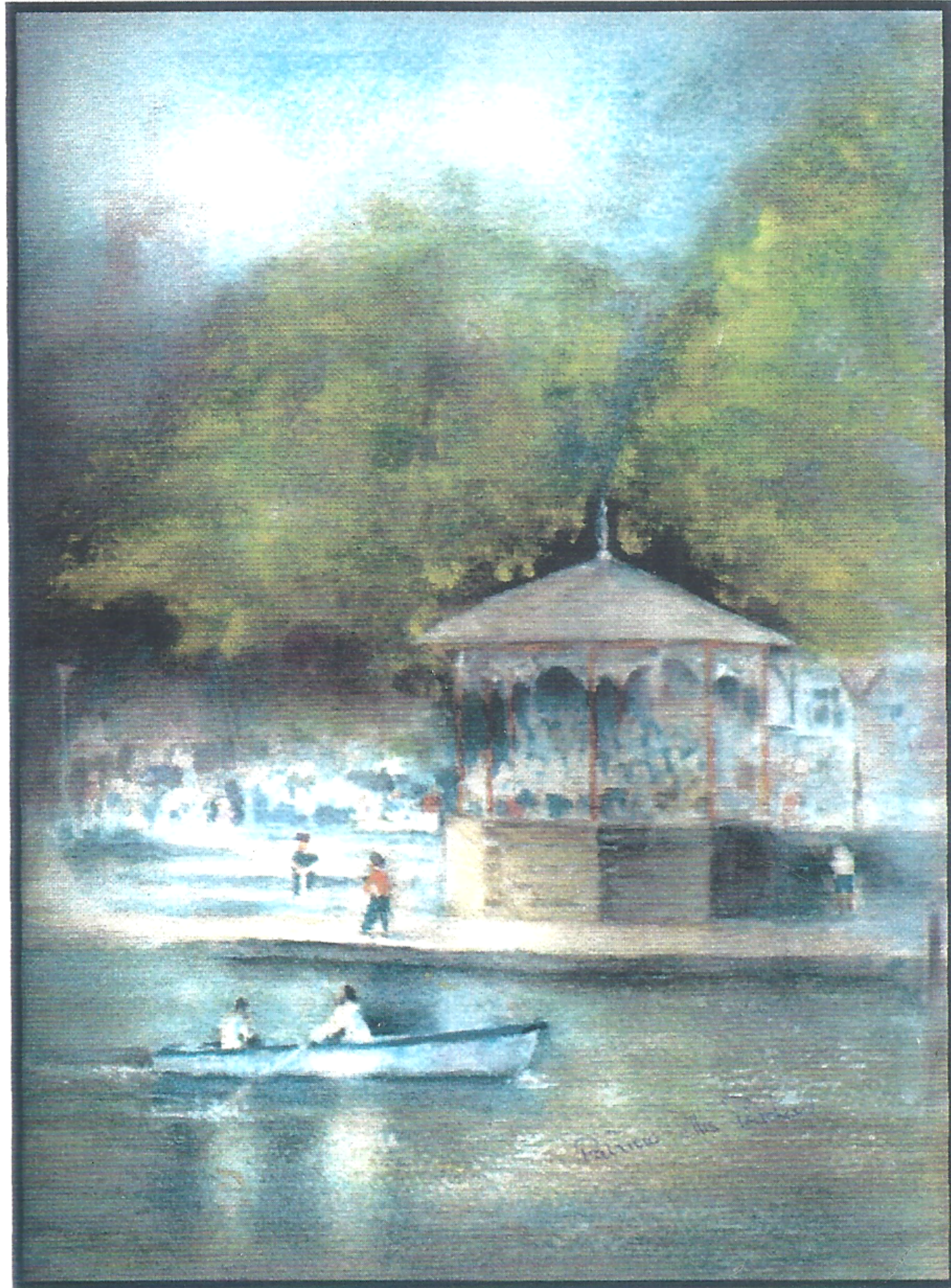


THE CHESTER U3A MILLENNIUM DOCUMENT



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Millennium Document of Chester U3A -University of the Third Age. In it we hope to show the purposes, the varied activities, aims, work and joys of our organisation, as it is at the beginning of the Third Millennium.

Founded in 1993, the Chester U3A now has over four hundred members; it is affiliated to the Third Age Trust, which represents approximately 85,000 members in over 400 U3As throughout the United Kingdom. Aiming to promote continuing activity and learning after retirement from full-time employment, we are essentially a self-help organisation, drawing on the wealth of experience and knowledge of our members, and aiming to provide a friendly, supportive environment in which learning may take place. No qualifications are required or given, but opportunities are created for members to explore existing interests more deeply, or to start a subject entirely new to them.

At the start of the new Millennium Chester U3A has about forty study groups, exploring topics as diverse as Art Appreciation and Science, Heraldry and Tapestry. Most groups meet in the homes of members.



Some, such as Birdwatching and Walking, go much further afield. Some activities have proved so popular that a second or even a third group has had to be formed.

As you will see in this Document, our activities are not limited to the Study Groups. The main monthly meeting attracts nearly half of our members on each occasion giving them an opportunity to hear good speakers on a variety of subjects and also providing our organisation with an important means of communication, reinforced by our monthly news-

letter. The "Sunday at Seven" when members can meet socially over a pub meal once a month is also popular as are our organised visits to theatres, the ballet, and trips to places of interest such as Jodrell Bank Planetarium or the Steelworks at Shotton. Parties have enjoyed longer coach trips, to Scotland, Paris and Lille amongst others.



Edinburgh Castle

As we look to the future, we are aware that our success and continuing growth may indeed cause problems. We find no suitable and affordable hall large enough to accommodate more than 200 members for our monthly lectures and we feel that increasing our size much further could endanger the friendly nature of our organisation.. Who knows, we may be the first of several U3As in Chester, giving still more opportunities for exploring new fields and widening horizons for those who wish to remain alert and active in their years of retirement.

We would like to think this document conveys to all our readers, young and old, how much our unique organisation has given and continues to give to its members.

June Hargreaves

Millenium Chairwoman

COMPILING THE MILLENNIUM DOCUMENT

Our aim is to document the state of U3A in Chester at the turn of the millennium for the interest of a future reader 1, 10, 100 or even 1000 years hence. We feel some explanation of our approach is called for to enable you to put the contributions in context.

Most of us come from professional backgrounds and are thankful to have an organisation to offer friendship and opportunities to keep our minds and bodies active through and beyond retirement. Each of us has been involved in starting new groups outside our fields of professional expertise and each has also enjoyed participating in other groups and the organisation of regional events. Apart from the obvious personal benefits, we see U3A as a forum for ideas and concerns affecting individuals and groups in contemporary society with a particular regard to those matters which relate to society's ageing members.

The contributions have made interesting reading, not least for the variety of interpretations of the above stated aim by the various writers and their interest groups.

Inevitably, the foundation and organisational details may seem a little repetitive between groups, but they are obviously important to the groups as a part of how they see themselves..

It should be noted that participation in U3A groups varies widely! Some people attend numerous of these - almost daily and even twice some days, others perhaps only weekly and some only monthly for the general meeting and speaker. Patronage of social and field events usually accompanies other interest groups. Thus some people are represented repeatedly in what follows and some hardly at all - everyone follows their own inclination.

The entries are in alphabetical order to make the publication more manageable. We hope that this helps to bring out the enthusiasm of people keen to study on into the third age and share their expertise with others.

THE EARLY DAYS

First there were seven! Yes, that was the number of people who gathered in the Refectory of Chester Cathedral one August day in 1993 to discuss the possibility of forming a branch of U3A in Chester. They were unknown to one another and all had separately written to the National Office in London requesting information about the organisation. National Office put them in touch and so the first meeting was arranged.

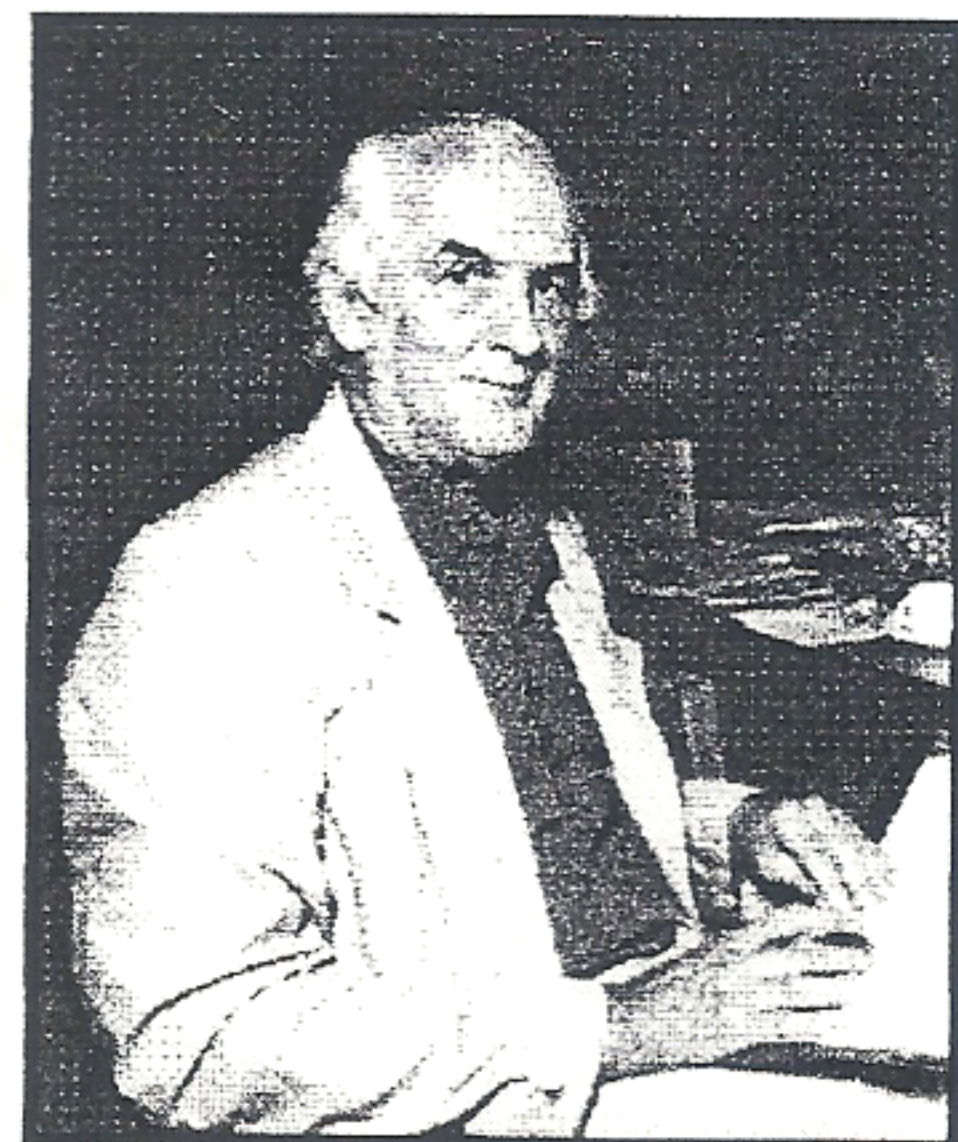
Of the original seven, three remain as members. There were six women and the late Roy Wilson, the "token" male, who far from being a token, proved to be our greatest asset. Publicity was our first priority. We realised we must reach as many potential members as possible. In this we received help from the Wirral branch who contacted Radio Merseyside and the Liverpool Daily Post for us. Roy spoke on Marcher Sound and on 03 September the Chester Chronicle and the Herald and Post published an article *Close Encounters of the Third Age* announcing that our first public meeting would be held on 7 September 1993 at 10 am in the Friends' Meeting House.

What excitement that day as the seven of us arrived early to set out the tables and receive the interested public! But would there be any interest? Would anyone come?

Then we heard the first footfalls on the stairs and soon the room was overflowing. Later we estimated around 100 people had come with 87 enrolling there and then.

Of course this was just the start, there was an enormous amount of work to be done, plans to be made, revised then re-revised, groups to be set up, paperwork to be designed and produced. By January 1994 our numbers had doubled, 20 groups had been formed and the rest, as they say, is history.

Since then very many people have done much to make Chester U3A the success it undoubtedly is, enabling us to share skills, knowledge, experience, ideas and friendship so enhancing this the 'third age' of our lives. This ongoing success is the greatest tribute we can pay to Roy, our first Chairman, remembering his paraphrasing of President Kennedy "ask not what U3A can do for you, but what you can do for U3A".



‘...AND IN CONCLUSION ...’

The place of Lecturers in Chester U3A.

Groups within U3A are becoming increasingly active in all sorts of surveys and scientific studies. No doubt it won't be long before a project is launched to explain what makes some branches hold monthly meetings with speakers whilst others don't - yet most appear generally to thrive regardless.

The programming of speakers may be an indication of the size of a branch - small audiences can't afford them and some large ones can't find a hall that would hold all who might wish to attend. This may soon be a situation that Chester will have to address.

Those U3As like Chester with a tradition of monthly meetings enjoy about 10 speakers a year, most of whom have been invited because their subjects generally expand, or lie outside, the fields covered by the study groups.

Some are narrators, some present descriptions, and a proportion are chosen because their material is academic and of an analytical or comparative nature. Most use visual aids and some have successfully contributed only a restrained commentary to a sequence of images. We have rarely been disappointed.

However, some recommended speakers have declined as they prefer to address a very much smaller audience. With this has increasingly come the explanation that their accompanying visual aids now take the form of video cassettes or disks shown on several television monitors round the auditorium rather than slides projected on to a single large screen. Venues offering such facilities are quickly booked up for business conferences and commercial promotions at rents far in excess of the resources of the U3A.

It would be difficult to engage speakers to a curriculum devised to supplement the coverage of group studies, for which programmes rarely run more than a few weeks ahead and are not heavily structured. The random mix we have enjoyed so far has allayed any fears of imbalance in favour of one or other subject; for example almost unlimited quantities of History at all levels of content are available in Chester from a multitude of presenters.

So it is an easy option and when historians are invited to speak it is usually because they can contribute specialised aspects; the 'why' approach, not just 'how'. This has enabled us to hear

"Consensus Government since 1945" in the run-up to the 1997 election and "The House of Lords in the 20th Century" at the time of its dissolution in 1999, both from an eminent author.

A bomb alert in the City as the County Emergency Planning Officer ended his presentation was entirely fortuitous and luckily it proved a false alarm!

This account of the contribution of Lecturers to the academic climate of the Chester U3A concludes with a list of some fifty who have spoken to us up to this Millennium Year, with an indication of their expertise.

THE FOLLOWING SPEAKERS HAVE ADDRESSED THE MONTHLY MEETINGS OF THE THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE IN CHESTER SINCE JANUARY 1995.

MORFYDD ADAMSON on Queen Elizabeth I.

TERESA CHILTON on Jodrell Bank.

RON DAVIS, 19th Century Historian (twice).

CHRIS VELLENOWETH, NHS Administrator.

SANDRA PARR, Director of the Orchestra Department, Liverpool Philharmonic.

GRAHAM FISHER, Manager of Cheshire County Library.

Revd HUGH LINN, Ornithologist and Photographer.

Dr DAVID DUTTON, Historian, Liverpool University (twice).

FRANK AMOS, Retired Marine Engineer, on the "Thetis" disaster.

PHYLLIS AMOS on Vita Sackville-West.

Dr COLIN OGILVIE on "The Finsthwaite Princess" (Cumbria).

Dr ALEXANDER WILSON, former Director of the British Library.

JEREMY TAYLOR, Director of the Policy Unit, Cheshire County Council.

IRIS SNELL on "The Use and Abuse of the English Language".

Dr SHEILA MADDOCK on "Genes and Genealogy".

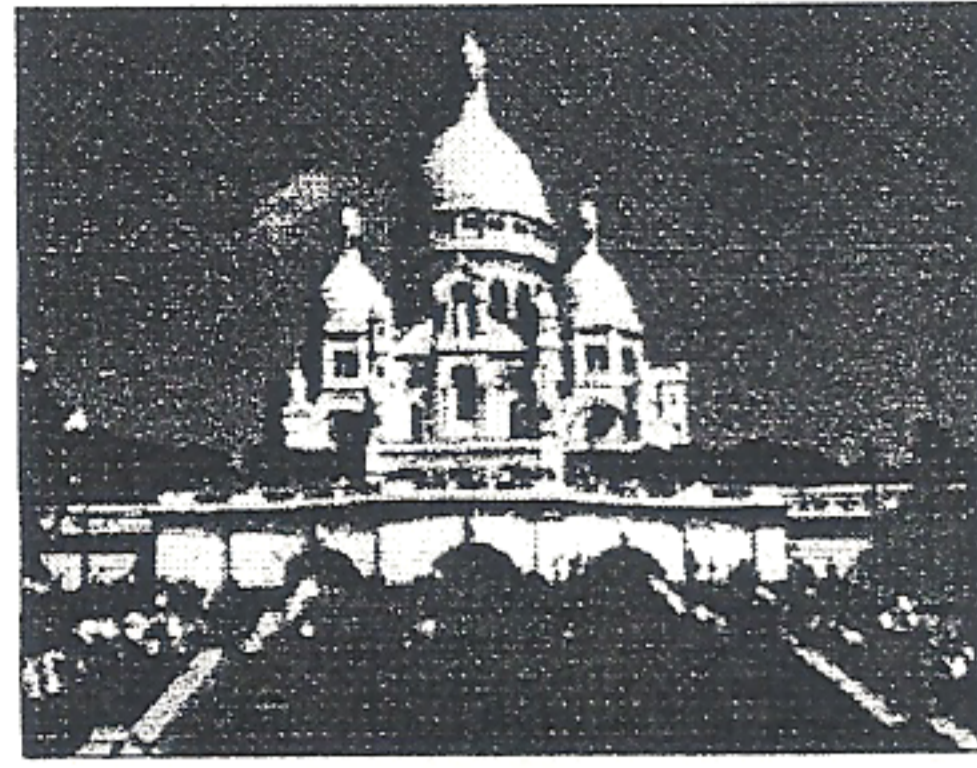
MARGARET CRAWFORD on "Kimonos".

GORDON JAY, Entertainer (twice).

MICHAEL CULL, County Emergency Planning Officer.

JOYCE COOK, Family Historian.
MIKE DIX, Countryside Officer, Cheshire County Council.
DAVID ABBOTT, Director, National Museums Conservation Centre, Liverpool.
CLIVE GARNER, Film Historian.
Canon MAURICE RIDGEWAY on Chester Silver.
PETER BOUGHTON, Keeper of Art and Architecture, Grosvenor Museum, Chester.
LES BROWN, retired Diver.
Dr RALPH MORTON on Musical Appreciation.
REG O'NEILL, Furniture Historian.
JUNE HARGREAVES, Chester Member, on "Antarctica" and "Heraldry".
RHYS WILLIAMS, Architect/Planner, on "Cheshire from the Air".
ROBERT WARD, Historian, on Sir Francis Drake in the Pacific 1577 - 80.
Prof MAURICE BROADY, Sociologist.
Dr ALAN JEMMETT, Project Manager of the Dee Estuary Strategy.
Dr M Le DUC, Ness Gardens, University of Liverpool.
FRANK BONSER, Philosopher (twice).
MARTIN JONES, sponsored by the Law Society, on "Wills of the Rich and Famous".
Dr BARBARA TONGE on "Good Water Supplies in Rural Africa".
TONY HIRST, Director, Ellesmere Port Boat Museum.
EIRA HUGHES, OU Chemist, on Genetically Modified Foods.
Dr JANE DAVIS, English Department, University of Liverpool.
KENNETH OULTRAM, Hon. Secretary, The Lewis Carroll Society.
JOAN LEACH, Hon. Secretary, The Gaskell Society.
KENNETH MARTIN, Architect.

TRIPS AND VISITS 1995 TO 2000



Outings started for Chester U3A in a very modest way with one volunteer doing all the work. Eventually a second member came to help so the programme has expanded and become widely popular. The purpose of these events is for members to see and enjoy new things and places and to get to know one another. People frequently say what a difference the joy of mixing and mingling has made to them.

It would take many pages to cover all the visits in our five years on the social scene, so I will mention just a few and hope to give a picture of what interests most people in our U3A.

Our first trip was to the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight and this has remained a popular venue. Port Sunlight is a charming and complete village built by Lord Lever of Sunlight Soap fame for his workers. The model village has been copied in various parts of the world but this remains a prime example.

The Pavilion Theatre at Rhyl provided our first Christmas Concert and Theatre Clwyd has given us many happy hours with a variety of productions.

We overcome the problem of transport by using coaches and shared private cars where appropriate but the frequent train service to Liverpool makes it a regular destination. Lime Street Station is next to the Empire Theatre which, with its enlarged stage, now offers musicals, operas and ballets straight from their London runs. Concessionary rail travel and valiant efforts with advance group booking economies make these trips a real bargain. In Liverpool we have ascended to the top of the Liver Building, visited the two cathedrals and have taken the civic tour of St George's Hall and the Town Hall. Lunchtime concerts at the Philharmonic Hall combined with visits to museums and art galleries frequently fea-

ture on our programme.

Our garden fans appreciate trips to flower shows at Harrogate, Southport and Shrewsbury. When the National Trust has a free Open Day we visit an historic property. We have also had several days out on canal boats run by volunteers who enjoy the day as much as we do.



Workplace visits have been varied and informative both for current practice and for showing how things were done in the 'olden days'. We have been to Granada TV, Shotton Steel, Post Office Sorting, Robert's Bakery, Manchester Airport, Llanberis Hydro-Electric power station in the mountain, Jodrell Bank, Wedgwood and Spode Potteries. The industrial heritage of Ironbridge, a typical Victorian village, the Salt Museum at Northwich, the Anderton Boat Lift and the Gladstone Pottery Museum all have attracted a good number of our members.

Tradition and historical themes are popular: well dressing at Tissington, Derbyshire; Shakespearean Stratford; the Royal Armoury at Leeds. This last was a wonderful experience and we were sad to learn of its financial difficulties.

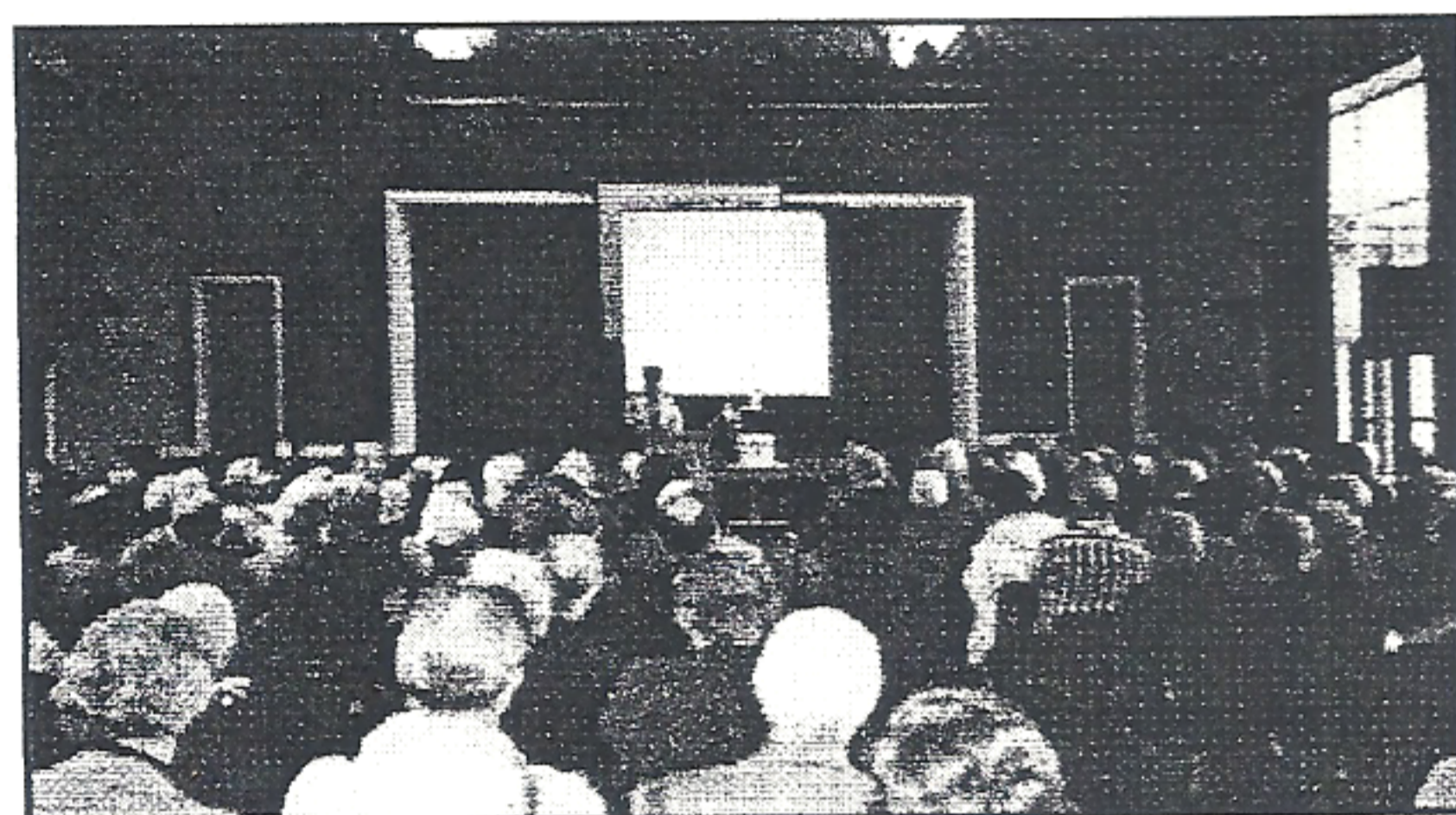
Locally, Greenbank Catering College invites us to sample the cooking and service of its trainees. Everything is usually of a high standard and very popular at a cost of £6 for three courses and coffee!



In 1997 we branched out to include weekend excursions in our programme. Our first venture was to France, travelling by coach and ferry to Rouen where we stayed for four nights. Monet's Garden and the Bayeux Tapestry were the highlights of the trip. In 1998 we were off to Lille taking in Bruges, Brussels, the Dutch bulb fields and the Keukenhof Gardens. Since then we have journeyed twice to Scotland and have experienced Paris in the Springtime. In this millennium year the

destination is Reims.

An exchange visit with Colchester U3A in 1998 was successful, making us focus on return hospitality the following year with visits to the Duke of Westminster's private gardens, the Town Hall and other local places of interest we tend to take for granted at other times.



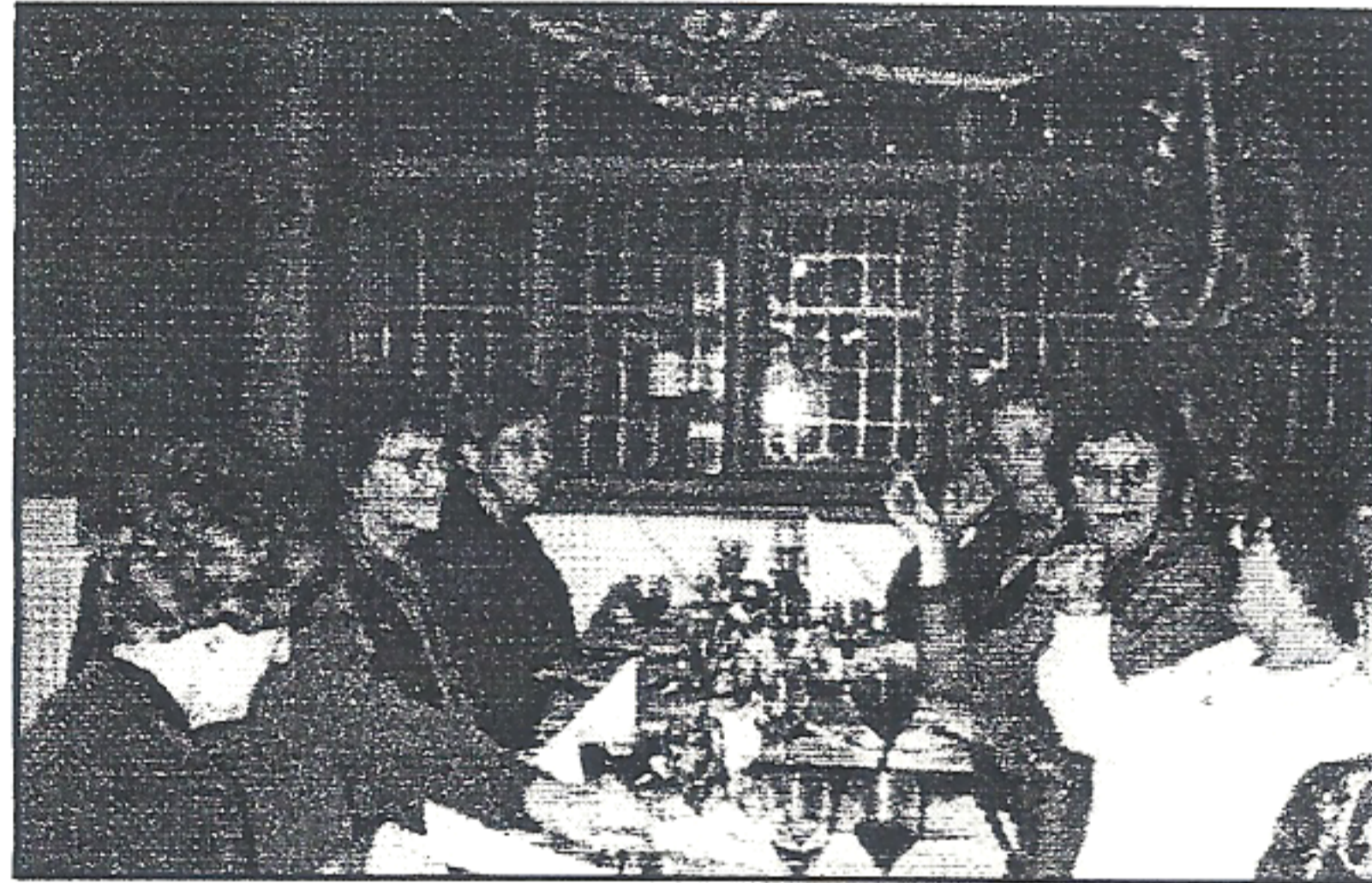
In 1998 we hosted the Regional Conference of our U3A Area. This required a lot of organising but as a team effort it was very worthwhile, taking as its theme 'Staying Young'. In the morning we had a most interesting illustrated talk given by an intrepid lady adventurer who assured us she was much older than she looked, and after lunch we split into groups to pool ideas for the future activities of our various branches. We then enjoyed a musical interlude whilst our reports to Conference were prepared. It was a memorable day, one of shared endeavour and enthusiastic participation - qualities which permeate throughout the U3A organisation.

SUNDAY AT SEVEN

One of the pleasures enjoyed by most of us is eating good food, so 'Sunday at Seven' started with half a dozen members who thought they would like to meet and have a meal, not only to sample good food in various places, but also to meet like minded people in a friendly and happy atmosphere.

Some of us live alone and find it hard to cook an elaborate meal just for one, others like the opportunity to go out safely in an evening. What better place to be introduced to fellow members and to learn more of others' knowledge of the many groups on offer in U3A. Members like to compare the quality of food in different venues and single gentlemen enjoy ladies' company and vice versa. Obviously conversation is no problem, as the noise level rises happily!

Our monthly get-togethers are always announced well in advance in the monthly newsletter and take place on the Sunday following our monthly Tuesday meeting. We go quite far afield, from the Boathouse at Parkgate on the Dee estuary to the Cholmondeley Arms, near to the Shropshire border. During the winter we stay in or very near to Chester.



Here are some of us at Bensons in the Billet this year.

We like to give our custom to the 'non-chain' venues, the Bistro type meals suit us best as the variety is greater, we can have as little or as much as we wish, and the vegetarians are well catered for.

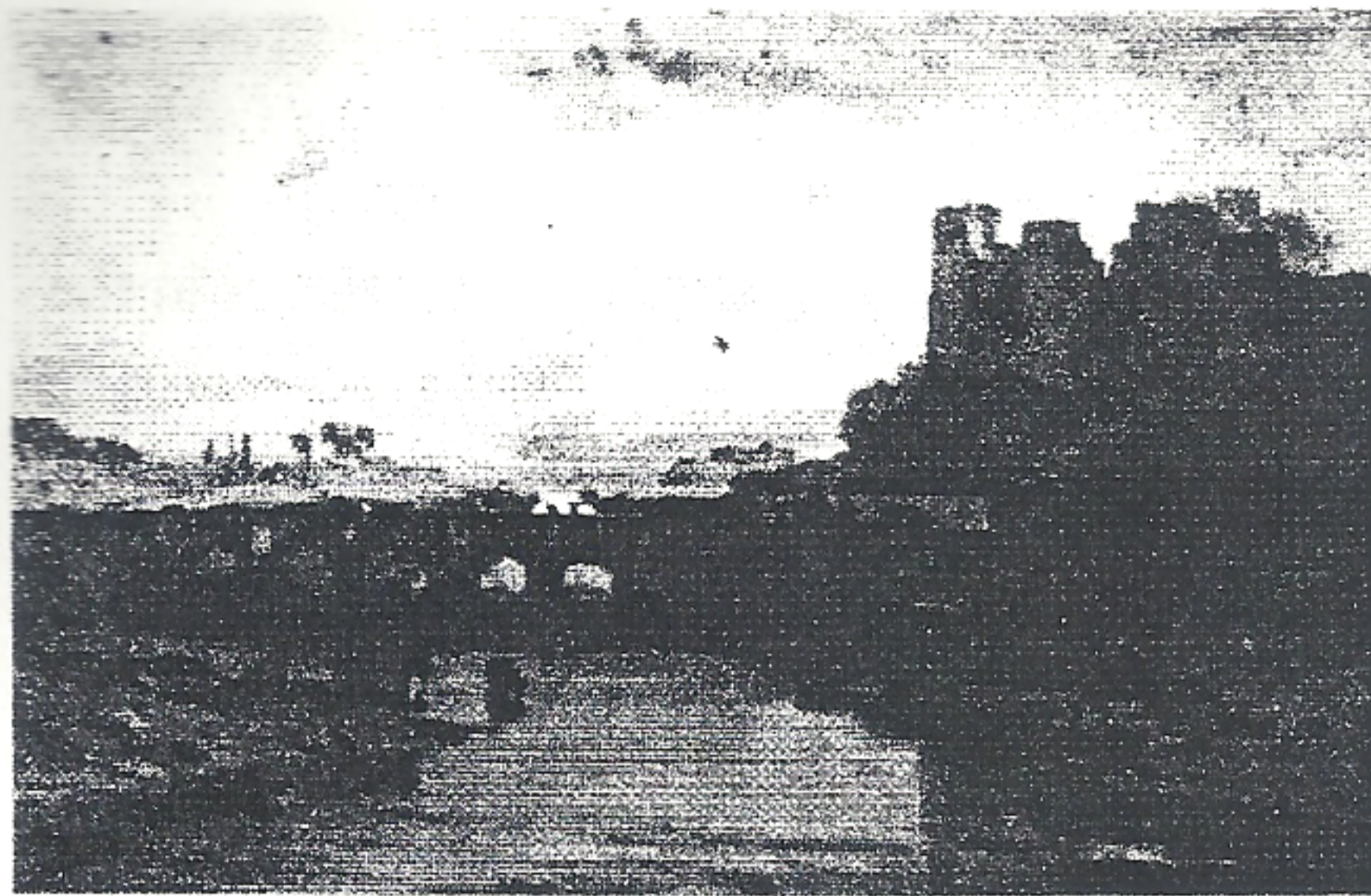
As organisers, our main task, apart from listing our 'customers' is to organise transport for anyone who needs it, and we have a very generous core of faithful friends who are always willing to help out on this front. So don't be put off, either by being on your own, or by having no transport. We get you there, and hope you'll enjoy the friendliness of everyone.

Over the years we have discovered 'gems' and of course go back to these places.

Conversely some do not get a second chance!! We have had our share of cold food (which should be hot), poor service and inferior quality. We have learnt by our mistakes and hope that the standard remains high for the future.



ART APPRECIATION



J M W Turner

Art Appreciation is one of the most recent groups to start at our U3A. It all began with a meeting called by the then Group Co-ordinator who had amassed a list of people who had indicated an interest in the subject and of those about 12 attended. At this meeting various ideas were expressed but the main outcome was that a subject co-ordinator volunteered as did a host for the first proper meeting.

As a start, for the first 'proper' meeting, a theme was proposed and members were asked to bring a painting that interested them which, however vaguely, interpreted that subject for the member concerned- and all were warned that they had to be prepared to talk! It worked well for subsequent meeting, but when the co-ordinator, who felt that perhaps there should be a more formal structure with 'experts' invited to participate, suggested this change she was firmly voted down by the core of six or seven members who met regularly at the monthly meetings of the group. The subject was to be in the hands of those taking part and so it has remained to the present time.

The themes have included Landscapes, Still Life, Shadows, Portraits and Artefacts. The latter gave rise to some excited discussion on a delightful cup and saucer belonging to a member who had researched it and led to some theorising that it might have been painted by Renoir who was working at that particular china works at the time of its production!

We do not limit the works brought to the meetings to paintings but they do tend to be graphic in nature and have included record covers, embroideries, architects plans and brief photographic slide shows. Famous paintings, amateur paintings, works we love and those we hate all turn up. It is very informal and we all contribute to the discussions with lots of use-



ful interjections, interesting comments and new viewpoints. We don't always stick to the point, but the digressions are interesting too!

When asked why the members came to the meetings (apart from an interest in the subject) some comments were:

'Even if it is not your kind of subject, it can open up new aspects'

'There is an impetus to work towards discussion at the meetings'

'Enjoy the structure of having a theme to think about each month'

The comment that '*contributions build up a picture and background to the subject or to the painter/artist*' probably best sums up what we are about as none of us are experts and we all find different aspects to research and talk about.

As individuals, we have discovered new artists and enjoyed the loved and the familiar; we feel we are always learning about artists [in the broadest sense] and artefacts, styles and influences. We use our experiences and personal impressions, all different as we come from different backgrounds and places, and the whole gives us a very enjoyable afternoon once a month.



The Mona Lisa-Leonardo da Vinci

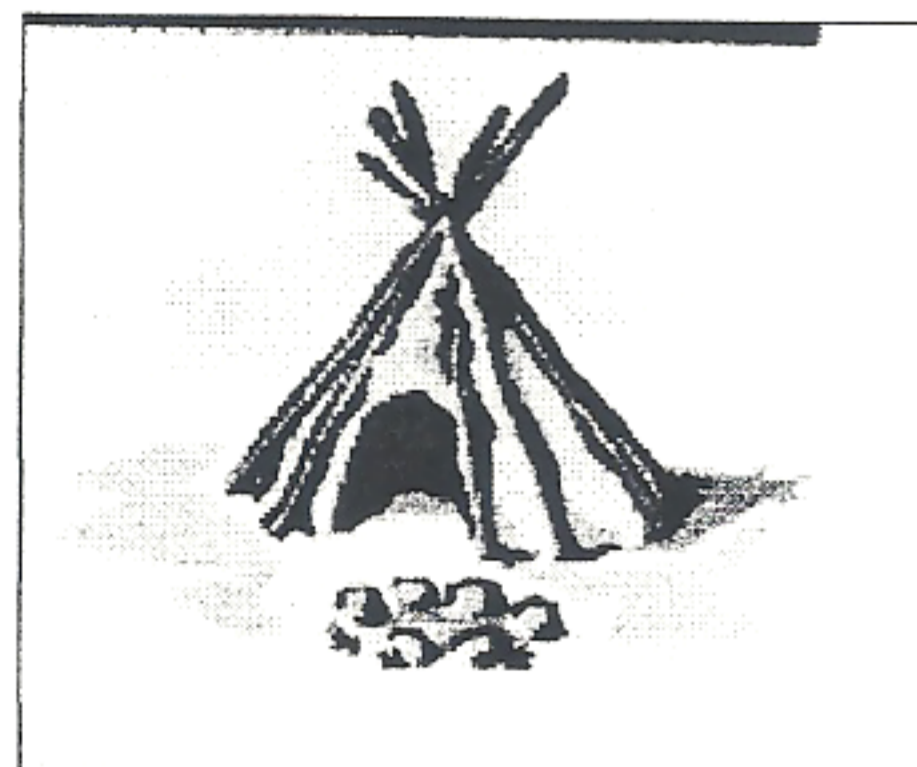
ANCIENT WISDOM GROUP



The so-called "Ancient Wisdom" is a system of philosophy, a kind of inner science, which really seems to explain life rationally and to account for many phenomena. It includes a vast system of truths about cosmic law, the nature of man, the power of thought, reincarnation, healing and many other matters. It lies in the background of all civilisations and all religions; mythologies are based on it and transmit pieces of it. The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, arose from it.

According to Goethe, "All truly wise thoughts have been thought already thousands of times but to make them truly ours we must think them over again, honestly, until they take root in our personal experience".

This could, in part, be said to be the *raison d'être* of the Ancient Wisdom Group. In truth, some of the ideas that we look at may be neither ancient nor wise and we have nothing to do with history except insofar that we are becoming a part of it. We meet together regularly, in pleasant surroundings, leaving our prejudices behind but bringing along open minds and a sense of humour, to explore and consider other people's ideas and perceptions, past, present, wild, weird and wise, of how the world wags and why we are here at all.

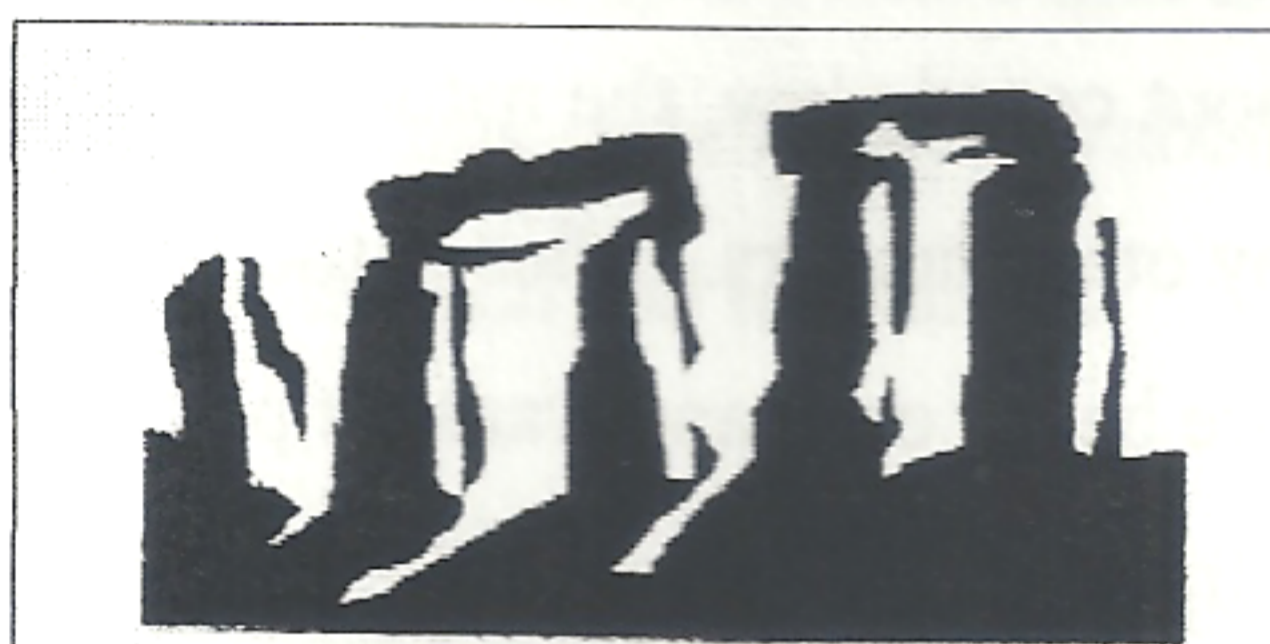


By the time we have reached the third age, most of us have probably acquired a set of beliefs and attitudes that were formulated and accepted in early life and often rooted in limited and outdated concepts. It is all too easy to get out of the habit of questioning these be-

liefs unless we continue to explore our own possibilities and re-evaluate our life experiences. We must ask ourselves, over and over again, as each succeeding generation must, the big and ultimate questions which can never be answered but which we need to ask in order to know and affirm that we are alive.

In addition to a sense of humour and open mind, Group members also require a rigorous critical faculty, for the idea is not to encourage gullibility and swallow unusual views whole, but to use them to challenge our habitual perspectives. Change is a cumulative process, and if we want

penetrating questions
many of the answers,
As Linus Pauling,



ist said "The best way

new insights, we need to ask
and consider all, or at least
both possible and impossible.
the Nobel Prize-winning chem-
to get a good idea is to get a lot

of ideas. To do otherwise is risky in a world where flexibility is a requirement".

We are also discovering that when there are so many differing versions, some of them wonderful, some quite bizarre, of how things hang together, of what it is all about, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to take anything, especially ourselves, too seriously. Wondering and marvelling at how things are, or are seen to be, is a lot more fun than lamenting that now they are not as they used to be.

A notable common feature of the regular members of this Group has to be highlighted: that is that they are all so young at heart and getting younger!



BIRDWATCHING GROUP

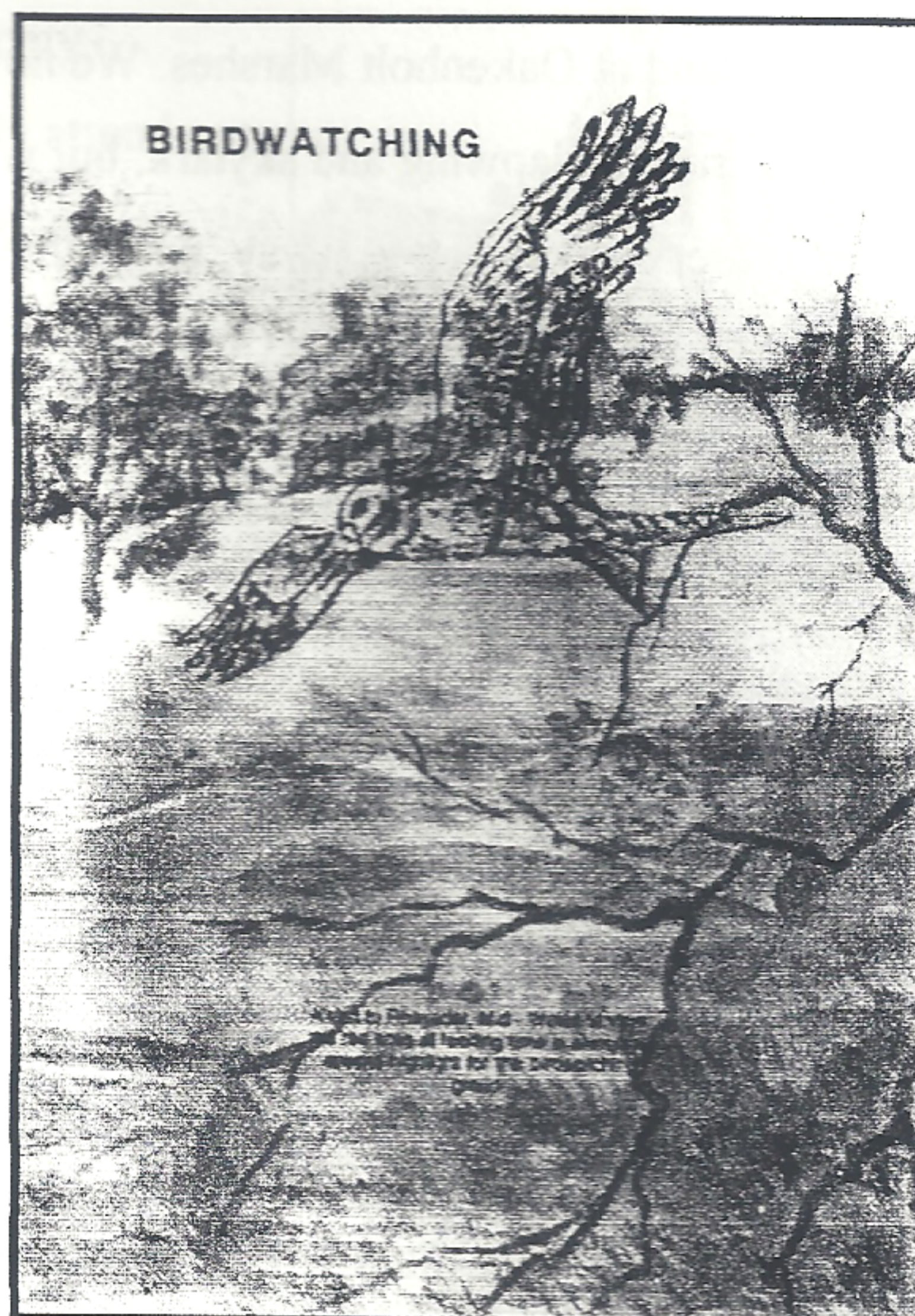
Chester U3A Birdwatching Group was formed in the summer of 1996 with 6 members. We now number about 25 members, with widely different levels of knowledge and experience in bird recognition.

Our main aim is to improve our identification and understanding of birds by observation in the wild. Over time it has become clear that the Group has a secondary aim, which is to provide the opportunity for like-minded people to enjoy a day out together, usually including a pub lunch. Our meetings take the form of visits to places selected as being favourable and instructive for bird watching, and we usually visit more than one site in the day.

Visits take place twice a month, on the first Monday and third Friday, and transport is by shared private car.

The locations visited include woodland, marshes, meres, coastal and mountainous areas. Some, such as the Dee Estuary, are within a few miles of Chester, but we also travel further afield, as to Portmadoc, Morecambe Bay, Shrewsbury and the Mawddach Estuary. Full use is made of RSPB reserves and hides, where feeding stations often provide superb views of garden birds as well as bullfinches, tree sparrows, and reed buntings which are seen more rarely at home. Coastal sites have provided us with views of little egrets, spoonbills, peregrines, puffins, sanderling and little stints, as well as huge flocks of golden plover, oystercatchers, and many other waders. All members of the group have gained confidence in identifying wildfowl and ducks, especially wigeon and pochard, shelduck and shoveler, tufted duck and teal.

It is recognised that there is a general concern in the community regarding the effects of modern life on natural habitats. However we have observed that some species of birds are



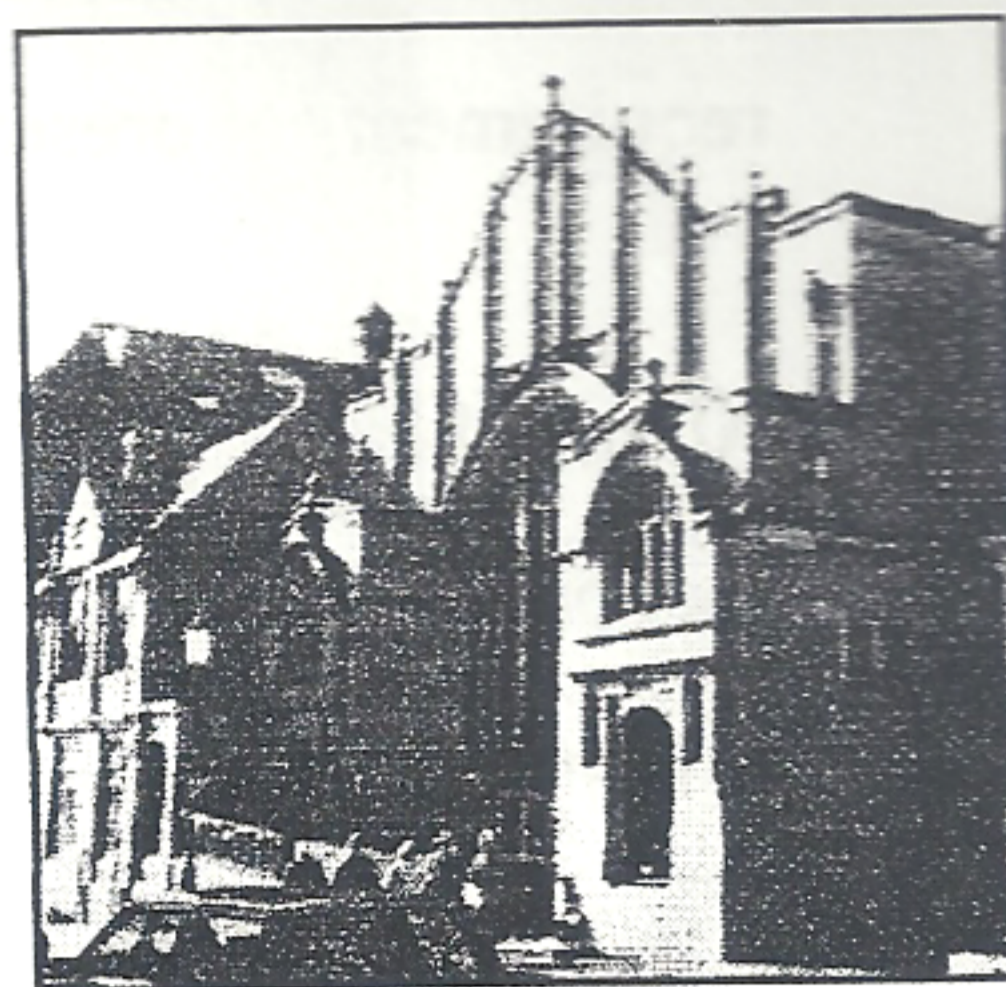
thriving as a result of specific environmental safeguards included in many modern industrial developments, such as the tern rafts at Shotton Steelworks and the reserve on CEGB land at Oakenholt Marshes. We notice and regret the increasing rarity of farmland birds such as lapwing and skylark, but welcome the creation and extension of many nature reserves, such as Conway, where these species still flourish.

We are also thinking of publishing our own "Good Pub Guide to North Wales and North-West England"!



BRIDGE GROUP

This group, founded in 1993, has currently twenty members of which fourteen to eighteen regularly attend our sessions in the Wesley Church, St John Street, Chester. We meet every Wednesday afternoon from 1.00 to 4.00pm. The group composition reflects the one seen in most public bridge clubs in the country as the ladies outnumber the men by about four to one!



Our activities combine card playing and tuition with the objectives of raising the general standard of knowledge and skill and bringing everyone up to more or less the same level. We also aim to help those with less experience to develop sufficient self-confidence to enjoy the game in a relaxed yet mildly competitive atmosphere. We usually play from 1.30 to 3.15pm then have a cup of coffee. For the remaining 45 minutes a refresher talk is given on a specific bidding or playing topic. This may be supported by a small class exercise or a quiz as homework together with a handout summarising the points discussed. We have just introduced (after majority voting) a Chicago competition every last Wednesday in the month. Chicago is a playing format used in some public bridge clubs and at the end a small prize is given to the winning pair. The first event was a great success and everyone enjoyed it!

In a recent open discussion over coffee to learn what actually drives the members to come every Wednesday the following reasons were mentioned:

- An excellent opportunity to practice the game and improve playing skills
- Less demanding and cheaper than evening classes offered by mainstream adult education centres
- An opportunity to socialise with people of similar interests
- An opportunity for mental stimulation, fitness and achievement
- An opportunity to develop one's confidence [in the game]
- Enjoyment of the caring environment of this U3A group

As the group is too large to be accommodated in any member's house, a suitable centrally located and yet affordable venue had to be found. Wesley Church meets those requirements at present.

All members pay a contribution of £1 per session to cover the cost of rent, the coffee, photocopies of the handouts and the purchase/replacement of playing cards, score sheets etc. The costs for teaching materials [mainly books] are born by the U3A committee.

Overall it appears that the bridge group delivers and achieves the essential U3A objectives; offering the opportunity for the older but still active and interested generation to share experience, to continue to learn, to jointly further explore bridge (as the preferred subject), to keep mentally fit and to make new friends.



*To bid or not to bid that is the question
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The call and passes of outrageous partner
Or to make bids against a sea of doubles
And, by revoking, lose them?*

CHAT GROUP



The Chat Group, for want of a better name, just evolved as the members of the Local History Group got to know each other, and everyone found a source of friendship, which, because so many of us are "solo", is a great comfort as well as a pleasure. We look forward to the monthly meetings / get together. There is no set routine. We have afternoon tea, and each member does their own thing. They may just want to talk about anything and everything, or bring some interesting story or reading. Most of the 'event' is spontaneous. Some put the world to rights, or relate interesting bits of 'news' of what's on or still to come etc. We do not gossip, as the name might imply!

The Local History Group and the Chat Group have been described as a kind of co-operative - the co-ordinators having the responsibility and having a voice as to what goes on, not just being spectators. We do extend our interest to the outside events which we enjoy and hope will bring pleasure or help to others.

We were pleased to arrange a Garden Party at the Bishop's House, to which other Branches of the U3A were invited. Some of the members volunteered to help as attendants at the Chester Mystery Plays, and enjoyed the production, along with grateful thanks from the Organisers. Last year we helped to host a party for the Diocesan Clergy and families, as the Bishop's wife was unwell. We volunteered, and enjoyed the experience. The children must have had more pop and treats than ever before - and all free. Everyone who helped had a personal letter of thanks from the Bishop and his wife - not expected, but a nice thought. The last time we visited Chester Castle, the Chapel had recently been broken into and the Cross taken from the Altar. Sadly funds were too low to

replace it. Happily the Cathedral joiner made a beautiful wooden Cross to specification at no charge. It also happened the Cathedral's Regimental Altar had a new Cross donated in memory of a deceased relative. The old Cross from the African Wars was in the Verger's office. It is big, and it is beautiful, and is now on long term loan to the Regiment much to everyone's delight - some were close to tears with the realisation that they could use the Chapel for Services again.

In the run up to Christmas charity cards are sold in the Cathedral Cloisters. They never had enough 'helpers' - they do now. Everyone likes to play 'shop'!

The 'star turn' of our members is 'she' who gave time to washing the bones of corpses found under the Cathedral Nave floor when it was replaced last year. We all find it difficult to follow that - whatever next?



Abbey Square-Chat group base

CHESS GROUP

"Chessing ? That's to do with the Government isn't it ? Meetings of Members of Parliament, with meals of prawns and rooks, from the cooks at Chequers".

"No, it's a thoughtful game where two players move pieces like Pawns and Castles on a chequered tablecloth, er I mean, board".

"And what is Checkmate, a chess playing partner ?"

"No, it is a chess move that ends the affair, er I mean the game. Perhaps, to understand the game you ought to start learning how to play."

"I'll think about it. I may join, because I think I look good in black and white."

The Chess Group meet on alternate Thursday afternoons in each other's homes. The participants play the board game from about 2.30 to 5pm, while their spouses meet in a separate room for discussions on a range of topics. A welcome break of tea and biscuits is provided by the hostess in mid-afternoon.

Meetings take place in the Westminster Park and Hough Green areas, as these are easily accessible by the present membership. Venues could be altered should new members from other areas of Chester join the Group.

All grades of players, including beginners, are welcomed. Tuition is provided if required. The beginner will be shown the moves permitted for each piece, the use of standard attack and defensive ploys and the irregular options that can be exercised. The game requires that players think ahead, in order to out-manoeuvre the pieces of the opponent and finally capture the King. The effort of working out moves takes place in one's head, a smaller effort is expended in moving and capturing the opponent's pieces on the board !

Perhaps the playing of chess appeals to the thoughtful, decisive and courteous type of

person. When a game ends there is no acrimony (a little shock, maybe) and players are heard to say:

"Good game"; "I was lucky there to win"; "I missed that move of yours"; "I thought you were going to move.....and I would be in a fix".

and after the removal of an important piece: "Oh! What a horror".

In some ways, the playing of chess resembles waging war. During the battle fallen pieces are removed (for burial), while the remainder continue the onslaught, trying to capture the opponent's King. Sometimes reinforcements are provided by a lowly pawn which has advanced right across the board to be promoted on the field to a Knight or, more usually, a Queen - the most powerful piece on the board. The role of the King is that of a fop, since the piece is very limited in what it can do.

Perhaps some U3A members used to play chess and would like to do so again, or others may have always wanted to but somehow never got started. Well now is the opportunity to join the Club, for a friendly couple of hours each week. It's your move, now!



CRAFT GROUP

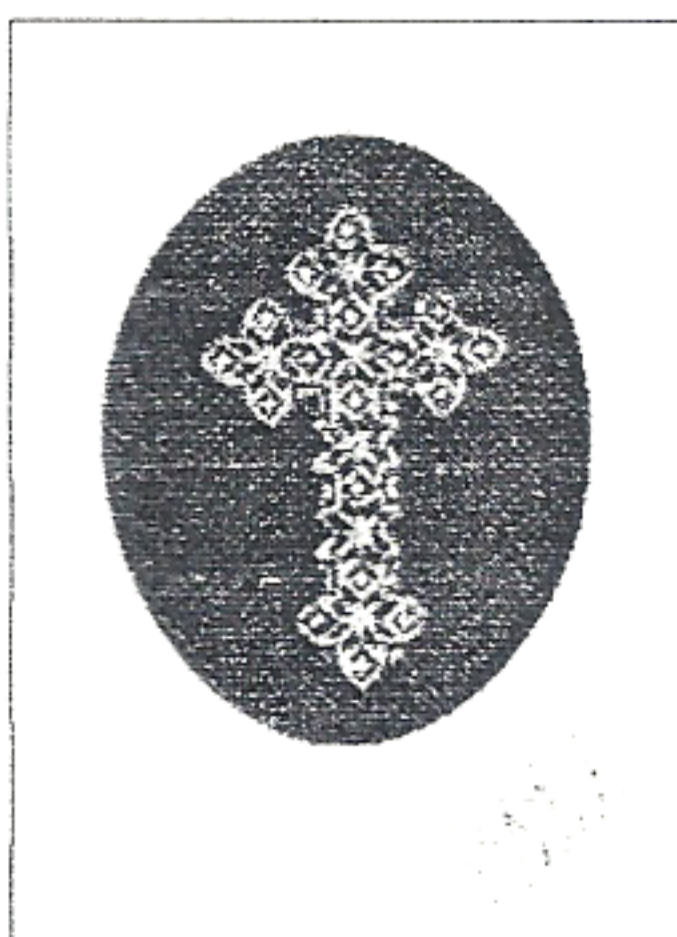
Members of the Craft Group identified many reasons for originally joining U3A. High on the list was companionship. The need to keep the mind active was seen as paramount, though the opportunities to develop new interests, learn new skills or to share those already held were nearly as important. Some emphasized the educational and learning aspect (together with the lower costs compared to mainstream adult education) while others enjoyed being able to learn at their own pace without feeling pressurised by tutors to progress at the same speed as others (usually younger) in the mainstream classes. Mutual support was also mentioned.

Most of us joined the Craft Group to extend our knowledge of skills already practised albeit at different levels of expertise. The sharing of interests is regarded as important with everyone generous of their time to help those who may be starting a new craft or are simply not as advanced. Materials are also shared providing opportunities to try out techniques before going to great expense and bulk-buying enables us to benefit from cheaper equipment.



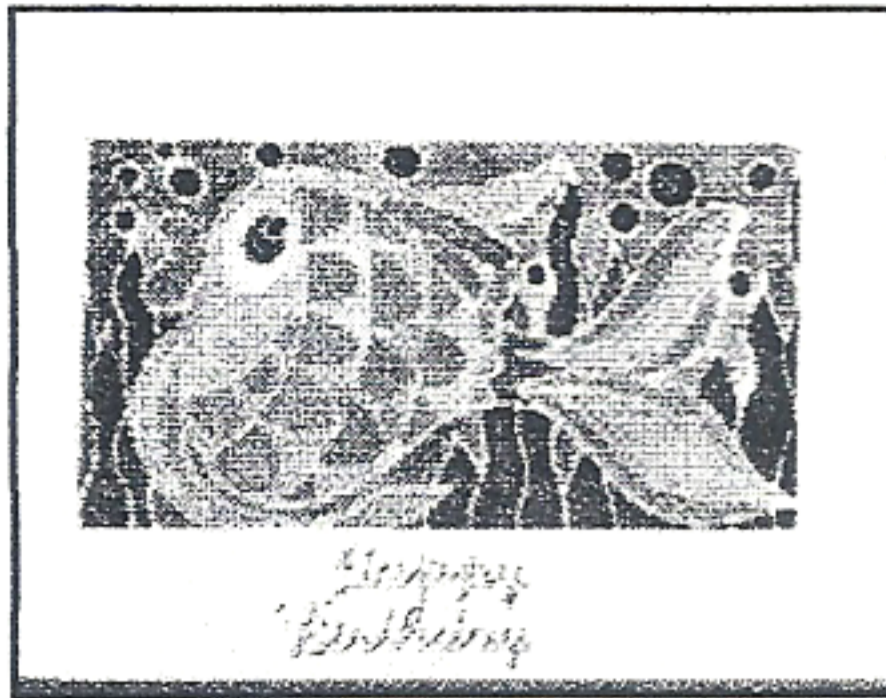
Some members come from an academic background and wish to develop practical skills while others have had a life-long interest in crafts and it is "exciting to carry it forward with like minded companions". One of our members had various interests but "this was the first group with a vacancy", though we are assured that the person concerned has no regrets!

The group is female dominated, no doubt due to our craft upbringing, but we have a small Calligraphy section which is led by and includes male members. Among the Crafts



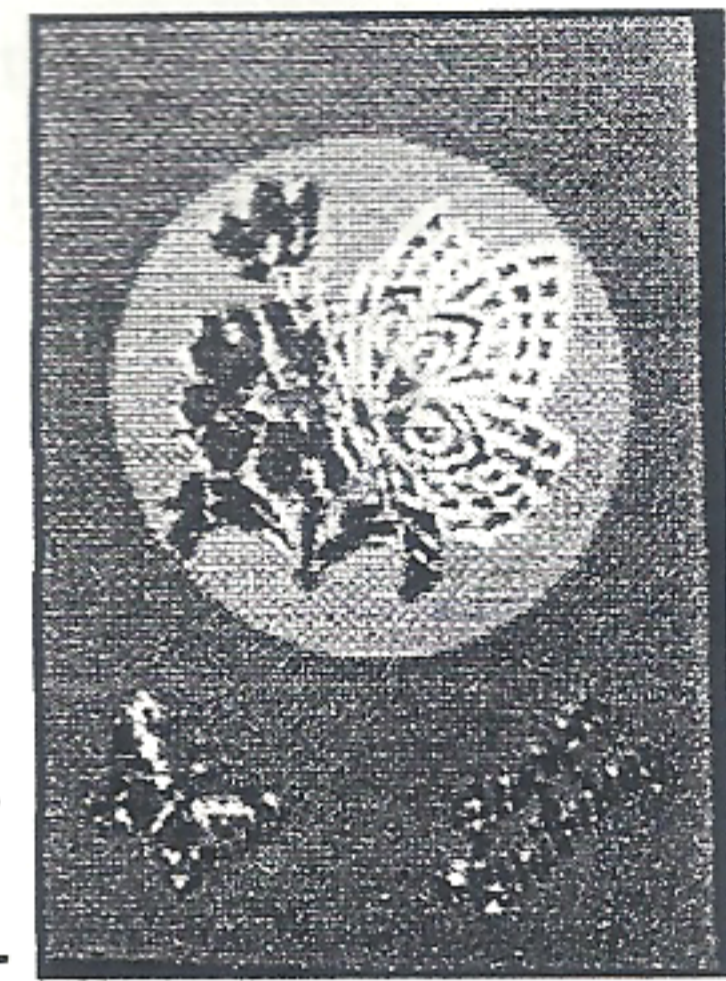
practised are: Parchment Craft, Rubber Stamping, Decorative Paper Pricking and Decoupage. These are mainly used for making cards for different purposes and many of us have our own mini-mass production lines at Christmas when we also recycle commercial cards, adding our own personal touches. Some members also use needlecrafts for making cards and Glass painting has been tried as has Silk painting - on a

very small scale.



Last November we held our first exhibition at the monthly U3A meeting. It consisted mainly of cards using a wide variety of techniques with a few examples of Glass painting and Decoupage. This aroused much interest among members.

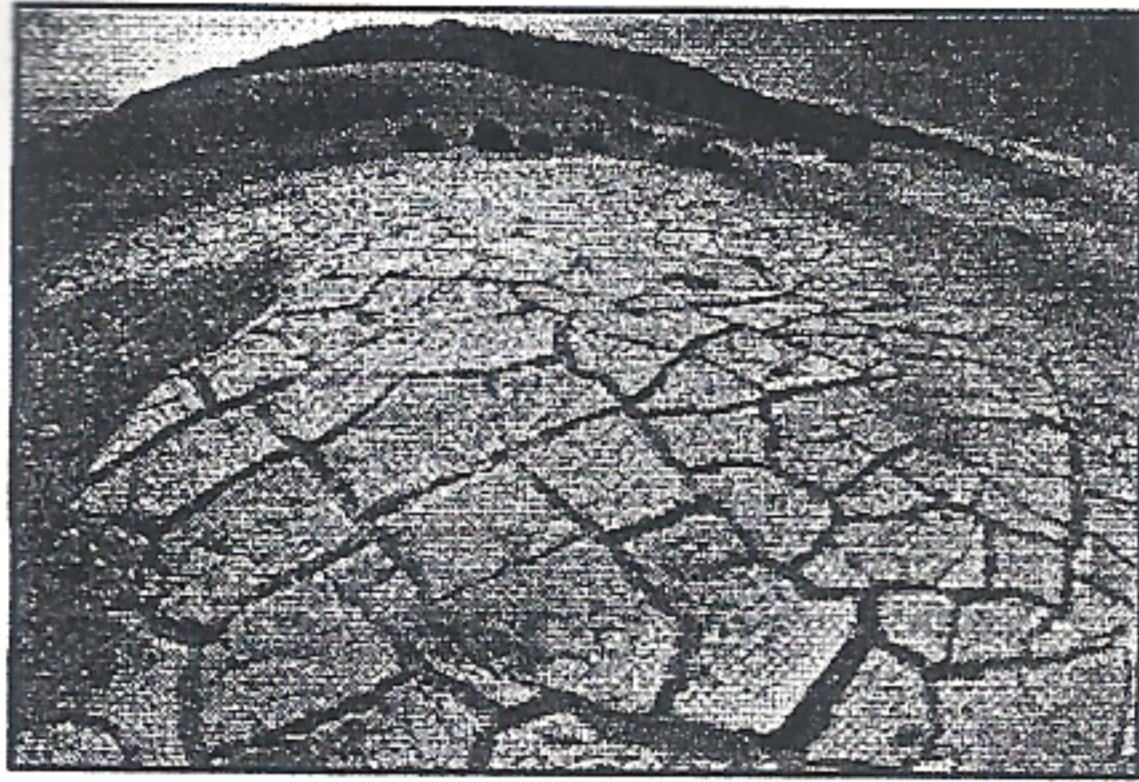
If anyone wants to try something new, we research it and have a try. We all watch the demonstrations though it is not compulsory to try everything and some members continue with their main craft interest. Very few people have dropped out and we are now looking to start a second group if the high level of interest continues. The study and practice of Crafts satisfies needs on many levels, from companionship and laughter, gentle mental stimulation (as we are continually practising and designing) and the chance to learn something new with people. In fact, it reflects the philosophy of U3A in general.



like-minded

THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES STUDY GROUP

What we aim for:



The Millennium sees a world beset with environmental issues and problems. They reveal themselves globally in such concerns as global warming, the destruction of the ozone layer, desertification, famine in Africa, the shanty towns of third world cities, and the loss of tropical rainforest. Nationally and locally we see them in the loss of biodiversity, the pressures for urban development in the green belt, the ever increasing scale of traffic problems, the use of pesticides and insecticides in modern agriculture, and the effects of industrial pollution on our towns and cities.

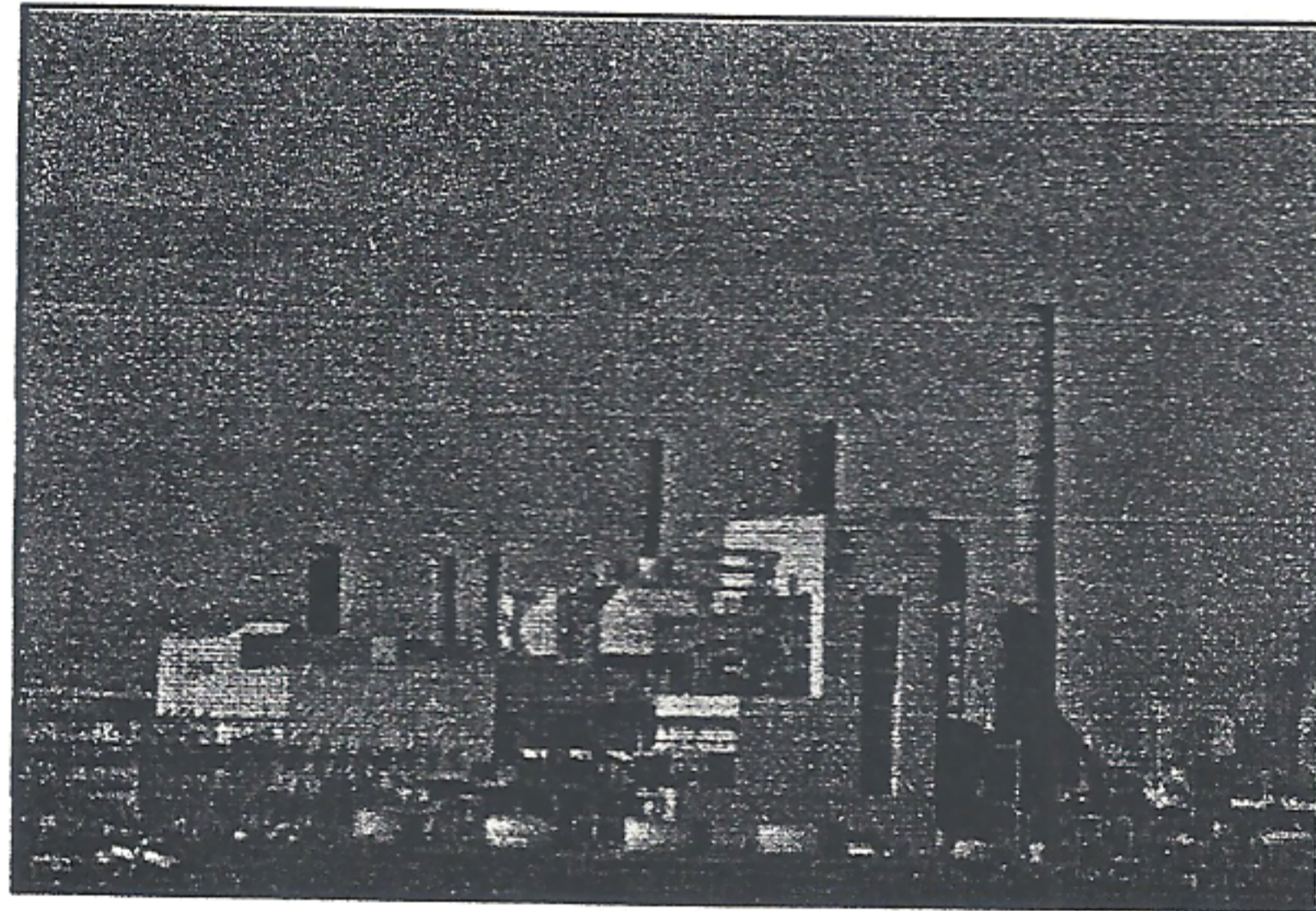
Matters such as these lie at the heart of our study group programme, the main aim of which is to help us develop knowledge and understanding, so that we can better evaluate the issues and the factors which underlie them. Some concerns, such as the loss of the ozone layer, are clearly problems and, although opinions may vary as to how they might be resolved, there is little doubt that they are damaging and that solutions need to be found. Other concerns, such as the loss of green belt land, are issues rather than problems and there may well be conflicting views as to their seriousness or how they should be addressed. Given this, we try hard to avoid a 'one-sided' view, and seek instead to arrive at an informed and objective viewpoint.

What we include:

The wide nature and diversity of environmental concerns makes possible a variety of content. Our programme is broadly-based and focuses on many issues at a variety of scales, although topical issues tend to predominate. Recent studies have looked, among other things, at GM foods, the future of farming, wildlife conservation, climate change, traffic problems, population growth, urban conservation, the future of cities in the developed and the developing world, alternative technology, air pollution and nuclear power. We have also learned about plate tectonics and earth history from using the television series Earth Story.

How we approach our studies:

Our approach generally is to use pre-recorded video material and discussion, supported by written material and supplemented by first-hand accounts and field visits where these can be arranged. Videos provide an effective means of bringing expertise and diverse opinions into our discussions. Visits take place about three times a year and have included the Alternative Technology Centre at Machynlleth, the Electric Mountain at Llanberis, a wind farm, Loggerheads Country Park, the Snowdonia National Park, the planned village of Port Sunlight, inner city Liverpool, and York, where we saw evidence of urban conservation. Visiting speakers have talked to us about the problems of small farmers on marginalised land in third world countries and about Local Agenda 21 issues. We are very fortunate to be able to meet in Dorothy Clift's home and she always provides us with excellent refreshments. The meetings are held fortnightly and last for about 2 hours. Twenty three people have belonged to the group and about twelve attend each meeting.



FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

'Gotcha!'

'Eureka! After all those years of searching I've found them, and who would have thought they would be there, of all places.'

One or other of these cries goes up when a member of the Chester U3A Family History Group finds an ancestor in the 1881 Census on the CD ROM newly acquired thanks to the encouraging support of our U3A committee. We are not all computer literate, but fortunately those in the group who have PCs are only too willing to search for these elusive folk for the rest of us. It is this cooperation that makes our group so successful.

About five years ago a handful of members got together to research family history. Some had been working at it for years; others were following this interest for the first time. All found the friendly help and atmosphere conducive to the free exchange of research methods around the country and abroad. We are encouraged to register the names and locations of interest and to make known any particular research where help would be welcome.

We pass on our experience of National and County Record Offices, Register Offices, The International Genealogical Index and sometimes private collections. Some of us who are researching in the same county travel to that county's Record Office together.

Our hobby can be pursued without the pressures that might be felt in other genealogical study courses. Here there is just a friendly 'How did you get on, did you find them?' There is source material available from U3A National Office should we want it. Another advantage is that our costs are low, as we are able to rent a room in a village hall for about £5 per head for a six-month period.

Not long ago a few of us stayed in London with the Bebington U3A History and Family History Groups. We researched together at Kew and the Family Record Office. How valuable all this mutual support has been, giving us confidence to carry on when difficulties

arise.

We can hardly believe that in future it will not be necessary to pursue our ancestors in Record Offices, struggling with barely legible documents. It will always be wonderful to put flesh on those bones, to know what previous generations did and how they lived. We are delighted to embrace new technology and search on the Internet too, but we are all experienced enough to know that we must check and recheck our findings.

But there is some urgency concerning our research and the production of results. It seems like only yesterday we were reminded that we must question our oldest living family members carefully for any information or papers they may have. Now, in many cases, we probably are the oldest living members.

However, we are always forward thinking and optimistic - so roll on the publication of the 1901 Census on the Internet in 2002.

FRENCH INTERMEDIATE GROUP

Nous apprenons le français parce que....

Comme garçon à mon lycée, je n'aimais pas le français. Ce n'était pas ma matière préférée. Néanmoins il y a quelques années un voyage le long de la vallée de la Loire a réveillé un désir d'apprendre la langue encore une fois. Je poursuis cette besogne depuis plusieurs années. Cette connaissance a augmenté le plaisir de mes visites en France. On apprécie davantage, non seulement son histoire, sa musique, son architecture et sa littérature, mais aussi surtout la gastronomie d'un pays si beau.



Il me plaît... pour la politesse, quand on fait les courses ou qu'on prend un repas...la



poésie comme celle de Verlaine, Apollinaire...la littérature - pour la lecture de romans de Maupassant, Daudet... pour apprécier les films - comme Manon des Sources - le Château de ma mère...pour l'amitié ...et pour le travail cérébral!

Mon fils a épousé une jeune fille belge. Donc j'ai décidé d'apprendre la langue française. J'aime la culture et les gens. J'aime beaucoup aussi les films français et lire un livre. Souvent je parle par téléphone avec une amie à Bruxelles; c'est un peu difficile. Cela me fait plaisir de causer avec mes amis.

Quand nous visitons nos amis en France, il est plus facile de poser une question ou de demander des informations pendant les visites mais il est plus difficile de comprendre une réponse, en particulier si elle est dans un accent régional. Mais si je deviens plus familière avec la conversation de tous les jours cela aidera ma compréhension. Je profite de l'occasion d'assister aux réunions des groupes français, parce que j'aime la langue, je peux lire avec plus de facilité mais malheureusement je ne peux parler la langue avec facilité. Je ne peux pas penser rapidement Mais aujourd'hui je comprends les lettres que j'ai reçues de mes amis en France, et je réponds aussi en français.





J'apprends le français, une belle langue, pour le plaisir qu'il me donne, parce-que j'ai beaucoup d'amis français et il est plus facile de bavarder avec eux, et aussi pour l'exercice de l'esprit!

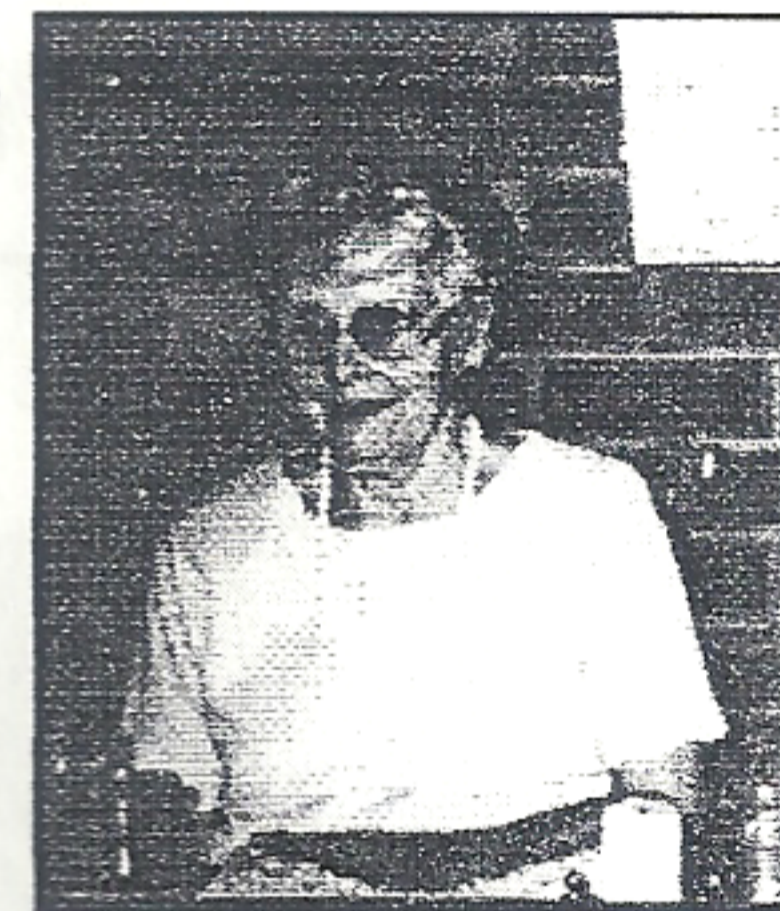
Quand j'allais au lycée j'ai pris plaisir à apprendre le français et je l'ai étudié pendant six ans. Cependant, quand je visite la France (et j'aime beaucoup la visiter) je ne peux pas très bien parler la langue. Aussi j'ai décidé de chercher une classe de français ou j'espère m'améliorer.

J'ai trouvé dans L'Université du Troisième Age une classe de français ou on peut parler français et continuer à apprendre la langue. J'ai reçu un bon accueil chez Maureen et Geoffrey, et là nous regardons les video cassettes ou nous lisons des livres français, et nous essayons de parler français.

Maintenant nous sommes aidés par Agnès, une jeune femme française, et cela fait progresser nos conversations. J'aime la langue française depuis ma première leçon française au lycée. Le professeur,

Mme LaHaye, nous a dit que le son de la langue était plus important que la grammaire.

Donc, la plupart des leçons était consacré à la prononciation et à l'écoute. Pas d'écriteur et pas de livres – quelles leçons merveilleuses! Pas conséquent, j'ai un accent impeccable et une bonne oreille pour la langue française. Malheureusement la grammaire française est pour moi un livre bien fermé.



One cannot tell how spoken French sounded a thousand years ago any more than we know how the English of those times was spoken. However, in the year 3000, they will have audio records of spoken English and other foreign languages. Who is to say that in a thousand years accent and spoken vocabulary will have changed less than during the last thousand years? At present, we even have young people using a vocabulary of their own! Several years ago one could have said that the BBC broadcasts were bringing about a conformity in accent throughout the members of society who were concerned about how he or she spoke. However, in recent years, we have had announcers and commentators speaking with a plethora of regional accents.

The French do not share this easygoing attitude towards how one's national language is spoken. In France it is not left to the publication of a new dictionary for authoritative pronouncements on the language. L'Académie Française meets regularly to announce what is correct or incorrect French. Now that international shipping, air traffic and recently the Internet have brought about the use of English as the global language of communication, one must ask 'How long can other national languages survive?' In particular, we can wonder if French, in its cosseted form, can survive until the next millennium.



GARDENING GROUP



As the U3A Gardening Group moves into the 21st Century, we wonder what changes lie ahead and hope that we can adapt to the new techniques which undoubtedly will change the approach to gardening and horticulture.

In order to leave a record of our gardening activities, it is necessary to briefly describe ourselves and our gardening aims.

We are a group of U3A members who meet regularly and who have an interest in all activities associated with the cultivation of the soil. Our gardens range from a few pots or tubs and hanging baskets through a variety of small patches of ground to domestic gardens or allotments growing flowers and a few vegetables for home consumption. Then there are much larger gardens, growing fruit, vegetables and flowers of all varieties and which often have a glasshouse where tomatoes and cucumbers and other tender species are grown

Over the years we have explored many and varied aspects of gardening, sometimes with the help of specialists who have enabled us to look in more detail at a subject such as the cultivation and care of trees and shrubs, the propagation of plants, the building and development of a fishpond in the garden, and the eventual stocking of the pond with suitable fish.

We have visited many gardens and have gathered new ideas and much inspiration from seeing the work of other gardeners. Some visits have been made to commercial growers, local authority parks and gardens, local garden centres and some to speciality growers such as herb gardens, tree gardens and the plant research gardens of Liverpool University.

Often our visits have been gardens; some to other and all have allowed us to wantalked about their plants and



made to our Group members' own amateur growers like ourselves, der around their gardens, have shared with us their knowledge and

enthusiasm.

Group discussions on all matters relating to gardening take place regularly and the exchange of ideas, the solving of problems and the successes and failures which we all experience, make interesting topics. Our interests have led us into considering the advantages and disadvantages of using chemical fertilisers on our gardens and the benefits of growing everything organically. The use of chemicals is not favoured by some of our members.

Having grown our flowers, we have extended our skills into arranging them in table decorations and cut-flower displays in the home. To achieve this, we have attended demonstrations and advice sessions given by experienced flower arrangers.

The effects of environmental changes to our climate are an on-going subject; also the issues of global warming and how these factors could influence the future approach to gardening.

In our lifetime we have seen the gradual mechanisation of all aspects of life including the reduction of physical labour in the garden. The use of mechanical equipment, both petrol and electrically driven for grass cutting, hedge cutting, soil cultivation, tree felling and many other tasks has made gardening an activity which people can continue well into their third age - hence the active interest which is shown by all members of the Gardening Group.

Our regular meetings help to give members confidence to achieve results which give them a great deal of pleasure - and since tea, coffee and cakes are consumed at every opportunity a happy social atmosphere prevails.



GERMAN GROUP

The German language is like the English language in that they are both languages of Literature and of Engineering and Science throughout the world.

Both languages use the same Roman alphabet but, with the German language, there is the addition of an umlaut, those rather odd two little dots occasionally used above letters such as o and a. The language also has a habit of using two letter S's intertwined that can make reading a German newspaper a bit of a surprise at first.

That, for the most part is where the similarities end!

To those of us who first began to learn German more than fifty years ago it is a pleasant surprise that in modern books and magazines the 'script' style of text, which was used in some German exercise books of our time, is now no longer used. But for many of us, this is not enough to make learning the German language any easier. For example what does one make of a word such as *Donaudampfschiffsfahrtgesellschaftskapitan?* [translated as 'Ship's Captain of the Danube Steamship Company'. This illustrates the German love of stringing several words together to make one.]

But enough of the difficulties! For many English people learning German is a challenge and the feeling when you get things right or pronounce something properly is wonderful. Germany and Austria are popular holiday destinations and to make oneself understood in a country's language adds much to the enjoyment of a holiday. The language is also useful in other countries of the European community and there is a sizeable German population in some South American countries such as Brazil.

The German group was started soon after the inauguration of the Chester U3A group. We have always met at the home of one of our members. Initially there were six of us, all with very different backgrounds in the language, and very different reasons for taking it up again. Only one of us was an absolute beginner and that proved to be very difficult as we had no real teacher then, so sadly she dropped out. One member had taken the German

language at university, another had been to a German school in Brazil in the 1930s. Yet another had had formal lessons in adult education and others had studied it at school (with little success in my own case and thus the challenge)

Without a formal teacher we worked our way through a commercial language course helping each other. We were joined by more fluent speakers but sadly lost a couple of our members through ill health. Then we were joined by a wonderful lady who acted as a guide to visitors to Chester and who had lived in Germany. With her help we did not have to resort so much to the dictionary and she also introduced us to some short stories in German. Another German course was bought with help from the U3A Committee and we followed some BBC programmes on Video. Homework was done with more regularity by some than by others, and a lot of fun was had along the way.

An enormous stroke of luck then occurred when a native German speaker joined U3A and became a member of the group. He was immediately conscripted as leader. He now puts in an incredible amount of work planning what we are to do, giving handouts and making us speak in German. He doesn't shout and wave his arms about as did my German teacher at school and when we make mistakes with our grammar and pronunciation he doesn't wince but smiles! The improvement in our confidence and ability to speak is noticeable, and we still have fun!

ADVANCED FRENCH CONVERSATION GROUP

We are a group of Francophiles most of whom visit France regularly, seeing relatives and friends or just holidaying to enjoy the countryside, culture and cuisine. We are fairly fluent in the French language, but this does not mean that we have stopped learning. Simply through listening to each other we pick up new words and expressions. We are not alone in hoping that, as a bonus, exercising the brain will help to improve the memory.

We take it in turn to host the meetings thus creating a more social atmosphere. In the group, some learnt French in their youth, others at school. Later on, for some of us, a spell in France brought us in contact with the everyday language. Some chose even to teach French professionally. For those in our age group, learning a foreign language was then, for the most part, from text books. We had to learn verbs and vocabulary by heart. Learning at home from a correspondence course using gramophone records was popular.

However, with the advent of the radio and television came new means of acquiring languages. Now we have computer courses, but perseverance is still required. 'Voice recognition' programs teach the user to pronounce words correctly. This could be useful for learning how to pronounce foreign words. No doubt there will be the need to make corrections where there are dual meanings. In English, 'fair' and 'fare'; 'to', 'too' and 'two' come to mind. Until a program can make sense of what is being said, this will apply also to the French language. Programs that claim to translate from one language to another are still in their infancy.

Unlike written English, written French is accented. One might well ask 'Why does written French need them?' After all, we do not have signs to tell us how to pronounce cough, bough and though. We learn the pronunciation in childhood. So why is there a need of accents in être, pêle-mêle, préconçu, élève, hair etc? Surely the French do not need the accent to tell them how to pronounce a word when they are reading it out loud. 'Mètre' meaning both 'metre' and 'verse' are spelt the same way but, 'mettre' meaning 'to put' has to have an additional 't'. Now one might say that in German you need the umlaut over the ö in 'schön' meaning 'beautiful' to distinguish it from 'schon' meaning 'already'.

HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

"What exactly do you do at Health & Happiness?"

This is a question we are often asked, and it isn't easy to give a simple answer.

Certainly *we enjoy ourselves, and laugh a lot*, whatever the topic under discussion. In addition we review some of the vast range of facts and ideas about what can affect the *length of life, the quality of life and, very importantly, how enjoyable it can be.*

There is an old saying that "*You are what you eat*", and this is confirmed by modern nutritional research. The key basics are *fruit and vegetables* with a minimum of five portions each day. Some of our members have managed to go completely vegetarian, but for those who haven't, it's best to *avoid red meat, and minimise the fat* on any meat. Fish is highly recommended, particularly oily varieties like mackerel and salmon. Nowadays it is quite possible to *eat a healthy diet and enjoy it too.*

Whilst on the subject of diet, we should mention *weight loss or weight control* diets. There seems to be a new kind of diet published every few weeks. Having put some of these to the test, we have not been able to find *a sure cure for "Third Age Spread"*. The main weakness in all of them is a shortage of that vital ingredient- *willpower*. Anyone who can provide, package, and sell this ingredient should make a fortune.

Drinking is another key activity, and in case anyone thinks we are candidates for Alcoholics Anonymous, the recommended drink is water, and plenty of it. Two litres a day is a good start, and spread over a normal day, that's less than a glass every two hours, which is quite manageable.

The *good news* is that fruit juices and soft drinks count towards your water intake, as do herbal and fruit teas.

The *bad news* is that ordinary tea, coffee, cola drinks and alcoholic drinks not only don't count towards your water intake, they *work against it*, because caffeine and alcohol actually remove water from your body. One very special exception is two glasses of red wine each day, because red wine helps prevent strokes and heart problems.

Sorry, only two (2) glasses per day, otherwise the benefits are offset by other risks.

Another major health factor is *exercise*, not a particularly popular subject with people of our age. Certainly the vision of local gyms and sports facilities being swamped by pensioners is an unlikely one, so we have tried to concentrate on exercises which are *easy and inexpensive* to do. Probably the best and cheapest is *walking*. A brisk walk of only 20 minutes per day, wherever and whenever it suits you, will work wonders for your general fitness.

Many members find *dancing*, in various forms, is a good exercise, and is good for the *morale* and for *meeting others*.

Others find great benefits from *Tai Chi, Yoga, swimming and mini-trampolining*. It pays to be careful where you place your mini-trampoline, to avoid being impaled on the light fittings, and it can perplex the neighbours as they see the face of a *healthy and happy U3A member* bouncing in and out of view at regular intervals.

On a less energetic level we have tried exercises you can do sitting down, including *stretches*, seated or standing, and even *facial exercises* to smooth away laughter lines.

Developing happiness is more challenging, because we are all different characters and it is a case of *different strokes for different folks*. However there are some approaches which can help most people to *feel more cheerful*.

Take some *exercise* or go for a walk

Get some *fresh air*

Enjoy the sights, sounds, and scents of *nature*

Talk to a *friend*

Listen to *music* you enjoy

Listen to the *radio* or watch a *TV* programme

Pray, for yourself and others

Go shopping - if money is tight, try the '£1' shops, for the joy of a bargain

Remember the old maxim ' *A little of what you fancy does you good*'

We have had some *enlightenment*, and great *hilarity*, over the subject of
'Difference between the sexes', based on two books,

- 1) 'Men are from Mars and women are from Venus' by John Gray, and
- 2) 'Why men don't listen and women can't read maps' by Allen & Barbara Pease

It has been very *reassuring* to find that we are not the only ones with little quirks of our own, nor are we alone in having partners with such strange and baffling characteristics. It seems many of these characteristics derive genetically from the cave-man days, when men's role was to go out alone to catch the food for the family, and women, in social groups, cared for the children. As a result, men are inclined to talk only if there is something vitally important to say, and even then it may be brief and possibly monosyllabic. Women on the other hand are constantly communicating, (as your phone bill may show), and can talk about several topics at the same time. This can seriously confuse the man, on the odd occasion when he is listening.

Similarly, men are very focussed, and can attend to only one thing at a time, so, if you want to get back at a man, go and pester him while he is knocking nails in.

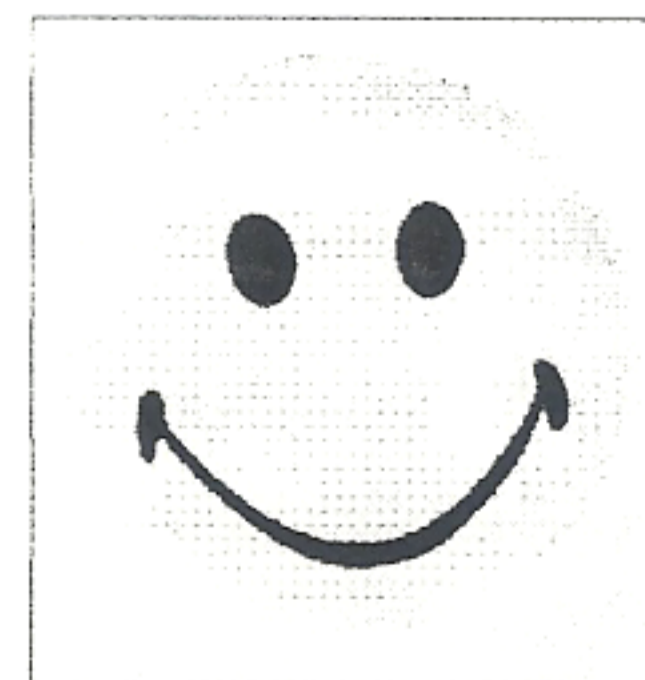
Women, however, are thinking of lots of things all the time, and their brains have more internal connections to facilitate this. However this can be a drawback, if you want a decision on something before the shops close for the night.

I think we have learnt to *understand the other sex better*, and now realise that adding together the capabilities of the sexes is far more productive than trying endlessly to change them or making either one dominant.

The overall aim of our group could be to *grow old gracefully*, or disgracefully, if that is *more fun*.

So far, we seem to have found *three ways to stay young*

- 1) Eat sensible foods, in moderation, with lots of water
- 2) Get exercise, 20 minutes each day, if possible
- 3) *Lie about your age*



HERALDRY GROUP

The Heraldry Group is unique in Chester U3A in that it has consisted mainly of a series of six-week courses intended to introduce members to this subject. Although examples of this art are found all around us, especially in the historic city of Chester, few of us had noticed this 'language', some understanding of which now enriches the lives of about fifty members.

Each group has consisted of from six to fifteen members, alternately meeting in the home of the co-ordinator, and going out and about to see Heraldry in situ and put our newly acquired knowledge into practice. The 'teaching sessions' have covered such topics as the history and language of heraldry, civic and royal arms, the College of Arms, the use of heraldry by guilds and livery companies, and the international use of heraldic devices today, including on postage stamps. Many members were surprised to learn that a 'family shield' can only be used legitimately by one person, the head of that family, and that others bearing the same name have no legitimate claim to use that device.



The visits in alternate weeks took us to Chester Town Hall to see the city's Grant of Arms, and to the Cathedral with its widespread use of the Grosvenor arms and those of other benefactors and bishops. We visited St. John's Church where, among a wealth of heraldic material, we particularly admired the west window, rich in its portrayal of Chester history as well as heraldry. We admired the beautifully restored heraldic tombs in St. Mary's-within-the-Walls, and noticed numerous heraldic references in the streets and on the city gates.

We also went further afield, to Cholmondeley Castle Chapel, to see the series of family hatchments, the most recent of which dates only from 1990. We explored the churches of Tilston, Malpas and Whitchurch, noticing how some churches clearly value the heraldic treasures they contain. Some of us visited Shrewsbury, to be shown the hatchments of St. Chad's and Old St. Chad's churches by the octogenarian enthusiast who has restored almost all the hatchments in Shropshire, and we were welcomed to the 'heraldic jewel' of

Moreton Corbet Church by a member of the Corbet family.

For the co-ordinator of the group, however, one of the chief delights has been to be told of the discoveries of group members as they have visited other parts of the country and the world. It is clear that many people now notice -- and ask questions about -- heraldry that they would not have seen had it not been for the course; visits to stately homes or distant towns have been given an added dimension as many members of Chester U3A have begun to read a language new to them, yet very ancient.

ITALIAN CONVERSATION GROUP

The original Group was formed in 1994. In response to interest and enquiries, an Italian member of U3A offered to start a beginners' course. We had found our Maestro !. Armed with our pristine copies of *Buongiorno Italia* every Friday afternoon we went to his home for two hours' tuition. We dived headlong into the intricacies of Italian grammar with enthusiasm our only qualification. For those of us who had not had the advantage of learning Latin at school and found it hard to remember the rules of English grammar, it was hard work. Italian grammar was not easy but the challenge was there and proved to be fun. Our teacher was patient and brought to our lessons his gentle and humorous approach. His aim was to make us sufficiently proficient in the language so that "if you are dropped onto Italian soil without *Buongiorno Italia*, you will survive".

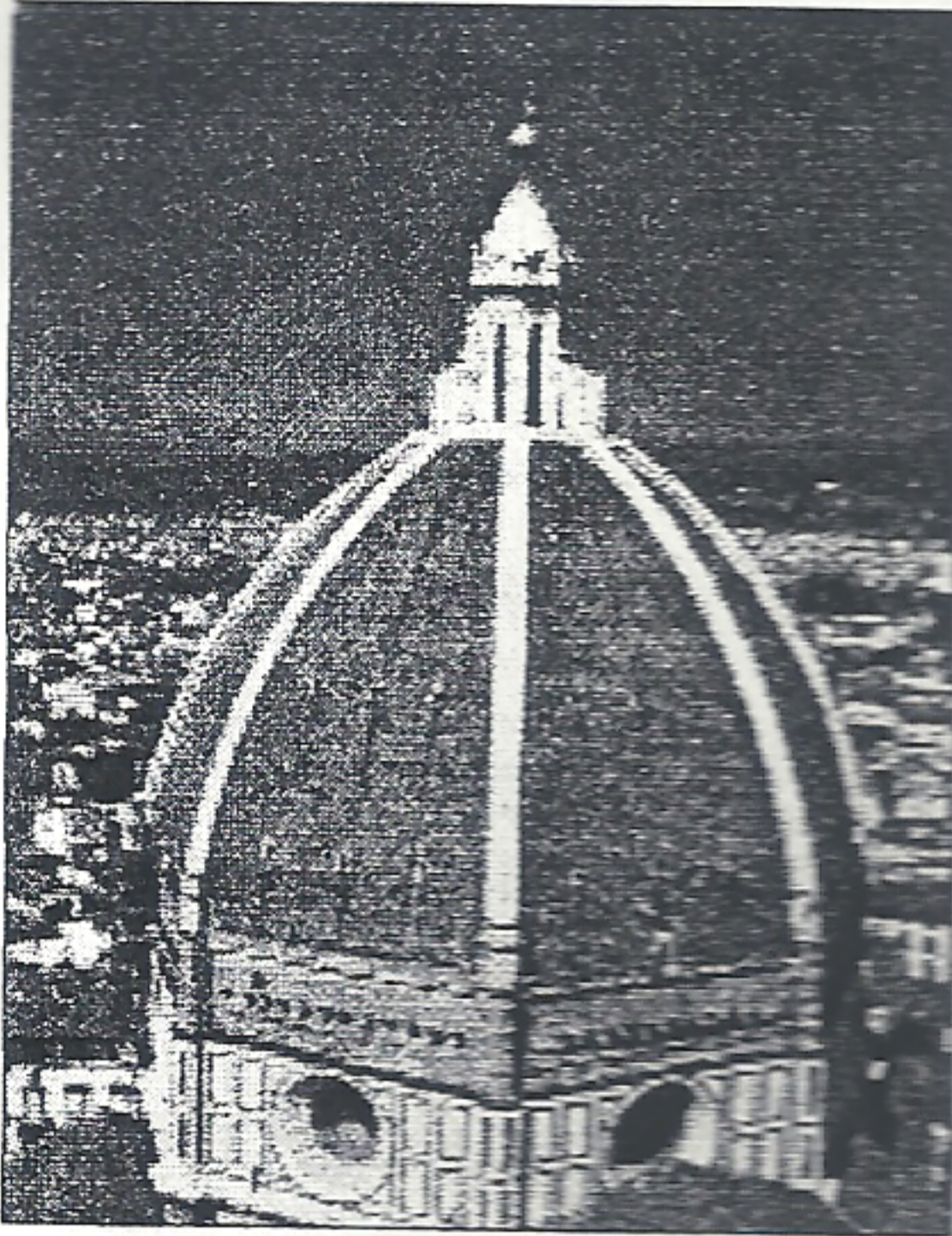
In May 1995 we took ourselves to a small town near Lake Trasimeno, Umbria for 15 days. It was not a package tour but an independently arranged holiday. We flew to Pisa and thereafter travelled everywhere by train, coach, bus and on foot. The days were magical, Assisi before the earthquake, Orvieto where we visited the caves and then watched a wedding at the Cathedral, Siena in the early morning and drinking wine at lunch time in the town square at 50p a tumbler! We soaked up the warmth and atmosphere and spoke a mixture of English and Italian - we were very much at the learning stage, but returned to England all the more determined to improve .

Soon our tutor had to give up his teaching as he and his wife were moving away from Chester. U3A Italian was at an end. One or two of us joined West Cheshire College classes and managed to gain certificates of varying merit. It was when these classes were no longer an option, that the idea of a Conversation Group was formed.

Initially we numbered three but this number has now increased to the point where we cannot accommodate more. A conversation group, as opposed to a teaching one, is better managed and enjoyed by a relatively small number.

In September 1999 four friends, all U3A members, went to Tuscany. I was the only one

from the Conversation Group so was anxious to do well in coping with everyday needs.



The appreciation of the Italians when one tries to speak their language is encouraging and when I was understood my confidence increased. One of our party who incidentally is a member of the U3A German Group, found herself engaged in animated conversation with several German ladies who were there on holiday. They were delighted to talk to an English lady who could speak their language. So not only was Italian enjoyed but German as well.

Without U3A many opportunities would be missed. The sense of achievement even limited success can bring, is in itself a reward.

A member of our Conversation Group recently spent a holiday in Sicily with her husband and managed more than adequately to converse - thus enhancing her enjoyment of the holiday.

Our Group goes well and we are gaining in both ability and confidence. From small beginnings we look forward to a happy and successful future.

LITERARY APPRECIATION GROUP ONE

The aim of the Group is to obtain a broader and deeper understanding of literature by reading a wide range of books, and at the same time providing pleasure for the members.



The Group has fifteen members of whom ten to twelve meet regularly on a monthly basis. This is probably the maximum number that enables all present to participate in the discussion.

The reading list is selected by the Group as a whole. Generalising, 19th Century novels have given the most pleasure and an insight into the social life and attitudes of that century. They have also been on occasions the most bleak or melancholy. The late 20th Century novels have proved the most difficult to understand. The Detective Novel and Humour have been the least popular.

Based upon this discussion two widely-read members of the Group prepare a possible reading list from which the Group selects a number of titles.

At each meeting a member will lead the discussion that can include:

- _ Background to the Author and the factors that may influence his/her writing.
- _ The structure of the novel
- _ The style of language.
- _ The creation of characters.
- _ The relationship of the novel being considered to others that have been read.

Three meetings have looked at poems. One was structured around some of the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins and at two meetings members read poems selected by themselves and put forward the reasons for their selection.

The Group has made no formal attempt to assess its value to individual members but some indication is given by the following quotations by members.

'I always loved the English Literature classes when I was at school, but during my working life I was never able to find a suitable class that met at a time I was free to attend. So it was with great pleasure I joined the U3A Literary Appreciation Group a few years ago. I so much enjoy meeting like-minded people with whom I discuss our chosen books. I also enjoy preparing for the meetings by reading the books, finding out something about the authors, and generally getting ready to take part in the discussion.'

'The main reason I joined the Group was to catch up with the reading I had been forced to miss because of work and family commitments. It has proved interesting to hear the different interpretations of a book, how people have read it and what it means to them.'

'I joined the Group because I have always enjoyed reading. Because of the Group I have read and enjoyed books I would never have read if left alone. I have learned how to look at a book in different ways - its purpose, its characters and style. The way it gives an insight into the life and character of the author. I have enjoyed the discussion of literature and the social chat with an interesting group of people with one thing in common - a love of books'.

'The Group has provided a great opportunity to widen one's appreciation of literature through the expertise of Helen and Ruth and the cut and thrust of debate within the diversity of the Group. I have enjoyed old favourites and making new discoveries. I have appreciated catching up with several authors published at a time when my family commitments left little or no time for reading.'

'I have always enjoyed reading but was aware that shortage of time was restricting what I read and the consideration of a book. The understanding of an author, what he was trying to say and the influences upon him have added further to my appreciation of a novel. The guidance of our readers has introduced me to writers I would have ignored and the

discussions have raised points of view and interpretations I had not appreciated.'

'Even though my subject is English Literature I have found that membership of the Group has stimulated me to serious and substantial reading which I might not have undertaken otherwise. The discussions are not always weighty however: there is plenty of laughter.'

'I enjoy the Group very much as it is interesting discussing literature with people who are reading because they want to read. Their ability to relate literature to their wide experience of life makes discussion lively and stimulating.'

Nineteenth Century Authors

Jane Austen	G.K.Chesterton
Wilkie Collins	Charles Dickens
George Eliot	Elizabeth Gaskell
George & Weedon Goldsmith	Thomas Hardy
Gerard Manley Hopkins	Henry James
George Moore	Anthony Trollope
Ivan Turgenev	Oscar Wilde
Emil Zola	

Twentieth Century Authors

Margaret Attwood	Arnold Bennett
E.C. Bentley	Christabel Bielenberg
A. S. Byatt	Agatha Christie
Roddy Doyle	W. Foley
Margaret Forster	Robert Graves
Rumer Godden	Graham Greene
L.P.Hartley	Susan Hill
Susan Howarth	Garrison Keillor
D.H.Lawrence	Doris Lessing
Laurie Lee	Penelope Lively

A.E.Macdonnell

John Masters

Carson McCullers

Iris Murdoch

V. S.Naipaul

Robert Roberts

Carol Shields

Joanne Trollope

Mary Webb

Virginia Woolf

Katherine Mansfield

Frank McCourt

Brian Moore

Dervla Murphy

Barbara Pym

Paul Scott

Muriel Sparke

Evelyn Waugh

Antonia White

LITERATURE GROUP TWO

The first Friday of the month is the most wonderful day: it is my literature group. We must all love it for we all turn up faithfully and the group is steadily growing!

Group Two is in its second year now.

We began with Louis de Berniere's *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, and its setting in Cephalonia inspired us to journey round the world in our reading. We had a taste of other countries through such authors as Arundhati Roy, Peter de Hoeg, Toni Morrison, Emile Zola, Gabriel Garcia Marcluez, and Isabel Allende. The genres of writing looked at include the literary novel, the romance, the thriller, the historical novel, and travel writing. What has been marvellous for all of us is to see how varied our reactions are to any one book:

'Couldn't get into that at all.'

'Oh? I loved it'

Seem typical of the opening comments.

And we have become bold: the Latin American literature with its extraordinary mix of the fantastical, the mythical, the real and the spiritual gave us some difficulties but we survived. We have also made a comparison of stories by Pushkin and Maupassant, tackled Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, followed by a light-hearted incursion into Anglo-Irish literature with James Stephen's *Crock of Gold*. Then to our big Millennial effort: James Joyce's *Ulysses*, followed by the fun of planning a third year's list!



LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

At the inaugural meeting of the Chester U3A in September 1993 more than fifty people expressed an interest in local history, far too many for one group. At a subsequent meeting it was decided to set up four groups to study different aspects of local history. However, within a short space of time only one group remained active, namely the Chester Local History Group which has maintained a membership of around twenty. Some members have engaged in research and others, many of whom are new to Chester, just want to learn more about our locality.

We have explored Chester through the centuries, following its development from an encampment to a full scale city. Evidence of our city's past is all around us, with a wealth of preserved monuments and buildings on view, dating from the Roman period onwards. Each age has left us plenty of material to study.

We have not confined our interest to Chester. Over the years we have visited places of historical interest in Cheshire and further afield. Castles, cathedrals, churches, towns, villages, museums - anywhere that offers a hint of the past has become our hunting ground.

During a typical outing we try to make contact with local dignitaries in order to establish links between the past and the present. One such occasion was our visit to Daresbury Church where the vicar showed us round whilst relating the 'story' of the Reverend Dobson (1832-98), alias Lewis Carroll, the author of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

Apart from regularly attending group meetings and visits to places of historical interest our members are keen to participate in local events. For example, some people have volunteered to help at Chester's Mystery Plays and when the BBC's Antiques Road Show was staged at Bebington we took along a member's Italian statue for valuation.

Whatever the era, whatever the context, we remain interested and involved with Chester's past and cannot imagine ever being otherwise.

The following list details some of the places that our group has visited since 1993

City of Chester

Elizabeth House and Georgian Houses in Abbey Square

Retreat House, Abbey Square

Dutch Houses, Bridge Street

Roman Baths, Bridge Street

God's Providence House, Watergate Street

Town Hall, the Mayor's private quarters

Chester Castle

Chester Cathedral

Further Afield;

Backford Village church

Chorlton Hall, former home of George Ormerod, Cheshire Historian

Chirk Castle

Steel Works, Shotton

Peover village and medieval church

Speke Hall, Liverpool

Boat Museum, Ellesmere Port

Nantwich Town and Church

Eaton Hall, home of the Duke and Duchess of Westminster

Sudley Hall, Liverpool Merchants' Mansion House



MUSIC GROUP ONE



Over six years ago the first meeting was held to discuss the formation of a U3A network in Chester. At the second meeting, we began to get into groups according to our interests. I got together with a small group of people interested in classical music, and soon found myself saying that they could meet at our bungalow, as my husband had some quality Hi Fi equipment.

The following Wednesday morning at 10.45am six ladies and two gentlemen arrived. We listened to some CDs, made plans, drank some coffee, and agreed to meet fortnightly on Wednesdays. Now, six and a half years later, we are still meeting. The original eight still come, but now our numbers have swollen to 22, which is the absolute limit, unless we move house or build an extension. We feel that the quality of the sound, and the atmosphere, would be spoiled if we met in a hired hall.

So what do we do at these meetings? We all agreed that none of us had sufficient musical knowledge to lecture to the others. We also did not feel ready to study music very seriously, but we all had our favourite composers and compositions which we were happy to share with others. We therefore agreed that we would take turns to prepare a programme of our choice. Each meeting would last for two hours, including a 20 minute coffee break.

We have continued with this format, as we find that it works really well. We have so far listened to about 200 hours of music with a wide range of content. We have members who are opera fans, and others who love church music. Some are keen on jazz, others like the romantic composers, and still others prefer to stick to the traditional classics.

All members present their programmes in their own way; telling us about the music, the composer, some of the background history, or simply why they like it. All willingly take their turn, and many have gained in confidence over the years.

So what have we learned? We have been introduced to composers and compositions which we didn't know existed. We have learnt to listen carefully to symphonies, concertos, operatic arias and chamber music. There is a lot of talk before the programme begins, and at coffee time, but while the music is playing there is complete silence broken only by the oc-

casional tiny snore!

So what have we gained by coming to the U3A Music Group? Apart from extending our musical knowledge and learning to listen to long compositions in the morning, we have made many good friends. We find our everyday worries and cares slip away in the company of such lovely people.

I don't know anything about music, really, but I know what I like.

Sir Max Beerbohm

There's sure no passion in the human soul but finds its food in music.

George Lillo

The man that hath no music in himself,

Nor is not moved by concord of sweet sounds,

Is fit for treason, stratagem and spoils.

Shakespeare

Here we sit, and let the sounds of music creep in our ears.

Shakespeare

Music hath charms to sooth the savage breast

William Congreve

Music represents an oasis in a sea of insanity - utterly refreshing to brain and spirit.

Anon

Let the sound of music creep in our ears

Shakespeare

The notes of music are worth much more than gold.

Musical keys unlock the hearts of young and old.

Loveluck

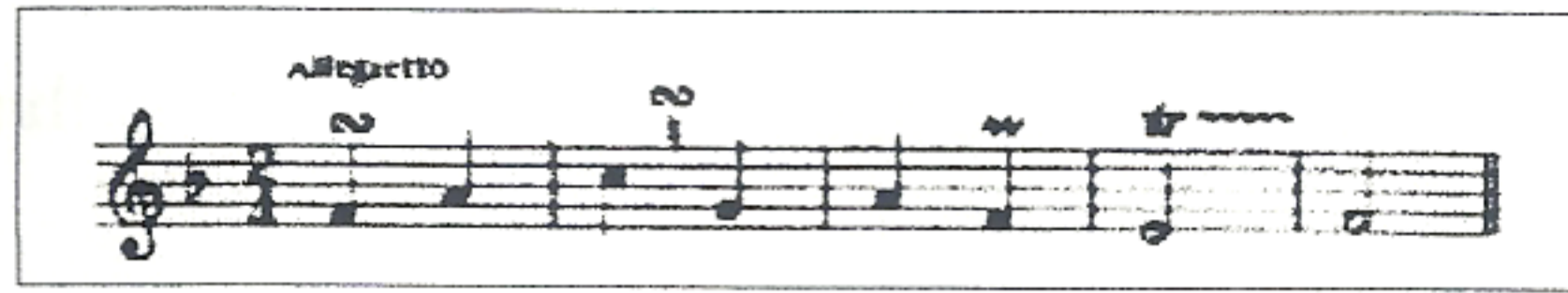
Music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory.

Shelley

Music exists to elevate us as far as possible above everyday existence.

Faure

MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP TWO



We meet on the second Monday morning of the month in the sitting room of a member's home to listen to serious music and to share our enthusiasm with others in the group which is known to the Chester U3A as "Music Two". None of us are experts but we all love our music and enjoy sharing it with our friends.

We take turns to plan a programme which we hope the others will enjoy and as our tastes vary widely this gives us the opportunity to listen to pieces which may be quite unfamiliar and therefore interesting and instructive. Our programmes have run from "early music", 13th and 14th century madrigals for example, through the great 18th and 19th century composers such as Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven, to Shostakovitch and others of the 20th century . Thus we expand our musical horizons.

Some of us love choral music, others don't really care for it, but we are always ready to listen and to learn. We have considered the influence of American Jazz on the great composers, and how they have made use of the folk music of their own countries in their compositions. We watched an illuminating video on the life of Schubert which we ordered from the U3A Resources department, and then listened with deeper understanding to his Unfinished Symphony and some of his glorious songs.

U3A has enabled us to meet and make friends with others with similar interests and in a relaxed, communal atmosphere to expand our knowledge of our chosen subject. Our gathering is cheerful and relaxed: in the grey winter days we sit by the fire and in summer the windows are open and the bird song in the garden joins in the concert. We hope that as time goes on more new members will join us bringing their own ideas and suggestions for music they enjoy.

The art of music moves forward in very much the same way as do the visual arts and just as 20th century art has become abstract and difficult to understand as the century progressed, so has serious music. It is easy to listen to Mozart or Beethoven, the music

that most of us know and love well, but Shostakovitch or Prokofiev, Britten or Stravinsky may present more of a problem. At all ages however, one can learn and appreciate the new developments of one's own time and it is rewarding to do this in company with others of a like mind.

So we arrive with our CDs, tapes or long-playing records and spend a happy and instructive morning together. No doubt before long we shall be listening to our music recorded digitally and perhaps "down-loaded" from our computers! The 20th century has seen such tremendous developments in the reproduction of music within the home, that we can only guess at what our new 21st century will bring. Whatever does happen, however, we in the Chester U3A Music Two Group will be there doing our best to understand and master it while enjoying ourselves at the same time.



PAINING GROUP

With retirement comes leisure time, missing contact with fellow workers, and a need to remain active, both physically and mentally. Time to take up a new hobby? What could fit the bill better than Chester U3A?

Watercolour painting is associated with retirement, to improve painting skills? perhaps to fulfil a lifetime ambition? discover latent talent? continue where we left off after school? and to enjoy doing so with like minded people.

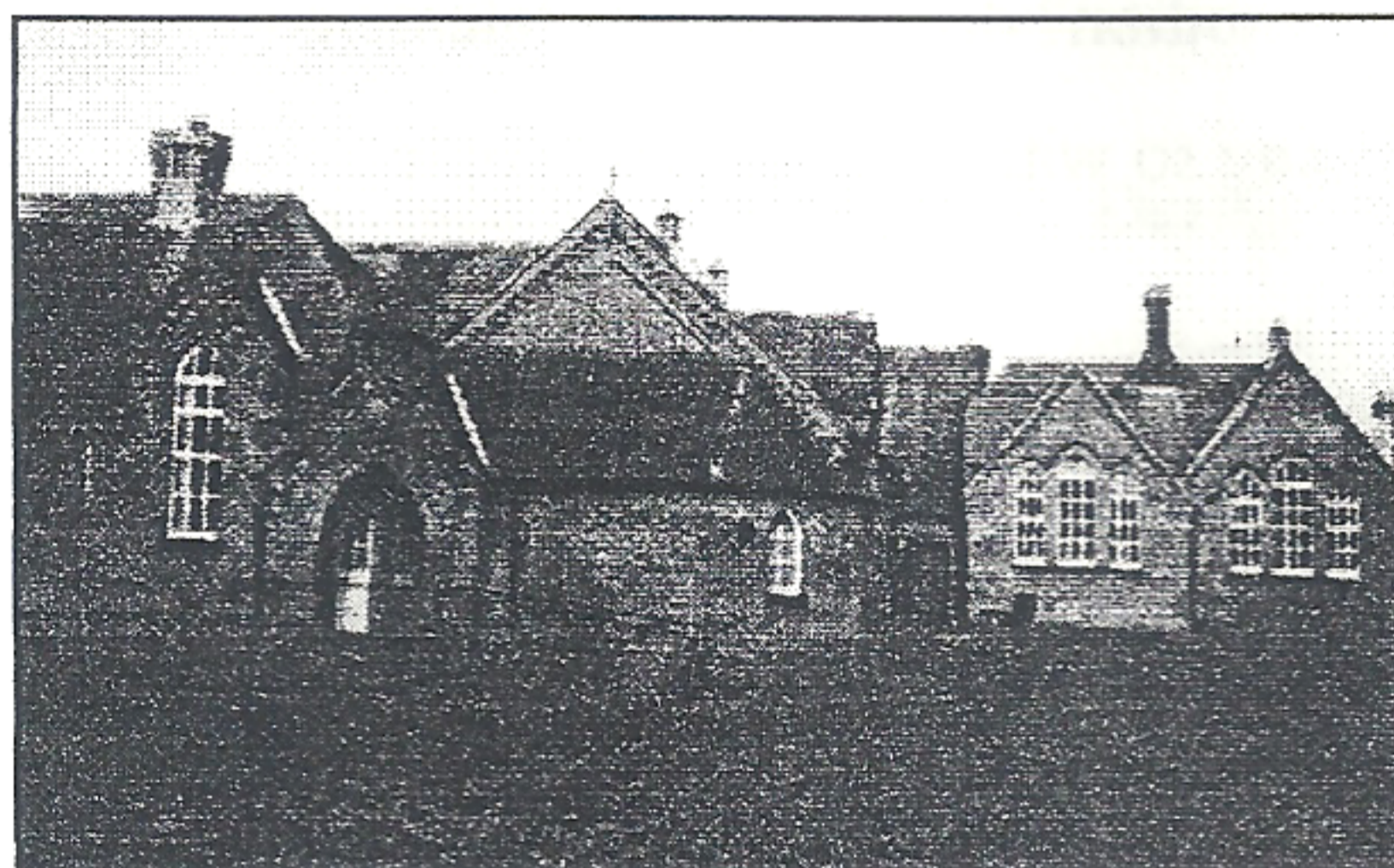
Whatever the reason a group of us wished to continue painting even though our leader had decided she needed more time for her own work. 'Out of the blue' a friend of a friend volunteered to become our new mentor. His first impression of our group was that we were using colours straight from our boxes, not mixing our own, and worst of all, copying other people's work. All the hard work had been done for us, for example the direction of the light, the shadows, lights and darks. In his opinion, this was no way to learn. We sensed things were about to change and change they did.

Some of us will not forget our first subject, a basket of fruit. What a poor job some made of it. The fruit didn't even appear to be sitting in the basket and some didn't look like fruit at all, and where were those dark shadows? Lesson number one - look for the dark and light areas! Clearly, we had a long way to go.

Since then we have painted fruit which looks like fruit and flowers in glass and stoneware vases - to rival the famous Sunflowers? - wine glasses, bottles, seashells, a landscape or two and a real live dog. The dog made a trying subject as she wouldn't sit still. Group members make much easier subjects, as they do sit still.

Improve we have. The Arts and Crafts exhibition was proof. We still have frustrating days when nothing goes right, when all we can do is laugh at our efforts. On those occasions someone is sure to say, 'isn't it time for tea?' On the other hand we can feel pleased, so pleased that we have nearly achieved an ambition to create a picture to hang in the home, and spent an absorbing 2 hours in so doing.

There are many more subjects to test our skills. This term's choice is cloth textures, starting with a length of satin. The finished effect should have all the shadows and highlights to make it look smooth and glossy. Ambitious? Yes but we have plenty of time to practice.



Hoole Community Centre

PSYCHOLOGY GROUP

When the Chester U3A was initiated in 1993 the founding members were asked to list the topics they might like to have as the basis of a study group. This gave rise to more than a hundred potential subject areas which were then sorted into groups which seemed to have some common ground. Thus the group we call 'Psychology' resulted from an initial meeting of over twenty people who had expressed varied interests including philosophy, sociology, complementary medicine and spirituality. While to many people 'psychology' apparently conjures up images of Freudian psychoanalysis or rather abstruse academic experiments, our group reflects its rather mixed beginnings and represents a very broad and liberal view of psychology. We agree with Joseph Campbell's view that 'Psychology's greatest value lies in the insights it offers to all of us about how we live our lives. The more we know about our common psychological roots the more we feel connected, not only to the rest of humanity but to the mystery source of all life'.

Our early attempts to explore issues such as personality using printed material from sources such as *Please Understand Me* (Keirsey and Bates) foundered on problems connected with producing sufficient printed material and discontinuity of attendance. We moved from a fortnightly to a weekly pattern of attendance and to basing each two hour session upon a video presentation. This has the advantage that everyone in attendance starts off with the same information. Moreover, aside from videos being a more absorbing mode of presentation than the merely verbal, they also give us access to leading figures and authorities from all over the world. The function of the co-ordinator/leader in such a group is very much that of resource person rather than tutor or presenter and the group meets whether or not the co-ordinator is in attendance.

Over the last six years we have considered a huge variety of subjects: dreams, memory, healing, bereavement and loss, Jungian psychology, psychology and mythology, the effects of birth practices, autism, sleep, hypnosis, psychology and the 'new' physics, gender differences, addiction, stress, the psychology of twins, depression, pre-natal learning, out of body and near-death experiences, creativity, happiness, and much more.

A recurrent motif in the lively discussions in the group is the tension between a 'scientific'

perspective with its emphasis on material, proof-based knowledge and a stance which is more accepting of less mainstream areas such as out-of-body experiences, parapsychological phenomena and esoteric aspects of psychology.

It has been suggested that we often gain as much insight into human psychology from a really good novel or film as from writing which is specifically designated 'psychology'. Similarly, we have found that some of the videos we have appreciated most are not really 'psychological' as such. Examples are the splendid series on *The Power of Myth* with Joseph Campbell and Kurt Hoffman's four-part series *Transformations*, a delight to the eye as well as a challenge to the mind.

Each session begins with refreshments (the group has been nicknamed 'The Biscuit Club'), general and U3A Information. We then view the video of the week with breaks for questions and elaboration. The two hours concludes with follow-up discussion. We normally meet in the flat of one of our members which is just right for the purpose. We have just over twenty members in the group, some of whom have been attending since it began. The weekly sessions attract an average attendance of about a dozen people.

The following is a selection of comments from group members;

'I have found in the psychology study group an interesting source of lively discussion and debate. The ambiance of the meetings is always comfortable and friendly. The content of the many videos we have viewed has greatly widened and deepened my awareness of psychological issues. I have very much appreciated the Joseph Campbell videos with the insights into myth and legend which they have provided.'

J.

'I enjoy psychology very much. It sounds a bit grand, but it really isn't. It is a lovely friendly group of mixed intellectual levels, but all of us as individuals have something to bring to the whole. The group gives me plenty to think about, enables me to voice my thoughts, and enlivens my brain. I recommend it to anyone who may think of joining us.'

D.

'For me it's about exploring how my inner world and the outer world interact through the medium of consciousness, whatever that is, and speculating about where reality lies'.

M.

'The Psychology study group has been very good for me as it has made me consider issues I wouldn't normally have thought about. Though some of the discussions are a little bit 'above me' I am sure something registers most of the time!'

M. B.

'I enjoy the psychology group because it helps you to understand the fascinating way the human mind works, and why we behave the way we do.'

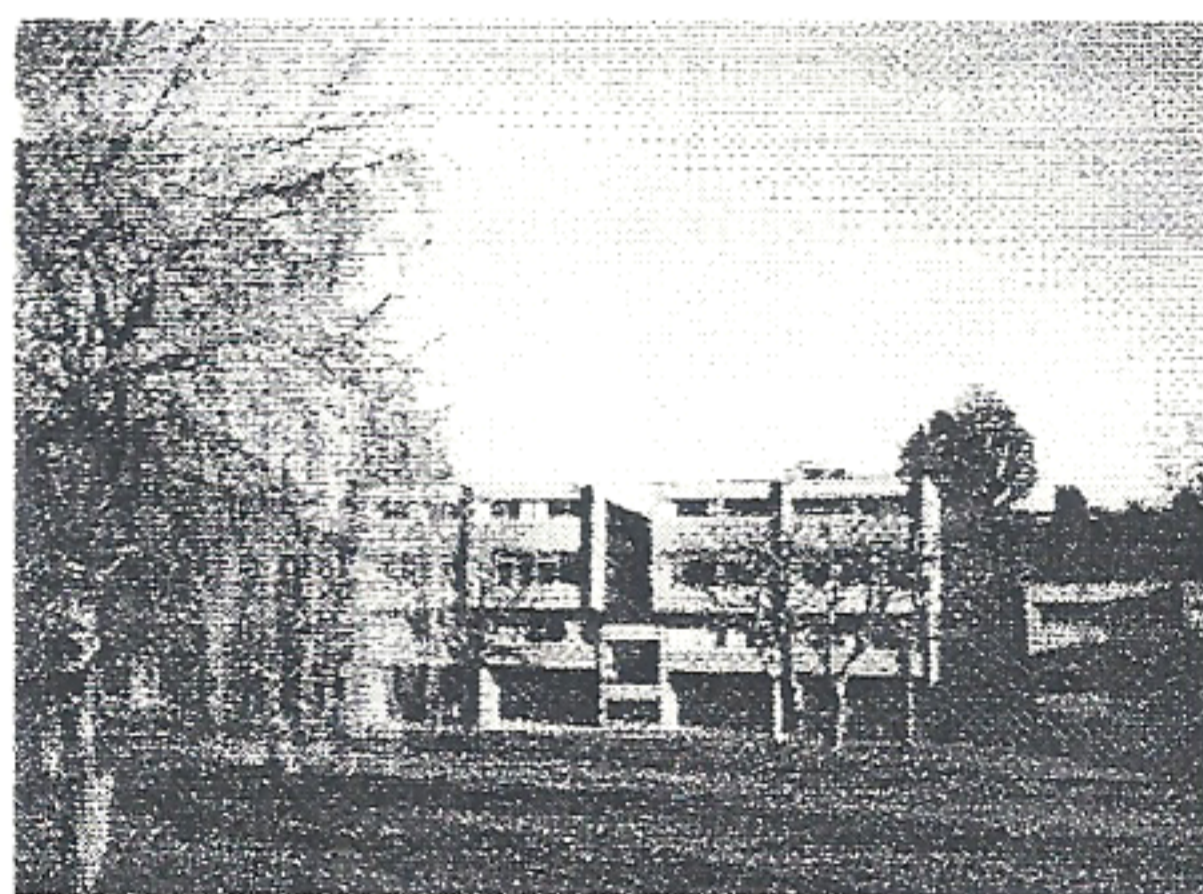
E.T

'When we are 'on form' the group is like a very good salad: the individual ingredients are interesting and the whole is a splendid blend of its diverse parts.'

B.

'A six year journey of exploration: thought-provoking, sometimes serious, often inspiring. A valuable exchange of ideas in a lively group atmosphere of increasing friendship.'

M.W.



Salmon Leap-Psychology group meeting place

REGIONAL HERITAGE GROUP

Chester is a superb centre for studying the heritage of our region. With documented history, and some historical remains, we can trace our heritage as far back as the Roman occupation from the 1st to the 4th century AD.

By the time the Saxons expanded Chester in the 10th century we had experienced rule by the Kings of Mercia, occupation by the Danes, numerous Viking visits, calling in for their customary rape and pillage, and of course frequent attacks by the local Celts after a boozy night out.

In Chester the Kingdom of England was unified by King Edgar the Peaceful, with all the regional kings showing their subservience by rowing him up the River Dee. Fortunately they didn't have to row across the weir cause this wasn't built until the 1100's when William the Conqueror left his nephew Hugh Lupus in charge of the area.

After the Norman Conquest, things were fairly peaceful until the Civil War of 1642-9, when Chester, supporting the King, was almost completely surrounded by landowners who supported Parliament, a recipe for conflict which erupted at frequent intervals. Once the nation had discovered that the republican leaders were even worse than the kings, they reinstated the monarchy, and we lived happily ever after, more or less.

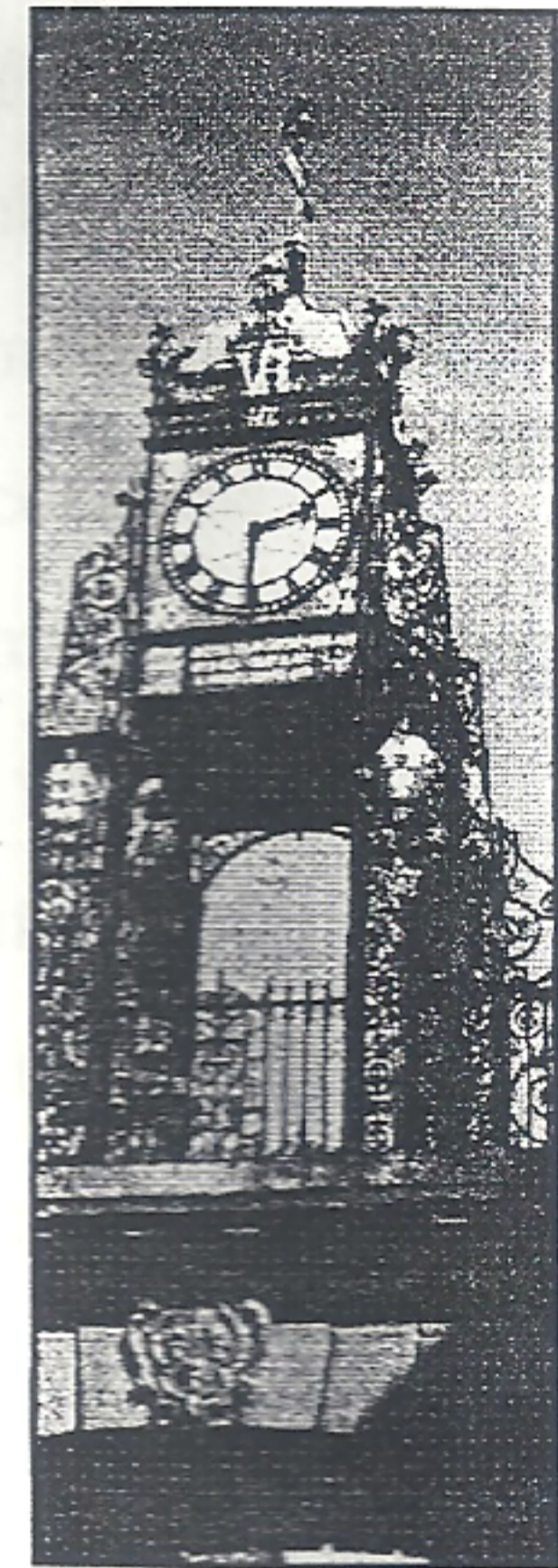
This is the first year the group has been meeting, and our programme has included a number of talks. Some of them have been given by outside speakers, and some by our own



Kings Head Hotel

members, who have researched topics of particular interest before making a presentation to the group.

Our local walkabouts have been successful, where we look at present buildings and discuss their previous history. It is particularly interesting to have the recollections of U3A members who have lived locally for many years, and remember what



went on at particular places, and it clearly gives a lot of pleasure to reminisce about by-gone days.

In the summer months we plan to spread our wings further afield, and visit heritage sites throughout Cheshire, the Wirral, and North Wales. We expect this will give us many interesting things to see and study in the coming years.



Stanley Palace

SCIENCE GROUP

At the Grosvenor Museum October 1993 the outlook was bleak. People were signing up in viable numbers for all the other groups but only four for Science. Doggedly, we agreed to meet at a members home on 19th November. The minutes record that we toyed with *Black Holes* seemingly in some ignorance, before one of our small group agreed to give an informed talk on the subject at the next meeting supplemented by a suitable video. This set the pattern for our subsequent meetings ; a prepared talk followed by a relevant video. Over the years our numbers grew, slowly at first, with some comings and goings, to reach our present maximum capacity of 16. We still meet at a member's house usually in Tarvin.

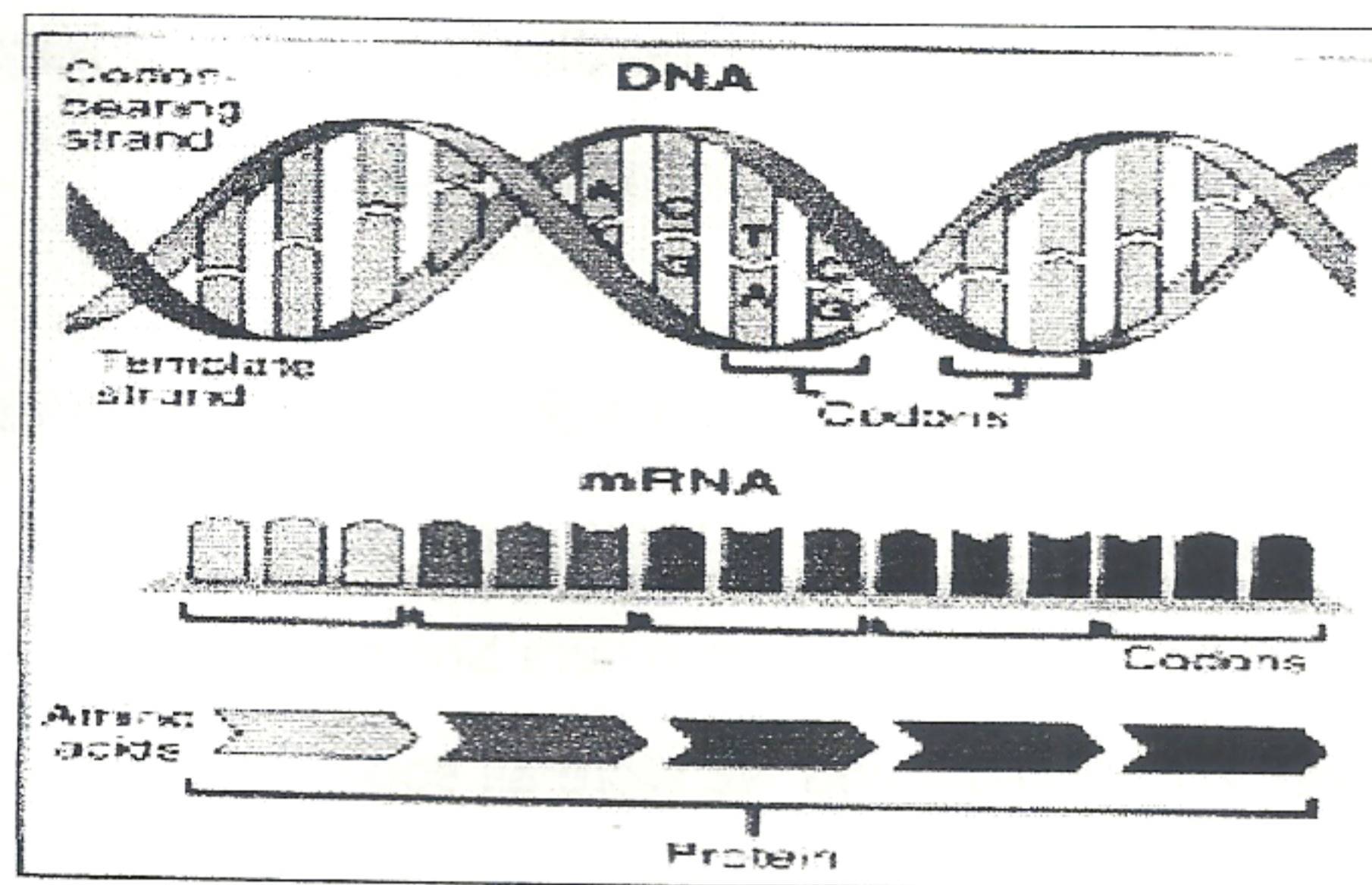
Our two hour 10 to 12 am meeting every third Friday is well structured. For the first five minutes our co-ordinator holds the reins passing on edicts from the Powers that Be. The speaker for the day then takes over usually armed with charts and diagrams (the back of old wallpaper comes in handy!). At 11.00am promptly coffee, biscuits and the 'Save the Children' box are rolled in amid non-stop lively discussion. At 11.15am we are persuaded to settle down for a continued talk or to watch a video.

We have not studied any topics at great length. Members give talks reflecting their current interests or past experiences. Sometimes these are illustrated by a short video often recorded from BBC's Learning Zone or Open University programmes. The topics have ranged widely e.g. from *Where did the Greeks go wrong?* to *Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging*, *Protein Synthesis*, *Codes and Ciphers* and *Composite Materials*. Members are urged (and coaxed) to give thought well ahead as to what their next talk will be so that the six-monthly list of activities can be drawn up.

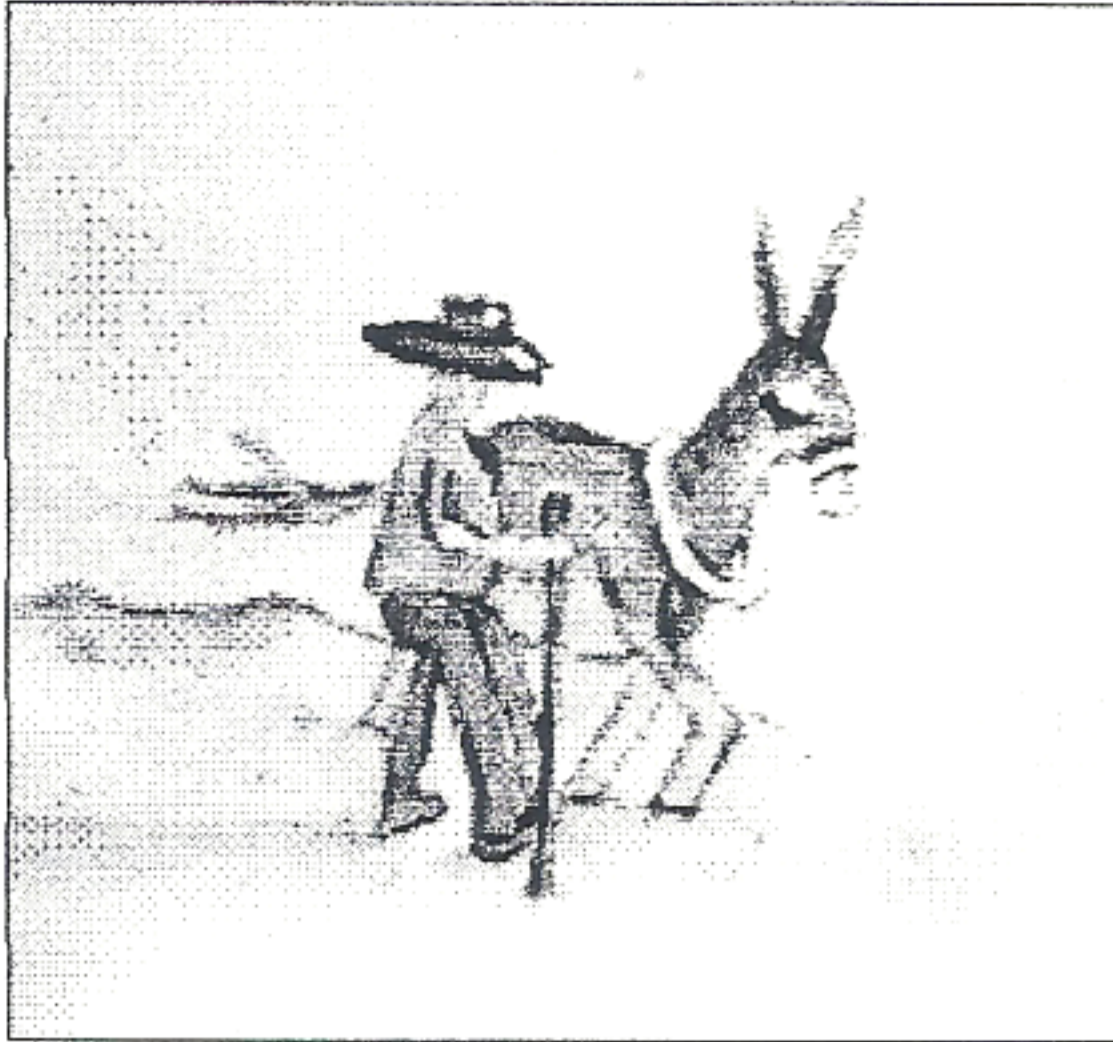
The social highlight for the group is the Christmas Lunch booked months ahead at the local golf club. We order our next Christmas pudding in February! Here husbands and wives find out what their partners are up to every third Friday! Our outings to scientific establishments once or twice a year afford other opportunities for socialising. These visits have included The Bidston Observatory, Pilkington Glassworks, and BNFL Capenhurst.

We view the future positively but are aware adjustments inevitably will have to be made. We are fortunate that 16 people can be accommodated and that we have a video player at

our disposal. Although not dependent wholly on videos its availability makes for a broader tenor to our meetings using O.U. material. We may not always be so well accommodated. Finally we wish to express our thanks to our hardworking committee and our appreciation to the University of the Third Age for the opportunity it has given us - a group of people previously unknown to each other to continue talking in what has been, for most, our life-long other language - science.



SPANISH GROUP



Our Spanish group started with very few members but soon grew once the news had circulated through the newssheet and the grapevine. During the following months more people thought it might be useful to know a bit more Spanish than just *Buenas Dias* or *Gracias* but by then catching up with the first group was not practicable so a second group was started. Both groups are DIY units

without teachers. We use books and tapes, and the more experienced members help the others. Pronunciation, pronouns and irregular verbs are daunting items but with laughter and a cup of coffee we tackle these hurdles and gradually improve. Different members of the group have contributed the following paragraphs:

When I joined the U3A I wondered which of the many groups on offer I should join. Having studied Spanish at GCSE level some years previously and having forgotten most of it through lack of use, I chose the Beginners Spanish group. It was a good choice. The atmosphere was very friendly and we were all soon conversing with each other, often with much hilarity at our mistakes, but at the same time learning. My personal highlight was when on holiday in Spain I was able to help a "non speaker" explain to the barman what was wanted and a relieved barman telling me that I was "una especialista". I hope in the years to come I will be able to live up to that description.

When I first heard that a U3A Spanish group was being set up, I was trying to teach myself myself the language working from a Teach Yourself book. I was very sceptical about the value of such a group without a fluent speaker to lead it. I imagined us lost in a morass of awful pronunciation and incorrect grammar, forming bad habits that we would never throw off. I was eventually motivated to join by the feeling that I thought I could do with something to stimulate my brain. We have had problems with grammar and pronunciation but not nearly as bad as I had expected, and I have enjoyed our cheerful and friendly weekly meetings very much.

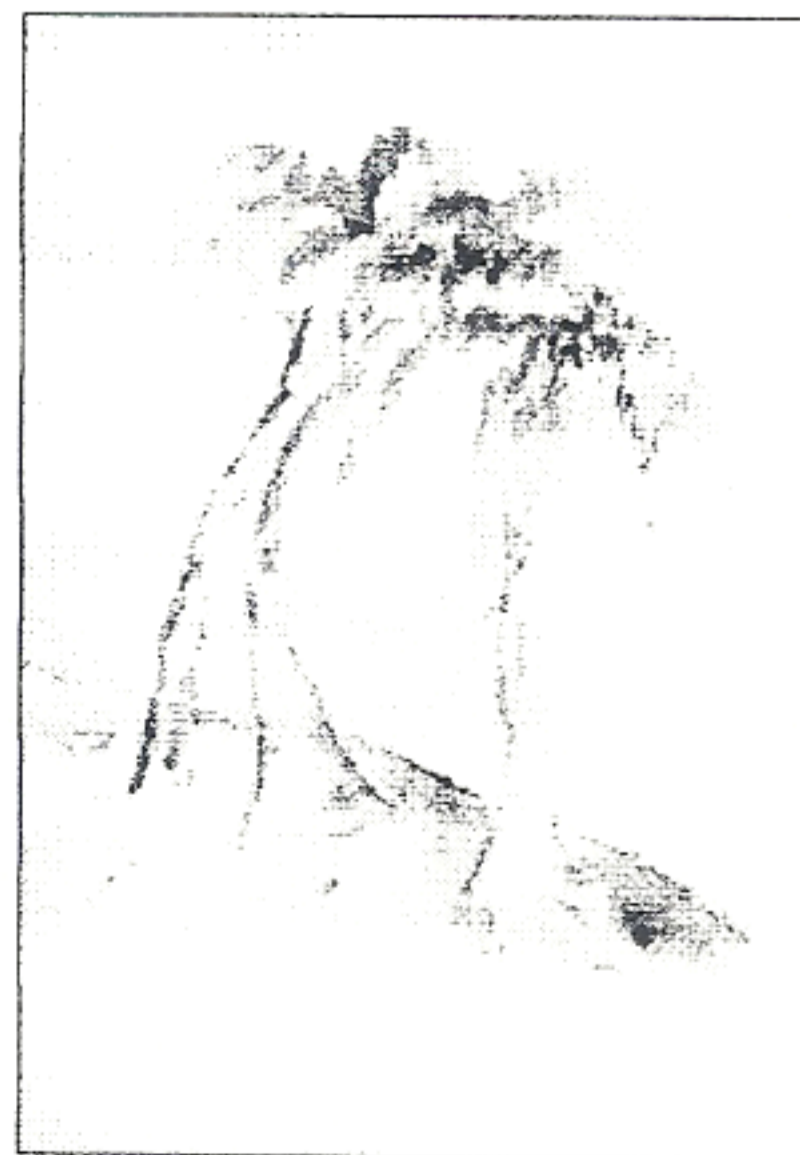
The increased interest in foreign holidays has encouraged people to consider learning a lit-

tle of the language of their chosen country so that they will be able to understand menus and to ask directions or to carry on a simple conversation. Rather than opt for a formal college course many prefer a self-help effort in a group of like-minded beginners with a leader who tries to keep one or two lessons ahead.

We like to spend our holidays in the interior of Spain, in the small old towns and in the country beyond them, where the people like to talk to the rare tourists. A knowledge of their language enhances the visits. There also one finds the loveable donkeys whose language is much easier to understand. Three cheers for the U3A language courses.

Our Spanish group has provided an avenue for promoting cordial relationships between ourselves and Spaniards visiting our city. It was both gratifying and entertaining to me when I was able to give directions in Spanish, to a group of young Spaniards seeking to buy "banderas and sombreros"

I had been going to Spain each year for about 15 years to play golf and had tried to speak some Spanish, but not having any knowledge of the language meant that I was not very successful. Therefore joining the U3A group for Spanish beginners in October 1998 seemed an excellent idea. I had recently taken semi-retirement so here was an opportunity to keep using my brain cells. Group study encourages more discipline than studying at home, but we can work at our own pace without having to follow a rigid syllabus of a college. The group has the additional benefits of the friendship that it creates, and the enthusiasm and hospitality of our group leader help to make learning Spanish such an enjoyable experience.



TAPESTRY AND EMBROIDERY GROUP

The first Tapestry and Embroidery Group was formed when the U3A first started in Chester and was run by a member in her own home in Handbridge. It was a small group with some very interesting work taking place in a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere where the less experienced learned the intricacies of needlework.

A second group started in September 1998, sometime after the first group had ended its connection with U3A and it is held on the North side of the city on the second and fourth Tuesday mornings of each month. This group is run by two members of the original group in their own homes (alternating) who by now had gained experience from the first group!

The group is small and friendly, a useful size considering embroidery frames can be bulky and our houses are not palatial. The group could be extended however! A cross section of people with varying abilities from beginners to experienced needlewomen are regular members. Problems are shared and advice given through group discussion. Anyone running out of thread will always be provided with a supply by another member who has surplus material in their possession.

Work created can be a cross section of Tapestry, Samplers, counted cross-stitch as well as other types of embroidery, from kits or from members own designs, canvas and thread to suit their individual tastes. The work is then framed, made into cushion covers, or used in other ways.

Financially the group has very few overheads. The hostess provides coffee and members make a contribution for this (and this is often given to charity). Accommodation is free and each member is responsible for providing their own work and equipment. Our books are available and shared to gain knowledge.

An Exhibition of work by members was given at the November, 1999 U3A Monthly Meeting where there was a good display of each individuals work. Great interest was shown, enquiries about joining the group were made and in fact one new member is now a 'regular' as a result of that exhibition.

The group visited the Knitting and Stitch Creative Crafts Exhibition at the G-Mex Centre in Manchester in February, travelling by public transport - so easy and straightforward. We also hope to visit the Voirrey Centre in the Wirral later in the Spring, probably using members' cars because that is more difficult by bus or train!

Members of the group have revealed a guilt complex in spending time enjoying embroidery in the mornings! This comes from a busy life of work and family commitments when the idea of relaxing and enjoying oneself during the day was totally unthought-of and taboo! But in discussion everyone agreed that in retirement this was a most enjoyable and relaxing occupation. The light essential to see the work is best in daytime and the privilege of time being available together with the ability to create beautiful things to enrich our own plus others' lives gives us satisfaction and also a feeling of achievement.



WALKING GROUP

In February 2000 26 people turned up for our walk. Why turn out on such a cold winters day? I think they were attracted by the Four E's: Exercise, Entertaining Company, Exploration and Eating Out.

EXERCISE

Walking is a great way to keep fit but many members have felt unsafe walking alone. Most of our walks are five to six miles in length, suiting the majority and we attempt to adjust the pace to the slowest walker. Leaders do pre-walks to ensure safety. However, accidents can occur, so we advise members to take out personal accident insurance.

The most memorable accident happened when an member collapsed on the top of a mountain and was rescued by police helicopter. Undaunted, she climbed Vesuvius the following week. Sadly, she has now passed away aged over 80.

ENTERTAINING COMPANY



If the entertainment value of the company is judged by the level of chatter, it is very entertaining indeed. Lively conversation on a wide range of topics never flags. Our main social event is the pre-Christmas meal which is always well attended.

EXPLORATION

We have the opportunity to revisit favourite walks and discover new ones. Most of them within a twenty five mile radius and transport is needed, so we are very grateful to those

who give lifts. Another example of co-operation within the group is the way those with a knowledge of wild flowers, bird watching and the locality, are willing to share it with us.

EATING OUT

We look forward to enjoying a meal together at the end of the walk. Most prefer to eat in a pub and on pre-walks leaders aim to find one with reasonable prices.

We were lucky to have an experienced walker, as a leader for the Monday walks. When she gave up her role as a regular leader recently, several members volunteered to lead walks. Many had never led a walk before but their experience within the group has given them the confidence to take this step. One such member is K and her account of her own experience follows:

Walking with a group had always attracted me but my excuse when working was 'no time'. On joining the U3A when I retired, the Walking Group was the first to beckon.

I was nervous at first, wondering how far I would be able to walk but was pleased to find I could manage the distances. For me it has been a worthwhile choice, making new friends, combining walks with a sociable pub lunch or picnic and seeing parts of the countryside I would never normally have seen on my own.

Over the years I have even progressed to leading a walk of my own instead of 'following my leader'! I hope we will all continue to enjoy our walking in the future.



WILDFLOWERS WE LOVE

Wild flowers still survive in our over-cultivated world and give pleasure to all who care to look. Whether your interest is prompted by aesthetic, artistic, conservational or scientific considerations, the study of these natural gems is rewarding. Listed below are some of the favourites of the Chester U3A Wildflower Group members.

Rosebay Willowherb (*Chamerion augustifolium*), also known as Bombweed, Firewood, Rambling Widow

Originally regarded as an escapee from gardens, this wildflower is now seen all over Britain, especially on railway cuttings and roadsides where fast moving vehicles carry along the plumed seeds. Sites cleared by demolition and bomb damage provide fertile ground, the devastation of these scarred places being quickly concealed by the tall pink-purple fronds of the Rosebay Willowherb.

Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*)

For me it is the first sign of the new year, its tiny green tips peeping through the grass in early January. By the end of the month the white buds are clearly visible and, come early February, the full white flowers open out, offering hope that Spring is on its way. From then on there will always be some flowers appearing around the countryside.

Common Poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*)

It is a simple flower. A hairy green knob splits open to reveal a tight mass of scrumpled red petals that seem to be made of fine silk that needs ironing. And yet this delicate flower can transform abandoned sites and road works into a mass of colour in only a few weeks.



Moschatel (*Adoxa Moschatellina*)

The vernacular name, Town Hall Clock, is much more memorable and appealing. This name is a description of the flower: twice the size of a daisy, the head consisting of five green flowers, one pointing upwards and the rest facing outwards horizontally like a clock face.

Primrose (*Primula Vulgaris*)

It's one of my favourite wild flowers, partly because it comes early in the year. It seems appropriate that an early plant should be gentle and delicate.

The slender pink stalks support the pale yellow flowerheads while the leaves at the base arch backwards, showing their wrinkly green surface and providing the perfect setting for the perfect flower.



White Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*)

My father permitted a patch of clover to grow on his intensively cultivated allotment in North London. He believed it attracted the bees and made good compost. Whenever I catch the clover's evocative scent I'm transported back to childhood days spent on the allotment officially weeding but in reality searching for a lucky four-leafed clover. And I did find one once !

Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)

It is one of our most well known and loved wild flowers. Its appearance confirms that



Spring had arrived and that summer is not far away. As a single plant it is easily overlooked but in its natural habitat it grows in masses, intensifying in colour and perfume. Whilst its natural host, the deciduous wood, is disappearing from our landscape, the bluebell is busy colonising the hedgerows and many domestic gardens, refusing to become an endangered species.

Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)

(also known as Jack-by-the-Hedge)

A very common white-flowered plant which grows up to 3 feet tall in shady woodlands and hedgerows, flowering from April to June. Its leaves are stalked, heart-shaped and bluntly toothed and they give off a strong garlic smell when bruised.

Devil's Bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*)

A member of the teasel family, this beautiful dark blue-purple flower grows in damp grassy places. Its solid, abruptly ending root has given rise to the fable that the Devil, envying the good that the herb might do, bit away part of the root in anger.

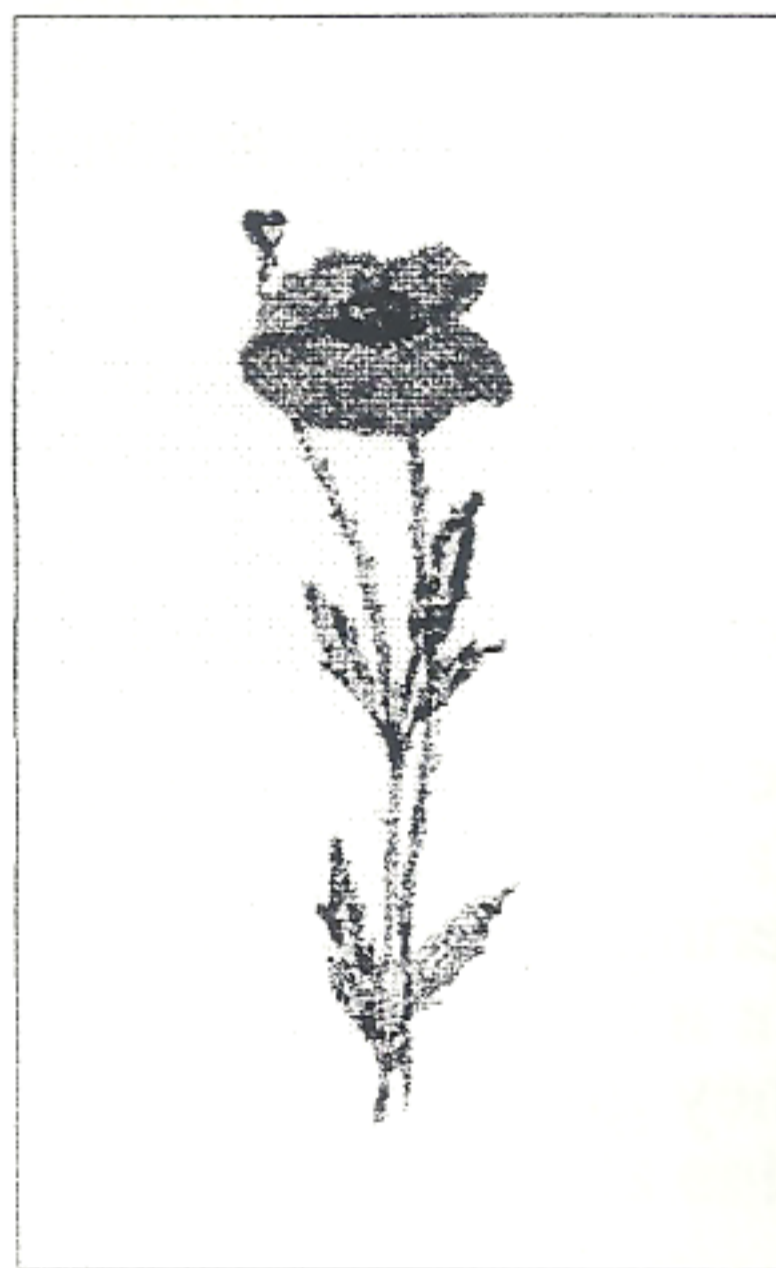
Buttercup (Ranunculus family)

I love the whole family, but the meadow buttercup is my favourite. In Spring it transforms lowly meadows into fields of gold. There are a number of myths associated with the buttercup: it can cure insanity if hung round the neck; it can improve milk quality if rubbed on a cow's udder; if you hold the flower under your chin and your skin turns yellow, it shows you like butter !

Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*)

These grew along the margins of the hayfields on the limestone meadows in the Peak District, where I lived as a child. On lovely summer days we would jump over the drystone wall at the bottom of our garden and go for a WOTF (walk over the fields) to discover our favourite flowers. For me it was always the harebell - a long thin stalk supporting a loose cluster of delicate blue bells, each with short, pointed petal lobes.

A very happy memory.



THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The concept of a university or learning community for older people no longer in full-time, gainful employment began in France in 1972 as the Université de Troisième Age or the University of the Third Age [U3A]. In France the traditional universities are required to make their facilities and staff available to older people. Their system resembles our own university extra mural departments, although it is aimed specifically at older people.

The idea of a university for third age people came to Britain 10 years later in 1982, but here the approach has been significantly different from France and other European countries. Our U3A is not a state run organisation, it is a self-help organisation, a do-it-yourself university. Its roots were planted in Cambridge in 1981 when Peter Laslett, Eric Midwinter and Michael Young convened a meeting to test the belief that older people interested in continuing their learning were capable of organising their own activities and providing all the skills and expertise that was necessary. Peter Laslett was a Cambridge academic, Eric Midwinter was an educational administrator, and Michael Young had founded the Consumers Association and the Open University. What they were proposing was a co-operative system of education, independent of central government and local authority control, run democratically for and by its members.

Peter Laslett drafted the objectives and principles of the new organisation and, while these were not meant to be hard and fast rules, they have remained central guidelines of the University of the Third Age. In essence these principles are that older people, like everyone else, have intellectual, cultural and aesthetic potentialities, and that these need

to be realised by the use of resources provided by older people themselves. So, in the U3A, there is no rigid distinction between those who teach and those who learn. The emphasis instead is on members who may act one day as group leaders, organisers or facilitators, and who the next day become students themselves.

As much input as possible is provided freely and voluntarily by the members themselves and paid help is considered only as a last resort. No qualifications are required to participate in the system and none are given. The term university is also used in its original sense as a community of learners and is not meant to imply that all the activities are of university standard or even intellectual.

The University of the Third Age functions at a local level through individual U3As which are autonomous organisations reflecting the needs and wishes of their local members. They vary in size from 20 members to over 1500 members and the range of activities varies considerably from group to group. Nationally there are over 400 U3As with some 100,000 members. A typical U3A will offer its members a range of interest/study groups, regular meetings, group lectures and social activities. Activities are organised mainly in small groups that meet regularly in each others' homes. Most U3As offer a combination of opportunities to study, create, socialise and, in general, develop a fitter mind and body. Membership fees vary from about £10 to £20 per year and each U3A manages its own financial affairs.

At a national level U3A is represented by the Third Age Trust which is a registered company and a registered charity. Its board of directors and trustees are the National

Executive Committee (N.E.C), whose members are elected by U3A members at an annual general meeting. The N.E.C. meets bi-monthly and does much of its business through sub committees. The N.E.C. also engages in fund raising, research and publicity. There is a National office which services the administrative needs of the Third Age Trust and the N.E.C., a development officer who helps set up new U3As, and a Resources Centre which is funded by a National Lottery grant. The finance to support the National Office and the N.E.C. comes from a capitation fee levied on members of individual U3As. Currently this is a modest £2 per year.

Although the British U3A movement as a self-help organisation is significantly different from the continental model of negotiated deals with local universities, it is nevertheless accepted as a member of A.U.I.T.T.A., the international branch of the movement and this has been the case since 1993. The U3As in Australia and New Zealand are of the British model.

STUDY DAYS

Ancient Wisdoms	<i>Friday am</i>
Art Appreciation	<i>3rd Tuesday pm</i>
Birdwatching	<i>1st Mon & 3rd Fri</i>
Bowling	<i>Tuesday pm</i>
Bridge Improvers	<i>Wednesday pm</i>
Canasta	<i>Wednesday pm</i>
Chat	<i>Wednesday pm</i>
Chess	<i>Wednesday pm</i>
Crafts	<i>2nd & 4th Tuesdays am</i>
(also Calligraphy Group <i>4th Tuesday am</i>)	
Collecting*	
Design from Experience*	
Environmental Issues	<i>Some Thursdays pm</i>
Family History	<i>3rd Thursday am</i>
French Conversation Advanced	<i>Altern. Thursdays am</i>
French Inter	<i>Monday am</i>
Gardening	<i>2nd & 4th Thursdays am</i>
Geology	<i>2nd & 5th Thursdays</i>
German Conversation	<i>1st & 3rd Wed am</i>
Health and Happiness	<i>Wednesday pm</i>
Heraldry	<i>Various</i>
Industrial Heritage	<i>3rd Friday</i>
Literature 1	<i>2nd Friday pm</i>
Literature 2	<i>1st Friday pm</i>
Literature 3	<i>Wed Once a Month am</i>
Local History	<i>1st Thursday pm</i>

Music1	<i>Altern. Wednesdays am</i>
Music2	<i>2nd Monday am</i>
Painting	<i>Tuesday pm</i>
Philosophy	<i>2nd & 4th Tuesdays am</i>
Photography*	
Psychology	<i>Thursday am</i>
Regional Heritage	<i>3rd Tuesday am</i>
Science	<i>Fridays at 3 wk intervals</i>
Singing for Pleasure	<i>One Friday per month</i>
Spanish 2	<i>Monday am</i>
Spanish 1	<i>Thursday am</i>
Spanish for beginners *	
Story Telling*	
Tapestry	<i>2nd & 4th Tuesday am</i>
Walking 1	<i>3rd Monday</i>
Walking 2	<i>1st Friday</i>
Wildflowers	<i>2nd Tuesday am</i>

* to start 2001