

Chair's Report 2022/2023

I am pleased to report that the past year has seen us return to our monthly meetings where we have been able to interact with other members and enjoy the craic when having our cup of coffee and biscuits.

The Committee have worked to continue to provide good service for all our members, giving advice where necessary and trying to help Group Leaders, when possible and necessary.

This year we jointly celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the u3a and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a picnic held on Wednesday 1st June in St. Mary's car park in the Square. It was a great success and having arranged to borrow gazebos from the Farmers Market in case it rained, we were blessed with blazing sunshine, but they came into their own supplying shade. I think I can safely say that everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed it, even down to the brave souls who got up to dance to the music supplied by Jim Quinn.

Through the hard work of David Wilson, we have been able to enjoy our monthly meetings with speakers such as Mike Hartwell showing us images of our landscape and heritage, Charles Friel who talked about the Belfast and County Down Railway which was especially interesting with references to our own railway station here in Comber and Will Hawkins a warden from the National Trust in Strangford Lough. In January we thoroughly enjoyed Matthew Warwick's talk on Robert Burns, complete with a piped-in haggis. In February Eric Woods talked about the famous Catherwood family, and in March Clive Scoular talked about Sadie Patterson and Edith, Lady Londonderry both local supporters of woman's rights. Ken Nixon in April and Neil Porteous in May will complete this year's series of talks. Many thanks to David for providing us with such a variety of interesting speakers.

We are very lucky to still have Hill Wilson looking after our website after standing down from the Committee. We are sorry to have lost Rosemary McFarland who looked after our groups and especially sorry to have lost David Kildea who did a superb job as Membership Secretary for the past 5 years.

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We have also been very fortunate in that our groups have been going from strength to strength, down to the efforts of our group leaders. The Ramblers and Tuesday Walkers met throughout the year, as did the Photographers, Spanish classes, Technology Group, Gardening Group, Craft Group, Play Readers, Book Clubs, Lunch Group, Film Club and the Tuesday Bridge players. This year we introduced a new Supper Club which is proving popular and have also trialled two wine appreciation nights which were very enjoyable, and I think will lead to the forming of a new group.

The Questa group visited the National Stud in Kildare, which was a great day out and we also went to the Seamus Heaney Homeplace in Bellaghy for a very interesting visit.

We did lose some folk in the past year, but we are happy to say that we gained many new members, as well as former members re-joining. As a result, we currently have 288 members. We hope to run our Open Day in September which in the past has always been a very successful event in attracting new members.

We would like to remind you that the membership fees are due on 1 April. We have kept the annual fee at £15, now unchanged for 3 years. We are aware that our operating costs have increased and membership fee may have to be reviewed next year.

Before I finish, I would like to thank on your behalf, all the Group Leaders and the Committee who have worked tirelessly to provide you with a programme of activities that we have been proud of year-by-year. Thank you to them all. I'm sure you also appreciate our Groups who are looking after the catering arrangements each month, and last but not least, our Meet and Greeters – Heather, Marianne, Maggi, and of course Kathryn who supplies our new member packs.

We have all come through a very stressful time in the past few years coping with the Covid pandemic, but I know things can only continue to get better for us all. Our aim is to further develop Comber and District u3a, but it needs everyone to make their contribution and to live the principles of the u3a.

Joan Cowan