

# Sheffield University of the Third Age

## The Story So Far

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## Chairman's Foreword

As the current Chairman of Sheffield U3A it is both a pleasure and a privilege to be invited to write the Foreword to this history of SU3A .

The project was launched by my predecessor Philip Jones in February 2000 when the Committee realised that unless an early initiative was taken much of our history was in danger of being lost. The first appeal for a volunteer to oversee and co-ordinate the project was in Philip's words "*less than overwhelming*". To his credit and for which we are most grateful Roy Darlison offered to play the key role in preparing the material for publication and has undertaken much research of our archives as well as encouraging those members with long memories to participate in the venture.

The content will be an eye-opener to some readers since it demonstrates so clearly the commitment of, and difficulties overcome by, that small band which gathered together in 1986 to launch what is now a thriving and well-established organisation of more than 1900 members participating in some 120 Groups. As a relative newcomer to SU3A (my wife and I joined in 1998) I cannot fail to be impressed by the energy and enthusiasm of those early pioneers who have for many years devoted much of their time to the successful and continuing development of our organisation.

Whilst continuing to uphold the primary purpose of the U3A movement - collective learning - we must also recognise the importance to most members of the social content of our meetings and the way in which new friendships develop and are nourished; these themes struck me as I read the various contributions. The value placed on membership of SU3A was amply demonstrated in the 2001 survey of members when an overwhelming majority reported high levels of satisfaction.

The active participation and enthusiasm of members will ensure our future success and if this publication encourages newer members to show the same level of commitment as our founders it will have served its purpose as a constant reminder of the debt we owe to the initiative they took some sixteen years ago.

It is timely to record our thanks to the many members who have contributed to this publication, to the steering group which gave support and encouragement to the venture, to Roy for his

tremendous enthusiasm in overseeing the project and to the Telegraph and Star Old Folks Fund - a charity established to benefit older people and administered by Sheffield Newspapers Limited - for their generous contribution towards the cost of publication.

**John Richards. October 2002.**

# Introduction

The inspiration for my part in this history was a timely proposal by Philip Jones, in his capacity as Chair of SU3A. It is thirty years since the first gathering in France which may be seen as the birth of U3A. Twenty years have passed since U3A came to the UK and sixteen years since the third National Conference was held, quite coincidentally, in Sheffield, in 1986.

The intention is not to provide a blow-by-blow account of all that has taken place over sixteen years since SU3A was established. Rather it is to try to capture the spirit of what has happened, to chronicle the milestones or staging posts and record, if not to dwell on, the roles and contributions of many of the principal players. Its value is as a threefold perspective in time. It provides an invitation to indulge in reminiscence, prompting recollection of people, places and events. For the present, it may provide a record in the form of a series of verbal snapshots covering the years which have passed since SU3A began. For the future, it represents a milestone, upon which to rest and look around, perhaps to consider, individually and collectively, what might be learned from the past and applied to the next phase of development.

The inspiration for the framework owes a good deal to Mary Clark's presentation at the Millennium Lunch in 2000 in which she summarised the earliest days of SU3A and which was reprinted in the June edition of LINKS.

The content depends heavily upon the recollection of those who participated in, and often led, the activities which are at the heart of SU3A. They have written of their recollections and allowed their contributions to be reprinted verbatim or edited by me in the interests of a better overall fit. Although many have referred to their own records of events and to minutes and newsletters, the results are inevitably subjective and personal. They are no less valid for being such and the very subjectivity offers scope for readers to differ and to have their own views and recollections challenged, surely a major function of any good history.

There is a straightforward record of the way things happened in the earliest days. A further element describes the numerical growth and the responses to that growth in size and breadth.

Discrete sections deal with the perspective on their time in office by individual chairs and a shortened version of Nigel Sandford's history of the Newsletter.

I have edited for the purposes of remaining within boundaries set by cost and printing practicalities. I had thought to edit contributions in a way which gave a unifying style. In the event, in most cases, I have done little beyond build bridges between areas of activity, leaving the content of contributions largely untouched. I hope you will find that the decision to allow the individual styles to show through gives the enterprise a freshness and additional interest.

### **Acknowledgements**

The responsibility for any errors in this history must lie with me as Editor. Any credit must lie with all of those who have given time to recollection and setting pen to paper and with the small group - Mary Balbi, Mary Clark, Frank Gutsell and Shirley Haworth - under Nigel Sandford's leadership, who have given time to acting as my guides and mentors in the enterprise.

It has been a very satisfying experience to work closely with some of those who played key roles at the start, and in the development of aspects of the organisation. All five of them are still concerned with, and engaged by, what comes next for the organisation and its membership and retain a huge commitment to its future well-being.

Thanks are also due to Miriam Currie for her work on the delightful cover.

In piecing together this tapestry I am struck by the contributions made by a widening circle of members over time but also by how dependent the organisation has been on a small group's continuing loyalty and commitment. It would be invidious to go further in seeking out and identifying individuals for fear of excluding others - equally deserving of note, and probably harder to identify because of their determination to remain unremarked and unsung - from any list. Nevertheless, SU3A, and this history, owes much to them all.

The material has mainly been written and collected together over the summer of 2002. Like any history, guide book or directory it will be out of date by the time it reaches the printer. Nevertheless it represents the first gathering together of the strands which make

up the fabrics enriching the lives of members of SU3A in its first sixteen years. It's to be hoped that you have enjoyed reading it either - if I may raid the argot of the walking faculty of SU3A - as a 'dipper' or a 'stroller'. The aim has never been to invite comparison with the long distance paths!<sup>1</sup>

**Roy Darlison - Editor**

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<sup>1</sup> In due course it is hoped that this history will be available at the SU3A Internet website and that unedited versions of the individual pieces will also be accessible there.

# Patterns of Growth

## The Earliest Days - Shirley Haworth

In January 1986 the Northern Co-ordinator for the National U3A, Jenny Betts, organised a meeting at the Polytechnic College, Mundella House in Collegiate Crescent, in response to growing demand filtering through to her at Preston Headquarters for something to happen in Sheffield. One week and one day later a steering committee meeting of local people was held at a small partitioned off space in Mundella House. The six people sat on a sofa and wooden chairs to make plans. Three, Betty James Shirley Haworth and Elizabeth Strevens, subsequently became the first Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. The other three were members of Age Concern expressing a welcome to any SU3A members to their activities, and offering help with the setting up of a U3A in Sheffield.

Five days later a public meeting was held which 25 people attended. Discussion took place on the name for the society, age of membership and meeting places (central buildings and local private houses). Application forms for membership were completed, on which interests were stated. The need for full regular meetings was expressed; and also the independence of the groups studying different subjects. Publicity attracting new members was talked about.

The first meeting was held at 10.30 am on Wednesday 15th January 1986 at the Collegiate Crescent campus of the Polytechnic (now Sheffield Hallam University) courtesy of Roy Bailey and under the chairmanship of Betty James and which resulted in the formal establishment of the branch.

On the 5th February 1986 the movement got a good boost from Maggie Lett in the Sheffield Telegraph, in which she quoted Dr Peter Laslett who masterminded the UK operation: *"Nobody is paid, there are no awards, no exams, we are not agents for any outside body which wants to know whether Smith is better than Brown. All people study because they want to, for aesthetic, literary or other reasons, and this is what a university is for."*

At a general meeting on 5th March 45 people were present. Confirmation was given to adoption of the title of SU3A. Members

agreed to a subscription of £1 to meet administrative costs to the end of 1986.

Following the general business, the meeting took the form of a 'market place', where people printed on a piece of card any particular interests they had, and these were held up for display. Quite quickly people moved around linking up with those similarly minded. Groups were formed, and then it was up to them to decide where and when they were going to meet, what they hoped to do together, and which person should be their co-ordinator.

The Polytechnic staff in Collegiate Crescent were very encouraging and helpful in accommodating our Committee and General Meetings on their premises. They also let us use their office facilities for producing literature to post out to members.

By March 1986 there were fifty members and eleven groups - many members had already joined more than one group. Most of them met in members' private homes. They included Archaeology, Art, Computing, Creative Writing, English, English Literature, German, Music, Natural History, Photography and Swimming. Ten other interests had been expressed but in each case there were not enough people to form a viable group.

March saw the production of the first Newsletter. Up to Newsletter 54 (December 1994) they were typed on Gestetner Stencils and run off on the Polytechnic duplicating machine, the foolscap sheets then stapled together, before being folded and put into envelopes already bearing hand-written addresses.

## **First Co-ordinators**

*(from Newsletter No.1 - March 1986)*

**Archeology - Margaret Usherwood**

**Art - Hazel Brackenbury**

**Computing - John Walsh**

**Creative Writing - Elizabeth  
Singleton**

**English Literature - H.C. Ogley**

**English Literature - Ruth Chapman**

**German - Susan Cotterill**

**Music - Edward Davis**

**Natural History - Austin  
Brackenbury**

**Photography - Douglas Betts**

**Swimming - Gwen Metcalfe**

Despite the subscription, more money was needed for administration, and during the first two or three years there were bring-and-buy sales, coffee mornings and garden parties (one at the Bishop of Sheffield's House at Ranmoor). As well as raising money this also helped people to get to know one another better across various groups.

In 1988 a Social Committee was created. The Christmas lunch in 1988 established a pattern of inviting group tutors (all of them giving their expert tuition without any payment) and their wives to join members.

From the beginning an annual Open Day was held at which all the groups were publicised at tables around a hall. In the first few years outside speakers were invited to address General Meetings, but these ceased to attract many members as people became involved in perhaps three or four different groups.

At the first AGM the National constitution was adopted. SU3A finances balanced at £102.80, with £41.27 in hand. At the second

AGM the annual subscription was raised to £3; and eighteen short, but lively group reports were given.

By 1989 there were twenty groups and over two hundred members were listed on the card index and membership cards were introduced.

## **Growing Pains**

The available statistics show how the membership of SU3A took off during the mid 90s. In 1995 the numbers passed 1000. By 1997 the membership was almost 1367 and a year later had reached 1423. The Committee was confronted with the need to respond to this growth - drawn mainly from the communities in the southern and western parts of the city - in some way or another.

Given the situation of the Sheffield University and the (then) Polytechnic, between the city centre and those parts of the city perceived locally to be the more affluent, one might have expected SU3A to have started as it did and where it did. However, there is a long tradition in the city of facilitating access to opportunity for the greater civic whole. It is no surprise that these two phenomena should eventually coalesce and seek to address the question "*how does the new organisation reach out to embrace with some certainty other parts of the City?*"

In the event, several options were explored: proactive expansion, limiting the scale of the existing organisation and promoting separate independent development or deliberate focus on specific areas seen to have need and potential for growth as extensions of the core. Each is described below.

***Ruth Abel** - Publicity Officer - describes the work which she and her husband Frank, have undertaken to publicise SU3A over twelve years in support of three models of growth.*

Ruth joined SU3A in September 1988 and took over the position of Publicity Officer as advertised in the Newsletter (not called LINKS then) about 1990. Originally, she distributed leaflets to libraries, hospitals, retirement homes, Age Concern, union headquarters, personnel offices of large firms and department stores, in fact, anywhere where there might be prospective members. She also spoke about SU3A to various groups - Women's Institutes, retired

nurses, Townswomen's Guilds and several times on Radio Sheffield.

Her biggest undertaking was in the early 90s, when the "Open Day" was held in Ecclesall Parish Hall as a giant publicity stunt. The area was flooded with posters and leaflets; local radio, newspapers, local shops and post offices, etc. They would have been very happy with 85 visitors, but in the event 215 arrived, the phone never stopped ringing and Rony Robinson turned up from Radio Sheffield with his roving mike!

A couple of years later Ruth and Frank ran another Open Day at Wellesley Hall, Crookes, with a follow-up meeting soon after. This too was a huge success, and as a result of the three meetings there was a big leap in the membership. It was felt that a steady increase in membership was preferable to sudden large influxes, and the Committee decided to undertake further publicity mainly through leaflets.

About three years ago SU3A was approached by a person appointed by "Churches Together" in Broomhill to look after the interests of older people. She saw the merits of U3A and asked if the organisation would publicise activities with her help. As a result an information meeting and membership drive was held in Broomhill Methodist Church, which resulted in the formation of a number of new groups.

### **New and Prospective Members Meetings**

These meetings came about as a result of a complaint from a new member who felt rebuffed after having tried to join several groups only to be told they were full. Frank Abel suggested a welcome meeting for new members, which would explain how SU3A operates and offer help in joining groups and setting up new ones. He was invited by the Committee to run such meetings and was joined by the General Co-ordinator, Membership Secretary (later replaced by the Enquiries Officer) and the Publicity Officer in planning and running them. They are now held four times a year, two in spring and two in autumn, and are attended by between 35 and 50 each time.

Ruth's main activity at present is to ensure that leaflets - around 1000 a year - are always available in the central library with occasional distributions to branch libraries and other places on request.

## South East Sheffield

At a Co-ordinators' meeting in the Summer of 1996 reference was made to the possible expansion of the SU3A into the South East area of Sheffield, and it was mentioned to Barbara Steel that, as she lived in the area, sometime in the future she might be asked for some input.

A sub-committee was formed: Jack Holland, Yvonne Gutsell, Frank and Ruth Abel, Bob Smith and Barbara were members. It was decided to hold an open meeting at the Waterthorpe Library Art Space situated at Crystal Peaks on Monday 20th January 1997. The local free newspaper, 'The Leader', published an article around Barbara's membership, including the fact that she had to travel to the other side of the city to find groups.

Three days in the week prior to the meeting the 'charity barrow' in Crystal Peaks was manned by the members of the sub-committee and volunteers. Information about U3A nationally and locally was displayed. Posters were put in libraries, doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms, churches, shops etc. A leaflet, a modified version of the one used to promote SU3A generally, was prepared to introduce the idea of expanding into the South East and giving the date of the meeting. SU3A members approached members of the public and spoke to them about the merits of U3A.

Ruth Abel, who had offered to prepare drinks for the meeting, was there early. Barbara suggested about 30 cups would suffice. A small trickle of people started to arrive and for a while stopped at five. Barbara and Ruth were apprehensive. Suddenly more arrived and the chairs were filling up. Barbara had been asked to take the meeting and was determined to start on time. As she got up to commence Frank whispered "There are 120 people here". At that moment another group arrived and he said with a laugh "There are more than 120".

It was January, but the room was so hot they had to open the fire doors to get some air in and there were as many people standing as sitting. Jack Holland talked about U3A in general and Frank Abel about SU3A in particular. Barbara spoke about her ideas for the South East and invited people to put their names on a list that day, so that within a week a meeting could be called for that group. Volunteers from the meeting agreed to take names and telephone numbers for each group. The majority of those who

volunteered became the co-ordinators of the groups: Art, Gardening, Discussion, Music and Poetry, Languages, Needlework, and Walking, Local History, Strolling, Bridge and Country Dancing.

Marjorie Michael who co-ordinated and tutored the country dancing group in the South west had offered to tutor one in the South East and Maureen Grey became co-ordinator. Enid Brown, who was already the co-ordinator for Local History II, had come to the meeting because she lived in the area. She took the names but at the subsequent meeting Jean Jackson became co-ordinator. Doreen Sissons organised the strolling groups but Freda Hunt became co-ordinator of the Wednesday group - using public transport - and Doreen co-ordinated the Saturday walking group for a short while before Joyce Beans and Alan Key took over. Bridge never opened because a tutor was not available. Maureen Hessell became a great asset to SU3A acting as Enquiries Officer for several years as well as doing many other behind-the-scenes computing tasks. The Country Dancing was the one group which attracted members from the South West and it was their input which kept it going. Unfortunately it never attracted enough local members and eventually closed.

Before the end of the session a follow-on meeting date and venue were announced. It was hoped all who wished would attend as a means of getting to know one another and as an opportunity for more new groups to be formed. Two such meetings were held, but as people got into groups it was thought that these meetings were unnecessary. With hindsight Barbara feels perhaps there would have been more growth if they had been kept going as coffee mornings and made more interesting with speakers etc. Starter group meetings were held either at Barbara's home or sometimes the volunteer name-taker's home. The groups which flourished were mainly those created that day. Barbara had regular get-togethers for the co-ordinators during the first year to give encouragement and help with difficulties. At the AGM in March 1997 Barbara was elected to the General Committee,

Five years later groups in the South East are still going strong; some have closed, others have opened. One walking group is unique in that it meets at Crystal Peaks car park and then members take only as many cars as needed to the start of the walk, using different members' cars each week. The strollers using public

transport started in the South East and there are now four groups, with members all over the city.

The large numbers who showed interest initially have not all maintained their interest. However, there is a lively committed nucleus of members in the South East with a trickle of new recruits.

### **North Sheffield**

The development in the South East of the city described above was not the only response to the growth which these numbers represent. The years from 1999 to the present have seen the creation and growth of a separate U3A in North Sheffield.

To the North of the city is an area made up of a number of large post-war council estates, older Victorian and Edwardian communities and still-growing, privately-developed estates, begun in the seventies.

*Development in the area is referred to elsewhere by **Julian Oakley**. **Bob Smith** has also written a more detailed piece on the origins, processes and the outcomes of this development on which this history has drawn.*

Towards the end of 1996 SU3A Membership Secretary, George Noble, confirmed that more than 90% of SU3A members lived in the South West of the city. There were fewer than ten of SU3A's 1400 members in a major area of the city stretching from Attercliffe in the South to Stocksbridge in the North. Proposed work in North Sheffield was seen as a continuation of the SU3A committee's agreed policy "*to extend our presence into other areas of Sheffield*".

Setting up any new U3A even in relatively prosperous and advantaged areas involves much planning and hard work. Often the active and helpful members of the committee of a neighbouring U3A or group of U3As do most of the preparatory work needed.

In early 1999 a grant was awarded to SU3A "*to develop self-help learning opportunities for older people in North Sheffield*". It fell within a framework created by the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) and National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NAICE) entitled 'Older and Bolder'. One of the project's aims was to promote and develop better learning opportunities for older people, notably 'Lifelong Learning'. As Chairman of SU3A at the time Julian Oakley deemed that involvement could be

compatible with the aims and purposes of the SU3A. As involvement would have presented an opportunity to introduce the U3A ethos of self-help learning to a wider constituency within Sheffield, he decided that an application for funds should be submitted. It was envisaged that, if successful, any funds granted should be used to expand membership in the north of the city. Because of time constraints, it was not possible to involve all the SU3A Committee before an application was submitted.

At the next Committee meeting Julian reported that although part of the bid had not succeeded, SU3A had been awarded £1,500 to promote adult learning in the North East of Sheffield. Bob Smith had also been offered access to a grant awarded by NIACE to the Adult and Community Education section of the Sheffield City Council to do a similar project in the Parson Cross area. Doubts were expressed in Committee about timescales and the likelihood of the success of the programme. A final decision was deferred until a new committee was in place following the impending AGM when the decision could be reviewed.

A change of leadership, a committee with new officers and five new members, resulted in a change of view and strategy about the nature and scale of the involvement. The new committee decided not to go ahead with the proposals accepted by NIACE and returned the grant.

Meanwhile additional funds from the same, DfEE/NIACE, source were granted to Sheffield Local Education Authority. A sum of £1,000 was added to that available for Parsons Cross. A small project group - under the chairmanship of Julian Oakley - included Bob Smith, Frank and Ruth Abel, George Noble, John Salt (Age Concern) and representatives from Barnsley and Rotherham U3As. Rita Brent attended as an observer on behalf of SU3A but played an active part in the work.

Publicity was followed by open meetings which led to the setting up of a steering committee. After further meetings it was decided that there was sufficient support in the catchment areas to merit forming a new, free-standing U3A to be known as North Sheffield U3A. Finally, at Paces High Green Centre on Wednesday 15 September 1999 the first committee of a new separate North Sheffield U3A was elected. Bob and Julian both served on its original committee.

The result has been a small but active U3A in North Sheffield.

## Summary

These different initiatives have resulted in interestingly different outcomes. The core of SU3A has continued to grow, and draw its membership chiefly from the South and West of the City. South East Sheffield has developed as an integral part of SU3A but running a number of separate groups and activities providing mainly for people living in that part of the City. North Sheffield developed affinities with Barnsley as well as SU3A and has opted for a 'free-standing' status. It operates quite independently as North Sheffield U3A and has a history of which it is rightly proud. Links remain with those who undertook the principal work of development.

Despite some serious misgivings, the project was described as "*successful*". In his annual report Jack Holland, then Chairman, made it clear that "*we hope to learn from this and seek to expand further into the Northern part of the city in due course*".

### Sheffield U3A 2000

The management and organisational responses to the growth described have called for a response of some kind from the main committee more than once. In 1994 a working party was set up '*to review possible problems arising from the increase in our numbers.*' It reported that it believed '*there is no need at the present time to take any steps to alter the structure of SU3A*' (Jack Holland 1997).

In 1996 a further sub-committee was formed, with the title Development Sub Committee, chaired by Yvonne Gutsell, "*to take stock of our present position*". It explored the options and offered three possibilities to the Committee: downsizing, freezing membership at the present level, and continuing growth as a single city-wide entity. This latter was the group's recommendation in its report "Sheffield U3A 2000". The report and the issues it raised caused widespread discussion and quite heated debate. A special edition of LINKS was published to allow the views to be expressed and shared across the organisation. Twenty recommendations in all covered such issues as membership and communication. The recommendations sought to address the issues facing the expanding organisation if the principal option was accepted. It identified new facilitating and management functions which proved unacceptable to the wider membership and which were not

implemented, although the key proposal of a single city-wide structure was to remain the model of choice.

The issues associated with the continuing growth and extension of the SU3A, which has continued to grow 'like Topsy', and the commitment to ensuring a service across the city, remain a focus for thought. The General Co-ordinator's report to a Committee meeting on 12th January 2001 states that Age Concern *"are working with residents in the over 50 age range on the William Sutton Housing Trust Estate in Hillsborough,"* She sees the wider extension of SU3A as *"unfinished business"* as far as she is concerned.

## **General Co-ordinator**

The role of General Co-ordinator has evolved as a consequence of the growth in membership, an increase in the number of groups and the need for new co-ordinators in particular to have a reliable point of reference in case of difficulty. Most new groups turn to the General Co-ordinator for support and occasional guidance and advice in developing group activities. The General Co-ordinator also keeps a watching brief on the health of all groups, and maintains records of group structures, organisation and programmes so that information can be provided to enquirers, including those attending our new members meetings.

The duties and responsibilities associated with the role evolved through work which records show to have been carried out by Liz Vallance from 1992 until Bob Smith assumed the role and the now familiar title in 1996.

### **General Co-ordinators**

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>1992 - 1996</b> | <b>Elizabeth Vallance</b> |
| <b>1996 - 1997</b> | <b>Bob Smith</b>          |
| <b>1997 - 2001</b> | <b>Barbara Steel</b>      |
| <b>2001 -</b>      | <b>Margaret Bullivant</b> |

## **General Secretary**

The successive General Secretaries are shown by minutes and other records to have played a central and crucial role in the day to day work and the smooth running of SU3A. They have - from the earliest days - kept minutes, written letters, convened and otherwise serviced Committee meetings.

### **General Secretaries**

|                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| <b>1986 - 1988</b> | <b>Shirley Haworth</b> |
| <b>1989 - 1990</b> | <b>George Dobinson</b> |
| <b>1993 - 1994</b> | <b>Margaret Barlow</b> |
| <b>1994 - 1995</b> | <b>Patrick Huck</b>    |
| <b>1995 - 1997</b> | <b>Julian Oakley</b>   |
| <b>1997 - 1999</b> | <b>Bob Smith</b>       |
| <b>1999 - 2002</b> | <b>Mary Balbi</b>      |
| <b>2002 -</b>      | <b>Helen Cowen</b>     |

## Group Histories

This section contains a number of pieces by members, co-ordinators or former principal activists about particular activities. They record the starting points and processes and describe the activities and personalities involved. They are in the main unedited and the list is by no means complete. The process of starting groups has varied widely and rested heavily upon the availability of appropriate leadership or a body of interest which has built a sufficient 'head of steam' to attract or produce a leader from within.

Early records show that 11 groups were in existence by March 1986 with co-ordinators for each. Already a second needlework group was emerging from a waiting-list for the first. Alternative medicine, bird watching, chess, current affairs, drama, French, history, outdoor pursuits, social and community concerns and yoga were all waiting in the wings or seeking co-ordinators. By January 1987, French, alternative medicine and yoga had acquired the leadership they needed and appear as fully-fledged groups in the Newsletter. Typewriting had joined the ranks by October of the same year. The regular general meetings continued to provide a focal point for the whole membership and were held in a variety of venues - often courtesy of the Polytechnic but including the Abbeydale Hall and the Cathedral Hall. Pubs and sports clubs have been among the other venues.

### Bridge - Betty McCall

In 1987 Betty McCall, her husband David, Eileen Graham and the late Phyl Graham were on their way to a SU3A house party and started chatting about what might be a good social activity for their old age. Bridge, good for the brain!

Lessons were held at Eileen Graham's house. The four of them were absolute beginners. Betty had never even played cards, *"didn't know a spade from a club, and had to learn a foreign language too!!"* After about twelve lessons, David McCall negotiated a free room at Abbeydale Hall and became Co-ordinator. However, no-one else was interested. The four began going to Carol Walton's Tuesday club at Greystones to improve. However, things slowly got going. Carol took pity on them and gave up her Friday afternoons to

encourage and support. (She was too young to be in U3A!) Jack Connors, from out of Sheffield, offered his experience with a blackboard. Stan Thirwell gave lessons on scoring and taught them to be silent bidders. Otto Jakobovic joined and helped with teaching; members made tablecloths out of old curtains. Equipment was borrowed from Sheffield Bridge Club, courtesy of Bernard Brightman. David put a notice up in the hall of Abbeydale, and suddenly the group was swamped with players of all levels, who became the backbone of the first SU3A Bridge Club.

### **Walking - Frank Gutsell**

The pleasure that the people of Sheffield take in the countryside around the city and beyond was bound to evolve into a walking group of some kind. Its first showings were in the form of '*group ambles*' by the Natural History group (April 1988) '*and an informal walking group during the Summer months*' (April 1989).

Although there had been an earlier abortive attempt to form a SU3A walking group, in reality the seeds of the first group were sown in 1989 when Yvonne Gutsell telephoned the then Secretary, Shirley Haworth, to ascertain if there was such a group. She received the well-known SU3A response... "*there isn't such a group, but there is now. You have started it...*" Hence when Frank returned from London he found that he and Yvonne had been charged with forming and organising such a group, a little daunting for two relatively new members with virtually no knowledge of the workings of SU3A and a complete ignorance of walking in the Peak District or anywhere else in the Sheffield area.

They advertised in LINKS for anyone interested in the formation of such a group to attend a meeting at their house and were agreeably surprised when sixteen members turned up. It was agreed that the formation of a walking group was both viable and desirable but there was disagreement as to the days and frequency of walks and the distance to be walked. As there was no obvious day that would suit everyone it was agreed that walks would be held on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday on successive weeks with a start time of 2p.m. and a distance of 5 - 6 miles other than the Thursday walk when the start would be at 10.30 am and a distance of 7 - 8.5 miles.

Frank and Yvonne compiled a twelve-week walks programme from walking books and the first walk was held on 3rd April 1990 at

Great Hucknall which was supported by thirteen members. The walkers assembled at a pub only to find that it was closed - the organisers' first "black mark". Although the walk was considered to have been a success this was not very obvious as the attendance at the walks dropped and only reached double figures on one or more occasion until September 1990. There was a very real danger that the Group would fold.

In an attempt to get a better response, walks were discontinued on the least popular days and were re-arranged for Tuesdays and Wednesdays only. This did not result in any increase in support and on 17th May a walk had to be abandoned as only one lady member turned up.

Frank Gutsell, who was by now vice-chairman of the SU3A Committee, was somewhat reluctantly persuaded by Mary Clark (Chairman) and others to persevere for a further three months.

An advertising stand was mounted at the SU3A Open Day in September which attracted a great deal of interest. So much so that eighteen members supported the next walk. This level of support was maintained throughout the rest of the year with the attendance averaging 22 members. This level of interest continued for the rest of the winter months and on 26th March 1991 40 members supported the walk.

By the time of the next Open Day (September 1991) the group nominally had 100 members although the average attendance was about 30. Another 53 members expressed an interest in joining the group at the Open Day and although not all of these attended a walk it was apparent that for safety reasons the group should be divided and split into two groups - A and B. Frank Gutsell announced his decision at a Walking Group General Meeting with a cut-off date of September 1991. Members who had joined before that date would remain in the original group (A) whilst those who had joined later would form a new group (B). To assist with this Jarvis Close left the group and became co-ordinator of Group B.

As the new group were very inexperienced it was agreed that the A Group walk leader would lead an identical walk for Group B the next week. This assistance was continued for three months after which the B Group found their own walk leaders and increased their distance to 6 miles - 7.5 miles.

A close liaison was maintained between these two groups with a treasurer acting for both and a code of safety adopted. There was

also an opportunity for members to walk with alternate groups if so agreed by the co-ordinators. A T-shirt publicising the SU3A was obtained by Yvonne Gutsell and was worn by most members of the two groups.

A General Meeting was held annually which allowed members to assist in formulating policy and new ideas. At the first of these Yvonne Gutsell gave details of a possible weekend walking holiday at a Holiday Fellowship centre in Conway. The response was so positive that the 40 places were booked before the end of the meeting. The weekend was a great success - with many friendships cemented - and was the first of a series of annual week's walking holiday at similar centres, including Bourton-on-the-Water, Coniston, Isle-of-Wight, Malhamdale and Minehead.

Although these holidays were always well supported they were becoming increasingly expensive so it was agreed that the A Group would change to a two weeks overseas walking holiday. The first of these was to the Auvergne. These overseas holidays have been held ever since, with the latest to be undertaken in Minorca in May 2002.

In 1994 it was realised that the B Group had too many members so an additional group (C) was formed with Hilda Wisbey leaving B Group to assist with its development. This new group adopted exactly the same policies as the A Group, and the same high level of mutual co-operation was observed. In 1994 another group (D) was formed to accommodate new members and the more active members of the other groups by organising walks of between 10 and 20 miles. The four groups still maintained a common policy with the respective co-ordinators taking it in turns to act as Co-ordinating Chairman, with a single treasurer.

In 1995 Group C was over-full and spawned a new group (E) to walk the same distances as the A and C Groups. The co-ordinator of this group joined the "policy co-ordinating team" and likewise shared the same treasurer and attended the same General Meeting. However at the next General Meeting this joint association was disbanded and from then on each group operated independently of the others.

An additional group had been formed in 1991 - Saturday Strollers - for those members who wished to meet, stroll 3 - 4 miles and end at a pub. This group did not join with the others but attracted good support and is still functioning with 41 members.

By now walking was very well established as a SU3A activity and Sheffield became a founder member of the National Walking Study Group. By 2002 there were 22 walking groups with a total membership of around 400.

The friendships made and fostered by the walking groups have become an important aspect of the activity. Even when members become unable to walk the allotted distance they will turn up to join other members for a pub lunch as well as any social gathering that may be arranged.

A Group (with perhaps the oldest members) has gone one step further and established a sub section (Alpha Group) with walks of 3 to 4 miles. These walks are planned to start and finish at the same location as the A Group so as to maintain social contact and friendship with the realisation that sooner or later most of the original group members will drop down to the shorter distances walked by "Alpha". It will be interesting to see whether the other groups evolve in similar ways.

### **Outdoor Sketching - Myra Powell**

The Outdoor Sketching groups were conceived early in 1995 during a SU3A Walking Group holiday in Cyprus. Some members of that party felt it would be pleasant to pause in their walks and sketch the scenery, but, of course, the other walkers wouldn't have waited!

*"Why not start a new group?"* was asked. So on their return home a notice was put in LINKS asking anyone interested to make contact - and there was another group. It was not long before there were two groups, as the original day chosen for the meetings was not convenient for everyone.

From April to the end of October each year they can be seen with their portable chairs, paper, pencils and paints anywhere within Sheffield and the Peak District, and even on occasion further afield - in Southwell, Rufford Country Park and Wentworth. Sometimes in the winter months they have sketched in such places as the Cutlers' Hall, the Lyceum and Crucible theatres, Sheffield Cathedral or an art gallery locally and in Leeds, Barnsley, Rotherham and Derby. They have put on an exhibition in the Crucible on one of their Open Days at the manager's invitation. They have also holidayed and sketched together in Whitby and, more exotically, in Madeira.

One of the group's favourite venues locally is Fanshawe Gate Hall, Holmesfield, where it has been made very welcome. A few of the sketches have, indeed, been included in the recently published book about the garden there: "A Garden in my Life" written by the owner, Cynthia Ramsden, to raise money for charity.

Interest in the group continues and they add to their members every year. They have no tutor, but learn from and encourage each other. No-one's talents are considered too meagre or too great for them to become a member. They admire one another's efforts and enjoy each other's company.

### **Sea Yachting - Roy Darlison (& John Wheeldon)**

Sea Yachting entered the list of activities in August 1996 (LINKS number 66) The group's co-ordinator, John Wheeldon, is himself a RYA qualified yachtmaster. The activity has rested heavily upon the willingness of a (non-member) yachtsman/teacher - Geoff Atkinson - prepared to share his knowledge and, more significantly, his boat - a Nicholson 32 - and his adventurous spirit with those interested in practising existing skills, developing a latent interest or learning new skills from scratch. The voyages have ranged throughout the Western Isles of Scotland, the Irish Sea, the Scilly Isles and the South West of England. Crews have included not only SU3A members but have introduced members' family and friends to the sport - and the thrills of seeing whales and dolphins etc. - alongside long standing friends of the owner. Sadly, Geoff Atkinson's health has led to the activity being (at least) suspended for the time being.

### **Aspects of Art 1 - Pat Roddis**

Pat had always been interested in art and the history of art, but when she joined the SU3A there was no group catering for this particular interest. When she suggested it, the response was, "*It's up to you*". Having put a notice in LINKS to see how much interest there was, thirteen people replied and a first meeting was held in the upper room at the Robin Hood in Millhouses Lane in September 1996. A committee was appointed; Pat was nominated as co-ordinator and the group decided to meet on a monthly basis in the same venue. (This was free of charge.)

In the early days speakers were SU3A members, but members soon realised that there were not enough specialist

speakers within SU3A to keep them going for very long. Their numbers too were growing very quickly and they decided to find more suitable premises.

In January 1997 they moved to Holy Trinity Church Hall. Soon there were 50 members and an agreement to pay an annual subscription to cover fees for speakers and the rent of the hall. Speakers were invited from outside the SU3A and this widened the list of topics that was covered. They put out a suggestion box and the first suggestion was a visit to Monet's garden. Yvonne Gutsell was in the group at the time and she organised the group's first big venture. Twenty-seven members of Aspects of Art and other SU3A groups had a splendid four day visit to Monet's garden and various chateaux around Paris. In 2000, a group visited Barcelona to see the work of Guadi and other Spanish artists.

Since then there have been talks on a wide range of subjects and several demonstrations. The group has visited art galleries all over the country, London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Salford to mention a few.

The membership was closed at 70 and two years ago a second group, Aspects of Art 2, was formed. Interest is still keen and there is still a waiting list. Pat has just retired as co-ordinator and Wendy Finch has taken over. They have a small and hard working committee that meets after the monthly meeting. After five years the group is still going strong.

### **Archaeology - Margaret Usherwood and Edith Fawcett**

The archaeology group was founded at the initial meeting of SU3A in January 1986. The group has never had a fixed membership, and welcomes any SU3A members who hear of its excursions and are interested. Two people, the leader and the convener, organise and run the group.

The annual pattern has changed little. Of the monthly meetings, they have an indoor one in January and an 'in-Sheffield' in February. From March to October there are afternoon excursions of up to 30 miles distant, with often one full day a little further afield, then a planning meeting in November but nothing in December.

They interpret archaeology quite widely. This has become increasingly necessary as the years go by. They do make repeat visits. A sample of sites visited includes: Arbor Low, Mam Tor, Toxford Windmill, Gainsborough Hall, Cresswell Crags, Southwell

Minster, Darfield Heritage Centre, Stannington Village and Kingshaugh.

### **German - Irene Roberts and Mary Emery**

This group met in the Polytechnic College, Pond Street, in 1988, with ten members, under the tutorship of Steve Mendelsson, a university lecturer - though not in German. He voluntarily undertook the teaching role and the group enjoyed his teaching and his wonderful sense of humour for three years, until pressure of work prevented him from continuing.

From October 1991 Irene, as Co-ordinator, took charge of the group, first at the Polytechnic and then, when the cost of hiring the room rose considerably, at her home at Firth Park. Here they had groups working at three different levels until 1997, when the more advanced members had reached the level of their teacher!

After several unsuccessful attempts to find a suitable person, they had a stroke of luck. A German lady rang Irene to ask if any of the group would be interested in joining her German club at the University. Any SU3A co-ordinator will guess the outcome... The lady, Katherine Smith, gallantly rose to the challenge and has been giving the group the benefit of her most entertaining and lively teaching ever since! At the moment, Katherine is recovering from an operation, so the group's future is a little uncertain, but the co-ordinator is filling the gap with part of the group, and the hope is that it will be possible to continue after the summer break at Mount Pleasant.

### **Spanish Intermediate II - John Brennan**

The term 'intermediate' is arbitrary, but all members, on joining, have some linguistic competence in Spanish, albeit at different levels. The group started in 1995 with four members, one of whom, Sarah Giles, agreed then to act as tutor. Since that modest start, it has grown steadily to its present membership of 16, which is felt to be the maximum for the group to function in its present form. Over these seven years, membership has gradually changed, but it is reassuring that the reasons given for dropping out, have always been personal and with never any expression of dissatisfaction with the class. There is a "solid core" of members, including three of the original four as well as one who makes a 30 mile round journey

each week. Attendance varies, averaging about nine or ten per meeting.

Sarah sets the scene with a gentle patience, using different approaches which always involve everyone. We do not follow a specific syllabus or have a fixed format for classes, but the overall aim is always to reinforce and develop existing skills - those of listening, reading and speaking. There is, however, less attention given to written skills than some might wish.

At times the group begins by discussing, always in Spanish, a topical issue. Recent ones have taken us from 'a holiday in the Amazon rain forest' to 'a walk round Dronfield'. Local, national and world problems, provide an inexhaustible source of issues. On occasions these discussions generate their own momentum, sometimes lasting for much of the meeting.

They regularly read and translate articles from Spanish newspapers, magazines and books. This often triggers spontaneous discussion.

On occasions more precise listening skills are exercised using audio tapes or with the help of speakers from Latin America. Over the last year they have benefited from the help of Rodrigo, a Chilean mature postgraduate student, who generously gives his time to preparing material, correcting members' work and exercising their listening skills to the maximum, and occasionally beyond. These classes have entailed a much more structured approach.

When neither Sarah or Rodrigo are available, members spend their time usefully on a self-help basis. Members provide resources such as photocopied material, written accounts or audio cassettes which provide ample scope for discussion. Whatever the approach, there is always the serious aim to improve their Spanish. There is always help and encouragement forthcoming from other members of the class. Humour is never far below the surface and every effort is made to make new members welcome.

In order to compile this account, members were invited to present their individual impressions. Perhaps the following quotation may speak for all. *"There is always a friendly happy atmosphere at our meetings and I always leave feeling better for a morning well spent."*

*Shirley Haworth has contributed the following pieces on groups which she enjoys.*

### **Poetry Study**

Soon after SU3A started, the first poetry group met with Marjorie Riley as Co-ordinator. In 1988 Enid Bennett took over that role, and for nine years the group met in Dr. MacKerness's house for fortnightly lectures on a range of poetical works.

After Dr. MacKerness's death, Mike Gardner became the tutor in 1997 and inspired lively discussions on the work of different poets. For many years an Annual Poetry Day has been held at Mary Clark's house.

### **Looking Towards the Mystics**

On 27th January 1992 five people met to initiate a group "Looking Towards the Mystics". This met monthly until towards the end of 1999 when the group decided to meet every two weeks. Since then numbers in the group have hovered around ten. Writings of the mystics in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are read through together, with an exchange of comments, questions and ideas. Despite pondering on the mysteries of life, the members of the group do not take themselves too seriously. Zen Buddhism will say that Reality is a serious matter, but not solemn.

### **Listening to Music**

At the 'Market Place', near the beginning of SU3A, Edward Davis offered to lead a group listening to classical music. This ran, under his expert guidance, for more than ten years. By that time he was running three groups instead of just one, and other music groups came into being. Margaret Davis was always there, being generous with tea and refreshments.

### **Novel Reading I**

The first meeting was held in 1988 in the home of Alfred and Margaret Jowett, and meeting once a month they reached their hundredth novel in 1998. The first book to be discussed was Iris Murdoch's "The Good Apprentice", and this was followed by books from all over the world written during the last two centuries.

At each session a member of the group introduces the chosen book, which is then open for full discussion. Now in 2002 there are fourteen group members, and Alfred continues with his frank and well informed opinion on every book. Pam West and Rachel Frith are the current co-ordinators.

### **Novel Reading V - Marion Edmonson**

Novel Reading Group V is a group made up of chatty people with a love of reading, but with different points of view. I do not think any of us takes all that is said very seriously, but each meeting passes a few hours very pleasantly and gives some purpose to our reading. A lot of the books I have read I would not have read otherwise and many points have been raised about various books which I had missed completely. So, yes, I can thoroughly recommend joining a reading group.

But how did this group start? It started simply because all the other reading groups were full. A few quick phone calls gave Marion about six names that were on various waiting lists and a few further phone calls produced enough people, four in all, to start a new group. None of them knew one another and none of them had been in a reading group before. They discussed their preferences and discovered that they were four different people with four different likes and dislikes but that all wanted the group to succeed. So after a browse through the Sunday papers' book reviews they chose enough books for the first four months.

Their very first book for discussion was David Guterson's "Snow Falling on Cedars" and what a good choice that was! A murder whodunit set in a Pacific Island with racial and cultural conflict as a Japanese American was brought to trial. So the discussion turned to racial issues and how the culture of a country is always changed by its immigrants. The next book was "One Thousand Acres" by Jane Smiley. This book was set in rural America and is based on the King Lear story, but subtly transposed. So here the discussion turned to the relationships of members of small communities and such emotive issues as incest and sexism.

The group's first factual book was "King Leopold's Ghost" by Adam Hochschild. This is the story of Belgium's rape of the Congo, where in excess of five million Africans were killed in the plunder of their land. Their thoughts here turned to the atrocities made by

European countries in their fight for the treasures of Africa and how these conflicts still affect Africa today.

Not all the meetings are so deep and meaningful and they do not put the world to rights every time. A lot of laughing takes place and not all the books they read are powerful and dramatic. Other books include "Harry Potter", "Notes from a Small Island" and "Fried Green Tomatoes".

The group slowly grew, and they have had some colourful characters coming to the meetings over the last couple of years, every one of them bringing something special and enhancing the group. A few left after a meeting or two but most stayed, and now the group is a strong little group of eight, with at least seven members making it for most meetings.

The group has grown in other ways as well as numbers. Because they always meet in a pub and have lunch and drinks afterwards, the meetings have become friendly social events, which they all look forward to. Friendships were made and they arranged a first outing - to Haworth to visit Top Withens and the Parsonage - which took place in August 2002. They are also planning a trip to see the ballet of "Wuthering Heights" to be performed in the Autumn. So the reading group has changed from a meeting of strangers to a meeting of good friends and where a meeting once a month does not seem often enough.

## **History I**

In the first novel reading group, Margaret Jowett was introducing Gogol's comic novel "Dead Souls" about the purchase of non-existent serfs. This led her to give a short history of serfdom in Russia. As a result, Enid Bennett suggested that Margaret should take a history group. She began the first History group with courses about Bismark and German nationalism; Irish history followed and then a number of other courses. Other lecturers contributed their particular subjects - e.g. Max Payne and John Hepworth.

After several years the group became too large to continue meeting in members homes and new venues were necessary. The Old Library was the initial choice and offered good facilities until its unexpected sale forced a relocation to Abbeydale Sports Club where several of the larger SU3A groups meet. We now enjoy a wide ranging series of talks, increasingly offered by members of the

Group and an active membership with a regular attendance of 40 or more. There are now three History groups.

## **History II - Mary Clark**

In May 1995 History Group II proposed a visit to Prague as an outcome of series of lectures on the history of Bohemia and its place in the general history of Central Europe. It had been given by Otto Jakubovic, a member of the group originating from Czechoslovakia, and he and his wife Angela were persuaded to lead the party. Some twenty members with a few friends set off on a visit that proved to be a wonderful and at times profoundly moving experience.

Travel arrangements were facilitated by the SU3A in Yvonne Gutsell's care and the group had a coach at its disposal throughout the visit. They stayed in a simple and friendly country inn a short drive from the city.

Untouched by bombing or bombardment it is Prague's amazing architecture that strikes one immediately and lastingly - brilliant in colour with a great deal of relief ornamentation, the house fronts everywhere present a picture book effect, with seeming infinite variety in design. The city's dramatic physical setting on hills rising above the river banks, with the castle and cathedral and the Strakov monastery high above them dominate the scene and confirm its significance within the Holy Roman Empire and under the Hapsburg rulers later.

After exploring the castle and cathedral and visiting the two magnificent 14th century libraries and had sight of some of their priceless treasures of learning and theology, they walked down past the ancient Basilica of St. George, on through the 17th century Loretto Palace's lovely gardens, and on down into the city to the great thoroughfare across the River Vlatava - the Charles Bridge. Below this, virtually invisible from above, lay a little island village complete with an old mill, its wheel still intact, and a row of small ageless houses along the shore.

The coach had to park on the outskirts of the city centre so we used metro and buses, and mainly walked everywhere. Thus we could pause to admire the many fine buildings, go into a church for a music recital, gaze at the great Town Clock in the market square, apparently the meeting place for everyone, and drop into the little "Black Theatre" for a "magic" performance of Dr Faustus in

coloured lighting. We saw the Opera House/Theatre, scene of the world premier of Mozart's "Don Giovanni", and walked along a narrow lane to the Hussite Hall where Jan Huss had preached to the Protestant rebels, and which now has a fine mural telling the story of their struggles in the Wars of Religion.

The coach took them through fine countryside to visit castles, monasteries, remote rural churches and the Bohemian mint. They went to Tabor, another centre of Protestant activity during the Reformation. But there were some disturbing reminders of the Nazi occupation during WW2. In Terezin, the internment centre for the Jewish population Otto showed them the dormitory he and other Jewish boys had shared before they were all transported in cattle trains to Auschwitz.

At Lidice a beautiful modern museum centre and lovely gardens stand to commemorate the massacre of all the male population and the destruction of the original village in revenge for the death of the local commander. Back in Prague they watched a woman volunteer inscribing by hand along the walls of the New Synagogue the names and details of all the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, from which relatives and descendants can trace anyone whose fate is known in the future.

And finally, to be in Prague as they were on the 50th anniversary of its liberation at the end of WW2, celebrating with its citizens and their President, Vaclav Havel, both that freedom and the much more recent one following the end of Soviet domination, was an unforgettable experience. Thanks are due to Otto and Angela for such careful planning and leadership.

### **Drama - John Parsons**

It was Mike Gardner, tutor of the Poetry Group, who suggested forming a Drama Study Group. During our poetry group sessions, in spite of his wide knowledge of poetry and general expertise he would look at us apologetically from time to time and say, "Of course I'm really a Drama Man, you know!" As indeed he was, having been lecturer in drama at what was then the Sheffield Polytechnic. He went on to tell us that he had a whole sheaf of lecture notes mouldering in his attic so why shouldn't we put them to good use?

So, in the autumn of 1999 with an enthusiastic nucleus of members from the Poetry Group the Drama Study Group was

formed. One member suggested we tie in our appreciation of plays with visits to the theatre, so where possible we sandwich our sessions around a live performance.

Mike takes us through aspects such as plot, characters, historical background in lively and informative way and his enthusiasm is infectious! To date we have looked at a wide range of plays from “The Tempest” to “A Streetcar Named Desire”.

### **Modern Design - Peter Barclay**

After several months of trying to engage the help of an architect, John Beckett finally agreed to assist Peter Barclay in forming a design group which had some architectural content, though not entirely architectural in its studies. Peter was also aware of the Design and Fine Art degree courses provided by Sheffield Hallam University at their Psalter Lane site. Derek McQueen was a recent graduate from Psalter Lane and agreed to play an active part in the Group.

At first the new group was known as Post War Design Group taking its inspiration from the Festival of Britain in 1951. John pointed out that the Festival was the result of new concepts in architecture and manufacture arising from the Bauhaus of the nineteen thirties. The group therefore adopted the title Modern Design and eventually traced the history of design from the Arts and Crafts movement headed by William Morris. Sheffield Hallam students and staff were keen to promote the group’s interest, helping with the choice of visual aids and welcoming members to their workshops. The group remained active from September 1997 to December 2001, meeting once every four weeks. From January 2002 regular meetings were discontinued but the link with Sheffield Hallam University students remains.

In keeping with U3A tradition the group met mainly at members’ homes. Discussions were held on topics ranging from the design of domestic equipment, city traffic congestion, the Super Tram and the Heart of the City project currently under development at the Peace Garden and Millennium Gallery. The group borrowed video tapes from U3A resources and collected some of their own videos by recording material from BBC and ITV programmes.

Looking back, architecture seems to be the members’ over-riding interest. The appreciated talks on Alvar Aalto, the Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright, Corbusier and Sir Norman Foster and visits to

architectural sites were especially successful. Most memorable was a long weekend at Glasgow to study the architecture and interior designs of Charles Rennie Macintosh. They also visited the David Mellor and Gripple factories, Saltaire, the Jubilee Line, Sheffield University and the Crucible Theatre. Each summer they attended the Sheffield Hallam finals show of designs by third year students held at their impressive Pond Street site.

Hallam University proved to be a most useful source of information and ideas. The group arranged afternoon visits to each of the university's design courses, Metalwork and Jewellery, Packaging Design and most significantly their Product Design Course. One of the third year modules was Designing for an Older Population. Here SU3A could help them. The members welcomed students into their homes and discussed the problems of becoming older. The group was linked to the U3A Design Age project based in London and some Hallam students on graduation moved to the RCA which offered a Masters Degree in design.

In general it proved to be a very successful SU3A group thanks to the willingness of all members to take a part in organising the programme. The link with Psalter Lane continues and currently members are helping students with Masters and Doctorate studies.

### **Country Dancing - Margaret Michael**

In January 1993, the Country Dancing Group was formed, having its origins in the fact that many of those who were members of SU3A walking groups were also interested in dancing. Our venue was the Mount Pleasant Community Centre, where twelve keen enthusiasts, most of whom are still members of the group, gathered on a very cold day.

As numbers increased, it gradually became obvious that the room at Mount Pleasant was inadequate for the needs of the group. In response to that, Margaret Bullivant investigated the merits of several church halls in search of an alternative meeting place.

In July 1996 the group moved to Holy Trinity Church Hall, Grove Road, Millhouses, where it now has 50 members on the register, with an average of 30 to 40 dancers attending individual sessions.

## **Environmental Studies I - Mary Clark**

It was as early as 1989 that Richard Baker, then vice-chair of SU3A, spoke of wishing to start an Environmental Studies group and invited Mary Clark to be the co-ordinator. Together with George Dobinson, then General Secretary, they discussed how it would work, invited some interested members to join and planned to start after Easter that year. Sadly, before that date Richard died, but his wife Grace, encouraged the others to go ahead with a project her husband had greatly hoped to launch. George agreed to take on the leadership and a group of about ten met as planned and created a term's programme. The group has met fortnightly in term time ever since.

They built on a pattern of using whatever material could be found and whoever was able to help by sharing their knowledge or experience: videos followed by discussion, talks by members, speakers from voluntary organisations - such as the Soil Association and Friends of the Earth - local farmers, overseas aid agencies, local authority speakers on such topics as transport or waste disposal, PR speakers from energy providing companies, or water boards and many others, with help from time to time from university departments.

When George Dobinson left Sheffield, Elizabeth Vallance, already a member, agreed to take on the role of Chair; an office she still holds. A themed approach included visits to woodlands, a wind power site and factory, farm land, Cromford Mill, Bernard Road waste disposal unit, a guided tour of Meadowhall and a city council housing estate to consider its relation to shops, work places and transport facilities. This last followed a study over several sessions of tape recordings of the Richard Rogers Reith Lectures on Urban Environment.

It was during sessions on energy in 1992/3 that Elizabeth brought Ralph Hebden, recently retired from Sheffield Hallam University, to address the group on alternative sources of energy. He offered to join the group and act as tutor. Most of the foregoing description of the group's activity relates to its work under his leadership. He has also enabled members to learn about sustainable development, about climate and environmental issues world-wide and where the UK relates to it as a country. He has also brought the members to a closer understanding of the

environmental history of their own city from earliest times up to now.

## Open Access Groups

From the earliest times the social dimension of SU3A had included a regular meeting of members. In the initial stages a monthly meeting kept people in touch and encouraged the continuing growth in numbers and the expansion of the range of activities.

Out of the earliest of such meetings came an activity which eventually became integrated into the work of the Social Committee.

The fourth Newsletter, in October 1986, contains the first reference to the idea of a committee to organise another layer of meetings of members. A year later (1987) a Christmas lunch was being planned for the Cathedral Hall. This event became a regular feature of the calendar for some years. A garden party in 1988 was deemed such a success that a Social Committee was formed to take responsibility for the organisation of such events on a regular basis. By 1989 the range of activities had extended to include theatre visits and coffee mornings. Some of these activities not only met their expenses but made a surplus which could be given to charitable causes. This activity was revived in 1993 on a quarterly basis, after a gap of some years.

A luncheon club first appears in the February 1994 Newsletter (Number 49) and is described in greater detail below. It is easy to see how this development contributed to the evolution of the open access groups described in this section.

*The Social Committee was very active over a period of eight years. **Ethne Fox** and **Marjorie Horner** were lead players throughout the Committee's existence. With Marjorie's help Ethne undertook to write for the record. Their contribution disguises the hard work involved in making such events successful.*

SU3A grew quickly in Sheffield in the first years attracting many members of the WEA and the former Sheffield Educational Settlement. Members of the discussion group suggested that in the summer of 1988 SU3A should have a communal event to enable the groups to mingle and let members get to know each other and share views. After much discussion a garden party was decided on and volunteers came forward.

Eileen Graham and the late Phyl Graham (not related) who lived side by side in Ecclesall loaned their houses and gardens. The date was July 14th 1988. This was a traditional garden party - strawberry teas etc. - and was a great success despite the weather and was much enjoyed by all. Its success led to the decision to make it an annual event and a Social Committee was formed.

The first committee included Eileen Graham, Phyl Graham, Marjorie Horner, Ethne Fox; Ruth Abel, Doreen Findlay, Joan Ward, Angela Jacobovic joined later. One member was to be co-opted on to the main Committee.

It was decided that the group should have our own treasurer and its accounts should be separate from the main Committee's. They always covered their costs and with the help of a raffle were able to donate any surplus funds to charities chosen by committee members. The committee was to meet monthly, but also felt it was important to meet informally at other times to exchange views. The yearly programme was carefully planned covering a variety of events: coffee mornings, a summer event and/or a winter event, a Christmas event with speaker, from the U3A if possible, and refreshments at the AGM. At this time co-ordinators' meetings were being tentatively planned. These were to be seen as a business meeting and a social gathering, probably three each year. The Social Committee were to arrange the venue and organise the cheese and wine. The early ones were at the home of Mary Clark and were always well attended. As the number of groups increased, however, this proved impractical and they moved to a larger venue - Whirlow Grange. They arranged the first theatre trip but it was decided there should be a separate committee for this.

Some of the highlights in the eight years included, in 1991, a French evening, undertaken with the help of the French group, who organised a wine tasting, and there was music, with entertainment from Catherine Davison from South Yorkshire Opera. In 1993 a Palm Court Orchestral evening was given by friends of the committee. Both were at Ranmoor Parish Centre. Other events included a Spanish evening buffet, guitar music organised with the Spanish group. A SU3A Anniversary evening at the Omega, a Garden Party in the Bishop's garden and a Christmas lunch at Tapton.

A number of different venues were used, always seeking for the perfect one. These included Whirlow Grange, Endcliffe Hall,

Abbeydale Sports Club, several church halls and of course, members' homes. Over the eight years cost of events with food rose from £4.50 to £10. This did begin to look costly, although the price covered food, venue, speaker and those tutors invited as guests by the main Committee.

Membership of the committee was not all work. They also had great fun, and there were some very funny episodes. For example: in 1994, at a special coffee morning for a SU3A anniversary there was a large and beautifully decorated cake made professionally. The scene was set, the cake was centrepiece, the SU3A Chairman came forward to cut it - and there was no knife - so it was cut up with a penknife.

On another occasion having invited a special guest to sit next to the Chairman at the top table, he was late, and then an enthusiastic member, also a little late, arrived, could not find a seat but then saw the empty one next to a friend. She immediately sat down, only with great difficulty was she persuaded to move because she was very deaf, and had turned her hearing aid off. The special guest sat next to the door into the kitchen.

There was the occasion when the door to Ranmoor was closed accidentally and the key left inside. The event had to be set up and was to start in 30 minutes - happy days!

In 1992 the membership of SU3A was 550 and increasing. The groups were beginning to arrange their own social programmes but those arranged by the Social Committee were still well attended.

The committee members were half way through their period of tenure but still had lots of ideas and in those later years had some great times. By courtesy of the Midland Bank Sports Club they had a lunch with an art show by Nora Rogerson. They had strawberry teas and coffee mornings. However, by late 1996 numbers were falling off and that Christmas they had to cancel the lunch for reasons which weren't altogether clear. It was then decided to wind up the whole programme. There are now almost 2000 members and what they did as a committee for a quarter of that number could not be done by such a committee for the existing members. They all enjoyed those eight years and were there when they were needed, and were an essential part of those early SU3A years.

*Four groups continue to feature as 'open access groups': Travel, Concertgoers, Lunch and Lecture and Theatre. These groups have had no individual membership list. Rather they are publicised throughout the organisation and invited participation on an event by event basis. Here are contributions from co-ordinators on each.*

### **Lunch/Lecture**

*It eventually became obvious that the growth in numbers made it hard to make such gatherings meaningful events. **Marjorie Smillie** (with additional material from **Yvonne Gutsell**) recalls its evolution into the present format.*

The Luncheon Club, which incidentally was always a misnomer, got off to a diffident start in 1994. The first references to the Luncheon Club appear in February as an extension of the activities of the Travel Group. The Social Section - often meeting in the evenings - had begun to lose some of its momentum and the Travel Group saw their initiative meeting the need for a meeting of members of a range of other groups. Niki Lockwood did the major part of the work, with Yvonne Gutsell in support, until it was decided that the group should be divorced from the Travel Group.

It was suggested from the platform at the AGM that more social events were needed in the SU3A programme. A Social Committee was already organising coffee mornings and strawberry teas, and more, and donating to charity any surplus they made. The new organisation would possibly combine meals and talks, but plans were vague at that stage.

With an idea of doing something for the SU3A which had given so much to them, Dorothy Manners and Marjorie Smillie volunteered for the task, together with Mary Wragg who identified Whirlow Grange Conference Centre as a venue for our meetings.

They had two meetings there. Lunch was buffet-style in a small uncomfortable dining room, and after that they had free use of a second room for their 'talk'. About thirty people attended and there was a talk about costumes at the Crucible Theatre and a depressing scientific lecture about the state of the world. In retrospect, Marjorie considered that the group probably owes its survival to those early quests who kept faith and gave the organisers a second chance! At this stage Mary Wragg who had

effected the introduction to Whirlow Grange had to retire for personal reasons, and after she had gone Whirlow Grange decided to charge extra for the use of the second room. This was not acceptable and the leadership knew the group had to move.

Help was at hand in the form of Pat Musselwhite who knew people at Castle College, and it was through her that they moved there in 1995. The food was cheap, excellent and beautifully presented by the students. The main drawback was the parking, although Supertram stopped right outside for those without their own transport. Numbers increased and there were two lunches held that year. In the autumn, Mr Anthony Davis of the National Trust spoke at one them. It was the Trust's Centenary Year and they had an interesting talk about its work. Confidence grew with the increasing numbers. The organisers decided to have three lunches in 1996: spring and autumn at the College and a summer event at Whirlow Brook Hall.

Out of the many speakers, some were more interesting than others and in the autumn Mrs Rosemary Isaacs gave an interesting talk on "The Jewish Way of Life". This was followed by many questions from an appreciative audience.

In 1997, Miss Bowen, a remarkable lady who had lived and worked in China for several years, came up from the South of England to speak of her experiences. Her lecture was entitled "Cabbages, Candles and Curriculae". She was an energetic person and she was accommodated in 'Bed and Breakfast' the night before and taken to a Chinese restaurant in Dore! It transpired that she had never before been to Derbyshire and it was agreed that Marjorie would take her for a drive around the county the following morning before lunch. At 9.00 am she phoned to say she was ready! It was a beautiful summer morning and she was overcome by the beauty of the area where many of us have enjoyed walking for years.

Numbers continued to grow - it would seem they had found a popular format - indeed at times they could not accommodate all who applied. The October lunch that year was postponed until November, due to refurbishment of the college kitchen. Although they did not know it then, the College discovered too late that the curtains in the dining room had been laundered and had shrunk, so would no longer cover the windows. This meant that Judy Collins's

illustrated lecture about work behind the scenes at Chatsworth was spoiled, because the audience could not see the slides clearly.

Off again to find a new venue, Dorothy and Marjorie visited numerous establishments, eventually settling on Tapton Hall, where in 1998, they held the spring and autumn lunches. In the summer of that year the venue was Chatsworth, for a lunch of cheese and apple pie and a guided tour of the cellars, workshops and part of the roof. The guide, who was a plumber by trade, gave everyone a unique insight into the way the estate works.

In the spring of 1999 the current Master and Mistress Cutler, Mr & Mrs Liversidge, spoke after lunch in an informal and entertaining way about their year in office. Later, in the autumn, Mr Sharman gave a fascinating illustrated talk about his daughter Helen's training for and experience in space travel.

The year 2000 was, of course, the millennium year and the main Committee organised a series of events including a reception and Luncheon in the Cutlers Hall in March. This was on a grand scale and we decided not to compete that spring.

In the autumn of 2000, John Salt, who represents Age Concern on the main Committee, accepted an invitation to Tapton. He gave a light-hearted address of both local and historical interest which he called, "A Sheffield Romeo and Juliet Story". He described love and enmity to rival the Montagues and Capulets among the wealthy and influential families in the city at that time.

This record mentions only a few of the talks enjoyed over time but the experience of organising these events has been very rewarding. However, by the end of 2000 both Dorothy and Marjorie decided to pass the baton on to someone else and since April 2001 Barbara Steel has undertaken the task. Dorothy still ably assists with the finances.

There is not always a rational explanation of why some things fail and others succeed. Marjorie considers that people enjoy coming together during the daytime for a leisurely lunch in comfortable surroundings, meeting friends and afterwards listening to a brief talk. Two or three gatherings a year may not seem many, but there is often value in scarcity. Apart from this, a lot of work is involved behind the scenes. The expectation is that the Lunch/Lectures will continue to flourish in Barbara's capable hands.

## Travel - Yvonne Gutsell

The National Travel Section was formed in 1989 following a decision made during the Annual Conference in London. The Sheffield Committee appointed Otto Jakubovic as local delegate to the National Travel Section. Although unable to attend its first meeting, Otto received the first issue of their Newsletter early in 1990. Following this he set about forming a Travel Group for SU3A.

In February 1990 issue of the SU3A Newsletter, it was proposed that a travel group should be formed for SU3A. The group would meet regularly, offer visits, trips and other travel initiatives. The Travel Group, as it was to be known for several years, was launched on March 27th 1990. Jane Dunne offered to act as convener and the inaugural meeting was held at her home. Ken Stancer was elected co-ordinator and the meeting was described as "lively". Four trips were offered from the National Travel Newsletter: a tour of Spain, Southern Spain and the Spanish Group, Thailand, and the Edinburgh Festival.

The second meeting was on the 22nd May and unfortunately only eight people attended. Ken Stancer felt that without more interest they would have to re-appraise the situation. However, undaunted, those present decided to proceed with the holidays but leave them until later in 1990 or early 1991.

The next meeting was on June 28th. What took place at the meeting, if indeed there was one, was not mentioned in the newsletter but a positive meeting seems to have taken place on July 26th, when six members were present. Two holidays were offered, one to Paris for four nights in October and one to Amsterdam for three nights in November.

A meeting was held on 3rd September but there was no detailed record of what took place. A further meeting took place on 29th November which eleven people attended, the majority of whom were new members. Jane Dunne reported on the success of the Paris trip. Five members participated. The last meeting of that group took place in January 1991.

It is not clear what happened, but in April 1991 issue of the newsletter, it was announced that a new co-ordinator had taken over from Ken Stancer. His efforts to try to establish a travel group were much appreciated, as was the work of Jane Dunne who organised and hosted the inaugural meeting.

Yvonne Gutsell took over as co-ordinator of the Group in 1991 in order to organise day trips and holidays. It was decided to ask for a one-off payment of £1.50 per member. A meeting was held at the home of Betty and Dennis Ward and a committee was set up consisting of Audrey Hallam, Margaret Mycroft and Maureen Hull, with Ron Mills as Treasurer. The first trip was to Burton Agnes Hall and the first overseas trip in 1992 was to the Floriade and Keukenhoff Gardens in Holland. The day trips have continued, on a nearly monthly basis, ever since.

Overseas visits have taken SU3A members to the USA in the Fall, the Canadian Rockies, Classical Spain, Italy (three times), France (Les Etables, Segur-Les-Villas (twice) in the Auvergne), Prague, Budapest and the Danube Bend, Berlin, Dresden and Erfurt (arriving on September 11th 2001), Poland and Australia and New Zealand. With the introduction of Winter Warmers, groups who wanted winter sunshine have been to Tenerife, Majorca, mainland Spain, Portugal and Madeira over the last ten years.

The Co-ordinator/Chairman and committee members have all organised day trips and tours during their terms of office. Betty and Joe Cotterill and Jack Davis have served on the committee over the years. Shirley Marney has served on the committee for the past eight years and assumed the Chairmanship in 2002. The current members are Barbara Robertshaw, Peter Frost, Eileen Walters, Niki Lockwood and Ken Parkin. The latter two have served on the committee for many years, Niki Lockwood as Secretary and Minute Secretary and Ken Parkin as Treasurer.

The University of the Third Age is for education in retirement. The National Travel Network, as the National Travel is known, had for some time referred to its tours as study tours. This was done in order to bring the Network into line with U3A policy. The committee decided that in future all travel activities should be referred to as Educational Day Visits and Study Tours. The Travel Group was changed to Travel when it was decided that there was sufficient funds available to cover all contingencies and membership was made free to all.

It is appropriate at this stage to mention the outstanding work undertaken by Ron Mills and Ken Parkin, who have been the only treasurers over the eleven years of the Travel Group's existence, dealing with vast sums of money and guiding the hard-working

committee, and the help freely available from Geoffrey Hunn as auditor.

### **Classical Concertgoers - Derek Shipley**

Classical Concertgoers is the youngest of the four groups open to all members of the SU3A. Its origin goes back to a meeting at the Robin Hood Hotel, convened by Barbara Steel in November 1997. Seventeen members attended, from which a group of six agreed to form a committee to set up a group which would organise concert visits. The inaugural meeting was held five days later, with Tony Allwright, Mary Balbi, Doreen Findlay, Sylvia Glew, Maureen and Derek Shipley and Muriel Stimpson. Muriel offered to become Treasurer and Mary Balbi Minutes Secretary. Sylvia has hosted the meetings and provided refreshments. Derek Shipley agreed to act as co-ordinator, with Maureen assisting. Tony later resigned, but the other members still form the committee. It was soon obvious just how much music is on offer in Sheffield - the annual Philharmonic Concert season, various amateur groups, choral societies, chamber groups, opera and ballet at the Sheffield theatres. The group identified one gap. The most prestigious orchestras and soloists rarely come to Sheffield, but regularly visit Birmingham and Manchester. The aim would be to supplement what was available in Sheffield by offering an opportunity to experience performances by the top orchestras and performers at the lowest possible price, using the advantages of group transport and bookings.

They established themselves as a self-financing SU3A group, with a membership fee to provide the necessary money to cover starting costs. Non-members could join on visits, but with an additional fee of £1. After two years the group decided unanimously to drop the group membership fee and to open visits to all SU3A members, in line with the Travel, Theatre and Lunch and Lecture Groups.

They currently provide six visits per year, all advertised in LINKS each as a complete package comprising concert (sometimes with a pre-concert talk), coach travel and gratuities. The group travels by coach and very little walking is involved. Lifts are available and refreshments can be obtained before the performance and during the interval.

The first visit was in April 1998 to the Symphony Hall Birmingham for a concert by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment conducted by (Sir) Simon Rattle. Since then, they have visited the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, the De Montfort Hall Leicester, the Leeds Grand Theatre, the Buxton Opera House, Gawsorth Hall, Harewood House and the Lichfield Festival. Orchestras have included the Philharmonia, London S.O., Royal P.O., BBC P.O., Baltimore S.O., Pittsburgh S.O., Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Israel P.O., Salzburg Mozarteum, Swedish Radio S.O., Vienna S.O. and Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin. Conductors have included Sir Colin Davis, Kurt Masur, Yevgeny Svetlanov, Yuri Temirkanov and Kent Nagano.

Three opera visits have been made: to the Buxton Festival (operas by Donizetti & Suppe), Leeds ("Eugene Onegin", given by Opera North) and Birmingham ("Rigoletto" given by the Welsh National Opera). In 2000 they enjoyed a splendid day at Gawsorth Hall followed by a Viennese evening.

Two of the most memorable visits have been to celebrity recitals. Derek's personal favourite is one given by the outstanding Italian mezzo Cecilia Bartoli in Manchester in September 2001. She sang for an hour and a half and then gave almost half an hour of encores, which had the entire audience standing and applauding - a rare occurrence in this country. The other was a dazzling performance of piano music given by the American virtuoso, Murray Perahia.

The Group does not make a profit and expenses are minimal. Any surplus from one concert is used to support one which would otherwise make a loss. As in 1998, the aim is to provide the means to enjoy live, top quality performances at an affordable price - and a happy social occasion.

### **Theatre - Joe and Betty Cotterill**

On the 15th March 1989 the late Phylis and Eileen Graham (two members of the Social Committee) organised a theatre trip to Manchester to see "Hello Dolly". As this proved successful, a Steering Committee met on the 22nd May 1989 at Phylis Graham's home to consider forming a theatre group. Twelve SU3A members attended and a Theatre Group Committee was formed with the following members: Chairman - the late Keith Haffner, Treasurer - Dick Horner, Theatre bookings and ticket distribution - Betty

Cotterill, Coach bookings - Joe Cotterill, Social Liaison Officer - Doreen Findlay

At this stage the Theatre Group had the financial backing of the Social Committee. Dick Horner, however, expressed a wish that it be independent and that there was a need to have a substantial contingency fund, to meet any necessary advance payments for theatre tickets, losses on ticket sales and incidental expenses etc. To achieve this end it was agreed that the committee organise a series of fund-raising events. The first took place on the 7th September 1989 after Mary Clark offered her home and garden, to hold a ploughman's lunch for approximately 50 people. The committee members provided all the food and drink and tickets were sold at £2.50 each. It was a highly successful and enjoyable event with the weather being especially kind. The outcome was that a profit of £110.99 was made; also between 50 and 60 people expressed an interest in becoming members of the SU3A Theatre Group. A membership list was set up and the Committee continued to organise fund-raising events, such as raffles on coach trips, plant sales coffee mornings etc.

On 26th October the Committee organised its first theatre venture - Noel Coward's "Design for Living" at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield. The first out of town visit was on the 17th March 1990 to the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, to see "Wild Oats".

A long association with the theatre and coach agent "Young at Heart" began on the 29th November 1990. They took a party to the Palace Theatre, London, to see "Les Miserables", the first of many trips to the capital. However, the group could fill only 24 seats on this - "Young at Heart" filled the coach with other club members.

Numbers increased, however, and soon the group could fill the coaches with SU3A members. Sometimes there were more people wishing to go than there were seats available, which meant that there was usually a waiting list, just in case anyone dropped out due to illness. This worked very well.

The Group membership continued to grow and by January 1992 SU3A Theatre Group became self-financing, with its own bank account, independent of the Social Committee.

In the early days there was often a communication problem with members, especially when booking shows in London. Often theatre dates did not coincide with the publication of the Newsletter, yet the organisers needed a quick response from members before

the deadline for payment. This was overcome by inviting members to go on a special list, whereby they could be contacted by telephone. Members were asked to pay a one-off joining fee of £1, to cover the cost of phone calls, photo-copying etc. (This was abolished in 1999 when the Theatre Group became open to all in SU3A.) It was suggested that the list be divided between six committee members, who would each ring twelve to fifteen members, a laborious task perhaps, yet it seemed to work well at the time. Today they plan ahead as far as possible, making certain events are publicised in LINKS.

A venture which proved very difficult to organise due to the complicated booking and seating arrangement was to the Globe Theatre in London in July 2001. However, through the diligence and patience of Denis and Betty Ward (who booked the tickets) 53 people were able to partake in this new experience.

From 1991 to 1999 they saw many of the shows presented by South Yorkshire Opera Society, which ranged from Gilbert and Sullivan to grand opera. In addition the group has always attempted to support as many local amateur theatre groups as possible, including Croft House, Woodseats, Manor and Southey Operatic Society.

June 1991 saw first of six visits to Stratford-on-Avon. This proved extremely successful and remains a popular day out.

The Christmas Musical Cavalcade in December 1995 has proved to be an extremely popular charitable event, resulting in ticket sales of over 150 being distributed to members in December 2001.

The Newsletter of February 1995 reported the death of Keith Haffner, the founder Chairman and Co-ordinator. Keith had made a great contribution to the Group and to SU3A. Joe Cotterill took on the role of Chairman and Co-ordinator. At the same time Denis Ward replaced Dick Horner as Treasurer. Doreen Findlay and Angela Jakubovic resigned in 2002. Now only Betty and Joe Cotterill remain from the original committee.

During the 13 years that the Theatre Group has existed, an average of seven events per year - shows, outings, etc - have been organised. In the early days when SU3A membership was much smaller, the demand for tickets was always high. The range of choices now available to the large membership means that there

is less support although the 'big national stars' continue to ensure a very heavy demand.

## The View from the Chair

### Chairmen

|                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| <b>1986 - 1987</b> | <b>Betty James</b>   |
| <b>1988 - 1989</b> | <b>Edward Davis</b>  |
| <b>1990 - 1991</b> | <b>Mary Clark</b>    |
| <b>1991 - 1993</b> | <b>Frank Gutsell</b> |
| <b>1994 - 1996</b> | <b>John Brennan</b>  |
| <b>1996 - 1998</b> | <b>Jack Holland</b>  |
| <b>1998 - 1999</b> | <b>Julian Oakley</b> |
| <b>1999 - 2001</b> | <b>Philip Jones</b>  |
| <b>2001 -</b>      | <b>John Richards</b> |

The Chair at the time inevitably has a perspective on the time of her/his period of office which encompasses their responsibility for providing leadership as well as making their individual contribution to whatever debates are current at the time. S(he) has to represent the organisation to the rest of the world and to retain the confidence of the membership whilst doing so. In a letter to Jack Holland, on his relinquishing the Chair, Mary Clark wrote to her successor “... *it's very hard sometimes to be in the Chair when strong views conflict...*”

A number of former office-holders agreed to write some recollections of their time in post.

### **Mary Clark: January 1990 - February 1991**

What sort of an outfit was SU3A when I joined it in 1988? What did the title University of the Third Age really mean? These questions about the two- year-old organisation had made me hesitate to become a member when widowhood and the dispersal of the family had left me wondering what structure I could create for my own life. Two good friends had coaxed me to join, one by saying it would be good for me and one by suggesting I might have something to

contribute and anyway I'd find good company there. Of course both were right.

The good company was the first feature that impressed me. A crowd of about 150 retired men and women met, mainly in small groups, to work at some cultural subject or pursue some leisure activity together. Sometimes they would gather in a large group in a hall lent by the Polytechnic to hear a lecture on some topic of general interest, followed by questions and discussion and ending with a cup of tea and chat. People obviously wanted to get to know each other, so it was easy to feel included. There was a sense that we were all glad to be free from the competitiveness and need to prove ourselves that pervades the world of working for a living. This set-up seemed to offer us a chance to discover new interests or potentialities in ourselves and to share these with others in a free exchange.

This was matched by a readiness of the members to take responsibility and to contribute ideas and expertise as participants or as group leaders. The Chair at the time was Edward Davis, retired from heading both French and Music Departments at the Polytechnic. A man of genuine intellectual ability and of kindly but firm character, he was well able to give the lead that the young U3A required. He helped us to shape our organisation and build a lasting structure for it, which has enabled SU3A to take the significant position it now holds in Sheffield's provision for senior citizens. Later, following him, during my own two years in the Chair we doubled our membership to 300 and seriously wondered if we would have to close the list at 500. But after earnest discussion we agreed that we should be open to anyone who wanted to join our venture into lifelong learning, however many applied. The fact that we offer neither exams nor degrees and accept members without requiring qualifications is sometimes challenged.

Yet the fundamental value of time spent as a student in any setting is surely the learning and personal development that takes place, which exams indeed may measure for use in the wider world, but something we no longer need. When I look back over a dozen years in SU3A I am aware of a great wealth of learning that I have experienced. I have regularly attended sessions on music, poetry and drama, novel reading, environmental issues, history and latterly, economics, sometimes in a group gathered round a highly

qualified tutor generously sharing his or her knowledge, sometimes working up themes to present themselves.

I have enjoyed social events, excursions, often in pursuit of a cultural interest, and always with a collective purpose in the visit. Science and technology, Aspects of Art and many craft subjects have joined the list on offer as have theatre and concert visits and, famously, the many walking groups and excellent travel facilities, as new members with fresh ideas have brought new possibilities into the organisation. Larger numbers make for economies of scale, particularly when excursions are planned, and for many of us new cultural activities outside Sheffield have become accessible in an easy and enjoyable way.

Is the very trigger this absence of the pressure of examination and qualifications, releasing a great outflow of energy and enthusiasm among us, generating ideas for collective study or activity? Is this sense of freedom the secret of the success of SU3A in harnessing the energy to bring the ideas and the plans to fruition? Is this indeed part of what a university has to do for its members? Universities originated when small groups of scholars broke away from church controlled learning to gather at the feet of a master (who would sit in a chair) to study or to join him in experiments in a wide, secular field of enquiry, opening up opportunities for new scientific research to develop.

While not overestimating the present level of study achieved in SU3A, one may perhaps see some echo of this process at work here. For example. the late Professor Peter Laslett, our national founder President, in his book "A Fresh Map of Life" in which he proposed the notion of the University of the Third Age, suggested that third-agers might be the very best people to undertake research into aspects of ageing and of life in retirement. He pointed out that this sector of the population was steadily increasing and living longer, and was physically healthier and financially better off now than in any previous period. Research into the sociology of the age group could be of interest to its members and of use to our legislators, already confronting the problems of an ageing population. A start has now been made by some members of the movement into this field of research, and we may expect some at least of the larger U3As to follow suit before long.

Looking back to the early 1990s I recall a constant sense of movement, of experiment in activities, testing out ideas among

ourselves to find what would capture our interest and attention and what we were willing to work at. For we certainly do work in SU3A and the evidence is to be found in the greatly increased range of interests we can now pursue. That same sense of movement and enterprise and the companionship that goes with it is still my experience of SU3A. But the very diversity on offer and the size of membership has had the effect of reducing the response to larger meetings and events, and we can no longer feel as if we knew everyone in the organisation.

Perhaps one of the challenges now is to discover ways of holding this dynamic, energetic and many-sided movement together so that its strength works for us all, supporting the multiplicity of sections - those all important groups to which we belong individually - yet giving us a continuing sense of overall unity.

We need, I believe, to maintain individually a sense of responsibility for the whole enterprise and to develop a democratic interest and concern in how it is managed and led. At the same time we must cherish and foster the small groups on which U3A in Sheffield has been built, with their proven value for learning and for the priceless comradeship and concern for each other which they have brought us.

### **Frank Gutsell: March 1991 - December 1993**

My term of office as Vice-Chairman to Mary Clark had been noteworthy for rapid growth in membership and expansion in our range of activities and number of groups. Although this was most encouraging it had identified two recurring and unresolved problems: a lack of suitable premises and difficulties caused by our recruitment policy. This latter resulted in substantial and disproportionate membership increase at, or immediately after our very successful 'open days'. This surge of new members on one date caused major difficulties for our membership secretary (we did not have a computer at that time) and more importantly for the existing co-ordinators who often had to disappoint would-be members by telling them that their study groups were full and that they could only add their names to already lengthy waiting lists.

Committee meetings and co-ordinators' meetings were held at Mary Clark's house - very hospitable and comfortable - but, with our increased membership, no longer practical. Fortunately, we were able to transfer our monthly committee meetings to the vicarage at

the St. John's church where the vicar very kindly gave us free use of his study and kitchen facilities.

After some lengthy consideration of the outstanding issues, the Committee rejected the idea of purchasing or leasing our own premises and decided to suspend the open days and to rely instead upon the distribution of leaflets and other initiatives so enthusiastically undertaken by Ruth Abel and, most productively, by word of mouth.

Whilst considering these two issues and others, the Committee became aware that we had only a very sketchy knowledge of membership views, the single means of communication being via the bi-monthly newsletter. It was agreed that much better use should be made of the co-ordinators whose knowledge was largely retained within their own small and increasingly independent groups. They knew what their members thought - we didn't. As a Committee we had been elected to act in the best interests of the members, and yet we had only a very limited idea as to what they wanted or where their interest lay.

We agreed that the friendly informality which prevailed at the co-ordinators' meetings held at Mary's house should still be encouraged but that future meetings should be held in hired accommodation with a loose agenda to which each member should feel free speak. By this means we hoped to get a better idea of the views of members in the groups that they represented. This proved to be most illuminating and on more than one occasion I, as Chairman, and other members of the Committee were told a few home truths. At least we had a much better understanding of what was expected of us, and what the members wanted.

One outcome of this expression of opinion was the realisation that we needed to change the format of our AGM. Traditionally at these meetings each co-ordinator had been encouraged to give an account of his or her group activities during the year. Even if each co-ordinator restricted himself to the allotted two minutes, many found this to be tiresome, irrelevant and of little interest to the majority. With agreement from the co-ordinators we decided to end that practice (and thus save up to an hour) and restrict that input to the Social Secretary, and co-ordinators of Travel and Theatre who were thus able to publicise forthcoming events which were of interest to all members and from any other co-ordinator who had a special point to make. The time saved gave us the opportunity

(hopefully) to provide for a more interesting afternoon by introducing an outside speaker. We were fortunately able to obtain the services of Eric Midwinter for my first AGM. He was an inspired choice and so whetted the appetites of members that we had a much enlarged attendance for my second AGM and a precedent had been set. Unfortunately, as was subsequently found, Eric proved to be 'a hard act to follow' and caused difficulties for my successors.

I would summarise my two years as Chairman by placing on record the great debt that I and SU3A owed to those members of my committee who rarely missed a monthly meeting and who endured a period of consolidation and unspectacular but steady growth, helped to move forward from the cosy and very comfortable informal type of meeting to a still friendly but more business-like environment which was unavoidable due to our greatly increased size and wealth.

For my part I thoroughly enjoyed my involvement and greatly value the friendships formed during that transitional period.

### **John Brennan: January 1994 - February 1996**

These two years marked a period of accelerated growth of membership increase in diversity of group activities and duplication of groups as the need arose. The growth over these two years - topping 1000 by August 1995 to become the largest U3A north of London - took place spontaneously without any active publicity (other than the standard leaflets in the city libraries) or recruiting drives. This passive approach was a result of a policy decision, so as to meet the need to absorb the continued flow of new members into the existing organisation, in a controlled and manageable way. New formats were introduced.

The latter proved very successful, largely due to the two new measures: information regarding full groups and waiting lists was fed by the co-ordinators to the Chief Co-ordinator to facilitate new groups, the first of the New Members Meetings was initiated by Frank Abel in October 1995 and a New Members' pack was provided.

The increasing work load resulting from increasing numbers (or occasionally a need to update) was catered for by a number of 'fine-tuning' measures, often building on foundations by pioneer members: Committee members took on specific roles and

responsibilities; the beginnings of the first use of computers - made possible by the skill and generosity of George Noble - replaced previous time-consuming manual methods, the 'cascade' method for the distribution of "Third Age News" was introduced, a fuller revised constitution was drawn up by Jack Holland; and early in 1995 there was a basic change in the format and content of the periodic newsletter to the present form.

Such rapid growth, while desirable in providing the opportunity for active involvement for all (the *raison d'être* of the U3A) resulted in a basic change in its nature. Earlier days of a smaller, socially-unified U3A where 'everyone knew everyone' slowly disappeared, to the regret of some pioneer members. A sub-committee was set up with the brief to consider the problems caused by growth - "Sheffield U3A; the Way Ahead". A policy decision was eventually made to continue as before, with growth sensibly managed by the measures recently taken.

Increasing size meant that members were identifying more and more with their own groups, as is inevitable in any large organisation or institution. The open access groups such as Theatre and Travel breached this barrier, as did some occasional activities, with the common denominator of food, socialising and 'enjoyment' e.g. the events organised by the Social Committee (strawberry and cream teas etc.) were well supported, as were the meetings of the newly formed Luncheon Club (and speaker). A one-off lunch held at the Abbeydale Sports Club was oversubscribed with 100 attending; food for thought? On the other hand the Members' Meetings, held three times a year, with a speaker on a topic of interest, received dwindling support and were eventually abandoned following discussion with the co-ordinators (i.e. the membership).

Some link with the membership was maintained by continuing the existing meetings with the co-ordinator three times a year, with a structure allowing greater involvement than previously. Any effect of these meetings is difficult to evaluate.

Contacts were made and maintained with other organisations in Sheffield which were concerned with a similar age group to our own members, or were concerned with the provision of Further, Higher and Adult Education e.g. Age Concern, Agewell, Sheffield University Department of Continuing Education, the Local Authority Education Department, Sheffield College and a broader composite

organisation of 'Adult Education Providers'. These produced a good deal of talk, but nothing of significant benefit to SU3A. Most bodies appeared to me to have their own agenda.

Little interest was taken in making contact with other U3As and despite its size, Sheffield had a fairly low profile nationally. We were able, however, to give the embryo Chesterfield U3A help in starting up. On the other hand a similar venture in Rotherham did not prevent that U3A being eventually subsumed by the Rotherham College of Arts.

Our membership of the North East (Regional) Group of U3A was largely unproductive. Meetings were held at different venues over a wide area of Yorkshire and adjoining parts.

With the possible exception of travel and walking, national networking in different activities and interests, likewise, seemed to be unfruitful to those of our members who took part although we were always represented by two delegates at the national conference.

SAGA was already involved in preliminary discussions with the National Executive concerning the publishing of "Third Age News" which would provide a free much more professional publication, in return for advertising rights. The SAGA proposal was eventually accepted in a modified version following much suspicion, acrimony and even hostility at the National Conference. The resulting publications were very acceptable and nothing sinister resulted. SAGA withdrew its involvement a few years later.

Sheffield in this period was a rapidly growing, flourishing U3A, providing a splendid range of opportunity and involvement for its members, but somewhat inward-looking in its groups. I suspect that there was a majority of members much less concerned with 'intellectual' stimulation than with socially 'easy' options.

### **Jack Holland: 1996 - 1998**

Both as Chairman and Vice-Chairman, one of my objectives was to have SU3A recognised as a significant contributor to adult continuing education in Sheffield so as to collaborate with other bodies and obtain any benefits that might be available. To this end I represented SU3A on the Adult Education Providers Group convened by the LEA.

The constitution was revised slightly - one important detail was the problem of the inquorate AGM; this, under the existing

constitution, could lead to a condition of organisational catatonia or suspended animation. With the agreement of the Charity Commission an amendment was introduced to allow a reduced quorum at the adjourned meeting.

Early in my time as Chairman it became apparent that the overwhelming majority of our membership came from the south and south-west of Sheffield. The Committee felt that this meant that the service offered to people elsewhere in the city was not as great as it should be. Thanks to the energy and dedication of Barbara Steel and others it was decided to set up a project to increase our membership in the south-east of Sheffield.

Considering the growth of SU3A and the geographical imbalance of the membership, the Committee set up a working party under Yvonne Gutsell to consider the future policy of SU3A. After some eighteen months' deliberation the working party produced a report called "U3A 2000". It contained a large number of proposals, some inevitable, some desirable and some contentious. The first draft was felt to be somewhat peremptory in tone, so it was referred back to the working party for redrafting. Some proposals required the active participation of the membership, so it was decided to publish the proposals and prepare a number of copies of the full report for members to study and comment upon. The response surprised me. I received many letters all of which objected in strong terms to some or all of the proposals; some letters were vitriolic, totally disproportionate to the nature of the report. A special issue of LINKS was produced to let people express their views, many of which were not particularly constructive. It was clear that in this matter the Committee had lost the confidence of the membership. A group of members called for an Extraordinary General Meeting. Meanwhile the Committee had decided, in view of opinions expressed, to withdraw the report, which left us with a call for a General Meeting to contest a point which had already been conceded. The members calling for the meeting declined to withdraw the requisition, so the EGM was held 15 minutes before the Annual General Meeting. It is interesting to see that some of the proposals in the report were seen as necessary and were implemented by subsequent committees without dispute.

## **Julian Oakley: March 1998 - February 1999**

Some issues don't go away. The role and duties of co-ordinators and payment of the administrative expenses, and payments to tutors were, as now, on the agenda when I first joined the Committee in 1995. Then it used to meet in St John's, Ranmoor Vicarage by courtesy of Michael Jarrett, the vicar. Trying to keep papers together, eyes and ears open, and to take notes while immersed in the depths of a comfortable study sofa was not always easy. I joined at a time of continuing rise, some might say 'explosion', in membership, activities and groups. There were inevitable growing pains and in 1996 the Committee, by then chaired by Jack Holland, decided to appoint a Development Sub-Committee to take a wide-ranging look at the future for SU3A. It was led by Yvonne Gutsell (Vice-Chairman) with Ruth Hinds (Minutes Secretary), Bob Smith (General Co-ordinator) and myself (General Secretary) as members. We had the remit to take stock of SU3A's position as at that time; to indicate how strengths could be built upon; and to make recommendations to develop and improve operations and facilities.

The sub-committee's report "Sheffield U3A 2000" was received by members as a whole with considerable misgivings and mutinous voices. Much of the early part of 1997 (prior to my retirement from the Committee) was spent in seeking to calm members' fears and to explain the sub-committee's thinking. Concerns continued to rage, not least in the Committee, and the calming role was revived when I was co-opted back to the Committee in the autumn of that year. As a result of the dissent the report was never formally implemented. Interestingly, many of the unfavoured issues and proposals in 1997 are now broadly welcomed and accepted.

During my year as Chairman (1998-99) membership and the numbers of activities and groups continued to grow. My main concerns were consolidation, maintenance of peace and the enhancing of communications with members. In the event while harmony was restored in SU3A as a whole, peace within the Committee was fragile and often disturbed by trivial and tendentious issues. No major initiatives were contemplated for the year but a number of significant developments took place. New Members Meetings, run by Frank Abel, were started to welcome

new members and tell them about SU3A and U3A as a whole. The meetings also helped them into groups where there were difficulties. In addition the wheels were set in motion for events to mark the approaching Millennium: a special lunch for all members in the Cutlers Hall, preceded by a service of thanksgiving in Sheffield Cathedral, and a special Millennium walk for all walking and stroller groups. The plans were taken to their successful conclusions by my successor, Philip Jones.

Shortly before the 1999 AGM, Government funding became available to extend the concept of lifelong learning. This was seen as an opportunity to fund the extension of SU3A to “the other side of the Wicker Arches”. (SU3A then drew its membership predominantly from the south west and south east of the city, and probably still does.) A decision to promote such an initiative was declined by the succeeding Committee but Bob Smith and I, helped by Frank and Ruth Abel and John Salt, were able to take it forward with the aid of funds channelled through Sheffield Local Education Authority. The venture culminated in the formation of North Sheffield U3A, now a small but flourishing body drawing its members largely from the Chapeltown, High Green and Grenoside areas of the City.

**Philip Jones: April 1999 - 2000**  
**John Richards: April 2001 to date**

Unfortunately my predecessor as Chairman has not been able to contribute separately to this account so I have undertaken a review of the last three years or so. However, Philip has kindly read and endorsed what I have written about his “watch”.

At the 1999 AGM five new members were elected to the Committee and this unusual situation resulted in significant changes of approach and priorities. At the outset it was clear that new ideas would be introduced, including in particular a clear determination to promote greater cohesion and unity of purpose within the Committee, aimed at repairing the loss of harmony on which previous Chairmen have already commented. The success of this approach may best be summarised by saying that although there have been occasional disagreements these have always been resolved without rancour and the Committee has invariably worked as an effective team - a situation which any Chairman appreciates.

An early task was to consider our financial position; we concluded that SU3A is strong enough to be self-sufficient and saw no need for reliance on external funding. We also developed the view that all our groups should stand on their own feet financially and gradually phased out the paying of co-ordinators' expenses from central funds. However central support remains available to newly established groups who may apply for funding to help in meeting essential start-up costs. The question of paying for tutors continued to be a contentious issue and after receiving representations from both "camps" we concluded that whilst exceptionally it is sometimes necessary to pay for external speakers, no payment should be made to SU3A members although groups may still wish to show their appreciation by giving suitable book, record or other tokens.

The regular quarterly meetings for new members continue to be very successful and a most encouraging feature is the frequency with which new groups emerge as a direct result of enquiries made and enthusiasms shown at these gatherings which regularly attract audiences of 50 or so. No less successful is the re-launch of the half yearly meetings of co-ordinators which provide a vital communication link between the wider membership and the Committee. The rapid growth of the SU3A (now nearing 2000 members) has reinforced the need for effective communication and these meetings have been helpful in meeting this need.

Much the most important bridge with the membership remains LINKS, our in-house magazine published every two months, with the Centenary issue appearing in August 2002. The current editor, Nigel Sandford, has been conspicuously successful in developing the quality of this much valued publication, building on the foundations laid so ably by Margaret Briddon and her predecessors as editors.

Although the first two years was mainly a period of consolidation and reinforcement it did include our very successful Millennium activities reported on elsewhere and also saw the start of the SU3A History project of which this forms part. We also embarked on exchange visits with other U3As, those with Lincoln and York being particularly memorable.

Our constitution was also updated during this period, and although the proposed changes were modest in scope the process was not without difficulty. Such formal matters are not the most

attractive inducements to encourage members to attend an AGM and in 2000 we lacked a quorum resulting in an adjourned meeting being necessary to transact the necessary business. Attempting to improve AGM attendance by inviting guest speakers has proved to be of some success and they have included, in 1999, Bruce Kent, in 2001 Kate Wedd the National Chairman of U3A and in 2002 Bob Kerslake the Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council; this is a pattern likely to be continued.

More recently we have launched SU3A's bursary scheme aimed at supporting attendance at U3A summer schools and other approved learning events. Disappointingly, and despite publicising more flexible arrangements in LINKS, there have been no applicants to date. We have also aimed to embrace modern technology by backing a dedicated SU3A web site now in the last stages of development. This should provide members with up-to-date information on activities in advance of data available through LINKS and will give potential members a good idea of what SU3A is all about.

The survey of members which formed part of the 2002 subscription renewal process produced some very illuminating information. Most members heard about SU3A by word of mouth and well over half had joined since 1996. Social contacts and mental stimulation were the most important factors in contributing to SU3A enjoyment, further evidence of which may be illustrated by the overwhelming majority of members reporting that their expectations on joining had been fully (57%) or mainly (32%) met. Touching comments were made by some members who said that membership had made a real difference to their lives - *"U3A has been a lifeline to me... many grateful thanks to all workers for SU3A and their commitment to us all"* and *"I would just like to say thank you. Your excellent U3A has given me reason to enjoy life again"*.

After nearly four years of seeing SU3A in action from the perspective of Committee member and Chairman I am left with a range of impressions:

- The importance of a purposeful and united Committee in promoting the well-being of SU3A.
- The commitment of many members who play a relatively unseen role but who make a major contribution to the smooth running of what is now a quite significant operation.

- A danger that our primary objective “... the education of middle-aged and older people not in gainful full-time employment” could become submerged by activities which are predominantly social; the ideal mix is to ensure that the learning experience remains fun.
- The satisfaction that so many of our members derive from their involvement. The greater the degree of participation the more these members seem to value what is available to them. The few grumbles which have come my way tend to be from those who are more inclined to be ‘passengers’ than active participants.

## **LINKS:** a Review of the First 100 Issues

*The Newsletter has been a feature from the beginnings of SU3A. The present editor - **Nigel Sandford** - reviews its history as the 100th issue goes to press. A fuller version of this history was published in the August 2002 edition of LINKS.*

The first meeting to launch the Sheffield U3A was held on 5 March 1986 and within two weeks Newsletter No 1 was sent to all those who had expressed an interest in becoming members. It began with an undertaking that newsletters would be issued at intervals to all members 'so as to let you know what is going on'. A pattern was established almost immediately of bi-monthly issues, which from February 1987 has remained unbroken for more than 15 years, right up to the publication of the 100th issue in August 2002.

Surprisingly, the content of the early newsletters, if not their format, was remarkably similar to what appeared in 2002. Details of group activities predominated, together with information about membership of the Committee, its meetings and decisions. New groups were publicised; social events were announced; reminders were given about unpaid subscriptions; the National U3A Annual General Meetings were reported. Tear-off slips for visits and Christmas parties were included from the start, as were appeals for volunteers to help with SU3A administration. The first dozen newsletters rarely exceeded three or four sides of A4 typescript, but the content has steadily expanded over the years as more features have been included.

The first producer of the newsletter was Shirley Haworth although, initially, the role was an adjunct to her position as SU3A's first secretary. It was not until January 1989, however, after eighteen issues had been published, that the term 'Newsletter Editor' was formally adopted. Shirley Haworth had been responsible for the production of forty-two newsletters in all when she relinquished her position as editor in December 1992 after almost seven years' service. The demands of the post had become evident two years earlier when the growing size of SU3A and the increased number of groups had led to a sharing of editorial responsibility for

the main news letter and the separately printed Group News. Ernest Street was the first to take on the task of collating all the announcements, programmes and reports submitted by group coordinators. Even with this division of responsibility, the pressures had not completely eased and, in April 1991, the editor made an appeal: *“We intend to form a Newsletter Panel to include more people to help with the editorial and production work.”* Volunteers were sought, but sadly did not materialise immediately. The next issue reported: *“it was disappointing that no-one came forward after our request for help. We do want to keep up the bi-monthly issues, but the present team cannot always be available due to other commitments”*. Fortunately, five people offered their help after this cri-de-coeur and they became the nucleus of the group who undertook the task of addressing envelopes and packing the copies for distribution.

Three editors followed Shirley Haworth: Colin Forsyth until February 1996; Margaret Briddon until February 2000; and Nigel Sandford since then. (There was a brief interregnum during the summer of 1996 when Frank Abel came to the assistance of Jennifer Pennell when circumstances prevented her assuming the editorship to which she had been appointed). In June 1994, Jarvis Close assumed responsibility for Group News; he was followed by Geoffrey Wordsworth from October 1997 and by Tony Bullivant from February 2000.

Under these four editors and four group news secretaries (as they were initially called), the newsletter underwent a series of changes and developments in format and appearance. Early issues rarely exceeded three or four sides of typewritten text, duplicated on an office Gestetner machine and hand-stapled. Clearly, there was never any complacency about the format of the publication, since issue 31 contained the announcement: *“After five years it would seem time to review our newsletter and its content, its style, its appearance. We would be happy to receive comments and new ideas from members.”* It would appear that the readership was quite content, however, as no suggestions for change were forthcoming.

There was a steady growth in size throughout the early years. From five sides of A4 in 1988, its length had trebled by the end of 1991, and had reached 36 pages by December 1995. The most significant change in format came with issue 55 in February 1995 when there was a move to the present ‘magazine’ style with A5 size

pages. This change did not, unfortunately, have an entirely auspicious start, with members complaining about the mixture of typefaces, including hand-written inserts, and the tiny print which made parts almost illegible. The editor felt the need in the next issue to offer some reassurances:

*“As many of our readers will be aware, it is becoming increasingly necessary to contain printing costs of our publication. One attempt currently being made is to change to a magazine-type format which, whilst being far more economical as regards paper, does mean a reduction in type size. Our last issue, which was experimental, resulted in poor quality print, which caused widespread complaints, and which was much regretted. This issue should show some improvement, though a consistent typesize is difficult to achieve where voluntary effort is concerned, and where the work is shared amongst those with different machines.”*

The teething problems were soon over, however, and the new format quickly won general acceptance. Further changes soon followed. A competition was announced in June 1995 when members were invited to submit a new title and cover design for the newsletter, entries to be judged by a panel of adjudicators. The initial response was slow but eventually 30 suggestions were received, and the winning title ‘LINK’, submitted by Enid Bennett, co-ordinator of the Poetry Group, was used for the first time in February 1996. A slight refinement proved necessary when it was discovered that another local organisation had been using the originally chosen version for its own publication, and after three issues the title was amended to LINKS.

For five issues beginning in August 1997, the front cover included the logos of Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield City Council with the strap-line ‘Sheffield U3A acknowledges help from Sheffield Education Services and Sheffield Hallam University’. There were protests from a number of the members, however; some felt this created an impression that LINKS was a joint publication and others thought that it suggested SU3A was not wholly independent. For one issue the strap-line was relegated to an inside page and afterwards omitted completely.

One useful feature of the newsletter has been the correspondence column. This was a late arrival as a regular feature, having been introduced only in 1997. An earlier attempt in

April 1991 to encourage members to contribute to a correspondence column failed as not a single letter was received. As the new editor, Margaret Briddon announced the introduction of a correspondence page in December 1996, and almost immediately letters began to trickle in. The first letter to be published was on the subject of the apparent absence of democracy in the conduct of affairs in one of the SU3A Groups. The second letter questioned the lack of any scientific studies in the Sheffield programme, and the third included some critical comments on the Committee's organisation of the AGM. It was clear that the new feature provided a useful vehicle for feedback and expressions of concern by members and that controversy was not to be avoided.

The existence of the correspondence pages may have stimulated the expression of strong views during the keen debate in 1997 on what proved to be controversial proposals in the report "Sheffield U3A 2000" prepared by the Development Sub-Committee. Following the announcement in issue 70 (August 1997) of the plans for the future of the Sheffield U3A, a great many letters were submitted for publication in LINKS. The early ones were published in October, but it soon became clear to the Chairman that, to allow expression to be given to a large number of very strong views and to promote constructive debate, a special edition of the newsletter was justified. This was duly published in November and, although it ran to twenty pages, was devoted exclusively to members' letters on the Report.

Over the sixteen years of publication, various new features have been introduced, some of which have flourished for a time and have then disappeared after running their course. In December 1995, three pages were devoted to computers and information technology training courses. This developed under Walter Cartwright as a regular bulletin inserted within the newsletter and appeared over a period of almost two years, before coming to a natural end. In February 1998, Peter Barclay provided a list of current and future exhibitions at the major local art galleries. This then featured in seventeen subsequent issues and was warmly appreciated by a section of the membership. It unfortunately had to be dropped in October 2000 because of pressure of space. At the same time and for the same reason the Committee had to take the difficult decision to exclude announcements in LINKS by external bodies, seeking access to SU3A members.

Another development over the past five years has been the occasional publishing of poems and prose written by members. The first of these was in February 1997, when a poem entitled 'Keys' appeared. At the same time the editor issued a general invitation to talented poets to see themselves published in future issues. Since then, poems and other pieces of creative writing have regularly appeared and have generally been welcomed as an enriching element amongst what could become predominantly routine items of news and administrative announcements. In August 1998, a limerick competition was launched. This proved popular with many entries being submitted, a number of which provided readers with entertainment over two successive issues. Since then, there has been a steady flow of such items, making it worthwhile to have a separate section for members' contributions of poetry and prose.

From the very beginning of Sheffield U3A, the bi-monthly newsletter has provided an important focus for the membership. It has served two broad functions. It has provided basic information about forthcoming activities (visits, holidays, general social events), as well as details of Group programmes and venues. It has kept members acquainted with the activities of the Committee, current issues, and developing policies. It has also met the requirements of the constitution to inform members of the agenda of the AGM and any proposed constitutional changes. Beyond this, however, it has fulfilled a deeper purpose. Since Sheffield U3A has always largely operated through semi-autonomous groups, the newsletter has attempted to meet the need for members to feel a sense of identification with a larger city-wide organisation which brings together people who share many common interests. It has already flourished over 100 issues and is likely to continue along its steadily evolving path over many more years in the future.

## Millennium Events

Two major events were promoted to mark the passing of the millennium in 2000: a celebratory walk in the Peak District and a lunch. On Thursday 9th March 2000 almost 500 members and guests met at the Cathedral for a service and at the Cutlers' Hall for a reception followed by lunch. Civic guests included the the Lord and Lady Mayoress, the Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University and the Provost of the Cathedral and their wives. Invitations were also accepted by the Chairman of the U3A National Executive Committee and the Director of Age Concern Sheffield.

The service in the Cathedral was conducted by the Provost Michael Sadgrove. An address was given by Julian Oakley. Mary Clark assumed the role - in her own words - of "*some ancient retainer... to tell the company the story of their clan*" which she did with her usual skill. The presentation was reproduced in full in the June 2000 (Number 87) of LINKS.

*Tom Foley wrote for LINKS from which this contribution is taken.*

The suggestion for a millennium walk came firstly from Julian Oakley. What evolved was a joint effort by 275 people from 15 different walking groups which reflected the demands that each walking group usually made on its membership and, through sponsorship, raised money for charity. It took place on Wednesday 12th April. The day was misty and it rained heavily. Starting from different points the spokes of a wheel came together at Carl Wark where they met up with members of the Edale Mountain Rescue Team and presented them with a cheque for £1500. It did not end before the Rescue Team had been called upon to demonstrate its skills. A member of the F group fell on Stanage Edge and needed the assistance of team members including the doctor and a helicopter to lift him to hospital.

## External Links

**Sheffield Hallam University** now, and in its former role as “the Poly”, was involved in the earliest days of the development of SU3A. Roy Bailey, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, attended the early meetings and made accommodation and staff time available in support of the launch and the early open meetings of the growing membership.

The interaction with other departments is exemplified by the links with the Product Design course and the SU3A’s Modern Design group. The University still actively supports the central organisation of SU3A.

Likewise, the links with the **Sheffield University’s Department of Continuing Education** emerge through references in both Newsletters and minutes.

The partnership with the **City’s Education Department** has been significant if not a major feature of SU3A’s history. Minutes and other records indicate a series of regular contacts with the Department including attendance at liaison meetings on various issues of common interest.. There have been grants in support of specific pieces of work and links and collaboration with individual members of staff.

**The Sheffield Telegraph** first featured early in this history in its role of a daily paper serving the city. Its contribution to the costs involved in preparing and distributing this work is central and is formally acknowledged elsewhere.

***John Salt, Age Concern’s** representative on the SU3A Committee, has written a piece describing the on-going involvement of his organisation.*

Readers of LINKS, the newsletter of SU3A, are sometimes intrigued by an addendum to the Committee list which tells them that there is a “representative of Age Concern”. Perhaps on the face of it, it does seem a little strange that a member of a rather different - and some might say a competing - organisation should contribute to the central discussions of a body like SU3A. Moreover, in that membership of the Committee rotates, but John Salt’s appointment has every appearance of being permanent, it could be argued that this alien is the Committee’s longest-serving member!

Actually, there's a good deal of sense behind this outwardly curious arrangement. Widening horizons for elderly people, and an increasing urge for individuals to grasp growing and varied opportunities for enjoyment and fulfilment, mean that the potential overall demand is unlimited. Moreover, one individual's needs and expectations are often different from another's in very subtle ways. Thus there is an underlying requirement for liaison between complementary organisations.

Now this is not to argue, along the lines of Gilbert and Sullivan, that anyone born into this world alive is pre-disposed to support the activities of U3A or Age Concern. There is, in fact, a significant overlap between the two memberships in Sheffield and common sense would suggest that some affiliations have come about purely by chance. On the other hand, it is obvious that some SU3A activities in our area are not supplied by Age Concern (Economics, Bridge, Gardening and so on), whilst a swimmer or a retired man wishing to learn to cook would turn to Age Concern. Even where titles appear to suggest duplication of effort (Local History springs to mind) the outlook and approach of tutors might be radically different.

Organisational differences come into the picture. Contrasting with SU3A provision, the Age Concern programme is not quite self-contained, but links with a broader programme of social action with headquarters accommodation in Sheffield. Obviously, it would be easy to make too much of the differences, but the value of the existence of a variety of approaches and provision to meet an ever-expanding range of student needs should not be forgotten. Conversely there is no shame in engineering mutual learning and in recognising and sharing good practice. Vive la Difference!

## **Finance**

Any voluntary society is dependent upon its Honorary Treasurer for the careful oversight and management of its funds. SU3A is no exception and has been well served throughout its sixteen years.

The growth of SU3A's funds has been largely a reflection of the almost continuous growth in membership which is reflected elsewhere in this history. The fact that it has been able to support such activities as the purchase of computers from time to time, has maintained its annual membership fee at a level which ensures that membership is available to all without making heavy demands, circulates a free newsletter every two months and has been able to meet half the cost of this history project are all functions of that prudent management by those listed below.

### **Treasurer**

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>1986 - 1989</b> | <b>Elizabeth Strevens</b> |
| <b>1989 - 1991</b> | <b>Otto Jakobovic</b>     |
| <b>1992 - 1994</b> | <b>Ken Sutherland</b>     |
| <b>1995 - 1997</b> | <b>John Roddis</b>        |
| <b>1997 - 1999</b> | <b>Philip Jones</b>       |
| <b>1999 - 2001</b> | <b>John Brooke</b>        |
| <b>2001 -</b>      | <b>John Roddis</b>        |

## Milestones for SU3A

***January 1986:***

Public meeting to launch SU3A

***March 1986:***

First Newsletter published

***March 1986:***

Membership of 50

***1996-7:***

Membership reaches 1200  
members

***1997:***

Sheffield U3A 2000 report

***1998:***

Membership passes 1400

***March 2000:***

Millennium Lunch

***April 2000:***

Millennium Walk

***August 2000:***

100th edition of LINKS

***October 2002:***

Membership reaches 1900

***December 2002:***

First history of SU3A published