

**u3a
Basingstoke
Old Basing**

25 years and counting — our u3a history

**25 Years
June 24**



The origins of the u3a



Did you know Basingstoke Old Basing u3a has been around 25 years? Yes, you heard right **25 years!** But have you ever wondered how the u3a began in the first place and how it got to what it is today? Then there's the question of how our very own Basingstoke Old Basing u3a got off the ground. Well, this little booklet will tell you and give you a bit of history in the process.

How did it all begin?

It all began in 1972 with **Professor Pierre Vellas**, at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Toulouse. He and his team wanted to see what could be done to improve the quality of lives of those in the 'third age of their life' (that's people like you and me) through physical and mental stimulation.

They recognised that this older age group was a growing in numbers and wanted to see what providing educational, social and physical stimulation would do. Their guidelines included that this had to be done at minimal cost to the individual and at that time each u3a group was guided by a local university.

But it didn't stay like that...

By the early 80's, Peter Laslett, an academic at Cambridge University, hosted a conference with the idea of bringing the u3a to the UK. He rejected the idea of the group being guided by a university and instead with help and backing from others re-wrote the guidelines to change it to the more self-help organisation that it is today. The idea quickly caught on and in the 80's the number of groups quickly expanded.

Today, the u3a has grown to 1035 groups across the UK with a total membership in the region of 400,000 members.

So, when did our group start in Basingstoke?

Our group first began in September 1998 when Tony Collyer, a founder member of u3a Guildford & Farnham, wrote to Alan Gibberd in Old Basing, in the hope of getting a group started in Basingstoke.

With the help of Canon David Pictor from St Mary's church, Old Basing, a meeting was held in the Parish Room and publicised in the local Parish Magazine. A further public meeting took place 23 Nov 1998 with 87 people attending.

For the next meeting Avrille Gibberd volunteered her house as the venue. She then became the first Chair, with a Steering Committee of five members, which met monthly from January 1999 until the first AGM in October. The Inaugural Meeting took place 15 February 1999, with the aim of recruiting new members and volunteers to organise groups. By this time, 120 members were part of the new u3a which gained publicity in The Gazette which reached out to the wider community.

In April 1999, after initially being granted temporary membership of the Third Age Trust for three months, Avrille applied for full membership. The group was admitted to the Third Age Trust as the Old Basing & District u3a on the **1st June 1999.**

We were official!



Group Expansion

The next meeting saw a number of people volunteering their services in various groups. One of the events that followed from the start-up of the Bridge Group was the development of the Swiss Teams Bridge tournament, which brought u3a bridge players together from all over the South of England to **Elizabeth Hall in Hook.**



Some of our early groups

Language classes proved popular and one of the first to start was German, which continues to this day. French followed towards the end of 1999, Italian in 2001, Spanish in 2002 and the Latin group began in 2006.



Christmas meetings were enlivened with the carols being sang in German and French.

Early Group Examples

- Natural History
- Ballroom Dancing
- Outings
- Luncheon Group
- Garden Appreciation
- Language Groups
- Meditation
- Recorder
- Bridge

The recorder group went from strength, playing at Christmas meetings. After one such meeting, in 2003, they gained wider recognition: a couple of days later, they featured in the York Nativity Play at Aldermaston, which appeared on the BBC's South Today programme.



Other groups included Walking, which proved popular, despite the problems caused by the foot and mouth epidemic at the time!

The Outings group was a very successful early addition to the list, now called Excursions and Holidays.



Our Venues

The Elizabeth Hall was found to be suitable and available for our regular monthly meetings. The first meeting held at this venue was on the 10 March 1999, with an attendance of around 90 members.

Regular meetings took place in Hook until 2021 when we changed the our venue to **Queen Mary's College in Basingstoke.**

Change of Name

At our AGM held on 9 July 2008, the name of the group was changed to **Basingstoke Old Basing u3a.**

Funding and Donations

In the early years, local businesses supported us until we became self-funding. Some of the early donations included those listed below.



Year	Donation
2000	BCOT gave u3a six computers, which enabled the start of the Computer Studies Group
2001	Basingstoke & Deane Council awarded £1,172 towards the cost of a music centre, computer equipment, display boards and accessories.
2005	Shell contributed £350
2009	Chineham Chat (a local magazine) gave £850 to purchase laptop and projector
2009	We received a Grass Roots Grant to help cover the cost of hall hiring and a total of £5,000 was donated over 6 months.

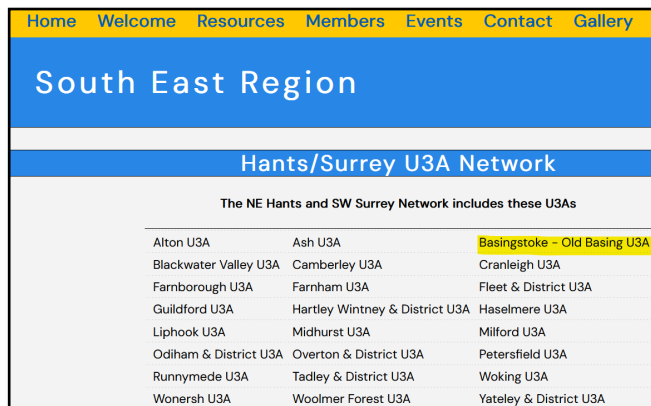
Regional and National u3a Memberships

Your membership fee includes being part of the Regional & National u3a Networks. We belong to the NE Hants and SW Surrey Network, which is in turn part of the South East Region. As you can see from the image there are quite a few groups in this network.

Occasionally, there are cultural or education events in our Network that you can take part in but this is something that **needs to be requested first**.

In the past activities have included organised tours to places of interest, including:

- A trip, in March 2002, to New Orleans for local u3a Jazz Appreciation groups.
- Study Days included a trip to the Wigmore Hall in London for music lovers, one in Barnstaple for those interested in Agriculture and a day at the University of Birmingham for the Arts Appreciation Network. A Languages Study Day in April 2008 was held at the National Union of Journalists in London, and the Yorkshire Dales provided the setting for Geology classes. A very successful Victorian Study Day in July 2010 was held in the Elizabeth Hall, in London, with a String Quartet playing in the background.
- Open University courses were available to u3a members, and Summer Schools were also held over the years. The latter often comprised 3 or 4-day courses, including seminars on Drawing and Painting,



Communicating with our members

Year Book

Initially, we created a year book and in 2006–2007 this gave members a complete list of our activities, plus contact details and timings for each group.

However, this was unsustainable as it was often out of date before it was printed and there were data protection issues. So, the Committee decided to scrap this as there were other ways that members could keep in touch such as Facebook, emails and a Summary Timetable.

Newsletters

We published our first Newsletters in 1999, consisting of a double-sided sheet of paper, issued two or three times a year. The format was a brief report by the Chairman at the time, followed by a list of proposed events, the groups and their activities.

In 2008, as membership grew, more groups were added, and the Newsletter developed into a booklet produced 2 or 3 times a year. Its importance grew during Covid, and included additional graphics and photos reflecting our activities during these difficult times.

News Edit

Today the Newsletter is called u3a News Edit and is produced online monthly by our PR Officer.

It includes news about our committee, members stories, group activity updates, quiz and monthly meetings.

This is available to download and read from our u3a Basingstoke Old Basing website.

Adopting New Technology

Who would have thought when our u3a first started in 1999, there would be such advances in technology? Just look below to see what we have adopted.

Website

In 2009, we replaced our initial website. The new website gave details about our groups and other activities, such as Monthly Meetings.

In 2020 we decided to replace our website again, this time with one that was easier to maintain and keep up to date. We also made it more attractive by adding more details of our activities and by increasing the use of colour, graphics and photos. This is what you see today when you visit the website.



Beacon

Some eight years ago we adopted the **Beacon Administrative system**, which is a national u3a database system. This was done to manage data about our members, which groups they belonged to, and the venues used. It also allows the Committee and Group Leaders to send emails to all or selected members quickly and securely.

Special Events, Exhibitions and Celebrations

Over the history of our Basingstoke Old Basing u3a many events have been held. On the next few pages we'll take a look at these. Some of you may remember them.

Summer Specials were held each year in lieu of a monthly meeting. In July 2002, one was held in the grounds of Basing House. In July 2004, Sheila Brinkman invited members to a Garden Party at her house for a strawberry tea with music by the Pardown Quartet.



Christmas Specials were held at the December meeting, where members themselves contributed to the entertainment. One year, the Recorder group accompanied the language groups, as they performed carols in French and German. The Singing for Pleasure group also contributed to the carol singing and musical entertainment.

Open Days were held for many years, usually in a member's garden or barn.

- In 2002, one couple opened their garden for two days in aid of Age Concern, raising a creditable donation to the charity.
- In July 2009, our Calligraphers contributed to a Pilgrimage Day for the young leavers at St Mary's C of E Junior School in Old Basing.
- Over the weekend of 8th/9th July 2000, a Millennium Festival was held in Old Basing for the Village.

Exhibitions

A Summer Exhibition to celebrate our tenth anniversary was organised in July 2009 in the Parkers Piece barn. One group featured a display of flower arrangements, and another showed their artwork. The Folk Dancing and Recorder groups demonstrated their skills while Cooking for Men provided delicious cakes, supplemented by the provision of tea and coffee by lady members.

Our 15 year's celebration was held at one of the monthly meetings in 2014. There was a cake competition and despite there being only two entries, the winner was a member who had produced a knitted cake!



The Queen's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated at the AGM in July 2012. Members were invited to tell of their experience of the Coronation and bring their souvenir photographs.

Other memorabilia from that time was also displayed in Elizabeth Hall, Hook. The date of that year's AGM was put back a week to accommodate the carrying of the Olympic Torch through Basingstoke on its way to light the flame at the Olympic Stadium in London.

Covid

During the depths of Covid in 2020 and 2021, the Committee and the Group Leaders worked really hard to keep our u3a going.

We had Monthly Meetings via provision of pre-recorded sessions, set up by Mirthy, and live presentations, run remotely via Zoom. Our outdoor activity groups were able to keep going for most of the time; many of our learning and craft groups embraced new technology and met via Zoom, from Art Appreciation to Needles & Pins; other groups kept alive by email. In fact, over half of our groups continued to stay in touch or meet in one way or another right through the Covid pandemic and this helped our u3a to survive.

In the period after the removal of the Covid restrictions, we literally bounced back, with increased membership, more groups. This was partly due to a number of events that we held to stimulate local interest in the u3a.

We held two afternoon 'picnic meetings' during August 2021 to thank our members for sticking with us during the Covid pandemic: one in Popley Fields and another in Stratton Park.

We also held one in June 2022 to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in Stratton Park, and the organisers did a grand job of providing teas and cakes. The green behind Sherfield-on-Loddon village hall was the scene of our picnic in June 2023.



Our line dancers finished our membership year in style at a village fete. On a very hot June day in Sherfield on Loddon, they gave a wonderful display of what being in the u3a is all about. The group performed several dances beautifully, and it didn't matter whether they were good dancers or still learning they all thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We watched on from our u3a stall, and they did us proud. Their efforts subsequently generated a number of enquiries about membership.

2024

So now our history of the u3a is complete and we are right up to date, or at least for a little while.

This year has been a little turbulent with changes to the committee but we have been growing in strength and numbers and we have won ourselves an award which we are very proud of.

A Place to be Proud of Award

On Thursday June 6th our very own Basingstoke Old Basing u3a group won the **Community Project Award**.

It was so lovely to be recognised for this award on our 25th Anniversary.

To achieve the award we provided information about our expansion, introduction of new technology i.e. website, members portal, our sustainable financial planning and continued commitment from our volunteers. These efforts allow our u3a to reach out and support our 1020 members who live in and around Basingstoke.



Picnic in the Park

Once again this year we had our annual picnic in the park on the 12th of June and used this as an event to celebrate our 25 year anniversary of our u3a.

Below are some of the images from our day out.



Group Travel Organiser (GTO) of the year Award

Joyce Cook, who runs our Excursions and Holidays group, won the "Group Travel Organiser Award" at the prestigious Group Leisure & Travel Awards ceremony in Kensington on 27th June 2024.

Joyce has been organising travel for over 35 years and has been managing our trips and holidays since the group started with 70 members. This number has now grown to over 400.

A very well deserved award.

