

I took over the chairmanship from Margaret Jocelyn in August 2019 and my first task must be to thank her for her years of service to the committee and the membership. In her final year as Chairman it became Margaret's task to steer Newmarket U3A through Charity Commission registration, which required the adoption of a new constitution. This was a lengthy and complex procedure which took almost a year.

Our U3A 'year' runs from 1 August to 31 July and our year began in August 2019 in a traditional manner. The month of August tends to be a 'slack' month with fewer group meetings and no Speakers Meeting as that always falls on the Bank Holiday. We resumed a full programme in September at our four regular venues, Exning Road Club, Tesco Community Room, All Saints Church and Newmarket Day Centre. During the Autumn we renegotiated our rates and terms with Exning Road Club, (ERC), to include refreshments. This is part of a longer term programme to even up costs to members and facilities available. This appeared to be an improvement for both ERC and U3A but we were closed down before the new system was properly reviewed.

In January 2020 we held our annual Lunch at the Rosery Hotel. It was a full house with more than 80 members enjoying a fine meal and good company. After that two new activities began: firstly a monthly series of meetings at ERC when members could meet, talk, take coffee, watch a documentary, look at books and magazines or join the Model-Making group running at the same time. This is known, inventively, as '2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday' because it happens on the second Tuesday of the month. The other new activity is M3A – Music of the Third Age, a performance group playing pop and country style music. This group began to meet at Gracewell Care Home in Kentford.

At this time, after years of debate, the committee finally purchased a public address system for use by music groups and at larger meetings. As Covid-19 intervened it has been used only once so far.

However, in the middle of March everything came to an abrupt halt with the advent of Covid-19 and all our energies for the remainder of the year have been entirely governed by that. The Executive Committee has continued to meet throughout, using the Zoom facility, which has been adopted by some of the other groups for whom it is appropriate. Great use has been made of the website and a number of groups have provided a variety of activities on a frequent basis. Our Group Co-ordinators are much to be commended for their endeavours to keep activities moving. The Publicity Committee undertook to produce a monthly newsletter which was circulated by email and by post to members with no email facility. Newmarket U3A set up its own Facebook page as another way to stay in regular touch with members. As standard activities were suspended the Committee decided to waive all membership fees for existing members for the 2019 – 2020 year. New members would only be charged £5.00

As the pandemic progressed Newmarket U3A responded to the changing instructions and advice, keeping in touch with venues and all our members. The result has been a very difficult year which is just beginning to ease now but is unlikely to change much for the foreseeable future.

Newmarket U3A has responded energetically to this crisis and continues to provide for all members in every way possible while safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of everyone.

*Tim Young*

**Chairman**