

**Memorial Service for Brian O'Rourke 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

U3A stands for University of the Third Age – although we have been asked not to use the word “University” lest there be confusion with organisations such as The University of Otago. As if.

U3A is an educational option for the retired which began at the University of Toulouse, France in 1973.

These notes have been assembled from comments from some of Brian's early friends in U3A Dunedin: Alan Roddick, John Newton, Lin Phelan, Geoff Adams and in particular Lorraine Isaacs and Clare Mathewson.

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It is believed that on a cold day in December in the year 406 of the Common Era, the River Rhine froze solid and a bridge was created to allow the barbarians to sweep westwards and begin the destruction of the Pax Romana. Alaric, king of the Visigoths, sacked Rome in 410. Meantime Irish raiders harried western Britain and enslaved a young man who would later become famous as St Patrick and find a fertile ground for spreading Christianity in Ireland and beyond. Irish monks kept alive traditional knowledge and writing and over later centuries took a lighted candle to the rest of the world.

Brian's contribution to education in New Zealand is a continuation of this ancient Irish tradition of teaching and sharing the good news.

He was Head of Continuing Education at the University of Otago, but left there to go to head the Centre for Continuing Education at Canterbury University in the mid-1980s. It flourished under his leadership, including his founding of U3A in Christchurch.

In July 1993, he came to Dunedin, visited the University of Otago and persuaded Lorraine Isaacs, Director of University Extension, and Bill Webb, from Continuing Education, to start up a U3A in Dunedin.

The following month the first meeting of the U3A Dunedin working party took place at Salmond Hall Chapel, and Brian visited again in mid-December that year.

He came back to settle in Dunedin in 1996 on his retirement and, to no-one's surprise, became involved with U3A Dunedin and the University Club. He became a member of the U3A Dunedin Board from 1996 to 2002 and played a key role in helping U3A Dunedin to become financially secure in 2002 by persuading the University to claim the funding from the government for adult education: this made money for the University as well as for U3A.

He was the founding editor of the U3A Newsletter, from January 2004 until issue 7 in November 2005. Former Chair, Elizabeth Timms, thanked him warmly in a farewell note in the Newsletter saying, "We are greatly indebted to him for his foresight which first promoted the idea of a newsletter . . . and . . . his willingness to take on the role of editor to get it established ".

Brian played a major part in U3A Dunedin from the time of his move back to the city. He was also instrumental in getting the Southern Institute of Technology in Invercargill interested in forming their own organisation.

At the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations in October 2014, Brian along with Katherine Dolby, David McKenzie and Lin Phelan were made Honorary Life Members of U3A Dunedin and so joined Emeritus Professor Alan Horsman, who had been made the first life member in 2009.

U3A Dunedin has become an important addition to the education environment in the city largely due to Brian's efforts. The organisation is now very different from what was envisaged in the early days but we must never forget that the fact that it exists at all is due to Brian and his colleagues.

Brian's late wife Adair was also a keen U3A member and her contribution to U3A and support for Brian must never be minimised.

He was a keen gardener and with his Irish ancestry took a special interest in the history and cultivation of the potato and presented several entertaining talks on the subject.

Memories of him are of a wise and entertaining human being always ready to help no matter what the task was. He was very much a people person who infected others with his enthusiasm, good humour and passion for adult education. Would that that there were more like him.

Would all people here who have been associated with U3A Dunedin please stand.

There are now 927 members in U3A Dunedin.

We are all part of Brian's legacy.

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Cahill, Thomas. 1995. *How the Irish Saved Civilisation*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Plunkett, James. 1972. *The Gems She Wore, a book of Irish places*. Hutchinson.

U3A Dunedin 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary FORUM

[https://u3adunedin.org.nz/documents/forum/U3A\\_Forum\\_October\\_2014.pdf?r=594400](https://u3adunedin.org.nz/documents/forum/U3A_Forum_October_2014.pdf?r=594400)