

Group Reports 2010-11

Badminton

Our first season gave us a lot of fun and healthy exercise. Although one or two of the initial group were unable to continue playing, the majority stayed the course and made a lot of progress in their performance. Although our games are distinctly competitive, the most important aspect is our enjoyment of the experience and we don't much mind whether we win or lose. We will be happy to welcome one or two new members next year.

Bible Study

The group held six monthly study and discussion sessions in Letham St Mark's. 14 members signed up for the course, and the average attendance was 12. Our workbook this year was "Soul Songs" by Tim Chester, exploring love, temptation, guilt and fear in the first book of the Psalms, most of which are the songs of people in trouble. We studied the structure of Hebrew poetry, and quickly became adept at detecting parallelism and chiasmus. By the end of the course we were ready to agree with Tim Chester that studying and meditating on the Psalms revives the soul like medicine.

Bird Study

The group met on seven occasions, usually in the Youth Room at Letham St Mark's Church. There were 24 members by the end of the session, with an average attendance of around 16. The group studied a number of issues relating to British birds, ranging from nest building to winter survival. We had one external speaker, who told us about bird watching on her local patch and we had a Great Christmas Quiz which had to be held in February because the December meeting was cancelled due to the severe weather. The group also carried out an observation study on Tree Sparrows in our local area.

Book Club 1

The group met eight times during this last session. We read a variety of books including the Booker Prize winner *Wolf Hall*. This received mixed reviews from our group. We also looked at the future of books themselves. We concluded that although E books might have their uses, we preferred traditional books!

Book Club 3

The group has had a successful third session. There have been only minor changes in membership since the group was formed, with just one new member this session, bringing our numbers up to 10. We managed eight meetings during the year and read and discussed the following books, which were chosen by us on the basis of suggestions from members:

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| A J Mackinnon. | <i>The Unlikely Voyage of Jack de Crow: A Mirror Odyssey from North Wales to the Black Sea.</i> |
| Ian McEwan. | <i>Saturday.</i> |
| Louis de Bernieres. | <i>Birds Without Wings.</i> |
| Lynda Prescott (ed) | <i>A World of Difference: An Anthology of Short Stories from Five Continents.</i> |
| Simon Winchester. | <i>Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded.</i> |
| Jeffrey Eugenides. | <i>Middlesex.</i> |
| Stef Penney. | <i>The Tenderness of Wolves.</i> |
| Andrew O'Hagan. | <i>Be Near Me.</i> |

Book Club 4

This new group started with 11 members, although one only managed to attend one session. We originally met in the Wheel Inn in Scone but as one member found it difficult to hear what everyone had to say she offered to have the sessions at her home which was very much appreciated. The books we read were as follows:

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| Mitch Albom | <i>The Five People You Meet in Heaven</i> |
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Bernard Cornwell	<i>The Last Kingdom</i>
Roberta Taylor	<i>Too Many Mothers</i>
Jill Dawson	<i>The Great Lover</i>
Markus Zusak	<i>The Book Thief</i>
Sei Shonagon	<i>The Pillow Book</i>
John Le Carré	<i>Our Kind of Traitor</i>

Not everyone wishes or will be able to continue next session but we agreed that the book to read over the summer and discuss at the first meeting of the new session would be *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* by Amanda Foreman.

Christianity Today

This new group is seeking to establish and expand upon a diverse range of topics as exemplified by its 2011-12 programme, which will include discussions on Circles of Silence: The Julian Meetings, The Media and Christianity and COROS (Collectors of Religious Stamps).

Coffee and Chat

For the last two years coffee morning attendance, although small in numbers, has remained stalwart. The 2010-11 session started well with 27 present, including 13 specially invited new members few of whom returned after the initial meeting, which might suggest that the format of the meeting is just not their cup of coffee or tea. Numbers dropped as low as four in February after a difficult winter. Over the course of eight meetings, 83 members in all attended and the group leader hopes that numbers will increase in the new session.

Community Affairs

More than 50 U3A members signed up for the community affairs group this session and attendances have been around 35 at each meeting. Numbers are not limited as there is a speaker on each occasion and we have space to accommodate large numbers. Some meetings have been publicised to U3A members not in membership of the group when the speaker and their subject have been of wider interest.

Our meeting in January had to be cancelled due to the weather and on one occasion we had to find a substitute speaker at short notice; on another occasion our speaker pulled out less than an hour before the meeting, so instead of having a talk about the challenges of managing a supermarket, those attending discussed their experiences of supermarkets as a contribution to a survey being undertaken by a group member on this subject along similar lines to an earlier survey under the auspices of the group some years ago.

The sessions which went ahead were as follows:

Oliver O'Grady (Archaeologist) *Recent Archaeological Findings at Scone Palace.*

Ann Dalziel (Head teacher) *Life in a Primary School and Curriculum Developments.*

Renata Fraser (Project Coordinator at The Learning Curve) *The Polish Community in Perth.*

Clive Bowman (Centre for Mountain Studies, Perth College, UHI) *The Clim-ATIC European Project, and local action for Climate Change in Alyth.*

Coral Bell (Head teacher) *The Work of Fairview School, Perth. (Special needs education unit)*

Jane Hope (Chief Executive) *The Work of Cairngorms National Park Authority.*

Crafts

Members of the group lead monthly tutorials in a variety of skills including paper craft, patchwork techniques, cross stitch and beading. Occasionally the group invite a speaker to present a workshop with a new skill in which members have expressed an interest, e.g., jewellery, spinning, etc. Visits to craft exhibitions are arranged from time to time. Each year the group work together on a project for a charity, last year a Linus Quilt and this year knitted hats for newborn babies at Ninewells Hospital. No particular level of skill is required, just an interest in craft work generally as group support is very strong.

Film Club

This group has been very popular group from its inception. This past year saw us start with 19 members, one of whom dropped out early on because of travel difficulties. We meet for lunch at the Lovat Hotel before going on to the film at 2 o'clock at Millburn Court. We finish with a cup of tea and chat. Over the years we have had a variety of films: drama, comedy, classic, etc. The selection this year included "King Lear", "Northanger Abbey" and "Kind Hearts and Coronets". We also made a point of seeing "The King's Speech" at the local cinema. A core group of members have been keen supporters since we began some years ago, and they claim to enjoy their visits.

French 2

The group has continued along the same pattern as in previous years. We have a little chat in English and French and read and discuss articles from the French press, extracts from novels or short stories varied with films or anything else of interest that comes along.

French Play Reading 1

There are seven members in the group. We meet in the houses of our members. During the 2010-11 session we have enjoyed reading a selection of plays by Anouilh, Feydeau, Marivaux and Racine.

Gardening

The group has a membership of 22 plus seven members on a waiting list. Waiting list members are allowed to attend such meetings as garden visits when accommodation space is not an issue. This has been a very varied session, including meetings at the houses of Margaret Hynd and Chris Willox, a visit to David Turnbull's garden to find out about apple growing, a demonstration on what can be done to clear up winter damage by Helen Leslie and a session helping Chris Bonomy in the garden for the blind.

Hill Walking

The group has enjoyed another successful year, having tackled some challenging routes. Away days on Arran in September were much enjoyed: an exciting ridge walk from Goat Fell descending over the Cloch na-h-Oighe Ridge, a lovely day on Holy Isle and walks to visit standing stones and caves. Plans are in motion for a visit to the Torridon area in May and Bulgaria in the autumn. Much of the pleasure of our days comes from the excellent company and the shared enjoyment of exploring lesser known areas. The group plans to continue walking every third Monday of the month throughout the summer.

Latin 1

This year the group, composed of four members and tutor Ronald Darroch, has studied a selection of Latin prose and verse using the text *Ecce scriptores Romani*.

Latin 2

The Latin course *Ecce Romani* continues to deal with such topics as family life, dress, imperial government, slavery, public amusements, communications and travel. On the linguistic side, continuing study shows that as a major contributor to the English vocabulary and our literary heritage Latin remains illuminating and relevant in the 21st century.

Mah-jong

At the end of our second year our enthusiasm for the game remains undimmed and attendances have been very good; even at the height of the winter blizzards a brave handful battled through the adverse conditions to do battle around the table. One of the most enjoyable aspects of our afternoons has been the friendly and supportive atmosphere we have created - in which it's not a major disaster if somebody occasionally (as we all do) makes a silly mistake. There's always sympathy for those who would be bound to triumph if it were not for the consistent bad luck with which their efforts are cursed!

My Life Story

The group consisted of eight members this session but we could not complete a full year programme due to weather conditions in December and difficulty in finding alternative accommodation in April. One meeting was held in Auchterarder to see whether in future members would be able willing to travel the extra distance. Next year's programme will consist of ten meetings to help to make up time lost this year as not all the stories are completed. We hope to attract new members to the group.

Philosophy—Introduction

Once again I did not know how this would go at the start of the year. 15 people registered and 11 were regular attenders. I changed the book this year to Simon Blackburn's *Think*, supposedly an introduction to philosophy, but this turned out to be a very hard read. The broad range of philosophical topics was covered but Blackburn quite often leaves the reader confused as to exactly what the point is. However, we had some interesting discussions and sessions and it will be interesting to see who carries on and comes along to the Continuing Philosophy next year.

Philosophy—Continuing A and B

There were 25 people registered for Continuing Philosophy this year. Most people know what they are in for so most people come along for at least some of the sessions and a good number of hard core members seldom miss a meeting. This year we read David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in celebration of the 300 year anniversary of Hume's birth. A world-renowned historian, essayist and philosopher, Hume is as fresh and relevant today as he was when he shook the established order in the 18th century. The subject of a huge amount of analysis and comment, it was a great pleasure and revelation to read the man himself.

Photography 1 and 2

Groups 1 and 2 continued the meetings at the Wheel Inn, Scone on consecutive Monday mornings. Initial group membership started at 12 for Group 1 and 14 for Group 2, although this reduced over the latter sessions. Unfortunately, on two occasions the meeting had to be cancelled due to the extreme weather conditions. To try and make the meeting more accessible to members it was agreed that if a member of group 1 missed their meeting for whatever reason, they could attend the group 2 meeting the following week and vice-versa.

The subjects covered this year followed the pattern established last year: discussion of members' photographs of a chosen subject followed by viewing of a DVD covering a particular aspect of photography such as White Balance or ISO. Subjects chosen for the photography ranged from Autumn, Snowdrops, Head and Shoulders through to Reflections. It has been encouraging to see how some members have developed their photographic skills over the period. Some have changed their camera as their desire to try new techniques has grown. It is also encouraging that most members have expressed a desire to continue with the groups in the coming year. A summer meeting in the Perth Theatre cafe has been arranged for Monday July 11th at 10.30. Weather permitting, we hope to capture street scenes.

Play Reading 1 and 2

Play Reading 1 started the new session with ten members and Play Reading 2 was started to accommodate ten more members, whose first meeting kicked off by reading two one-act plays, written by Third-agers and published by the Third Age Trust, which the first group had read in the previous session. Thereafter both groups read one-act plays in the Vintage series written for mature casts and borrowed from the Scottish Community Drama Association library in Edinburgh. Over the course of the last two meetings both groups enjoyed reading J.B.Priestley's three-act play, *When We Are Married*, and agreed that next session we would tackle longer well-known plays spread over two meetings.

Poetry Appreciation 1

Another most enjoyable session. Our selected poets included the following :- Robert Tanahill, Robert Fergusson, Margaret Atwood, Stevie Smith, Les Murray, Peter Porter, Lord Byron and the soliloquies of William Shakespeare. One session was spent reading Seamus Heaney's

translation of Beowulf. Five different group members led the five specialist meetings. Poetry Please, during which we read our chosen poems for the meeting, remains a very popular part of the programme. Sixteen members attended the group on a very regular basis.

Poetry Appreciation 2

Our group of eight has enjoyed meeting together, although illness depleted our numbers occasionally this year. We read poems of choice at all meetings but devoted two meetings mainly to the poetry of T S Eliot, one meeting to Philip Larkin and another to the poetry of women. We look forward to increasing our numbers to perhaps 12 next year. Producing sufficient copies of texts can be quite burdensome and we have yet to find a solution.

Russian

A small but committed group of five students continued to meet as a home group to study basic Russian and to discuss many aspects of the country's culture and politics.

Scottish Studies

This group uses material freely available from OpenLearn Scotland, a subset of the Open University. This year we have studied "Nationalism, self-determination and secession". Our study takes the form of agreeing which chapters should be studied for the next meeting, and then discussing them at our next meeting. At our last meeting, using our newly gained knowledge, we reviewed the last Government's proposal for a referendum on Independence. Our group is a house group, which members take turns to host. We also share the role of facilitator who leads the discussions, thus relieving the pressure on the group leader. For 2011-12 session we have agreed to study the course entitled "Sustainable Scotland".

Scrabble 3

At the end of our first year we can report a most enjoyable session for our small group, although a variety of unforeseen circumstances forced some to withdraw during the winter. It has been good to travel around the homes of our members and play in a friendly and supportive mood. One interesting by-product has been the remarkable variety of new words we have learned from each other. There's a vigorous and on-going debate about the admissibility of some local dialect words - not only Scots ones, since we come from several different parts of the UK.

Still Life and Pastel Drawing

A 'non artist' member volunteered to 'keep the register' of this group to ensure its continuation. There were several hiccups – mix-ups with booking dates, access to the venue and bad weather, but the group persevered and, as the year progressed, became a self-help group with participants sharing ideas, skills and techniques. The group will reinvent itself next year with a more flexible multi-media content and new group leaders.

Walking

Our programme of Monday morning walks every four weeks hit a few predictable obstacles in the worst of the winter weather, which caused more than one cancellation and/or last minute change of plan. Our numbers, however, have remained high, averaging 16 or 17 per walk. We continue to venture into new territory, some of it slightly more 'suburban' than other areas, and the past few months have seen us heading in such differing directions as Scone, Blackford, Forgandenny and Lochore Meadows. We continue to walk throughout the summer and are always ready to welcome new recruits.

Walking and Wildlife

On average about ten members enjoyed the two to three mile walks which included rambles at Auchtermuchty, Dunning, Dunkeld and along the Tay at Perth. The two winter meetings took the form of Wildlife magazine programmes. While I will remain a member of the group next year and offer to lead the indoor meetings, I will be looking for a new leader to take responsibility for the walks next year.