



## ASSOCIATION OF OPEN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES in THE REST OF THE WORLD

EDITION 5

SPRING 2015

**AOUG would like to start this Newsletter with a contribution and message from a member in Iceland to give you an idea of what the festive season was like for her family.**

*“Gledilegt nytt ar”* A very happy New Year.

How time flies, it doesn't seem long since our daughter Katrin and husband Alister visited us for a ten day Christmas holiday with their two children Orri Sigþór (11) and Matthías Smári (6). They live in Reykjavik, and had travelled by car to Akureyri, where my husband Sigthor and I live. The journey took about six hours as travelling was difficult owing to driving snow and high winds, the journey involves driving over two mountain passes.

The day Katrin and family arrived here in Akureyri on December 23 is called “Thorlaksmessá” (Mass of Saint Thorlakur), which is the beginning of Christmas in Iceland, it is celebrated by having a meal of fermented skate (kaest skata), melted lamb's fat, potatoes and mashed swedes! Thorlakur Thorhallsson the Holy was a Bishop in Skalholt and died on the 23rd of December 1193. Skalholt, during Catholic times was the Bishopry of the South of Iceland. Holar was the Bishopry of the North. Everyone tucked in and ate with relish after their long journey from Reykjavik. No one seemed to object to the strong urine-like odour from the fish! Some people eat salted cod instead of, or as well as, the skate. The main Icelandic Christmas meal is usually celebrated on the 24th December, where most Icelanders dress in their best clothes, which are often purchased for this occasion. The main Christmas meal usually starts at 6pm. There is considerable variation in the customary meal.

Probably the most common now is smoked pork or lamb with boiled or caramelised potatoes, white or brown sauce and tinned peas, red cabbage and pickled cucumber etc. Ptarmigan (Icelandic: rjupa) is a popular game bird in Iceland. In households where the husband is a keen ptarmigan catcher, this is most likely the Christmas dinner. Turkey is becoming more popular as a Christmas meal in Iceland.



A ptarmigan in winter clothing

Following the Christmas meal on the 24th, the presents, which are kept under the Christmas tree, are opened and many families go to Midnight Mass later on. The State religion is the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which about eighty per cent of the people belong to. Icelanders, however, are not great Church goers and do not usually go to Church as a regular practice on a Sunday. They do go to Church on the big Church festivals, Christmas and Easter. Religious instructions before Confirmation are always taught to children at the age of 13-14 years old by the local priest. This is organised by the local church. Weddings, Confirmations, and Funerals are in many cases huge occasions in Iceland. The Churches are packed for these services, followed by expensive meals. Hallgrimskirkja in Reykjavik holds a

Nine Lessons and Carol Service just before Christmas for the English speaking people and all are invited to the British Embassy for mince pies and mulled wine after the service.

As a family we have kept our mainly British Christmas traditions and have our main Christmas meal on December 25th. For many years we have always had the same meals, and start by eating lobster and salad on Christmas Eve and after the meal we prepare for our Christmas dinner and get everything ready for Christmas Day. We start the day by going to church on Christmas morning, then about 2pm we have our traditional turkey with all the trimmings, followed by Christmas pudding and mince pies. We had so many presents this year it took us a long time to open all our parcels. After lunch our two grandsons were very excited and couldn't wait to play in the deep snow in the garden. After all the excitement of playing with their presents, they dressed up in all their winter clothes and boots and went into the garden to build igloos and snow men and run down the slope on sledges. On Boxing Day everyone slept late so we decided to be more active and trooped off to the outdoor swimming pool, which is a ten minute walk from our house. The pool water is lovely and warm, everyone is required to take a hot shower without their costume before going into the water. It is not uncommon that people coming to Iceland try to dodge this requirement and are told in no uncertain terms that they cannot go into the pool unless they follow the rules. The end of the year and the beginning of a New Year is celebrated by large public bonfires and fireworks displays. Many households also have their own displays and the ships and trawlers in the harbour also have a massive show of fireworks at midnight. After midnight we had a glass of whisky followed by hot chocolate and whipped cream. After lunch on New Year's day Katrin, Alister and the boys went back to Reykjavik as the boys had to start school and their parents to go to work on January 2nd!

I had hoped to come to Caernarfon in Wales in May, but unfortunately I am having an operation on my hip in March or April. I will end this Newsletter by wishing everyone a wonderful time in Wales. I hope to be able to come to the UK this summer, and hope to see you at another AOUG event.

**Colleen Petursson – Iceland**

*It would be really interesting to hear of experiences from other AOUG members in the various parts of the world. This would give members a better understanding of how life, and all the things we take for granted as common to everyone, can be so different depending on the country we live in. Maybe you might like to explain how where you live affected your OU study.*

## **Association News**

### **AGM and Social weekend in Caernarfon, North Wales.**

There is still time to book for the Association's annual get together which this year will be held at the Celtic Royal Hotel, right in the heart of Caernarfon, just five minutes' walk from the famous castle. Full board package from after Friday lunch until after Sunday lunch is £270 and this includes all the evening entertainment on both Friday and Saturday evening. The Gala Dinner on Saturday is a real chance to dust off your finery and enjoy a relaxing evening with a pre-dinner drink, a three course dinner, an after dinner speaker and then musical entertainment. This year we have a 'twmpath' – the Welsh equivalent of a Scottish Ceilidh. In addition there are the optional excursions starting on Friday afternoon with a train ride up Snowdon and weather permitting, a chance to take in the views from the top. Then on Saturday afternoon, there is the chance to visit the National Slate Museum, based on the site of the Dinorwic Quarry, and on Sunday morning, a unique opportunity to take a bus ride go

deep inside the mountains to experience the Electric Mountain Power Station. All the excursions and other activities are open to all OU graduates, friends and family whether they are AOUG members or not. Everyone is very welcome. So come on your own or bring a group, the choice is yours but do come! Why not take this opportunity to come over to the UK for a holiday.

### **Summary of Executive Committee Meeting at Milton Keynes**

At the meeting on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February the Executive Committee re-appointed Trevor Taylor as our OMEGA Editor for the next twelve months and it was also noted that the Spring edition of OMEGA would be produced in full colour. Lesley Sleight was also re-appointed for the coming year as Company Secretary. Unfortunately due to family commitments, Violet Rook has had to resign as Development Officer and so all her areas of responsibility are now being shared out amongst the remaining four Officers.

Cheryl Cowley our Clerical Officer has had a request for a reduction in her hours approved and so from the start of February, Office hours will be 10am until 4pm Monday to Friday. You are still able to leave messages on the answer phone when Cheryl is not available, and she will respond to you as soon as is possible on her next working day. It has been approved that AOUG advertise through Reeds Employment Agency for a Clerical Assistant to work just one day a week alongside Cheryl to learn the Office procedures.

The AOUG Foundation for Education Awards for the Regions and Nations are once again to be widely advertised. Nominations for any new graduate who has gained their OU degree within the last twelve months despite overcoming adversity over and above that of the average student need to be received at the AOUG Office by 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2015.

Information will also go out in March to all OU research departments to encourage nominations for our AOUG Foundation for Education Research Awards. The presentations for these will take place as usual on the first Friday in October on the OU campus and will be followed by our Annual Foundation Lecture which this year is going to be by Paul Catley, the Head of the Law School. Tickets, for any or all of the day, including a buffet lunch, are priced at £10 each and can be obtained from the AOUG Office (01908 653316). If you have never been to the OU campus before, then this is your perfect opportunity to explore the beautiful grounds.

The Officers have had several meetings with the OU over the Winter months and further meetings are in the process of being arranged. All of these seem to present positive support. The new OUSA President, Ruth Tudor, has also met the Officers and it has been agreed that links with AOUG will be included on the OUSA Website. Research is in progress as to AOUG making more use of various electronic communications in order to promote our Association and to provide more fluid communications between members.

The most important function of the Spring EC Meeting is to set the budget for the ensuing year. Money is always extremely tight and priorities for the year have to be agreed. Executive Representatives' budgets increased over the last two years to enable the production of the Local Newsletters but you may recall that in the Winter 2014 OMEGA, members' attention was drawn to the ever spiralling cost of sending three Newsletters annually by post. The decision has now been reluctantly made that unless a member is able to receive a Newsletter electronically, it will not be possible to post copies out. Please do check that AOUG Office has your current e-mail address so that you do not miss out.

## **OUSA Conference**

Several of the AOUG Officers attended the OUSA conference which was held in Milton Keynes during the Summer of 2014. Our stand was situated in the Jenny Lee Building, This gave the opportunity to meet and talk to many students, some already graduates but continuing their studies, and others who will hopefully be future graduates in a few years' time. All of these are our potential future members so specially designed information packs had been prepared and these were handed out along with copies of our OMEGAs to any that showed an interest.

## **AOUG Research Awards and Foundation Lecture**



The AOUG Research Award Ceremony was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2014 at Milton Keynes when our charity the AOUG Foundation for Education presented four of the nine Research Awards. The recipients were research students who had been nominated by their Faculties and who were accompanied by their families and friends to see them receive their Awards. Research covered the varied topics of 'Crete and the Cretans of Euripedes', 'Low Frequency ARay (LOFAR) studies of the Galactic Plane', Attitudes towards teaching in the national language in Zimbabwe, and Structural analysis of Java Identifier names. Displays of their research work had been prepared by our Publicity Officer and their supervisors gave glowing reports on why these students had been nominated. Members from AOUG and dignitaries from the OU all enjoyed the Ceremony, which concluded with lunch and the opportunity to socialise. We were especially grateful for the fine October weather which allowed attendees the chance to enjoy their lunch on the patio.

During the lunch period there was an informal presentation of flowers to Karen Bradbury by the Chairman, as a personal thank you from the Officers for her support of AOUG for many years. She is a senior member of staff who works for OU Estates and who has also acted as the Returning Officer for the AOUG election count but who was due to retire at the end of December.

AOUG members and their guests, including some Award winners and their supervisors, stayed to hear the Foundation Lecture entitled 'Personalisation in Early Years – Processes and Outcomes', which was given by Natalia Kucirkova, the winner of our 2013 Olga Camm Bursary. She described the research that had led to her Doctorate. The research had been inspired by the relationship that she had had with her grandfather when she was a child and looked at how the interactive creative process of producing their own books using photos, pictures and their own words could positively affect children's motivation to engage with the stories and to gain pleasure from communicating and reading together with adults.

## **Diary Dates**

*Members living in the 'Rest of the World' are invited to attend any of the events advertised in OMEGA when they are over in the UK and we encourage as many as possible to join us at the AGM.*

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May.** AGM/Social Weekend

The Celtic Royal Hotel, Caernarfon, North Wales. The booking form is on the AOUG Website and full details can be obtained by e-mailing [aoug@open.ac.uk](mailto:aoug@open.ac.uk)