

## Consolidated Group Reports for 2022-23

### 3D - Delve, Discover, Discuss

Most groups 'say what they are on the tin' – not this one! It began several years ago as the MOOC group, but few people had heard of Massive Open Online Courses, so a change was called for.

Over the years we had branched out from MOOCs to a variety of other online learning opportunities – and found some quite fascinating and obscure ones. So, after much deliberation, we decided that three words neatly summed up what we are about: **Delve, Discover, Discuss**. So '3D' we became. We know it's no more obvious than MOOC, but we hoped it might generate curiosity. An unexpected bonus has been that the computer places us in pole position on the groups list!

To business ... throughout the session we have met each cycle for convivial conversations about what members of the group have been learning from the internet. Courses offered by Future Learn, an offshoot of the Open University, have continued to be our staple diet, but TED talks have also featured (if you don't know about them, google 'TED'). Then there are courses on Open Learn (another Open University initiative). We have drawn from *The rest is history* (an Audible site) and considered the themes of the 2022 Royal Institution lectures, as well as talking about Melvin Bragg's *In our time* radio programmes. On some occasions we have heard about interesting findings uncovered by members – including the history of Rosslyn House, and the content of a document dating back to the 1930s which a member came across at a sale, comprising a letter addressed to Adolph Hitler on the occasion of his birthday. In a nutshell, we explore many and varied topics – and often stray far from where we started. The discoveries of the year have included additions to our vocabulary like "Stretterhawl" (from a poem by Edwin Morgan) to "Coddiwomple" (yes, it is in the dictionary and it is defined as 'to travel purposefully toward an as-yet-unknown destination') which neatly sums up the group.

Do join us next session.

### Archaeology & Local History

This year we were back to face-to-face meetings which has been interesting since, although on balance this is most people's preference, I think we have all come to realise that there is something to be said for Zoom, especially on a cold, wet Monday afternoon. Average attendance has been 16, slightly up on last year. Our sessions have been centred around two themes, 'Ordinary People 1750 to 1850' and 'Major Scottish Sites and Excavations' although we always welcome off-theme contributions by anyone who feels they have something they want to share with us. Topics have included the Roman Fort of Trimontium, Transport development in Perth 1750-1850, Glimpses of the Life of the Ordinary Soldier, Mining in Scotland, Forteviot: a Pictish Power Centre in Eastern Scotland? and a debunking of the 'coin' of the unknown Roman emperor Sponsianus. plus, of course, Richard Coles' regular and excellent 'Archaeology in the News' slot. Next year we will be trying a new format for our meetings, based on group discussion, rather than presentations. We are still discussing the main themes, but as ever they will be wide-ranging and centred on Scotland, preferably with a Perthshire element.

### Art Appreciation

We have had 5 art trips since September 2022. Whilst they have all been to Edinburgh, this is entirely coincidental and will not always be the case:

Barbara Hepworth - Modern 2, Edinburgh

National Treasure (Scottish Modern Arts Assoc. ) - City Art Centre, Edinburgh

A Taste for Impressionism - National Gallery, Edinburgh

Knitwear: Chanel to Westwood - Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh

Mansfield Traquair Centre, Edinburgh

We plan to continue visits in summer: the Hunterian Museum and Mackintosh House, Glasgow; Stirling Smith Museum and Gallery, Stirling; and Kaffe Fassett - The Power of Pattern, Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh.

The group has 60 members and between 8 and 17 have attended the gallery tours this year. We usually start or end the trip with a coffee together and where possible arrange for an art guide to help enhance our understanding during visits. Possibly due to our need to travel beyond Perth for interesting exhibitions, numbers attending have been low, though increasing recently, and we hope that they will continue to grow in 2023 - 2024.

### **Backgammon**

This has been another enjoyable year for the backgammon group which now has seven active members. The rules are straightforward so those new to backgammon were soon playing and getting to grips with this wonderful game.

Backgammon is a dice game but with a strong element of skill. We've discussed some of the strategies and rules of thumb that can improve one's chance of winning. The dice often throw up difficult choices and we've talked through a number of interesting positions, trying to tease out the best choice of move. No two games are the same and there's rarely been a dull moment. Nothing can be taken for granted: victory can sometimes be snatched from the jaws of defeat and vice versa.

The doubling cube has also been introduced which provides a way of raising the stakes in a game (no money involved!). Mastering the cube is tricky but some straightforward methods have been presented which should help.

I hope that new members will join us next season: no experience is needed and hours of fun are (almost) guaranteed.

### **Bible Study**

We increased our numbers this year to 10 with good average attendances. We embarked on studying the well-known Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel comprising only 3 chapters. However, we certainly did not run out of discussion points over the meetings. Many people say that if everyone just lived by Jesus' teaching in the Sermon then life would be grand, but once you delve into it you realise how high a standard it is and really impossible to fulfil by human endeavour alone. We found it challenging, drawing out many questions and so brains were well exercised. Next year, as is our custom, we will turn to the Old Testament for our subject. Some suggestions are: The Ten Commandments and their relevance today; some of the Psalms; or what we can learn from characters such as Moses, Abraham & co, Elijah or Nehemiah. Yet to be decided! We all hope to be present again in September.

### **Book Group 1**

We managed to recruit some new members last year which has led to many lively discussions at our meetings in Unit 7. We agree on our future reading list at the end of the previous term and, as well as fiction, we try to ensure we have a mix of various genres, such as biography, classic, non-fiction or crime. We also have two Free Choice sessions when each member is free to discuss a book they have personally enjoyed and would recommend to other members of the group. Our list for 2022/23 was as follows:

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck  
Hide by Nell Pattison  
The Girl at the Back of the Bus by Suzette D. Harrison  
The Old Ways by Robert McFarlane  
Islands of Mercy by Rose Tremain  
A Long Petal of the Sea by Isabel Allende.

### **Book Group 2**

We are sad to report the recent death of Christine Crawford who was a member of the group for many years until ill health prevented her from attending. Christine brought a lively intelligence to our discussions and was extremely well read. We will miss her warmth and humour.

As usual we have had a varied fare of reading covering a range of genres. One of the benefits of a book group is that you get to read authors and titles you would not normally consider. This can be challenging at times but also stimulating. Our discussions have always been lively, fun, engaging and thought provoking. It is always interesting to get different perspectives on the same book and appreciate it from another's eyes.

My thanks to the members who make the group so enjoyable and especially to Pamela Mitchell who offers her home and refreshments to us each month.

The 2022-23 schedule was as follows:

**Summer reading** – any from the following to be discussed at first meeting on **September 8th**

- A A Gill
- Edith Eger
- Carson McCullough
- Honore de Balzac
- Matt Haig
- Eowyn Ivey
- Eowyn Ivey
- Jean Rhys
- Colson Whitehead
- Geraldine Brooks
- James Cormac
- Madeline Miller
- Martin Cruz Smith
- Angry Island
- The Choice
- The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
- Cousin Bette
- The Midnight Library
- The Snow Child
- To the Bright Edge of the World
- Wide Sargasso Sea
- The Underground Railway
- March
- The Surfacing
- Circe
- Gorky Park

**October 6th**

- Mary Beard
- Pompeii

**November 3rd**

- Jackie Kay
- Red Dust Road: An Autobiographical Journey

**December 1st**

- Anne Donovan
- Hieroglyphics

**January 19th**

- Bridget Collins
- The Binding

**February 16th**

- Boris Pasternack
- Doctor Zhivago

**March 16th**

- Kate Quinn
- The Diamond Eye

**April 13th**

- Bernardine Evaristo
- Girl, Woman, Other

**Book Group 3**

We meet on a Thursday afternoon on week 2. Each member takes a turn at hosting in their home (if space allows), and choosing the book to be discussed. He or she also provides tea or coffee and cake. We have read –

The Zookeepers Wife by Diane Ackerman.

Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak  
Emma by Alexander McCall Smith  
O Caledonia by Elspeth Barker  
Grandmothers by Salley Vickers  
Beartown by Fredrik Backman  
Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus

We plan to read *The Rising Man* by Abir Mukherjee over the Summer and will start the next session with *The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles and *Talking to the Dead* by James Roberson.

There are eight current members of the group plus one who put her membership on hold due to illness.

#### **Book Group 4**

Before this session began one of our members moved away and another decided not to return because of time constraints. As we are a home based group we agreed to restrict the numbers to eight, ten being rather tight around the dining room table.

We have read and discussed a mix of fiction and non-fiction books:

*The Dive* by Stephen McGinty  
*The Lamplighters* by Emma Stonex  
*Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman  
*H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald  
*We Need To Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver

At the time of writing we still have one meeting when we will discuss *The Book of Dave* by Will Self. As well as the above, for the September and January meetings each member brings a book they have read over the break to talk about. The current session included:

*The Kashmir Shawl* by Rosie Thomas  
*Saul Bass, A Life in Film and Design* by Jennifer Bass and Pat Kirkam  
*Mayflies* by Andrew O'Hagan  
*Sad Little Men* by Richard Beard  
*Surfacing* by Kathleen Jaimie  
*The Librarian* by Allie Morgan

We will choose our reading for next session at our last meeting in April.

#### **Book Group 5**

No report available.

#### **Book Group 6**

We have continued to enjoy warm hospitality from members of the group who hosted our meetings this year. Our books were wide ranging, including classic and new, from a variety of areas of the world and different time periods, and included a non-fiction book on Memory. Although opinions varied, we enjoyed reading most of the books and they gave us plenty to talk about. Interestingly, the book that proved most unpopular also resulted in a long and interesting discussion!

We have read:

William Boyd	Trio
Bill Browder	Red Notice
Abi Daré	The girl with the Louding Voice
Emma Donoghue	The Pull of the Stars
Arthur Conan Doyle	The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
Lisa Genova	Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting
Barbara Kingsolver	The Bean Trees

Anne Michaels

Fugitive Pieces

Kate Quinn

The Rose Code

We have chosen our books for next year, another varied and interesting mix, and we look forward to more stimulating discussions.

### **Botanical Illustration**

We have enjoyed a lovely year of the Botanical Illustration group with some continuing members and several new people joining, eleven of us altogether. Everyone made progress and there was some brilliant work in pencil, watercolour, coloured pencil and pen and ink with subjects ranging from spring blossoms to plants in winter, from Scottish wild-flowers to exotic plants from California. We have met in Balbeggie Village Hall once every four weeks on a Monday afternoon. New participants are always welcome whether you have drawn or painted before or not. All you need is a love of plants.

### **Bridge**

We are a small group of 7 members, we were 10 but we are reduced to 7 now. We play social bridge with the focus on enjoying the game in a friendly environment. We meet fortnightly and I really have no problems facilitating the group. All members are very good about letting me know if they are unable to play for whatever reason. Altogether a nice group of friends and I want to continue with the group as long as I am able to make up 1 table of 4 most meetings.

### **Canasta (new group for 2022-23)**

The Canasta Group, which started in September 2022, has a small but enthusiastic group of members that meet every two weeks in a bungalow in Luncarty. We play for about two and a half hours on a Tuesday starting at 2.00pm with tea or coffee and biscuits provided. There is no charge to members for any of the facilities.

The game of Canasta, which is a rummy type of game, is normally played with four people, two teams of two. It can also be played with six people, three teams of two.

We are looking for new members and would be happy to teach anyone who has not played the game before. It is very easy to learn and a very enjoyable game.

### **Card Games**

The Card Games group is a small house group (maximum 8 members) that meets in a flat close to the centre of town. We have 2 books (The Penguin Book of Card Games), 6 sets of cards and a cribbage board. As there are so many variations for card games, these act as a reference on how to play. We've started with Whist, Rummy, Cribbage and Canasta, and there are lots of other card games in the book that we can try. So far, there has been a maximum of 4 members attending the group, due to medical appointments and holidays. One member, a proficient card player, has kept us on track while playing. The group is open to all levels of ability.

### **Ceilidh Dancing**

This is our first full session since we started back after lockdown. We enjoyed a large variety of dances over the session while keeping with the structure of circle dances, round the room dances, dances for two people and set dances which can be up to six couples. We spent some time learning the Reel of the 51<sup>st</sup> dancing it every week since the beginning of the year. Although not necessarily a ceilidh dance, it is often requested and is dearly loved by many, not least because of the history behind it.

The emphasis continues to be on socialising and having fun while engaging in hardly recognisable exercise which engages the brain as well as the body. To keep us on our toes a few new dances were incorporated throughout the session.

As we don't worry too much about footwork (the dances can be walked if dancing is a problem) - or doing the dances perfectly (half the fun is getting things wrong!) this makes the sessions enjoyable

and fun. Comfortable footwear and clothing.....and water is all you need to give it a go.

### **Crafts**

At the moment I run the craft group. Unfortunately due to circumstances I had to cancel two of our meetings. We have done a variety of crafts; we made an appliqué bag, felting pictures, pencil holder, cross stitch key ring, Christmas decoration out of Suffolk puffs. We have all enjoyed our crafts with a lot of chat going on making it a very pleasant way to pass a morning.

Unfortunately I would like to give up the craft group for a variety of reasons mainly the time involved in preparing as I have a lot of other commitments. I would like to start up a new group using the same Wednesday morning and call it Stitch and Chat. This would be for anyone with an interest in any form of stitching be it embroidery, tapestry, cross stitching or any textile art. I have quite a lot of knowledge in most aspects of stitching and could help anyone if required or we could just have a very pleasant relaxing morning stitching over coffee and biscuits. I hope people will take me up on this new venture.

### **Creative Writing**

For each meeting, a suggested starter prompt of some kind is given in advance - for example, a topic, a title, or a format. It is also open to members to write in whatever way they wish, on any subject or in any style that catches their imagination. They produce a piece of prose or verse for discussion at the next meeting. This writing is then shared online in advance. At meetings, each member reads their piece - or an extract from it – and this is discussed by the group. The atmosphere is relaxed, friendly and constructive: we try to be helpful to each other. In practice, members write a very varied and enjoyable selection of work each time: serious, humorous, dramatic, verse, prose, or drama.

We are always open to one or two new members each year.

### **Film Appreciation**

It is with pleasure that I can report that the group has had a very successful season. There were eight film showings, five English and three foreign language films. The aim of the group is to access the type of non-mainstream world films that local cinemas often can't or don't show. We also revive old and favourite films of years gone by which group members enjoy.

Average attendance has been fourteen which equates to 37% of the membership. Next season's programme has been produced along with details of each film, which can be used for a short discussion following the viewing. This provides feedback information from members for future film programmes.

To summarise, we are all looking forward to next season's programme especially as some members have put forward films from their own collection.

### **French (Advanced)**

This session, our group has practised our skills in reading aloud, translating and discussing articles sourced from current French newspaper and magazine articles. The emphasis has largely been on the Arts and aspects of cultural and everyday life, rather than politics and pandemics. We are all very aware of the benefits of using a foreign language to maintain mental dexterity, but we also appreciate the social side of enjoying each other's company.

### **French Conversation**

This year we have had discussions about a variety of topics, including films and theatre; celebrations and customs remembered from childhood; favourite food and restaurants; books we've read and would recommend. We do a small amount of preparation for each topic to help extend our vocabulary. There is also time for spontaneous conversation and we sometimes have a quiz or a game. The emphasis is on fun and participation for all levels of proficiency.

### **French Play Reading**

The group meets fortnightly in members' homes. Our aim is to read a varied and enjoyable selection of plays by French dramatists. Among others we have read Moliere's *Le Misanthrope*, *Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*

by Eugene Labiche, *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Beaumarchais, and some plays by Jean Anouilh, including *Cher Antoine*, *Le Bal des Voleurs* and *Le Voyageur sans Bagages*. We enjoy drama and we enjoy French.

### **French Reading**

We have welcomed two new members this year and are now up to our full complement of eight members for this house group. We are just finishing "Boule de Suif", a collection of short stories by Guy de Maupassant. We will begin again next session with Georges Simenon's "Maigret et L'Indicteur".

### **Gaelic Interest**

As planned, the group continued this year on an ad hoc basis, meeting together to attend ceilidhs, walks, concerts etc as they arose. We also had two really interesting house meetings. One was a highly informative talk on place-names by Dr Jacob King, and the other a very convivial house ceildih, led by a visiting Gaelic singer Linn Phipps. The group was also actively involved in the Mòd in Perth, helping out with stewarding etc, along with attending the many competitions and events going on.

The group is small with regular numbers of 6 or 7. We plan to continue on the same ad hoc basis next year.

### **Genealogy 1**

This year we've mostly met in person, but held the January meeting via Zoom to avoid any weather disruptions. Attendance dipped a bit this year, but this could be seen as a positive sign that life is at last returning to normal as engagements and appointments again compete for space in our diaries. Membership has remained static and no vacancies are anticipated before meetings resume again after the summer break.

We've enjoyed sharing our family stories and ongoing research progress with each other, which often prompts helpful suggestions for next steps from group members. We made no group visits this year, but are hoping to arrange a trip to the National Registers of Scotland for next year.

Some of us have undertaken genealogy study during the year, including the new University of Strathclyde open learning course on Genetic Genealogy.

Topics discussed this year include dating old photos, writing up family histories and the 1921 Scottish Census. We've also made use of the projector and screen in Unit 7 for the first time and hope to do more of the same next year.

### **Genealogy 2 (new group for 2022-23)**

Thanks to a healthy waiting list at the beginning of the year, we were able to form a second Genealogy Group, which began meeting in October 2022.

There is a good mix of experience and abilities in the group and we have enjoyed introducing each other to our known family stories as well as sharing new discoveries as the year has progressed. Our families come from many different parts of the UK and we have been able to expand our knowledge of different areas as a result.

Some group members have already undertaken DNA tests, while others are contemplating taking one. We have discussed the pros and cons of which testing company to use, as well as how to proceed once results have been received.

We also made use of the projector and screen in Unit 7 to share some old family photographs and discuss techniques for dating them.

There will be at least one vacancy at the beginning of next year, possibly more.

### **Geology 1**

The group had a number of new joiners this year and is currently full, with 14 members. We meet at

unit 7. Over the year we have been studying the geology of Fife, learning about its varied landscape and geology. This had involved learning about the creation of coal seams, looking at the remnants of ancient volcanoes and discovering that Fife was once a great delta, similar perhaps to the Mississippi today. Over the summer we will be travelling out to Fife to look at some of the notable aspects of its geology.

The group comprises a mix of beginners and more experienced members, who are always willing to share their knowledge. Meetings take a variety of different forms, from presentations to discussions or more practical sessions looking at geological maps or different rock types. We are a friendly enthusiastic group who welcome new members, beginners and experts alike.

## **Geology 2**

Members of Geology 2 have had an active, informative session, enjoying field visits, presentations and some research.

In September we met to discuss and formulate a plan for the coming session. The first field visit was to the Scottish Limestone Centre at Charlestown where Dr Katie Strang gave us an excellent introduction to Carboniferous rocks and fossils before we ventured out to find specimens in the ballast at Preston Island.

Back to base in November, Tom gave us an insight into South African geology when explaining mining of resources – gold, diamonds, platinum, coal and antimony. Stunning examples of Fuchsite, Stibnite, and a drill core containing gold were examined.

'Hands on rocks' was the theme for December, when members brought in samples for identification and discussion. These included world-wide examples of fossils, igneous and metamorphic exhibits, and extra-terrestrial iron and stony meteorites.

In January, group members gave five-minute talks covering topics from Iceland, Skye, Ben Lawers, and Perth, contrasting limestone landscapes and pyrite.

In February, Tom led us through the stages of field mapping in the Comrie area from many individual records to the final map and interpretation.

Members investigated available information about local SSSI sites in the Perth area for the March meeting. They reported on the accessibility and availability of information, ease of access to the site and whether the published site description reflected reality.

In April the group enjoyed a field visit to the historic silver mine at Alva.

Fifteen members were enrolled for the session – attendance rate averaged 73%.

## **Glen Walking**

With Covid slowly fading into our memory (and hoping it doesn't return), we have been more or less back to previous arrangements. With several new members bringing fresh ideas, we are still able to find new places to go and to have walks led by people who have not previously done so. It's quite a challenge to keep this up, but we seem to be rising to that challenge with so many willing volunteers.

We seem to have established a sort of 'halfway house' with the car sharing arrangements. Some people, understandably, still have sensitivities about being in confined spaces with others, but solutions always appear.

## **Golf**

The Golf group plays monthly on a variety of 9-hole courses throughout Perth and Kinross. We start in April and generally finish in October. Dates for outings are dependent on specific course availability. Last year we played at Crieff, Milnathort, Blair Atholl, Blairgowrie, Glenisla and finished with 18 holes at the North Inch. The day consists of 9 holes of individual golf in the morning followed by lunch and

a further 9 holes of team golf in the afternoon.

Although there are a total 24 members at present, attendance at any one outing varies from 10 to a maximum of 18. Members, from a variety of clubs throughout the area, have handicaps varying from 14 to 36.

## **Hillwalking**

We have been able to operate a full programme this year with walks on a 4-weekly schedule over the winter and a 3-weekly schedule over the summer months. Reports of all the walks with photos are provided after each walk and posted on the group webpage, (though some were temporarily lost after the problems with the national U3A web).

Our walks are generally in the region of around 10 miles with an ascent of round 2-3,000 ft and normally within 1.5 hrs of Perth. However, we were able to hold our usual extended visit away; this year we were able to spend three days at Ullapool and enjoyed some tremendous walking in the Assynt area including Stac Pollaidh and Suilven and were blessed with good weather. This February we were able to hold our annual lunch combined with a moderate walk in Angus. We already have another extended visit booked for May, when we plan to do some walking on the west coast using Corran as the base, located a few miles to the south of Fort William.

## **History 1**

We decided to do something a little different this year and try some social history. This was a slight worry to some members who were concerned that we would not be able to find enough material on our chosen topics. Quite the reverse! In the event we overran more often this year than ever before.

Our historical period was not strictly applied but we tried to stay fairly close to the nineteenth century. Each month we limited ourselves to one area of life. The areas that we chose were as follows:

- Capitalists
- Manual Workers
- Domestic Servants
- Population Movement, internal and external, and growth
- Transport
- Crime, Punishment and the "Poor"
- Agriculture and Fishing
- Sport, Clubs, Societies and Religion – ie what people did in their "leisure" time

Within each of these areas we each chose a topic as usual and made a little presentation lasting 10 minutes or so. As an example, "Transport" included railways, canals, horses and pushbikes amongst other things. Often the material was local and most of it referred mainly to Scotland but sometimes it was much more wide ranging as was the case with bikes.

Our next job is to decide on next year's plan.

## **History 2**

The History 2 group has had another interesting and successful year, with plenty of lively discussion. We covered some close-to-home topics this year, including the Scottish Enlightenment and the history of modern Ireland. We also looked at the stories of some famous women in history, ranging from Dundee's Mary Slessor to the Roman/Egyptian philosopher Hypatia and a Chinese pirate queen! Topics for next session will include a study of pivotal points in world history, and an in depth look at the history of South America, from ancient civilisations to more recent political uprisings.

## **History 3 (new group for 2022-23)**

This has been the first season of the group. We were formed as a response to the existence of a waiting list for the existing history groups. We decided not to settle on particular themes but to adopt a format which allowed us to range over a wide variety of historical subjects. The general intention

was to have a group member introduce a topic of their choosing, usually based on a book they had read (including, if appropriate, a work of fiction). This has worked well and we have discussed the following:

- The history of ransom in warfare
- *The last emperor of Mexico* by Edward Shawcross
- The background to the English Revolution (and its Scottish connections) drawing upon *The world turned upside down* by Christopher Hill
- The history of the Caledonian Canal
- The Border Reivers, drawing on *The steel bonnets* by George MacDonald Fraser
- Reflections on the Spanish civil war, using *A moment of war* by Laurie Lee as a starting point

There is space in the group for additional members. It is not compulsory to offer a presentation, but all offers to do so will be gratefully accepted.

### **Inch Walkers (new group for 2022-23)**

Since the withdrawal of the original leader mid-session the leadership role has been filled by a member acting only as a point of contact for the remainder of the session; no report is therefore required.

### **Italian Conversation**

This is a group for people who like to speak Italian. Each meeting we discuss a theme, sometimes previously agreed. We listen to recordings of native speakers of Italian and read aloud documents and literature in Italian. There is general conversation and debating.

At present there are 6 members plus myself as leader, but we seldom if ever have a full attendance. We are always looking for new ideas to explore, in Italian of course, to freshen up the approach and I think I can say we always manage to get something out of a group meeting.

### **Knit & Natter**

We at the Knit and Natter Group meet once a month. We knit and do a lot of nattering. If you are struggling with a pattern or a stitch, more than one person is able to help you. The natter bit is very important as we all missed meeting up and socializing with each other, exchanging patterns and information about any knitting shows or new shops selling wool and craft works opening in Perth. There are two knitting shows held in Glasgow's SECC every year, in March and October.

### **Let's Discuss**

We are a lively discussion group of up to 25 people, focusing on one or two topical issues per meeting, and giving everybody a chance to have their say. We often find we've learned something new or completely unexpected by the end of a session. We usually pick the next topic(s) by consensus at the end of the previous meeting and in most cases we invite one or two members of the group to do some research in the topic area to help to kick-start the discussion with a short briefing.

In the past year we discussed a number of issues such as: Is Male Superiority Innate?; How to Get Girls Into Science; Scotland's Problem with Addiction; Are Food Banks Good or Bad?; Should Revenge ever be Part of Justice?; How Do We Get the Politicians We Need?; The NHS; Gender Identity; and Class (Class Identity Versus Real Divisions and Divergent Values).

### **Listening to Classical Music**

The group met on 8 occasions, generally in the group leader's home, with up to 9 members attending each meeting. For each meeting we agreed a topic and then each member chose about 10 minutes of suitable music. During the meeting, the member who chose the music introduced it, perhaps saying something about the composer, the instruments, the performers, or why they had chosen the piece.

Topics for 2022-23 included:

- Music inspired by literature
- Out of this world

- Music in which percussion instrument(s) is/are prominent
- Music for voice(s)
- Children
- Music inspired by landscape or countryside
- Homages - a tribute to someone or something
- Enjoyable recent discoveries

We've agreed that next year we'll function the same way with a topic as the basis for each meeting but we'll also reinstate 'mystery pieces' which don't have to relate to the topic. This works as follows:

- one member chooses a mystery piece
- it is played without introduction
- everyone else attempts to comment intelligently on the piece, for example, 'it sounds twentieth century', 'is it Russian?', 'I think it's by ....'
- finally the chooser reveals the answer.

### **Listening to Opera**

I took over leadership of this group after Peter Porter was so sadly taken ill.

The system is that I choose, after group consultation, an opera on YouTube, which people can watch at home. I then provide (technology willing!) excerpts from another version to compare in our monthly meeting. This year we have seen operas from Purcell, Verdi, Menotti, Britten, Mozart, Handel + bits from others.

The group numbers 12 now (2 have never attended) of which about 8 regularly attend.

Entertainment is provided not only by the music but my wrestling with the equipment.

### **Lunch Group**

The group has had a membership of 24 throughout the session, which is the maximum agreed upon. The members make life easy for the group leader by taking a turn to organize the lunches which take place mainly in Perth, although some restaurants outwith the city have been visited and enjoyed. In addition to the food and drink, members enjoyed social interaction and lively conversation at each meeting.

### **Lunch Group 2**

The 2nd lunch group is made up of friendly, welcoming people who love to have a good blether and a laugh. This is made all the more fun by enjoying the culinary delights Perth has to offer.

### **Mah Jong**

Mah Jong or the Game of the four winds is believed to have developed in the Ningpo region of China in the 1870s. Each region had its own rules with special hands and there were no written instructions or standardised rules. Most people learn to play by watching others.

The Chinese game is fast, noisy and played for high stakes whereas the Western game is slower, not so complicated and there is little interest in gambling.

Perth u3a has been running a Mah Jong group for many years now and we decided early on only to use the Third Age Trust rules (which are similar to the British rules) so that we can teach learners.

Most members have their own sets but only one is required between four people and we do a bit of sharing.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is concerned with living in the present, not obsessed with yesterday's regrets nor with tomorrow's fears. Each meeting will contain a meditation, an examination of an aspect of mindfulness and a discussion. All members of the group are welcome to contribute to the discussion.

The group had a successful 2022-3 season with a steady attendance. The format for each meeting has been to take a topic related to Mindfulness, then before the meeting to listen to up to four recommended talks on the internet (usually TED talks) or to do some individual research on that topic. At the meeting the topic has then been discussed using the preparatory study as a starting point and moving on to a wide-ranging discussion. We have usually concluded the meeting with a short guided meditation. The topics this year have been a general overview of mindfulness as an introduction, self-esteem, procrastination, ageism, managing stress and anger. At our final meeting we had a visit from representatives of the Mental Wellbeing charity Mindspace who led a very interesting session.

Unfortunately during the year Peter Porter had to withdraw from leading the group due to ill health but we hope to continue to build on his success in future seasons.

### **Nature Strolls**

After starting the session with a visit to Kinclaven Woods, led by David Combe, the next three walks had to be cancelled due, firstly, to heavy rain and then to snow and ice. However, the second half of the session has seen better weather and we have enjoyed walks around Braco Castle estate, led by Peter Trant, Auchterarder, led by Stewart MacGlashan, and Newburgh, led by Joan Fraser. Highlights have included seeing red kites and hares at Braco, massed snowdrops in Auchterarder and a marsh harrier over the reedbeds across the Tay from Newburgh. We are hoping our luck holds for our final outing to Bertha Loch, which David Washington will lead.

With a total group membership of over 50 most walks attract a turnout of between 12 and 20 walkers.

### **Painting – all media**

The Group continues to have a core number of enthusiastic painters who paint in watercolour, acrylics and oils and share information and advice on painting topics.

The numbers attending have not yet recovered to pre Covid levels. The Group has a maximum of 15 members and at the start of the season there were 13 names recorded at Registration Day. The Group has now 9 members after membership was adjusted for those who can no longer attend or had registered and subsequently decided not to attend.

I look forward to a successful Registration Day and would encourage any U3a member who would like to try painting to join the Group. No previous experience is necessary and it can be a rewarding experience painting in a friendly relaxed atmosphere.

I look forward to the 2023/2024 Session and especially welcoming new members.

### **Philosophy**

The group has a stable membership of seven at present. Attendance at the group meetings has been almost 100% and hopefully this reflects the enjoyment we all feel. The usual format of the meeting is two parts. Firstly a short presentation from the group leader on terminology and general philosophy relevant to the main part of the meeting. Secondly, each member of the group takes it in turn to lead the main topic for a meeting. Most of our topics are taken from a book of 50 brief summaries of well known philosophical ideas. We all read the topic and do some additional reading around the subject. Some topics this year have been Plato's Republic, The Stoics, Boudrillard, Chomsky, philosophical Zombies and philosophy of Science. Discussion takes up most of the meeting. We usually manage to stick to the subject in hand and keep to aspects that have some relevance to present day living. It is lively and well informed resulting in us feeling mentally invigorated. We have already planned the first meeting of the next session which will be On Confucius's Analects.

### **Photography**

The group met on 7 occasions, only missing the September meeting as it would have clashed with the late Queen's funeral. There was an average attendance of 11, from a membership of 15. For each meeting the group leader selected a topic and invited members to submit photographs on the

relevant topic which were projected on to a large screen. Members then discussed the merits of the photographs. Topics covered were “Buildings”, “Macro” (close-up shots), “Patterns in nature”, “Autumn”, “Bokeh” (a special effect), “Yellow” and “Leading lines”.

At each meeting a member then led a discussion on some aspect of photography, such as “Close-up photography”, “Still versus video” and “Wedding photography”.

### **Poetry Appreciation 1**

Sixteen members enjoyed another stimulating year (our seventeenth) in which we studied the work of seven poets and had two group topic choices.

Our chosen poets were Hannah Lowe, Warsan Shire, Douglas Dunn, Oodgeroo Nooruccal, Dorothea Mackellar, Ilya Kaminsky and Edward Thomas. Thus we stuck to our usual pattern of having past and present poets, Scots and English, female and male and overseas poets including poetry in translation.

Our topics were ‘Choice and Chance’ and ‘Poems for a Desert Island.’

We continue to meet as a house group starting with coffee. Each meeting is led by a different member. We learn and laugh a lot!

### **Poetry Appreciation 2**

Once again we are an extremely small but very happy group. We began with 4 members which has dwindled to 3: Mavis Gudrun, Mary Lilburn and myself. June Scott dropped out. We follow the same format as usual, selecting poems to a theme, reading over our choices then an interesting discussion of each follows.

### **Science Behind the News**

We loosely define ‘Science behind the News’ to include:

- science underlying news items in the general media
- new science reported in the scientific media
- topical science relating to everyday life.

During the 2022-23 session, the group met on 7 occasions, including once by Zoom. We enjoyed science talks on a wide range of topics given by about 8 members who volunteered, some more than once. Most speakers use PowerPoint, but we’ve also had interesting talks with no visual aids. With 25 members, we’ve fitted easily into Unit 7 in the Perth Business Centre.

Topics have included:

- DeepMind and Alphafold
- Brown bin recycling at PKC
- Why the Vikings died out in Greenland
- Pterosaurs and us
- Circuit symbols
- Philosophy of science
- Avoiding culling male chicks and calves
- The brain on music
- Mapping earthquakes using radar
- 3D printing
- Methane and climate change
- Darwin tree of life
- Powering electric cars
- PSA testing

### **Scrabble 1**

For the first time for 2-3 years we have had a full programme and have been really enjoying the

opportunity to keep challenging each other – always in the most friendly of ways of course, to come up with new words and justify their appearance. We are all finding that it's rather remarkable how many strange new combinations of letters seem to be admissible as genuine words - for the purposes of the global Scrabble 'lawyers', but it's a lot of fun.

### **Scrabble 2 (new group for 2022-23)**

This group formed late in the session but has not yet met due to insufficient interest so far.

### **Semi-Tones Music**

The Semi-tones is a music group. We play mainly fifties and sixties pop, rock and blues music, such as, All Shook Up and Blueberry Hill. It is great fun to be able to play different instruments together and re-live our youth.

We had five consistent members throughout the 22 – 23 season: three guitarists, a keyboard player and a drummer. Unfortunately, our saxophonist of several years left the group after a few months of this season.

We welcomed two new members to the group following registration, a flautist and a violinist. Both attended some sessions but decided not to continue with us as they felt that their playing was not a good fit with our type of music.

The Semi-tones met fortnightly on Wednesday afternoons and have had fourteen sessions this season. This includes a performance of ten songs for Perth U3A on 12 April. (The Ukulele Group also performed on 12 April.) Our last meeting for the season will be on Wednesday 26 April.

Our sessions are in Letham St Mark's, which is a very suitable venue for our group. There is ample parking that is close to the entrance, which is practical with all the equipment that we bring. We also have the use of Letham St Mark's PA system, sound board and drum kit, which is a real bonus for our group. Letham St Mark's were very helpful in hosting the performances on 12 April.

Any new players or singers, who enjoy pop, rock and blues numbers, will be welcomed into the group.

### **Social Psychology**

Social psychology looks at human behaviour as influenced by other people. It is about understanding individual and collective behaviour in a social context. During this session we continued to use the Social Psychology book by authors Michael Hogg and Graham Vaughan for reference to the chosen topics.

The subject matter that we used in this session was chosen by group members. Our aim is to apply these discussions to real world issues and above all to be socially relevant. Topics chosen through various research papers were:

- Societal Age stereotypes in USA and UK, WHO and the global campaign to combat ageism and the work of Dr Becca Levy a pioneer in the field of ageism.
- Comparisons of healthy ageing in USA, UK, China and Japan.
- Super ageing in Japan. Community based care systems.
- Social psychology of making poverty history. Anti -poverty action in Australia.
- Cooperation and Competition, Morton Deutsch and Margaret Mead etc.
- Utopia -the ideal community, Sir Thomas More. Members own ideas on Utopia.
- Last group session - addiction and personality.

It is the aim of the group leader to encourage participation by recruiting members to lead the group and to stimulate discussion from all other members. Members are encouraged to bring their own contribution on the subject to each meeting.

We look forward to another year of discussions and thought provoking fun!

## **Something Scottish**

We are a house Group and limit our membership to 10 so that all have an opportunity of contributing to the discussion. This year we had 10 members and an attendance of 70%.

Each member of the Group gives an informal presentation on a topic that has Something Scottish in its content. This past year has produced a variety of topics delivered in a variety of ways - ranging from semi-professional Power Point to a reading from notes. But these are just the starting point for a discussion involving all the members.

Over the past year our members' choice of 'Something Scottish' included the Stanley engineer George Turnbull, Landscape interpretation, the making of the film 'I Know Where You Are Going' on location on Mull, Kitty, Duchess of Atholl, The Cowie Line, Swanston village, the building of the Caledonian Canal, Scots in the Antipodes, the Tartan Pimpernel, the drove road Skye to Crieff, Scottish Tapestry, Gaelic culture and life of a Perth teenager in 1927 -thanks to all for such a wonderful selection of topics.

## **Spanish Improvers**

This year each group member has contributed providing an interesting and diverse selection of topics. We have enjoyed topics ranging from cookery, poetry, art, history, geography, sports and many more. This has allowed us to learn more about Spanish culture and of course has highlighted more than a few grammatical problems along the way. We have had many laughs too! We are a friendly helpful bunch who all share our love of Spanish and would welcome new members.

## **Strollers**

I am pleased to report a successful walking season, with 7 scheduled walks completed, 1 cancelled due to weather. Our group remains adequately full with 61 registered members, with a few retirements and a few new arrivals. I decided to keep the group list open this past year.

Our 6 walks: Alyth, Fiddlers Walk Dunkeld, Blairgowrie (our Xmas lunch walk), Abercairney, Crieff, Crook of Devon, Craigton, St Andrews.

We had an enjoyable Xmas lunch this year at the Dalmore Inn, Blairgowrie (29 attendees).

I am indebted to various members who suggested, recced and led walks, notably, John Andrews. Attendance has been good, with a minimum of 8 and maximum of 29.

With the decision to open the group to new membership there is an occasional restriction on actual walking numbers, but this has not impacted on any group yet.

We have reinstated car-sharing, which has of course advantaged new members who do not have their own vehicle, the environment, and makes parking easier.

We will continue with scheduled walks through the summer as this is a very popular pastime.

## **Tai Chi groups**

The benefits of Tai Chi are many, including maintaining flexibility, mobility and balance, all particularly important for our age group. The sessions incorporate a series of exercises (movements) accompanied by melodious Chinese music to carry us along and are suitable for all ages, abilities and degrees of fitness, giving us a worthwhile workout to enhance our mental and physical well-being.

We are fortunate that our enthusiastic, dedicated and highly qualified instructor, Alexander Chan, is also a member of Perth U3A and we appreciate his sharing his extensive knowledge with us. He begins each session by highlighting the benefits of a particular movement, followed by ongoing comments and instructions as we work our way through the various exercises. His message is: Relax, Follow the Music and SMILE!

The venue, the North Inch Bowling Club Hall, is bright, airy and spacious, with free parking and easy access by bus and foot, capable of accommodating our expanding membership. We don't operate a waiting list, all are welcome – the more the merrier! We offer taster sessions for those who are uncertain.

There are weekly classes from September to April inclusive, Weeks 1 and 3 funded by the U3A and Weeks 2 and 4 self-funded by the members who choose to attend those 'extra' sessions. Although it is more beneficial to attend on a weekly basis, this gives everyone the flexibility to attend whenever they wish.

There is also a social dimension to the group with a welcome halftime chat break followed by many members heading to the local cafes at the end of each meeting plus, of course, the optional Christmas Lunch. Perhaps we should also celebrate Chinese New Year next year?

## **Trail Running**

The group although small continues to enthuse about our outings even in some cold weather. Again our aim was to take in some new and less usual running areas.

Group Members Bill Melville (Leader), Katharine Melville, Philip Bryers, Ian McCubbin, Jeff Banks, Maria Dale, Findlay Dale.

Runs -

September 19th - Cycle and Walking Path at Gleneagles Golf Course

October 17th - Murthly Estate West from Bankfoot road parking

November 14th - Killiecrankie to Pitlochry on riverside path.

December 12th - Perth - Inveralmond to N Inch

Jan 30<sup>th</sup> - Blairgowrie Golf Course Path circuit

Feb 27th - Lochore Meadows parkrun circuit

Mar 27th - Scone Racecourse Hotel to riverside

Apr 24th - Dunkeld Jubilee Bridge and back by riverside path.

As in the last two seasons we have linked up with Perth parkrun occasion runners to augment our ability range and make sure people always find a running companion. The visitors are made aware that they are not covered by U3a Insurance. We will probably continue with a few runs over the summer months.

## **Travel**

Meetings of this group were held in Unit 7, monthly intervals on a Monday on Week 1. Following the hiatus as a consequence of the pandemic lockdowns and the resignation of the previous Chair, this group was resurrected under the joint leadership of Joan Fraser and David Washington. There are 31 members in the group and 6 new members joined at the beginning of the session. A total of 7 meetings have been held, the final one will be in May.

The aims of the Travel group are to enable people to find like-minded travel companions and to potentially organize group travel where appropriate, either led by an individual or using a travel company.

This past year, 3 main trips have been organized;

- Herefordshire, May, a group of 5, under the leadership of Chris Mackreth
- Northern Spain, June, a group of 7, a tour with Riviera.
- Budapest, May, a small group of 3, going with a Thomas Cook City Break tour.

2 more tours are still in the planning stages for later in the year, Malta and Munich.

## **Ukulele for All**

We have continued to grow our repertoire this year, including a range of different types of song. Our membership has been steady and, although we have lost a couple of members, we have recruited fresh faces. Our attendance has been excellent with attendances never less than 70%.

We took variation as our theme this year and we have tackled new chords and techniques and have continued learning to play tunes as well as strum. We have learned different ways to play song accompaniments. We continue to increase our range of songs and the genres that we draw from. Most importantly, we continue to have fun and enjoy making music together.

### **Upland Explorers (new group for 2022-23)**

The Upland Explorers group formed late in the session and has not yet met.

### **Viewpoint Walks**

The Viewpointers enjoyed an enjoyable summer of varied walks during the u3a 'closed' season operating on a three-weekly cycle in co-operation with the other walking groups. During the summer, we accomplished five walks including Gartmorn Country Park, Bluebell Woods Blairgowrie, Stanley Mills, Glen Ogle and Inchewan Glen.

#### Winter walks 2022-23 Report

Our current membership stands at fifty, however we have around ten people we haven't seen very often, or at all, for the last year. I shall be inviting everyone to commit to the Viewpointers again in the new u3a year in August. I am still trying vainly to find a replacement as Group Leader; having done the job for seven years, it would be nice to get a new face and perspective on the job! However, here is a summary of our walks since the start of the u3a period:

12 September, Barbara Smith led 25 of us to Wester Fowlis and the pictish stones in a five mile walk.

10 October, Anne Kean led 21 walkers to Killiecrankie in a six mile walk.

7 November, 14 of us did a circular 5 mile walk from St.Martins led by Helen Lunan.

5 December, John Andrews and I led 35 walkers over 5 miles at Huntingtower and environs prior to our Festive Lunch.

6 January, I led a group of 13 on our 'cobwebs walk' of 5 miles at Moncreiffe Hill.

23 January, Margaret Gordon led 21 walkers over the five-mile Abernethy circular for 'David's Walk'.

20 February, Sue Hendry and Florence Proctor covered 7 miles in a pretty dreich day from Dollar to Muckhart Mill with 18 walkers.

20 March, David Combe led 13 walkers on a 5 mile forest walk at Pitmedden.

Totals: 160 walkers, average attendance 20 (40%). 42 miles walked, average 5.1 miles.

### **Yoga**

We have continued to meet at the North Inch Bowling Club which offers great facilities. The group operates as part of the u3a on a fortnightly basis. On the alternate weeks the group runs on a private basis for which there is a small fee.

This year we had 23 sessions between November and April. One of these was an online class organised because of adverse weather. There were 23 participants during the course of the year and the average attendance was 12.

Seen by many as a purely physical discipline yoga is about the whole person and not just a practice for the mat but for living your life. A regular practice of postures (asanas), breathing (pranayama) and meditation leads to alterations in the physical body which has an impact on the mind. Stilling our chattering minds and learning to relax is so important in this world of multi- tasking and numerous distractions.

Scientific research continues to confirm the wisdom of the ancient yogis that yoga enhances physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

It has been wonderful to see participants develop their practice during the course of the year, extending their range of movement, improving their posture and confidence. Yoga can be enjoyed by anyone and our group included complete beginners as well as those with experience. Adaptations can be provided for those with specific health issues. The group offers some laughs as well as the more serious side. If you are considering taking it up do come along and see for yourself.