

## Salford u3a – 40th Anniversary Celebrations, 19 June 2026

Mr Mayor, Madam Mayoress, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen

The u3a originated in France in 1972, in England in 1982, and in Salford in 1986. It's an organisation for people who want to keep active in mind and body and are no longer in full-time employment, learning for the joy of it and perhaps making up for lack of opportunities in younger days. Many friendships have been formed through joining. There are over 1000 u3as around the UK now, and thousands internationally, with millions of members.

We are here today to celebrate 40 years of the existence of Salford u3a

In Salford In the mid 1980s there was a series of evening lectures at Ladywell Hospital (which then mainly specialised in medical treatment for older people). Experts came from near and far to share ideas about how to promote independence and improve quality of life for people who are growing older.

One expert came from Cambridge and spoke eloquently about the potential of an organisation called the University of the Third Age to promote learning amongst people as they grew older. The voluntary cooperative self-help model he described sounded ideal: there was great enthusiasm in the lecture theatre!

Apparently, the enthusiasm was mixed with anxiety: the elderly speaker was very tall and thin, walked about the stage energetically and constantly looked as though he was about to trip over the long cord of the microphone he was using and fall off the stage, only to repeatedly disentangle himself at the eleventh hour!

Members of Salford Social Services later met representatives of Salford u3a on several occasions when Salford was trying to develop new services in the City, advised by a group of senior citizens.

It was eventually agreed that citizens of Salford would be invited to an inaugural meeting to assess the interest in setting up a u3a group in Salford.

A lady named Betty Sutcliffe heard on the radio and she also saw a notice in the Salford Advertiser that there was to be a meeting at Eccles Library for people interested in setting up a branch in Salford (the meeting was to be run by two people already involved in another u3a). At the inaugural meeting 15 people were expected and over 50 turned up. At the next meeting it was thought one class could be arranged, English Literature. Other meetings followed and other groups formed quickly. A committee was set up and Betty became the first Chair. Since then there have been 12 Chairs, 5 of whom are here today, Marlene, Brian, Mary, John and myself. Betty's enthusiasm and commitment throughout was paramount to its success, supported by other members of the Committee. Apart from group activities there was also interest in national and local issues.

At the 25th anniversary in October 2011, Betty said "I did not dream, 25 years ago, that this day would ever come". I wonder what she would say today? Her vision and enthusiasm for learning, helping people to share their interests and starting new things was an ever-present feature of her life, together with having fun. The senior citizens of Salford and the u3a have much to thank Betty for.

Betty was very proud of her association with Salford u3a. She said to me on one of my visits to her that the u3a had been such a valuable and important part of her life and she was sorry she couldn't take part in its activities because of ill health. Her husband Harry was also an enthusiastic member and leader of the Walking Group.

We don't have any of the founder members here but we have the closest thing, Doreen Bradshaw!

Doreen is the longest serving current member (BUT NOT THE OLDEST!) and she joined in February 1992, her membership number is 275 (our latest recruit's number as at today is ?). Some of us have seen many members come and go over the years, for various reasons. Doreen heard about the u3a when attending Ellesmere Sports Club (she is a keen bowls fan) and another previous member asked her to come along to a meeting (this is how many of us have joined). She embraced everything that was going, walking, embroidery, scrabble, bird watching, and says today that this was one of the best things she has ever done in her life, as many of us also say.

Covid proved a challenge and something no-one was prepared for and we had to find new ways of keeping in touch and keeping Salford u3a going. We rose to the challenge through zoom meetings and got things moving again socially as soon as we were allowed. We now have over 500 members and over 50 groups.

So now we look to the future and see how we can continue Salford u3a's vision and development together, and wish the new Committee success with this.

**ON BEHALF OF ALL MEMBERS I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS ORGANISED TODAY'S CELEBRATION.**

Thank you.

Carole Bowler

19 June 2026