

From the Editor Helen McGlinchey

Welcome to the Mar/April newsletter. Thank you to all those who sent contributions for this edition. My thanks also to the Chair, Jim Livingstone, Barbara McDermott, Ann Hayes, Noreen Caffrey and June Martin.

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

As Spring now approaches, it's always a time of renewal. We have all experienced a wet and cold winter. But hopefully that is now well behind us, and we can look forward to sunnier days and lots of interesting fun with Belfast u3a. Speaking of renewals, it is perhaps timely to remind all members that membership subscriptions are due for payment at the start of April 2024. The Committee has been able to avoid any increase in fees this year. So they remain at £15 by Direct Debit or £20 by bank transfer or cheque. But renewal, in the best sense, is about refreshing our u3a, so it can meet the needs and aspirations of all our members in their wish to **Learn, Laugh and Live!**

The Executive Committee is working hard to help Belfast u3a grow and develop. It is wonderful to note that we now have 1,010 members. We have seen an amazing growth in just these last two years with membership growing by over 10 per cent. We have also seen the number of interest groups exceed 65 and our monthly meetings at the Balmoral Hotel continue to attract up to 150 members - time to meet friends and enjoy fascinating speakers.

It is great to see three new Interest Groups being established this year already: a new Book Group and a new Backgammon Group. A proposed new Creative Writing Group has attracted 14 potential members, but still needs to confirm a convenor and venue. If you

would be interested in taking on the role of convenor for this new Creative Writing Group, please let the Groups Co-Ordinator, Geoff Crowther, know by emailing him at groups@belfastu3a.org .

Next year is a special year for us, as it is Belfast u3a's 25th anniversary. The Committee has agreed unanimously that work should now begin planning for this anniversary. We hope individual groups may find ways of celebrating this anniversary during 2025, but the committee is going to focus on one big event, hopefully at a venue such as the City Hall. The Belfast u3a first met in April 2000 and held its first AGM in Belfast Castle in October 2000.

For those planning to attend the monthly meetings at the Balmoral Hotel in March and April, please note that, due to scheduling difficulties, these two meetings will **NOT** be on the last Thursday of the month as usual. The March meeting will be on **Thursday 21 March** (a week earlier) and the April meeting will be on **Wednesday 24 April** (a day earlier). Please see the details below for the March and April meetings; Thursday 30 May and Thursday 27 June meetings will be notified later.

So, lots to look forward to at this time of renewal. We hope you continue to enjoy Belfast u3a and remember the u3a adage to **Learn, Laugh and Live!**

Annual Membership Subscription 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Our Annual Membership Subscription is reviewed by the Executive Committee each January, in the light of ongoing and proposed expenditure. We have agreed the following for the coming year:

- The Membership Subscription for the year ending 31 March 2025 will remain at £20.
- This will apply to those paying by Cheque, or Bank Transfer (no cash payments will be accepted).
- There will be a £5 discount for those paying by Direct Debit, as this reduces the workload of the Treasurer. For any Member paying by Direct Debit, the Membership Subscription will remain at £15.
- The Membership Subscription is not due until 1 April.
- You will be sent a reminder towards the end of March with full instructions on how to pay.
- If you are paying by Bank Transfer, please ensure that you do this on or after the 1 April.
- If you have already signed up for a Direct Debit, you will receive a note in advance as to the date in April when it (£15) will be taken from your bank account.
- If you have previously paid by Bank Transfer or Cheque and wish to change your payment method to Direct Debit, please contact the Membership Secretary to obtain a Direct Debit Mandate form [email: membership@belfastu3a.org]
- If you decide to pay by Cheque, the Treasurer will be happy to receive it at the monthly meeting on Thursday 21 March.

Information on Monthly Meetings

Monthly Meetings in the *Balmoral Hotel*, Blacks Road, Dunmurry, Belfast BT10 0NF.

Please note that monthly meetings are normally held at 11.00am (tea & coffee from 10.30). The speakers are listed below. Reminders will be sent a week before the meetings.

THURSDAY 21 MARCH - Dr Greer Ramsey, Curator of Archaeology at the Ulster Museum, will be presenting a talk entitled *Treasure Island: Archaeology and the Coroner's Court*. He has some interesting items which have been used in past investigations involving the Coroner's Office.

WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL - A speaker from Cancer Focus NI will be talking about the organization and the work they do, as well as more specific details, e.g. on the European 12 point code, which helps us avoid the lifestyle factors which might have a negative impact on our health.

Group News

Art Appreciation Group – from Sandra Foster



We began the New Year with some fun. Members of the group were 'cast away on a desert island' and had to choose a piece of art to take with them. Their choices ranged from Raphael, Rodin, Rothko and many more. It was lovely to listen to the reasons why members made their choices.

In February the group visited the Ulster Museum to see the exhibition Kelpra: Artists and Printmakers. We learned that the prints on show were as a result of a close collaboration between the artists and printmakers. Artists included Elisabeth Frink, John Piper and Bridget Riley. The printmakers, Kelpra, were Rose Kelly and Chris Prater. Below is a lovely print by John Piper.



About our Climate Group – from Theresa McVeigh



Our meetings are conversations about various aspects of climate change. We each bring information on the subject to share with the group and we aim to learn and improve our understanding.

The group has been talking about Katherine Hayhoe's ideas on her TED Talk on "The most important thing you can do about climate change: talk about it". She is a Canadian climate scientist with a particular interest in how climate change affects people in the places in which they live. She advocates putting political differences to one side and concentrating on our shared values. To successfully make the changes needed to reduce our carbon emissions and stop global warming, we need rational hope of a better future, a stable economy, abundant energy and resources available to all. Hayhoe strongly believes there are solutions that are practical, viable, accessible and attractive.

The next meeting is on:

- Friday 8 March at 2.30pm

New members welcome. Please contact the convenor, Theresa McVeigh. Please see the [Contacts Section](#).

Wine Tasting Group -from David Blair



This Group is two thirds of the way through the current set of tasting evenings. The next cohort will be after the summer break, but you can express an interest now. Priority will be given to new enquiries as demand is high for this activity. (I wonder why?)

You will learn the techniques which will help you get the most from your glass of wine and understand which factors have contributed to the style and characteristics of each particular wine. Each session follows a theme: either a region, country or a couple of grape varieties. Tasting glasses are provided. All you need to bring is an open and curious mind.

Backgammon Group – from David Blair

The newly formed Backgammon Group is up and running and meeting fortnightly at Tesco Newtownbreda in the Community room. Don't worry about equipment or coaching, as all is provided. Even if you haven't played this game before, come along, and give it a try. It's great fun and a very sociable game. Check the website for dates and times.

Book Group 1 – From Anne McGovern



We continue to meet every month in members' homes. In February we read the Booker Prize winner *Prophet Song*, challenging but worthwhile. For March we are trying something lighter, *Relative Love* by Amanda Brookfield. At present we are at full capacity.

Mindfulness Group – from David Blair

Spring '24

It is planned to run another 8-week Mindfulness Programme later in the Spring. It will be a repeat of the previous content, so suitable for anyone interested in learning the skills and techniques associated with the practice of Mindfulness. It has many recognised benefits, but the programme will require a time commitment (which is easy to fit into your daily routine).

Please get in touch by clicking the pigeon link on the website and I'll send you more comprehensive information and confirmation of dates and venue. (Please mention that it is Mindfulness you are interested in as I run other groups.)

You will be supplied with a book and access to all the material. Previous participants have mentioned how it has helped them to think more clearly and deal more effectively with issues in their lives, both current and from the past.

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.

Book Group 4 -from Anna Carragher



Book Group 4 will have its first meeting on March 12 in Lisburn Road Library and anyone who is interested and has not already made contact please refer to the [Contacts Section](#). The first meeting will not have a selected book to discuss but will be an opportunity for members to introduce themselves to each other and to share what books they would like to read and discuss over the next few months.

All weather Walking Group – from Brenda McHugh



We have had an unprecedented period of wet, very windy weather. On more than one Thursday, the advice from the weather forecasters has been to avoid travel unless absolutely necessary!

As you can imagine, we are looking forward to seeing the lengthening days and the signs of Spring, when we can plan ahead with confidence.

Our walks are still popular and well attended. We will make the most of longer days to travel a wee bit further afield to find what changes have taken place in the favourite routes.

Golf Group – from A. Ross



The golf group met at Castlereagh Hills Golf Club, and after some discussions, the following courses were chosen as the preferred options for this year: Ardminnan, Spa, Lisburn, Carrickfergus, St Patricks, Ballyclare, Larne and Carnalea golf clubs. After contacting these clubs re availability etc, the following courses have been booked and will be the programme for the incoming season. Ardminnan Golf Club (April), Carrickfergus Golf Club (May), Carnalea Golf Club (June), St Patricks Golf Club (July), Ballyclare Golf Club (August), Larne Golf Club (September).

Our annual trip to the Ballymascanlon Hotel in September has been booked and we hope to build on the success of the past few years to have another fantastic time at the hotel.

Photography Group – from A. Ross



The inclement weather is still hindering our ability to get out as a group and take photographs. This has had little effect on the enthusiasm of the group and some great photographs have been taken by individual members getting out and about. A recent visit by waxwings from Scandinavia to the Victoria Park/Connswater area has provided an excellent opportunity for our members to return terrific photographs of these beautiful birds.

Our monthly theme competitions continue, for the month of February the theme is *Framed within a frame* and the opportunity to submit photographs to a specific letter, for the month of February the letter B is proving to be sometimes challenging but enjoyable.

The Garden Group - from Rosemary Thomas



The monthly garden visits will resume towards the end of April, by which time the weather will hopefully have improved and stabilised. Details of the first visit will be emailed direct to group members as usual.

As there are almost 100 in the group, demand for places is high so if you see a visit which interests you, it's best to book your place sooner rather than later.

If you no longer wish to receive emails about the Garden Group, please let me know.

Classical Music Appreciation Group – from Keith Thompson



The next meetings of the Classical Music Appreciation group will be Tuesday 12 March and Tuesday 9 April in Finaghy Community Centre (Geeragh Place, BT10 0ER) from 10.30am-12.30. At the March meeting Brid Coady-Weekes will give a presentation on early music, with the emphasis on the choral tradition. For the April meeting participants will bring favourite pieces to share by composers with initials D, E or F.

Online Bridge Group -from Dolores Hutton & Sheila Bones



We continue to meet every Tuesday online at 10.30am, lasting about 2 hours using the *RealBridge* platform, which is very simple to use. We play Duplicate Bridge in a relaxed and informal setting.

Since the last Newsletter, we have had some new members join our Group, which is always very welcome! We will continue to host a table prior to every Belfast U3A monthly meeting at the Balmoral Hotel. If you have any queries, please come over and say hello. We can provide you with a booklet to take away that walks you through how we operate the Online Bridge and shows you how you can go back in after we have played to review how you, and others, have played. You can replay all the cards.

We thought it might be more informative, if instead of us extolling the benefits of joining our Group, one of our members provided a testimonial for each issue of this newsletter. Thank you to Joanna for providing the following for this issue:

‘The Tuesday morning Bridge group, run very efficiently by Dolores and Sheila, is now well established, which I look forward to every week. The group is very friendly and welcoming to new members. Playing online has several benefits such as the video facility, which means the social element of bridge is not lost. Also, if my regular partner is not available, Dolores and Sheila can organise for me to play with someone else. There are several members of the group who do not have a regular partner, but this is never an issue. Every board can be looked at after the game each week, which means we can always learn from our mistakes and other’s good play! I would highly recommend Tuesday bridge for players of all abilities.’

If you are interested in joining our fabulous group, we would love to hear from you, please contact either Dolores or Sheila - please see [Contacts Section](#).

Plato’s Parlour (Philosophy Group) -from Rosie Dargan



There will be no meeting of this group during March, April, or May. It will recommence on Thursday 6 June.

Science For Everyone – from Mavis Turner

I regret to say the Science for Everyone group has drawn to a close with no further meetings planned.

While there were a few loyal regular members and some interesting group meetings it did not attract the members needed to keep the group going.



Concert/Theatre Group – from Maureen Pimley

Event

- Lyric Theatre ***The Pillowman*** by Martin McDonagh.
- Sunday 26 May @ **2.30pm** £15.00 TBC.
- Waterfront Hall Fri 7 June ***Seven Drunken Nights – The story of the Dubliners.***
Friday 7 June @ **8.00pm** £27.50.
- Ulster Hall ***Joy! Joy! Joy!*** Belfast Community Gospel Choir.
- Sunday 9 June @ 3.00pm. £34.00
- Grand Opera House ***Sunset Boulevard*** Summer Youth Production.
- **Saturday 20 July @ 2.00pm** £28.00
- Grand Opera House ***Grand Ballet Gala.***
- **Early Saturday 26 October @ 2.30pm £55.00 TBC booking essential.**

The Last Word Group – from Hilary Davidson & Ann Hayes

We continue meeting Fridays 1.30pm -3.00pm at Shaftesbury Community Centre. Any new members would be very welcome.

We are very sad to announce the death of Pauline Nixon a former convenor of our group. She will be remembered and sorely missed by us.

Scrabble Group – from Hilary Davidson



Meetings are held on Thursdays 1.30pm - 3.30pm at Clonduff Community Centre and new members would be very welcome.

We are sad at the death of Pauline Nixon a founder member of our group. She will be missed by us all.

Literature Group – from June Martin



We have been pleased to welcome some new members to the group this term. After our reading and discussion of the anti-war novel *Slaughterhouse 5* by Kurt Vonnegut dealing with the bombing of Dresden in 1945, we move to 1920s rural France in our study of *Therese Desqueyroux* by Francois Mauriac. First published in 1927 it dates from the same year as the publication of the very feminist book, *A Room of One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf, our final text of the term which ends on 20 March. Meetings will resume after Easter on 10 April.

Pilates Groups – from Rosemary Thomas



Pilates 1

From Monday, 11 March, the 2-3 pm class will re-locate to Belvoir Activity Centre.

Antoinette Bradley

Pilates 3

The Monday 12.45 class in Belvoir Activity Centre is popular and full. However, there are places in the Wednesday 12.45-1.45 class if anyone is interested. For more information, please see [Contacts Section](#).



Creative Writing Groups – from Lena McCann

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

WWW Group (Monthly Tesco Community Room Newtownbreda)

2nd Wednesday 2pm-4pm

Both groups continue to enjoy individual and collective inspirational pursuits and are attracting new members.

Local History Group – from Elizabeth McKeown

Local History Group Belfast walking tours in winter can be challenging. The weather is cold and wet. Nevertheless, already this year we have managed a variety of outings. Some of us have enjoyed guided tours of Milltown and Balmoral cemeteries. Twenty three of us met for our Walk in the West. We much appreciated the sharing of Falls Road childhood memories from two or three members. We have plans to investigate North Belfast - *a Walk in the North*. Relevant to this - the North Belfast February festival programme was packed with excellent events. We have sent our congratulations to Felicity McCartney. Felicity is a member of Belfast u3a. Her talk focus is locally based Social History. The Executive Committee would also like to acknowledge Felicity's excellent contribution and express their many thanks. Lastly, our January Clonduff Community Centre meeting was cancelled because of bad weather. Anna Monks, another Belfast u3a member, has volunteered a *conserve your treasured artefacts workshop* session. Anna is a retired museum curator.