

Ashby:

Blaby: Not currently in the Network

Bradgate: Have left the Network

Charnwood:

Countesthorpe: We have recently started a new group for Cryptic Crossword enthusiasts, a small but energetic group are now meeting regularly. A recently formed group of Bird Watchers is gaining support. We have no natural 'leaders' but with support and the use of visits and the occasional speaker and use of local resources they have built a programme that is maintaining the support of the group. The leader of our Jazz and Classical Music Groups has left the area and both groups lacked the support to continue. However, with some encouragement the Jazz Group has reformed but the Classical Music group is currently not operating.

Enderby Area: Our U3A members are to embark on their second Scottish holiday this year in time for the festive season. We much enjoyed our holiday last November and it was good to be together as a group. In the meantime we are planning a visit to Alan Henson's (from Countryfile) farm in the Cotswolds.

At home at our Christmas party we were entertained by a lady who was very well versed playing the ukulele. She was superb and sang her way through songs old and new, including a number encompassing all of the countries in the world – we just wish that our memories were as good as hers!

Our Knit and Natter group continues its good work, receiving letters of thanks for the charitable work they do. On the craft side, a new card making group is being set up. Our kurling group continues to be popular and trophies were presented to our outstanding and long-standing members who contributed towards and won many competitions at our recent monthly meeting.

Glenfield: We now have around 270 members, with an average of 10 joining every month.

This may sound like good news, but our meeting venue can only accommodate something like 150, so we may be faced with closing our books. At least 100 members attend the monthly meeting. We would welcome comments and advice from other U3As in the Network who have had to face similar situations.

The Groups we have on offer are very wide ranging and well supported, at the last count well over 30.

Glenfield U3A also has a very active social calendar. Members are very supportive and contribute widely to the success of these ventures.

We had a successful and hugely enjoyable Christmas Concert utilising the talents of our members, and that of a local choir one of the members is involved with.

More recently we held a Quiz Night with supper, which was well received. In the pipeline are a 60's Night, canal boat trip and an Antiques Roadshow.

We supported our local library on National Libraries Day and ran our first Memory Course.

Great Glen:

Hinckley: For several years now, we haven't held a group Christmas lunch; preferring instead the option of a New Year's Lunch in January – when venues are not usually as busy. A concert brought together by the Recorders group, Singing group, Poetry Reading and Creative Writers was enjoyed by all. Still in January, we had a great day out, visiting the Globe Theatre exhibition. If you haven't been there, I can thoroughly recommend it for a group day out. The following week another trip out visited Anglesey Abbey's "Winter Garden". (*That's the NT one in Cambridgeshire, down the A14, not across the Menai Bridge*). The colours are just stunning on a winter's day and although it was a cold day, being National Trust, there is a restaurant – lovely hot food. After the garden walk, cake is abundant, but I enjoyed the hot chocolate with marshmallows and sprinkles!

Leicester: Our new website (www.leicester-u3a.org.uk) was launched last month, and has received complimentary comments. It is still under development and work needs to be done to extend the range of information available, to institute Members' and Committee pages, and to allow group conveners to upload their group information.

Following the example of another U3A, we experimented in January by turning our monthly meeting into a membership renewal afternoon with tea and cakes. This social occasion generated a real buzz and was

much enjoyed. We will be repeating the venture next year. Coffee mornings, both for new members and for all members, continue to be much appreciated.

Loughborough:

Lutterworth: As we moved towards 2015 the December meeting was a jolly occasion with singing, a mini pantomime, readings and fun. At the December Wine group meeting members acted out a Murder Mystery and despite the sad demise of Santa much mirth and laughter was enjoyed with the fine wine and excellent food.

In January our new year of general meetings was opened in fine style with a visit by Eugene Schellenberg who represented an organisation that has come to be known as The Ifakara Bakery Project. It was founded out of a perceived need during a visit made to by Eugene and his wife to Tanzania. They arranged for installation of baking equipment and training of bakers and now many hundreds of loaves of bread are produced by the Sisters of St Francis who now run the bakery attached to the convent.

February saw a return by Andrew Lounde and whilst remaining in our chairs in the Wycliffe Rooms we were taken out into space as we followed the history of space travel.

March brings the AGM & in the weeks prior much thought has gone into the changes on committee that result as a retiring Chairman stands down and candidates for vital committee roles are canvassed. Retiring Chairman Glenys Peverley founded the group 12 years ago and returned for a 2nd spell as Chairman at our 10th anniversary AGM in 2013.

With spring comes the Spring Walking weekend. In April 36 members will be heading for Ilfracombe in Devon with all that there is to enjoy in that beautiful county

In February a meeting of all group co-ordinators and committee members was held and in that forum it was possible to hear so much more about the groups than can be reported in brief in a newsletter. It is also possible to take soundings of possibilities for new groups and to plan ahead for changes in existing groups. Many of our interest groups include an eating activity along the way and this meeting was rounded off with delicious cakes and tea. A truly worthwhile occasion

Market Harborough: "Market Harborough's Chairman, Kay Knight, has very sadly had to step down due to ill health. She was an excellent Chairman and will be much missed.

However, there is a strong committee and our U3A continues in good health. A new group, Concert Club, has been successfully started, and a new Discussion Group is starting in April. One committee member is eager for us to offer short term Groups and we are currently investigating this."

Melton Mowbray: After a very busy year we are coming up to our AGM this month. Several of our colleagues on the Committee are standing down and although we will miss them we are looking forward to welcoming and working with the new members on the team.

Our group numbers continue to grow and we are particularly pleased to have had sufficient people who want to join a social chess group that one of our members has been keen to launch for a while. Also to have found someone at one of our new member's coffee mornings to start a beginner's French group for which we have had a waiting list since the existing beginner's French group morphed into an improver's French group! At that coffee morning our Group Coordinator echoed Kennedy after a fashion in saying to members "ask not what our U3A can do for you but rather what you can do for your U3A" and a recently retired language teacher answered the call!

Oadby & Wigston: Our membership seems to be growing steadily and while we have lost two groups we have had some refreshing growth in new areas.

The Reading Group has turned its final page, and the Digital Photography Group has closed the aperture once and for all. Perhaps the reason is that most people now seem to understand the wonders of what happens in the complex world of digital photography: What are pixels? What is "white light balance"? Who knows....?

We have some interesting options on trips for the months ahead: outings to Liverpool, Birmingham Botanical Gardens and the Oaks Outlet Centre. We have also begun a new group "Patchwork, Quilting and Applique".

It is, perhaps, not a unique situation but we need more members who are willing to take on 'responsibilities'. We need new committee members, new Group leaders and coordinators, and even people to make the tea.

I suspect that we are not alone but a look at the names on the committee, and the names of group leaders, suggest the same few people and most found on the distaff side. What happens to the men when they retire?

We have 8 committee members but only 2 men: 20 groups but only 3 male group leaders—and two of these are committee members. Perhaps the old adage is true :- behind every great man is a great woman—doing all the work:

- Wordsworth—Dorothy
- Shakespeare —Anne Hathaway
- Blake—Catherine

Also: - How can we get more science/ technology groups? e.g

Structures and modern materials

How does my DAB radio work - or not, whatever the case.

Why is a carbon fibre bicycle so light but so expensive?

Why does 'float' glass float?

Or - a course on macro economics: the I.M.F., Inflation and Government 'Bonds'

Rutland: Rutland U3A has been seeing a steady growth of numbers throughout the last year, we now have around 470 members, which is fantastic as it is contributing to an ever increasing range of groups. In January, our speaker cancelled with only 24 hours' notice, so we took the opportunity to show several of the DVD clips on the TAT website showing various other U3A's in action, presented by Barbara Lewis, it was really well received and acted as a stimulus for members when we had our February meeting. This was an Open meeting, for members and public alike, and we were amazed to have over 200 members taking the opportunity to see what our groups offered and to Socialise - suggestions for 10 more Groups were made. It is good to see lots of new third agers joining....thereby reinvigorating our U3A.

Soar Valley: Soar Valley U3A Art Group will be holding an exhibition of their work at Hathern Church on Saturday 18th April, 10am to 4.30pm and Sunday 19th April, 12 noon to 4.30pm .

With the cessation of activities of the Theatre Group, we now have 42 active interest groups, with many of these being full, or nearly so. New leaders will be required for the Holiday Group from April, and for Ballroom Dancing from May. Please note that the Chess Group has lost some members and is urgently looking to increase its membership. You do not need to be any sort of expert, so if interested then please join up as soon as possible. Remember, use it or lose it! Various other group activities are potentially available but to date insufficient interest has been shown and/or no one has offered to undertake the role of group leader. For details of these please see the Groups Display at meetings and coffee mornings and on our website. These are all groups which our members have requested, so if you are interested and especially if you would be prepared to lead, or help lead a group, then contact your Groups Coordinator. The latest suggestions for new groups are for a second Birdwatching group, Amblers walking only around 2 miles or so, and for groups offering Canasta and Tap Dancing: are any of these of interest to you? For any new group a leader will be required.

From information recently received from some group leaders, the following groups would be happy to welcome further members: Snooker, Tai Chi and Scottish Dancing. And remember, you do not need to be an expert, just come along and enjoy the activities.

Requests are often made for new groups and there is help available to get them up and running. We are, however, very much a self-help organisation and it is up to our members to lead, coordinate and take part in any groups that are available: ultimately the availability and success of our group activities is in your hands.

Following previous successful group displays at Coffee Mornings we have been seeking volunteers for future displays, with no offers as yet: no volunteers, no displays!

Finally, please remember that all members of both new and existing interest groups must all be either full or associate members of our U3A.

South Leicestershire: Our membership numbers continue an upwards trend with 990 names currently on the data base including 20 new members this year so far. Recently launched new Interest Groups include a 2nd Keep Fit Class, French for Beginners, Singles Sunday Lunch, Spanish for Beginners, Ukulele Players and, following a 6 months absence, Local History. Walking and Strolling Groups and Transport and Railway Exploration Groups continue to steadily grow in size and we are looking to add a 3rd Card Craft Group, Ballroom Dancing and Badminton Groups to our menu very shortly. Annual subscription renewal time

draws near and the Treasury Team are bracing themselves accordingly. We have regular useful and friendly contact with our neighbours, Market Harborough U3A.

West Leicestershire: We now have 72 members which is unlikely to change for 2014/15 as our membership year ends 31 March. An open afternoon aimed at recruiting from villages around Barlestone has been arranged for 11 March. Anyone wanting to join at this event will be signed up for 2015/16 and given a voucher to attend as a visitor (free) for March. In February we had our highest attendance, so far, at a main meeting (59, including 17 visitors). This was despite several members of the Theatre group being absent due to attending a performance at Curve.

Our website is now up and running and has generated interest from potential members and a couple of possible speakers.

There are now 10 active groups, the latest being reading/book appreciation. The occasional walking group ('occasional' because of the number of walking groups in the area) have decided to arrange a walk monthly and have now completed their 3rd walk. Although only getting started in September, the photography group produced a Calendar for 2015 which made a profit giving a boost to funds. Two potential new groups are Local history and Architecture. Both have people very keen to learn but no one with any knowledge to take a lead. As a result we have decided to try combining the groups and getting started by going on Blue Badge guided walks in Leicester. The Trips and Visits Group have planned 3 trips over the next few months. Other potential groups (Family History, Dancing and Bake Club) are currently investigating possible venues, meeting dates etc.

We have applied for a Your SHIRES Community Grant in the hope of being able to buy much needed PA system, projector and screen for use at meetings and interest groups.

Whitwick & District:

Wycliffe Lutterworth: