

AYLESBURY VALLEY
U3A

10th
ANNIVERSARY

11th January 1999

Foreword by the chairman

Let us give thanks for ten years of U3A.

When I was contemplating the possibility of early retirement, my wife said that if I decided to take it then I must find something in retirement which would stimulate my brain and keep it working. Trust a teacher!

So when I retired early I joined U3A and my wife and I joined the East Anglian Studies and Jazz Appreciation groups. We enjoyed each, as well as the monthly meetings at the Bucks. C.C. Sports Club in Stoke Mandeville. One of the early meetings I attended had a spectacular display of ancient Chinese costumes. Another was a great talk on the geology of New Zealand by Eric Dorrance.

Then came the double shock; Eric's sudden death and my becoming your chairman. His was an act impossible to follow.

Because I have been in U3A for about half of its existence in Aylesbury, I have no knowledge of the early years, save for what I have read from files and what I have been told. Most of our members, like me, know only of more recent events, so the suggestion of a special newsletter to relate reminiscences over the whole period, with perhaps the emphasis on contributions from our more long-standing members received my full support.

Thank you to all who have put their memories into words for this special edition. Thank you to Bill Skeggs for pulling it all together. Thank you to those early members who strove to get this U3A going, no doubt the most difficult task it has faced. Thank you to Sir Roy Harding, for your early encouragement as Chief Education Officer for Buckinghamshire and then as our president. But thank you most of all, Eric Dorrance, for the vision and the drive you contributed to make our U3A a reality and then a success.

G. E. Schoon

Anniversary Luncheon

Today, Monday 11th January 1999, we celebrate our 10th anniversary with a special luncheon in the Maxwell Hall at the Civic Centre. Two hundred and twenty eight of our two hundred and ninety members are present.

Our principal guests and speakers are member, and founder president, Sir Roy Harding and Sir Lawrence Verney.

Why this special newsletter?

This special 10th Anniversary newsletter is the brainchild of a member who, whilst not a founder member, has spent the last five years working on the committee finding the speakers for our monthly meetings and also running a group -Looking at Photographs. At the end of one committee meeting, when we had completed all the scheduled business, Muriel Beech quietly suggested that it might be a good idea to have a permanent reminder of our 10th Anniversary. She followed this up with a suggestion that the most appropriate way to achieve this would be with a special edition of the newsletter, devoted to members' personal memories of memorable or important events associated with our U3A since we were founded. The committee quickly agreed, but it was three o'clock the following morning before the implications of what I had agreed to dawned on me! Our chairman did not make matters any easier when he made appeals for contributions at subsequent monthly meetings, wrote to founder members and insisted that I should include an appeal for contributions in the autumn newsletter. Muriel was the first to oblige -there would have been trouble if she had not put pen to paper- and all of the content of this special newsletter is the work of our members; unabridged, and exactly as told to me. Identities have not been changed to protect the innocent which is perhaps why some contributors have decided to remain anonymous!

I hope you will agree that Muriel's innocent suggestion has been worthwhile.

Finally, my apologies to the few members who sent me a contribution which I was unable to include.

Bill Skeggs

From then till now

A look at the minutes reveals:-

The inaugural meeting to establish the new U3A took place on Wednesday 11th January 1989 at the Civic Centre.

The meeting was attended by "about 150 people".

The steering committee that had got us to this stage comprised; Eric Dorrance, chairman, Ellen Bates, Fred Bush, Harry Cafferata, Barbara Clark, Donald Evans, Ron Fisher, Margaret Gornall, Lesley Holloway, Arthur Horlock, Barbara Menches and Geoff Wood. You will no doubt be familiar with the names of some of these "old stagers".

Eric Dorrance, who was a member of Thame U3A, was the driving force behind the proposal to establish the new U3A in Aylesbury. Sadly, Eric died in October 1994.

At the inaugural meeting, Sir Roy Harding, who was guest speaker, accepted an invitation to become our president.

The meeting formally approved a proposal to establish U3A in Aylesbury.

The speaker at the first monthly meeting, held at the Abbey Centre on 22nd February 1989, was Eric Dorrance who gave a talk on the Armenian earthquake.

The first groups to be set up were, Play Reading and Poetry, Geography, Calligraphy, French Conversation, Recorder, Spanish Conversation, German, Swimming and Painting.

In the last 10 years we have welcomed over 550 new members and membership now stands at 290. Of the 60 members who completed application forms at the inaugural meeting in January 1989, thirty three are still members today.

Our continued growth has been responsible for a number of changes in venue for our monthly meetings. After the first meeting in the Abbey Centre, we moved almost immediately to Hazell's Club, then on to Bucks. C.C. Sports and Social club before moving to our present venue at Aylesbury Football Club in May 1995.

And the rest, as they say, is history. We have achieved steady growth and would have continued to grow but having reached 290 members, which the committee considered was our optimum size, the decision was made towards the end of 1996 that we should admit no more new members and that we should establish a second U3A in the town. Mid-Bucks U3A formally came into being in January 1997 and continues to grow steadily. We have a small waiting list of potential members who prefer to wait for a vacancy in our membership rather than join Mid-Bucks.

Ron Fisher was in at the beginning

I met Eric Dorrance (whom I had known for many years) by chance in the County Hall office of Jane Malloys, the Aylesbury Vale Youth & Community Officer, where they were talking with Lesley Holloway (now Lesley Heather) about setting up a U3A. At that time Eric was a member of Thame U3A. "Have you got a minute?", he said. I should have known better! Two hours later I left as a member of the steering committee which was about to be set up.

Dr Barbara Clarke (she was my old GP) was also in on it. Quite how, I don't know. She later ran a recorder group and a calligraphy group. You will never believe that I belonged to the latter. Barbara moved to Windsor some years ago.

Roy Harding was proposed as president at an early meeting of the steering committee. A number of us knew him already, of course. We wanted what he would bring; insight, authority, influence and friendly participation.

Eric Dorrance was a popular one-man band. We all liked his music and style of conducting. The committee was a point of reference and a back-up -a benign influence. Eric used us in that way both as a committee and as individuals -he would ring up to chat things over. I think we had the same relationship with Roy. It would not be possible to run in the same way now.

John Mason, appointed as secretary shortly after we were established, was the key figure in keeping us on the main line and making sure we didn't run into a siding.

And so was Greta Morgan

Greta, leader at various times of Rhythmic Fun, German and Discussion groups, as well as an enthusiastic participant in other groups, was one of Eric's first recruits. As a near neighbour of Eric, whom she had known for many years, she found his invitation to the inaugural meeting difficult to refuse. Greta has no regrets and recalls that the arrival of U3A in Aylesbury was "the best thing that has ever happened to us third agers."

John Mason has memories of the early days

My recollections of our early years seem to revolve round repeated searches by the Committee for new accommodation as our numbers increased and we had to move on. Our very first meetings took place at the Abbey Centre, but that was before my time, and soon after I took on the vacant job of Secretary we moved to Hazell's Hall. We were quite happy there, except that we were not allowed to make coffee for ourselves -so we went without rather than pay 50p a cup. However, after a couple of years, the fire regulations began to worry us (and the management), so the hunt for accommodation started again. We were then offered the use of the Bucks County Council Sports Club at Stoke Mandeville (cheap if not very cheerful!), where we could make our own coffee, discovering what a money-spinner that could be. Finally, still one jump ahead of the fire regulations, another frantic search produced a real find -the Aylesbury United Football Club ground where we still meet, despite occasional scares about our tenure there.

Apart from such mundane matters as these, what were we about and what did we hope to achieve? Generally speaking, we tried to keep the emphasis firmly on educational (in the stricter sense) pursuits, within the limitations imposed by the scarcity of potential group leaders -an ever-present problem. Even so, we strongly believed in the U3A principle of self-help. We were not unaware of the need to leaven our studies with a modicum of entertainment, but such activities were organized within the Committee. Our annual holiday probably loomed larger in our minds than it would nowadays, because one coach-load was equivalent to half our membership and the September meeting date was sometimes changed to avoid a clash.

In those early days we felt obliged to keep expenditure down to a minimum, always fearing that we might at some time have to pay for the accommodation that our first chairman had obtained for us at the Grange School. Hence, we had no newsletters or similar communication with our members (except at A.G.M. time), rather putting the onus on them to come to monthly meetings, which an impressively high proportion did and, of course, still do.

All in all, the differences between then and now are not great; it is just that then we had modest beginnings and limited resources. Now we have more members, more money and more technical back up, but our basic aims have not altered, and that is what matters. Together, over the years, we have built a thriving organization, and I am glad to have had a part in that endeavour.

Everyone likes Fred's music

During the first year of the U3A a number of groups were started, but music was not available as no expert could be found to run it. However, after about six months from the inaugural meeting, I decided that since I was keen on classical music I would try to establish such a group. I already had quite a large library of LPs and cassettes and a portable cassette player, so there would be no problem in providing the music. Since then, except for the summer breaks, the group has continued to meet at the Grange Centre fortnightly. It has maintained a fairly good membership and has 18 members at present. There has been the occasional meeting in members' houses.

Many of the pieces of music were copied from my collection of LPs onto cassette. I also provided the programme which was generally accepted by the members. It was called "Music I Like" which incorporated all kinds of music and in the early days included Jazz. Since then of course a Jazz group of its own has been established and the programme now consists of classical music as produced by the great and famous composers.

Some members of the group have presented their own programmes and this opportunity is always available. Whilst most of the time is spent listening to music, there has been a development of learning about the lives of composers and the environment in which they lived. Over the years members have increased their knowledge of music and the exercise has been greatly rewarding and helped all to appreciate music and its development in the community.

Opera is now included in the programme and more knowledge is being gained in appreciating this art form.

There has been a change in the membership of the group over the years although some of the existing members started when it was first formed nearly ten years ago. There is always an open invitation to join although numbers are limited.

Fred Bush

Mary Rogers was bowled over by Eric

In the summer of 1989 I was persuaded by Eric Dorrance to start a Bowls group. At this time I was a very new bowler and quite frankly I took the game very lightly, happy to throw the woods and see where they landed. It took some time to find somewhere we could bowl that would accept casual wear and provide the bowls so that anyone could try without involving too much expense. It was late summer before we found the answer on the greens at Aylesbury Vale Park and it was there we started and have remained.

Initially I gained confidence from the knowledge that I could rely on my father, a keen bowler, to help me run the group. Unfortunately he died suddenly soon after we started. I was on my own when we restarted the following summer. Out came the rulebooks and as members of the group started to improve, I had to try to keep up with them.

What have I gained? Well my own game and attitude have improved immensely. I have been on two residential courses and then tried to pass on what I have learnt. Somewhat belatedly, realising how many people I have started from scratch, I took and passed the English Bowls Instructors course and last but not least, I have made so many wonderful friends.

There has been a sense of achievement that most of those who have learnt to bowl with U3A have continued to play and enjoy the game, though some now bowl just with affiliated clubs, indoor or outdoor.

To anyone who is approached to take a group, I say take a chance and do it however little you feel you know, it is learning together and the rewards are greater than the effort it takes.

Nancie Mason was thrown in at the deep end

Nancie recalls: "I uttered an incautious word 'swimming' at the inaugural meeting in the hearing of our newly appointed, very enthusiastic chairman. The result was instant 'promotion' to leader of a swimming group which has been meeting weekly, except for school holidays, ever since."

It's a bit of a blur to John Jonas

As I write this, a jazz tape is playing in the background; the same tape that was playing nearly 10 years ago. This music was played at my retirement party at St John's hospital. Very soon after this the steering committee of the proposed new U3A met at the Civic Centre and Aylesbury Vale U3A became a reality. I met somebody at that first meeting as I was going into the hall who said; "They'll expect you to organise something!" This forecast turned out to be accurate. I was told to run a painting group!

This task was a challenge for, although I am an artist, I am not a qualified art teacher. I thought at the time that we artists had better sharpen our basic skills with elementary exercises. I remember a member of the painting group asking when we were finally going to paint a picture!

A blur occurred as time rushed along lasting nearly 10 years. What a wonderful blur. I'm conscious of the friends, outings, parties and, most of all, the deep commitment to learning. 10 years proof that retired people can learn and give to others. I'm grateful that our committee members give of their precious time to keep all that going.

Bill Skeggs is another of Eric's victims

Bill tells how he became leader of the French group.

"I joined U3A immediately following my early retirement at the end of 1992. I was interested in improving my French and the French conversation group, which I understood was being led by a native French member, seemed to present an ideal opportunity to do this. I went along to my first meeting to find five other participants but no leader -she was no longer a member of our U3A! My innocent enquiry 'what are we going to do?' drew the response, "we're waiting for you, you're our new leader!" It seems that Eric, whom I had known for some time prior to joining U3A and who knew of my interest in all things French and my attendance at French evening classes at the Grange Centre, had decided that I would lead the group and that the best way of getting my agreement was to leave it to the members of the group to tell me!"

Barbara Whitaker remembers the annual study trips

Some months after the founding of Aylesbury Vale U3A, Eric Dorrance, our first Chairman, and I made plans for a short study trip. We decided to stay in University accommodation and find interesting things to see and do in the surrounding area. We decided on Sheffield University, as the Warden of Earnshaw Hall was an old friend of mine, and to use Plastow's coaches. Eric and I went to do a 'recce' in the Sheffield area and devised the first of what has become an annual event. We had a day's walking in Derbyshire and visits to Buxton, Chatsworth, Haddon Hall, the Blue John Mines and the Cutlers' Hall. One night the fire alarm sounded and, outside, we were treated to the sight of Eric trying to keep his pyjama trousers up because the cord had gone and to Keith Potter who arrived fully-dressed and carrying his rucksack. Everyone thought they saw Jake Kendall, but he insists he wasn't there.

The following year we went to Durham University and visited Cragside, Beamish, Hadrian's Wall ("are there any shops?"), Blanchland, Helmsley and Beverley, where we all had an ice-cream cornet from a famous local dairy.

In 1993 and 1994 we decided on the luxury of the Mytton Fold Farm Hotel in the Ribble Valley, where outings in the first year ranged from the sublime Whalley and Bolton Abbeys to the "cor blimey" of Harry Ramsden's and Wigan Pier, by way of the Museum of Cinematography and Saltaire in Bradford. The second year's outings ranged from the Lowry Museum and the Museum of Science and Technology to the Witches' Shop on Pendle Hill and a ride round Blackpool Illuminations. On our last night we had a Lancashire supper of black pudding (ugh!) and hotpot, and a display of clog-dancing by local children.

Cardiff University came next where, after a Welsh Night and unlimited wine at Cardiff Castle, and one member reputed to have gone to bed in his clothes, we sobered up for visits to the Rhondda Mining Heritage Centre, St Fagan's Folk Museum and Castell Coch, ending with a visit to the Garden Festival on a wet and windy hillside.

In 1995, from Hull University, we had a study day at Burton Agnes Hall, visited the Fishing Museum at Grimsby, Lincoln and Gainsborough Old Hall, besides walking the Fish Walk in Hull and touring historic Leicester. For some of the regulars, the highlight of this and of all the trips was their descent into the bowels of the supports of the Humber Bridge, and being allowed to visit the control room to watch all the vehicles as they stopped to pay their tolls. One evening there was a talk on the old Hull fishing community and sea-songs by a man called Shanty Jack.

1996 saw us at Keele University; we visited Chalcote Park, the Wedgewood Museum, Gladstone Pottery, Stafford and Shugborough; we marvelled at the beauty of the Dorothy Clive Gardens and on our last evening were taught line-dancing by the young man who served behind our bar.

We had lots of fun and found many places of interest which some would never have thought of visiting, but after Keele my aching bones and increase in girth made climbing in and out of the coach hard work, and family commitments meant I had less time to spare for planning and it was time to pass on the baton. We never quite made it to China to study Chinese Script, which had been one of Eric's more fanciful ideas, but this year's trip to the Dutch bulb fields and next year's to Bruges, show that our U3A is heading off in the right direction, and that visits to the Great Wall and the Terracotta Army are only a matter of time!

Geoff Young takes up the study tour story

The 1997 holiday went to south west England with our base in the University of Exeter, St Luke's campus. It was a mixture of educational, interest and fun visits, starting with Stonehenge on the way down and Wilton carpet factory.

On contacting Exeter U3A it was found that one of its members was a cathedral guide and so the day in the town itself started with a tour of the cathedral. The next day we were off to Somerset to the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovil and Montacute House. The next day was more of a fun day - Dartington Hall and Cider Press Centre, then to Paignton for a steam train to Kingswear, on the ferry to Dartmouth and a boat trip up the Dart. Next day, home via Street and Wells, on to Longleat and a cream tea before the long journey home.

And finally, Brian Samuels

In 1998 we visited Kent, my home county, for five days, using the University of Kent in Canterbury as our base. The first day saw us in Rochester where we visited the cathedral, the Dickens Museum, the Guildhall and the Royal Engineers Museum. Our first day ended with a talk on piloting by Captain Russell, a senior channel pilot who is also President of the Nautical Institute, followed by a presentation on Canterbury Cathedral by one of the guides.

Next day we visited Dover, its castle and museum.

The coach driver was able to put his feet up next morning whilst we stayed in Canterbury and had a guided tour of the cathedral. Then on to historic Leeds castle.

Our last full day took in the Brogdale National Fruit Collection, which houses the largest collection of fruit trees and plants in the world, Igtham Mote, a picturesque 14th century house and finally Cobtree Museum of Kent Life at Maidstone

On our way home we called in at Chartwell and Hever Castle.

Some more memories of the study tours

Knowing the basic accommodation that our children had had at University, it was with some trepidation we signed up to relinquish home comforts for a few days amongst a group we barely knew, at Sheffield University.

What a revelation — the pans, pots, tuck boxes etc. were all superfluous. Food was excellent with ample portions, kettles provided to make hot drinks at will. It was a male Hall of Residence so modesty dictated we made our own notices designating Ladies and Gents bathrooms — the thought of opening a door to find a male body taking a shower was just too dreadful!

However, we did learn a lot during the week, not all academic. A fire alarm revealed secrets like who slept in the nude, who wore a hat and knapsack in bed and who had a broken cord in his pyjamas. I'm sure I was not alone to discover that "something for the weekend" now came fruit flavoured!

The day that stands out as my personal favourite was a visit to the Blue John Caverns in the morning then walking on Mount Tor during the afternoon. Keith Potter led the serious walkers while Eric Dorrance led the "gentler" walk. If climbing up into caves to study rock formations and up hill and down dale was considered the gentler then I can only assume we did fewer miles. We all came back from the four days stimulated and eager for next year.

Mary Rogers

Another sleepless night

The first U3A study/holiday brings back memories of the night the fire alarm went off! It was immediately above the door of one member's room but he did not hear it. One lady in her night attire did think to take some outer-wear with her e.g. a skirt and blouse but did not remember any underwear, whilst another lady brought her underwear but no outer clothing.

A very well known gentleman had to sit on a wall whilst we waited for the fire engines to arrive. He dared not stand up because his pyjama cord had broken! A well organised member arrived outside, fully dressed, clothes all packed in his bag and hat upon his head. All this for a slice of burnt toast!

Anon

A walk around London with Ron Fisher

Ron Fisher's and Len Bickley's interest in the treasures and hidden corners of London led to the establishment of the group, "Discover London Walks". However, before Ron's account of what goes on we have a report, not from Ron or Len, but from a participant in the very first walk who, for reasons that will become obvious, wishes to remain anonymous. You will soon see why the group continues to be popular and a firm favourite of our members. Suffice to say, Ron does not appear to remember much about the first walk! This account reveals a side of our activities about which many members were, until now, blissfully unaware!

This account can only be called "An *unsteady* walk around Clerkenwell."

The first outing in the programme of London Walks was planned as a walk round Clerkenwell. A subsequent offer to take the group to a local distillery beforehand was accepted with alacrity. On arrival at the distillery there was free coffee and biscuits. We looked round the distillery and the museum, but then the bar was opened with free drinks ad lib! At this point my recollection becomes a bit hazy!

Lunch had been organised for us and the starter was melon in sloe gin, leading one lady member to remark, "the gravy was lovely!" whereupon a full bottle of sloe gin was put in front of us. Wine flowed freely with the rest of the lunch.

When the time came to think about the walk round Clerkenwell there were only five members left - I'm not sure whether that included the leader! Now, whether many of our members thought that the wisest thing to do was to go straight home, or whether the shops were more attractive, I don't know.

Anon

There were some hazy memories of our first London walk as our anonymous friend has recalled. We have taken in a few splendid Victorian gin-palaces since then! And breweries.

If you transcribe the 'phone code for the Borough it still spells 'HOP', and our second walk in June 1989 was to that particular part of Southwark, which lies just across from London Bridge. It was an area of hostelries and hospitals; playhouses and prisons; beer, bards and brothels. Was, and in some respects, still is. Not that we found any red lanterns, you understand, but we did discover bollards marked "The Clink 1812" Then there was the parish boundary -St. O.M.- for St Mary Overie (over the river), now Southwark Cathedral; plates on buildings insured with the Sun Fire Office; sword-rests bearing the insignia of the livery companies of long-gone Lord Mayors; sixteenth century timbers behind plastic shop-fronts; plaster decoration of hops and barley around hops factors offices; pub signs; the Monster Clothing Company advertising in faded paint on the wall above its emporium; cobbled quays; watermen's steps to the river; weather vanes (any ships coming in today?) The list is endless and the richness in part derives from the location: the Roman Ermine Street and Stone Street met there to enter the City by the bridge over the Thames. I suppose that the academic classification would be 'topography'. After all, we are the U3A.

This kind of topographical approach entails reading, walking, and looking -really looking. Then you begin to see, and we all see differently.

Serendipity came into it. Or is it chance favouring the prepared mind? Imagination too, to sense the shades of sometime locals. There was Chaucer at the Tabard seeing Pilgrims off to Canterbury: Shakespeare anticipating a first night -or, more likely, afternoon, at the "Wooden O"; Dickens visiting his old dad in the Marshalsea debtors' prison.....

On that exploration of the Borough this group gelled and we continued to walk together regularly. Once we dined with royalty! True. Prince Harry, (or was it William?), with his pre-prep school pals and grey-suited shadow came into our Holland Park café. There!

Sometimes, other members of the group did the homework, made the "recce" and led the walk. How else would we learn about mercury in the Apothecaries' Hall; trace the initials carved in the desks at Harrow school; discover William Morris wallpaper in Walthamstow, or take an Edwardian tea in Bedford Park?

Something of this same spirit of excitement was experienced by all the early groups. I like to think that the tone was set then for what has followed. Inevitably, as numbers have grown so has the need for more formality in organization, but that has not got in the way of what lies at the heart of U3A -sharing delight in learning.

Ron Fisher

Vic loses his freedom

U3A was to be my husband's "thing" -I was far too busy. He returned from his first meeting, fragrant with the smell of whisky. What is this, I asked myself and was not a little suspicious of the explanation that the subject of the meeting had been "The Making of Whisky" or some such name. This was followed soon after by a London walk, preceded by a visit to Gordons Gin factory (not all the group managed the walk, I understand). By now I was very sure that this U3A was nothing but an alcoholic boozing club. Strangely enough, apart from Christmas sherry and wine and the odd pint on subsequent London Walks or the annual holidays, the last ten years have been quite abstemious and alcohol has not raised its head again in all that time.

I was, of course, eventually persuaded along to a meeting -"Deer Culling in the Chilterns"- I think. I was impressed and have been a happy member ever since.

Barbara Fenner

....and so does John

Although John did not attend the initial meeting in January 1989 he joined a couple of months later, in March. His first group was Geology with Eric Dorrance which he enjoyed for many years.

Some of John's early activities had an alcoholic flavour; there was a whisky tasting which was enjoyable and, under the pretext of a London walk, a visit to Gordons Distillery which was certainly memorable! A sampling of several varieties of gin was followed by an excellent lunch with a glass of sloe gin as a liqueur. The walk had been planned for the afternoon but even walking to the nearest tube station required a considerable degree of effort for some members.

The reports of all these activities encouraged Fay to join in September. Some of the early monthly meetings that Fay attended covered unusual subjects such as, "Ribbon Making in Victorian Coventry" and "A Geographer Looks at Japan".

We both remember with pleasure the trips to see the 'Mary Rose' at Portsmouth, Chatham Dockyard and the Open University at Milton Keynes (of particular interest to Fay who was studying for her OU degree at the time). The visit to Harrow School in the autumn of 1990 was intriguing and showed that school days were very hard in the early years. We both went on the holidays to Durham and Cardiff Universities and to Lancashire where, despite Eric's misgivings, we stayed in a small hotel. Barbara Whitaker's itinerary kept us fully occupied and we appreciated the creature comforts at the end of the day.

John and Fay Buswell

Daphne and Jose look back

I attended the inaugural meeting to decide whether there was sufficient interest to form a U3A branch in Aylesbury when it was held in the Civic Centre in January 1989.

I remember that more and more chairs had to be brought in to seat the people who came. Eric Dorrance and others talked about what U3A meant and I was delighted to find that I really wanted to join. When the first few groups were formed I joined the play-reading group, led by Don Evans, and since then have joined three more groups, all of which give me education, enjoyment and the chance to meet people who want to learn. Some groups have closed over the years but more are being formed and it is feasible to be out every morning and afternoon attending one meeting or another -no time to do housework!

I am very grateful for all the companionship and pleasure I have received over the years, for the very friendly welcome at the monthly meetings and particularly for the good friends I have made.

May it long continue.

Daphne Smithers

Nearly 10 years! A long time to look back over. Memories crowd in of monthly speakers, mostly very interesting, a few quite outstanding in both content and presentation. I wish I could remember all the wealth of information imparted, but at least some sticks!

Classes attended have opened new subjects, and extended old interests to me, but above all this, my great gain has been making new friends with similar or fresh interests.

Speaking to a stranger recently, U3A was mentioned and I was shocked to hear her say, "I have no time for them. I went to some meetings and no-one spoke to me!" On enquiry I was much relieved to hear that it was not our U3A she went to. It was possibly her own fault, but I thought of our own meetings. There are so many people, I wouldn't know if the person next to me was new or had been a member for a year or two, and one can be so busy talking to friends, and attending to business, that a lonely person is overlooked.

Jose Harrison

Muriel catches the moment

1993

; and new to the U3A committee. When our then chairman, Eric Dorrance, asked for ideas on new groups that we could form, I tentatively suggested "Photography". Had I known him a little better I should have been more wary, for immediately he agreed, and asked me to start a group! Too late I pleaded my lack of technical knowledge, but Eric did agree that we should just call it "Looking at Photographs" to prevent misapprehensions of a more serious treatment of the subject. At the next monthly meeting, twenty members expressed their interest and so the group began.

My first task was to assure everyone that they didn't need to have an expensive camera, nor much experience. All were welcome, and hopefully would learn a few tips from our discussions. A few eyebrows were raised when I suggested that some of their photographs would look better trimmed, cutting off distracting intrusions at the edges of pictures such as cars or people; after all, photographs cost money, and with each snip of the scissors some of it was being thrown away! Sometimes mutterings can still be heard when viewing each others' holiday snaps - "Don't let Muriel see that or.....!" Gradually though more care was given in choosing the right moment to click the shutter, and the results improved.

Indoor meetings were, and still are, only held monthly, but in between we sometimes took our cameras out together for shooting sessions. The first of these was around Aylesbury on a Sunday afternoon, when our enthusiasm for the reflections visible in the "Blue Leany" led to their security guards getting suspicious of our motives, and we were sternly banished from the forecourt. Another memorable trip was a winter walk in Oxford, where, feeling remarkably cheerful, we ate lunch outside a small pub, warming ourselves by a brazier. Since then there have been trips by car and coach to many different locations, and Ron Fisher has led us on walks round interesting parts of London; and we have compared photographs afterwards.

Some cameras have seen more daylight in the last few years than they have ever done before. Have we learnt anything amidst our good companionship and shared interest? I think most of us have and are still doing so. The most rewarding remark that I've heard from a group member during the past five years was that for the first time they'd "seen" a tree blossoming at the end of their road. Although our photographic results may still not be as good as we'd hoped, our powers of observation have certainly improved, and accordingly our quality of life.

Muriel Beech

'IN A NUTSHELL'

By Peggy Wrighton

I came across U3A one day,
At Civic Centre Education Display.
Fred Bush and Eric Dorrance were there
Inviting me to the listening chair.

At Abbey School the Steering formed
Aylesbury Senior Citizens – reborn.

Donald's poetic tones paved my way
Alerted my brain to Poems and Play.
Win Sweet showed me how to improve, my
Floral Art, how each bloom should move.

Barbara planned Holidays and Trips,
Durham Uni., still tops my list.
Beamish and Cragside were seen
With witty companions -U3A. keen.

My senses alerted in London by Ron
To Wall Plaques, Coal Holes walking upon
Interesting Buildings-great Pubs where we ate
Parks, Canals, Underground, his knowledge perfect.

I enjoy the artistic - gentle Tai Chi.
Relaxing with Music, the best therapy.
The joy of Photography - Natures art
Sharing a theme, the fun to take part.

Our Membership grown - a thirsting for more
Knowledge and Friendship..the U3A core.

Many Leaders to mention, many to praise
On this 10th Anniversary..our glasses raise!
To our Friends – especially those passed on,
Who laid Aylesbury U3A stepping stone.

OUR U3A

By Eileen Davis, with apologies to Thomas Hood.

I remember, I remember, some 10 years ago
When a group of mature people said, "we know
That an organisation called the U3A
Could flourish here in a wonderful way."
So it came to pass, one bright new dawn
Our Aylesbury group came to be born.
Members flocked from far and wide
To participate, learn, and teach and guide.
We attend the classes, hear the talks,
Exchange our views and go on walks.
Learning all the time with friends,
Our knowledge expands and never ends,
Here's to the future, long may we live
To benefit from all that minds can give.
So join with me you lads and lasses
And help each other to enjoy the classes,
As we battle on day by day,
Let us say,

"LONG LIVE OUR U3A."