



Surrey Network

Universities of the Third Age

Surrey U3A Network & Its Study Day Programme

Arthur Browne recalls that the Network existed as the Central Surrey Region before March 1997. It seemed to have been formed for the mutual benefit of the U3As and it used the system of rotating chairman/host with two meetings per year in spring and autumn. Arthur had the role of Education and Development Contact for the Network for many years. In 2000 the Network became part of the South East Area, along with Kent and Sussex, in the new Third Age Trust national structure with Arthur Russ from Kent elected as trustee. In 2008 the Trust adopted the government regional structure and we became Surrey Network in the much larger South East Region.

In 2004 the Network decided to start a study day programme following the lead of Sussex Network and found a suitable venue at the Royal School of Church Music near Boxhill. Our first topic was the ecology of Box Hill with the Head Ranger as speaker. All went well in the first season with good speakers and full attendance, except that the RSCM had a financial crisis and stopped operating. We needed a new home and found one at the Menuhin Hall, although hard hats were required on my first visit. Our first study day at the Menuhin Hall was in October 2005 and since then we have held fifteen successful seasons at this excellent venue.

Fetcham U3A was kind enough to manage our finances for five years but eventually we needed to open a bank account and it was clear that we needed an elected committee. A constitution was agreed in 2009 and Tom Appleton, Elmbridge U3A became our first elected chairman; he was followed by Yann Trevou, Ashtead U3A in 2012, Doreen Raine, Dorking U3A in 2015 and Caroline Sawers, Guildford U3A in 2019. Our next project is to adopt a new constitution for the Network and obtain affiliation to the Third Age Trust; we can then apply to become a registered charity as is required by charity law. As well as the study days the Network has organised workshops on various topics such as finance and U3A Plus, arranged exchanges with U3As in Poland and Spain, organised exhibitions of U3A activities at Denbies Wine Estate and held an open lecture on Richard III by one of the members of the archaeological discovery team.

The study days have been run by a team that has evolved over the years with too many members to name all involved but some should be mentioned to acknowledge their contribution. When we started Jennifer Anning, Kingston U3A organised the bookings for three years, then Jennifer Grant, Ashtead U3A took over for two years, followed by Sheila Hill, Fetcham U3A for four years, and John Kennedy, Ashtead U3A for six years. John Kennedy was our first treasurer for four years and then he swapped jobs with Sheila Hill who took over for five years, and John took over both jobs in 2019. Recently Sheila passed away and we sent our condolences to Graham Hill. Sheila and Graham were the familiar faces at on the registration table for members attending study days for the last decade.

The study day programme over sixteen years has been very successful with some outstanding speakers and events. The study day committee itself organises the programme and runs the events on the day. There are currently ten members but we are always looking for more members who can share the load, especially for the roles of booking secretary and treasurer to relieve John of some of his responsibilities. We have a team of members who act as door stewards for the study days once they have received Menuhin Hall training and there are fourteen of them. In addition we have ten members who have received basic Red Cross first-aid training. The Menuhin Hall is a great venue as it can feel pleasantly full with an intimate atmosphere with around one hundred people present and yet it can cope with up to two hundred and twenty for our style of event. Once the numbers exceed one hundred and eighty we need to use the balcony and have four stewards on duty rather than two. Over the last twelve years the average number of members attending study days has increased from one hundred to one hundred and sixty.

We have a website with the programme and down-loadable booking forms which are available four to six months in advance and we also circulate booking forms to U3As by post - <https://u3asites.org.uk/surreyu3anetwork/events> . We aim to offer a broad range of subjects and seek feedback on whether there are other new areas that members would like to hear about. The website has a complete list of subjects presented but to give an idea of the range we have had; six each on Archaeology, History & Science, five each on Art History & Music, three on Health, two each on Current Affairs, Philosophy & Surrey & one each on Architecture, Espionage & Magic, making forty study days over the last five years.

Our most popular study day titles were “Bletchley Park & the Role of Intelligence”, “Vincent van Gogh & Painting in Nineteenth Century France” and “The Bayeux Tapestry & Life in England before the Battle of Hastings”. We had particularly memorable occasions when the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey opened the One Hundredth Study Day with a talk on his role and later when Evan Davis from the BBC spoke on “Public Discourse in the Modern Age”; Evan’s parents are U3A members.

We like to have U3A speakers for the study days and are pleased that around 30% of study days have U3A speakers. Leslie Pitcher, Fetcham U3A has given six study days on Art History, Maria Chester, East Berwickshire U3A has given four study days on Archaeology and Art History, Roger Luther, Preston Park U3A has given three study days on Mathematics and Anne Davison, Arun U3A has given three study days on the Historical Impact of Religions.

Finally I would like to thank Alison Gaitonde, Banstead U3A who was one of the original team and is still involved and Arthur Browne, Horley U3A who has stepped back from full involvement but still produces the booking forms and posters. I run the website and try to ensure the show stays on the road but we would all welcome offers of future assistance and new ideas for study days and events.

Ian Funnell, Fetcham U3A & Study Day Committee Chairman

1st February 2020