



WREKIN REVIEW

FEBRUARY 2024

“Making life-long learning a reality for all third-agers in the Wrekin locality”

The Wrekin U3A is an educational and recreational charity registered in accordance with the Charities Act 1993 (Charity No.1098219).

FROM THE CHAIR

The Wrekin Review is an opportunity for every member and group to tell the whole membership about their activities. Giving new members an insight into the opportunities available. Articles and photographs can be submitted to the editor Anne Tranter at any time. A copy of the Review is mounted on our web site and hard copies are available at monthly meetings.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this issue and to Anne Tranter our editor.

Dates for the diary

Deadline for articles:

May 31st, 2024, for publication in June 2024; September 30th 2024, for publication in October 2024; Jan 31 2025 for publication February 2025.

Monthly Meetings

There have been three monthly meetings since the last Review. In November Jack Dent an Associate of the Inner Magic Circle drew us into the amazing world of magic. The talk on the history of magic incorporated a demonstration of his skills, which are attracting interest from several u3a's in our area.

After Christmas we had a very different talk from Chris Hyde about the role of Blood Bikes. These volunteers work on a shift basis around the clock to transport medical products. Any members who expected him to arrive in leathers on his motor bike might have been

disappointed, but his animated presentation, without notes. left us confident of their commitment to our collective welfare.

The period finished in February with the enchanting true story of Pen Turner and penguin 'Scott' who explored the beautiful environment of the Antarctic. Pen showed us a fine example by seizing a rare opportunity to visit one of the most challenging environments on earth.

Listening and responding to our members

Our u3a will remain fresh and relevant if members have opportunities to express their view of our activities and be part of its development. In the past few months, I am pleased to report that there have been a series of initiatives, which will enable us to understand the needs of both experienced and new members. All feedback is valued and will be used to develop and enrich our u3a. Initiatives include an informal monthly drop in with coffee and cake at the Vintage Pearl in Shifnal and Church Farm Wrockwardine, a questionnaire sent to all members, a meet the committee tea party, and a discussion with Group Leaders. Watch out in later editions of the Review for reports which show how we are developing our offering by responding to our members.

Thank You

This is my last Review as chairman, it has been a privilege to give my time to Wrekin u3a. You are an amazing group of people. Thank you for supporting me. I look forward to meeting you at general meetings and interest groups.

Thank you to all the committee members for their commitment and the entire membership for continuing to make our u3a a centre of learning laughing and living.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Mary Rogers

GET WELL CARDS

Wrekin u3a cares about its members. If a member is seriously unwell or has an operation, the committee feels that it is appropriate to send a Get Well card to show that someone is thinking of them. This is particularly important for those who live alone. If you know of anyone who is ill and would appreciate a card, contact a committee member giving the reason, a Sympathy and Thinking of You can also be sent

Snowflake Break

A group of U3A Wrekin members had a lovely stay at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, from 15th to 19th February. A popular trip every couple of years, it was our first "Snowflake" break, and we had been told how there was ALWAYS snow, and how beautiful it was! Well, we didn't get the snow, however, the wonderful colours that just shout "Scotland" were in abundance, the golds, russets and greens, and there was SOME snow on top of the Cairngorms!

On Thursday 15th, we started out from Shifnal, at 8am, and had several comfort breaks along the way. Then, it was straight on to our hotel, arriving just before 6pm ready for dinner at 6.30pm. Unfortunately, the following morning, Celia was unwell, and was taken to hospital, where she was kept in. She was much missed on the rest of the trip. (She's home now)

On Friday 16th, our first full day, we headed to Aviemore base camp, and watched the skiers. Despite very little snow in the area, it was being artificially produced so that the skiers were still able to have fun! Afterwards some of us chose to go to the small, independent Kinrara Gin Distillery, for a tasting.

On Saturday 17th, we visited Brodie Castle, for a fascinating look inside this beautiful building, where every item was genuinely owned by the family. When there was money in the family it was lavished on magnificent extensions and decor, and wonderful ceilings, however they did have more than their fair share of tragedy, as well as the inevitable "black sheep" who wilfully overspent.

From Brodie Castle, we headed for Nairn, an ancient fishing port. We had a look around, then enjoyed lunch outside, yes, it was that mild - though soup was a popular choice!

On Sunday, 18th, our last day, we headed for Fort Augustus, to the Clansmen Centre, but we first stopped at the Laggan Dam, which was built in 1934, and stretches across the river Spean, a most imposing structure. The water builds up behind the dam and is sent by underground tunnels to Loch Treig, then to the slopes of Ben Nevis before spilling down to the power station at Fort William. Excess power is then sold to the National Grid. We had a brief stop outside the village of Spean Bridge, to see the Commando Memorial, unveiled in 1952, to honour the original British Commando Forces raised during World War II. It stands, in splendid isolation, on high ground, with a direct view across to Ben Nevis.

At the Clansman Centre, there is a replica of a Clansman's home, with a wood & peat roof. We were shown how a traditional Plaid (Gaelic for blanket) was worn, and John Tisbury bravely volunteered to be the model. Unlike the modern fashionable kilt, a large woollen Plaid was a blanket which formed a garment with pockets, hood and cape, and being water resistant, protected the men from the weather. The women wore simpler long dresses, also ably demonstrated by John!

We then headed for Banavie, just north of Fort William, to see Neptune's Staircase, which was built by Thomas Telford between 1803 and 1822, and is the longest staircase lock in Scotland. Its eight locks raise the canal by 19 metres, (62 feet) over a quarter of a mile. No photograph could do it justice, but it was impressive to walk alongside, and imagine how it was engineered over 200 years ago!

Then it was back to the Duke of Gordon for our final night. We were piped into dinner. Afterwards, the brilliant duo the Black Rock Ceilidh Band, entertained us on various instruments including guitar, piano accordion, saxophone and small and large pipes. Quite a few of us were persuaded to get up and dance and a great night was had. Then it was off to pack, ready for the trip home in the morning.

On Monday 19th, after breakfast, a beautiful rainbow greeted us as we boarded the coach, and we were blessed with sunshine and wonderful quintessentially Scottish landscapes through the windows on our way back down towards England.

Finally, after the customary essential pit stops, we arrived back in Shifnal around 6.30pm, said our farewells to each other, collected our cases from Steve, our driver, and headed for home, tired but having packed a lot of interesting visits into just a few days.

Many thanks to Denise for all her work in organising another very successful Cultural Visit.
Debbie Halford



Group photo taken at Brodie Castle.

Thank you everyone for making this year's Snowflake Break another special holiday, despite it being a 'Snowfree' one. As with all our visits, it gave us the chance to relax and spend time with old friends and make new ones.

Denise Smith

Visit to Kinrara Gin Distillery near Aviemore

As part of the Snowflake Break we visited the Kinrara Gin Distillery near Aviemore.

We were met at the door by Lorna and Caroline who treated us to a very interesting tasting and presentation that demonstrated their enthusiasm for their product.



The base spirit is brought in, this is 90% proof. Other ingredients are added according to the blend of Gin being produced. All Kinrara gins are Juniper based and these are sourced from Macedonia. It was explained that the berries and leaves form an important part of the Capercaillie's diet. This bird's numbers are in serious decline and all the craft gin makers have agreed not to source local juniper.

We sampled 5 gins which are 40.5% proof. They were all different and had names such as Freya, Cairngorm Whiteout, Jinny the Cow, Caper and Strewan the Stag. The bottles were beautifully decorated by artist, Kat Baxter, who used illustrations of the various botanicals used, such as rowan, root ginger, lemon thyme, rosehip, to make up the colourful pictures of a Cow, a Capercaillie, a Stag and a Fox. Fortunately, the samples were small, just enough to feel and enjoy the warming tastes. Nobody was legless.

We then moved to the shop which was most attractively set out with the decorated bottles. After making our various purchases we returned to our coach.

Jane Pearson

GROUP NEWS

ITALIAN GROUP

Italian Christmas

At the beginning of December both u3a Italian groups met lunch at Osteria in Shrewsbury for some excellent Italian food. The award-winning chef provided a delicious lunch; some new dishes for people to try and some old favourites.

Sue Luchetti



ART APPRECIATION 1

DESERT ISLAND ART

What art piece would you take with you to a Desert Island?

This was the question put to members of Art Appreciation Group 1 for their January meeting. Unlike the long-running radio programme, with its choice of eight records, only one artwork would be allowed, and practicalities such as price, availability and logistics were to be disregarded entirely.

The selections made by members were varied – to say the least! Some went for much-loved works by famous artists which would remind them of happy times or encourage them to persevere in their isolation and hope for rescue some day – Van Gogh's '*Irises*', Hogarth's '*Portrait of Captain Thomas Coram*' - who worked for years to establish London's Foundling Hospital - and Grayson Perry's series of tapestries on '*The Vanity of Small Differences*'. Michelangelo's '*Pieta*' from St Peter's in Rome was another choice (although its absence might be noticed!). Two bronze statuettes of horses, acquired many years before, were the prized possession of another member and would bring back happy memories.

Others chose items that they had produced themselves or that had been painted by those that they had lost and which brought back good memories: paintings of a grand-daughter lost in thought atop a rock above the Grand Canyon, of the tranquil Suffolk coast and of Cotehele House in Cornwall. The final choice was a member's cross-stitch work based on Lowry's '*The Organ Grinder*', with its depiction of ordinary Salford folk going about their lives.

So what would YOU take?

Bob Vincent

ART APPRECIATION 2

SESSION ON FABRIC ART

This month members of the Art Appreciation 2 group met to find out about Textile art in its various forms. The session was led by one of our group, Karen Dolman, who has worked with fabric to create a range of artistic pieces. Although self-taught, Karen has worked for several years using a variety of techniques to produce her pieces. We were all very impressed by the beauty of the work and the skill and creativity they displayed.

She showed her work to the group and explained her inspiration for the pieces and the techniques that she employed. The pieces ranged from lovely quilts to wall hangings and framed artwork for the wall.

The group found the session really enjoyable. So, at our next meeting, we are going back to "Have a Go" with a practical workshop using some of the techniques we were shown.

David Tipper



WALKING GROUP

On Friday 26th February a small group of us set off from Pontesbury Hill, on a lovely walk through the Shropshire countryside. After quite a stiff climb through Poles coppice we emerged into open grassland offering some stunning views of Shropshire including Long Mountain, The Breiddens and Clywydian Hills. Our route continued onwards along undulating terrain passing through more woodlands as we circled Lord's Hill. A picnic lunch was taken at the isolated Lordshill Methodist Chapel at the edge of The Stiperstones. The chapel was built in 1833 with the congregations approaching 350 people recorded in the late 19th Century reflecting the size of the local mining community around Snailbeach Lead Mine. The location was chosen in making the film based on the book 'Gone to Earth' by local author, Mary Webb.

Lead mines in this area were some of the largest in Europe during the 1800s and can be visited on certain open days. Passing The Hollies, after lunch we dropped down into the village of Habberley before returning via Lees Coppice back to the car park.

Despite the mud and detour round the cattle, weather-wise it was a perfect day for walking being clear and sunny. A pleasant change from the rain and wind of previous weeks.

Thanks to Gill for recceing and Valerie our leader on the day.

Diane Tordoff



COME DINE WITH ME



Monthly lunch with yet another fabulous menu, lots of chatter and a quiz to round off - it is a lovely way to socialise.

Wrekin u3a Annual Lunch 2024



In January we celebrated our annual Wrekin u3a lunch at the Hundred House, Norton. Seventy-two members were booked to dine and we arrived to a beautifully set out room in the barn there. The tables were graced with attractive centre pieces and lights twinkled around the room.

It was a lovely occasion and a great chance to have a post-Christmas catch up with friends. The room was soon full of chatter and laughter. The menu was varied, and the food lived up to our expectations. The meals were flavoursome and served promptly by the attentive staff on piping hot plates.

Many guests expressed their enjoyment of the occasion and the venue, and it is definitely one to consider for our annual celebration next year.

Linda Tipper



Meet the Committee Tuesday 30 January

Following feedback from a recent questionnaire, we wanted to provide an opportunity for **ALL** members to get to know us better and tell us more about their u3a experience. What better way to do this than to combine a proper chat with afternoon tea?!

Almost 50 members enjoyed a very convivial afternoon with all committee members in attendance. Mary introduced the afternoon by encouraging everyone to share their views with committee members and ask questions to find out more about what we do.



The tea and cakes were much enjoyed. Erica and the refreshments team were ably supported by Harry who did a great job in encouraging everyone to have seconds and thirds! It was great to see so many engaging in fruitful conversation about all things u3a and more. Pam's questionnaire not only offered up some excellent suggestions but also resulted in 10 offers to volunteer. At the end of the afternoon, Karen thanked everyone for coming along and responding so positively. This dialogue between members and the committee will continue and further events will follow.

Many thanks must go to:

Harry for setting out and clearing the Hall; Pam, Karen, Linda and Jane for providing the goodies; Erica, Gill and the team for serving the refreshments and Roger for his "enhanced" rolling display of photos showing all the fabulous things Wrekin u3a members get up to.

Karen Appleby

New Members Drop In

After our first gathering back in July of last year, we have continued to meet on a monthly basis at the Vintage Pearl in Shifnal. Our numbers have steadily increased and since we started, 24 new members have dropped in at some point.

Sandie and Cheri have looked after us brilliantly, keeping us topped up with a whole range of hot drink requests and spoiling us with their lovely selection of homemade cakes. Sandie also runs Church Farm Guest House in Wrockwardine and in January she invited us to hold our first drop-in of 2024 in front of a roaring open fire in the 18th century farmhouse. It is set in a beautiful location beside St Peter's Church and it was just what we needed on a rather cold and grey January morning.



11 new members and 4 "old hands" enjoyed coffee, cake and plenty of chat. There was plenty of room to allow us to move between tables and get a share of the hot spot by the fire!

New members were able to ask questions about how Wrekin u3a works and find out more about our interest groups. Getting to know other members in a more relaxed setting makes it easier to make the most of the opportunities available and feel more connected.

It's great to see people getting involved. Several of our new members now make up the refreshment team at our monthly meetings and very grateful we are too!

I am particularly pleased that the New Member Liaison team (which until recently was just me!) has some new faces. We'll be wearing yellow flower badges at the monthly meetings. so that visitors and new members can find us and receive a warm Wrekin welcome.

Karen Appleby

Getting Involved

I joined Wrekin u3a in June 2023, and felt very welcome when I attended the first monthly meeting.

I am now part of the Country Dancing Group, which is great fun, made more enjoyable with a live band.



I have also joined the opera group, mainly to improve my knowledge of opera. I find it an interesting couple of hours.



All in all, I feel very much at home with the Wrekin u3a group, helped enormously by the New Members coffee mornings, a good chance to meet and converse.

Sheila Davies

WREKIN U3A GROUPS LIST

Group	When	Where
Art Appreciation 1	2nd Monday afternoon	The Old Police Station Shifnal
Art Appreciation 2	2nd Wednesday afternoon	Members house
Away Day Group	Various Dates	Various
Bowls	Various	Various
Bridge	Every Wednesday afternoon	Senior Citizens Room
Classical Guitar	2nd Thursday morning	Members house
Classical Music	2nd Thursday 1:30-3:30	Members house
Come Dine With Me	4th Saturday of Month	Various
Committee 2023-24	First Monday	Admaston House
Country Dancing	2nd Thursday afternoon	St Andrews Youth Club Shifnal
Cultural Visits	As arranged/published	Various
Digital Photography 1	1st Thursday afternoon	Members house
Digital Photography 2	Last Monday afternoon	Members house
Discussion	3rd Friday morning	Saxon Park Albrighton
Family History	4th Thursday morning 10:30	Wellington Library
French	3rd Tuesday afternoon	Members house
French	3rd Tuesday afternoon	Members house
German	1st Tuesday afternoon	Members house
History	3rd Monday 2:00 pm every month except December	Wellington Library
Houses and Gardens	As arranged/published	Various
Italian-Beginners	1st Thursday morning	Members house
Italian2	2nd Wednesday afternoon	Members house
Latin	1st Monday afternoon	Senior Citizens Room
Latin 2	2nd Friday morning	Zoom
Lunch on the 15th	15th of each month	Various
Members on their Own (MOTO)	No formal meeting members arrange	To Be Arranged
Not another book group	1st Monday morning	Members house
Opera Appreciation	3rd Friday each month	Senior Citizens Room
Out and About	As arranged/published	Various
Prose and Poetry	Last Monday afternoon	Members house
Quiz Group	Last Friday	On Line
Reading	2nd Tuesday morning	Members house
Science Reading	3rd Monday afternoon	Members house
Scrabble 1	1st Tuesday afternoon	The Plough Shifnal
Scrabble 2	2nd Tuesday afternoon	Members house
Short Walks	3rd Thursday morning	Various
Singing for Fun	3rd Wednesday afternoon	The Old Police Station Shifnal
Walking 6-8 miles	Last Friday morning	Various
Wine and Cheese	3rd Wednesday Evening	Members house
Wine Tasting 1	2nd Monday evening	Members house
Wine Tasting 2	3rd Monday evening	Members house

SPEAKERS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

MONTH	SPEAKER	TALK
26 th March 2024	AGM Plus Speaker Lyn Evan	Torn Paper Collage
23 rd April 2024	Will Farmer	A talk on Rene Lalique: From Gold to Glass. This covers his early career as a jeweller and shows his position as the leading designer of the Art Nouveau era.
28 th May 2024	John Butterworth	Hitting the Headlines as a Newspaper Editor

Executive Committee 2023/24

Chairman	Mary Rogers	chair@wrekinu3a.org.uk
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Beacon admin		
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Membership Secretary	Jane Pearson	members@wrekinu3a.org.uk
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E news Editor	Karen Appleby	newsletter@wrekinu3a.org.uk
New Members Liaison		
Non Committee Roles		
Review Editor	Anne Tranter	
Web Master	David Winterbottom	
Hall Manager	Harry Pettit	
Refreshments		Refreshment Team

You will see that personal e mail addresses have been replaced and personal telephone numbers are not shown in this edition of Review. This is to ensure that our members are protected from spam and other communication violations.

Our magazine is produced three times a year. It provides each of us with an opportunity to share our u3a highlights with the whole membership. The copy on our web site is produced in colour. A limited number of black and white paper copies are produced for buddy members with no e mail address and for circulation at monthly meetings. Until we have new e mail addresses for Anne, David and Harry please send articles and photos to a committee member. Thank You