



The Association for
Education & Ageing

AEA DIGEST

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Robin Webster (Age Action Ireland), Jo Walker (AEA Chair) and Ted Fleming (NUI Maynooth)
at our Maynooth international conference

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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker

Dear Friends,

In the first few months of this year, AEA has seen the fruits of much planning in two major areas. The first was the formal start of the FORAGE European project, which aims to build and operate an interactive network of projects across Europe on older people and learning. The Association is one of sixteen partners and our particular contribution will be to host a website to make European project findings and resources more widely available. We hope this will also be of great interest and value to AEA members and increase our international reach. In February this year, FORAGE held its first meeting of all the partners, who came to Leicester for three days, as Leicester University is the lead partner. Future international partner meetings are planned for Cyprus and Portugal. The project will run for three years, and we will feature regular reports in the Digest and on the news page of our website.

The second 'fruit' of the season was our international conference in Dublin in March, organised by AEA in association with Age Action Ireland (AAI), Workers Educational Association Northern Ireland (WEA NI) and the New Dynamics of Ageing Research Programme UK (NDA). A fuller report appears within this issue (pages 3 and 4), so let me use this opportunity particularly to thank our partners. The Irish flavour of the event added tremendously to the international gathering of academics, practitioners and older learners. The St Patrick's College venue, part of the original institution created in 1795, spoke of the history of learning in this place and we heard more

about this from one of the lectures. The modern National University of Ireland, which currently occupies the site, still accommodates a thriving adult / community education department. They hosted a pre-conference session with older learners and fed back the proceedings into the main conference.

The hospitality and the level of sharing of good practice, as well as of research findings, were all that is hoped for in meetings of this kind. AEA has always sought to bring all parties involved in later life learning together in constructive and imaginative ways, and the conference was a fine example of how this can work. Our thanks to Robin Webster, Margaret Fitzpatrick and Lyndsey Jones of AAI; to Carolyn Hale and Sinead Devine of WEA NI, to Alan Walker of NDA; to Michael Kenny, Ted Fleming and the Conference office of NUI Maynooth. You can access the conference programme, abstracts and papers via the Events page on our website.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/aea-events.html>



Sinead Devine from WEA Northern Ireland and Margaret Fitzpatrick from Age Action Ireland - our partners in the conference.

*The full title of the Maynooth international conference referred to the From the Chair column was **New Dynamics of Learning and Ageing: Research, Policy and Practice**. Here's an overview from Jo Walker*

AEA was delighted to work with partners in UK and Ireland to put on another successful international conference in its triennial series. It took place in the inspirational setting of the National University of Ireland's campus at Maynooth in the historic St Patrick's College (founded in 1795). Overseas delegates travelled via Dublin and a strong contingent from the North came from Belfast and Derry. The event demonstrated yet again AEA's central belief that academics, practitioners and older adults talking together is a powerful activity and well worth the effort it takes to engineer.

In addition to UK (including Scotland and N. Ireland) and Ireland, delegates and presenters came from Belgium, Estonia, Netherlands, Malta and Portugal. Plenary inputs came from gerontologists, adult educationists, European policy makers and a historian. Shorter papers and presentations offered by delegates were programmed in parallel, enabling the opportunity to follow particular themes or strands. The topics on offer included: learning for the life-course, learning through arts and creativity, learning about (and through) ICT, learning through social engagement and participation in arts.

These sessions enabled practical projects and learning programmes to show-case their achievements and reflect on how their work was of benefit. In several sessions, older people involved in

projects and activities attended and demonstrated their learning through performance. Memorably, the Big Telly Theatre Company from Derry told us about a number of intergenerational projects they are involved with, including their Spring Chickens programme, which aims to better connect older people to their communities and build confidence and skills. It also develops a pool of artists with knowledge and experience of working with older people.



The Big Telly Theatre Company entertaining conference delegates over dinner

Existing institutions, such as universities (London, Strathclyde, Hanze) and museum services (Northern Ireland), also illustrated imaginative programmes targeted at older learners; innovative third sector organisations (Beth Johnson Foundation, First Taste) discussed ongoing programmes with older people that focused both on learning and on the training of others to work with older clients. An ongoing theme of the plenary papers was the need for greater inclusion of older adults in learning and, within such provision, the awareness of those who were least likely to be reached.

We are in the process of uploading papers and photographs of the international conference – visit our website and look at 'events'. If you

attended, do let us know your highlights and what you took away for further thought / practice. If you're reading the papers online, let us know what you find most interesting. Send your feedback to infoaea.allen1@gmail.com

Many thanks once again to our partners: Age Action Ireland and Workers Educational Association Northern Ireland, who helped us plan the event. We were also grateful for the support of the New Dynamics of Ageing UK Research Programme and to the Irish Tourist Board for sponsoring the reception.

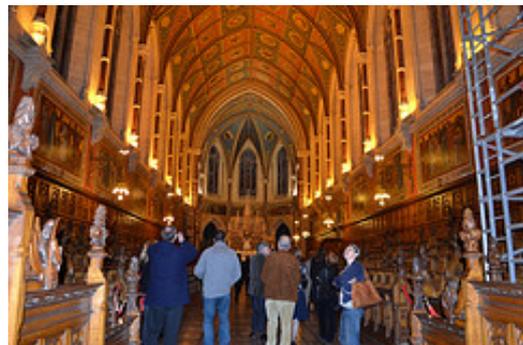
One of those attending the New Dynamics of Learning and Ageing conference was Dr Jonathan Hughes, who here gives more detail on the conference programme and its setting.

Ambitiously, the conference had five aims:

- To identify new areas of teaching and learning, especially through arts and creativity.
- To share good practice about adults' learning and educational opportunities.
- To include the voice of the older learner.
- To highlight the EU year of Active Ageing and intergenerational Solidarity (2012).
- To showcase the work of conference partners and other contributors.

It is worth saying at the outset that these aims were met, and probably exceeded, in what turned out to be a fascinating and lively event marked out by a real sense of place derived in no small part by its setting in Maynooth.

Historically, St Patrick's College in Maynooth has trained more Roman Catholic priests than anywhere else in the world (some 11,000 in total). A small seminary training a limited number of priests each year still exists in parallel to the secular National University. However, the legacy remains clear in the building and in the rooms, which were used for the conference.



There is a magnificent chapel, which was opened especially for conference delegates and plenary sessions were held in the Renehan room, which is where the Irish bishops have always met and continue to do so. Indeed, one of the speakers, herself a graduate of Maynooth, revealed that in her day, the Renehan room was strictly out of bounds to students.

The conference was formally opened by the university Principal Philip Nolan, who indicated that in all its various incarnations, there has always been a commitment to inclusiveness and to action, activism and questioning. Philip also noted that NUIM has the best department of Adult Education in Ireland and underlined his view that the inclusive stance taken by the university enriched not just learners but the university too.



The first key note speaker was Professor Tom Scharf, Director of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, NUI Galway. Tom took a helpful but critical look at the idea of active ageing which implicitly or explicitly underpins much thinking and practice in relation to older people - not least the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Tom's critique of the concept of active ageing stemmed from what he saw as a tendency to prescribe unattainable goals for some older people, for example those with dementia or who are frail or live in poverty. Tom was also critical of the concept of active ageing, because it individualises the risks associated with ageing and distracts from the real purpose of public policy which, Toms argued, is to promote the welfare of everyone as they age. Thus 'active ageing' ignores the role of the market and instead focuses on what Tom called the moral dimension of ageing. As a way of analysing policy initiatives Tom drew on the work of Ruth Levitas, who differentiates three different discourses or approaches to social exclusion. These are RED - a redistributive discourse; MUD- a moral underclass discourse; and SID - a social integration discourse. RED sees poverty as the main cause of exclusion. MUD focuses on the behaviours of the excluded and SID focuses on employment. As Tom put it, in RED

people have no money, in SID they have no work and in MUD they have no morals. Awareness of these different approaches can be used as a framework against which to assess different policies. Tom concluded by suggesting that this highlighted the need to focus on learning, as this can address the risks posed by social issues in ways ignored by 'active ageing'.

During the lunch break on day one, Keith Percy and Jo Walker gave a cogent presentation about the International Journal of Education and Ageing. I know that both were pleased with the way that this went and were hopeful that there will be additional subscribers and new contributors as a result.

The first and second of the first of the three parallel sessions took place before and then after lunch. Delegates heard about work that is going in across Europe. I attended a paper given by Nick Walters on *Active Participation for Times of Austerity - Older Adult Learning* and a paper by Lynne Weallans, *Enhancing Experience of Ageing through Life Planning*. Both were fascinating presentations and I would urge you to have a look at what is available on the AEA website. <http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/ufiles/Maynooth%20papers%20and%20presentations%281%29.pdf>

Nick pointed out that we need to re-visit the assumptions we have about later life and reassess whether in times of austerity the high expectations of now-retiring 'baby boomers' may become increasingly outdated. Lynne Weallans from the Beth Johnson Foundation highlighted the value of life planning throughout life, while raising interesting

issues about the implications of seeing our own lives as a 'project' and about the role of learning in this.

Lynne also touched on intergenerational learning – a theme that was picked up by Tina Tambaum in her presentation, *Internet Learning Needs in Intergenerational Teaching and Learning*. Tina highlighted the need for younger people to be pro-active in their interactions with older learners but found that they were often unprepared to do so. I gave my own presentation about a Grundtvig funded project which introduced technology to older people through creating opportunities to play with same. This was followed by Raquel Patricio talking about *Technology for Learning in Arts and Creativity*. This project enables older people to teach younger people about local traditions in northeast Portugal while learning ICT skills from the younger people.

Two plenary sessions completed a full and fascinating day. These were very different in both content and style. The first provided a European dimension and featured contributions from Martina Ni Cheallaigh from the European Commission, who spoke about *European Policy in Lifelong Learning and Older Learners* and from Louise Richardson, Age Platform Europe, on *The European Year of Active Ageing – Where does Learning Fit?* These talks were both highly detailed. It was good to have this input, which reminded us that the issue of learning in later life benefits from more attention in the European context than it does in the UK at least. It was also interesting to hear that all the current programmes (Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo and Grundtvig) are to be brought together as *Erasmus for all*

– although some concern was expressed that smaller organisations might find it harder to make successful bids in future.

The final session of the day was a keynote address by Dr Ted Fleming, *Cinderella or Princess? History and Other Narratives of Adult Education in a University*. This was a terrific talk and I would urge you to make the time to read the transcript. However the truth is you really had to be there to appreciate the value of this address. Ted drew on his own experience of adult education to highlight how learning has played a key role in the contest over Irish core values. He charted, with great scholarship and wit how Ireland has seen changing frames of reference being developed, which are available to help adults make meaning. He argued that an economic frame of reference has supplanted the one provided by the Catholic Church but questioned the value of this frame. Ted drew on the ideas of Habermas and Mezirow to suggest that education is valuable, because it makes us more aware of these frames and, perhaps more importantly, of the need for better ones. He pointed out that in a more inclusive, democratic, open and flexible society the only power that should operate is the power of a good argument.

The final day of the conference opened with a plenary led by Dr Marvin Formosa from the European Centre of Gerontology, University of Malta, *Missing Voices in Older Adult Education: Reaching the Outsiders*. Marvin noted that while the EU is an advocate of lifelong learning, the focus tends to be on economic competitiveness and active citizenship. This, he argued, leaves some people out. Marvin argued that women, the middle class, city

dwellers and those who are mobile and alert participate more, while the working class, men and ethnic minorities are more likely to be excluded, as are those in the 'fourth age', along with people who are home-bound and their carers.



Marvin suggested that the root of the problem is that decisions about widening participation strategies are made by academics rather than older people and that this could be mitigated by a Freirean approach, in which teachers negotiated the curriculum with older people.

Lunch was followed by the final paper session. I chaired both Esmeraldina Veloso's *Active Ageing and Strategy in the EU and Portugal* and Keith Percy on *Educational Gerontology in Practice and Principle*. Esmeraldina highlighted the problems faced by older learners in Portugal, where older people have a high rate of illiteracy. In addition, low rates of participation among older Portuguese people means that the opportunities that learning could provide to combat loneliness and promote civic engagement and physical and mental well-being are lost.

Keith Percy's paper charted a discussion initiated by Glendinning and Battersby in the 1990s and recently revived by Marvin Formosa. Keith took issue with Marvin's suggestion that later life

learning should unsettle the complacencies of older people. Keith questioned whether older learners really needed such 'unsettling' and questioned what teachers would actually do and whether older learners would put up with it. Keith found himself agreeing with much of Marvin's argument in principle but was concerned that education practice was left unaddressed.

There remained a plenary session from Professor Sue Hallam, Institute of Education, London, who spoke on *Researching Music in Later Life within the New Dynamics of Ageing Research Programme*. This was a fascinating presentation about a research project, which found that music-making in later life lead to consistently higher scores on measures of well-being and also found that participants attributed significant social emotional and health benefits to this activity.

The conference was rapidly drawing to a close and delegates' thoughts were turning to train times and airport departures. However, there was still time for a review, led by Jim Soulsby, of what the conference had achieved. It was clear that the event had been well organised and stimulating and that links between practice and academic theory has been usefully explored. Delegates felt that they had learned a great deal and had made useful new contacts. We also felt that we needed to go on talking to each other to build on these connections and to help develop the role of later life learning.

*As this digest was being finalized, we heard sad news of the death of AEA patron **Derek Legge**, who died peacefully in hospital on April 5th at the*

age of 95. Derek was formerly Head of Adult Education at Manchester University and one of the great advocates of liberal adult education as well as an enthusiastic supporter of AEA. We will be carrying a fuller tribute to him in the next digest.

*Another figure who worked tirelessly for the betterment of older people, particularly women, was feminist, socialist campaigner and journalist **Zelda Curtis**, who died earlier this year. **Carlie Newman** knew her both as a colleague and a friend and remembers her as a truly remarkable woman.*



Zelda, who died recently at the age of 89, was very well known in the 1970s and 1980s for her innovative work with women pensioners. In her early life Zelda was a member of the Communist party and those views led to her becoming a political activist. As she grew older, Zelda focused on working on behalf of older women. A strong feminist, she moved away from the Communist party, but was active in the CND, Anti-Apartheid and the NUJ.

Slight in figure, her presence and influence were huge as she delivered services for War on Want. She worked alongside George Galloway and probably became disillusioned with him around the same time as did my mother,

(who ran a War On Want charity shop without pay, which is how she knew Zelda) as Galloway's alleged extra-curricular activities and high spending came to light.

In 1944 Zelda married Gerry Curtis and they settled in Finchley. One of the first projects they worked on together was helping to run the left-wing progressive Unity Theatre in St Pancras. When she was 60 Gerry died, and Zelda was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Undeterred however she seemed to become even more active, fighting to make sure that older people would be given a voice. She founded the Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW), was co-opted on to the GLC Womens' Committee and served on Islington Womens' Committee. In 1984 she became a paid worker for the Pensioners Link Older Womens' Project funded by the GLC.

Zelda was also a writer and in 1999 she edited *Life After Work: stories of freedom, opportunity and change* for the Women's Press. As with many feminists in the 1970s and 80s, she was rumoured to be a lesbian, but men who were friendly with her knew otherwise and in fact Zelda spoke openly about her own sex life, declaring in a newspaper interview and in several broadcasts that she felt freer at enjoying sex: "I'm delighted to say I still have an active sex life; sex is better than when I was young because I have lost my inhibitions. Sometimes within marriage you build up a particular way of living because of the children. It's good to be free of that and start all over again."

I got to know Zelda when I was the director of the Greater London Forum

for the Elderly (GLF) and we worked together on issues of concern to all pensioners, not just women. She became more widely known when a Channel 4 documentary was made about the Grey Panthers Movement in the USA in 1995, in which Zelda interviewed the leader of the women's movement, Maggie Kuhn.

Zelda was keen on cultural activities and accompanied me to the theatre on a few occasions, when I was reviewing, although when her Parkinson's disease got worse, she found it difficult to sit still throughout a performance. She raised two daughters, Sue and Joan. Zelda's "Story," based on her own notes is being written up by Sue and can be read as a work in progress on <http://zeldacurtis-alife.blogspot.com>

For many who knew her, it will bring back memories, while others may well learn from it.

Zelda suffered from Parkinson's Disease for almost 30 years and spent the last seven in a care-home, visited faithfully by her devoted friend and partner of 20 years, Stan Davison. Remembering Zelda reminds me of just why we are all striving for better health, education and quality of life for all older people.

*You may be looking forward with eager anticipation to the Olympic Games later this year or you may, particularly if you live in London, be dreading the disruption to normal life, but certainly along with the Queen's Jubilee, 2012 is going to be a year to remember. **Professor Brian Groombridge** recently attended an event commemorating the **1952 Olympic Games**, which were held in Helsinki, Finland.*

The occasion was one of a series of meetings arranged by the Anglo-Finnish

Society to celebrate its 100th anniversary and it featured some remarkable older people. This particular meeting benefited from the involvement of the Finnish Ambassador, Pekka Huhtaniemi, who hosted it at his London Residence. Its theme was the Olympic Games held 60 years ago in Helsinki and there, sitting in the front two rows, were some of the athletes, Finnish and British, who had won medals at those Games in 1952.



Ambassador, Pekka Huhtaniemi with 1952 medallists John and Sylvia Disley

Once we were all seated, the Ambassador brought in another special guest: the Duke of Kent, now in his 70s - he'd been lucky enough to go to the Games with the Duke of Edinburgh when he was 15.

The programme opened with an introduction to the background to those Games from Professor Johanno Aunesluoma, a historian from Helsinki University, who set them in their international political context. Some of us but not everyone in the audience, already knew that Stalin's serious threats had made it necessary for Finland to fight alongside the Nazis, to preserve their independence. They insisted that they were co-belligerents, not allies of Nazi Germany but nevertheless

internationally Finland's reputation was damaged. Aunesluoma's scholarly detail and complex analysis provided a well-informed context.

When it was decided to hold the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952, it was clear that Finland's reputation was recovering. It was still paying back its reparations debt to the Soviet Union but by then Finland was also one of the countries, which was not involved on one side or the other in the Cold War.



Sylvia Disley nee Cheeseman addresses the meeting, while her husband listens attentively

The meeting then focused on the athletes, who each made brief statements about their experiences 60 years ago. There was some disappointment of course when we learned that both Roger Bannister and Chris Chataway had sent apologies for absence. One of the Finnish medal winners was also unable to be with us but his story was read to us by his sister. The athletes from both countries were introduced by Paulus Thomson, the A-F Society's General Secretary. The first to speak was Hannu Posti. He needed more time than the others because he set the scene from the athletes' point of view (he spoke in Finnish - the Ambassador followed him

with an English translation). He'd run in one of the three races at those Games won by the celebrated Czech Emil Zatopek. We were also lucky enough to meet and hear John Disley and his wife Sylvia (Sylvia Cheeseman in the Games). They had both won medals in 1952 for their steeplechasing.

We were reminded that participants in the Games were amateurs in those days. Disley himself could only afford to take part by missing the first three days. Since the Games he has maintained his fitness partly by returning to Finland to join in their major Orienteering events. This part of his story particularly interested me as an AEA member: Older people are taken seriously as Orienteers - people of all ages from 8 to 80+ are active either just for leisure or in order to take part in national and international competitions. Disley became one of the founders of Orienteering in the UK and was a member of the International Orienteering Federation in the 1970s. He was also co-founder with Chris Brasher of the London Marathon. Concluding on a personal note, Dr Nic Groombridge, one of my sons, who came with me to this meeting, has run in a London Marathon - making him one of the many who have benefited from the Brasher-Disley initiative.

*Spring Online Week April 23-27 is fast approaching and the excitement is building, says **Julia Shipston** of Digital Unite*

It's the week when organisations throughout the UK are holding events to help older people get online. They'll be happening everywhere from the European Commission in the UK to the Victoria and Albert Museum; the DVLA

in Swansea to Brenda's cowshed in Lancashire and a fish and chip shop near Stockport!

Libraries, schools, sheltered housing schemes, UK Online Centres, cafes and community groups are opening their doors in one of the biggest digital inclusion campaigns of the year. Spring Online with Silver Surfers' Day has been going for 11 years and during that time has helped more than 150,000 people get more out of life online.



Spring online 2011

Seven million older people in the UK have never used the internet. They're missing out on a huge range of benefits – from saving money to keeping in touch with friends and family. In a survey for Digital Unite, 72% said being online reduced their feeling of isolation, so that's a vital reason to help them get connected.

There is still time to organise your own Spring Online event. Emma Solomon, Managing Director of Digital Unite says: "Access to computers and the internet can enhance people's health and wellbeing – and open up whole new worlds. If you know your way round a computer, why not volunteer to show someone else how to do it? Often, all people need is someone to get them started, show them the basics and make it fun. Holding a Spring Online session can really help."

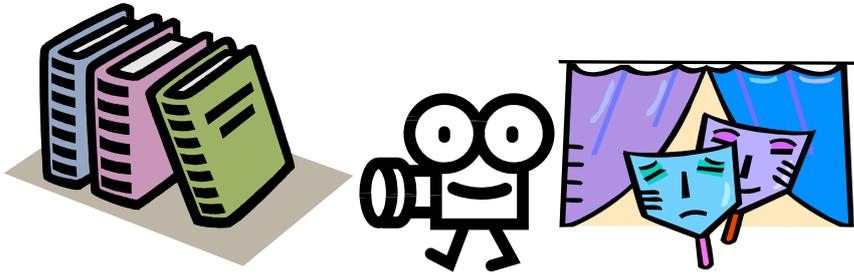
Martha Lane Fox, UK Digital Champion, said: "There are still a staggering 8.2 million people in the UK who are yet to experience how magic the web really is. Saving money, keeping in touch and reducing feelings of isolation are just a few examples of how the internet can change lives for the better. Fantastic initiatives like Spring Online play a vital role in highlighting these benefits and helping us achieve the ambition of creating a truly networked UK."

For more information about Spring Online, to register an event or find one near you, visit www.springonline.org or call 0800 228 9272.

The International Journal of Education and Ageing

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AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

*Those of you who receive the AEA e-mail information service were alerted recently to the imminent launch of the new **Reminiscence Theatre Archive** (details at the end of this article). As a devoted culture vulture, I immediately wanted to know more, so I asked **Pam Schweitzer**, creator of the Age Exchange Theatre Trust, whose work is the subject of the archive, to tell us more about her work in reminiscence theatre.*

For 23 years I was totally immersed in the making of theatre from memories. The memories were those of older Londoners interviewed about their experience of particular events or issues, and the theatre was of a touring nature, playing to mainly older audiences, with a view to triggering further reminiscences. In 1983, I founded Age Exchange Theatre Trust and in the following years conducted close on a thousand interviews in connection with the making of 30 pieces of professional reminiscence theatre and as many amateur productions, performed by older people and by young and old together. In those years I collaborated with many excellent researchers, oral historians, theatre writers, designers, musicians and of course actors in order to generate new shows and related arts events, including installations, festivals, etc.

A style emerged, which we called Reminiscence Theatre, the defining characteristics of which were the use of individuals' reminiscences, mostly as told in their own words (verbatim); the combining of different people's experience into a tightly wrought whole; and exploring a topic or issue from the first half of the 20th century and highlighting its relationship with present day life issues. Topics covered included unemployment in the 1930s, healthcare before the NHS, the building of inter-war housing estates around London (in the "homes fit for heroes" drive by the London County Council), women's wartime work and many other themes of enduring significance.



Scene from "What Did You Do in the War, Mum?"

The ideas emerging from the research were embedded in the stories and characters of the plays, which were highly entertaining pieces, invariably

supported by music of the period and performed by professional actor-musicians. Scenery and costume, live music and action transformed sheltered housing lounges into intimate theatres, in which the audience could enjoy the shows up close and spend time talking to the actors after the show about the memories they had shaken and stirred.



Vincent Ibrahim and Rosaline Dean in 'Routes'

Many of the plays explored the memories of older people from minority communities, including Indian, Caribbean, Irish and Jewish experience. These plays, usually researched, written and performed by (or with) people from those ethnic minority groups, played to temples, churches, synagogues, day centres and clubs, as well as touring to wider audiences from different backgrounds.

Six days a week, the actors were on the road performing these plays to audiences, who would not normally have any access to live theatre, much less theatre tailored around their interests and life-experience. The discussion sessions following every show enabled audience members to get to know important things

about one another's past lives, thus leaving behind a friendship basis on which to build.

For every show a book of memories and photos was produced, so that the audience could remember the play, see where the stories had come from, read more about related memories and discuss their own memories together in venues, especially when performances were followed up by reminiscence workshops over a number of weeks, which was often the case. These illustrated books (30 of them) also gave a more lasting life to the older people's gift of their remembered experience and were in much demand in schools as a source of immediately accessible stories and images, illustrating the past and contributing to educational project work by young people.

Audiences were not charged for these shows. The company gained grant aid and sponsorship from a tremendous number of sources to enable the professional productions to go forward with the highest production values, and the (mainly) older people, for whom the shows were intended, to enjoy them free of charge. This extended to audiences up and down the UK and across Europe, thanks to EU funding. Thousands of people engaged in pleasurable and productive reminiscence afternoons, combining theatre and memories, drama and music, laughter and tears, and a chance to reconnect with their own personal pasts.

Leaving Age Exchange on my 60th birthday in 2005, I pledged that I would create an archive of the memories collected, the shows developed, the tours played, the books published, the funding

secured and the press coverage generated, as well as films of the shows and thousands of photographs and slides. For the last six years I have been gathering and ordering this material, so that it can be of use to oral historians, theatre scholars, arts practitioners, social historians, creative writers and others. This archive is now going to the University of Greenwich, where I hope it will be digitized and catalogued, and it is my hope that it will be used widely across the curriculum. It is already being used as a source of new drama by theatre students at the university.



Pamela Lyne and Godfrey Jackman in “Many Happy Retirements”, which played regularly for 20 years

On Saturday, 5th May 2012, from 10am to 4pm, there will be a Symposium to launch this archive at **Greenwich University Drama Department, The Old Baths, Woolwich, SE18 6QX** (closest station, Woolwich Arsenal). The day will include short performances developed by the Greenwich students from stories in the archive, papers by visiting experts in theatre archiving, oral history, with input from writers, directors and film makers. The event is free of charge, including refreshments, but people wishing to reserve a place should contact Dr. Heather Lilley, lh23@gre.ac.uk

Pam Schweitzer MBE is Director, European Reminiscence Network, Founder and Artistic Director Age Exchange Theatre Trust (1983 -2005) Further information at www.pamschweitzer.com www.europeanreminiscencenetwork.org pam@pamschweitzer.com

*This is, as mentioned earlier in this digest, EU year of **Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity** and I think it's fair to say that most if not all performing arts activity is intergenerational in some way – and everyone involved is by definition pretty active! In theatre and film certainly – veteran actors such as Judi Dench and Michael Caine happily work on stage and screen with new young talent in both the acting and directing fields. While by no means in that league – yet at any rate! – as some of you may be aware, your digest editor **Carol Allen** has been going in for a bit of film making – an activity which has not only been intergenerational but a valuable learning experience as well.*

Two half hour dramas doesn't exactly make me David Lean, I will admit, but my goodness, have I, my students and my (largely though not exclusively) young technicians learned a lot in the eighteen months since I started this enterprise. One of the hardest lessons has been how long it actually takes to complete even a short film, particularly when you have no money to pay people, so they have to fit it in with their other commitments. Little did I think when I rashly said to my older learners' drama class “Let's make a film” that I would still be working on it now. The fun of the actual shoot is just the beginning of a very long post production process.

The first film, *Miss Threadgold*, which some of you saw in rough assembly form at the AEA conference last summer, is now nearing completion. We just have to wed the now graded picture to the finished soundtrack and I should then be able to get some DVD copies made and start “getting it out there”.

That first film was primarily an education exercise but out of that grew its prequel, *With Marjorie Gone*, which I wrote for the two talented young actors, who played two of the older characters as young people in the earlier film. Filmed last autumn, that too is moving towards the finishing post and should be ready this summer.

None of this would have been possible without that creative intergenerational input from a cast and crew, whose ages range from eight (my youngest actor) to 92 and who are almost a copy book example in terms of cultural and generational diversity.



The crew on location

What I have learned from the experience could almost fill a book, if I had the time to write it. All sorts of technical stuff obviously, a lot of it from my genius twenty something editor. Strange terms like .wav and OMF files. The principles

of lighting from my sixty something lighting director with his lifetime in the film and tv industries and the intricacies of the sound mix from the audio guys. I am also overwhelmed by the sheer talent of the people I have been working with – the actors, the technicians and the two young musicians who composed the music - and my hope is that they will be able to use my little movies to further their careers.

I have also learned I can do things I never thought I could, like conjure up 50s and 60s period costumes out of goodwill and turn my house into a film set. I have learned not to panic when things go wrong and my carefully planned location shoot goes pear shaped because the local football team has changed its match date, to never again give in to an actor who claims he can't drink cold tea standing in for whisky and let him have pomegranate juice – no, it's the wrong colour but that too can be fixed in what we film folk call “post” - and above all to be patient and never, ever lose my temper, even when someone else is having a hissy fit. And also that film making is a great way to effortlessly lose excess weight!

I now have my own fledgling film company, a computer genius on the team is helping me create a website for it and I am looking for funding for my next project, which is to make a film of a theatre piece created with the drama group about the situation of older people living in isolation. No budget is all very well as a starter but my loyal team now deserve payment for their hard work. So any suggestions for funding, please pass them in my direction!

Intergenerational creative activity – you can't beat it for learning new skills and giving you a new lease of life.

*Have you ever been watching a comedy show on the telly and thought, "Oh, I could do better than that." Well, here's your chance. If you fancy having a go at being a stand up comedian. **George Baddeley** has **Silver Comedy** news for you.*

Following on from the successful launch of our *Silver Comedy Stand Up of the Year Award* in partnership with Dave's Leicester Comedy Festival this February, we've now decided to offer a new stand up course targeted at people aged 55+ who want to try their hand at stand up comedy.

This will be run by highly experienced comedy trainer Chris Head and the course will take place over four Thursdays – four, weekly sessions, from **3rd to 24th May, 1.30-3.30pm at Camden Head, 100 Camden High Street, London NW1 0LU.**



On the course you will learn how to create your own stand-up act. Complete beginners are particularly encouraged to come along, as well as those wishing to refresh their technical skills or create new material. The course has a balance

of theory and practice. Exploring and analysing stand-up comedy, then putting it into practice with performances at the microphone in the sessions. Feedback from the tutor and your peers will guide you in developing, honing and enhancing your act.

We'll uncover all sorts of techniques and approaches to being funny - as well as gaining inspiration for writing material. We develop the skills needed for joke writing and crafting material. We'll explore your persona and you will learn all the practical skills needed for a stand-up performance from microphone technique to dealing with hecklers.

Topics covered include:

- * Stand-up performance and delivery
- * Microphone technique
- * Comedic techniques: e.g. misdirection, call-backs, act-outs, rule-of-three, bathos etc.
- * Remembering your material
- * Developing a persona: attitude, status etc.
- * Joke writing
- * Dealing with heckling and other audience interactions
- * Ways to recover when something falls flat

For more information about our trainer Chris Head, including his press coverage, see his website at: www.chris-head.com If you wish to find out more details about the course or have any more queries you can also phone Chris on: 07814 962687; email: chris@chris-head.com

The course costs: £60 per person and payment can be made either via cheque for the full amount payable in advance to: "Silver Comedy Ltd" posted to: George Baddeley, Managing Director

Silver Comedy, 13 The Wayback, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB102AX or you can also pay via BACS to: Silver Comedy Ltd; sort code: 09-01-27; account number: 46034768 account and confirm via email to george@silvercomedy.co.uk.

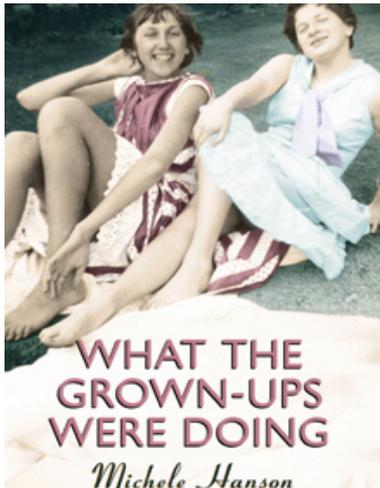
For more information about the our company, please check out our website at www.silvercomedy.co.uk



Don't forget – comedy is no longer exclusively a male province!

BOOK, THEATRE AND FILM REVIEWS

*We have two book reviews in this edition of the digest. First Alex Withnall writes about **What the Grown-ups Were Doing** by Michele Hanson (2012)*



Guardian readers will be familiar with Michele Hanson's delightful and witty weekly column originally on life with a teenage daughter, then later the perils of sharing a house with an elderly mother and more recently the ups and downs of growing older. Now she has produced an affectionate and highly amusing account of growing up in a Jewish family in 1950s west London suburbia, much of which will evoke memories of just how different life was in those post-war years

and indeed, provoke reflections on how very different our own children's lives have been. Michele was born into a reasonably affluent family in Ruislip and although she grew up as 'an oddball tomboy disappointment', her experiences will definitely ring a bell with those of us from the same era. Behind the façade of suburban respectability, bridge parties, martinis and holidays in the south of France there existed a web of quite malicious gossip, of suspicions of 'goings-on' and general disapproval of what happened in other families especially from her strong-minded Jewish mother, who was seemingly obsessed with bowels and their functions. Meanwhile, Michele encountered a host of unforgettable characters beyond her own parents – glamorous Auntie Celia, her various friends and cousins, those strait-laced and slightly bonkers female teachers we girls all knew in our single-sex grammar schools and a range of other notable individuals who moved in and out of her life over the years.

One of the most amusing themes of the book is Michele's total naivety about sexual matters – not unusual at a time when children were largely kept in the

dark about such matters - so bosoms, bottoms and babies were something of a source of terror to her. But we also learn of Michele's passing fervent attachment to Judaism in her early teens, her early friendships with boys and her rebellious last days at school before she went off to art school and discovered a whole surprising new world, into which she felt she did not initially fit. As we leave her deciding that art is not for her and that what she really wants to do is music, she has a variety of new acquaintances, mainly from outside Ruislip, and her one determination is that she will not end up like her mother. She and her friends are quite sure that girls of her age can do anything they want – something we probably all felt before we came up against the societal restrictions of those pre-feminist days.

I really loved this book not just for its witty recollections but also for the photos of Michele and her relatives and friends that help to bring the narrative to life. I hope she will publish another instalment soon – I can hardly wait to hear what happened next.

What the Grown ups Were Doing is published by Simon & Schuster Price £14.99 (hb)

*Kathryn Stockett's book **The Help** was made into a hit film last year, which won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for Octavia Spencer. **Howard Gilbert** has gone back to the original novel and he finds it an extremely good read.*

This is a remarkable book. I could not put it down, or – when that became necessary – place it other than at the top of my mind



A scene from the film of *The Help*

Three women, Eugenia Phelan, addressed as Miss Skeeter, who is white, and Aibileen and Minny, both black domestics (Helps), write about the real lives of coloured women servants in white households in Jackson, Mississippi. They are assisted by ten interested volunteer maids, who are anxious, sometimes reluctant, fearful but none-the-less willing to tell their stories. There is a pledge of absolute anonymity. This is the deep American South; the time 1960 to 1965, during which period President Kennedy was assassinated and Martin Luther King led a thousand people marching to Washington, and delivered his great speech “I have a Dream”.

The story is grounded deeply in situations, circumstances and facts of the time in which it is set. Coloured maids – the Helps – raise the white children almost as their own from the moment of birth, often to the onset of puberty and beyond. They care, clean and maintain the households where they work, become intimately involved with much of the family's ordinary year by year life, nurse the sick, assist the old and the dying, and yet are deemed to belong to an inferior alien class and race.

There is a social line that exists; if crossed by chance or from relaxed personal discipline, instant dismissal can

follow even after a life-time of service. A white woman, Hilly Holbrook is made to say “they” are different, “They have different diseases”. “Would you” she asks her friend Elizabeth, “want your boy educated with one of them?”

There are moments of pure enjoyment, of hilarious laughter, of quiet reflection, and of pathos. There are times of tension, of fear for life, of anxiety, terror and near despair. The three women, Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny, slowly realise their growing interdependence upon each other; colour and status become irrelevant. They are just people, sharing a common humanity. Not much separates them; not nearly as much as living has led them to believe. To read this book is surely to comprehend and understand more about the racial stresses and tensions that permeate the American South.

The three women decide to name the book *Help*. A New York publisher takes it up. The (real) author’s personal note, printed separately at the end, recalls her own childhood attachment to Demetrie, her family’s *Help*. She provided support and comfort to three children caught up in a family dependent upon income from a motel owned by their father. Their parents divorced; the mother left the family periodically and finally disappeared. Until she died just after the author’s sixteenth birthday, Demetrie became Kathryn Stockett’s alternative mother.

This remarkable book undoubtedly stands alongside those other great classics *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and *To Kill a Mocking Bird*.

The Help is published by Penguin Books.

It was first published in USA 2009; in UK 2010; and in the film edition, 2011.

Theatre reviews from Carlie Newman



Adam Cooper as Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain*

What a glorious feeling! Yes, you will certainly come away from this show full of light and happiness and hopefully not too wet. Although be warned: the first few rows of the stalls are liable to be splashed! *Singin' in the Rain* (Palace Theatre booking until 29 September), while closely based on the well-known film, is a worthy musical in its own right. Tying in nicely with the current popularity of silent films, including the BAFTA and Oscar winning *The Artist*, this musical tells of Don Lockwood (Adam Cooper), who, along with Lina Lamont (Katherine Kingsley) is a star of silent films in 1927. When the talkies arrive, the film they are making is transformed first into a talking picture and then a musical. Unfortunately Lina cannot speak in anything but a terribly grating, screeching voice. Don has become friendly with Kathy (Scarlett Strallen), who has a lovely singing voice and she is persuaded to act as the speaking and singing voice of the new film, while Lina acts on set. When she discovers that the film-makers have not used her voice, Lina is furious and plans

to put out publicity saying that she has performed everything herself, which will mean Kathy being forced to continue as Lina's voice for ever, thereby giving up her own career.

The songs from the film are all in the stage show and the chorus along with the three main stars perform really well, putting flesh on to such numbers as *Moses Supposes* and *Beautiful Girls*. Don's friend Cosmo Brown (Daniel Crossley) is very funny in *Make 'em Laugh* with inventive choreography by Andrew Wright, who has assembled a very talented group of dancers – the chorus taps its way fluently and speedily through many numbers. Strallen and Cooper are delightful together as they fall in love crooning “you were meant for me” to each other. Cooper is an ex-Royal Ballet dancer and his singing is not as strong as Strallen's, who can dance as well as sing sweetly, but his dancing is very graceful.

Director Jonathan Church together with the choreographer has given us a show with much that is gorgeous for the eyes, the ears and other senses – as the water pours down. The highlight of the first half is Cooper splashing through gallons of real water on the stage for the title song and then the whole cast get wet in the final moments of the show as it rains again. I haven't seen so many happy faces leaving a show for a long while!

About as far away as you can get from *Singin' in the Rain*, which is jolly and funny, is *Sweeney Todd* (Adelphi until 22 September), which is humorous but grim, and a superb production of Stephen Sondheim's musical. Almost unrecognisable with his slicked back, side-parted hairstyle and pasty face, Michael Ball portrays the wronged barber with passion and sings

beautifully. Matched by the excellent Imelda Staunton as his accomplice, Mrs Lovett, the pair are mesmerising and one would wish they were in every scene were it not for the fact that there are some other good actor-singers and a number of beautifully staged scenes.



Imelda Staunton and Michael Ball

Jonathan Kent has changed Sondheim's original period setting from Victorian to the 1930s. The story of the wronged barber is still there but the scenes of melodrama, such as in the madhouse, where Johanna has been taken, lose some of their impact. The chorus portray characters in the story, and as they do, we are able to feel the life of the city of London going on around the barber and his activities. We learn that Sweeney was deported on a trumped up charge and after many years has returned to London with a new name but the same desire for vengeance on the Beadle (Peter Polycarpou) and the Judge (John Bowe), who sentenced him and destroyed the lovely life he had with his beautiful wife and baby daughter. Sweeney becomes even more incensed when he learns from Mrs Lovett that the two defiled his wife before she poisoned herself and the Judge “adopted” their daughter, Johanna (Lucy May Barker). Sweeney samples the disgusting pies in Mrs Lovett's shop and moves back to his former upstairs room as a barber. How

he achieves his revenge finally after much blood-letting, is the meat of the remainder of the story. Mrs Lovett finds he has killed his first victim and joins in with enthusiasm when she discovers that humans of all kinds turn into very tasty pies. Her pie-shop becomes very busy and financially successful and she develops a passionate love for Sweeney. Ball's demon barber doesn't start out with murder on his mind, but develops a taste for it as he realises it will help him reach his goal. Ball manages the character so well that we relish alongside him the moment when he lifts up his barber's knife after his first killing. Staunton's gifts as an actress of maturity come to the fore as she uses them to great effect here and puts across the lyrics in an amusing and most tuneful manner. While Lucy May Barker is somewhat light in delivery, she trills along nicely in the bird song and is good in the scenes in and after the asylum incarceration.

The multi-tiered set serves the director well and Kent has managed Sondheim's creative musical score well with the orchestra and all the performers doing it justice. If you can take the excessive spurts of blood and still enjoy the wonderful music along with appreciating the superb cast, you will certainly find it worthwhile seeing this outstanding production.

For something with an educational element, we have *The King's Speech* (Wyndham's Theatre booking until 21 July). When Bertie, as Prince Albert is known by his family, is unexpectedly thrust into the limelight, when his brother David (King Edward VIII for a short while) decides to abdicate in order to marry the twice divorced Wallis Simpson, Bertie is petrified that his

speech defect will stop him from ruling in a proper manner. Luckily he has a sympathetic and resourceful wife, Elizabeth (Bowes-Lyon), and she finds him an excellent speech therapist. That Lionel Logue is Australian and has aspirations of going on the stage is somewhat off-putting, but Bertie perseveres in spite of Logue's unconventional teaching methods. Logue believes in informality and wants the prospective King to reveal all his childhood secrets. The somewhat repressed Bertie finds this very hard and gets out his cigarettes. Horror! "No cigs" barks Logue to the amazed Prince, who has been told by other speech therapists that smoking would assist his speech-making. We see how childhood traumas have brought about the King's stammer and it is only by systematically working on freeing the Sovereign from his fears that Logue is able to help the King deliver his coronation speech without trouble.



Charles Edwards catches King George VI's diffidence combined with his supreme belief in the divine right of royalty. Emma Fielding looks like the late Queen Elizabeth. Jonathan Hyde's Logue is a good match for Edwards and combines gritty determination with a sympathetic personality. While not as moving as the recent film, David

Seidler's play is worth seeing for both its performances and demonstration of an unusual form of teaching.

On Screen with Carol Allen

I wouldn't normally review something in this column which has been on screen for so long. But *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* has proved to be a bit of a movie phenomenon. Because this film, which opened in February, and deals with a group of older people, who retire to what turns out to be a run down hotel in India, has been a runaway hit, not only with older people, who according to received wisdom don't get the pictures very much but have been turning out for this one, but also with young people too.



Evelyn (Judi Dench) explores the exotic glories of India

Mrs Brown director John Madden reunites with Judi Dench plus an impressive ensemble cast of actors, who are all, apart from Celia Imrie, genuinely over sixty. They include Maggie Smith, as a crusty working class pensioner, as opposed to her usual *Downton Abbey* style grande dame roles, who's in it for a promised cut price hip operation, after which she intends to hop it back home to Blighty; Tom Wilkinson as a disenchanted High Court judge, who is haunted by the memory of his youthful love affair with a man in India; and ever squabbling couple Penelope Wilton and Bill Nighy, the latter of whom enjoys a

sweet, late life romance with Dench. There are some young people on hand, most notably Dev Patel as the wildly inexperienced and inexorably optimistic young hotel owner but what makes this film is the performances of its cast of veterans skilfully doing their experienced stuff. It's a bit of a master class in acting. The film is still playing in a goodly number of cinemas, so you might have a while to wait before the DVD comes out. Go see it.

Staying with the Indian theme, *All in Good Time* is writer Ayub Khan Din's contemporary version of Bill Naughton's sixties comedy of the same name. The writer has homed in on the similarities between contemporary Asian culture in the Midlands and the working class culture of Naughton's play. The film opens with a gloriously exotic Indian wedding and then brings us down to earth by showing us it's taking place in a scout's hall in Bolton.



Atul and Vina plight their troth in Bolton

The basis of the story is the problem experienced by the young newly weds, Atul and Vina (Reece Ritchie and Amara Karan, who find that living in a tiny two up two down with his parents and particularly Atul's conflict with his blustering father, make it impossible for them to consummate their marriage. The young couple are endearing and there's a particularly strong performance

from Meera Syal as Atul's mother, who is both funny and moving, as a woman who has endured a lot in her marriage but has soldiered on with humour and persistence.

Although she didn't win the Oscar for which she was nominated, Glenn Close as *Albert Nobbs* gives a remarkable performance as a woman in 19th Century Ireland, who lives as a man working as a waiter in a hotel in order to survive in an environment, where poverty and unemployment are rife.



Albert, awkwardly courting Helen
(MiaWasikowska)

We're in on her secret fairly early on but even so, she's very believable as a man, albeit a slightly prissy one, whom today one would probably assume is gay.

The film has an excellent sense of its period and the spectre of poverty which looms over all the characters, even the bossy and bitchy owner of the hotel (Pauline Collins) and in the character of Joe the hotel porter Aaron Johnson, who attempts to exploit for gain Albert's feelings for chambermaid Helen (MiaWasikowska). He could have just been a villain but in Johnson's interpretation we understand that he too is fighting to survive. There is also a remarkable performance from Janet McTear, who befriends Albert and teaches him/her by example what love really is. Close's excellent central performance is enhanced by a first class supporting cast, that also includes Brendan Gleeson and Maria Doyle Kennedy, every one of whose characters is beautifully written and realised.

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