

BARMOUTH



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Newsletter



Spring 2015



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A message from Alan Vincent

"Sitting here, as always a day late with my submission for Norma, thinking about what I can put into my piece for the Newsletter" – this is the same sentence that I started with in my Winter Newsletter so nothing has changed – in fact I probably could have started ALL my Newsletter pieces with the same sentence. I have always achieved very high marks in the art of procrastination – as Geraldine would confirm (through gritted teeth).

This, however, is my last little essay as your Chairman – my three years are up at our AGM in May and looking back through the pieces I have written over the last three years I find that, sadly, I have mentioned submitting them late in almost every one of them. I will still be around and will remain on the committee for now, supporting our new Chairman.

The last three years have been very interesting and I have enjoyed them immensely. Going

forward, the U3A organisation, nationally, not just in Barmouth, appears to me to have a great future. Last year's National AGM approved a document that sets out a 3 year plan of development. Part of this document reiterates and defines the Vision and Mission Statements of the U3A Organisation in the UK and I thought it would be of interest to all our members to see how these have been defined and to therefore understand the ethos under which our organisation operates.

Vision & Mission Statement

Our Vision

Our Vision is to make lifelong learning, through the experience of U3A, a reality for all third agers.

Our Mission

Our Mission declares our purpose as an organisation and serves as the standard against which we weigh our actions and decisions. It is to:

- Facilitate the growth of the U3A movement.
- Provide support for management and learning in U3As.
- Raise the profile of the U3A movement.
- Promote the benefits of learning in later life through self-help learning.

The Principles of the U3A Movement

The U3A movement is non-religious and non-political and has three main principles:

The Third Age Principle

- Membership of a U3A is open to all in their third age, which is defined not by a particular age but by a period in life in which full time employment has ceased.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a U3A.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a U3A can do so.

The Self-help Learning Principle

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire; by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with

enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.

- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers; they are all U3A members.

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The Mutual Aid Principle

- Each U3A is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of The Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the U3A movement.
- No payments are made to members for services rendered to any U3A.
- Each U3A is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the U3A movement.

Now you may feel that the word learning appears too frequently and that is often raised as an issue when discussions are held about the potential to grow the organisation. In fact last week I attended the All Wales Conference where suggestions were made that the word "University" be removed totally from the title as "it scares people" and creates barrier to membership.

However what needs to be remembered it that it is learning in its widest sense – the Strollers, going up above Barmouth, learnt about the history of Cell-Fechan and had their lunch sitting in an Iron Age Fort, whilst the Film Group learn how enjoyable it is to watch old films again – and to remember what they were doing when they watched them the first time.

Age UK promote the U3A as one of their ways of beating loneliness, so when a friend says "I'm not going back to University..." tell them how much they will enjoy just being a member.

I'm sure our new Chairman will have his/her own way of promoting and leading Barmouth U3A but for me I want to say "THANK YOU" to all the people who have helped and supported me over the last three years.

Alan

STROLLERS' GROUP

From: Patricia Percival, Strollers' Group co-ordinator

JANUARY – SHELL ISLAND

I awoke to the sound of rain lashing against the window. Looking out, I thought 'nobody will turn up in this', then I heard Maxine say 'nobody will turn up in this'. We decided to make a flask and sarnies and head off to Llanbedr Station, just in case anyone was mad enough to turn out in such awful weather.

By the time the train arrived, the weather was decidedly better – a good thing too because fifteen people (plus Patch) turned up ready for the stroll.



We left Platform One and turned left over the level crossing towards the car park. From here we followed the banks of the River Artro towards the estuary. On the way we passed a bridge reported to be a good place to spot salmon and sea trout in the Autumn. We then crossed the rail track again and continued down the river bank.

Along this stretch of river I noted a mallard, a cormorant, an egret, a young swan, and geese in a field and also heard the sound of a curlew across the river.



The good level pathway bent to the left towards the road and crossing, passing the end of the main runway on the site of the old RAE Llanbedr – no flights that day - so no need to duck. As we passed by, a big old raven sitting on a fence post gave a couple of grunts. We then went through a small gate onto Shell Island. This part of Shell Island is noted for its abundance of wild flower species in the Spring and Summer (but not in January).

Looking back from Shell Island gave a splendid view of Moelfre, Y Llethr and the two Rhinogs, Fach and Fawr, all dressed in a bright white blanket of snow. We stopped for a quick coffee break during which I spotted tracks of a rabbit and otter in the dunes. After coffee we headed along the tarmac track which afforded good views across Tremadog Bay to Criccieth and the Llyn Peninsula.



With one eye on the tide I decided that it was time to leave before the road off the island was covered by the sea, so we headed back along the road, past the Airfield entrance to the Station.

I don't know if it was the lack of toilets or the thought of food and drink by a roaring log burner, but the pace suddenly quickened here and the Victoria Hotel was reached in record time.

Thanks to everyone who turned up in such bad weather, I'm glad that the sun decided to shine at just the right time. Cheers! Ian Hall.

FEBRUARY STROLLERS - ABERGWYNANT WOODS

The Strollers welcomed Christine Radford from the 'Friog Friday Walkers' who joined us for the February Strollers Walk from Penmaenpool. Christine had kindly offered to lead our February walk through Abergwynant Woods.

Thirteen Strollers (plus Patch the dog) joined us on a rather cold, dull, but dry Tuesday morning.



Starting from Penmaenpool Bridge we passed the George III Hotel, leading to the Mawddach Trail, along the track bed of the old railway line which ran from Barmouth to Ruabon from 1867 until it closed in 1963. A short distance along the track Christine led us through a gate to the left made from windblown oak trees from the woods, into Abergwynant Woods.

The footpath, which was reconstructed in 2004/5, took us up several sets of steps (also constructed from windblown oak) until we came to a viewpoint with a picnic table. We had a short drinks break while we got our breath back and took in the lovely Mawddach estuary views. We then continued, following the river, past old estate workers cottages to the 'Green Lake' (not green anymore). The circular path then led us down past an old Lime Kiln back to the gate onto the Mawddach Trail.



To finish an enjoyable walk we called at the George III for food and drink before picking up our cars.

A 'Thank You' to Christine for leading us on an enjoyable walk and we hope that you will be able to join us again in the future.

MARCH STROLLERS - BLUE LAKE

Due to requests from our Strollers, for our March Strollers Walk, we repeated a walk to Blue Lake above Fairbourne, which we last did in April 2011. Most of the Strollers met on the train to Fairbourne Station where we joined up with the other members ready for the strenuous stroll up to the lake. Since it was a lovely sunny day, we started by walking the length of the beach, passing under the railway bridge to come out onto the main road by the old Toll House which was nice to see was going through a process of renovation (Grade II listed building).



A short distance along the main road brought us to the lane on the right which took us up to the start of the track to Blue Lake. The steep path up is now part of the Wales Coastal Path and everybody made it to the top without too much trouble. Before going through the entrance to the Lake we stopped a while to look at the interesting machinery from the old quarry workings and to admire the wonderful views.



Once we were all through the tunnel leading to the lake we had a refreshment stop, looking at the clear blue water and watching the fish swimming. After a game of seeing who could spin stones furthest on

the surface of the water we went back through the tunnel with Trish at the entrance taking everybody's photograph as they emerged back into the bright sunlight.



Not content with just walking up to the lake, our Strollers decided to go higher, walking up the old rail track to the next level. We were rewarded with views looking down on Blue Lake and entertained by watching RAF cadets abseiling down the old quarry face.



The descent down to sea level, with a slight detour to Panteinion Waterfall, was made in record time after Evelyn kindly invited us back to her house for drinks and homemade cakes. Here we sat in the garden in brilliant sunshine while we enjoyed our lunches and cake. We then had an extra treat of seeing some of Jack's excellent paintings which are distributed around the house.

Again we managed to pick the best day of a rather wet week for our stroll which was enjoyed by everybody.

U3A WALKING GROUP

From: Norma Stockford and Peter Leyden

JANUARY

Nine members and two dogs met at Coed y Brenin for the first walk of 2015. Following the ancient Roman road, Sarn Helen, the route passed mediaeval smelting works on forest roads and farm tracks with fine views of the Rhinog mountains. A five-mile walk, crossing the Afon Eden brought us back to the Coed y Brenin Visitor Centre where Dave kindly treated us all to coffee!

FEBRUARY

For February, Peter had arranged for us to walk in the Dyfi valley. We took the 8.52 train (an early start for us!) from Barmouth, arriving at Machynlleth at 9.55.



Our walk took us over the Dyfi bridge and along the Aberdyfi road for a short distance before beginning a very steep climb for what was only a couple of miles, but felt endless for some of us!

Pretty soon the views opened out to overlook the lovely Dyfi Valley.



We traversed country lanes and fields, missed a turning and had to climb a fence to get back on course.



There were some interesting wet and muddy forest tracks to negotiate before we had to leg it back to catch the train. We caught the 14.56 with about ten minutes to spare. An enjoyable and varied seven-mile walk, thanks Peter.

MARCH



The March walk was led by Brian and Eric. We met in the layby opposite the old harbour at Aberamffra, the site of one of the many lime kilns built during the 18th century. A pleasant start by the stream and through the woods to Panorama road, then back and up through Gorllwyn towards Gwastadagnes and towards the slabs. A right turn here took us towards the site of the television mast where there are fabulous views of the estuary. Sadly it was too misty to see much.



After lunch in the shelter of the TV mast building we made our way down towards Capel Cutiau, an old chapel which is now a holiday home.

Before the arrival of the coastal road, the main route north to Harlech lay further inland, leaving Cutiau an isolated hamlet. The new coastal road to Dolgellau, built in 1798, cut across the River Dwyntau, blocking the main supply route for Cutiau village, and this meant that boats had to be unloaded and goods transported across the adjacent land opposite the old harbour, much to the distaste of the landowner. The parties fought it out in court, and the villagers won the right of access to supply the village, but it was all in vain. The embittered landowner could not bear being beaten by mere peasants, and had them all evicted. Eventually most of the houses fell into disrepair and little can now be seen of the original hamlet.

On our route behind Glan y Mawddach we passed a derelict tavern with connections to the 14th century poet, Dafydd ap Gwilym. Rumour says that he made arrangements to meet several young ladies individually at the tavern. They all turned up, but he didn't! Judging by some of his poems, he had more than just an eye for the ladies, so we can expect this to be true!



After a detour to the Panorama viewing point, we managed to get superb estuary views once the mist had cleared, before making our way back to Aberamffra.



Our Management Committee

The 2015 AGM is being held in May and if you think you might be interested in joining the committee, but not sure what it entails, why not come along to our final committee meeting before the AGM and see how it works. This next meeting is on 5th May at 10.30 in the Parlwr Bach at the Dragon.

If you are interested but unable to attend ring Alan Vincent (01341 247415) and have a chat.

Would you like the chance to spend a day (or two, or three....) doing something you love or would like to try for the first time?

**U3A PORTHMADOG
SUMMER SCHOOL WORKSHOPS**

MONDAY 8TH TO FRIDAY 12TH JUNE 2015
PENMORFA HALL, PENMORFA

10.00am to 4.00pm

PLACES COST £12.50 FOR EACH WORKSHOP
AND INCLUDE:

A light lunch and tea/coffee

FEEL FREE TO BOOK AS MANY AS YOU
WISH....

******CLOSING DATE FOR BOOKINGS IS Friday
8th May 2015******

This year U3A PORTHMADOG is running a whole week of SUMMER SCHOOL WORKSHOPS for members. These will offer an alternative to the residential schools, run by the National U3A in London and Newport, for people who don't wish to be away from home for several days or to travel long distances but do want some summer fun.

They are full-day workshops with a different subject on each day. You can try your hand at

- Stump work embroidery (8th June)
- Photography - point and shoot (9th)
- Painting in pastels (10th)
- Watercolour painting(11th)
- Creative writing (12th).

The only workshop that requires any previous experience is Painting in pastels.

These are practical workshops and you will need to bring certain materials with you

Details of the courses and booking forms are available from our Chairman - Alan Vincent (01341 247415 – alan@t4alv.com).

DISCUSSION GROUP

From: Peter Leyden

The January topic was '*What is Fascism?*'

Umberto Eco, in his essay '*Eternal Fascism*' describes fourteen general properties of fascist ideology, some of which are:

'*The Cult of Tradition*': Hitler's quest to find the origin of the Aryan race.

'*Disagreement is Treason*': Fascism devalues intellectual discourse and reasoning as barriers to action.

'*Fear of difference*' seeks to exploit use of racism and blames immigrants.

'*Contempt of the Weak*' labelled Jews as inferior humans and the physically or mentally disabled, along with other groups, were exterminated.

Leon Trotsky made it plain that Fascism was more than a military dictatorship or theocracy. The ruling class give their power of the state as happened in Italy, Germany and Spain, to a movement whose main base was in the middle classes and the peasantry also in poor and unemployed of the towns and cities.

It was also mentioned that a number of regimes in the Third World may be Fascist, but a lot of these countries may have political independence, they are still controlled by western economic interests. Hence the ongoing wars in many for the raw materials they have.

The February topic – '*How the media make and report news*' was more of a general discussion on '*What is News?*'

Why are some minor issues given front page status? For example, the sacking of the Top Gear person. In normal circumstances, this behaviour would not only lose them their employment, but they would very likely have ended up in court.

The consensus was that a lot of news items were made up to fill newspapers. Real news is becoming a rare thing, and there are only a few good reporters left in the newspaper industry. Twenty-four hour rolling news on television and radio is seeing the decline of printed news.

The Mars Mission was discussed in March. The Mars One mission has been set up to put a permanent base on Mars by 2022. Over 200,000 people have registered for the selection process. The three to four hundred chosen will have to train for eight years and spend many months in isolation in simulation facilities. They will have to learn many new skills to build the Mars base. The trip is only one-way, so people will have to get used to living in a small community, and not just on the eight-month journey to the planet.

If anyone wishes to take a life-changing trip to the Red Planet, contact Mars One Mission.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

January 2015

The speaker for the first meeting of 2015 was Dr. Liz Green, National Trust Curator for North and Mid-Wales, talking about 5,000 years of Egryn. She began her talk by telling us about the aims of the National Trust, when and where it was founded, and the work being carried out today in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Dr. Green spoke enthusiastically and very knowledgeably about Egryn and its history from Neolithic times, its archaeology, inhabitants, dwellings, mining and agriculture up until the present day.

Egryn Hall is a typical hall house and dates back to 1510. Rodney Bryne bequeathed it to the National Trust in 2000. The restoration work took two years to complete.

The hall is presently let as luxury holiday accommodation, and all the money made from this venture will be used to restore the property's gardens and an old water mill and several farm buildings at the site.

The presentation was very well received with many members looking forward to attending the next open day at Egryn.

February

Photography: 'The Dyfi and Mawddach' was the topic in February, presented by Jean Napier.

Jean began her very short presentation by telling the audience about herself and the many different activities that she has undertaken.

The photographs of the journey of the River Mawddach from its source to the sea were interspersed with humorous stories and grizzly tales about the people who inhabited the area in years gone by.

It is obvious that Jean enjoys exploring the Welsh landscape, the magnificent Snowdonia National Park being the main inspiration for her work.

Unfortunately there were no photographs of the Dyfi so the meeting was shorter than usual.

March

Barmouth based artist and designer Merfyn Rowe was the speaker at the March meeting. His fascinating and extremely interesting talk about his extensive travels in provincial China was illustrated with his amazing drawings. He is passionate about China and feels privileged to have witnessed the changing nature of the country and to have captured a record of a rapidly vanishing 'older' China.

He talked about seeing women working in the fields wearing national dress, eating food in the Forbidden City, following the Great Wall and meeting wonderful people from all different walks of life, some who had never met a foreigner before. He delivered a rare insight into a diminishing culture and painted in words and pictures a glimpse of a beautiful and virtually unknown country. A very enjoyable afternoon.

April

The speaker for April could not be contacted so at the very last minute our very own Geraldine Vincent stepped into the breach. Geraldine delivered a very interesting talk, peppered with stunning photographs, about a cruise from Southampton to Norway and Iceland. We were treated to pictures of imposing mountains and wooden houses that perch on the edge of the shores, spectacular fjordland, masses of blue lupins, cascading waterfalls, puffins and other bird life, lush forests and of course the scenic railway at Flamm.

A beautiful journey and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

TABLE TENNIS

From: Geraldine Vincent

The regular sessions on a Friday are still great fun but recently, our numbers have dropped.

We are not competitive and enjoy a good laugh as well as the game.

Members were recently invited to a day event at Blaenau, courtesy of Porthmadog U3A. A fun day and an invitation to call at the Porthmadog table tennis sessions on Monday afternoons. No skills needed, we have all the kit and will teach the rudiments of scoring (We ourselves find this difficult – to multitask – to score and play).

Everybody is welcome. See Diary for dates and times.

SING OUT!

From: Sally Franks, Tywyn

Having joined the Singing for Fun group in Barmouth in 2014, I was interested to see an article in the U3 Matters publication at the end of that year highlighting an event to be held in London on March 3rd 2015.

I decided to apply for one of the 150 available places although was not optimistic as the previous 'sing out' in October had been over-subscribed. I was therefore delighted to be allocated a ticket (number 138!)

The 'Singout' was held at the Playhouse Theatre in the West End and having registered, we all gathered in the auditorium of the venue and were divided into our 'singing voice' groups and listened to an introduction about the day from the organiser, Ellen Bott.

The teacher for the day was Louisa Ridgway, an accomplished musician and singer with plenty of experience in Musical Theatre and who proved to be an excellent coach. She was very patient with everyone and worked through four songs with us including a beautiful one from a production of 'The Scottsboro Boys', which many of us had never heard of. We also learnt 'I just can't wait to be King' from *The Lion King*, a Cole Porter number called 'I get a kick out of you' and 'Relight my fire' which proved very challenging!

Having learnt and rehearsed all the songs before and after the lunch break we were deemed ready to record them! These will be put on to a CD which will eventually be sent to each participant.

This was an excellent, well organised day and great fun. More events are planned for the U3A and I would highly recommend them.



BADMINTON

From: Wendy Bramley

We are still enjoying our Friday afternoons at the Leisure Centre playing (or attempting to play) Badminton. We do have many laughs and it helps us to keep fit. Our numbers fluctuate between 6 and 9 as inevitably something crops up that makes it impossible for one person or another to be able to attend.

As always we would welcome anyone who would like to join us, so if anyone would like to give us a try come along 2p.m. - 4p.m. any Friday afternoon.

May I say a big thank you to those members for keeping the Badminton Club alive - sometimes it is a close call.

GROUP CO-ORDINATOR

From: Geraldine Vincent

Thanks to the efforts of all the individual leaders we currently have 14 groups in existence.

The latest to join us is the second Singing for Fun group which is taking place at Fairbourne Village Hall on the first Thursday of the month. There will be times when this venue is not available, possible alternative for these times will be the home of Evelyn Richardson at Friog. Notice will be given when there is a change of venue.

I am presently trying to get funding for both Singing for Fun groups by way of grants for equipment, costs, music. It is hoped that we will be able to have a portable keyboard so that the groups may visit housebound members, or just the community, and sing with/for them. We have had donated a recording machine so that we have backing and piano accompaniment to swell the glorious singing.

The highly successful Bridge Beginners class has now come to an end. There have been as many as 12 players, including competent Wednesday evening players helping with coaching. At least five players have elevated from the learners to the regular Wednesday evening slot. These Wednesday evening sessions were becoming costly, so the addition of extra players is making the group viable. Thanks must be made especially to Brian Williams for his excellent coaching. We had lots of laughs along the way and still have much to learn. It certainly helps the brain cells.

Bearing in mind we only have 125 members, the fact we have 14 groups is wonderful. As I have said many times before, if there is enough interest by members I will try and set up new groups.



BOOK READING

From: Geraldine Vincent

Our regular, first Wednesday in the month, meetings at Sylvia's home are great fun. Book choices have been made and current reading has been debated. Full details of all titles can be found on the website. We have also been treated to some wonderful 'eats' including Chocolate Salami courtesy of Sue Leyden. The books have been varied, some sad, some ghostly but we are professional in our critiques of them.

It is not a matter of reading what you are told, but discussion of what we would all like to read, and our thoughts after reading.

In the last month or so we have each read a different Graham Greene which made for interesting discussion. To compliment this particular author choice the film group will be showing Brighton Rock for the May screening. We have had one new member recently and always welcome anybody who would like to join.

North Wales Association of U3As Theme Day

(Organised by Anglesey and Dyffryn Conwy U3As)
Tuesday 20th October 2015 at Glasdir Centre,
Llanrwst LL26 0DF

It's Good to be Green – North Wales Renewable Energy Projects

9.45 am for registration and refreshment

10.30 – 10.45: Welcome: Hilary Jones
Chairman North Wales U3As Association

10.45 – 11.45: Dr James Walmsley
An Introduction to Renewable Energy

11.45 – 12.45: Gavin Gatehouse
Chair, Anafon Energy Hydro Scheme

12.45 – 14.15 LUNCH

14.15 – 15.15: Anglesey Solar Park
(Speaker to be confirmed)

15.15 – 16.15: Biomass Plant & Eco Park,
Anglesey OR Tidal Lagoon Project, Colwyn Bay

16.15 – 16.30: Closing Remarks: Hilary Jones

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The summer newsletter will be published for July. Please submit your contributions by mid-June.