in an informal setting are very welcome. Queries about bidding or play can be discussed in a relaxed atmosphere. You do not need to come with a partner.



Online Bridge Group -from Dolores Hutton & Sheila Bones

If you are interested in joining our group, we would love to hear from you, please contact either Sheila or Dolores. Please see **Contacts Section** above.

Ukulele Group -from Geoff Crowther

Just an update on the ukulele group.

The ukulele group is up and strumming in 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast.

The 26 members are mostly beginners so now is a good time to join.

We meet on the first and third Tuesday of each month between 11am and 1pm.

Starting to sound like music but the world tour is someway off!!

Bridge Group -from Jim McDonnell

CELTIC PAIRS [Monday December 4]

Congratulations to Jim McDonnell and Brian Moore who came first of 637 pairs from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales with a score of 72.29 per cent.

U3A BRIDGE CONGRESS 2024

NIREC have asked Belfast U3a to host the U3a Bridge Congress next autumn – more details to follow.

BRIDGE BREAK 2024


We are hoping to organise a Bridge Break for Belfast U3a members.

I have made preliminary enquiries to some hotels - **Cavan Crystal, Slieve Russell, Carrickdale** - regarding availability in March /April for 2 or 3 night bed, breakfast and dinner. The approximate cost would be between 200-300 Euros depending on the number of nights. No decisions have been made at this stage. We are just asking for an expression of interest. If there are sufficient numbers, we will set up a committee to finalise arrangements. We may get quotes from some other hotels. If you haven't done so already, please contact me to express your interest. No commitment necessary at this stage! Jim McDonnell [membership@belfastu3a.org]



Classical Music Appreciation Group – from Keith Thompson

The first meetings of the Classical Music Appreciation group for 2024 will be Tuesday January 9 and Tuesday February 13 in Finaghy Community Centre (Geeragh Place, BT10 OER) from 10.30am-12.30pm. To get us started at the January meeting members will be asked to bring a favourite piece to share by a composer with initial A, B or C. Suggestions for future topics include choral music, organ music, musicals and instruments of the orchestra. We also intend to have a session looking in detail at Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin* before the NI Opera production at the Grand Opera House in September.

Concert/Theatre Group – from Maureen Pimley 

Event

- Lyric Thurs January 4 **Hansel & Gretel 12.30** £15 TBC
- Waterfront Wed January 24 **Prof Brian Cox 7.30** £44

The Last Word Group – from Hilary Davidson

We start back on January 12 at Shaftesbury Community Centre 1.30pm -3.00pm. Please feel free to come along for a “taster” session .

Scrabble Group – from Hilary Davidson



We restart on Thursday January 11 from 1.30 - 3.00pm. and any new members would be welcome.



Pilates 3 – from Rosemary Thomas

Classes continue in Belvoir Activity Centre on Mondays and Wednesdays from 12.45pm-1.45pm. There are some additional spaces available in the Wednesday class.

Creative Writing Groups – from Lena McCann

Monday Group (Weekly, Ormeau Library) 2pm-4pm

WWW Group (Monthly, Tesco Community Room, Newtownbreda), second Wednesday 2pm-4pm

Both groups are continuing to enjoy individual and collective inspirational pursuits. On December 11, 2023 the Monday Group welcomed guests to an afternoon of readings in Ormeau Library – seasonal refreshments were provided by group members. It was a very sociable and entertaining afternoon and may have attracted some potential u3a members! The group would like to express their sincere thanks to those who came along for their encouragement and support.

WWW Group (Weaving Words of Wonder) – New Venue

From Wednesday January 10 2024 Members are now meeting in the Community Room in Tesco's, Newtownbreda, from 2pm-4pm. Members will continue to develop their individual writing skills and chosen genres in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, benefitting from constructive feedback and ongoing support.

Backgammon -from David Blair

A new Backgammon group is being formed and a questionnaire has been sent out to those who have already expressed an interest. This will establish the preferred format and venue for the group. If you would like to be involved, please contact David using backgammonu3abelfast@gmail.com and I will send you a questionnaire to seek your views. Don't worry if you haven't played before. There are many novices already in the group, so those who have played before will guide you through the rules and playing strategies. It's a great game and very easy to pick up.

Local History Group – from Margaret Stirrup

The Local History group continues to meet monthly at Clonduff Community Centre (Wednesday 1.30pm- 3.00 pm) and in addition organise visits to local places of interest. Our recent visit to Brownlow House in Lurgan was excellent and we look forward to our Jan visit which will be a *Walk-through West Belfast* on January 23. Current and new members welcome.



All weather Walking Group – from Brenda McHugh

During the run up to Christmas, everyone has been busy, and the weather hasn't encouraged outdoor activities. Nevertheless, our walking group leaders have kept turning up faithfully in all weathers.

Of course, we need to adjust our plans sometimes, but usually an alternative route is an obvious sensible choice, and everyone feels satisfied that they have made the effort. (Prospective walkers take note).

Each of our groups enjoyed their own Christmas Lunch. These get togethers are enjoyable and give the walkers an opportunity to see one another when we are not dressed in clumsy boots, chunky jackets and sometimes waterproof clothes (not the most fashionable or flattering looks!)

We are, like other groups, looking forward to 2024 - for us that means continually exploring the countryside and enjoying great companionship.

Pickleball Group – from Neil McQuillan

A new Pickleball group has started up. For those of you who may well be unaware of this game, it is said to be the fastest growing sport in the world.

We only started the group in early November when we had 3 sessions in which people could try out the game with a coach in attendance to offer advice, encouragement, and an explanation of the rules. These were held at three separate sports centres at differing times in an attempt to allow as many as possible to give it a go. There was huge interest shown and over 50 turned up over the three days.

Stemming from these sessions, it was obvious that there was sufficient interest to get regular sessions up and going. So, we have now started 2 sessions weekly. These are as follows: -

1. **Shankill Leisure Centre at 12 noon every Monday** for an hour and a half (restarting after Christmas on **January 8**, cost £3)
2. **Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre at 10am every Friday** for an hour (restarting after Christmas on **December 29**, cost £4)

These sessions are already well attended with approximately 16-20 turning up at Shankill every week and a completely different dozen or more attending Lisnasharragh. I only see these numbers increasing as those currently attending seem to be complete converts to the game. To all others I cannot recommend the game highly enough, and we would welcome any member to turn up at either of these sessions and give it a go.

For the moment our funds should continue to cover the costs of our coach, Phil Wilson, which is of great benefit as we are basically all beginners (but becoming improvers!)

Rambling Sketchers Group -from Judith Loder

Hi....have you got the gear to cope with local weather and the inclination to practice your sketching or indeed painting skills outside?

Do join us. We travel independently, bringing our own materials, meeting up at the venue around 10.30/11.00am. If you join in, I'll give you my mobile number so you can locate me. Once at the venue we disperse for a couple of hours to do our own art thing having agreed when and where we are going to meet up again. That might be in a café or pub, or we might just be eating our own packed lunch outside.

Part of the craic is a show and tell. This is not about good, better, and best artistic efforts; it's just fascinating how different we all are in our approach to things and the materials we choose to use.

Be very clear, I am hopeless at sketching – it's not 'my thing', that's why I started this group, but I do enjoy the outdoors and the discipline of looking at things very closely.

So, when do we meet? The weather mostly dictates that. Sunday is a favourite meeting day for me.

Here are some dates for the first couple of months of the year planned with optimism!

- Sunday January 7 **St George's Market** (meet entrance facing Cromac St/Lanyon Station).
- Wednesday January 24 **The Square Emporium**, Sydenham Business Pk, Heron Rd (car parking front of building).
- Sunday February 4 **Scrabo woods or quarries** (meet golf club access road, by toilet block). Lunch or gathering at Scrabo Golf Club 1.00pm
- Wednesday February 21 **Minnowburn** (meet Minnowburn car park).



Literature Group – from June Martin

The first meeting of 2024 will be on Wednesday January 10 at Finaghy Community Centre from 10.30-12.30pm. We shall be reading/discussing *The Lost Daughter* by Elena Ferrante when Patricia Feeney will lead the group. The other texts on our programme for spring term are *Therese Desquerox* by Mauriac, *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, and *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf. The last meeting of the term will be on Wednesday March 20.

New members are welcome. Anyone wishing to join the group should contact either of the 2 convenors, June Martin or Nuala Zahran.