

In August 2000, after 25 years at the Wigston College (now South Leicestershire) I retired from my 'day job' - Section Manager with responsibility for secretarial courses. This was a very demanding and time-consuming position which took most of my time and energy. It seemed as if I could not appear anywhere without staff or sometimes students, requiring answers or views on a myriad of questions. I must admit I had not thought much about retirement and I realized that even though I had lived here for 20+ years, except for one friend who was still working, I knew nobody in Countesthorpe. I had noticed in The Herald that a new U3A group was being formed so I rang the College, spoke to John Slipper and he advised me to telephone a member for details. I spoke to a very nice lady who agreed to send details but when I gave her my address she said that as she only lived at the bottom of my road she would push them through the letterbox - Ruth Westley! So, on a very hot afternoon in September 2000, I arrived (in my shorts) at my first meeting. What a contrast to the day job - no responsibilities for organising the meeting or having to lead or speak myself, no questions demanding answers which could have far-reaching consequences - just time to enjoy the afternoon. Everyone was very friendly and I quickly joined the walking group.

One thing was missing for me - a travel group. In my role as Section Manager I had frequently organized educational trips, both in this country and abroad. I got to go on many of the overnight trips because, (contrary to popular belief) most members of staff did not want the responsibility of taking a group of teenagers to London or Brussels, so as Section Manager, I had to lead the way. Unfortunately, although I had organized outings to the International Conference Centre at Birmingham I had never managed to go - there was always some more pressing need which kept me in the College. So, at my second meeting in October 2000 I spoke to Vicki Armstrong - responsible for group liaison - and agreed to give twelve months to establishing a travel group. My first trip was to the ICC and the Jewellery Museum in Birmingham.

I planned to travel by a privately hired County Council minibus which took 15 people and was amazed to quickly fill the bus and have a waiting list. The trip was a great success - we had an interesting look behind the scenes at the Conference Centre where we were shown one of the theatres with a lift from outside which could deliver cars on to the stage, a walk around Birmingham City Centre, followed by an afternoon visit to what had originally been a family firm producing jewellery - absolutely fascinating.

The next trip was to be a morning visit to Stamford with a Blue Badge guided walk and an afternoon visit to Barnsdale, the late Geoff Hamilton's garden. After having disappointed U3A members who could not take part in the visit to Birmingham I realized the need for a small coach. On a private visit to the Botanical Gardens in Leicester I noticed a very smart little coach parked on a side road. So out came the pen and paper and I noted the name and number of the firm - so began the long association with Robinson's Coaches. It wasn't long before I planned a coach holiday, using the Channel Tunnel, to Bruges followed by a holiday by air to Barcelona.

On my first outing with the walking group I was kindly given a lift to the starting point by Shirley and Michael Taylor and it wasn't long before the conversation turned to holidays. I was extremely surprised to learn that they had a touring caravan and, like me, a love of the Bernese Oberland. (I was even more surprised to learn that they stayed on the same site as I had done in Interlaken.) In conversation on the area's attributes I thought how wonderful to share this lovely area of Switzerland with the members of Countesthorpe U3A and so the seed was planted to organize a trip to Wengen!

As the saying goes "the rest is history", but 10 years on I find myself still running the travel group, having enjoyed many trips and I now feel I have many friends in Countesthorpe - long may the U3A continue.