



The Association for Education & Ageing

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AEA DIGEST

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Final preparations for our 2014 Conference - AEA Secretary Sasha Anderson with Anita and Jonathan Hughes. Photo by Val Bissland

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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jonathan Hughes

This year's conference on the theme of *Celebrating Informal Learning and Well-Being in Later Life*, along with the 2013 AGM took place on 5th September 2013, at The Open University, Walton Hall. As many of you will realise this venue was a late decision, as the planning had been that we would have our conference in Norwich. I would like to repeat my thanks to all the people who made the conference possible, in particular, OU colleagues, Caroline Holland and Josie Tetley.

Caroline was tireless in making sure that the practical arrangements were in place for the day as well as making sure, through her links with the Ransackers and Age UK Milton Keynes that older learners were well represented. Josie Tetley also agreed to lead one of our workshops, as did Lynne Wealleans of the Beth Johnson Foundation and thanks are due to Jane Watts for standing in for Stephen McNair in leading the first workshop of the day, *Economic engagement, workforce development and wellbeing*.

I would also record my appreciation to AEA colleagues, especially Sasha Anderson, Alex Withnall, Anne Jamieson, Keith Percy and Carol Allen for their inputs which enabled the conference to take place. I'm also delighted to report that Caroline, Josie, Lynne and Jane are all now on the AEA executive committee. Between them I'm sure they will be able to contribute a great deal to the future development of the association.



Dr Astrid Wissenburg
Photo by Val Bissland

The conference opened with a welcome on behalf of the Open University by Dr. Astrid Wissenburg (Director Research, Scholarship and Quality). Dr Wissenburg reflected on the fact that the conference was taking place in the Michael Young building. In addition to being one of the founders of the OU, Michael Young is well known for the terms 'meritocracy', as a result of his book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, first published in 1958. These days the terms meritocracy has been hi-jacked by people who missed the point of Young's satire about a world in which it was assumed to be self-evident that it was only right and proper for people with high IQ to rule.

Dr Wissenburg noted that the conference's focus on wellbeing and informal learning in later life recognised that for many older learners assessment and accreditation may be less significant (although this is not the case for all older people). It was pointed out that the Open University's mission is still to be open to people and for this reason, the OU is actively exploring, and resourcing, JIFL – the journey from informal to formal

learning. This journey is based on the use of online resources –such as on iTunes U and OpenLearn –which can underpin the learning that was explored in all of our three workshops. For employment in later life, for active retirement and to be able to play an informed role on care and health decisions, it is vital to be able to access a wide range of resources in order to maintain wellbeing in its widest sense encompassing social, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

The conference was to have been opened with a key note speech from another AEA executive member, Dr Marvin Formosa. Unfortunately, Marvin was unable to attend for health reasons. Fortunately, he had sent his power point slides in advance so we had an impromptu discussion around these led by Caroline Holland and me. This got the conference off in the interactive style that I always think differentiates AEA events.

The three workshops were developed by people with a concern and expertise in these different aspects of lifelong learning:

Economic engagement, workforce development and wellbeing

Led by Jane Watts (NIACE)

Active retirement and well-being

Led by Lynne Wealleans, Beth Johnson Foundation

Supported living and well-being

Led by Josie Tetley, The Open University/ Manchester Metropolitan University

Each workshop was comprised of a number of short inputs and lively

discussion from among the delegates – another key feature of AEA conferences.



Dr Fisk enjoys an informal moment with conference delegates. Photo by Val Bissland

I would also like to thank Dr Malcolm Fisk for agreeing to deliver this year's Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecturer.

- further details on page 4. It was wonderful that Angela Glendenning was able to introduce him and I'm grateful to Malcolm for doing 'double duty' by agreeing to form part of the plenary panel with Josie, Lynne and Jane. The plenary succeeded in maintaining the lively interactivity that had been a feature of the day.

Our conference was an opportunity to emphasise our on-going commitment to lifelong learning across the life course. If learning can be compared to an iceberg, informal learning probably represents the submerged tenths. Most learning most of the time for most people is informal learning. It may not be formally taught and it is almost certain not to have formal accreditation but it is nevertheless fundamental to being an engaged human being. The conference also showed that the AEA recognises that not everyone has equal access to the resource of informal learning and to other resources that also promote wellbeing. Thus older people remain

significantly less likely to be able to access the internet or other sources of information. But older people are not all the same. So another of our aims was to explore some of the differences in the needs of older people depending on whether they are still in paid employment, are 'actively retired' or are facing some of the problems associated with later old age.

This was an important occasion which allowed us to renew our commitment to later life learning. But it will have been

no more than a pleasant day if we don't as an association continue to move forward. We may 'punch above our weight' as far as influence is concerned but we still need to increase the numbers of members and of journal subscriptions. To this end we have set ourselves realistic targets in terms of making the offer to members more compelling. These will be the focus of our next executive committee meeting in November.

For further details on this see page 6

Jo Walker summarises this year's Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture 2013, which was delivered by Dr Malcolm Fisk, Co-Director, Age Research Centre, Coventry University on the subject of **Older People and the Health Literacy Imperative.**

Dr Fisk's lecture explored the importance of 'health literacy' in the context of an ageing population. How could the lifelong acquisition of a good understanding of health and healthy behaviour be encouraged? Images of active ageing were now more prevalent and could be used to promote higher expectations, replacing the negative stereotypes of age of previous periods. Citizenship in later life could also be seen as encompassing positive attitudes and knowledge about health and care, including self-support. The opposite picture, of poor health literacy, was linked in later life to less ability to make good judgments about health behaviour and lifestyle choices. It was associated with more smoking, alcohol, hospital admissions, risky behaviours, work accidents and medical complications.



Dr Malcolm Fisk. Photo by Val Bissland

Dr Fisk went on to address some of the means by which people become more health literate, and discuss the merits of some particular interventions. Learning, understanding and action needed to come together in various settings, such as workplaces or community activities. This process could be aided by health champions, who might be informal volunteers, or formally made available through special schemes and training.

We hope to post a fuller account of this year's lecture on the website shortly.

*New members of the Executive Committee. At the AGM Caroline Holland, Josie Tetley, Lynne Wealleans and JaneWatts were all elected to the E.C. We hope to hear from Caroline, Josie and Jane in a later issue of the digest, but first up is **Lynn Weallens** to tell us a bit about herself.*

Lynne has worked in the voluntary sector in North Staffordshire for over 18 years and has been at the Beth Johnson Foundation for the past eleven. Having completed a degree in Law & Politics as a 'mature' student, Lynne took a different path than the one expected, (becoming a solicitor), having been influenced by her voluntary work at a refuge for females who experienced domestic violence.



Lynne Wealleans – photo by Val Bissland

Lynne has had varied roles during her years of work having supported homeless, people, young people leaving care and those experiencing mental distress.

When she moved to the Beth Johnson Foundation in 2002, her role was originally around project development and particularly in designing the Foundation's Mid-life Programme.

Already an advocate for continuous learning, Lynne recognises the power of learning for people in making the most of their opportunities and life choices as well as for the sheer enjoyment. A powerful message in support of lifelong learning came from the recognition of the health and well-being benefits of being involved in learning.

From an early stage in her role at the Foundation Lynne recognised the value of the Association of Education and Ageing and has sought to work closely with them over the years. This culminated in the joint AEA/BJF conference held in Stoke in 2012 and the signing of a Partnership Agreement between the organisations this summer. Lynne is delighted to have been invited on to the Executive Committee and is looking forward to working with the other committee members to promote this most valuable element of ageing positively.

At the AEA conference in Milton Keynes this year Lynne facilitated the workshop stream around the topic of 'Active Retirement and Well-being'. Following Lynne's introduction around the theme of positive ageing were three interesting presentations which both fitted the theme and complemented each other. Stephanie Warren spoke of her involvement with Senior Voice in Milton Keynes and her Sheila McKechnie Take Action Award for campaigning; Val Bissland from the University of Strathclyde on the critical role of attitudes and beliefs for sustaining wellbeing in later life and Alex Withnall on long term health conditions and retirement.



Alex Withnall at the 2013 conference – photo by Val Bissland

PLANS FOR 2014

Our 2014 conference has been pencilled in for September 2014 with an emphasis on Older Learning and Europe. Venue and further details as they become available.

Another event planned is a one day conference on Memory in Later Life to be held on June 9th at Lancaster University

Further seminars are planned as follows:

May – Leicester – Older Workers and Later Life Learning

December – Stoke on Trent – Active Retirement

March 2015 – Manchester - Older People Learning about Health and Care Issues

Details when finalised will be posted on our Facebook page, Twitter and website

*Looking further to the future of AEA, your Executive Committee is working on a plan to expand our membership and give you even better value for your subscription. Keith Percy fills us in on **The MORE Process – Making the Offer Real.***

In October 2012 the AEA Executive Committee reviewed the number of AEA members and the level of annual membership income. It agreed that membership was not at a sufficiently high level and that, since annual membership income does not cover core costs, it must be increased. The committee decided that a fundamental review was needed of what was being offered to members and, in effect, of

what AEA was doing. What was needed, it was agreed, was a membership offer that was real, in the sense of being recognisably attractive to potential new members. Thus the MORE process got underway.

Between November 2012 and January 2013 four members of the Executive Committee considered current and possible target audiences for AEA membership and what AEA had, or could have, to offer them, within the bounds of feasibility and affordability. It reported to the January 2013 Executive Committee with a set of outline proposals, which included adding new categories of “associate” and “student” membership and making the category of

“corporate “ membership more attractive. The Committee agreed to the proposals in principle and set up three broad-based action groups to work out feasibilities and implications of i) financial and membership targets and fee levels over the next four years; (ii) marketing, including website, social media etc. (iii) new developments such as student prizes, mentoring and writing for publication workshops – each of these associated with a particular category of membership.

Each action group worked away busily during Spring 2013 and reported in a balanced fashion to the May Executive Committee. On the basis of these reports and of a further two weeks of on-line discussion, the Committee agreed to press ahead with gradual but real expansion targets for membership numbers and income but with only modest biennial increases in membership fees. Upgrading of marketing with clarity of messages about the advantages of membership are expected to bring initial increases in membership.

Details of the offer for new categories of “associate” and “student” members are planned to be ready for launch and for a modest influx of new members in these categories by the end of Summer 2014,.

The Executive Committee has resolved that, in order to make “the MORE process” successful it will in the future review membership numbers and membership satisfaction regularly and make adjustments as necessary.



Keith Percy – photo by Val Bissland

*AEA is now involved in an exciting new EU funded project **WELL - Well-being in later life: education, creativity and physical activity**. Another report from Keith Percy*

Last July, AEA heard that it was to be funded by the EU Grundtvig Programme to be a partner in a new “Learning Partnership” project. This is the third EU funded project in which AEA is currently a partner.

The duration of WELL is from August 1 2013 to September 30 2015. The partnership collaborating in the project consists of AEA and organisations from Poland, Turkey, Italy, Slovakia, and Spain. The organisations from the latter four countries are new partners for AEA. The lead partner is the “Fullness of Life Academy” from Krakow, Poland. AEA is acting as co-ordinator of project content.

A Grundtvig Learning Partnership is funded to organise a programme of “mobilities” - of tutors and learners – between the partners over the two year period. The partners in WELL are varied and include organisations which specialise in teaching older adults sport

and physical activities, traditional crafts, drama, dance, classroom and workshop based subjects. The key objective of the project is for the partners to examine each other's work, to experiment with teaching and learning methods and to explore what connections can be detected between participation in educational, creative and physical learning by older people and feelings of well-being and meaningfulness in later life.

WELL is underway and I have already attended planning meetings in Slovakia and Poland. The project will be carefully

evaluated and AEA will be responsible for a handbook which will be one of the project's outcomes. Apart from the European networking benefits for AEA of participating in this kind of collaborative activity, and the potential value of the project activities themselves, the financial contribution which these projects makes to AEA through overheads is significant.

I invite any member of AEA who might like to become involved in WELL, possibly to travel on one of the "mobilities" to get in touch with me as soon as possible - percyk90@yahoo.co



*And looking to the very immediate future, here's wishing you all a very happy Christmas.
May 2014 be a prosperous and happy year both for all of you and indeed for the every growing Association for Education and Ageing.*

*An increasingly important aspect of work with older citizens now is concerned with intergenerational projects. In September Intergen organised the **Second National Intergeners Day**. **Ben Bolt** of Intergen reports on a day which had both a serious purpose and some lighter moments.*

The event was held at Stockport College, where 55 Intergeners (our volunteers) from Chorlton, Whalley Range, Cheadle, Droylsden, Tyldesley and Bethnal Green in London came together to meet the Trustees of the charity and each other. The Intergeners told the trustees what they thought about Intergen, how it impacted on their lives and shared their ideas on how it could grow and improve its services to local schools



Intergeners having a bit of a ball

Our Intergeners, Coordinators and the Trustees then all learnt some Morris dancing and enjoyed a wonderful afternoon tea provided by the Young

People's Support Foundation based in Manchester.

In the tradition of the charity it was a truly intergenerational and fun afternoon for the Intergeners all of whom are members of Intergen UK, part of the charity From Generation to Generation. They are retired men and women who volunteer in their local schools. The schools are partners with the charity, which creates opportunities for both younger and older people to come together in their local schools to enrich learning, raise aspirations, discover that learning is fun and build stronger communities

*One of the most brilliant educational opportunities for older learners that has ever been created is **Ransackers** - 'an educational adventure for Older People', which was launched by BGOP in Plater and Ruskin adult residential colleges in April 2004. **Audrey Mullender** of Ruskin College writes about a decade of achievement.*

Ruskin tutor – sadly died in October 2013. Vi's vision was of a project that would bring older people aged 55+ back into learning in the collegiality of a residential setting. They would have the freedom to pursue a project of their own choice and would benefit from an educational experience that so many of their generation were denied.



Ruskin College in Oxford is the longest standing and most consistent institution offering the Ransackers Programme whose founder, Vi Hughes – a former

Vi, a student of Gaelic in her own later years, chose the name 'Ransackers' because it derived from a word indicating searching and discovery – something that learners have in intellectual terms subsequently gloried in. Whether it be a former chef pursuing an interest in social justice after an accident left him unable to work or an ex-trade union general secretary studying Nazi attitudes to art and jumping straight to an MA in Public History, the Ransackers have followed their own hidden interests, often submerged through many years of

employment, family life and public service.



Ransackers are celebrating their first decade of existence this academic year; the first certificates having been presented in summer 2004. From the start, these courageous learning returners have attended classes in IT, library skills and other topics designed to support the success of their projects. A surprising number have gone on to undertake a degree. Pauline Hamilton, last year's President of the Ruskin Fellowship (Ruskin's alumni association), for example, was a Ransacker before taking an English Studies degree, also at Ruskin College.

The Ransackers Programme has been Ruskin's best publicised course, featuring both on *Woman's Hour* and on *Something Understood* on Radio 4. Even so, there is scope for the programme to expand beyond the 8 to 10 students it has attracted in recent years, back to the 20 or so of its earliest days. Past Ransackers have been delighted with their experience. As one said, "It has

instilled a real core of learning and a sense of achievement." In an age when older people are too often written off and neglected, please help to spread the word about this exciting door into a whole new world of learning.

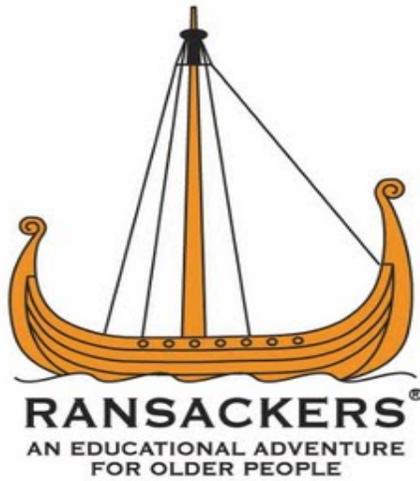
Further information:

There are two intakes a year at Ruskin, in January and April, for 10 weeks study at a time. Enquiries can be directed to ransackers@ruskin.ac.uk and there is more information about the College at www.ruskin.ac.uk. In future, the programme will be offered at Level 2 (rather than Level 3, as in the past), in order to guarantee continued bursary funding. In order to qualify, applicants must have been resident in the UK for at least three years and must not previously have received a grant for higher education. This makes them eligible for support from the Skills Funding Agency to come back into education.

*Your editor was privileged this year to attend the post AGM conference of the **Ransackers Association's**, (Ransackers alumni), where my *New Horizons* drama class was invited to present our *Isolation Project* as part of the proceedings (further details on page 17 of the Culture Section). I particularly enjoyed taking part in AEA member Jackie Richardson's workshop. One of the many people I chatted to at the event was **John Miles** of the British Society of Gerontology, who offered to write about the association for the Digest.*

After the Education and Ageing conference in 2009 Brian Groombridge wrote about the importance of Ransackers, the former BGOP initiative which has since 2004 worked with several UK colleges to offer older people

with no experience of higher education the chance of extended residential study.



On May 17th this year the Ransackers Association, an alumni group run by former students of these courses, held its AGM at Europe House in London. The event ran for over five hours. There was a high quality discussion about the association's future led by its chair Teresa Lefort; stimulating presentations about 'citizenship and orientalism' from research associates of the Open University; a brief, moving, play about loneliness from Carol Allen's New Horizons theatre group, and a workshop on the theme *Is Education Wasted on Older People?* led by social enabler and Tottenham-based adult educator Jackie Richards, currently in the throes of her own PhD on older people and dance. The event concluded a busy, but exhausting, twelve months during which this tiny group of enthusiasts punched well above their weight during the 2012

European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between the Generations.

The Ransackers' case for a kind of student union for older people who have accessed public education facilities would appear persuasive, but it is evidently a difficult one to put across. The Association faces an ongoing struggle to first enlist, and then mobilise, a membership, which is by definition scattered across England and Wales. One emerging theme is whether the Association should now abandon its gold standard promotion of residential courses, in recognition of the pressures on older participants as a consequence of contemporary lifestyles.

But whatever adaptations are made in response to patterns of consumption and family responsibility, the fact remains that running small under-funded bodies is now very hard work and needs to be shared. The Ransackers' committee has done well in drawing on help from a range of colleagues at the OU, London Metropolitan University, Camden Council, and the European Commission. They have imaginative plans and are looking at ways to train members in basic research skills. Perhaps the participating colleges can find a way to help promote and encourage membership, but as several speakers pointed out there's also a need for more students of these important courses to make a commitment and get involved themselves. Democracy takes effort.

*The afore-mentioned **Professor Brian Groombridge** is still very much on the older learning scene and was an enthusiastic participant in this year's AEA Conference – seen here with former AEA Chair Jo Walker.*



Photo by Val Bissland

*Earlier this year Brian attended an event at the House of Commons organised by the intriguingly acronymned **POST***

"POST" is the familiar name for the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. It formally describes itself as "An office of both Houses of Parliament, providing independent and balanced analysis of public policy issues that have a basis in science and technology". For some years I received its 4-page summaries of science issues with a direct bearing on public policies, but now POST tells us what its POSTnotes are about and only sends notes which we ask for. They recently offered to send 4-pagers about Autonomous Road Vehicles, Cosmetic Procedures and Pre-Implementation Genetic Diagnosis.

POST also has meetings to explore issues. They will soon be arranging an event to explore Allergy matters. Last June they mounted a special "interactive exhibition", which provided an opportunity for users to become more aware of some of the sources on which the research used by POST depends. This event was held in the House of Commons with seven leading public bodies which fund research in the UK. The theme was *The Science of Health and Wellbeing*. I was lucky enough to be one of the hundred-or-so people present on this occasion.

We all met in the Members' Dining Room. and were welcomed with a few words from POST's Chairman, Adam Afriyie (MP for Windsor). He regards POST as "the bright light of science in Parliament", especially for "the central role it plays in informing democratic debate". The room was large enough for POST and these research organisations to display "hands-on exhibits", to introduce leading researchers to talk to us and we could wander round and see our priority interests in a broader, more comprehensive, scientific context.

Some Research Councils focussed on very specific themes; others provided miscellaneous examples of their issues and work. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Council, for example, concentrated on Tobacco, Health and Wellbeing; whereas the Arts and Humanities Research Council could illustrate their broad theme (relating Arts and Humanities to Health and Wellbeing) with different examples bearing on "broader medical, therapeutic or demographic challenges". They talked for instance about White Peacock, "a vibrant multi-sensory play written for

audiences aged 11 and above" with "profound and multiple, severe or moderate learning disabilities". It provided a strong contrast through a discussion on the positive impact of "philosophy clubs".



These different approaches are to some extent conveyed by the themes adopted by the seven Councils:

Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC): *Mental Health and the Philosophy of Wellbeing*

BBSRC Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council: *Epigenetics and Wellbeing*

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): *Impact of Tobacco on Health and Wellbeing*

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC): *Medical Devices.*

Medical Research Council (MRC): *E-Health*

Natural Environment Research Council: *Natural Hazards*

Science & Technology Facilities Council: *Lasers for Health.*

The demonstrations and discussions were reinforced by leaflets and other publications in the displays. Arts &

Humanities, for example, had published an illustrated booklet, *The Human World*, outlining its priorities. *The Public Good and the Power of Knowledge* was connected with grants from Postgraduates to Principal Investigators and it is to be hoped that AHRC's financial claim that "the immediate benefit generated by a £1 investment in arts and humanities research is £10" will be taken seriously.

The scope of the Natural Environment Research Council's terms of reference was also clear from their well illustrated journal *Planet Earth*. The Spring edition focused on food systems, with articles about ozone pollution, the impact of cows on civilisation and weathering the drought in Africa. The Summer edition goes "Under the sea", but it also reckons that genetic science could help save Britain's ash trees, and explains how to safeguard the unique wildlife of the Galapagos.

It was unfortunately harder than it should have been for us to appreciate and learn from all these active displays, as the exhibition opened at 4 pm but closed at 5.45! Maybe that's a snag when using the Members' Dining Room..

However, I saw enough to admire what these research organisations can offer organisations like ours in terms of enabling active citizens to access research resources. Indeed when it comes to our membership, contributions and benefits could possibly become even more mutual with some of the research organisations taking part as exhibitors becoming our allies!

Dr Martin Formosa has recently published a book with fellow writer Paul Higgs on a subject which could almost be described as an English obsession – social class. Witness the popularity of television’s Downton Abbey!



Michelle Dockery and Joanne Froggatt as mistress and maid at Downton Abbey

*Dr Formosa’s book, **Social Class in Later Life: Power, Identity and Lifestyle** is however is a very contemporary and wide ranging take on the issue and how it affects older citizens.*

The theme around which this volume has been organised is the continuing utility of the idea of social class for the understanding of contemporary later life. Within the chapters published in this book we have seen many different ways in which social class continues to be a valuable concept for researchers as well as constituting a critical aspect of old age.

Elizangela Storelli and John Williamson’s chapter on the global implications of changes to pensions policy both in the United States and abroad demonstrates that pension policies not only create or maintain class differences in later life, but that different models based upon different contributory principles can have

different implications for providing financial security in later years. That these alternatives are not pursued is seen as one of the consequences of the salience of social class and of the interests implicated in its existence. The chapter on social work among older people in the United Kingdom [UK] by

Trish Hafford-Letchfield also points out that evidence of widening inequalities is emerging as a result of changes to social policy such as the introduction of direct payments and this is affecting those who have the poorest health and the lowest capacity to take advantage of formal and informal sources of support.

Christina Victor’s chapter extends our understanding of how the formal and informal care sectors both in terms of providers as well as recipients are connected to social class as well as being affected by gender and ethnicity. These chapters provide valuable analysis regarding the connections between social class and old age that are ever-present in contemporary social policy directed towards later life. They demonstrate that the issues faced by the oldest sections of the population are not just issues of age and dependency but also are structured by many of the same forces that influence younger sections of the population.

This point is made more directly in Chris Phillipson’s chapter which addresses the topic of globalisation and its effects on both later life and social class. Starting from a position that accepts that class has both been neglected in social gerontology and that it has a major impact on the lives of older people, Phillipson also acknowledges that social changes brought about in the wake of

globalisation are changing some of the coordinates of old age and not just around changes in pension policy.

It is therefore not surprising that one theme that has run through many of the chapters in this book has been that it is our theorisation of social class has not developed sufficiently to keep up with the task of understanding the linkage between old age and social class in the modern world. We would argue that there are two reasons for this. The first reason is that contemporary sociological enquiry into the operationalization of social class has generally concentrated on people of working age or younger. The second reason for this lack of development has been the reluctance of many researchers to situate possible linkages between old age and social class in changes to the nature of later life in North America and Western Europe.

These difficulties are often compounded by many writers who use class interchangeably with inequality. For many such researchers, life after retirement is still a residual category created by social and health policies. We would argue that it is important to acknowledge the need for rethinking social class under new conditions because without it research into later life and retirement will become less and less convincing about the role of social class in older people's lives.

Social Class in Later Life: Power, Identity and Lifestyle by Marvin Formosa and Paul Higgs is obtainable from Policy Press at the reduced price of £56

<http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?ISB=9781447300588&>

The Association for Education and Ageing

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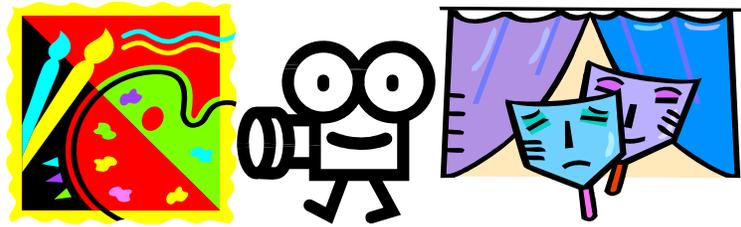
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<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/about-us.html>



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

Apologies are due from your editor for the lateness of this digest, which was originally intended to be out in the summer and has now morphed into an Autumn issue being published just as winter is starting to bite.

My excuse, apart from having the builders in my house from July onwards (and we all know how time consuming that can be) is that culturally it's been a very busy time for both me and my older learner drama students, in the course of which I've learned a lot more about older people and what we can achieve in the arts. And as no-one else has been able to contribute any arts and culture news for this issue, I'm afraid it's all about

Carol Allen's Cultural Summer.



Back in April I attended the Carmarthen Bay Film Festival in South Wales – an intergenerational event if ever there was one.

I was there with my film *With Marjorie Gone*, which is not an older learners project – just a film - although it does feature two of the actors from my drama class, who were in my earlier educational project *Miss Threadgold*. It is a prequel to that film, telling the story of two of the characters when young. I met a lot of other film makers of all ages and the audience appeared to like my movie, although it didn't win a prize.

The prize for Best Feature Film however went to a film called ***Chinese Burns***, which was written and produced by Julian Lamoral Roberts, who also plays the leading role of Oscar Tarporley, a retired horror film actor – a character with a distinct resemblance to Christopher Lee.

The story is about a young trainee journalist, who inveigles her way into the actor's home on the pretext of wanting to do an interview with him. She has a secret agenda however, in that she believes he is her grandfather.

It's a good tale well told and very entertaining, which also explores our human need for family and family connections and it well deserved that prize.



Julian Lamoral Roberts in *Chinese Burns*

The story behind the making of the film is also an interesting one. Julian started his career in the sixties as an assistant film editor and only became a professional actor when he retired from his day job as a producer of children's programmes for BBC Television. Since then he has acted in plays, sketch shows, self-penned solo performances, commercials and dozens of short films as well as several low budget features. Julian wrote and produced *Chinese Burns*, his first feature film, because he felt that at the age of 70, he'd better do it now or he'd be too old; "a now or never situation", as he puts it.

As well as winning that Carmarthen Bay film festival award, Julian was nominated for both Best Actor and Best Screenplay awards for this film in the Maverick Movie Awards, USA, 2012. The film has also been seen at festivals in Lucerne in Switzerland, Marbella in Spain, Oaxaca in Mexico, Huntington Beach, California and at this year's Portobello Film Festival in London, where it was nominated in five categories and it has now been picked up for DVD distribution. Julian has also written and performed a 45 minute one-man show "Oscar and The Shrink" a theatrical spin-off from a scene in *Chinese Burns*, which won the award for Best New Writing in the Solo Festival in Camden, London, 2011.

All of which goes to prove that you're never too old to fulfil your dreams. I'm taking Julian as a role model in following mine!

Watch the trailer for *Chinese Burns* here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_x5a9Z3FnlQ

*In May, as mentioned earlier, my drama class at the New Horizons Centre was invited by the Ransackers Association to perform our **Isolation Project** at their post AGM conference.*

This piece is built around the theme of isolation and older people. It was created three years ago, when I was asked to create a piece for a conference on that theme. We were then asked to perform it a couple of months later at the launch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's *Campaign Against Loneliness* and we have since presented it at various other

conferences and as part of our show at the Drayton Arms Theatre last December.



Jo Cooklin in *The Isolation Project* at the Drayton Arms Theatre – Photo Michael Spry

For a class whose membership inevitably fluctuates and changes, it has the advantage of being what I term a “slot in and slot out” project, in that it’s structure enables me to accommodate new students and we can still perform the piece even if members of the original cast are no longer available. Each student initially creates a character through improvisation. The piece starts with the characters all trapped in their individual invisible “boxes”. Individually they then address the audience, talking about their isolated situation. A character who describes herself as their “fairy godmother” then has a dialogue with each one of them, encouraging them to break out of their boxes and come to classes at New Horizons! And the piece ends with them doing just that.

The “slot in, slot out” aspect was well demonstrated, when the class took part

in a storytelling workshop in Rotherhithe as part of the Capital Age Festival, where we performed the piece to the rest of the group. One of the participants with whom we’d been working earlier on another exercise, was keen to take part. In the twenty minutes preparation time we were allowed, I and the students helped her create a character and plan her dialogue and she did her piece to perfection.

When we performed *The Isolation Project* for the Ransackers Association, one of the members of the audience kindly recorded it for us and put it on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4HuYdiNvws&noredirect=1>

And I have ambitions to turn this into a film, which would be somewhat different in concept, if I can find some funding.

*Next up in a busy summer for older artists was an event organised by the Royal Court Theatre in London – **Playwriting Workshops for Over 80s***

The Royal Court has a long tradition of supporting new writing. When the new director Vicky Featherstone took over in the summer she took that tradition a step or two further by deciding to uncover hidden talent in the older generation. One of the octogenarian writers who were selected to take part was Dorothy Adibi, one of my New Horizons students.

In the workshops she and some eight or nine other writers each wrote a short play of around ten minutes each.

Dorothy’s play was about a conflict between actors in a theatre company



Dorothy Adibi, Photo Michael Spry

The plays were then given a rehearsed reading by professional actors before an invited audience in the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs. The standard of writing was high – well up to professional standards – and the actors

did their writers proud. And for Dorothy it was an immense thrill. She is now part of an exclusive octogenarian club who can say they had their play premiered at the Royal Court.

*Chrissie Fraser, another budding writer among my students, also experienced the thrill of having her play **Going Back** given a professional performance at the Tristan Bates Theatre in Covent Garden.*

Going Back is adapted from a novel which Chrissie is currently writing. Last year I took extracts from what she had already written and turned it into a 20 minute play, which we tried out first in a rehearsal conditions performance at New Horizons and then as part of our Drayton Arms Theatre show. From the audience reaction we knew the play “had legs”, as they say.

So this summer I submitted the script to the *Kick Up the Arts* festival being held in July. It was accepted and we went into production with me directing, Jo Cooklin, a former professional actress who is also one of my students, reprising the role of Leyla she had already created and with fellow professional Jackie Lye playing opposite her as Julie. Claire Jared and Taran Bolina, who had appeared in my film *With Marjorie Gone* played young Lizzie and her lover Ahmed.



Jo Cooklin as Leyla Photo Michael Spry

The story: At the funeral of her mother Lizzie Julie sees a woman in a burka observing from a distance. It is the start of a shocking and poignant journey into Lizzie's life when young, which totally changes Julie's view of the woman she knew as her mother.

As with previous performances it was well received by the audience. The cast and I also took part in some of the workshops which were part of the festival and made some useful contacts and new friends and learned an extra trick or two. And as a result of someone remembering her performance in *Going Back*, Jo was offered a role in a new play, which was part of an evening of new writing held at the Southwark Playhouse in November. Jolly good she was in it too.

As a health related postscript to the drama work I've been doing with older learners over the last few years, apart from acting we do a lot of work on voice

and speech, including correct breathing. Two of my long standing students were sent recently by their doctors to have lung tests. They passed with flying

colours. One of them was told she had the lung capacity of a 20 something man!. Any connection to those breathing exercises? My students seem to think so.

Last but not least, with the invaluable help of website designer Ray Fury my Cat's Whiskers Films website went live

this summer, just in time for the No Gloss Film Festival in Leeds, where *With Marjorie Gone* got another showing. If you have a moment, do pay us a visit for more information on what *Cat's Whiskers* has been up to of late. <http://catswhiskersfilms.co.uk/>

And that's quite enough of me banging on. **Carlie Newman** has some recommendations on what's worth seeing *At the Theatre*.

An excellently designed set by Soutra Gilmour's marks out *From Here to Eternity* at the Shaftesbury Theatre (until 31 January 2014 Box office: 020-73795399) as a very professional show. It is, of course, necessary to put aside all memories of the 1953 film directed by Fred Zinnerman. Tamara Harvey directs this new musical based on James Jones' 1951 long novel about life on an army base in Hawaii in the lead up to the attack on Pearl Harbour, December 1941.



Darius Campbell as First Sergeant Milt Warden & Rebecca Thornhill as Karen Holmes

The show follows three soldiers at the base: Robert E. Lee Prewitt (Robert Lonsdale), a Private, who refuses to join the army boxing team; the very macho Milt Warden (Darius Campbell), the

Company Sergeant who has an affair with the Captain's wife and Private

Angelo Maggio (Ryan Sampson), the American-Italian wide boy, who is continuously picked on because of his ethnicity.

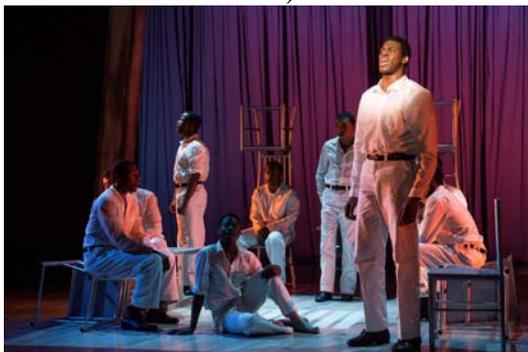
The musical is mainly serious in tone. Maggio makes his money by gambling and offering favours to the clients of a gay club. At a different club we see the girl that Prewitt has fallen in love with, together with the other girls who work there. Lorene (Siubhan Harrison), Prewitt's girlfriend, and her friends presumably offer more to the soldiers than just dancing. Prewitt is mocked and suffers physical abuse because he refuses to fight.

Understandably the audience is waiting for the beach scene with its memories of Deborah Kerr and Burt Lancaster rollicking in the surf in the movie. Here it is a more muted affair, although at the end of the scene Rebecca Thornhill as Karen Holmes, the Captain's wife does strip off.

To my surprise I found that the show works well as a musical, not least because of the strong musical content provided by Tim Rice's lyrics and Stuart Bryson as composer. The score uses a number of different styles, which effectively enhance the on stage action, including military music, blues and a

strong romantic ballad in *Love Me Forever Today*.

The best new musical since Billy Eliot – that's *The Scottsboro Boys* (Young Vic Theatre booking until 21 December box office: 0844 858 8877).



The Scottsboro Boys – Photo by Richard Hubert Smith

With music and lyrics by John Kander and Fred Ebb, it tells the true life story of the wrongful arrest and even more shameful conviction of nine young men (the youngest was 13) who in Alabama in 1931 were taken off a train and accused of the rape of two white women. Even though one of the women withdrew her allegation, they were still found guilty. They had a number of re-trials with a better lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz, but still the all-white juries maintained they were Guilty.

The show is played as a minstrel show with all the characters except the Interlocutor (Julian Glover) played by a black cast. Even the white women are played, most amusingly, by young black actors. Set in the town of Scottsboro, Alabama 1931-1937, the actors move chairs around to represent the train, the courthouse, a prison cell etc.

Directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman, there is some great dancing and singing by all, particularly from long-legged Kyle Scatliffe as Haywood Patterson, one of the accused. This is a

fantastically well staged and performed piece of theatre and well worth making a huge effort to get tickets.

Having also seen the show, I'd like to endorse Carlie's recommendation here. This show merits a West End transfer – it's highly entertaining but also very moving.

*I don't spend all my time in the movies you see! However I do dabble in that area from time to time. Here's **Carol Allen's** news and reviews of what is around **On Screen**.*

I have been surmising for some time in this column that more films appear to be being made now to meet the demand from the discriminating older audience, who want something meatier than the spectacular and noisy comic book and video games type big screen spin off. And the box office figures are starting to prove it. It wasn't just older people though who went to a film like say *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. And it looks like the same will be true of *Philomena*.



Judi Dench and Steve Coogan in *Philomena*

Judi Dench plays the title character, an elderly widow whose born out of wedlock son 50 years earlier was forcibly adopted from one of the infamous Magdalen laundries in Ireland, where she was being held prisoner for

her “sin”. Steve Coogan is the journalist, who helps her track him down in America, where he was taken. Dench is as usual superb – she moves you both to tears and laughter - and Coogan, who also wrote the script and produced the film, shows once again that he’s now a film maker and actor to be taken seriously. They make a great team.

In good time for the Christmas holidays, ***Saving Mr Banks*** is not the story of the making of the much loved film *Mary Poppins*, but of Walt Disney’s determined battle to persuade the book’s author, P.L Travers to let him make it. The film is charming and funny but also has depth, particularly in its flashbacks to Travers’ Australian childhood and her relationship with her charismatic but flawed father (Colin Farrell), which ultimately reveal the reason why she is so protective of her character Mary and “Mr Banks”. Tom Hanks gives a likeable performance as Disney but the centre of the film is Emma Thompson as Travers - an irritable, prickly school marm of a character who is complex, moving and very funny in her conflict with the Hollywood way of doing things.



Tom Hanks and Emma Thompson.
Photo – Disney

In ***Nebraska*** Bruce Dern plays Woody, an elderly man, who with his estranged son makes a trip back to the small Nebraska town where he was raised to

claim a million dollar lottery prize he erroneously believes he’s won. In the course of their journey the son discovers a side to his father he has never known. Shot in beautiful black and white, the film is a bit slow in places but Dern holds the attention with an interesting portrayal of alcohol induced dementia - or is it? As his son says early on in the film "all he needs is something to live for".

There are also some good films opening early next year with “older audience” appeal. ***Last Vegas*** has Michael Douglas, Robert de Niro, Kevin Kline and Morgan Freeman as four elderly men “behaving badly” as they try to recreate their teenage closeness sixty years on at a stag do reunion for Billy (Douglas), who’s marrying a woman half his age. The characters are strong and these real old acting hands have years of experience to draw on in bringing them to life. Although the film has its poignant moments, it is overall very funny with spot on good jokes about the challenges of old age. Another plus is it provides a really good role for an older woman, Diana, played by 60 year old Mary Steenbergen, as a Sin City chanteuse who befriends the group.

Colin Firth plays ***The Railway Man***, based on the memoirs of Eric Lomax, a victim of the infamous Japanese "Death Railway" in World War II Burma, whose nightmare memories cause him as a middle aged man to seek out his former tormentors. Good support from Nicole Kidman as his wife in the present, some horrific but not over explicit flashbacks to young Lomax’s wartime experiences and a very moving climax when Eric finally confronts the man who oversaw his torture.

Another performance not to miss is Idris Elba in *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, a thorough but gripping biopic of the South African hero. Elba does a good job of humanizing a man, who is effectively regarded as a living saint and Naomi Harris skilfully makes sense of the sad journey of Winnie Mandela from loving young wife to ruthless and self seeking activist.



Idris Elma as Mandela

Two more films worth your attention which should be coming out soon on DVD. *The Emperor* stars Matthew Fox as General Bonner Fellers, an expert in Japanese culture, who helped General MacArthur (Tommy Lee Jones) resolve the tricky problem of what to do about Emperor Hirohito, when America occupied Japan at the end of World War II. Like *The Railway Man* it has a climax which delivers a powerful moral

message about reconciliation and the past.

In contrast *Le Weekend*, which reunites writer Hanif Kureishi with director Roger Michell, is a charming and perceptive tale of a couple on the verge of retirement and old age, played by Lindsay Duncan and Jim Broadbent, who attempt to rejuvenate their marriage during a hopefully romantic weekend in Paris.



Jim Broadband and Lindsay Duncan in *Le Weekend* Photo Nicola Dove

Nice witty touches and beautiful observation of a couple who've known each intimately for 30 years, which demonstrates both tenderness and cynicism – Kureishi's writing at its best.

So don't go thinking they don't make films for grown ups any more – it's no longer true.

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