

## Chairman's Report March 2025

Reflecting on the past year we can take satisfaction for a fair degree of progress. Beacon is working well, the Open Day was very successful, membership seems to have stabilised and the Craft Group's continuing exhibition, "Stitches in Time" a good reflection of Bu3a at its best. On the other hand we still need volunteers to make life more comfortable for those in office at both committee and group level; we could promote ourselves more effectively and there is a persistent need for a greater number of younger members to ensure continuity.

Adopting Beacon as our database was a big step forward. Any system is only effective if data entry and maintenance is accurate. There are bound to be small glitches and delays but it is comforting to know that I can say with some confidence that, at the time of writing, we have 276 members (though some of whom remain to pay their subs) and more than twenty active groups. Beacon allows us to identify the groups to which members belong and for group co-ordinators to communicate more easily with their members. Ainslie Kelly has worked tirelessly supporting Beacon and delivering training to those who volunteer. Of course Beacon may not be essential for small groups with established communication channels. Moreover we must ensure that those without access to email are not neglected. However, the overall benefits of the system are very obvious. The next step is to fully exploit Beacon's financial component and streamline our accounting processes.

This has been an expensive year - but for good reasons. We invested heavily in the Open Day. The marketing and production costs came in at almost £1500. The outcome was an estimated additional forty new members who may not otherwise have joined. Over time their continued membership will repay the investment. But the success of the Open Day should not be judged solely in economic terms. New groups were established, older ones regenerated, some even challenged. by additional members. Any organisation needs new blood to take it forward and it is comforting to see that we are gradually recruiting members who will contribute to the future health Bu3a. The Open Day also provided the opportunity for each participating group to show-case their activities to members and non-members alike. I will not forget the wonderful buzz and sense of community around the Medway Centre on that day. I must express a huge thank you to Jonathan Wicksteed and Helen Parker whose hard work, enthusiasm and dedication led to such positive results and to every one else involved.

It was a close call about holding the Open Day on an annual basis. It does stretch our resources and new groups take time to become established. Additionally an Open Day really demands the emergence of new groups which were not naturally forthcoming. In the end it was decided not to hold another Open Day until 2026.

Additionally we have invested in a thermal imaging camera for use by The Environment Group and it will be fascinating to see the results of the projects they have in hand. These expenditures have depleted our reserves a little which we have compensated for by raising the annual subscription from seventeen to twenty pounds. I am of the opinion that our fee remains extremely good value and is competitive with other local u3a groups.

A particular highlight for me was the privilege of being asked to launch the exhibition of the Craft Groups Exhibition "Stitches in Time" at Bakewell Information Centre. The project took over four years to complete involving more than thirty embroiderers producing a twenty-nine "Time Line" panels each depicting a scene from Bakewell's varied history. It is a wonderful piece of collective art of reflecting the close ties between Bu3a and the local community. The Craft Group and Bu3a can be very proud. The sterling effort of Gill Roberts in leading this project has to be applauded. Ensuring an effective design, acquiring teaching expertise, maintaining group momentum, persuading sponsors and deftly organising the launch and exhibition were just some of Gill's tasks. You did a brilliant job Gill.

Of course I have seized on some special occasions to emphasise the good work which is ongoing within Bu3a but perhaps our greatest strength lies within the groups which I barely hear about. Bu3a is best when it just gets on with things within the accepted norms of the u3a culture. This quiet efficiency is demonstrated in most of what we do and particularly important in bringing it about are our Group Leaders without whom there would simply be no Bu3a. We owe them our gratitude. Throughout the year many events just happen - but behind each one there are a few dedicated members working very hard. The Gazette, our web site, the visits, lectures and activities of our various groups, the agendas and minutes which have to be compiled and, of course, not forgetting the teas, coffees and cakes which appear on appropriate occasions. The tasks are endless and do not simply just happen. They demand dedication, time and a little bit of love. To everyone involved: thank you very much.

Peter Holt  
Chair  
Feb 2025