

# **Massereene u3a**

## **Report for year September 2023 – September 2024**

From a total membership of 81, the average attendance at our Friday monthly meeting was 47, which was excellent.

As in previous years, a variety of topics were covered in the Friday morning meetings.

In September, Gary Blair (representing the Ulster Scot Agency) gave an excellent talk on the history of the Ulster Scot and how it is established across the nine counties.

In October, the artist Janice Lightowler from Moira, brought along some of her intriguing paintings and gave an excellent talk about her work and creativity.

In November, The Garden Manager Claire Woods from Hillsborough Castle, took us on a journey through the gardens at Hillsborough Castle from January until December - reminding us of the danger of Spanish bluebells!

In December, a well-attended Christmas lunch was held in the Dunsilly Arms. As usual, the food and service was excellent. Many thanks to all who helped to organize this event and provided gifts.

In January, Adrian Steel returned to our meeting to present the topic of social history through various folk songs. A very entertaining meeting!

In February, Massereene u3a celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To mark the occasion, we held a dinner in The Dunadry Inn and were delighted that the previous 3 Chairpersons were able to attend, namely Linda Houston, Brian Turnbull and Hilary Beckett. We also welcomed Valerie Cobain, from the Northern Ireland Regional Executive Committee.

The planned speaker for February was unable to attend, so we were delighted to welcome John McElrea from the Air Ambulance. Via their two red helicopters, they can reach anywhere in Northern Ireland in just 20 minutes! This was a very informative talk.

Michael Fryer from the War Memorial Museum joined us in March, and outlined the formation and activities of the work of the museum.

In April, Philip Simpson from The Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum gave a really interesting talk on the history of Irish linen from flax to fibre.

Our last formal meeting of the year was in May, when Colin Stark from The Ulster Orchestra, a former woodwind player, gave a talk on the formation and activities of The Ulster Orchestra – oboe and bassoonist players are in short supply!

This year's outing in June was to Killymoon Castle in Cookstown. After a conducted tour of the castle, it is fair to say that one of the best Afternoon Teas was served. An excellent way to finish the year!

The 5 main groups; Bridge, Book Club, Rang Gaeilge, Dine Out and Let's Go continued their activities during the year. Many thanks to Graham Seymour for starting an Environment Group – to date they have been involved in collecting litter in Rea's Wood, a talk on the merits or otherwise of electric cars, a very wet visit to Portmore Lough and Montiaghs Moss and a visit to Ballylagan Organic Farm.

Some of the highlights of Let's Go was: a visit to HMS Caroline, the Aviation Centre at The Maze, Antrim Omniplex, making a Christmas table decoration, a visit to Belfast Central Library, a visit to Hillsborough Castle Gardens and attendance at the Christmas Tree Festival at Muckamore Presbyterian Church.

Dine Out continues to be popular, with visits to Jaspers, Flame Restaurant, Stix and Stones, Edo's, Town Square Brasserie and Malmaison. There was also a 3 day visit to Gorey.

Thanks are due to the various facilitators, who organized the various groups and a special word of thanks to the Massereene u3a Committee, for their help and cooperation during the year. Their support is vital in the running of our u3a.

Looking forward to seeing you all during the incoming season!

**Alan Ashenhurst**