

## U3A IN LAUNCESTON

In 1991, Peter Hart, who had taught at Bishop Otter Teacher Training College and then worked for international organisations, came to Launceston. He believed in life-long learning, sharing knowledge and experience, and enjoying life together. These are the ideals of U3A – so Peter set about forming a U3A branch of the organisation, assisted by Les and Ann Richardson, David and Sheila Brown, Jake Jackson, Ann Hendrie and Margaret Jarvis. Other early members included Beryl Marden, Betty Gilyead, John Clarke, Mary Rowe, Frank and Barbara Greenwood, Jill Boettison, Kate Leggett, Ruth Sheppard, Lilly Ackroyd, Joan Blackmore, Anne Morrison and Sheila Grant.

Peter saw U3A established in Launceston by 1993 and took responsibility for the earliest Newsletters. Then he was killed in a car crash on the A30 at Kennard's House in 1997. He would have had pleasure in knowing that his foundation continues 25 years later. But the Launceston and District U3A needs new members, new interest groups, new leaders and new committee members.

With the passage of time there have been considerable changes. Some groups – for Gardening, Kensey Vale Study, Creative Writing, Swimming and Theatre, have folded, whilst others – for Crafts, History, Art, and Stretch and Relax, have been established and flourish. Currently there are 28 interest groups.

From its modest beginnings, the local branch gained popularity and membership, and in 2018 – 2019 there were more than 300 members and 34 interest groups. Early records show that U3A Launceston held public meetings, arranged visits to places of interest in Cornwall, and planned a holiday to Spain.

There has always been a monthly meeting at Central Methodist Hall for coffee, the dissemination of the latest information, short talks of common interest or topical news, and occasional displays.

An annual Speakers Day has been established and become well supported, the subjects of lectures being varied.

Our association, like many others, was much affected by the Covid epidemic – membership was reduced from over 300 to under 200. A campaign has brought in new members, but not to the number pre-Covid.

Recently the national organisation leaders have been re-thinking with accompanying amendments. The symbolic U3A has been changed to u3a. “University” means the study of many disciplines on one site; our organisation has no entry requirements and no premises. “Age” is equally inappropriate because our organisation has no upper or lower age limits. Currently the emphasis is on a new mantra – Learn, Laugh, Live! - which is what we are about in u3a. We welcome you to join us.

In 2023 and into 2024 the aim of increasing membership was given further consideration. It is the case that many members of the public know about Lions Club and Rotary but have not heard about u3a. Recent issues of ‘Launceston Life’ have included u3a in the ‘Wosson’ listing. Banners and umbrellas announce the monthly coffee mornings, whilst a warm welcome, music, and guest speakers (a recent one being on Advanced Driving Skills) are intended to make these gatherings more

attractive to newcomers as well as established members. It has been noticed that outings have been very popular; a recent visit to Exmouth and the River Exe for bird-watching attracted a full coach of members. Quiz nights have also been very successful.

A start has been made at holding events with other organisations, with u3a and Launceston in Bloom working towards a jointly arranged flower festival at St. Mary's Church.

Peter Adams  
17<sup>th</sup> April 2024