

BUDE & DISTRICT USA

ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007

Our seventh year has been another lively and varied one.

Membership reached 155, which is an all-time high for us. As always our numbers were reduced by those who moved away — notably two of our founder members, Eta Ivey and Frances Tindall. Eta was a loyal supporter of the Theatre Group and a keen Scrubbier, as was Frances, who also started and managed the Singing for Fun Group.

Sadly we also have to record the deaths of three members: Tom McGrath at the end of October; in December. Emily Moore, a founder member and valued participant in both Discussion and Sharing Poetry One Groups, and just last month, Barbara Crompton, a keen member of the Theatre Group.

Those who knew them will miss all who have left us, but at the same time it is good to welcome many new members and hope that they will find being part of USA an interesting and stimulating experience.

A year ago the Committee took a gamble and started to book this Hall regularly for our Open Meetings rather than the much smaller Room 5, and it seems to have paid off. In the time since then we have enjoyed a great variety of presentations from our visiting Speakers. Thanks for making all the arrangements are once again due to Mary Dobson, our Secretary.

Through the course of the year we have heard some personal experiences — our own Coral Forshew in Customs and Excise, Alan Lafferty on his time with Bude Metric Brass, and last month Jolyon Sharpe and his Beach Ranging. We learned about Islam from Colin Hodgetts, and also heard about the tremendous difference that Shelterboxes can make to people who have had the misfortune to lose everything in natural disasters. Animal life came into our programme with Dominic Boothroyd from the Padstow Lobster Hatchery, and Alastair Hellyer brought us a really close up experience of a Police dog at the November meeting when he introduced us to Boris and told us of their life and work together. Our other two Speakers gave us some pointers towards taking care of ourselves -- by driving more safely so that we could arrive alive, and in case one day we don't, the need and importance of considering inheritance Tax and making a Will.

Once again our December Meeting was our festive Christmas Lunch at The Falcon. During the weeks that preceded it Audrey Armitage and her roll of wallpaper became a familiar sight as she took bookings, recorded menu choices and collected your money. The Committee is delighted that she has volunteered to do the same again for 2007.

Pat Netherton and Sylvia Henry with help from Lynn Green on folding duty and Brian Leonard at the Prize Table made sure that the Raffle ran smoothly, it yielded a net profit of £ 94.00. Kate Peardon and Sylvia entertained us with some lightheaded poetry, and as has become the custom, the Singing for Fun Group rounded off the occasion.

But it is probably our April Open meeting that most of you will remember best, and for longest, it grew out of one member's suggestion made almost twelve months earlier. All our groups took part in an Open Afternoon with a display or demonstration to show something of what they do. The Afternoon was a totally new venture for us. but the tremendous effort

that everyone put into it ensured its success. It was a popular and well-supported opportunity for members to find out about groups other than their own, and to make new friends. We were also especially delighted to welcome our new Area Rep, Fran Elkin. It is worth mentioning that two records were broken that day; the attendance, which was over 80, and the annual Plant Stall supplied and managed by the Gardening group, which this time made over £111.00 !

When recalling our Open Meetings a big thank you is due to Hazel Cook. She and her helpers do a much appreciated job providing us with tea, coffee and biscuits at exactly the right moment, in order for it not to become a burdensome chore for anyone she tries to run it with as many volunteers as possible on a rota. This is probably something where many more members could lend a hand occasionally. After all, the more people there are, the less frequently your turn comes around! So don't forget to have a word with Haze! if you could help out sometimes.

We have continued to work to keep awareness of USA alive in the outside world. For the first part of the year Bernard Kennedy led the team of Pat Netherton, Jean Brown and Sylvia Henry ensuring that a report of every Open Meeting appeared in the Bude & Stratton Post. When Bernard retired Pat Netherton took over the reins and Linda Bunker was recruited, in her role as Distribution Manager Sylvia has also left copies of the National Magazine at strategic sites in Bude. ,1

Unfortunately, our Notice board (a well-used focal point for 6 years), was removed by those intent on "improving" the layout of the Library, and in spite of protests, we have had to accept instead a file in the lobby for keeping our information.

This year the USA's National AGM was held in Falmouth. It makes a change for it to be within reasonable reach of Bude, and Mary Dobson and Vera Roper went to represent us.

At the beginning of this week the North Devon U3As with Tiverton and North Cornwall held an Egyptology Study Day. The occasion was very well supported. Some of our members went and took full advantage of learning about excavations and conservation as well as meeting members from other U3As in our area.

Our appearance on the national scene and our relationship with other U3As is very important, because it helps to remind us that we are part of a huge organisation. There are now 645 U3As in the UK, with over 195,000 members.

However, the core of the life of USA happens within the local Interest Groups. At the beginning of the year we had 15, but the French one led by Pat Holdcroft was suspended as one or two members dropped out and one couple, Ashley and Lesley Churnside, actually moved to a new life in France and are now making use of what they had learnt! USA is not an organisation where things stand still, and at the end of October, Peggy Timms launched our second Sharing Poetry group. So 15 groups functioned and flourished through the winter and spring. Then three new groups sprouted from the injection of life and enthusiasm generated by our April Open Meeting — Serendipity 2 with Linda Bunker, Discussion 2 with Jenny Leyland, and Cinema and Films with Marilyn Daly; and, at the beginning of this month, our newest group - Art history - was born. We wish all these fledgling enterprises every success.

All the Group Leaders have contributed to the next section of this Report. I have tried to keep it as concise as possible, but as we grow it inevitably grows too!

It was Carolyn Merreit's idea to start an Art History group, and although there has only been one meeting so far this was well attended. The members are enthusiastic and looking forward to a bright future.

Richard Evans says that in this, their fourth year, three new members have joined the fun in the Bridge group. They all enjoy each other's company and play to the best of their individual ability. There is competition, but it is relaxed and non-acrimonious. He has no space to take any more members in his house, but if there is anyone else interested in the Game Richard would be happy to help to start up a second group.

The original idea for the Cinema and Films group was to go to the The Rebel at Poundstock, or Wadebridge or Barnstaple, if there were films showing that members wanted to see but didn't want to go alone. Unfortunately almost as soon as the group began the Rebel closed which was a bit of a drawback! However, Holsworthy's newly refurbished Memorial Hall came into the picture where there is now a film shown once a fortnight on a Thursday evening. Because the film goes there are asked for suggestions for future programmes this is proving very successful. Although the seats lack a little in comfort, there is a bar as well as a choice of coffee, tea, or ice cream in the interval, which more than compensates. Numbers in this group are increasing!

June Cann's Craft in Miniature group meets in Holsworthy. Unfortunately ill health has forced her original co-organiser to withdraw, so this year June's husband Albert has been ably providing the necessary assistance. Rather than try to adhere to rigid times for the group they now meet on a "drop in" basis between 1.00 and 4.00 pm on the first Thursday of the month. They have found that this suits the members better as they can fit in with bus times or with breaks between shifts. Everything they make is on about a one-twelfth scale. Some of you will have seen last year's Edwardian Garden Party; this year they displayed a market scene based on their local one in Holsworthy.

Owing to some confusion with bookings by the organisers they were unable to exhibit at the Holsworthy and Stratton Show in August, but did have a stall at the Memorial Hall in Holsworthy at the end of September. Here their work was much admired, and members enjoyed the appreciative comments made by visitors and other stallholders. They also took great pride in seeing items that they had made simply for the fun of creation being valued by others to the extent of their being willing to pay for them! income from the sales helps towards meeting next year's running costs. There is one more opportunity to see their handiwork this year — at Hatherleigh Community Centre on Sunday 18th November. June says that their project for 2008 will probably be beach orientated. New members are welcome to join at any time, though she would appreciate a call first to enable her to have enough materials on hand.

As you probably know, I have looked after Discussions since the beginning. At our January meeting we plan our programme for the next twelve months and share out the responsibility for introducing the various topics among the members. We do not always stick to our pre-planned subject if current news seems more important at the time of our meetings. Since our last AGM we have considered governance in various forms -- Reforming the House of Lords, Managing Pandemics and mass vaccination, the Welfare State, and the proposals for the Unitary Council for Cornwall (which we were unanimously against). We wrote to the Government Committee to tell them so. Not that it had any effect, of course, and a few months later we shared our thoughts on deceit and spin in high places! Other matters that have claimed our attention are Climate Change and Governing by Fear, Pets. The Permissive Society, Trident, Marital breakdown and Corporate Manslaughter.

After a long time with a full house for Discussion we were delighted to re-name it Discussion One and welcomed Jenny Leyland's offer to start Discussion Two in the summer.

After only a few months Jenny reports that Discussion 2 is now thriving. Although their exchanges have so far been spontaneous she says that members are not just a collection of grumpies venting their spleen on the ills of modern society, although these have been mentioned; other topics that they have covered range from social and local history to the best way of making quince Turkish Delight! They have seven members at the moment but there is room for more, so please have a word with Jenny if you are interested.

Iwan Davies reports that although numbers were reduced during the year the Enjoying Music group shared many excellent afternoons. Sessions are usually based on a particular theme., and Iwan always enjoys talking about and playing his CD's! After a summer break they started again this month and have already welcomed several new recruits.

The Gardening group is lovingly tended by Marion Hall and meets on the first Wednesday of every month. They have over twenty members, the majority of whom turn up to most of their events. The most popular meetings are outings to local gardens, three of which this year were opened up especially for their visits. They share cars as much as possible, as organising coach trips became far too much like hard work! Some meetings seem to have become a tradition — their winter shared lunch and plant swap, a visit to Rosemoor, exploring a plant nursery in the spring, their planning meeting in November and of course their April fund-raising Plant stall! They are looking forward to their planning meeting next month and hope it will lead to another crop of memorable afternoons in 2008.

Jill Davies oversees the thinking of the Philosophy group, which has continued to meet twice a month, though they had a break during the summer. She and group members found it a pleasure to share their subject matter with those who came to the Open Afternoon, and hope that they *were* able to convey the flavour of some of their debates to enquirers.

The Playreaders have found their way through an entertaining range of works in the past year, even though the choice ultimately depends upon the number of copies that Bude Library can obtain for Mary Dobson. Terence Rattigan seemed to be making a return to the London stage, so they read "Adventure Story", not very well known; this was followed by Enid Bagnold's "The Chalk Garden", which was better known and appeared much less dated. Their next playwright, Oscar Wilde, will never fade into obscurity, and although "The Duchess of Padua" hardly saw the light of day, "A Woman of No Importance" and "Lady Windermere's Fan" are perennial favourites of repertory and film companies. It is interesting to note that both Wilde and Rattigan were homosexuals and both write tellingly and sympathetically about women as their central characters.

After their Wilde time they wanted a change, so turned to Somerset Maugham's "The Letter", which is also currently on the London stage. They followed this with something completely different — "The Musicians" by Patrick Marber, which has a much lighter touch and the more modern theme of a traveling school orchestra. They finished off the year with a very short play by Tom Stoppard -- "The Fifteen Minute Hamlet". Mary says that she has heard of The Reduced Shakespeare Company, but this was ridiculous, though you can't help admiring Stoppard's knowledge of The Bard's complete works,

Gill Gilkes is now hosting Scrabble One, and here members continue to enjoy the ever-changing challenge of the quest for the best way to the highest score as well as friendly chat and a cup of tea. The Group has witnessed several changes both in location and personnel over the years and the last twelve months were no exception, when both Frances Tindall and

Eta Ivey moved away. The number of regular players is down at the moment and they would be delighted to welcome one more member.

Sue Evans is in charge of the Boards for Scrabble Two, and says that members continue to play regularly, enjoying their games and each other's company. They never know what an afternoon's play will bring, as every game is different. Variations of luck, knowledge and concentration, as well as changes in combinations of players can all have a real influence on the outcome. They currently have eight players, who don't all play every time, so if you fancy a game one week give Sue a call and there might be a spare place, if there's -more than one of you she will be happy to help you to set up Scrabble Three!

Serendipity has the widest remit of all our groups and seems to go from strength to strength. Liz Whattler started the first one two years ago and was soon oversubscribed. Members put a lot of effort into a very impressive display for the April Open Meeting, which demonstrated something of the way they try to inspire each other and develop creative ideas, both individually and as a group. They were delighted with the reaction from the rest of USA members, and as a result of all the enquiries Serendipity Two was formed.

Their first meeting was held in May with Linda Bunker as co-coordinator. With some guidance and much encouragement from Serendipity One. they agreed on their format and projects of interest. In July both groups together descended on the Cowslip Workshop in Launceston where they were made extremely welcome. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the visit. Although Group One is full, with 18 members. Group Two has only five so far, so if you are attracted by the idea of "happy accidents" please give Linda a call.

The members of Sharing Poetry One have shared much laughter through the year and learned a great deal in the process! Alternating particular subjects with "free choice" mornings they have covered a lot of ground. Linda Farmer reports that topics have ranged from parodies of well-known poems, (sometimes wickedly amusing) through both "age" and "Spirit" (all types) to one session on poets beginning with D. The theme that engendered most research and brainwork and threw up several poets previously unknown to the members was "Dreams", chosen for September in conjunction with National Poetry Day. This group also lost two members during the year — Barbara Morrow moved to Liskeard; she will be remembered for her quiet humour and wonderful poem choices. Emily Moore's death deprived the Group of her sharp mind and erudite insight into both poems and poets; she is sorely missed.

When Linda's Group became oversubscribed last Autumn Peggy Timms volunteered to start Sharing Poetry Two. They had their first meeting in October. They take it in turns to read aloud a poem that they enjoy, often with a memory of where and when they made its acquaintance. They also give a brief description of the poet, and find that some crop up over and over again, while others, not well known, can provide an introduction that leads to a new interest. Sometimes a member will read a poem written as a result of one of their sessions. This is always especially interesting and enjoyable. They too may select a specific topic for research or leave the choice entirely free to the members, but whatever they do they are sure not to fake themselves too seriously!

The emphasis of the Singing for Fun Group has always been on the fun, but members have also managed to make a sort of harmonious noises too. Although reduced in numbers the Group entertained everyone at the Christmas Lunch in 2006 and gave a cameo performance at the Open Afternoon in April that was very well received. Sadly, they then had to say goodbye to Frances Tindall. but were delighted that Ros Dolphin had volunteered to take over. Apart from the summer months the group has also kept up their regular visits

to Fairfield and Red Gables Old Peoples' Homes where a singing session for an hour or so gives the residents some exercise and enjoyment and the staff a bit of a break. Ros has introduced a change of tune and this autumn the group will be having a go at numbers from the Beatles, the Carpenters and some songs from the shows. Regular meetings have now resumed and new members will be most welcome. There is no audition and you don't have to be able to read music, you just need to like the idea of singing with others in a relaxed atmosphere. Accompanists are still in very short supply, so any keyboard, guitar or even kazoo player will be greeted with open arms!

The Theatre Group, Mary Dobson's other "family" has enjoyed another good year's varied programme of high-class productions, mostly at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth as the Northcott at Exeter is being rebuilt. "White Christmas", seasonally in late November, and the ballet "Cyrano" were both lavishly presented. The sets were beautiful, and the Birmingham Royal Ballet told the sad story of Cyrano de Bergerac's lost love without words most expressively. Those who like musicals were able to see "Guys and Dolls" and "High Society", while those who prefer a story told in the spoken word saw the thriller "The Unexpected Guest" by Agatha Christie (although some were a little baffled and afterwards were unsure who had actually "done it!"), then "Charlie's Aunt" with the excellent Stephen Tomkinson, which many of the group considered to be the funniest play they had seen for years, and lastly two short plays by Alan Bennett called "Office Suite" starring Patricia Routledge.

Their annual ration of Shakespeare was well catered for by an excellent open air production of "Macbeth", with the Rougemont Gardens in Exeter providing a very acceptable Birnam Wood to Dunsinane backdrop and suitably revolting witches in the form of ingeniously designed puppet crones. So popular has this venue become that this year they went twice. The second occasion was an evening performance (which they have never tried before) of Laurie Lee's "Cider with,»Rosie" performed by an amateur cast with a narrator to tell some of the background and sustain the continuity. On both these occasions the group was grateful that the weather was favourable, although by the second act of the Laurie Lee they were glad of all the scarves, rugs and gloves that they had had the foresight to take with them!

The Walking Group under the guidance of Sally Bannister and Tricia Parsons has enjoyed an interesting and varied year, exploring the coast and countryside. Their numbers are usually between 7 and 10, but on one rare sunny day about 25 walked from Stoke, past Hartland Abbey and through the bluebell woods. In contrast, this year is the first time that a walk has had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions — the wind and torrential rain were just too much! They are always happy to be joined by new people, meeting in Stratton Car Park at 1.15 pm for a prompt 1.30pm departure. They generally walk for a couple of hours and try to arrange to finish somewhere that can offer them a welcome cup of tea!

Nineteen groups -- a real achievement — congratulations to all concerned. One of the biggest problems of growth is trying to ensure that all the news and information reaches everybody. Eric French has done a sterling job throughout the year as editor of our quarterly newsletter, and I would like to record our thanks to him once more for all his hard work.

During the last year we moved into the 21st century by launching our own website, with many thanks to Mike Roper. It has generally been well received, in spite of some teething troubles. We hope that eventually all members will feel able to contribute either with suggestions, or with news and perhaps even some photographs.

Three years ago, when I took over from Mary as Chairman, I had serious doubts about my

ability to do the job. Now, looking back, I can admit that there have been some headaches, some heartaches and one or two panic stations, but overall things have run pretty smoothly. The credit for this is not mine. I owe a great debt to all the members of the Committee, on whom I have depended.

Never take your Committee for granted. They are the 10 most valuable people in your U3A. You may have convinced yourself that you "did your bit" to help to run something when you were working. Now that you have retired it's time for "someone else . ." But in USA we've ALL retired — and if we didn't have a Committee everything would fall apart. Bude U3A couldn't exist. A few groups might soldier on for a while, but without the Committee to hold everything together the cross-pollination of information through our Branch Newsletter and the open door for newcomers at our Monthly Meetings would be a thing of the past, and the groups would soon dry up and die.

That is why I want to end this Report with one message to everybody to remember that USA is a co-operative ~ the more you put in the more you get out — and my biggest thank you — to all those who have served on the Committee with me during my Chairmanship. Thank you for your loyalty, your hard work and your support. I couldn't have done it without you.



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