**Flitwick & District U3A**

Registered Charity Number 1168040

 **A Brief History 2003 -2023**

**The Beginning**

Anne Slack was for a long time the librarian in Flitwick Library and had a regular series of meetings, the Good Afternoon meetings, offering talks each month on a range of topics. In January 2003, Dudley Davis asked Anne about establishing a group for local older people, and arranged for him to talk to that month’s Good Afternoon meeting. That was attended by 66 people and featured a talk about the Bevan Boys, who had replaced miners called up for war service. Dudley asked at that meeting if there was interest in creating a U3A for Flitwick & District.

Dudley was an ex-headmaster from a local school, and spurred on by his wife Miriam, decided there was enough interest to go ahead and our U3A thus began. Initial meetings of around 30 members were held in the library but it was quickly realised that a larger venue was necessary, so the Rufus Centre became our home venue. Following the move to the Rufus Centre, the numbers swelled, which included Val and David Barrick and Jean Reeves. All three quickly joined the committee and have played an important part in our development. Dudley unfortunately became seriously ill after a short time of leading our U3A, and was replaced as chairman by Rex Markham. The Davis suite at the Rufus Centre is named after Dudley. An important early member was Margaret Allman, who had been a member of Buxton U3A. She passed on a great deal of her knowledge of the organisation and worked extremely hard to make our group a success. Over the next few years our numbers grew as did the number of groups we offered. Dave Barrick succeeded Rex as chairman.

Subsequent chairmen have been Jean Reeves, Bill Cadman, Val Barrick, Jean Reeves (again), Vida Turk and now Nick Rose.

**The 10th Anniversary**

In 2013 Val Barrick arranged a 10th Anniversary Cream Tea at the Rufus Centre which was very well attended. 180 of our members came and were entertained by the play reading group. An exhibition of art work, papercraft and jewellery was held in the coffee lounge. The mayor and members from other U3As were also in attendance. Flowers for the tables were arranged by our group.

**Our Constitution**

Initially, our constitution was that of a members’ society. Prompted by the Third Age Trust we sought charitable status in 2015, Judi McKay doing most of the negotiation with the Charity Commission and the Trust. This became a reality in May 2016. Our constitution has been updated since, the most recent was at last year’s AGM, bringing it more in line with the Third Age Trust’s latest model constitution.

 **Our Newsletter**

 We started publishing a newsletter 3 times a year to keep members up-to-date with events and other happenings, and gave this a revamp in 2018 to the much glossier A5 size it is now. It remains difficult to get our members to provide updates on group activities we can publish in the newsletter, despite Marlen’s best efforts to persuade members to write something.

**Monthly Meetings**

Our monthly meetings on the second Thursday of the month have always been popular, with speakers on a very wide range of topics. Many of our members saw this a good opportunity to socialise, with tea and coffee and biscuits available for free afterwards - some attended just for this whether or not they were interested in the speaker. Typically, in 2019 we had around 180 members coming to those talks, but then Covid struck, and with the lockdown all our group meetings and the monthly general meeting had to stop.

We then started doing our monthly meetings by Zoom, which was a new experience for us all - we mostly had about 90 members watching, and gave us the opportunity to use speakers from much further afield, as it mattered not where they were in the country. This continued until October 2021 when we were at last able to resume face to face meetings. Attendance was quite limited at first but there was so much pleasure in the faces of those coming to the first few meetings that they were able to meet friends in person and not just online.

An unfortunate change during lockdown, according to some, was the opening of the Rendezvous Café in the room next to the Lockyer Suite where we meet. This was where previously we had offered the tea and coffee, but we could no longer do so. This has almost certainly resulted in some reduction in members attending our meetings.

**Membership**

Over the years our numbers swelled, and by March 2018 we reached a peak of 600. Membership has declined since and is currently just below 500. As always happens, there are a number of members who do not renew each year, for a variety of reasons – being unwell, moving away the most frequent. While this was the case again during 2021/2, we had two years of very limited new members so our overall membership of around 500 is well below the March 2018 peak.

**Groups**

The most important aspect of our U3A are our groups, and the Group Leaders who give up their time to run them. We currently have about 50 groups covering a very diverse range - Astronomy to Ukelele, Bridge to Walking, Lunches, Latin and many more. The newsletter gives the full list and details of when and where they meet. Our groups really are what U3A is about, passing on our knowledge and interests to our fellow members and making each group meeting a friendly and sociable event. It really is a huge tribute to our Group Leaders past and present that we have such a great and popular U3A today.

*Nick Rose*

*June 2023*