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# AEA DIGEST

Issue no 44  
Summer 2015

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**AEA patron and long time member the late Professor Brian Groombridge, pictured here at the 2013 AEA Conference with then Chair Jo Walker.**

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## **FROM THE CHAIR.....**

*Jonathan Hughes*

They do say that time seems to speed up as you get older and I find it difficult to believe that some four months have elapsed since I wrote "From the Chair ..." for the AEA Spring Digest. Back in February I was reflecting on the challenges facing AEA.

These challenges included replacing Sasha Anderson as administrator, the ending of funding associated with three European projects, the need to establish the Forage database as a valuable resource on later life learning and the need to increase the number and involvement of members.

I also looked ahead to three planned events. The first, in February, was a joint seminar with the Manchester Institute of Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA) and Manchester Metropolitan University focused on *Later Life Sexuality*. The second was a seminar in London, *Learning about Learning in Later Life* in June and the third was the AEA Conference at the Open University, *Learning in Later Life: Research, Theory, Policy and Practice*, due to be held on 23rd and 24th September 2015.

You would be surprised, I am sure, if I claimed that the challenges I identified in February had disappeared.

We have still to replace Sasha as administrator so I am really grateful that Sasha has said she is prepared to continue dealing with membership queries for a short period. I would also like to thank Keith Percy and Anita Hughes who have stood in to take minutes of our executive committee meeting. From January 2016 AEA will need a new Treasurer, as Diane Sawyer

is no longer able to continue for a variety of health and personal reasons. I would like to thank Diane for her terrific work as Treasurer over the last couple of years.

The Forage project was extended to reflect a number of difficulties which I won't rehearse here. These have involved AEA (in the persons of Keith Percy and Sasha) in a great deal of work to ensure that AEA is not put at financial risk. The other two projects will continue to the end of this year and have also involved AEA in more work than had been anticipated. I would like to put on record AEA's appreciation of the work that has been done to establish the Forage database as an invaluable resource. *For an update on the Forage project see page 6*

That leaves the need to increase the numbers and involvement of members. This now needs to be our focus. We have adopted a clear stance on levels and benefits of membership which was agreed by the membership at the AGM in 2013. I checked back to the minutes of that AGM and was reminded that we had hoped to have a membership of around 100 (if all types of membership were included) by this point in time. Currently we fall far short of this target. This means that the next few months need to be marked by a concerted effort to spread the word and to increase our membership. If you feel able to offer any of your time or energy to AEA, please do get in touch with me.

Despite these challenges AEA has been active in a range of ways. Some of these will be visible elsewhere in the Digest but these notes can only touch on few.

In February I looked forward to the *Learning in Later Life Seminar* held at the OU in London in Camden on 17th July. This proved to be a stimulating seminar. If you would like copies of the key notes from Paul Nash (Swansea University) and Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha from Tubingen University please get in touch with me. The participants had to earn their lunch by contributing to a workshop, which considered what research needs to be done to further the case for the value of learning in later life and how different groups and organisations might be brought together to make the case for the value of later life learning. I particularly liked the notion of starting a campaign for Older People's learning. *A further report on this event can be found on page 5*

The seminar also highlighted the dearth of teaching about ageing in any shape or form in UK universities (only 16 out of 203 universities teach courses about ageing and that includes medical schools). There is a real need to address both what is learned about older people as well as what older people's learning needs are. One of the aspects of the seminar was to discuss whether some of these issues might be addressed by the creation of a special interest group (SIG) within the British Society of Gerontology. There were clearly mixed opinions and there were also mixed emotions about the nature of the relationship between AEA and a BSG SIG. Personally speaking I think it is worth exploring whether a new SIG and AEA could work together to the benefit of both organisations and to raise the profile of the importance of education in later life.

In May I was asked if I could contribute to the *Kilburn Debates* which form part of Camden Intergenerational Week. My contribution took the form of a workshop in which participants were invited to identify themselves as either older learners or as teachers of older learners. These groups then debated the question of "Does age matter when teaching older adults?" I also asked people to design a short piece of learning around the Putney Debates, which occurred during the English Civil War and focused on who should be able to the vote.

There was a wide range of views expressed, sometimes very forcibly but I think the consensus was that age can matter if it is used to pigeonhole people and that it needs to be recognised as a source of experience and wisdom (or perhaps a fixed mind set). However, older people need to be viewed as diverse individuals and chronological age may only be a very approximate guide to this diversity.

My invitation came from John Miles who has links with Camden Intergenerational Week, the Kilburn Older Voices Exchange, the BSG and the Ransackers Association. I have agreed with John that we should continue working to move the May 'conversation' on. I have booked space at the Open University in Camden where we will take forward the notion of a framework focused on democracy, participation and intergenerational relationships. This event will take place on Monday, 12th October. Further details to follow.

While I'm talking about dates, we have decided that the AEA international

conference will take place in the spring of 2016 (date to be confirmed). This means that the AEA AGM and Annual Conference and Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture will take place at The Open University, Walton Hall (Milton Keynes) on Wednesday, 23rd September. This year's Frank Glendenning Lecture will be given by Professor Sheila Peace of the Open University and current President of the BSG. The lecture will be *Changes in perceptions of ageing over the last 30 years: what happened to educational gerontology?*

I hope to see you there.

*A quick reference list of dates for your diary can be found on page 10*

*One of those who attended the seminar on **Lifelong Learning and Social Gerontology: an Essential Partnership?** was **Jo Walker**, who reports here on her impressions of the event.*

AEA was delighted to work with the British Society of Gerontology (BSG) to offer this day seminar on June 17, at the London office of the Open University in Camden Town. It aimed to promote the joint interests of both organisations and explore the idea of doing more together. This is a welcome development for AEA, since many of the original academic departments that supported its work have been closed down in the general retreat of adult and continuing education from the UK higher education sector.

However, it seems that the issues of older adult learning, as well as the business of learning about older age, are being rediscovered by a new generation of academics in both gerontological and

educational settings. Two excellent presentations to the seminar were made by members of the Centre for Innovative Ageing at Swansea University and Educational Research at Universitat Tubingen in Germany.

Dr Paul Nash from Swansea first tackled the issue of numbers of older students in higher education (small) but with the observation that future generations of people aged 60+ would contain one in ten who already have a postgraduate degree. Education about ageing, for those who wish to enter the various professions that support our ageing society, was also at a low level – only available in sixteen out of over 200 higher education institutes (including medical faculties). Greater recognition and clarity about what gerontologists could do was needed.



**Dr Paul Nash, Swansea University**

Paul went on to revisit the purposes and provision of learning for older people, setting store on the widening access agenda and the commitment to lifelong learning that is meant to feature in UK (and European) policy. He acknowledged the key role of voluntary sector providers and urged greater

leadership from older adults themselves, both to sustain services and to improve understanding of needs and the most relevant ways to deliver learning.

The second paper was given by Professor Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha from the Institute for Educational Science, Tübingen University. He is familiar to AEA members who have attended or followed the proceedings of the European Education and Learning of Older Adults (ELOA) network that he has been instrumental in establishing. We were very pleased to be able to welcome him to London. Bernhard took us through various European measures and descriptors of the educational experience of older people, together with the differing techniques and purposes involved in estimating later life learning. Much data gathering is still oriented around labour-market concerns, such as employability and competencies in later life.



**Professor Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha,  
Tübingen University**

Further analyses were presented on participation in learning by age-groups,

and people's expressed purposes for learning in later life. Two interesting conceptual schema were offered, on older peoples' aims in pursuing learning, and on the educational outcomes of continuing to learn (this latter based on Tom Schuller's notion of identity, social and human capital). Bernhard then went on to describe a particular project on the opportunities and limitations associated with intergenerational learning on the topic of IT. Last, he shared ideas about future research topics on older adult learning.

After lunch, the seminar reconvened to tackle some workshop questions on the nature and potential of research that could further some of these issues about learning in later life. It was especially helpful that the seminar participants included researchers, practitioners, providers of learning and older learners. On a quick straw poll, representation was noted from AEA, BSG, OU, U3A, and The Ransackers - with many participants as members of more than one of these networks. A particular suggestion for a special interest group on later life learning to be formed within BSG found some support but also some opposition from those present. No doubt the debate will continue!

*AEA is grateful for financial support from BSG towards the costs of organising the Seminar, and to the OU for use of their London offices.*

*As promised to in Notes from the Chair page 2, here is an update from **Keith Percy** on the **ForAge Project**.*

When I wrote last about *ForAge for later-life learning: Building on European experience* (in Digest 43 last February) the Project was only a few

weeks from its completion date of March 31, 2015. This EU Grundtvig-funded Project had begun in January 2012 with AEA as one of the original 17 strong partnership of organisations in 15 countries. Its aim was to function as a European multi-lateral network creating and supporting a database of information, research and opinion on all aspects of later-life learning and using it to promote discussion, development and change across Europe. I wrote in February that “AEA began the Project expecting to play a relatively minor role but over the years has taken on increased responsibilities. As it did so, it made sure that the additional work would potentially have a long-term benefit for AEA”.

Since late 2012, AEA has been the prime mover in developing the ForAge database and populating it with data. It has experimented with the structure of the database and dealt with many technical difficulties. Partners have provided some of the content of the database but AEA has needed to be active in internet and other searches (even in languages in which nobody in the AEA team was proficient) in order to supplement the data.



**Jim Soulsby at last ForAge partners' meeting, Portugal, Nov. 2014**

At the time of writing (June 2015) transition from the Project to the post Project phases is taking place. The University of Leicester (lead partner) is writing a Final Report for presentation to Brussels. AEA is now assuming ongoing responsibility for the continuing use and development of the ForAge database. Other aspects of the Project are being decoupled from the database and may develop, separately, in other directions but in other hands.



**Jonathan Hughes and John Benyon at the last ForAge partners' meeting, Portugal, Nov. 2014**

AEA needs to take some decisions on how it is to support the ForAge database on the future. Various models are being considered. One is that of going into partnership with another organisation in order to share necessary tasks and to utilise different sets of expertise and experience. A second is to seek funding support. A third is to identify a small group of AEA members who would like to work in a team developing and disseminating the ForAge database and in so doing perhaps gaining valuable – certainly interesting – experience. None of these models is incompatible with the others.

Information about the ForAge Project and access to the database can be found at <http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/>



*Another project in which AEA has taken a leading role is **Wellbeing in Later Life** or **WELL**. A further update from **Keith Percy**.*

In an article written last February for Issue 43 (Spring 2015) of the “Digest” I described the purpose and activities of the EU-funded Grundtvig Learning Partnerships Project *Wellbeing in Later Life: education, creativity and physical activity* in which AEA is a partner with organisations in Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Turkey. The Project began in August 2013 and ends on July 31 2015. The Partnership has been exploring how and in what ways learning increases the well-being of older people. Each of the partner organisations has experience and expertise in different aspects of classroom learning, creative arts and physical activities. The Project has been developing and reflecting upon learning for older people in each of these areas and also upon how tutors can promote wellbeing among older people through their approaches to teaching and organising learning.

In the five months since that article was written, the Project has been accelerating towards its conclusion. International meetings (of older learners, tutors and project coordinators from all of the countries) have been held in Italy and the UK to hear about and to discuss two sets of “local activities” which the

partners have undertaken in their own countries. The Italian meeting took place in March in Rome in the exquisite and tranquil beauty of a city-centre convent. There were about 45 participants from the partner organisations. The theme of the Italian hosts was to explore the connection between workshop experience of dance, movement and music and expressions of well-being of older people using feedback from the participants.



**Workshop at WELL meeting in Rome**

The Italian hosts had produced an 8 minute video for the Project of their most recent “well-being learning activity”. It showed a class of older and younger adults, including some with special needs, overcoming their inhibitions about expressing body-movement in front of others and going out into the Roman streets to “perform” in front of (and eventually with) unsuspecting passers-by. It is a very moving and evocative video with high production values and you can see it on the Project Facebook site at <https://www.facebook.com/wellbeinginlaterlife/videos/vb.341373479386389/362024993987904/?type=2&theater> .

As a last evening treat, all participants in the Rome meeting were invited to attend a modern-day interpretation of “Carmen” (choreography by the Italian Project leader) in the beautiful 18th

century Teatro Argentina, one of the oldest theatres in Rome.

The final international meeting of the Project was hosted by AEA and held in Lancaster in a town-centre hotel. Only project coordinators attended this meeting because its main business was to plan and discuss the resource pack and final reports of the Project which have to be completed and submitted before September 30th. AEA has the main responsibility for this phase of the Project and its outcomes.

The early part of the meeting, however, was taken up with presentation and discussion of the last round of local activities which each of the partners had carried out since the Rome meeting.

The Polish presentation was, by common agreement one of the most stimulating. It described two recent activities. The first was the development of ten “Golden Rules” for the tutoring of older people which would promote their wellbeing. They were developed by brainstorming and discussion by all of the tutors in classes for older people in the Polish organisation. The “Golden Rules” will be found in the Project Resource Pack, when it is available.



**National Museum, Krakow**

The second recent local activity presented from Poland was concerned

with innovative teaching in an intriguing art history class conducted for older people in an exhibition of XIXth century Polish painting in the National Museum in Krakow. Learners were presented with a card from a popular card game bearing an abstract, dream-like image and asked to walk through the art gallery to find its “pair”, a painting with which it could be associated. Then learners were asked to explain the connections they had made (some of which were quite abstruse) to others in the group. The outcome was stimulating, successful and mind-opening for all learners as they were introduced to the imaginations, reasonings and memories of others.



**A welcome break from the hard work!  
WELL Project coordinators at dinner in a  
hotel overlooking Morecambe Bay**

The next issue of the “Digest”, hopefully, will contain an account of the last months of the WELL Project with some indications of the content of the resource pack and the final report together with information on how AEA members can access them. Meanwhile further information can be accessed on the project website at

<http://www.edu-well.eu/>

The Association for  
Education & Ageing

***DATES FOR YOUR DIARY***

**AEA AGM, Annual Conference and  
Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture**

**Date:** Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015  
**Venue:** The Open University, Walton Hall (Milton Keynes)  
 This year's **Frank Glendenning Lecture** will be given by **Professor Sheila Peace** of the Open University and current President of the BSG on the subject: *Changes in perceptions of ageing over the last 30 years: what happened to educational gerontology?*

**Seminar**

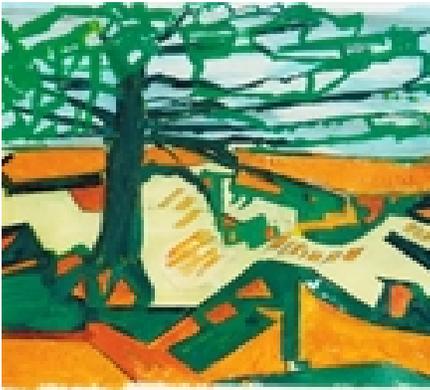
**Date:** Monday, 12th October 2015  
**Venue:** Open University, 1-11 Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, London NW1 8NP  
**Theme:** TBC. It will though be related to democracy, participation and intergenerational relationships (see notes from the Chair page 2).

**International Conference on  
Learning in Later Life: Theory, Policy and Practice**

**Date:** March/April 2016 (date tbc)  
**Venue:** The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, UK  
**Details:** The Association for Education and Ageing, in partnership with the formerly Grundtvig-funded multi-lateral network "ForAge for later-life learning: building on European experience" announces a two-day international conference. Call for papers, outline programme and registration details will be available on our website shortly

## OBITUARY

*In April we received the sad news of the death of long standing member **Howard Gilbert**. As well as his many professional achievements in the field of lifelong learning, which **Jo Walker** remembers below, in recent years Howard also took up art and was highly commended in the EAC Art Awards 2012 for his painting *A Shaded Corner in a Hot Land*.*



**Howard Gilbert's award winning painting**

Howard was among AEA's very first group of members in the mid-1980s and continued an active contributor to its work almost to the end of his very long life. It was because of his vitality that his death, just short of his 92nd birthday, came as a shock and is a great loss to many people who knew him.

Howard's great passion in life was adult learning in many forms, including creative arts, drama, history and pre-retirement education. This commitment to people's ongoing opportunities for learning, including into later life, may have come from his own experience of disadvantage in early life. Born in 1923, his family suffered during the Depression and his formative childhood years were spent away from them in one of the Government open-air schools for

malnourished children. At the age of 12 he was re-united with his family, but senior elementary education ceased at 14, when employment as a shop assistant beckoned. As with the lives of other young men and women of his generation, the war intervened and took him to service in North Africa and Italy as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps, whereafter he was discharged with an exemplary service record.

Demobilisation enabled his selection by the Ministry of Education for teacher training under a special scheme for ex-service personnel, and so began the story that would unfold for the rest of his working and retired life. His training took him from his native Essex into Middlesex and Hertfordshire. In this formative period up to 1950, he studied the great many subjects associated with the primary school curriculum, discovered drama, and met and married his wife Pamela.

Once qualified, teaching posts followed in Sussex in the early 1950s, along with the first appearance of adult education on his CV as an evening institute instructor. Making the transition to secondary school teaching in the mid-fifties enabled Howard to make good the gaps in his own schooling, pursuing A level and other advanced studies alongside work and parenthood. By 1960 he was Organising Master of an evening institute, and had three young daughters. The following year he moved back to Hertfordshire to take up a post as Head of Extra Mural Studies at Cassio College, Watford, which he held for five years before becoming Principal of North Havering Adult Education College

in 1966. Howard's interests in history and drama had taken him into the worlds of further and higher education and, with periods of professional training, he made the connections for which he became mostly known: extra-mural studies, educational management, committees on aspects of adult education. His family was complete with the birth of a son in 1965.

The beginnings of interest in later life learning could be seen in his early involvement with the newly formed Pre-Retirement Association in 1964, and in lifelong learning through the Educational Centres Association and the Association for Adult Education (which later became the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education). Adult education was in its heyday, thanks to post war educational philosophy and policy, and Howard's next posts were as leader of various adult education institutes. Now serving on various national bodies on adult and continuing education, in 1977 Howard was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal for services to education. A significant invitation from the British Council in 1980 to pursue international contacts on behalf of British adult education put Howard in touch with the nascent movement for third age education, which at the time was linked to pre-retirement, paid educational leave, and workplace learning – and a new French initiative, Université du troisième âge (U3A).

It was not surprising therefore that, following his retirement from professional work in 1983, Howard's first step was to set up a training company for pre-retirement education, dedicated to demonstrating good adult educational practice and addressing the

learning needs of people in the third age. Surprisingly, this was a novel approach at the time. The Pre-Retirement Association was now being funded by government to promote a better quality of pre-retirement learning, so Howard was a natural ally and expert member. It was in this capacity that I first met him and he was of immense and continued help and support to my role, to develop and disseminate educational resources in this new field of adult learning.



Howard became a shining example of how to build an active, fulfilling and significant retirement, making the most of his talents and interests. He continued to develop innovative pre-retirement courses with his company 'Midlife Options', focusing on two main aspects: how to use time in retirement (which involved working out values and priorities) and getting in touch with creativity, even if people had not done much of this in their lives before. His courses famously involved working with clay, for instance. This was a far cry from the industry standard for pre-retirement preparation at the time, which took people passively through a list of uninspiring topics.

Howard and his business partner Barbara French joined a new Masters degree programme at Birkbeck College, London on Life Course Development, to further

their professional understanding. From Surrey University, I had the privilege of helping them prepare their dissertations. By now, Howard's skills as a writer and editor as well as a valued committee member were in demand by key adult education bodies. He served the Educational Centres Association (becoming its chair and president later in the 1990s) and the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (as vice-chair) in these capacities. In 2001 he co-wrote a memoir for NIACE's 80th anniversary entitled *A Passion for Learning*. Other adult education charities also benefited from his help with creating histories of their work: *The Fortunate Hills: the Story of the Chiltern Society* in 2004 was swiftly followed by *Forty Years of Success: The Pre-Retirement Association 1964-2004* and, in 2006, *'Moor Park College: A Remarkable Venture in Christian Adult Education*.

Other voluntary activities continued at a local level, reflecting Howard's interests in local history and genealogy, which he taught on behalf of the Workers' Educational Association, having pursued a genealogy research skills course back at Birkbeck. His life as a student was by now blossoming in a new direction – that of painting. His delight in the last few years of his life was to attend residential courses at some of the last remaining centres to offer these opportunities, such as West Dean College, close to Chichester in West Sussex and Dillington House in Somerset. Despite failing eyesight, Howard would book assisted rail travel from Hertfordshire, be met by the college mini-bus and then revel for a week in what had become familiar

surroundings, developing his talent with watercolour, acrylic and oils.

He hosted a wonderful gathering of friends and family for his 90th birthday at West Dean, where examples of his work were on show. In 2014 he submitted a picture to an open painting competition which attracted hundreds of entries, winning a 'highly commended' place and attending a presentation at the House of Lords, where he was proudly accompanied by his daughter Kas - herself a professional artist.



**Howard at work on one of his paintings**

Howard leaves an extraordinary legacy of work, from a time when adult education was significant in the life of the nation, and from the example of his own life and retirement - continuing to pursue new things that expressed his vocation to connect and contribute to the flourishing of others.

*Articles by Howard about his painting can be found online in back copies of the digest Issue 38 Autumn 2012 and Issue 42 Autumn 2014*

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/aea-digest-2.html>

*As this edition of the digest was being finalized, we received further sad news of the death of AEA patron and long time member Brian Groombridge. We will be carrying a full obituary in the Autumn issue but meanwhile here is a selection of short tributes and memories from some of Brian's fellow AEA members.*



**Brian at the AEA conference at Birkbeck 2007, pictured with (l to r) Eric Midwinter, Angela Glendenning, David James and William Tyler**

Brian's death is certainly very sad news. I will remember him as a generous man who always had time to listen and help others on all aspects of adult learning. He was especially helpful in stimulating in how we should communicate our ideas more effectively and attractively to a wider audience. May Brian rest in peace.

*Robin Webster*

I am so very sorry to learn of the death of Brian. He was a lovely and most learned man. I knew him for many years through our mutual work for adult education. He was always so helpful to me as well as others with whom he came in contact. I appreciated the work he did many years ago on ageing in the entertainment industry - long before the current fuss about older women on TV.

*Carlie Newman*

I had long been aware of Brian's considerable contribution to lifelong learning in the UK. He once met with me in London on one of my very early visits to the UK (before living in Scotland for four years) and I have very fond memories of that occasion.

*Brian Findsen*

I met Brian at a recent AEA conference for the first time and he told me how he had been in France as a guest lecturer for the British Council when he heard of a new adult learning initiative called L'Université du troisième âge (UTA). He made contact and visited some UTAs, was enthusiastic about it and brought the idea back to the UK to share with other leaders in life-long learning.

*Janet Whitehouse*

I have known Brian since 1983 and he has always been a major figure in our field of older adults learning, and a great supporter of AEA. As well as being a great asset at any social gathering, he could also add a well chosen statement to any discussion, and so was a welcome participant in any conference even if he was not actually on the platform as a speaker.

*Jo Walker*

I met Brian through AEA. He was a delightful and charming man, very lively, intelligent and amusing company and he continued to make a great contribution in his years of very active non retirement. He was very helpful to me in my capacity as digest editor, contributing many entertaining and informative pieces to these pages. He will be greatly missed.

*Carol Allen*

## ***The Association for Education and Ageing***

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**Corresponding members:** Dr Brian Findsen, Dr Marvin Formosa

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***Visit to the European  
Parliament & the Alsace  
Sponsored by Lucy Anderson  
MEP***

Carlie Newman has organised this five day trip in September through her **TOFF (Trips for older Females & Fellows)** group.

The dates are:  
**Tuesday 8th – Saturday 12th  
September 2015**



## **Itinerary**

### **Tuesday 8th September**

- Pick up outside the Ibis Hotel, Euston Station and a South London pick up
- Travel by an executive touring coach with a Eurotunnel crossing
- Check into the Grand Hotel Continental in Reims

### **Wednesday 9th September**

- Visit to a the Mumm's champagne house in Reims
- Wine tasting in the Alsace en route to the hotel
- Check into the Hotel Des Vosges, Klingenthal

### **Thursday 10th September**

- Visit to the European Parliament, with time in the viewing gallery and a talk from the visitor' service and your host MEP
- 3 course dinner in a local restaurant in Strasbourg with your MEP



### **Friday 11th September**

- Coach will depart to Ypres
- Check into the Novotel Hotel, Ypres
- Attend the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate
- 2 course evening dinner at the Pacific Eiland Restaurant in Ypres

### **Saturday 12th September**

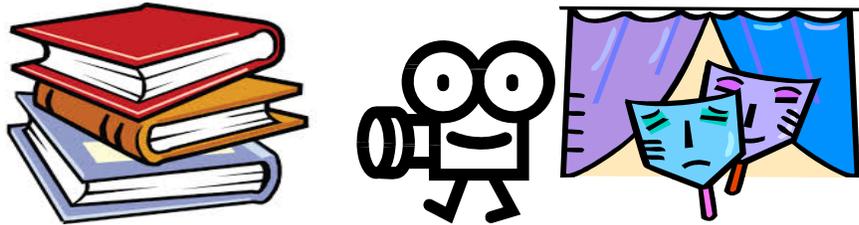
- Guided coach & walking tour of the battlefields & cemeteries along the Ypres Salient
- Free time in Ypres before heading home

All of this for the subsidised price of  
**£349 per person**

**Full details and booking form  
from Carlie**

**[carlie.newman@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:carlie.newman@hotmail.co.uk)  
07973 932665**

***Only a few places left!***



## ***AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION***

### **BOOKS**

*In the last digest I drew your attention to Jeremy Hardie's biography **Variety is the Spice of Life - The Worlds of Eric Midwinter**. A significant figure in the field of lifelong learning, Eric has been a long time supporter of AEA. Jim Soulsby has been reading what Hardie has to say about him.*



**Eric Midwinter delivering the Inaugural Founders lecture U3A**

This is not just 'a' biography, it is several! For the Eric Midwinter we know and cherish as a master and pioneer in one field is actually skilled, lauded and revered in many.

Yes, for most of the members of AEA, he is one of the prime movers in the University of the Third Age movement and developments in the UK over the last 34 years. Yes, he was the very

successful Director of the Centre for Policy on Ageing (CPA) for many years (and in later years the chair of its Governing body – not mentioned in the biography). Yes, he is a brilliant speaker on (adult) education matters. Yes, he is an accomplished author on the same subjects. AEA members will remember the Frank Glendenning memorial lecture memorial Eric gave not in Keele as written here (p.202) but in London, which was subsequently published by the Association with NIACE and perfectly demonstrated his literary and public speaking skills.

(available on AEA's website <http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/frank-glendenning-memorial-lectures.html> )

So for readers of the Digest this biography has much to commend it, as it charts the recent history of many of the initiatives and happenings we have experienced in the last 30 to 40 years. I am sure so many of us will be able to identify with events, happenings and achievements described and remember where we were at those times. Our lives will be intertwined with Eric's, but possibly not so vividly describable or amusingly recalled.

But there is so much more. The author of many books on sport – cricket and football – that have won awards not least among cricket aficionados; the author of publications about music hall, comedians, radio; an expert on Gilbert & Sullivan and even a writer of pantomimes.



There is a danger in glossing over some of the achievements in Eric's life by marvelling at the breadth of his life experiences. For this reviewer his first knowledge of Eric was as the mover and shaker of education in Liverpool that successfully engaged whole communities but ultimately fell foul of the political changes of direction UK governments are so fond of – particularly when it comes to education. Consumer education, transport – railways of course but not solely; and certainly not as a train spotter but an ardent and affective advocate for the traveller, hence his success in creating the London travel card.

Jeremy Hardie has produced a biography which does Eric justice. I can imagine him being a reluctant subject but responding enthusiastically and wholeheartedly once committed. Reading it made me laugh out loud frequently as Eric's use of humour and wit illustrate many stories and indicate the basic humanity of the man that produces huge respect and admiration but also much affection.

*Variety is the Spice of Life; The Worlds of Eric Midwinter by Jeremy Hardie is published by Third Age Press Ltd. 2015. £14.50 (available at <http://www.thirdagepress.co.uk> or by post from Third Age Press, 6 Parkside Gardens, London SW19 5EY.)*

*Fellow book worm Alex Withnall has been exercising her brain over what sounds like a very thorough study of **The Ageing Mind** by Patrick Rabbitt*

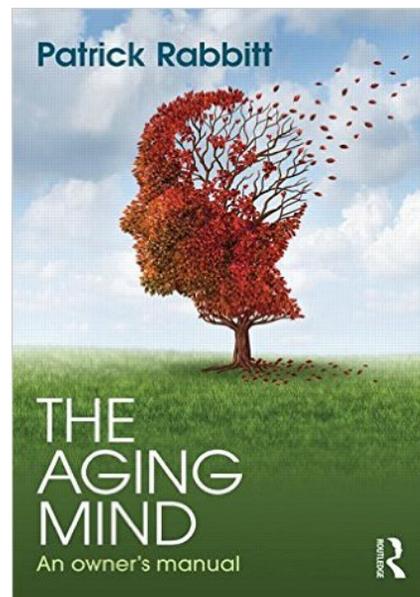
Emeritus Professor Patrick Rabbitt from the University of Manchester who describes himself as a cognitive gerontologist has been active in research on ageing for well on half a century. He is particularly well known for the work he and his team carried out in Manchester and Newcastle with 6500 volunteers over a 20 year period in order to investigate how age affects people's brains and thus their minds. In this book, he explains how he didn't want to produce just another text book but rather aims to have a 'conversation' with his own generation about the changes we all experience as we grow older, why these changes occur and what, if anything, we can do about them.

The result is not a particularly easy read - the book is still quite academic in approach - but I loved the personal perspective that informs the discussion throughout and helps to make some of the more complex ideas easier to understand. Drawing on his own and other recent research, the author introduces his topic in Part I by examining the phenomenon that is ageing, stressing the advantages of keeping healthy and mentally active. In Part II, he turns his attention to memory with a fascinating exploration of those topics that worry most of us as we age – how we remember (or not) to do things, forgetting what we've said to whom, being unable to recall words and names. There is also an interesting section on our early memories and how we remember what we have learnt. As many of us have long suspected, it becomes harder to retain new information as we grow older but it's good to have it confirmed that we can still learn well into very old age.

Part III examines how changes in sensory abilities affect cognition; I had not realised the extent to which changes in taste and smell can have an impact on the brain nor given much thought to the relationship between the risk of falls and cognitive losses. In Part IV, we move to a very topical exploration of intelligence, skills and wisdom. The chapter that discusses how far we can keep the skills we have learnt is particularly interesting for those of us interested in later life learning. Chess is used as an example of how people can maintain intellectual skills well into their fifties and sixties but there is emphasis on how our changing lives may impose new challenges that affect how we are able to function mentally. The importance of

continuing to practise and 'refurbish' the skills we have acquired over our lifetimes is seen as particularly important in offsetting any decline.

Part V explores some issues associated with living with ageing on a day-to-day basis such as depression and anxiety, speed of thought and paying attention as well as changes and variations in patterns of sleep, a topic which has been researched extensively in recent years; and that vexing question as to why time seems to pass much faster as we age. Here, the author makes interesting use of novelists' accounts of the subjective experience of time and of mind maps of space and time rather than just recounting psychological experiments.



I particularly liked the fact that in Part VI, the author brings his very wide exploration together by asking 'what can we do about all this'? He again emphasises the importance of improving any skill through sustained practice – something I and my fellow learners have come to realise in our attempts to become more proficient in Italian – but

is less convinced by current attempts to produce effective brain training programmes and memory improvement systems. He comes down in favour of the observable benefits of sustained exercise in youth and middle age and produces convincing evidence of the benefits of even moderate amounts of aerobic exercise in later life, something which has long been stressed by the medical profession.

This is a fascinating, erudite and very well referenced book that makes a very valuable contribution to the existing literature. What a pity that the print is rather small and the layout somewhat dense for the ageing eye. But this criticism apart, it is a fascinating read.

*Patrick Rabbitt (2015). The Aging Mind. An owner's manual. London and New York: Routledge. 253pp. £19.99*

## THEATRE

*In the last digest I reported on The Old Vic Community Company's audition workshops for their production of "Ages". The show was put on for twelve performances in late April and early May. I and some of my New Horizons students went along to see it.*

Just to give a brief recap, the intergenerational company of 50 was drawn from the London community and writer Alexandra Wood's play was inspired by stories and views of over 200 Londoners who attended the early research workshops.



The Old Vic Workrooms space, where I and some of my students had attended the audition workshops was transformed into a striking theatrical space with the raised acting area down the middle of

the room with the audience on either side – a staging which drew us right into the action.



**Olive and some of her new friends**

The play tells the story of Olive, a strong minded Bermondsey woman now in her eighties. Her children are trying to sell her house from under her. But the house is her home and has been for her whole adult life from the day she got married. On a trip to the supermarket, Olive makes new friends and takes them and us on a journey through her past from the end of the Second World War to the present. It is a journey full of friends, celebrations and lost loves – the story of growing up and growing old in London.

The show was, as I said, beautifully staged, very well directed and with really good production values. While not all the performances were of a professional level, several were and the director and production team did a splendid job in supporting and encouraging the largely non professional cast in achieving such a high standard. The show held our attention and while there were a few places where Ms Wood's play which didn't work for me – a sequence in the afterlife where Olive met her dead brothers being one and another, where her friends were for some odd reason in a boat being tempted by Sirens to give up on life and accept the inevitability of an inactive and useless old age – I was still impressed however with the way they were staged and performed.

I should also mention the contribution made by the London Community Gospel Choir – and not just because one of my New Horizons students was in it. The choir not only acted as a link between scenes but was also part of the story and their singing was magnificent.

*Looking back again to the Spring Digest, I also reported on the historical mini epic **The Glorious Georges at Kensington Palace** that I was staging at the palace itself with my New Horizons drama group. On the day of performance the cast really rose to the challenge of performing in front of what was a very appreciative audience. One of those in that audience was **Alex Withnall**.*

AEA's own Carol Allen is to be congratulated on what she achieved as the writer/director of this production that told the story of Kensington Palace and the Georges who reigned in the 18th

Century as well as their successors including the current royals. What made the production particularly unusual was that it was staged entirely by Carol's drama class from the New Horizons/Open Age activity centre for the over-50s which had been invited to put on the show by the palace itself.

Staged in the august surroundings of the Mrs Lyons Learning Room, the production played to a very enthusiastic audience who thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.



**Ray Shaw as Queen Anne**

In fact, members of the cast were all over 60 with the narrator, Ray Shaw as Queen Anne, being 94! With minimal props and most of the actors cleverly playing multiple roles, the production fairly romped along. Carol's script was both informative and witty in places and it was apparent how much the cast were enjoying themselves. Diction was very clear and movements smooth and very well-rehearsed – a back reference to the execution of Charles I was mimed in a way that was positively scary! Special mention might also be made of Peter Cairns, the only man in the cast, who made a very impressive German speaking George I.

With this production, Carol has demonstrated very clearly how it is possible to encourage seniors to have an

enjoyable learning experience through encouraging them to step outside their comfort zones and to engage in team work in a fun and enjoyable activity. I'm sure everyone in the audience was left eagerly anticipating her next production!

*Reviews now of some productions in the West End theatre from Carlie Newman.*

It's very unusual for me to recommend two musicals but my excuse is twofold, firstly that it is summer and we need some jollity and secondly that they are both absolutely super. I can't think of a jollier evening than to spend it at the Old Vic's production of *High Society*. Maria Friedman has directed a show that not only has beautifully sung songs and really good acting but also the loveliest of frocks currently on show in any musical in London. The Cole Porter musical – most memorable for its 1956 film version with Bing Crosby, Grace Kelly and Frank Sinatra – is itself based on Philip Barry's *The Philadelphia Story*.



We find ourselves on Long Island where Tracy Lord (Kate Fleetwood) is about to marry boring George Kettredge (Richard Grieve). Out of the blue C K Dexter Haven (Rupert Young), Tracy's first husband, appears at her home and proceeds to disrupt proceedings. He still

likes to drink, but professes love for Tracy, who realises that George is perhaps not the right one for her, as she dances and drinks and swims naked with Mike Connor (Jamie Parker, one half of a pair of gate-crashing journalists who spy on the proceedings) and re-captures some of the magic she first shared with Dexter.

Lovely songs including *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *True Love*, *Let's Misbehave* and, of course, *High Society* are performed with style and gusto. In fact, *Let's Misbehave* which opens the second Act, is performed by the musician and singer Joe Stilgoe on one piano and the musical director Theo Jamieson on the other – although to be absolutely accurate the two move between the two pianos in a most exhilarating manner. There is also a tap dancer (Omari Douglas) who performs on the top of a piano in a most exciting way.

All the choreography is most competently executed, especially when you consider that the staging is in the round and so set pieces are particularly difficult and are, of necessity, circular.

Kate Fleetwood shows that she is not only a fine actress – she captures the snobbery as well as the delightful drunken behaviour of Tracy in a very natural manner - but she also has a great singing voice. As do Jamie Parker and Rupert Young. Lovely characterisations from Ellie Bamber as Tracy's younger sister and Jeff Rawle as Uncle Willie show just what a good cast can achieve with a lovely musical under good direction.

Very highly recommended.

It was one of my favourite musicals last year and I was absolutely delighted to learn that the Chichester Festival

Theatre's production of *Gypsy* was coming to the Savoy Theatre in London. Well, it is now here and, if anything, even better in the smaller proscenium theatre than on the bigger apron stage at Chichester. The musical is a delight in itself and with the talents of composer Jule Styne, book by Arthur Laurents and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and the performance of Imelda Staunton as the extremely ambitious mother of two girls in show business, it is definitely one to see.



Momma Rose is a character of such immense power that she threatens to dominate the play – actually in the person of Staunton she does but that is not to say that the other characters disappear. While it is June (Gemma Sutton) whom Rose pushes, it is in fact Louise (Lara Pulver) who becomes a world-wide success as the lady-like

stripper, Louise. With the change of venue, Peter Davison has taken over the role of Herbie, the girls' manager, who really loves Rose but is pushed aside when her daughters' careers are being pursued. He is a sympathetic character who works well with the more abrasive Mamma Rose. I think Lara Pulver is stronger here than in Chichester: She is more confident in the part and this gives her a certain aura once she becomes the star of striptease. Pulver develops her character nicely and there is good support all round, particularly the lively chorus who produce a variety of styles, which are all beautifully executed.

Staunton, however, is the real star of the show and well deserves all the praise heaped on her performance. Not only can she act to show the pathos behind the mother's seeming strength but she puts across the well-known songs so that they are always meaningful as well as tuneful. What strikes me is Imelda Staunton's ability to remain in character; she doesn't 'perform' the songs as much as inhabit them as Momma Rose

If I gave stars – out of five - I would give six for this wonderful show! When can I see it again?

*High Society is at the Old Vic until 22 August 2015. Box office: 0844 871 7628)*

*Gypsy at the Savoy has just been extended to 28 November . Box office: 0844 871 3046*

## CINEMA

*News from Carol Allen of some new and upcoming films on the cinema screen.*

Maybe it's to do with people living longer, including older actors, who are still working, but there are many more

films today dealing with stories about older people than there were when I first started this column over ten years ago.

*Ruth and Alex*, played by Diane Keaton and Morgan Freeman, have lived in the

same charming and homely Brooklyn apartment for some 40 years. But now they are older, the fact that their beloved apartment is five floors up is beginning to be an issue. So they decide to think about relocating – which brings them into the modern world of the New York property market, where things are a lot more ruthless and cutthroat than they were 40 years ago.



The film will ring a lot of bells with Londoners and people in other areas of the UK where property prices have gone off the charts. The film gets some nice comedy out of both the estate agent, desperate to make a sale (Cynthia Nixon) and the “open house” system, where a load of strangers/possible buyers invade your home making snide comments about the decor.

Keaton and Freeman are convincing as an affectionate couple with a long history together in a happy union contracted in an era when mixed race marriages were frowned on. The actors are very comfortable together. Ruth and Alex are childless and devoted to their dog, whose illness in the course of the story adds to their stress. The apartment, where artist Alex has painted for all those years, is charming with a lovely roof garden – I’m beginning to sound like an estate agent here! – but the film makes its point that where you spend your life is your home, filled with the

memories that make that life and not just a piece of real estate and an investment. As Alex says wryly at one point: “This room where I painted my life’s work is worth more than the work I created in it.”

In *45 Years* Kate (Charlotte Rampling) and Geoff (Tom Courtenay) are a couple living in serene country retirement and about to celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary. Then Geoff receives news that the body has been found of his former girlfriend, who was killed in an accident when they were on holiday in the Swiss Alps in 1962. As the week towards their anniversary party proceeds, Geoff becomes increasingly preoccupied with his memories of Katya and Kate becomes obsessively jealous of her long dead rival.



This is something of a chamber piece, focussing almost entirely on the two central characters with Geraldine James as Kate’s close friend and confidante. The director’s attention is though primarily on Kate and her growing unease over the re-emergence of Katya in her husband’s life – a situation which for her threatens to negate the 45 years they have shared. Rampling, cool and self possessed as she is initially, makes her quite scary in her growing jealousy. Courtenay though seizes his moments, in his moving recollections of his relationship with Katya and particularly

in the speech he makes at the wedding anniversary party towards the end of the film.

The writing is full of telling and poignant detail and writer/director Andrew Haigh, who made the sensitive gay love story *Weekend*, here shows again his feeling for the nuances of relationships. Superb performances from the two leads and it is good both to see these two veteran actors in a story in which they are centre screen rather than relegated to the supporting roles so often given to older actors and to have a story about a mature relationship handled with such sensitivity and depth by a young writer/director.

*Mr Holmes* is a very different take on the Sherlock Holmes myth, in that it imagines the great detective as a real life figure, now a difficult and bad tempered old man living in rural retirement in post war England, where he is tending his bee hives and railing tetchily against the vulgar fictionalization of his work by the long dead Dr Watson. He lives alone apart from his housekeeper Mrs. Munro (Laura Linney) and her little boy Roger (Milo Parker).

Now 93 he is still troubled by his failure to solve his very last case some thirty years earlier, which involved the disappearance of an enigmatic young married woman Ann Kelmot (Hattie Morahan). As he struggles to remember the details of the case and to write down the true facts, as opposed to what he contemptuously terms Watson's "penny dreadfuls with an elevated prose style," he and we realise he is in the early stages of dementia.

It is an intriguing story with an interesting and original view of this oft interpreted character. McKellen, in real life a fit 76 year old, convincingly plays

the middle aged and still vigorous Sherlock in flashback, working on that case whose outcome led to his retirement. Despite the luminous Ms Morahan though these flashbacks are the less absorbing aspects of the film. It is in the film's present time that we are totally gripped, where McKellen is disturbingly and brilliantly convincing in his portrayal of the fearful frailty and yes, ugliness of old age, in his fear of losing both his memory and the deductive powers that have always defined him and still fretting over that one failure.



The real heart of the film is his relationship with the widowed Mrs. Munro and her son. Fiercely protective of her son, she is very much a product of war time deprivation and post war austerity and Linney brings the character's history with her in every gesture and expression. Parker proves to be another of those remarkable children who are totally natural on screen. Roger is a lively, curious and outspoken child, eager to connect, in contrast to Sherlock, a man with a lifelong lack of empathy for relationships. That, it is suggested, is why he was unable to solve that last case. But it is through the boy's persistent efforts to engage the old man as a surrogate father figure that Sherlock finally finds his humanity and the ability to connect with another human being, making this ultimately a touching but

totally unsentimental story of redemption.

Al Pacino was seen on screen a few weeks ago as the charming, selfish but likeably self mocking ageing rock star *Danny Collins*. If you missed it, it's worth catching up with on DVD. It is very entertaining. In *Manglehorn* he is playing the very different role of the reclusive small town locksmith of the title, living alone with his cat and stuck in the past, most particularly the love of his life Clara, from whose loss he has never recovered.



This is very much a character study of a film for which you need an actor who can create a not always likeable man, who will hold your attention – and Pacino is of course such an actor with his world weary eyes and richly rusty, husky voice reading the letters he has written to Clara over the years, which have been returned to sender. The character intrigues, we want to learn more about him. And as he moves about the narrow confines of his life we do. There's his difficult relationship with his son Jacob (Chris Messina), whose mother, he cruelly claims, he never loved. And there's his friendship with kindhearted Dawn (Holly Hunter), who works in the local bank and who would obviously be happy for that friendship to blossom into something more – but he's so obsessed with his memories of Clara, he just can't respond to intimacy. You begin to wonder, just how perfect was that relationship with Clara? And when he is eventually forced into confrontation with both Jacob and Dawn in two blisteringly moving scenes, he can't cope.

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