

From the Editor Helen McGlinchey

Welcome to the May/June newsletter. Thank you to all those who contributed to this edition. My thanks to Barbara McDermott and Ann Hayes for their help & advice. Wishing everyone a lovely summer.

Contacts

For reasons concerning compliance with General Data Protection Regulation, Belfast u3a is no longer publishing the personal email addresses of Committee Members, including the Newsletter Editor, on the public website. Convenors may be contacted through the website <https://belfast.u3asite.uk/>. Go to the Group tab, find the Group page and click on the convenor's name.

Committee News

It's been a busy few months for Committee, especially as we have been running lighter after the resignation of Jim Livingstone as Chairperson in early March. At its meeting on the 23rd, tribute was paid to Jim's tenure of care of the organisation over the past almost 3 years, a time of significant expansion in the number of members and during preparations for the 25th anniversary year. In the absence of a Vice-Chairperson too, the work is being shared amongst other members until such time as new officers are appointed at this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM).

One of the issues Jim put a lot of thought into was about updating the Belfast u3a Constitution. Making a start on this, Committee put forward a resolution to change the quorum for AGMs and Special General Meetings (SGMs), and an SGM was called for 26 March. Every effort was made to make it an attractive morning out at the Balmoral Hotel; traybakes with coffee, the inimitable Eamon Mallie signing and giving away copies of his book of poetry and this was all followed by an inspiring talk by Dawson Stelfox, the Belfast architect and mountaineer. Getting on to the SGM, using barcode scanners for those who brought membership cards and manually recording of names for those who didn't, a total of 217 members were counted in. Disappointingly, this was not enough for a quorum. On the basis of 1,234 members on the Belfast u3a database that day, we needed a quorum of 20% (ie. 246) members to be present. Had a quorum been achieved, and no more, we would have required $2/3$ of $246 = 164$ members to vote in favour of the resolution. In fact, 217 voted in favour, with none against. Indeed, another ten expressed written support, though absent from the meeting. No members expressed their intention to vote against the resolution. It is perfectly clear that our membership overwhelmingly wished the resolution

to be passed. So, we failed to meet our statutory quorum by a narrow margin. Seeking advice as to how to make the change, we are currently in discussion with The Third Age Trust and subsequently will need to engage with the Charities Commission for NI.

Meanwhile, business must proceed for us to continue operation and to this end an AGM has been called for Thursday 28 May. A notice and call for Committee nominations was Emailed to members on 18 April, and a reminder sent on 2 May. The business of the AGM will include election of members to serve on the Executive Committee (which has a maximum of 12 members).

There will be vacancies for two Officers (Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson), a Deputy Treasurer and five ordinary Committee Members (with various roles) - Groups, Events, Speakers, Minutes, Website. Officers can serve for a period of 2 (+2) years and ordinary members for not more than 3 consecutive years (from 28-05-26). Please contact any member of Committee (<https://belfast.u3asite.uk/contact/>) if you would like to discuss these opportunities. The deadline is Friday 8 May 2026. Papers for the AGM have already been posted on the website, and here you will find:

- *01 Notice and Agenda 2026
- *02 Minutes if the last AGM held on 29 May 2025
- *03 Business Secretary's Report
- *04 Accounts and Treasurer's Report
- *05 Independent Examiner's Report
- *06 Trustees' Report

Immediately after the AGM, a General Meeting will take place as usual, when the speaker is astrophysicist, Professor Alan Fitzsimmons.

It has been an exciting few months for new Activity Groups coming on stream. *Ballet for Life* started in mid-April and, although currently full, there are second and third blocks planned for later in the year, for absolute beginners or those with some experience. These classes run in collaboration with the Whitehouse Ballet School. *El Español Inmersivo* also started mid-April, running in the Morton Community Centre and focusing on improving the skills of those already able to speak Spanish. *Musical Theatre* has had 30+ expressions of interest, and a meeting will be convened soon to plan a way forward. *Sign Language*, a course to run probably in North Belfast, will benefit from support by a National Lottery Community Grant. *Finding Your Creative Talent*, 'a craft class with a difference' will provide opportunities to use many craft tools and materials in unexpected ways; this will start on 11 May in Tesco Knocknagoney Community Room. There are two proposed new groups. *E bike cycling* would meet on Wednesdays at 11.00h and cycle 20-30 km, with appropriate breaks for lunch and refreshments. Further information all of the above can be found on the Website, and/or by contacting the Groups Co-Ordinator, Geoff Crowther. *Tai Chi* will be located at the Shaftesbury Bowling club (Annadale Avenue) on Tuesday mornings and, if there is enough interest, at Musgrave Park on Wednesday or Thursday mornings. If interested please see more information under 'Group News'.

And lastly, we can look forward to the Summer 'Smoke' BBQ to be held on Thursday 25th June. Here's hoping for a sunny day.

Belfast u3a Website from the Web Admin Team

Belfast u3a Website

<https://belfast.u3asite.uk/>

(You can also find the website by googling Belfast u3a)

As we step into another busy month at Belfast u3a, our website continues to hopefully reflect the energy, creativity, and curiosity of you, our members. From new groups taking shape to familiar favourites thriving, it's a pleasure to showcase everything you bring to our community. Thank you for keeping our digital home lively, welcoming, and full of stories worth sharing.

But we can't stand still and we are continually working on improving the Belfast u3a website. A number of changes have already taken place, with the addition of Website News, this is your first port of call to latest news about the Website and is found on the Welcome page, a 'How To' page and the 25th Anniversary page with audio/visual content including audio and transcripts of the speeches on the day.

Also, we have recently introduced a website News Flyer, which you would have already received in a Members email. It was also available to pick up at the website table at the monthly meeting and also recently at the new members meeting.

To assist us to improve your website, I would now really value your thoughts on the following:

1. How easy is it for you to find what you need, and what do you enjoy most about the site as it is now?
2. If anything feels confusing, hard to locate, or frustrating, please let us know.
3. It also helps to hear whether you usually visit on a phone, tablet, or computer.
4. Do you feel that the site feels welcoming and true to the spirit of Belfast u3a.
5. Most importantly, what improvements or new features would you find useful — and if you could change just one thing, what would it be? Your feedback will help shape the next stage of our website.
6. What are your thoughts of the Website News Flyer recently introduced, did you find it useful and informative, is it something you think we should continue with?

Your thoughts, and answers to these few questions can be forwarded to the Belfast u3a Web Manager using the contact page on the Website or by email to u3aBelfastwebmanager@outlook.com

This is a first step to ascertain your usage of the website. It will be followed up later this year with a website survey, further details will be forthcoming on this later, also an online version of the survey form will also be available on the Website at that time.

u3amatters Magazine DIGITAL | LIVING WELL

I draw your attention to an interesting article in the latest edition of u3a matters magazine, the Spring edition under Living Well - Deal with Digital p31 titled Silver Screens, this article deals with how we are spending more time on-line and how to keep it balanced and healthy. I found it a worthwhile read and would recommend it to you. The digital edition of this magazine is accessible below.

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/u3a-matters/u3a-matters-spring-2026-screenreader-edition>

NEW You can now access the Belfast u3a website quicker by using the QR-code below, to use this just point your camera on your mobile device and scan the code.



Sean Canning Web Manager Belfast u3a

Information on Monthly Meetings

Monthly Meetings in the Balmoral Hotel, Blacks Road, Dunmurry, Belfast BT10 0NF.

Please note that monthly meetings are usually held on the last Thursday of the month at 11.00h.

Tea/coffee is served from 10.15. We will send out a reminder a week before the meeting.

THURSDAY 28 MAY 11.00 am, The Balmoral Hotel (Tea/coffee from 10.15)

Prof Alan Fitzsimmons whose talk is entitled *Defending the Earth from Asteroids*.

Asteroids and comets hitting the Earth are a staple of science fiction. In reality, we now discover thousands of new Near-Earth Objects every year and are in the middle of the first test of asteroid deflection by NASA and ESA. This talk will explain how potentially dangerous asteroids are discovered and tracked every day. Asteroids and comets posing a risk of future impact are targeted for further observations, and possible mitigation of an impact can be planned for. Alan Fitzsimmons has worked in this field for over 20 years. He will describe the current state of the art, and how new observatories coming into operation will help this effort over the next decade.

THURSDAY 25 JUNE

Summer BBQ Venue and time to TBC

Membership Cards with Barcodes

The membership secretary issued everyone with a new membership card which now bears a unique barcode. These cards are required to be shown at the monthly meetings as they will be scanned upon entry to the meetings. If anyone does not have access to a printer or smartphone, please get in touch with the membership secretary and a card will be provided.

British Sign Language from Nick Acheson

The story of deaf sign languages in Northern Ireland. Why do we have two?

On 28th April 2026, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Sign language Bill, landmark legislation that gives the recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) as languages in their own right the force of law. It goes further than legislation in the rest of the UK and in Ireland in that it will provide for free sign language education for Deaf and deaf-blind people as of right.

The new law is also unique in that it gives equal recognition to two different sign languages in a single jurisdiction. The passage of the legislation is a good moment to reflect on why this is so.

Sign languages used by Deaf people are not signed versions of spoken languages but have their own complex syntax and structure; they work in physical space by gesture and expression rather than by sound. They are the native languages of people who are born deaf or who become deaf in early childhood. These are Deaf people (the capital 'D' is important as it distinguishes them from the many people who lose their hearing later in life, but whose native language is spoken). Deaf people are a distinct language and cultural community.

Officially in Northern Ireland, BSL has about 3,500 users and ISL about 1,500 although it is more, if you include Deaf people's immediate families. They are different languages in the same way as are French and German. We need to go back to the beginnings of deaf education in Ireland to understand how we got both.

The first deaf school in Ireland was the Claremont Institution for the Deaf and Dumb Poor of Ireland founded in Dublin in 1813 by Charles Orpen, the son of a Church of Ireland rector. It was a Church of Ireland school, and this was reflected in its governance and objectives. The Ulster Society for the Deaf, Dumb and Blind was founded in Belfast a bit later in 1831 and had a similar ethos: to afford to deaf, dumb and blind children, whose parents reside in the Province of Ulster, a religious and literary education, in accordance with the standard of doctrines of the Churches of England and Scotland, and to prepare them for learning some useful trade, by which they may be entitled to earn their livelihood.

Parents sending their children to either school had to agree to the religious education offered. Catholic children were expected to trade in their religion for the sake of an education. This had predictable results.

After the introduction of the Irish Poor Law in 1838, Poor Law Guardians began to send Catholic children to the Claremont Institution, which was asked to provide them with religious instruction in their own faith. It refused on the grounds that its aims and objectives didn't allow it. This was also a time when the Protestant churches became keen to evangelise Irish Catholics, and educating Catholic deaf children might have seemed a convenient way of doing it.

As a direct consequence in December 1845, the Catholic Institute for the Deaf and Dumb was established and opened a school in the Dublin suburb of Cabra, for deaf girls in 1846 and then for deaf boys in 1856.

Now the origins of ISL. As it suspected the Claremont Institution of proselytizing its Catholic pupils, the new school looked to France for guidance and a delegation including its first two deaf pupils went to the Le Bon Sauveur School for the Deaf in Caen. This was based on the system devised by Abbé Charles Michel de L'Épée who founded in Paris in 1755 what is thought to have been the first public school for deaf children anywhere.

Abbé de L'Épée was the first to recognise that signing used by his pupils was a language in its own right. He both systematised the language and developed a combined method of teaching to enable his pupils to communicate with the hearing world. This was the system that the Irish delegation encountered in Caen. The two Irish deaf girls picked up the sign language being used there and brought that back to Ireland with them. ISL thus began as a dialect of French sign language. Because the boys and the girls were educated and lived completely separately until the schools in Cabra were finally amalgamated in 2016, ISL is unique among sign languages in having different versions for men and women.

The Claremont Institution finally closed in 1978. Covering all nine counties of Ulster before partition, the Ulster Society provided education for most Protestant deaf children in Ireland. Catholic children could go to Cabra to be immersed in ISL.

Like nearly all philanthropy in Ireland in the 19th century, the Ulster Society remained heavily aligned with church values, in this case Presbyterian and Anglican. Strong business and cultural links in Belfast with the north of England and Manchester in particular, made it natural for the committee and the staff to look to England for guidance. In this context it is hardly surprising that that BSL was adopted in the Society's school and among its pupils.

BSL was only recognised and systematised in the 1960s and 1970s after years of oppression. Its use in schools had been banned in 1893 when education of deaf children was made compulsory for the first time. Deaf teachers lost their jobs.

The denominational principle became embedded in deaf education in Ireland creating two language communities among Deaf people in Northern Ireland. After partition in 1921, ISL became the default sign language in the Free State. From partition on the Ulster Society restricted itself to Northern Ireland only. So BSL became embedded in the North, but with a minority of ISL users among those educated in Dublin.

The Ulster Society opened its school in 1845 in a very grand building on the Lisburn Road in Belfast on the site of what is now the Queens Medical Centre. The building was demolished in 1966 after the school moved to Jordanstown. The school is now a maintained co-educational school for deaf and blind children wholly integrated into the state education

system in Northern Ireland. It currently has about 100 pupils of all ages. The Ulster Society has survived as a charity looking after endowments that date back to the 19th century, but it hasn't had any direct role in managing the school for 60 years.

The author, a member of Belfast U3A, is a retired lecturer in social policy at Ulster University.

Thanks to Brian Symington MBE for help in compiling this article.

Group News

Scrabble Group – from Hilary Davidson

We will continue to meet on Thursdays finishing on 25th June and restarting on 10th September.

Informal Bridge Group – from Pat McNamee



Mon and/or Fri 2 to 4 pm in the convenor's house. Contact Pat McNamee tel 02890612942

New members who have learnt basic knowledge of bidding and play and who wish to practice their play in an informal setting are very welcome. Queries about bidding and play can be discussed in a relaxed atmosphere though members should have enough knowledge to bid and play without constant teaching and advice. If needed beginner's courses are available elsewhere. You do not need to come with a partner.

Garden Visits Group - from Rosemary Thomas

On Earth Day, 22 April, we had our first outing of the season, to Antrim Castle Gardens. Volunteer Ranger Jeff gave us a wonderful tour of the historic gardens which looked glorious in the sunshine.

Classical Music Appreciation Group – from Keith Thompson



Our May meeting will be in two sections. First, I shall try and summarise what we have learnt from the Bernstein lectures. Then we shall listen to a selection of famous *Gilbert and Sullivan* operatic arias. At the June meeting, which concludes our sessions until the autumn, I intend to listen to series of pieces chosen at random from *Year of Wonder*, a selection of music for each day of the year by the presenter Clemency Burton-Hill. Some pieces will be familiar favourites - some unknown.

Meetings are on the second Tuesday of the Month (12th May 9th June) 10.30-12.30 in Finaghy Community Centre."

Mindfulness Group – from David Blair



We had a very relaxing weekend at the glorious Tobar Mhuire Retreat and Conference Centre. Nine u3a members joined David for a weekend of Mindful Meditations, periods of silence, reflection and some gentle movement following instructors in Yoga, Non-impact Aerobics and Tai Chi. The latter was so successful that we are going ahead with a new Tai Chi Group* .

We were blessed by lovely weather for most of the weekend and had some of our sessions outdoors while listening to the birdsong. A magical experience!!!

I have decided, following requests from previous attendees, to change the format of the Mindfulness Group. Rather than running the structured 8-week programme, which has been way I have done it for the last 3-4 years, I am offering drop-in sessions. This will give members the opportunity to recommend meditations and sitting practices from a variety of sources. These can be tried and discussed along with any new developments in the subject. This will be open to anyone from Belfast u3a and will be free to members. The venue will probably be the Morton Community Centre. I'll send out details via WhatsApp. Anyone wishing to join, please make contact by email to mindfulnessu3abelfast@gmail.com

Tai Chi Group – from David Blair

If you are, like me, receiving endless adverts for armchair Tai Chi – BEWARE!!! They are mostly scams!

There is nothing like the real thing with a qualified instructor, so take the AI out of Tai Chi (and I don't mean T Chi) and join us for a series of structured exercises with the lovely Sheenagh. Sheenagh led us during the Mindfulness Retreat and she is qualified to help people with restricted abilities and movement. Sheenagh describes her sessions of Tai Chi as 'a form of alert relaxation and meditation'

We have costed this at £40 for 8 sessions and the venues will be at both Shaftesbury Bowling Club and Musgrave Bowling Club hopefully starting during the second week of May. This will be confirmed on receipt of your expression of interest. I have created an email for you to reply, so please let me know if you are interested by contacting taichibelfastu3a@gmail.com

For those of you who have never tried it before, it is a very gentle way of getting the body moving and it feels great. Your muscle tone, stability and balance will all improve, and the more you do, the better you will feel.

Backgammon Group – from David Blair

The Backgammon group continues to meet weekly at the Newtownbreda Tesco in their Community Room on the second floor. We start at about 13:30 every Tuesday afternoon. If you have never played before, don't worry, help is at hand, and one of the regulars will show you the set up and go over the rules. It only takes half an hour to learn but the rest of your life to master!

Singing For Fun Group – from David Blair

We are hoping to sing a couple of songs at the summer BBQ on June 25th. The venue for this had some storm damage at their premises and at time of writing we are trying to source a replacement venue, and this will be advertised as soon as it is confirmed.

New members of the Singing for Fun group are always welcome. No audition is required and we meet at the Four Winds Bar/Restaurant every second Thursday, the next being May 7th.

Wine Tasting Group – from David Blair

A few people have been asking when the next set of wine tasting sessions will be taking place. There won't be any before the Autumn as I am too busy with other groups at the present. Keep watching the newsletter for future dates and venues.

Photography Group – from A. Ross



Now that the weather is starting to improve, the group are beginning to identify and target dates for outings to locations such as Castlewellan Forest Park and the Argory in Armagh. We are also working our current policy of taking photographs to a specific letter, for April the letter is U and we have had such subjects as University, Umbrellas, Udder etc. The month of May onwards should be interesting when we meet the letters V, W, X and Z. We will also be continuing our refresher sessions on such topics as *Composition*, *The Exposure Triangle* and *Which Format to use JPEG or RAW ETC*.

The Last Word Group – from Hilary Davidson

We meet on Fridays 1.30-3.00. We continue until 26th June then restarting on 4th September.

Myths & Legends Group – from Mavis Turner

This group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month in Clonduff Community Centre at 2pm. We are currently using Stephen Fry's book *Mythos* as a basis for the Greek Myths. Stephen Fry makes the stories easy reading and accessible. At present the focus is on *Jason and the Golden Fleece*.

New members to this group will be made welcome, either come along at the time mentioned or get in contact with me for further information. We will meet for the last time before the summer break on 10 June.

Poetry Interest Group – from Mavis Turner

This group continues to meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month for May and June 2026.

At each meeting the group selects a poet or theme to concentrate on. The selection of poetry varies and members choose poems to read, which usually stimulates interesting conversation. The poet *Cecil Day-Lewis* has been chosen to focus on at our meeting on 12 May.

Do come along , join us for a cuppa and listen to contributions or take part.

Creative Writing Group – from Dorothy Byrne

The creative writing group continues to meet every Monday in the Ormeau Road Library from 2-4pm. Group members usually bring along a piece of work from a given set of triggers, or a piece which they have been working on which is separate to the triggers. Group numbers remain constant as does attendance and members enjoy the stories and poems.

Golf Group – from Jim Lowry



Our programme for this year is well underway with the following outings agreed at our annual preseason meeting.

6th May Whitehead. @ 11.00

3rd June. The Blackwood @11.00

1st July. Helen's Bay @11.40

5th August Carrickfergus @11.00

September - Trip to North Coast

Potentially Portstewart Riverside, Bushfoot or Ballycastle details TBA.

Our first outing to Kirkistown was a bit of a wash out with just a few members braving the downpours. Hopefully we'll have better weather for our next outing to Whitehead GC. on 6th May.

Strength, Balance & Beyond Group – from Doris Gentemann

Since I last wrote, I've passed the *LifeDock Strength & Balance* coaching training 😊 That programme has really useful exercises! I continue to interweave them with Tai Chi, to give a nice natural flow, especially when we walk.

My current classes are about to come to an end. People who attended and practised at least some of the exercises at home showed good results: less tripping, wider range of movement, realising just how many opportunities an ordinary day can offer to practise balance. At least one of my previous group members is doing the one-legged-brushing-of-teeth in Spanish 🇪🇸 - talk about multi-tasking! 😊

So, I'd like to offer a more regular group. But first, I am taking a month-long break from teaching, to give me time to properly evaluate how the classes went so far and rethink the format. Then we can start again in June or July.

I am inviting people to email me suggestions and expressions of interest at third_age_doris@yahoo.com.

Please let me know:

- Would you be interested in a one-off workshop where we would combine chatting about people's situations (health conditions, challenges to exercise), learn some useful background info, and practise the exercises? I could offer several stand-alone two-hour workshops over the summer.

- If the interest was there, we could even have a week where we do a build-up of workshops on four or five mornings!

- Or might it work if there was a monthly drop-in group, for new people as well as members of previous classes, going over the exercises people find most useful, ironing out details, and, together, figuring out what tricks might work best so that we all really do get these exercises incorporated into our daily habits? Then check in again the following month and so on?

- Any other suggestions? This is your chance to co-create a group format that would work for you! Has anyone any experience with fortnightly groups? Any venues that are particularly suitable? Meet in the park? Over to you!

Concert/Theatre Group – from Maureen Pimley



1. Lyric Theatre. *The Blind Fiddler* by Marie Jones. Sunday 2nd August 2026. 2.30pm. £16.00 TBC. Booking open
2. Grand Opera House. *High Society* Wednesday 12th August 2026. 2.30pm. £52.50. BOOKING CLOSED.
3. Ulster Hall. Ulster Youth Orchestra Summer Concert. Sunday 16th August 2026. 2.45pm. £17.50 TBC. Booking open.
4. Waterfront Studio. *Celtic Heart Experience* Sunday 23rd August 2026. 2.00pm. £22.50 TBC. Booking open
5. Lyric Theatre. *The Life and Times of Paddy Armstrong* Sunday 13th September 2026. 2.30pm. £16.00TBC. Booking open.
6. Grand Opera House. *Carmen* by Bizet. NI Opera. Saturday 19th September 2026. 2.30pm. £62.50. BOOKING CLOSED.
7. Grand Opera House. Grand Ballet Gala with Melissa Hamilton. Saturday 10th October 2026. 2.30pm. £57.50 TBC. Booking open.
8. Ulster Hall. *Alan Davis---Think Ahead* Tuesday 13th October 2026. 8.00pm. £35.00 TBC. Booking open.
9. Lyric Theatre. *Faith Healer* by Brian Friel. Sunday 18th October 2026. 2.30pm. £16.00 TBC. Booking open.
10. Ulster Hall. *Music of Fleetwood Mac by Candlelight* Thursday 19th November 2026. 7.30pm. £45.00 TBC. Booking open.
11. Ulster Hall. *London Symphonic Rock Orchestra* Thursday 3rd December 2026 7.30pm. £46.50. Booking open.

Play Reading Group – from Sharon Adair

The Play reading group are meeting at 10 30 each Tuesday in the community room Tesco Newtownbreda.

We read plays from Shakespeare to Wilde and have a happy and friendly group membership.

We would we welcome anyone who is interested in theatre or joining us for a taster session.

All Weather Walking Group – from Heather Sharpe



On 15 April, 34 of us set off to the Isle of Man, for a 3 day walking trip. After quite a rough ferry crossing, we were greeted by sunshine on arrival in Douglas. We were blessed with good weather for the rest of the trip.

We were given a choice of 2 walks each day, one of 4/5 miles, the other 7/8 miles. These were led by local guides who were very knowledgeable, and we learnt many interesting facts about the Isle Of Man. The walks covered Isle of Man's only mountain Snaefell, coastal paths, some of the Manx national glens, and some towns and villages.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the walks, and those who had not visited before, got a great first impression of the island.

The walks, combined with great service, food and accommodation in our hotel, made this trip a very successful venture.