



Orkney U3A 2025 Annual General Meeting – Minutes

St. Magnus Centre, Kirkwall, on Thursday 20 April, 2025

Present

Keith Ramsay (Chair), Gill Lewis, Martha Kirby and 51 members.

Apologies for absence

Alison Cruikshanks, Bill Stout, John Mowat, Marion Sutherland, Judy Fryer, Mrs. A. M. Downes, Sandra Higgins, Margaret Sutherland, Myrtle Cassidy, Audrey Lee, Ian Robertson

Chairman's Remarks

Keith welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the 2024 AGM

These were agreed as correct and submitted for addition to the web site.

Matters Arising

There was none.

Chairman's Report

I have to say that after a very hectic six months, I'm very glad to be returning to 'normal' life! Life is certainly much better now that I have the benefit of a third kidney, courtesy of my wife!

When I was indisposed, Martha Kirby stood in for me at very short notice as we had no Vice Chair, I want to thank her once again for her efforts on my behalf!

We now have over 130 active members, a good total for what is a geographically small island. Our meetings continue to be well attended, with a wide variety of subjects being presented.

In particular, we had a lively meeting in January, when the speaker was Roslind Johansson, textile artist, a very entertaining speaker, who described her life in textiles in four countries: Norway, Africa, Peru and Orkney. She brought costumes, which were obligingly modelled by Pat Retson, and samples which were passed around a very appreciative audience. At the request of the U3A members present, she subsequently offered two workshops at her studio in Finstown, where she taught applique techniques in the style of the Peruvian weaver, Maximo Lauro. We then had a most interesting presentation in February, by Merryn Dineley on behalf of the Botany Group. Her presentation was illustrated by slides of Orkney flora and she also brought photographs.

Other speakers have included Ellen Pesci, talking about her father, Jim Baikie, a very well-known Orkney artist, Laura Drever, another Orcadian artist, Lucy Gibbon, on the Orkney Archive, and Siobhan Miller, describing her work at the Orkney Museum.

The Committee has continued to meet, and has taken reports from the various U3A groups, which all seem to be thriving. It is a testament to everyone's hard work that this remains one of the strong points of our small U3A.

The treasurer has undertaken to explore, together with Peter Drummond, sources of external funding through grant aid.

The perennial question of venue has been discussed again, with alternative spaces being discussed and considered. I think the consensus is that we will await completion of the new Salvation Army building and car parking facility to see how costs and space compare.

Although it sometimes seems we are stuck out here in the nether regions, we are not forgotten by the wider U3A. We have been gifted by a copy of a self-published book of short stories, memoirs and photographs by a U3A in England. Please let me know if you would like to read it.

There have been elections for the National U3A committee, and a new overall constitution has been adopted because times have moved on since the last one. On the subject of constitutions, we have been informed by 'Headquarters' that our own is no longer adequate, so that's on my jobs list to sort out. I may need ad hoc help from the committee with that.

In terms of the officers, there are only three of us, (Chair, Treasurer and Secretary). Our current Secretary, Alison Cruikshanks has completed her three-year term of office and is preparing to ride off into the sunset with our (and my particular) thanks for a job very well done. When I became Chair two years ago, being new to the U3A as an organisation, she helped me settle in enormously.

I've always thought that three is too small a number on the committee for such a large group, my own recent experiences have reinforced that view. We really should have a Vice Chair and a Meetings Coordinator and I'd like to think that there are people in the U3A who are prepared to stick their heads above the parapet and take on these roles. It is not onerous at all, in fact, I've found it to be quite enjoyable, even though my wife will tell you that I'm not a natural committee member! Please let me know if this appeals to you.

The committee receive copies of the U3A magazine, which are available for members to read. They are usually brought to meetings and can be borrowed.

The National U3A website has come on in leaps and bounds in the last year. Being house-bound for several months after my transplant has made me aware of what is on offer, I've joined an online archaeology group and also a group that offers on-line talks on aviation subjects, which is a particular interest of mine. I would encourage you to have a look at what is on offer. I've been amazed at the depth of knowledge of the presenters I'm sure you'll find something to interest you! Or maybe you would like to form a group on a subject that isn't yet represented...

In closing my report for 2025, I would like to thank the committee, and most of all, you the members, who make this U3A such a success.

Keith Ramsay

Treasurer's Report

As at 31st March 2025, Orkney U3A funds amount to £1,745, with a further £1295 being held in the bank account on behalf of the Craft and Straw Work Groups.

The accounts for this extended 14-month period have, as in previous years, been certified by Gavin Cullen (AIB) Scot and are attached to this report.

Our surplus for the year is reported as £1463, which includes the Craft and Straw Work grant funds. Excluding this, the surplus is £169. Since increasing our monthly meeting donations, we are indeed now covering our overheads.

Grants - Within and Without

Internal “grants” of £50 are still available to any groups who have not already taken up this offer. Any group leaders interested in this should contact me via email with an outline of their application – the only criterion for purpose is that the money is to be spent for the benefit of group members.

With support from Peter Drummond, given his successful external grant applications, we will be investigating the feasibility of raising funds to help groups with venue hire in the future so that group participation remains accessible to all our members.

Membership

With a few losses and a few gains, Orkney U3A membership remains relatively constant, and currently has 127 members – assuming all opt to renew this year.

We have welcomed a total of 20 new members since the last AGM.

Gill Lewis

IT Report

Website maintenance

Having completed the updates emerging from the AGM in April 2024, there has been only limited activity. This has involved primarily three functions:

- creating and posting general meeting notices
- posting blogs from the Botany, Photography and Walking groups
- posting general meeting notes

This pattern is likely to continue unless we decide to undertake a revamp of the site. U3A nationally has developed a new website platform for branches to use, but there is a good argument for us to stay with orkneycommunities.co.uk given its integration with many other organisations based in Orkney and the fact that it is probably a go-to site for folks looking for local activities. Our updates get promoted to the home page, so it does give us visibility.

Beacon

The Beacon membership database and finance management features are being fully updated and exploited by Gill Lewis.

Email services

The email services based on Beacon and Orknet Roundcube are well bedded-in. The old system based on Sal MacKintosh’s account has been sunset. An email address directory is maintained on Beacon as part of the membership database by Gill and is copied periodically by IT Support to Orknet Roundcube to provide addressing from there. A slight limitation of Roundcube is the volume of storage we’ve contracted for. This is consistent with the original intention, which was to use the service only for email redirection. We have insufficient space to maintain a long-term email archive

on Roundcube. Most of the emails are fairly ephemeral anyway, except perhaps those relating to finance. We could take a view on increasing the capacity at some point, but it hasn't been much of a problem so far – we ran out of space once and had to be rescued by Orknet. There would be a cost associated with any space increase of course.

Group Reports

Cinema Group

The cinema group has been somewhat in abeyance for the last half of the year, due to my illness. But it is definitely not dead! I hope that members have continued to go & see the films that interest them!

The first film of the new “season” was “Flow”& hopefully more good films will follow. Films in the first half of the year included “Dune 2”, “Ferrari”, “Anatomy of a Fall”, & “North Circular”. We meet at the venue (normally the Picky or West Side in Stromness) about 10 mins before the start time. We have not yet ventured down to the Hope when they have a film night. For films at the Picky, I try & choose a screening that starts around lunchtime so that it finishes while the cafe is open & we can meet for a coffee & to put the world to rights (which is getting ever more difficult!). There is no official group membership, just turn up as per the email that I send out. If you're interested but don't get the email, please let me know & I'll put you on the list! Hope to see you sometime.....

Keith

Botany Group

The Botany Group meets on a Tuesday afternoon, every fortnight, between May and September. We visit different locations on the Mainland to identify plants and trees, aiming to include a wide variety of habitats. Walks on the Mainland are usually a couple of hours and each year we try to visit a couple of islands as well.

There are currently 26 members of the Group, so there is some space for a few more people. The main constraint on membership numbers involves car parking space at the places we visit. This can be limited, so we do as much car sharing as possible.

Group members volunteer to organise and lead the walks and they always write a report which is presented on the U3A web page for all to read. Some of the Group are excellent photographers and a few of their flower photos are included in the Walk Report.

This year, in February, we presented a slide show for the U3A monthly meeting which summarised our walks in 2024. We visited Holm, Yesnaby, Finstown, Hillside, Midland Hill, Mousland, Russadale, Hoy and Egilsay.

We met at the Firth Community Centre on Tuesday April 1st to discuss and organise our walks for this year. We will be going to

- The Primrose Field, Finstown
- Birsay (details to be confirmed)
- Eastside, South Ronaldsay
- Hoy, the Dwarfie Stane
- Stromness Reservoir

- Loch of Hundland
- Egilsay (a different route to last year)
- Burray Barrier 4 beach
- Quoyloo, to look at arable weeds.

Merryn Dineley

Straw Work

Eleven members are meeting weekly between 12 and 2p.m. in the Carnegie Room at the Orkney Library and Archive. Mostly working with oat straw to produce items using the coiled basket technique which has been popular in Orkney for many years and is now classed as an endangered craft.

Sandra Higgins very kindly offers advice and guidance to the participants. We were able to closely examine relevant items held in Orkney Museum during 2024, thanks to Ellen Pesci the Curator of Social History for Orkney Arts Museums and Heritage who arranged the visit.

Grants have been applied for to assist with the running of the group.

The group is presently full.

Peter Drummond

Walking Group One

The group followed a wide ranging programme of walks of a challenging nature. Walks this year have been to:

- Newark in Deerness
- Birsay and the Brough
- Fourth Barrier to Eastside in South Ronaldsay
- Up Keelylang to the Masts
- Hammers Hill in Rendall to the Mast, Ward Hill in Orphir
- Yesnaby to the Black Craig
- Happy Valley and Russadale
- Marwick Bay to the Palace in Birsay
- Holm - around the Loch of Ayre and Graemshall Loch (circular)

Reports on all these walks are on the blog on the Orkney U3A website.

New members are welcome.

Tim Wright

Walking Group Two

A walking group for folk who enjoy a leisurely ramble. We meet on the first Monday of the month at 10.00 or 10.30 am. for a walk of 3-5 miles at a gentle pace, with plenty of stops to admire the view or take a photo. We have had another successful year and managed plenty

of walks. There are twenty-four people in the group and 8-12 usually come along for a walk. The walks end with coffee and cake.

We plan to visit at least two isles during the summer months. Occasionally walks are cancelled due to adverse weather, but we are a very hardy group and manage a walk most months. Places walked during the year: Rendall, Ophir, Birsay, Harray, Stromness, Burray, Dounby, Newark and Marwick.

A big thank you to members who have supported me during the year. New members are very welcome and will find us a very friendly easy-going group.

Ellie Wiltshire

Photography

In pursuit of photographic opportunities during the past year, the group visited

- St Margarets Hope
- Earl's Palace, Birsay
- Finstown and Binscarth Woods
- Westray (day trip)
- Shapinsay (day trip)
- Scapa Beach and Pier
- Harrold Esson's Collection
- Ness Battery
- And four days away in Grantown-on-Spey

Reports on all these can be found on the blog on the Orkney U3A website.

The Group is full. Another photo trip south will be planned for 2025.

Tim Wright

Scrabble

Continues to meet on a Friday with 9 regular members attending. There would be room for 1 more table. If more members join, consideration could be given to hiring a room.

Pat Retson

Music Appreciation Group One

As last year, Music Appreciation Group One met on the last Monday of each month, from 10:30 until 12:30, at the home of the leader of the group, Glenys Alsop, to listen (and watch via YouTube, if possible) to classical music. However, as noted before, this is not set in stone – a theme is chosen each month, and every member either brings their own CD choices or sends Glenys links to YouTube music videos on that theme. Over the years, the group has enjoyed listening to a variety of music from all over the world (folk music from Armenia, baroque music from Bolivia, fiddle music from Northumberland, film themes) - however, generally the majority of the music listened to tends to be classical. It is not all music – there is a break for coffee/tea and cake, and a lot of chat takes place!

Because the group has always met in members' homes, six has proved to be the ideal number of participants (simply to fit into the space available). At present, Group One has five members, so another one would be welcome!

Glenys Alsop

Music Appreciation Group Two

Music Group Two meets in Kirkwall on the second Wednesday morning of each month. This group relies on CDs for their music choices, which can be in any musical genre. They have space and would welcome new members.

Valerie Pomfret

Recorder Group

At the last AGM, the recorder group had just started. Since then, it has met weekly on Tuesday mornings, usually in Kirkwall.

At present, there are nine U3A members in the group, with varied levels of experience. We have enjoyed playing a range of music, from 14th century dance tunes to 21st century pieces, and everything in between.

Most members play either treble or tenor recorders, or both (*examples were shown at the AGM*). There is space for one or two new members. If anyone would like to join the group, please make contact via info@orkneyu3a.com. Instruments can be borrowed for a three-month period from the Instrument Bank (see website of Orkney Music and Culture for details).

The group currently meets in a private house, but alternative arrangements may be sought if the group expands.

Valerie Pomfret

Non-Fiction Book Group

The group usually meets once a month at my house in Kirkwall, although some meetings have recently been held by videoconference. We read and discuss a wide range of non-fiction books: zoology, immunology, philosophy, physics, economics, engineering, sociology, psychology, language and botany. Books are chosen by members on a rota basis. Recent examples:

- September: "Exactly", by Simon Winchester
- October: "The Wood Age", by Roland Ennos
- November: "What we cannot know", by Marcus du Sautoy
- January: "Doughnut Economics", by Kate Rayworth
- February: "The Mother Tongue", by Bill Bryson
- March: "Cynical Theories", by Pluckrose & Lindsay

There are currently five members and we could accommodate up to three more. Please contact me if you think this is for you.

Bill Stout

Book Group

The book group has had another very successful year with regular attendance. There are ten members in the group, (the maximum number). We meet every six weeks at the Lynnfield Hotel or members' homes for lunch and discuss the book we have previously read. At the start of the year we devise a programme, members recommend a book, and we take it in turns to research the author and lead the discussions. We are a very friendly interesting group who enjoy a good discussion. A big thank you to the group for your contributions in making the book group run successfully.

Books we have read throughout the year:

- Agatha Christie book of choice
- "Masquerade" by Georgette Hayer
- "Leonard and Hungary Paul" by Roan Hession
- "Free to go Across the World on a Motorbike" by Esa Aldegheri
- Discussion on our Secret Santa Book
- "The Midnight Library" by Matt Haig
- "Where the World Ends" by Geraldine McCaughrean
- "His Bloody Project" by Graeme Macrea Burnett
- "The Reading List" by Sara Nisha Adams

An excellent choice of books, which created lots of discussion.

Ellie Wiltshire

Art

Currently meet twice a month on the second and fourth Friday in Stromness Community Centre. There is a small charge per person for room hire (£2.40 regardless of numbers). New members are welcome.

Gill Cooke

Play Reading

Reading list:

- "Mary Queen of Scots had her head Chopped Off"
- "Blood and Ice", "Perfect Days" and "Misery Guts" all by Liz Lohead
- "The Misanthrope" Molière
- "The Man of Mode" (or "Sir Fopling Flutter") Sir George Etherridge
- "Antigone" Sophocles
- "Antigone" Darren Murphy (After Sophocles)
- "Cornerstones" and "Sophocles Asks Why" both by Eric Linklater
- "Tartuffe" Molière
- "Fallen Angels" Noel Coward
- "Fuente Ovejuna" Lope de Vega
- "Time and the Conways" J. B. Priestley
- "An Ideal Husband" Oscar Wilde

The last member of the group has now returned following covid. Eight or nine members continue to meet regularly reading various plays. There is space for another member.

Craft Group

Twelve members meet weekly for a variety of BYO crafts at the library, which is currently affordable. The group is currently full.

Pam Woodcock

Election of Officers and Committee Members

Status quo ante:

Chairman: Keith Ramsay (2 years completed)
Vice Chairman: vacant
Treasurer: Gill Lewis (1 year completed)
Secretary: Alison Cruikshanks (3 years completed, retiring)
IT/Web team: Roella Wilson (2 years completed);
Bill Stout (1 year completed)
General Member: John Mowat
Martha Kirby (1 year completed, retiring)

Bill Stout was proposed as the new Secretary by Alison Cruikshanks and seconded by James Temple.

There was no nominee for Vice Chairman.

Gill Wilson came forward as a volunteer, and was duly co-opted onto the committee. Her role will be decided in committee.

The resulting committee:

Chairman: Keith Ramsay (2 years completed)
Vice Chairman: vacant
Treasurer: Gill Lewis (1 year completed)
Secretary: Bill Stout
IT/Web team: Roella Wilson (2 years completed);
General Member: John Mowat
Gill Wilson

Keith will arrange a briefing/meeting (date/time TBD) of the new committee to discuss roles, etc.

Any Other Business

None was raised.

There being no further business, the meeting formally closed at 3.30pm, after which members were treated to a slide show/quiz of Orkney scenes by Tim Wright. Valuable prizes were awarded!

Bill Stout

Bill Stout
Secretary
21 May, 2025

Keith Ramsay
Chairman

DRAFT