

# An OPPORTUNITY for THIRD AGERS

The University of the Third Age is a nation-wide network of non-profit-making, self-help learning activities organised by and for retired people, who will probably be over fifty years of age.

What is the Third Age? The First Age is that of childhood and dependence, the Second Age of work and parental responsibility and the Third Age is the age of maturity, retirement – and new opportunities.

In 1972 Pierre Vellas, a professor at the University of Toulouse, proposed that the university buildings and facilities, normally empty and unutilized during the long summer vacation, should be used by older people for a programme of lectures, guided tours, concerts and other cultural events. Known before long as *l'Université du troisième age* the idea was such a success that it rapidly spread throughout France, and to several other countries, with year-round programmes being developed.

The first British U3As were founded in Cambridge and London in 1982 and both benefited initially from links with Higher Education. Again, the idea spread rapidly and there are now at least 150 groups and over 18,000 members.

There is a U3A National Office, but each group is largely autonomous and organises its own activities. These include daytime courses with small informal groups, probably a monthly meeting with a specially invited speaker (from within the membership or outside it) which is also an opportunity for members to meet and, possibly, social events.

Each group provides not only the students but also the leaders/tutors. A leader of one course may well be a student in another. The only qualification required to join a course, apart from being retired (or semi-retired) is interest and a willingness to take part; it is a cooperative enterprise. It is a university in the original sense of the word – a collective of people devoted to learning. Many older people have skills, experience and knowledge to share and an enthusiasm for trying something new or developing a long-term interest.

There has been a U3A in Canterbury for several years and some of its members are drawn from this area. However, following an article in the *East Kent Mercury* in October 1992 which attracted a number of people to a meeting in Walmer, it became obvious that there was sufficient interest to form a group in the area covered by Dover District Council. A small steering committee was created and its members decided to call the new group WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRY U3A. By February 1993 there were over forty members.

It is proposed that there should be two ten-week terms in Autumn and Spring. This Spring we have begun modestly with four courses: French conversation – we were very pleased to be able to satisfy some of our partially-sighted members in this – Intermediate German, Needlecrafts and Appreciation of Art, studying some paintings in the National Gallery. Monthly Wednesday afternoon talks have been on 'Some East Kent Writers', a talk, illustrated with transparencies, by Raymond Venables, 'Privacy and the Press' by John Grant, and 'Travel through Time in Turkey' by Peggy Alexander.

In the next academic year, commencing in September 1993, we hope to offer courses to include Local History, French, Needlecrafts, Music, German, Flower Arranging, English Literature and Appreciation of Art. The programme of monthly talks is expected to contain subjects as diverse as Beethoven: the Deaf Composer, Pottery, Costume, Religion, and the Third World.

For the first few months we were linked to Canterbury U3A and were given the benefit of their advice and help. From the official launch meeting on 17th March, and the election of a committee for its first full year, White Cliffs Country U3A will be independent.

The White Cliffs Country U3A steering committee hopes that some more members of the Dover Society (several already belong) will find that the U3A complements the activities and interests of the Society.

For a fee you will be placed on the mailing list to receive regular newsletters with details of courses, monthly meetings and any social events we may arrange. For further information please contact the Membership Secretary, Helen Ormiston, Garden Flat, 'Oakmead', Marine Road, Walmer, Deal CT14 7DN.

Details of courses on offer will be available in late summer. A small fee will be payable with applications. Most courses will be for informal small groups and all will be in daytime.

The 'White Cliffs Country · Kent · U3A' logo © Philomena Kennedy 1993

## DEAL TOWN HALL

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TUESDAY 11th MAY at 2.30  
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## A PUBLIC MEETING

to introduce the newly-formed

## WHITE CLIFFS U3A

—  
There will be a speaker from the National Office of the U3A  
All are Welcome – You'll find it more than interesting