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AEA DIGEST

Issue no 37
Summer 2012



Jo Walker looks back over developments in AEA during her seven years as Chair
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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker

Dear Friends,

This will be my last note from this location in the Digest, as my term of office has come to an end and I will be handing over to a new chair from this September's AGM. I will very much miss being at the centre of an exciting network of people and activities focused on older adults' learning, which is an issue that still engages my interest, concern and effort.

I took up the chair's role in autumn 2005 and have added a two-year extension to that original five-year term. The most immediate concern, I recall, was to increase the attendance at the Frank Glendenning memorial lectures, which has been achieved. Since then, I have had the thrills and spills of three AEA international conferences (Brighton 06 in partnership with NIACE, Lancaster 09 with the University, and Dublin 12 with Age Action Ireland). In between, we have had national conferences at London Birkbeck, Leicester, London Camden, Birmingham and forthcoming in Stoke. All of these have also involved working with partner organisations and I have been grateful for their friendship with AEA.

The Frank Glendenning lecturers have included Brian Groombridge, Eric Midwinter, David James, Keith Percy, Alex Withnall and Lesley Hart and I believe this has become a speaking invitation that is highly valued by its recipients and a worthy annual event. We are pleased that we can still draw on people who knew Frank personally and this is again the case for 2012, when the lecture will be delivered by Alan Hatton-

Yeo, Chief Executive Officer of the Beth Johnson Foundation and indeed for next year, when Judith Phillips, Professor of Gerontology at Swansea University and recent ex-president of the British Society of Gerontology has agreed to deliver the Frank Glendenning Lecture at our September 2013 conference at University of East Anglia (Norwich)

We succeeded in 2007 in winning funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) to carry out a professional consultation and strategy planning exercise; this resulted in further funding of development work to help implement the resulting business plan. A new logo and website then followed but, more importantly, an increased sense of our strengths and potential contribution, especially in the intersection of research, practice and policy. A literature review and enhanced participation in national and international arenas were additional outcomes.

For a while, I thought my long-held ambition of re-starting AEA's journal was not going to materialise. Long negotiations with possible publishers had not succeeded. We decided, with financial backing from members, to go ahead independently, with moral support from colleagues at Leicester University. The International Journal of Education and Ageing was re-launched at our London conference in July 2010. Soon to enter its third volume, a high benchmark for quality of articles and editorials has been established.

In my last year of chairmanship, increased activity particularly on the European front has brought successful involvement in a major EU partnership: The ForAge network will have increasing impact on our work in the next few years and take us to the heart of European activity with older learners. We have lately heard of our award within another European partnership project, this time on memory in later life.

I will take the opportunity at the conference / AGM on 10th September at Stoke to pay fuller tribute to colleagues and partners who have been responsible for this progress. For now, I will say that the Association is in good heart for the challenges ahead and offer my thanks to members, partners and sponsors such as yourselves.

All good wishes, as you pursue the cause or enjoy the benefits of later life learning.

AEA CONFERENCE AND AGM

Notification of Annual General Meeting 2012

The annual general meeting of the Association will take place on Monday 10 September at 2.45pm, at Ashley Conference Centre, Leek Road Campus, Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DE.

This venue is within 10 minutes walking distance from Stoke-on-Trent railway station. For those coming by car, take Junction 15 from the M6 into Stoke-on-Trent and follow signs for Staffordshire University (Leek Road campus). Further travel information can be provided on request.

Annual memorial lecture and day conference 2012

The AGM will be followed at 3.30pm by tea, and at 3.45pm by the Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture, which will this year be given by Alan Hatton-Yeo, Chief Executive Officer of the Beth Johnson Foundation. You are cordially invited to join us to attend the AGM and the lecture.

A day conference on 10 September is being organised in partnership with the Beth Johnson Foundation on the theme: *Thinking about the Future: Older people and learning*. This will take place from 10.30am to 2.45pm, also at the Ashley Conference Centre. Further details below.

For further information on AGM, contact Sasha Anderson on sasha.anderson75@gmail.com

For a downloadable copy of the conference booking form, please go to our website:

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/ufiles/Conference%20booking%20form%202012%20and%20prog.pdf>



The Association for
Education & Ageing



Thinking about the Future: Older People and Learning

Monday 10th September 2012

10am registration for 10.30am to 2.45pm

Ashley Conference Centre, Leek Road Campus, Staffordshire
University, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DE

Conference cost

AEA Members	£25
Un-waged non-members	£25
Waged non-members	£30

Conference outline:

10am registration for 10.30am to 2.45pm

Ashley Conference Centre, Leek Road Campus, Staffordshire
University, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DE

Keynote Address

Professor Paul Kingston (Staffordshire University) on 'Education and Mental Health in Later Life'



Professor Paul Kingston

Parallel Sessions will include:

- **The FORAGE Project - a ground-breaking repository of the successes of European projects focused on later life learning (Jim Soulsby, Leicester University)**
- **Involving older people's organisations in European Lifelong Learning Initiatives (Dr Josie Tetley, The Open University)**
- **The influences of social capital on Lifelong learning and the role of U3A (Lou Taylor)**
- **How Staffordshire Housing Association approaches well-being and the needs that result from demographic change (Barry Pitts)**

The Beth Johnson Foundation will be also be running sessions on Promoting Positive Ageing and the recent Next Steps Report.

Early warning: The 2013 conference/Frank Glendenning Lecture will take place in September 2012 at the University of East Anglia, Norwich

Meanwhile Jonathan Hughes gives further details here on the highlights of this year's conference.

This conference is being organised jointly by the Association for Education and Ageing (AEA) and the Beth Johnson Foundation, which this year is celebrating its 40th Anniversary. It takes place at the purpose-built Ashley Conference Centre which is a short walk from Stoke-on-Trent railway station. For those coming by car, there is ample (free) parking on the Leek Road campus where the conference takes place,

The key note address will be given by Professor Paul Kingston of Staffordshire University. Professor Kingston will use his address to explore the implications of education for mental health in later life. Paul's interests in later life include dementia and the spiritual aspects of later life. He has also been involved in

work with both the Beth Johnson Foundation and the U3A.

The day will be rounded off by this year's Frank Glendenning Memorial lecture. The lecture will be given by Alan Hatton-Yeo who will be using the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Beth Johnson Foundation to consider the achievements of the past 40 years with regard to attitudes about ageing as well as outlining the challenges that lie ahead.



Alan Hatton Yeo

There will be parallel sessions in the morning and in the afternoon. These will include Jim Soulsby outlining the potential of FORAGE, a ground-breaking repository of the successes of European projects focused on later life learning, while the European theme will be picked up by Dr Josie Tetley of The Open University, who will talk about involving older people's organisations in European Lifelong Learning Initiatives.

Closer to home, Lou Taylor will outline the influences of social capital on lifelong learning and the role of U3A, while Barry Pitts from the Staffordshire Housing Association will give a presentation outlining the association's approach to well-being and how it addresses the needs that result from demographic change.

In addition the Beth Johnson Foundation will be running sessions on promoting positive ageing and the recent Next Steps Report.

Delegates are encouraged to attend the AEA AGM, which follows the conference. AEA welcomes new members and new subscribers to the *International Journal of Education and Ageing*.

All in all, the day promises to be a stimulating one combining a variety of inputs about later life learning with the opportunity to network with people who share this interest.

For any queries about the conference, please contact Jonathan at j.e.hughes@open.ac.uk

*The Beth Johnson Foundation was one of the organisations that contributed to the recently published report **Next steps: Life transitions and retirement in the 21st Century**, which was published last month. Lynne Wealleans, Positive Ageing Manager for BJF, represented the foundation at the launch of the report.*

And so to Westminster on a sunny (yes honestly) Monday morning to attend the launch of the report led by Lord Wei of Shoreditch and supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

The launch was held in a committee room of the House of Lords and I'll never tire of visiting a place with such a strong sense of history. It's awe inspiring to leave the tube station at Westminster and to find Big Ben staring down at you.

Prior to the launch of the report I had attended a working group convened by Lord Wei to scope out ideas around the potential for a National Retirement Service. The Beth Johnson Foundation had been invited to send a representative because of our work around life transitions across the life course, including pre and post retirement planning.

The research underpinning the report found that there is no systematic focus in policy making on supporting life transitions holistically; and that there was scope to use National Service Programmes as a tool to address common transitions – retirement being seen as one of the major ones.

So one of the next steps is the formation of a new All Party Parliamentary Group

co-chaired by Lord Wei and Chris White MP to further investigate the impact of life transitions and identify potential appropriate interventions.

Key stakeholders, including recent retirees, will be invited to work with The Shaftesbury Partnership to develop a pilot National Retirement Service programme to raise awareness of the impact of this major life transition and to plan for a smooth transition into retirement and later life. One of the research findings was that those older people who were consulted felt that any such service should take a peer coaching type of approach; a model that the Beth Johnson Foundation has found to be very successful in the delivery of some of its' programmes.

For further information and discussion, a parallel session covering the content and implications of the report will be held at the joint AEA/BJF conference in Stoke on 10 September 2012

The report, Next steps: Life transitions and retirement in the 21st Century, can be found at <http://www.gulbenkian.org.uk/files/01-07-12-Next%20steps%20-%20Life%20transitions%20and%20retirement%20in%20the%2021st%20century.pdf>

*Returning to the subject of U3A, which will also be figuring in the AEA conference, 2012 is the **30th anniversary of the University of the Third Age London**, making it the oldest U3A in Britain. **Professor Brian Groombridge** was invited to be a speaker at its recent celebratory event, where he told the gathering the story of how he came to be*

involved in setting up this pioneering organisation.

About 150 people came to the party, so the atrium at their headquarters (the former Hampstead Town Hall), was jam packed. There are now 859 U3As in the UK (with nearly 900,000 members).



Professor Brian Groombridge speaking at the anniversary event

After Chairman Barry Rae's welcome, a dozen or so members were presented with special documents naming and thanking them for being such active tutors for many years. Then it was my turn to reminisce. I had to be brief - there were two other items in the programme after mine - so I told four short stories about key people in the history - Mary Wane (an unfamiliar name), the late Michael Young and Eric Midwinter (both familiar names but not to all the members there) and one of their own members, the late Sidney Jones.

Mary Wane, now a member of a U3A in the Lake District, is a key person to start

with. She was the British Council's representative in France in the mid-1970s, which was when she invited me to give lectures about British university adult education, then a century old, to three universities in different parts of France. France had recently set up the Université du Troisième Age, which had become very popular.

I took that concept back to the UK and discussed the idea with colleagues a good deal. Older people were included among the active students in our extra-mural departments, but the French reckoned that it was worth setting up particular departments, which specialised in providing older people with study opportunities. There was a real limit to what I could do. I was the director of the University of London's Extra-Mural Department, which then worked all over the London area, so I was not only busy, but I was also running into academic disapproval!

Michael Young came to the rescue. He was already a remarkable innovator, inventing useful organisations which would then run themselves, I told him about the U3A over sandwiches at his Bethnal Green office. He welcomed the opportunity and started planning the U3A with Peter Laslett at Cambridge University and the socially versatile Eric Midwinter, who is now well known as a speaker at U3A national conferences and elsewhere.

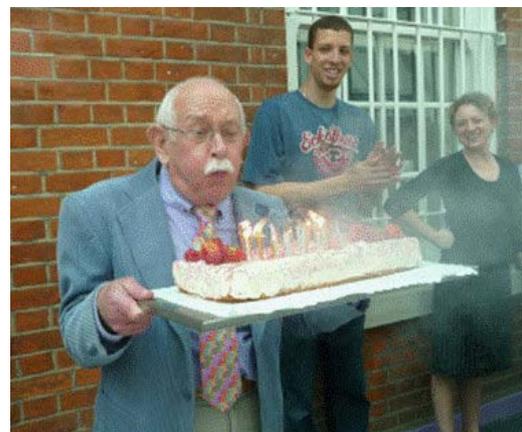
By July 1981, they were ready. Eric Midwinter talked about the new project on the BBC's radio programme, *You and Yours*, inviting interested listeners to make contact. About 400 people replied, all seriously curious, and more than expected. Eric arranged for all the London names to be sent to me.

I urgently needed help. My contacts all over Greater London included Sidney Jones, on the staff of what was then the North London Polytechnic. He was in charge of teacher training, but I knew that he'd also started meetings and courses for retired people, who were keen to learn. Would he become an active ally and colleague?

Sid gladly agreed. He was keen and practical. He found several places to start - the Working Men's College, for example. We brought together several of his students and some of the people who'd contacted the BBC, so we were well supported and active from the very beginning. I chaired the group that started planning our activities, and was later formally elected Chairman.

Had there been time at this anniversary gathering, it would have been good and celebratory to remember how our U3As now belong, along with the French and many other countries, to the International Association of U3As, some modelled on the French template, others on the British.

But after giving that brief history, I could then relax, join in and enjoy some of that birthday cake!



U3A London Chairman Barry Rae, blowing out the candles on the birthday cake

“The work done in the group has helped me in the talks I sometimes give. I have a better relationship now with my audience in those situations and am more responsive to them. And I’ve learned not to be scared about learning lines.”



Greta Trevers, student in the New Horizons drama class for older learners.

*Drama is just one of the ways through which memory in later life can be improved. AEA has now become involved in a new Grundtvig funded initiative that will explore the many and varied techniques through which this objective can be achieved. **Keith Percy** writes about **Memory in Later Life: Learning – Supporting – Developing**.*

AEA has recently been informed by the Grundtvig National Agency that it has a grant of 20,000 euros to be a partner in a two-year Grundtvig Partnership entitled *Memory in Later Life: Learning – Supporting – Developing*. The Partnership will begin in August 2012 and will be co-ordinated by an organisation in Cracow, Poland. Organisations in Germany, Greece, Hungary and Italy will also be partners.

The project to be undertaken by the Partnership will be concerned with memory in later life and its impact on the learning of older people. The project would aim to explore various practical memory and mnemonic rules, methods and techniques which might be implemented by teachers and older people, both in the classroom and in daily life. Partners’ objectives would be to develop older people’s perspectives on memory and to help them to perceive and to use their memories more positively.

Six international meetings will be held. In five of them, older people and teachers, travelling from the different countries, will be present to discuss and evaluate with partners the outcomes of memory learning activities, which each partner will have carried out with groups of older people in his/her own country between international meetings. A bank of methods and materials will be built up in the form of a user-friendly handbook for dissemination at the conclusion of the project. The final international meeting, concerned with evaluation and the testing of the project outcomes, will be held in the context of a national conference in the UK organised by AEA in June 2014.

Professor Keith Percy is leading AEA’s contribution to this Partnership and will be pleased to receive any expressions of interest from AEA members - email: k.percy55@gmail.com).

An important area for older people in terms of getting the best out of the contemporary world is learning how to use digital technology – things like using e-mail and indeed chatting on Skype as a

*means of keeping in touch with friends and family, while knowing how to shop online is increasingly becoming an essential. A friend of mine recently trekked up to Wembley to buy tickets of the Olympic women's football, only to be told they didn't sell tickets at the box office. You could only buy them via the website! Getting the older generation online is the raison d'être of **Digital Unite**. Katharine Teed reports on the success they experienced with their **Spring Online 2012 Campaign**.*

Digital Unite's award winning digital inclusion campaign, *Spring Online with Silver Surfers' Day*, saw another fantastic level of participation this year with around 2,000 digital taster events held across the UK (23-27 April). Venues included libraries, schools, housing associations, the DVLA, the Victoria and Albert Museum and even a fish and chip shop!



An estimated 30,000 people were helped to engage with modern technology, many for the first time. Learner stories from the week's activities included a lady of 100 years, who enjoyed using computers and the internet so much at her event that she's asked her son to buy her a laptop, and a gentleman recovering from a stroke who was helped to access services such as online banking and

shopping, making a real difference to his quality of life.

Six organisations have been now shortlisted for the Spring Online 2012 Best Event competition:

- The DVLA in Wales who teamed up with Swansea City Council to help over 50 people aged between 50 and 80 years with their first experiences of emailing, web browsing, using Skype and shopping online.
- **The Wealden Senior Citizens' Partnership**, who worked with Heathfield Community College to bridge the generation gap with students helping older people get to grips with modern technology including Facebook and Twitter.
- **Starting Point in Stockport**, who took over their local fish and chip shop to introduce local older people to the wonders of genealogy, teaching them how to trace their family trees online.
- **Home Group**, who ran taster events for their tenants right across the country, transforming their one-to-one computer learning sessions into social occasions complete with a Swing/Big Band theme.
- **Halton Housing Trust**, who involved their local primary schools, enlisting Little Diamond Helpers to show the 'grown ups' how to send emails to the Queen and how to take a trip down memory lane on Google maps.
- **Wigan and Leigh Housing**, who got people on board with new technology by running taster sessions on their mobile bus which they parked at

supermarkets, on the local estates and in town centres.

The winner of the Best Event competition will be announced at an official awards ceremony in the autumn and will receive a total prize value of over £1,200. To read more about each of the shortlisted events and the campaign visit the Spring Online website.

<http://springonline.org/2012/07/10/shortlisted-finalists-for-spring-online-2012-best-event-announced/>

Courses and Guides - Supporting you to help others get online

Being digital literate can help people save money, reduce loneliness and social isolation and enhance their health and wellbeing. Indeed four out of five internet users (86%) aged over 55 years say that having access to computers and the web has improved their lives and 81% say being online makes them feel part of modern society¹.

So if you are involved in helping other older people to learn about computers and the internet, don't forget that Digital Unite offers two key resources:

Online courses to help you teach others

Launched earlier this year, Digital Unite now offers two online courses for people who want to help others with using computers, the internet and other modern technology. From computer buddies to aspiring Digital Champions, the courses develop valuable digital skills and techniques to engage and teach others. Visit www.digitalunite.com/academy for more.

Free learning guides

From mastering the use of a keyboard and mouse to researching ancestry, using

Skype and sending emails, Digital Unite has hundreds of easy-to-use learning guides, available free of charge at <http://www.digitalunite.com/guides>

¹Digital Unite's OnePoll online survey conducted in April 2011 among 526 people aged over 55 years who had been using the internet for five years or less.

Have you ever heard, used or had used to you any of the following phrases?

What else can you expect at your age?

I'm too old to be doing with all that.

You're just too old for this job.

You're the first person I've spoken to in four days

I know it would help but how can I afford it

You look very good for your age

You don't look your age

Gosh, can you still do that at your age?

I am not old, I am a recycled teenager

I'm 82 you know

My memory isn't what it was

*The above, according to AEA member William Tyler, are phrases which should be banned in relation to older people. They are taken from his blog on the Galatea Trust website. The Trust defines itself as being "about the nurturing of the Human Spirit and the role environments can play in this process." Elsewhere on the site William has this to say on the subject of **Being Old.***

"Being old', the old themselves repeatedly tell the rest of us is not a good thing to be in the Britain of the twenty-first century.

They say this despite the vast amount of public resources spent on older people, from State Pensions to The National

Health Service, from the winter fuel allowance to national bus passes. Yet none of this seems to dent the belief of older people that growing old is no fun today.

What do they mean? What do they expect? The answer lies in the area of therapeutic environments. They hanker after a society which cares and respects its older members. Older people today remember, or think they remember, how older people were treated when they were young. This view says that older people then had a place within families and within the wider community. A place of respect. Today by contrast many older people find themselves socially isolated from their families, speaking to few people on a daily or even a weekly basis. No friendly butcher, baker, milkman, postman to speak to. And if they do attend outside clubs and organisations these also tend to be age related, whether specifically so, as in the case of 'Over Sixties Clubs' (usually of course full of over seventy-fives) or in the case of organisations such as The Townswomen's Guilds, which often prove to be in reality older peoples groups. Nothing wrong in any of these organisations, far from it; but the point remains that if these organisations represent the only outside contact an older person has then that adds to their isolation from the wider community and fuels their own age related views. They are living, in fact, in what might be described as an age ghetto. Worst of all, in this respect, are Retirement Villages or Retirement Complexes.

All of the foregoing begs a number of questions:

Firstly, what do we mean by old in our society? Sixty, Seventy-five, eighty, ninety years of age? The answer to this question has changed over the last half century. When today's sixty years olds were children, then sixty was usually considered old for most people and seventy was definitely old. Today as society has changed – we live longer due to better nutrition, health care and the decline of heavy manual labour – the age when we can be considered old has likewise changed.

In 1918 the average life expectancy of a British male was 44 and of a female 50. Today the comparable figures are 77 and 82. Forecasts predict that today's babies can expect to live to 89 and 92 respectively. This shift, we can already see, has entered Government thinking. The retirement age is about to be raised, although some would argue that the bar needs to be raised considerably more than that proposed; not by the odd year but by a full decade.



Elderly women in the workhouse – the not so good old days (c. Public Record Office)

That we are living longer is not in dispute and we have only to go back to the 18th century to find medieval levels of life expectancy, lying somewhere in the late thirties. But living longer is only part of the issue of change in relationship to being old. The second issue is the way in which society views older people, and in this respect our

elderly today have got it sussed. Society regards older people as a 'problem' not as a resource. Hence why there are political arguments on the level of State Pensions or on whether the winter fuel allowance should be means tested. At best this problem approach to the old is deeply patronising – they are a group to whom good can be done. Wisdom is not a prized virtue in our society as it once was.

How then do we approach these two issues and how can we best address the concerns of older people themselves?

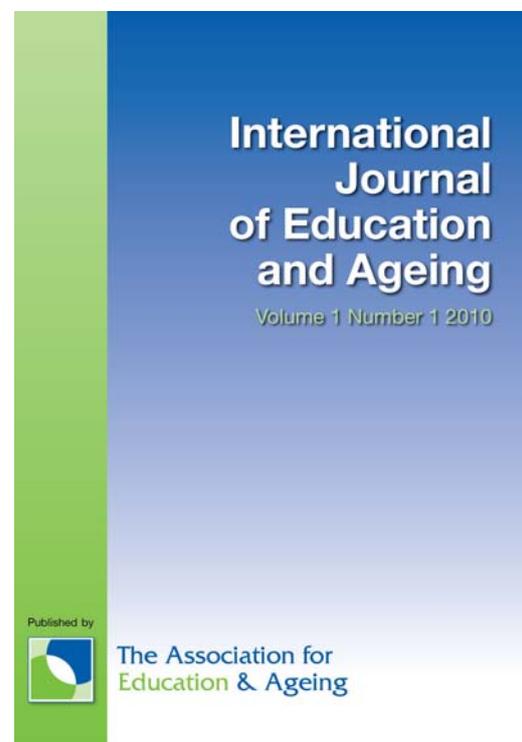
As regards age, then surely we must begin by differentiating the various cohorts that fall within the 60 to 100 age band that is too often used as the catch all for all older people. How odd to group all those within this wide age range within one group. One wouldn't dream of doing the same for any other 40 year range of ages, say 20 to 60 year olds or 30 to 70 year olds. There are probably three generations contained within this wide group. The oldest born around the time of The First World War, the youngest after the end of The Second. It doesn't seem to make much sense to treat this group as though they were homogeneous. A more sophisticated approach needs to be adopted by Government and other national agencies.

Some of the real issues facing older people and discrimination against them are the quality of care in our residential homes, the decline in provision of adult education opportunities, the age discrimination too often experienced in the National Health Service, for example over the fitting of hearing aids (most

often an age related problem), or the growing problem of elderly carers.

A measure of how society interacts with its older members would seem to be a good test as to the health of that society. How near is it to creating a therapeutic environment for old and young alike?

<http://www.galatea-trust.com/>



Since the first issue of International Journal of Education and Ageing, published by AEA, was launched at our conference in July 2010, its reputation has been spreading, not only in the UK but we now have institutions and individuals subscribing from many other parts of the world. In addition to hard copy publication, back issues of the journal are now in the process of being made available online to subscribers. Editor in chief Keith Percy explains why

IJEA has become essential reading for anyone involved in the field of older learning.

There are three issues in each yearly volume. Each issue contains articles (normally four) based on original recent research and/or scholarship by distinguished academics or by young scholars making their careers in the study of learning in later life or related fields. Articles are not published unless they are approved by two or three appropriately qualified referees, who see the article without knowledge of who the author(s) is/are. The editors lay great stress upon their international mission, of publishing articles of suitable quality from all over the world. Each issue also contains a substantial editorial essay designed to comment critically upon, and to suggest links between, the contents of the issue. There is a section of reviews of books and other materials and a section of 'international notes' which keeps readers up-to-date on worldwide developments, policy and research relevant to learning in later life. The editors insist that all of the contents of an issue are written in clear, good and accessible English.

Each issue contains about 35,000 words. The third issue of volume 2 of IJEA will be published in August 2012. The second was published in May and contained four varied and stimulating articles. Maya Azuri and Vanessa Beck, from the University of Leicester wrote about a research study of workplace learning for older workers in the Kingdom of Bahrain; Rebecca Hooker, recently awarded a doctorate, considered the implications of her research into the benefits of learning a language in later life; Professor Patricia Boechler and a

team of colleagues from the University of Alberta, Canada considered critically their investigation into differences in memory, performance and strategies of web search between older and younger adults; and Dr Uzoma Okoye, a sociologist from the University of Nigeria, discussed the education and learning implications of family care-giving practices in Nigeria.

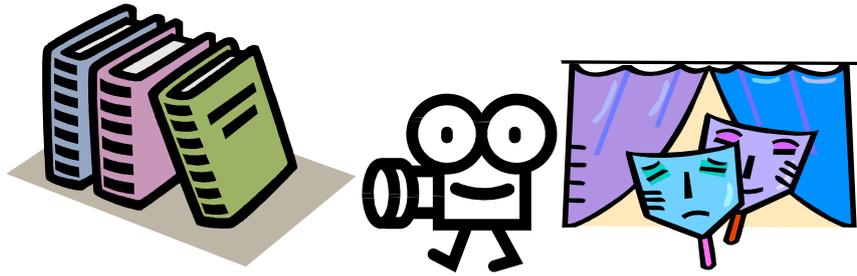
If any AEA members do not yet subscribe to the International Journal of Education and Ageing, they should consider doing so immediately and join the worldwide readership. For existing members of AEA, the IJEA is very affordable. Adding the IJEA on to an existing AEA membership costs only £39 for unwaged members and £45 for waged or corporate members (saving in the range of 20% to 25%).

We have noticed that a few AEA members have let their IJEA subscription lapse recently. As a once-only incentive to them to renew their subscriptions, they can claim the last issue free, and the one before that for a nominal price, if they want to fill in gaps and have a complete run of IJEA issues and volumes.

Contact Sasha Anderson, AEA and Journal administrator at sasha.anderson75@gmail.com

For further information including Guidelines for submissions, a downloadable subscription form or to subscribe directly online, please go to the journal page of our website :

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/international-journal-of-education-and-ageing.html>



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

*In the Spring issue of AEA Digest, we carried a piece about George Baddeley's then forthcoming **Silver Comedy workshop**. **Chrissie Fraser**, one of Carol Allen's older learner drama students, was intrigued by the idea and went along to find out what it takes to be a silver (or in her case blonde!) comedienne.*

I am no spring chicken and joining the other oldies on the Silver comedy course was a revelation. Our tutor Chris arrived with his fold up bike and promptly guided us through a menu of what is funny. I had no idea that making people laugh was such a serious business. There are particular techniques, - one called call back, another called recognition, and another called set ups and pay offs. All these techniques can be combined with clever wordplay and of course style. I found it difficult to be spontaneous without a glass of wine and a partisan audience. We quickly learned that Chris does not smile easily - rather like someone working in a chocolate factory, he just doesn't respond to the product. He held his flashing light from the back of his bike and stated "when I start flashing you have to stop!"

The course took place in a tiny room cum makeshift theatre over a pub in Camden. Not the sort of pub I usually

frequent, but the drinks were cheap and the patrons colourful. Chris soon had us up on the little stage at the side of the upstairs room practicing our microphone technique. I managed to get caught up in the wires which caused much amusement - far more than my puerile jokes written the night before.

My fellow aspiring comics were made up of middle aged men, and grey looking women. To my delight the large boisterous man from the suburbs who looked like Father Christmas held up his homemade picture of a pasty (remember the pasty tax), which was welcomed with loud laughs. Goes to show comedy can be just that - a cartoon on a card. My own rant, as it is called in the trade, about my children brought a few chuckles, as did the shared experience of bringing them up.



Chrissie "having a silver comedy rant"!

I was impressed by Rosemarie, a delightful full time poet, who made us all laugh with her ‘reasons as to why women wear lipstick’ - something to do with baboons’ bottoms and Desmond Morris. Another comic, Christine, did a sort of pseudo striptease with long black evening gloves. Wonderful and not a bit erotic - they might as well have been marigolds or mittens - but delightfully silly. The large woman from Essex, who was an older biker girl, delighted us all with her tales of internet dating with men, who had very high expectations. She marched all over the little stage and made us all giggle.

Actual jokes were very hard to script and make up. We tried to re-invent Victoria Wood’s style and of course the brilliant Jack Dee, who discusses everyday domestic scenes and turns them into wonderfully witty scenarios. On the last day I tried my best, but stand up is tricky I have to say.

I ended up buying Rosemarie’s book of poems, each one a gem. Middle age is a time to experiment, to try and do things out of the ordinary, to get away from all the dreary stuff of routine. I recommend a course in comedy - a little laughter goes a long way. But watch out for the microphone. It really is a dangerous instrument.

For further information on future Silver Comedy courses, keep on eye on the website:

<http://silvercomedy.co.uk/about-us/>

Also in the last digest Carol Allen reported that Miss Threadgold, the film she has made with her older learners’

drama class, was nearing completion. Well, it is at last finally finished.

“About time too”, some of the silver comedians among you may well mutter. Yes, you’re right – the gestation period has been nearly as long as that of an elephant – which is 22 months for the non zoologists amongst you! Excluding the writing of the screenplay, the project actually took 20 months from first day of shooting to the celebratory cast and crew screening.



Joan Lovelace and Salman Hasan

I am currently in the process of setting up screenings for older audiences in London. An early assembly of the film was screened at the AEA conference in Birmingham last summer, where it was kindly, indeed enthusiastically received, and several delegates said they would be interested in having a copy to use in their own work with older learners. DVD copies are now available and information about the making of the film and details of how to get a copy are now on the news and views page of our website under *Publications* <http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/news-views.html>

Alternatively for further information please e mail Carol at aeasecretary@googlemail.com or ring 020 7385 4641

Winston Churchill Fellowships



Would you like to travel overseas and visit examples of best practice, innovation and inspiration in your field? Would you then be able to disseminate your newfound knowledge for the benefit of your organisation or community? Applications are now being invited for the Winston Churchill Fellowships. One of the categories this year is for those working in or interested in the field of *The Arts and Older People*. Full details can be found at <http://www.wcmt.org.uk/report-categories/general-ategories.html> Closing date for applications is **2nd October 2012**.

Theatre reviews from Carlie Newman

In *The Doctor's Dilemma* (National Theatre until 12 September), George Bernard Shaw is writing about the time when the play was written, 1906, but he touches on a subject very close to our hearts today – the importance of having a National Health Service. All except one of his cast of doctors works in private practice and, as Shaw puts it, they are treating people for money and cannot judge the actual medical need without the question of money entering into the decision.

The dilemma faced by newly knighted Sir Colenso Ridgeon (Aden Gillett) is whether to treat the husband of a beautiful young woman, Jennifer Dubedat (Genevieve O'Reilly), who pleads for the life of her husband, the artist Louis Dubedat (Tom Burke). Sir Colenso has discovered a TB inoculation which will cure people of tuberculosis, but he only has sufficient to treat a small number and his quota is full. He finds out that Louis is a scoundrel having cheated on his wife and conned lots of people including his doctor friends out of their money.

At the same time one of his friends, a hard-up doctor (Derek Hutchinson), who treats people according to need rather than having a private practice, is suffering from TB too. Which of the two should he cure? He is worried that, because he is in love with Jennifer, he might let Louis die in order to marry the widow.



**Genevieve O'Reilly and Tom
Photo: Alastair Muir**

Young director, Nadia Fall has mounted a most attractive production. Although there is much earnest discussion about the merits of various treatments and the advantages of one over the other, the quality of the acting and the interesting sets, which change seamlessly from one place to another, ensure that the serious comedy comes across as vibrant and engrossing.

Even though summer got lost after a brilliant start in May, it has now officially arrived with the summer seasons at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, presenting an excellent *Henry V* and Mark Rylance as *Richard III* in an all-male production, and two very different plays at the Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park. A new version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is delightful and *Ragtime* (Open Air Theatre until 8 September), which is not your usual jolly musical, but a serious narrative of American immigrants in the early 20th century, based on the novel by E.L. Doctorow. It's a bit of an illustrated lecture but with some good songs and an amazingly impressive set.

Don't miss *Chariots of Fire*, now playing at the Gielgud Theatre (booking until 10 November), directed by Edward Hall in a lively production, which depicts the characters with clarity, and uses the stage and auditorium (which has been adapted to allow a running track in the stalls and has part of the audience seated at the back of the stage), to show great runs by the actors that leave one gasping as they whistle past your head!



Photographer: Manuel Harlan/Premier PR
via Bloomberg

Adapted for the stage by Mike Bartlett, the play is based on the 1981 film. The same Colin Welland screenplay is used, but it seems to make more sense here, perhaps because we are able to

concentrate on the dialogue in the many short scenes where speech is more important than action and are not distracted by visual images.

The story follows the journey to the Paris Olympics of 1924 of Harold Abrahams (James McArdle), son of a Lithuanian Jew, who is completely dedicated to winning. He puts up with the anti-Semitism (sometimes expressed in an indirect manner, "With a name like Abrahams he won't be in the chapel choir.") of his fellow students as well as from the dons at Cambridge in order to achieve his success on the sports field. He is helped to victory by another outsider, Sam Mussabini (Nicholas Woodeson).

Eric Liddell (Jack Lowden) is driven by his strong Christian faith. He is the son of a Scottish Missionary serving in China. His belief in following God's will leads him to refuse to take part in the 100 meters Olympic heat, which is run on a Sunday. There is a certain amount of rivalry between the two runners until finally Harold admits, "I was faster, but Eric was better."

The acting is not only of a high quality but all the younger members' exhibit an astonishing athleticism. Short scenes have been inherited from the film, but these work well in such a buoyant production. The theatre is set out as a stadium so that the actors literally run past you. The actors exercise before the start of the show and then they do choreographed moves to the music of Vangelis. As the girlfriend of Abrahams is a mezzo-soprano with the D'Oyly Carte, Hall uses this to bring Gilbert and Sullivan's music into some of the scenes. One of the hurdles races takes

place to a chorus from *The Pirates of Penzance!* It is surprising that, although we know the ending, watching this production still brings tears to our eyes. Don't let this play suffer the fate of *The King's Speech*, which closed early because people had seen the film and thought that was enough. It is well worth the effort, particularly in the light of the Olympics.

On Screen with Carol Allen

There appears to be a wind of change starting to blow in the movies as far as the depiction of older people is concerned. *Hope Springs* is romantic comedy for older people, starring Meryl Streep (now 63) as Kay and Tommy Lee Jones (65) as Arnold, a couple from whose 30 year marriage the magic has long gone. Kay arranges for them to go on a week long marriage counselling session with happy marriage guru Dr Feld (Carell), dragging Arnold along pretty much kicking and screaming. The screenplay by American tv series writer Vanessa Taylor has a touch of the late Nora Ephron about it, in that it's a mixture of wry sadness and comedy, skilfully executed by the three leading performers.



Photo Barry Wetcher Associated Press

Streep gives a beautifully nuanced performance, which can convincingly

change moods in a second., while Lee Jones shows a flair for both comedy and poignancy. Carell gives a very unselfish, beautifully judged performance, which is sometimes gently comic as therapists can be. But like any good therapist, he stays in the background, prompting and supporting, letting his "clients" take centre stage.

The film skillfully treads a delicate line between comedy and sadness – one minute we're laughing, next we're aware of the pain underneath. It also isn't afraid to tackle the issue of sex and older people, which it does delicately, humorously and again with that touch of pain. Streep is a serious actress not a sex symbol but she has already projected the image of the older woman as a still sexual person in films such as *Mama Mia* and *It's Complicated*. With the much publicised ageing of the population, we may well find this issue featuring in many more future films.

I wouldn't normally recommend a film called *Cockneys vs Zombies* to an older audience. But in this case over half of the cockneys concerned are older people fighting off a zombie invasion of the East End! Ray (Alan Ford) is the leading light of a retirement home, whose residents are facing relocation to the sticks because of redevelopment. His grandchildren decide to rob a bank to save the home but get sort of distracted, when the aforesaid zombie plague comes to town and they must get to Ray and his friends, who are under siege from the walking dead. The film is subversively cheeky in the spoof horror style of *Shaun of the Dead* and the older actors, who include Richard Briers (running for his life with a zimmer frame), Honor Blackman (still lovely at 84), Dudley Sutton (mustard in a

wheelchair) and Georgina Hale, are a feisty bunch.



Alan Ford as Ray. Photo Flynetpictures.com

Ford in particular, a 76 year old true East Ender, who's played tough guy roles on the telly and whose catch phrase to the young ones is "Don't call me Grandad. It makes me feel old", lights up the screen. The film also got me thinking. This could well be one way forward in terms of changing the image of an

ageing society. Young people and older people working together in an intergenerational movie!

Canadian actress turned director Sarah Polley's first feature *Away from Her* dealt beautifully with the challenge of Alzheimer's in the older years of a long time happy marriage. She turns her attention to a younger marriage in *Take This Waltz* (title from the Leonard Cohen song), which tackles the question of whether relationships can ever live up to the fantasies and expectations we are fed about them. It is not as moving as Polley's previous film but it has an interestingly quirky, original and visually poetic story telling style with good performances from Michelle Williams and Seth Rogan as the couple and Luke Kirby as the man whose attraction for her threatens their marriage.

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