

CELEBRATING ROTHERHAM U3A 25th ANNIVERSARY - (2019)

Photos courtesy of Graham Ford, Neil Kirkham & Rosalind Duckmanton



Twenty-five years ago, a small group of local people under the leadership of Tom Brown, sowed the first seeds of Rotherham U3A. Tom, a promoter of lifelong learning, foresaw government cutbacks in “adult leisure classes” like Art, Crafts and Fitness depriving older people of opportunities to keep mentally, physically and socially active. The establishment of a local U3A would change all that.

Current members June Robinson, Penny Ralph and Megan Topp were amongst 60 people present at the inaugural meeting. Five groups, Art, Embroidery and Soft Furnishings, Lifestyle, (all still flourishing today), IT and Bridge emerged from their discussions.

Since then, membership has grown from 60 to 465, and interest groups increased from 5 to 35. To celebrate this “milestone” our Anniversary lunch was held at Aston Hall on 9 October. Later we enjoyed an illustrated talk given by members of a Sheffield U3A project team, on some aspects of life in the 1960’s. Then followed Jim Walker’s interesting interviews with 6 of the “oldest” members of Rotherham U3A each reminiscing about the early years. Prompted by a Timeline and photographs showing its history we exchanged stories of U3A past and present.

The venue was ideal, food was delicious, the ‘birthday’ cake impressive and the Quiz baffled our ‘little grey cells’. Aston Hall staff proved friendly and efficient and the atmosphere in the room was joyful. Judging by the animated conversations around the tables, no-one could doubt that the U3A motto “Learn, Laugh and Live” is absolutely appropriate.







[Lesley and the 4 guest speakers from Sheffield u3a cutting the anniversary cake.](#)

[Talk by June Robinson at the 25th Anniversary Celebrations](#)

Good evening! May I say a warm welcome to all of my fellow members of the U3A to this our 25th Anniversary. What can I say? 25 years, yes 25 years, since our Rotherham U3A began in 1994.

My name is June Robinson and as I remember it, I was employed by Rotherham College of Art and Technology as a part-time lecturer, my subject being anything to do with textiles. I worked at the College for 33 years, yes 33 years, and on my retirement in June 1994 I was approached by a gentleman, who was my Head of Department called Tom Brown.

Many of you would have known Tom better than I did because he was the Co-ordinator of the Friday afternoon Lifestyle group for a long time. Tom was a serious character, something to do with being Scottish I thought, and he was very dedicated to promoting and facilitating all kinds of adult education in Rotherham College. He explained that he was trying to start a

University of the Third Age in Rotherham and that he was to hold an inaugural meeting at the College to explain what it was all about and what it would entail and he was looking for volunteers to be co-ordinators to start some groups. There were about 60 people at the meeting.

Tom was very persuasive and as I was retiring, and in his words "Would have nothing to do with my time", I committed to form the Embroidery and Soft Furnishings group. Did I ever think that it would still be going 25 years later!!!

Tom became the Chairman and formed a committee of about 4. And as I remember there were some 6 groups to begin with. We were billeted at the old school on Alma Road. I think Tom must have had some influence with the Rotherham Education Authority because it financed the venue at Alma Road for us. Eventually after a few years we were informed that we would have to finance the U3A ourselves and we moved to the Unity Centre. Tom Brown watched over the Rotherham U3A until he passed away.

I believe we all have much to thank Tom Brown for, he left a valuable legacy to all of us who are members now, and to all Rotherham people as the U3A is open to anyone who wishes to join and take part. After all, when we retire, we don't give up learning, in fact we need to be in a constant learning process for self-improvement, sharing ideas and expressing our talents. We need to pass on our knowledge to each other. Surely this helps to make the world go around and gives us personal esteem and dignity and ultimately a sense of well-being and mindfulness.

Lecturer who chose to 'educate not legislate'

TOUCHING tributes have been paid to a former college lecturer and councillor who dedicated his life to improving that of others.

Tom Brown, a lecturer at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology (RCAT) for ten years, died last month at the age of 85.

Mr Brown also worked as vice-principal at North Nottinghamshire College in Worksop before representing Rotherham as a county councillor from 1981 to 1986.

His daughter Emma (43) said: "Dad was very caring and him and my mum, Kay, both dedicated their lives to helping others."

"He was a real character and he tried to make people smile. He was quite quick witted about it too."

"I was the youngest of four children and my parents had numerous other children as well but dad always did everything to make sure his children were safe."

Mr Brown moved to Rotherham with his wife Kay in 1971, having been born in Carlisle, in Scotland.

As well as his work at RCAT at North Nottinghamshire College, he is chairman of governors at Wickesley Comprehensive School for 15 years and was also chairman of South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive.

Ms Brown said: "My dad saw a lot

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of poverty when he grew up in a former mining village in Scotland before he won a scholarship to study at Ruskin College, Oxford.

"It was a completely new world to him and he realised he wanted to educate people and try and make things better for others."

"He was heavily involved with the Labour party and he was offered the chance to be an MP in a safe seat in Glasgow but he turned it down because he said he wanted to educate rather than legislate."

Following his retirement, Mr Brown founded the Rotherham branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A), which now has 340 members from across the borough.

He leaves four children — Stephen, Christopher, Sara and Emma — and four grandchildren — Thomas, James, Finn and Freya.

Mr Brown's funeral will take place at Rotherham Crematorium on Monday at 10.30am, followed by a celebration of his life at Wickesley Cricket Club.

Ms Brown said all friends and family were welcome to attend.



TRIBUTES: Tom Brown

MEETING THE FOUNDER MEMBER

As a 19-year-old Sheffield Transport Department Bus Conductor, some of my memories are the weight of all that pre-decimal coinage, remember 240 pennies to the pound the threepenny bits etc. not many 10 bob notes around in those days. The early morning dashes on the 69 bus route between Sheffield and Rotherham, trying to dodge the red dust outside Steelo's that is now the Magna Science Centre, and watching construction proceeding on the M1 motorway viaduct at Tinsley.

Two years on I left the buses and entered the building and civil engineering industry as a carpenter and joiner. Transferring my trade union membership from the Transport and General Workers Union into the A.S.W. Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. Later to become U.C.A.T.T Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians, after mergers with the bricklayers and painters Trade Unions. In 1984 just in time for the start of the Miners' strike, I was elected a Yorkshire regional organiser for the Union. One of the jobs I was given was to look after our craft members employed by the South Yorkshire County Council.

Shortly before the Authority was abolished by Mrs Thatcher's Government, I received an invitation with a guest to attend the annual dinner of the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive. On arriving at the event my wife Ann and myself were warmly welcomed by County Councillor Tom Brown. After joining Rotherham U3A I was not at all surprised to learn that the Branch had been established by the late Tom Brown such a popular and talented man. It had been a privilege to have met him all those years ago.

Don Kellam, Come Dancing group

Thanks go to Don Kelham for providing these 2 articles.