



The Association for  
Education & Ageing

# AEA DIGEST

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AEA Chair Jo Walker with Nat Lievesley of the Centre for Policy on Ageing, who kindly hosted our temporary website for us, while our present one was being designed and built. Our thanks to Nat and to CPA director Gillian Crosby.

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

*Jo Walker*

Dear friends,

I have just returned from the British Society of Gerontology annual conference, *Culture, Diversity and Ageing*, which sadly did not contain much input on learning but was good for networking within social gerontology and keeping up with the news – such as the merger of Age Concern and Help the Aged, two major British NGOs – and the much deserved award of the Alan Walker prize to Tessa Harding for her pioneering policy work on ageing.

AEA members contributed at the Paris meeting of the International Association of Gerontology and other major conferences over the summer. Do let us know of your conference involvements – whether attending or presenting. It's always interesting to know where learning in later life is represented.

As mentioned in the previous issue of Digest, the Association is in the final months of its funding from the Esme Fairbairn Foundation and has been looking to the future. We have not been successful in our application to the new UK Government 'Transformation Fund' for informal adult learning and must now try other avenues. On the European front, projects and networks to do with adult learning abound and we are communicating with those with whom

we share interests in older learners with the aim of forming alliances and avoiding unhelpful overlaps.

Our top priority has recently become the re-launch of the Association's journal, to be rebranded as the *International Journal of Education and Ageing*. An editorial team has been set up comprising Editors: Franz Kolland, Vienna University; Keith Percy, Lancaster University; Jim Soulsby, AEA; Associate Editors: John Benyon, Leicester University; Jo Walker, AEA. Editorial Assistants: Isobel Woodliffe, Leicester; Sasha Anderson (currently based in Australia).

Progress is being made in forming an international editorial board, designing publicity and marketing and inviting initial contributions for the first Volume, which we hope will be available from Spring 2010. If you would like to be involved in any way, for instance as a contributor, peer reviewer of articles, book reviewer or could help distribute publicity, do get in touch with Jim Soulsby or myself. Instructions for authors and outline contents will be posted on our website as soon as these are available. We are very grateful to three donors (who wish to remain anonymous) for gifts that have enabled us to develop the Journal and fund its initial production as we canvass subscriptions.

## NEWS ITEMS

Congratulations to **Professor Brian Groombridge**, who has been invited by **The International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame** in

the United States to be inducted into their Class of 2009. The induction ceremony is being hosted by the Association for Continuing Higher

Education and will be held on 17<sup>th</sup> November in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the Sheraton Society Hill Hotel. The honour, Brian tells me, is “in principle, though not in glamour status, something like an Oscar or a BAFTA in that it is bestowed by other members of the same profession.” And though he doubts that he will be able to make the journey to Philadelphia, he will be receiving a plaque to mark the occasion.



**Professor Brian Groombridge**

According to their website The International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, which is based at the University of Oklahoma's Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education, was created “not only to honor leaders in the fields of continuing education and adult learning but to serve as a record and inspiration for the next generation of continuing education leaders. Election to the Hall of Fame acknowledges that these men and women have made distinguished contributions to the field of adult and continuing education. Each has provided a crucial nexus between resources and learners.”

“These innovative leaders have believed passionately in the evolutionary power of education. All are themselves exemplary lifelong learners and have left lasting impressions on the students, institutions and organizations they have served.”

All of which describes our Professor Groombridge pretty well, I'd say!

More information on the awards can be found on the Hall of Fame website:

<http://www.halloffame.outreach.ou.edu/index.html>

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***Older Learners' Day***, now in its third year, was held on 1<sup>st</sup> October. The aim of the event is to celebrate the role that older people play in our society; to promote a positive view of later life and to provide an opportunity for generations to get together and interact. Events took place all over the country.

**Newcastle upon Tyne Elders Council**, which is a corporate member of AEA, held a special day in their popular series of Older and Wiser Days but then went the whole hog and mounted a week long Older Persons' Festival, with drama sketches, dancing, tai chi, sport, music, painting and craftwork exhibitions and many other activities.

The charities Live Music Now and Musicians Benevolent Fund marked the day with a their “**Adopt-a-Musician**” appeal for an intergenerational project in which the charities ‘adopt’ gifted young performers to play for older people in venues such as residential care homes, day centres and other settings. .



**Richard McLaughlin (LMN) and Simon Callow with musicians Jose Luis Gayo, Daniela Lehner and David Sulkin (MBF)**

LMN Ambassador, the actor, writer and director, Simon Callow says:

“It’s deeply moving that so many of the performers are eager to do this. The fact is that they find it moving themselves, especially when they’re playing for retired musicians, people for whom music and performance have been a driving force and who are now cut off from the joy and inspiration of live music.”

Further details of Adopt a Musician on [http://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/adopta\\_musician.htm](http://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/adopta_musician.htm)

The ever busy Brian Groombridge was one of the speakers at the **Bolder and Wiser conference on Older people and Culture** held on 1<sup>st</sup> October. It was organised by Audiences London, whose overall raison d’être is to “increase understanding of and develop creative approaches to audience and visitor needs.” The brief of the conference was to explore what an ageing population means to cultural organisations and how engaging with older audiences can be inspirational or as Brian describes it “engaging with older people not just for marketing purposes but also creatively.” Brian will be following up the conclusions of the conference in the next edition of the digest and meanwhile you can find further information on

<http://www.audienceslondon.org/1286/symposia/bolder-and-wiser-older-people-and-culture.html>

Older Learner’s Day also marked the launch of NIACE’s interim report and consultation document on “**Enhancing Informal Adult Learning for Older People in Care Settings**” authored by Fiona Aldridge. Fiona has started a discussion group on the topic in which you can take part at: <http://thelearningrevolution.ning.com/group/olderpeople/forum/topic/show?id=3348376%3ATopic%3A3267> Some very interesting contributions have been posted so far and at time of writing the group has 379 members. You can also download the report from that site. Meanwhile Jim Soulsby gives a round up other recently published policy papers on page 6.

And finally the Times newspaper chose 1<sup>st</sup> October to promote this year’s **Active Life Award**, which is designed as a celebration of old age and an encouragement to the thousands of older people who choose to keep working after pensionable age, either as volunteers or for charitable causes that benefit others. Nominations are invited from anybody aged over 18 who knows of somebody over 70 whose life and continuing achievements are an inspiration to others. A panel of judges will assess the nominations, and the winner will be invited to tell our readers why in these ageist times old age can be a period of the greatest and sometimes most inspiring, achievement. Nominations should be sent to [activelife@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:activelife@thetimes.co.uk) and you can read the full story at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6856021.ece#>

## HELP WANTED – URGENT APPEAL!

*Due to the expansion of AEA and of her other activities, which now include teaching an over 50s drama class, your secretary/digest editor/website manager is now suffering from a serious work overload and needs some help please! Where I desperately need some assistance is in the administration of our now considerably larger membership – chasing and collecting subscriptions, keeping membership records up to date and taking and writing up the minutes of the EC meetings. I reckon I can just about press on until the end of the year, when I would hope to have a fully up to date membership list to pass on but after that, unless I can share the load, I'm in danger of going up in smoke!*

*Any offers would be gratefully received by Carol at [aeasecretary@googlemail.com](mailto:aeasecretary@googlemail.com) Terms and conditions to be agreed.*

### *Membership News*

Our best wishes to **Doctor Alex Withnall** and **Professor Keith Percy**, who have both just retired, Alex from her position as Associate Professor in Lifelong Learning and Health at Warwick Medical School and Keith from his post as Director of the School of Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation at Lancaster University. Not that either of them is likely to be “putting their feet up”, as the saying goes. The day after she officially retired, Alex was appointed to a new Honorary post as Associate Fellow in the Centre for Lifelong Learning, also at Warwick University. She has also

found time to write her regular book review for the digest (page 18) and is a very active member of our Executive Committee. So too is Keith, who is also one of the trio of editors on our forthcoming journal and is very busy helping to get that off the ground.

Welcome to new members who have joined recently:

Norma Raynes; Val Bissland, who gave a paper at this year's conference; Claire Surr and to corporate organisation member Age Concern Coventry.

## FEATURES

**BIS** | Department for Business  
Innovation & Skills

**niace**  
promoting adult learning

*There has been a plethora of **policy documents** published this year both by the government and by NIACE. Some of them you will have read about in previous issues of the digest or on the news pages of our website [http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/news\\_views.html](http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/news_views.html) AEA Development Coordinator **Jim Soulsby** rounds up of some of the most recent papers and the issues they have been dealing with.*

Three years ago NIACE embarked on its enquiry into the future of lifelong learning, fuelled by concern at the drastically reducing numbers of adults engaged in formal adult education. Now NIACE has produced its ‘definitive’ report on the future of lifelong learning in the UK. The report ***Learning through Life*** was launched on 17th September 2009 and copies are available to purchase from NIACE. <http://shop.niace.org.uk/>

John Denham the previous Secretary of State at DIUS launched his own consultation into the role of informal learning. This might have lessened the impact of NIACE’s enquiry or may have

been stimulated by it. However the emphasis on ‘informal learning’ - not allowing for any comment on the way formal learning has been delivered recently – only shows us part of the lifelong learning landscape. Nevertheless that perspective is important and the Government’s White Paper on the future of informal learning ***The Learning Revolution*** (reported on previously – see website), published in the spring of 2009, showed just how much learning does take place in and around our communities. The Government wishes us to celebrate that learning and offered a £20 million Transformation fund to stimulate new opportunities. One of the first mentions of this fund was at the AEA’s international conference in Lancaster in April of this year and among the first beneficiaries of the fund are Lancaster University with the local University of the Third Age. We look forward to hearing how their project progresses.

The white paper also proposed work to create better learning opportunities for older people in care settings and the Association has been invited to contribute to the project steering group. We have also been invited to contribute to the Third Sector Forum also proposed in the white paper. Its first meeting in late September was tasked to ‘champion informal adult learning, develop new approaches and partnerships, and widen participation.’

In the rapidly changing world of older people and education policy the NIACE

policy paper – *Older People’s Learning: an action plan* - brings together coherently the main issues and constraints around learning in later life. The paper written by Professor Stephen McNair has an action plan embracing the need for a lead role for local authorities, the development of a national ‘curriculum framework’, retirement preparation, learning for work and learning in care settings. This report is also available to purchase from NIACE.

July 2009 saw the publication of another important consultation document from the government concerning older people. *Building a society for all ages* is the long awaited follow-up to *Opportunity Age* published 4 years ago. This is a well presented paper offering some interesting new actions: -

- The development of one stop shops to help older people plan ahead
- Action 60 intended to encourage older people to be more active
- A Families and Relationships Green Paper and an examination of the role of grandparents
- A re-examination of the default retirement age of 65 with a thought that this might be raised to age 70.
- A Care and Support Green Paper looking at the future of social care and support
- A new UK Advisory Forum on Ageing
- A Generations Together programme to fund 12 intergenerational projects
- Refresher driving lessons

The consultation paper refers to *The Learning Revolution* and the actions to improve and increase informal learning

opportunities for older people and for those in care settings.

At a time when many of us are striving to ‘prove’ and cost the benefits of learning in later life, the paper notes the cost savings that healthier, more active later lives could bring in terms of reduction in the costs of health care, social care, pensions and benefits. “It has recently been estimated that improving healthy life expectancy by just one year each decade could generate a 14 per cent saving in spending on health care and an 11 per cent saving in spending on benefits between 2007 and 2025”.

For many of us in recent years our strategy has been to try to mainstream later life learning into wider government policy concerning older people. In this way learning becomes seen as an integral element in improving health, well being and engagement in later life. It should also open up other funding streams for later life learning. It is this collaborative approach that the Government is seeking. An enhanced role is envisaged for local authorities but having spoken to some of those with a responsibility for older people’s services and quality of life, there may be a very long way to go before anything like this is achieved.

Nevertheless this is a vital document which poses a series of questions for which responses are being sought by 12th October. The association will be making its own response, which will be available on our web site in due course.



**OU Chancellor Lord Puttnam congratulates Paul Joseph on his success**

*An absolute star in the older learner field is **Paul Joseph**, who acted for several years as AEA treasurer. Now 79, he is involved with many older people's groups, usually as treasurer - I think it was six at the last count. He helps out in a local primary school giving a spot of maths tuition and on a personal level, I've lost count of the number of grandchildren he now has! But somehow he has also managed to fit into this busy life studying for his BA (Hons) in Business Studies at the Open University. And having achieved that, he's now hoping to go on and study for his Masters. Paul writes here about his*

*experiences **Studying at the Open University.***

It is now 2009 and at 79 years old, I have done it. From 2002, when with trepidation I began my degree course, which seemed at that time an insurmountable mountain to climb, it had been a steady unrelenting routine of "burning the midnight oil".

What an exhilarating feeling it was, when on 1st May, 2009 at the Barbican in the City of London, I stepped up to receive my Open University degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business



Studies from Lord Puttnam, of Queensgate, OBE, the Chancellor of the University.

The seed which launched me on this 'adult learning odyssey', was planted in my mind by Jim Soulsby after an AEA meeting. He assured me that, in spite of my misgivings about embarking on such a challenging mental pursuit at my age, benefits would accrue. Even so, many times in the course of my studies, I felt that my 'past its sell by date' brain could no longer be coaxed to analyse, sift and store the complex theories, concepts and models, which wriggled out of the text books, tutorials and websites recommended to us by our tutors. While sitting in tutorials with eager enthusiastic peers almost half my age was very embarrassing and definitely not my idea of a "fulfilling pastime".

But the OU was very supportive. Once I enrolled, they injected me with upbeat assurance and optimism. They also kept me alert and productive, coaxing me to finish the course, continuously feeding me copious notes, lessons, DVDs and course guides both in print and online, not to mention assignments which had to be delivered to deadlines. They also gave out notes on mental and physical exercises which, believe me, improved my study skills, calmed my nerves and left me with a positive outlook. The scores of learning aids like *Suggestions to Improve Concentration & Control Panic*, *How to Revise* and *Examination Strategy* and helpful notes on the meaning of the sort of words and phrases, such as "analyse, compare, define and comment" that one

encounters in questions, prepared me well for the exam hurdles at each stage of the course.

There is plenty of interaction among students, who log on as Study Buddies on the First Class Conferencing site at each stage of the course. The fact that I could share my anxieties and problems with my peers and the tutor was definitely a boost to my confidence and morale.

Moreover the local regional Students' Associations organised social evenings and study groups, which made me appreciate that younger students too had difficulty with certain areas of their study course. Not to forget the annual student conferences, where one socialised and exchanged ideas, tips and examination strategies.

University of Oxford scientists say that adults may find learning more difficult than children because their brains store memories differently. A study in the journal *Neuron* looked at nerve cell activity, which is the basis of learning and memory. Experts agree that younger brains may learn things more easily but older brains may store information more efficiently. So though old dogs may find really find it hard to learn new tricks, it is nevertheless never too late to get back to one's books

I conclude with a quote from CALL, the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning, "We believe that affordable access to the life changing opportunities provided by education is the hallmark of a civilised society".

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

**Patrons:** Baroness Sally Greengross, Mr Derek Legge, Professor Arthur Stock, Professor Brian Groombridge

**President:** Professor David James

**Chair:** Jo Walker, [jo\\_walker26@hotmail.com](mailto:jo_walker26@hotmail.com) Tel: 01483 484909

**Secretary/Digest editor:** Carol Allen, 132 Dawes Rd, London SW6 7EF [aeasecretary@googlemail.com](mailto:aeasecretary@googlemail.com)  
Tel: 020 7385 4641

**Treasurer:** Ron Speight [ronspeight2003@yahoo.com](mailto:ronspeight2003@yahoo.com)

**Development Office:** Jim Soulsby [jim.soulsby@btinternet.com](mailto:jim.soulsby@btinternet.com)

**Elected members:**, David Crossan, Mervyn Eastman, Trish Hafford-Letchfield, Jonathan Hughes, Anne Jamieson, Carlie Newman, Keith Percy, Glenys Tuersley, Dr Alex Withnall

*Making a Will is something we're often reluctant to think about for understandable reasons. But it's something that every adult of any age should do, even though it will hopefully not be needed for many years.*

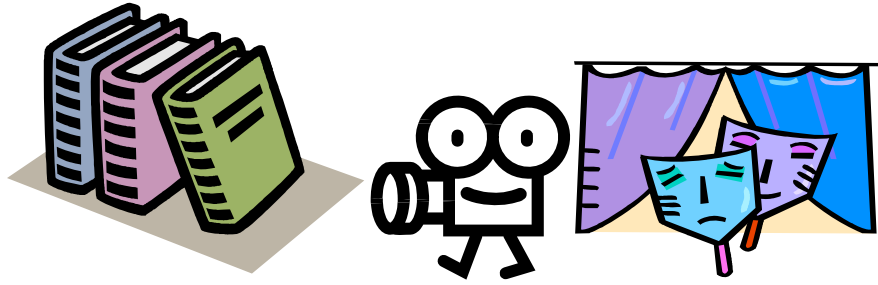
It is particularly important for people with young children and for unmarried couples or step-families. In a recent survey, the consumer organisation Which? found that more than half of those they polled did not have a will and that three-quarters didn't realise that if both parents were to die, failure to appoint guardians for their children could result in the courts having a say in their future and they could be raised by someone the parents wouldn't have chosen.

“Which” has recently updated its publication *Wills and Probate* in the light of current legislation. It is impressively comprehensive and easy to read, covering all the angles from what to include to how to draft the document clearly and without ambiguities, what other pitfalls to avoid, how to make amendments, the implications of Inheritance Tax and legal ways of saving

on it and applying for probate. The received wisdom in this matter is to employ a solicitor to draw up your will, though even then it's as well to be clear on what exactly is involved. And if you wish to do the whole thing yourself, this helpful little book also gives you guidance on writing your own will, if your wishes are reasonably straightforward.



*The Which? Guide to Wills and Probate is available from bookshops and online at <http://www.which.co.uk/books-and-magazines/books/finance/wills-and-probate/index.jsp>, priced at £10.99*



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

*"Morris: A Life With Bells On" is a little British film with a huge potential audience. And the reason why the film is getting seen, Carol Allen tells us, is because that potential audience, many of them older cinemagoers, demanded the right to see it.*



I first heard of *Morris* back in February, via an e-mail from a friend directing my attention to "a small, but super cast film "Morris: A Life with Bells On", which looks like "Strictly Ballroom" but with Morris men and is only being shown in village halls, as it does not have a distributor." The village halls in question are on a circuit run by an organisation called Movieola, who take films around to various parts of the UK but mainly the West country, where there is a dearth of cinemas.

As a result of the buzz caused by these screenings, which were packed, sometimes at five shows a day, a petition appeared on the internet demanding that this delightful British film get a wider showing. Word got around and into the press and distributors, who'd previously rejected the film on the grounds that "no-one wants to see a film about Morris dancers" were starting to show interest. But they were too late. The couple behind the film, Lucy Akhurst (director/producer) and her husband Charles (Chaz) Thomas Oldham (writer/producer), who also plays the lead in the movie, weren't going to be messed around any more. Having raised the finance for the film themselves and responding to public demand and interest from independent cinemas as opposed to the big chains, they decided to distribute it themselves too.

The film itself is a charming and comic celebration of English eccentricity and individuality in the tradition of *Calendar Girls* and *The Full Monty*. Made as a mock doc, it's the story of Morris dancer Deryck Twist (Oldham), who falls foul of the all powerful Morris Circle, the governing body of Morris dance in England led by the sinisterly urbane Quentin Neely (Derek Jacobi). Stripped

of his bells, hankies and staff, Deryck attempts to form an alternative Morris group, but a tragedy forces him to find pastures new. He goes to California, where he takes up with the seriously camp Morris men of Orange County and finds success and true love in the shape of Sonja (Naomi Harris) - though that's not the end of the story. It's a delightful, gentle satire on people and their obsessions, made in an age where much of our humour is cruel and cynical. And that, believes Lucy Akhurst, is why the demand is there.

"There is a huge market, which is being ignored, many of them older cinemagoers, of people who want to go to the cinema but there's nothing on that they want to see, because the distributors are only interested in catering to the 16-24 age group with what my friend Liz describes as 'films with people pointing guns sideways before splattering someone's brains across a window to a funky soundtrack.'" We're catering for an audience, who want to be entertained and drawn in to the characters and story".

Although Oldham is gently taking the mickey out of the fanatical Morris dance troupe in the idyllic English village where much of the film is set, the mock doc style does give the film a certain sense of authenticity. But although there were some Morris experts on hand to advise, Oldham is quick to point out that the extremes of the film, like the repressive Morris Circle, run from a skyscraper in the city; the eccentric dance titles such as *Jimmy Hands a Clappie* and the overseas offshoots, including the Maurice of France and the aforesaid Morris Men of Orange County are all total fiction.



**The Morris Men of Orange County strutting their stuff**

There is though a basis of fact behind the film, in that when Oldham was a teenager he spent some time living with a family, who were keen Morris fans and held hankie and bells sessions at their barbecue parties. "I was the only one who thought it was funny", he remembers. "I wasn't a film maker then but something in me must have seen the comic possibilities for an affectionate parody, which is what we're doing here."

The film was shot entirely in England with Poole beach standing in for California, locals joining in as extras for a cup of tea, a bun and the fun of it and a lot more creative improvisation to make their little bit of money go a long way.

*Morris* is currently being shown at independent cinemas at various dates throughout the UK. To find out where it's on near you, go to [www.morrismovie.com](http://www.morrismovie.com), click on "Where can I see the film" and then click on your area on the map. Or you could of course look at the film listings in your local newspaper.

When AEA member **Jackie Richards** retired just over a year ago from her full time job with City and Guilds, she looked forward to a retirement in which work would be pursued for interest and how worthwhile it was, whether it were paid or voluntary. It was, as Jackie describes it, something like a second adolescence in terms of the unknown opportunities ahead but with the advantage this time of “experience, confidence, more understanding of what I want and value in life. I am also calmer, more patient and outrageous. And I have a husband!” She writes here about one of her retirement activities - being a **Film Extra**.

Working as a film “support artiste”, as some prefer to be called, was something I enjoyed as a student forty years ago. Then it was unionised, well paid and the industry was small. Nowadays it is unregulated. There are websites giving opportunities for all to display their talents and apply for work in feature films, TV productions, videos and modeling. Work ranges from unpaid, expenses only and minimum-wage to the better paid jobs, which require experience and a reputable agent. Many more films are produced these days in terms of all those media-studies students making movies as part of their courses plus the demands for multi-media software, the internet and the extra TV channels which have sprouted in recent years..

This year, I have been in four films playing an aged-hippy at a rally and a bar mitzvah party guest, (*The Infidel*); a bingo player, (*A Cure for Hiccups*); a passerby in a street scene (*Blitz*); and a Camden intellectual drinking by Camden lock in *Streetdance- the Movie*, which is

the first British 3D feature film. All these films should be out in 2010.



**Jackie’s publicity pic – the one that gets her work!**

So why do I do it? Being a film extra is not glamorous work. It can be boring with lots of hanging around. The pay is not brilliant (so far!), and after a long day, I return home shattered. However, film sets are vibrant, creative environments giving you a chance to enter a different reality, dress up and see famous people. Not that I’m that bothered but I have recently seen David Baddiel, Omid Djalilli, Aiden Gillen and Jason Statham and, when I was younger, Sidney Poitier, Richard Attenborough, Rod Steiger and Anna Calder- Marshall. Then there is the buzz and excitement. Being a film extra is a chance to step back from ordinary life. Just for a change let others work hard, take responsibility and make decisions! As an extra, all I do is watch, listen and do as I am told; sometimes act and repeat actions consistently. Whilst waiting, there is time for thinking, for just “being” and giving your brain a rest. This too can be a challenge.

I have also met some really interesting and talented people. Extras and film crew staff tend to be individualistic; many of them are singers, artists, dancers and actors, as well as people

who have recently been made redundant and are victims of the credit crunch. I have enjoyed meeting performance artists, who prefer extra work to bar or cleaning jobs whilst “resting”; a 40 year old DJ with green and yellow feathers and plastic streamers adorning his hair, who had returned from a week-long gig in Turkey and was very serious about the state of the world and the need to encourage happiness; a chauffeur who has driven film stars around the world for some 30 years; men who’ve made a career out of playing policemen in films; a very softly spoken young male dance teacher, who was privately educated in Jamaica and found the change staggering when he came to London as a teenager; a wealthy person of independent means who enjoys the odd day on a film set; students who are supplementing their income and of course several professional actors who “don’t usually do extra work.”

One of the other pluses is the enjoyment I get out of being with young, optimistic people. I miss the day-to-day contact I had with my young work colleagues, whom I managed and encouraged. So I appreciate being part of an intergenerational group again, listening to others’ perspectives and dreams, joining their conversations, as well as laughing and moaning together. I felt at home as soon as I got back on the set - after all I was dressed as a hippy! It was as if I had never been away and I look forward to further opportunities, perhaps one day playing a monster or a sad passerby with bags and an umbrella.

Last week I was called to a casting for a TV comedy pilot. When I arrived I was given a script and had some lines to say. They expected me to improvise – Wow!

I was way out my comfort zone but it was fun. Now I am waiting to hear whether I will be called for the forthcoming shoot.

*If this has whetted your appetite, visit [www.StarNow.co.uk](http://www.StarNow.co.uk) No experience needed and with the demographic change there might be increasing demand for older people in films UK wide and internationally.*

*When not a film extra, Jackie is enjoying a non-bureaucratic life as a freelance consultant specialising in older peoples' choices, intergenerational learning, awarding and assessment and she is a coach-mentor. She has recently initiated the setting up of a diverse intergenerational choir to encourage neighbourliness in Tottenham. And in the next digest, she will be writing about her return to ballet and creative dance.*



*The EAC Art Awards have come round again and we have been featuring the scheme for several weeks on our website. Created to celebrate and promote the artistic talents of older people, this awards scheme for Over 60s offers amateur artists the chance to exhibit their work at the Bankside Gallery in London, next to Tate Modern..*

The awards have been running for over a decade and with every year have grown in quality and strength, uncovering a wealth of talented artists over the age of 60. Many entrants have come to making art later in life, often finding more time for creative pursuits in retirement. Others adopt art as a therapeutic activity which becomes increasingly important to them.

This exhibition creates a wealth of interesting stories and touches the hearts of all who participate, both in the competition and visiting the exhibition. Art Awards is not about winning and losing, though artists do like to have their work exhibited in a London gallery and win prizes. But the real joy of Art Awards is the unique opportunity it creates for older people to demonstrate their continuing capacity to be purposeful and involved, and to enjoy the collaborative venture of entering a national competition.



Golden Memories – watercolour by Carol Bowler age 65

Entries for the 2009 exhibition are invited from all amateur artists and can be in any medium – oils, pastels, watercolours, pencil, collage,

needlework – as well as 3D work and photography. Initial entry is by photograph or photocopy of the original work or by digital image which can be submitted through the new online entry system at <http://eacartawards.org.uk>. Artists can send in more than one work for consideration and discounts are offered for multiple entries from groups and individuals.

**The closing date for entries is 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009.** For further information regarding EAC Over 60s Art Awards 2009, and how to enter, visit: <http://eacartawards.org.uk/>. OR, send a stamped addressed envelope to: Art Awards c/o Parker Harris Partnership, 15 Church Street, Esher, Surrey, KT10 8QS.

*News from the Royal Shakespeare Company of a new play, **A Tender Thing**. It is based on **Romeo and Juliet** but the lovers here are in their seventies.*

Writer Ben Power has woven the text of Shakespeare’s play into a new and contemporary two hander about a much older couple. It is a play which tells what he describes as “an elegiac yet ultimately hopeful account of the depth and power of the human capacity for love.”

‘It arose from a discussion with Michael Boyd (RSC Artistic Director) about how we might make the poetry of *Romeo and Juliet* available for older performers’, says Power. “I was fascinated to see if it was possible to investigate a very different kind of relationship, a different kind of love, using the words that Shakespeare gave to his teenage protagonists.”

“I wanted to challenge some of the assumptions we make about older people, particularly in terms of their romantic lives, whilst at the same time making the case that what Shakespeare has written is universal, transcending the specific circumstances of the original play.”

The play premieres at Northern Stage and is part of the RSC’s annual residency in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It runs from 29th October to 7th November and will hopefully be revived next year at the RSC’s Stratford upon Avon home and possibly seen at other venues.



Actors Kathryn Hunter as Juliet and Forbes Masson as Romeo in rehearsal

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## REVIEWS

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*More theatre news from Carlie Newman, with her round up of some of the shows on offer in London’s West End.*

***An Inspector Calls*** (Novello until 14<sup>th</sup> November) is a play that is well-worth reviving. Stephen Daldry’s 1992 production was rightly praised at the time for its innovative introduction of three time frames: 1912, when the main action takes place, 1945, when it was first produced and 1992, the present (at that time). The set shows a slightly tipping house on stilts, with the outside and downstage a waste area inhabited by a crowd living in the 1940s complete with sirens sounding at the beginning (when JB Priestley actually wrote his play). This small house (actually a mansion) is still lived in by the Birling family who, on the night Inspector Goole visits, are entertaining the fiancé of the daughter, Sybil. The self-satisfied family talk about the future, which they see as all good. When the house opens up and the family step into the rubble we

see them starting to confront the real world. We learn through his conversations with Inspector Goole that Mr Birling is a magistrate and former Lord Mayor and he is most unhappy at suggestions that he is any way connected with the suicide of Eva Smith, one of his workers, whom he sacked when she asked for higher wages. The other members of the family find that they, too, are involved in Eva’s subsequent life as a shop assistant and later when she becomes pregnant, and eventually dies.

The play is brought up to date when the house lights are turned on and the Inspector directly confronts the audience reminding us that we are all responsible for each other. The play’s dialogue is, at times, a bit dated but Daldry’s use of the wonderfully evocative set and the somewhat melodramatic music that accompanies his production bring out the thriller aspect of the play – the “what is going to happen next?” aspect – and the acting all round is spot on with a smart but sinister Inspector from



Nicholas Woodson and a feisty daughter and son played by Sandra Duncan and Robin Whiting respectively. Do go and see this – it will be an experience to remember, I promise you!



“An Inspector Calls” at the Novello Theatre

It is very difficult to live up to a well-loved film and for many people *The Shawshank Redemption* (Wyndham’s, until 14 February 2010), will always be a favourite movie. However, the play is not without its own merits. Set in Shawshank Prison, Maine USA, former banker, Andy (Kevin Anderson) finds that he has to struggle to protect both his body and his belief in himself. Wrongly found guilty of the murder of his wife and her lover, he suffers at the hands of a group of bullies, led by the vicious Bogs (Joe Hanley), who bash him up and – in one very graphic scene – rape him. Andy also forms a friendship with Red (Reg E. Cathey), who acts as the ‘fixer’ in prison and for a price can get anything an inmate wants, even the tools Andy requires for his hobby, chiseling stones. The main difference from the film, apart of course from the audience’s active involvement in the live story taking place before them, is that the play returns to the source, the novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Rebellion* by

Stephen King. Both actors look like their movie counterparts, Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman, but the memory of Robbins in the part of Andy makes you wish for a stronger performance by Anderson. Cathey as Red has a dangling looseness about him and is very moving both in his relationship with Andy and indeed in his entire characterization of the convict, who keeps getting refused parole.

Another excellent production at the National Theatre (until 7 October then touring\*) is Hanif Kureishi’s *The Black Album*, based on his novel of the same name. Set in 1989 the play shows the effect of racism on a young Asian, when he goes to college in London. He arrives from Kent full of enthusiasm, willing to work hard to please his mother. Then he becomes part of a group of anti-racists and also forms a relationship with his white college lecturer. His Muslim friends want him to turn to religion and work against his white acquaintances. Torn between the various strands of his life, Riaz (a lively portrayal by Alexander Andreou) is forced to make a decision, when he is drawn into the repercussions of the outcry over the fatwa against the author of *The Satanic Verses*. Kureishi’s work always makes one think and this is certainly a thought-provoking production.

\* **Tour dates:** 20<sup>th</sup> October to 24<sup>th</sup> October West Yorkshire Playhouse, Courtyard Theatre 0113 213 7700, 27<sup>th</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> October Liverpool Playhouse 0151 709 4776, 10<sup>th</sup> November to 14<sup>th</sup> November Oxford Playhouse 01865 305305, 17<sup>th</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> November Warwick Arts Centre 024 7652 4524, 24<sup>th</sup> November to 28<sup>th</sup> November Bath Theatre Royal 01225 448844

*When I am an old woman I shall wear purple  
 With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.  
 And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves  
 And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.  
 I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired  
 And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells  
 And run my stick along the public railings  
 And make up for the sobriety of my youth.  
 I shall go out in my slippers in the rain  
 And pick flowers in other people's gardens  
 And learn to spit.*

*Extract from **Warning** by Jenny Joseph (1961)  
 - voted the UK's "most popular post-war poem" in a 1996 BBC poll*

*For her autumn book review **Alex Withnall** has chosen **Sue Ellen Cooper's** 2004 account of the founding and growth of **The Red Hat Society**.*

The Hen Coop, the Raging Grannies.....older women's movements and their success in drawing attention to the comparative neglect of issues that affect women as they grow older has surely been one of the success stories of recent years. However, the Red Hat Society has no political axe to grind; it is concerned with celebrating women's lives after fifty with joy, fun, sisterhood and sheer silliness. Originating in the US, the Society, which cheerfully describes itself as a 'disorganisation', now boasts Red Hatters across the world; a quick internet search uncovered a growing number of groups in the UK and Australia as well as in the USA and Canada.

In this book, Sue Ellen Cooper describes how she was inspired by Jenny Joseph's well-known poem *Warning* to contemplate her own ageing. Years later, the discovery of a captivating red hat in a thrift shop gave her the idea of giving her friends red hats for their fiftieth birthdays, sometimes with purple trimmings – shades of Jenny Joseph again! She and her friends decided to meet up in public in their hats and before long, other groups sprang up dedicated to grasping the fun there is to be had in life after fifty. Now it was not just hats, but feather boas, purple robes, diamante, gloves, shoes, stockings and other regalia to be worn in public. Sue Ellen herself has become the 'Queen Mother'; the Society's official mascot is Ruby Red-Hat, representing the spirit of the little girl who is said to be alive and well within all older women. The Society has no rules as such but Ruby has 'ten rules for living, plus one', largely relating to

the need to nurture oneself in later life, to play and have fun, to have courage and to accept the reality of the present. Nothing wrong with those!

So any woman over fifty can become a Red Hatter. There are apparently now over 300,000 women involved in Red Hat Society chapters with such names as the Well-Red Ladies of Minneapolis, the Red Hot Senior-itas of Fort Myers, Florida and the Sassy REDS (Real Elegant Dames) of Peace River, Alberta. Be warned that a convention is planned for just after Christmas in London when Red Hatters from all over the world plan to congregate for more madcap merriment and sisterhood dressed outrageously in their red and purple gear.

The book is really an engaging romp through the Society's history and development illustrated with stories and anecdotes, poems and a whole range of inspiring quotations from writers ranging from Frank Lloyd Wright to Audrey Hepburn. No doubt the Society has done an enormous amount to help make older women visible in their communities, to show that ageing is not necessarily a negative experience and to help women develop lasting supportive friendships. However, from further investigation, it seems that much of the fun of searching for red and purple glad rags has come to be replaced by a creeping commercialism – I identified a number of websites offering the requisite adornments to members – and as I read on, my traditional British reserve sometimes crept in and I shuddered with embarrassment at some of the Red Hatters' public antics.

Sadly, I discovered this book in the 'remainders' section of a Toronto

bookstore. It was once a *New York Times* bestseller but I fear it may be really past its sell-by date. I wonder if the same thing applies to the Society itself.

*Fun and Friendship after Fifty* by Sue Ellen Cooper is published by Warner Books, New York and Boston (2004) and is available through [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) (price varies) 256pp

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### *On Screen - Carol Allen*



The ever busy Michael Caine is back on screen later this autumn as *Harry Brown*, an apparently lonely and harmless elderly widower living on a grim council estate. But when his only friend Leonard (David Bradley) is murdered by a gang of young thugs and the police are powerless to act, Harry's past persona as a tough Marine comes to the fore and he sets out to dispense his own brand of justice.

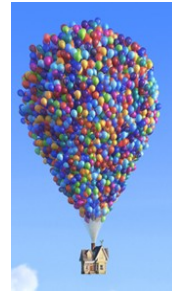
This is a very violent film at times, as Harry battles his way through an underworld dominated by drugs and guns, and its vigilante philosophy is arguably morally suspect. But Caine is terrific – one of the few elderly actors

who could convince as a pensioner vigilante without the idea seeming ridiculous. You can see the character's whole life in his face. The film also tackles head on the fear of violence from young people that many elderly people experience and is a gripping thriller, which tackles some hard contemporary issues with intelligence.

*An Education* however may well hark back to your own schooldays. Set in an academic girls' grammar school in the very early sixties, it's the story of how bright and spirited 16 year old Jenny (Carey Mulligan) is seduced from her school books by David (Peter Sarsgaard), an apparently sophisticated older man. Nick Hornby's script and Lone Scherfig's direction perfectly capture not only the look but the social attitudes of England at the time before the "swinging sixties" kicked in, particularly in Alfred Molina's performance as Jenny's loving but dominating dad with his obsession with "getting on" in life and his restricted experience of the world.. Mulligan convinces as the would be sophisticated schoolgirl greedily absorbing the world David introduces her into and Sarsgaard is suspiciously charming as her boyfriend, about whom we soon have our doubts. There's also good support from Dominic Cooper as his best friend, who has misgivings about the situation, Rosalind Pyke, delightfully funny as Cooper's girlfriend, and a strong cameo from Emma Thompson as the school's strict and anti-semitic headmistress.

One thing director Richard Linklater is always good at even though he's now pushing 50, is identifying with and communicating the enthusiasm, passion and energy of being young, which he does again in *Me and Orson Welles*, where teenager Richard (Zack Efron),

through an accidental meeting with the super talented and then young actor/director, lands himself a small part in Welles' groundbreaking 1937 production of *Julius Caesar* at the Mercury Theatre in New York. This is a great film for theatre lovers. Christian McKay captures what we understand as the young Orson's charisma, arrogance, charm, vanity and ruthless dedication, while Efron, best known for *High School Musical*, proves to be a good actor in a straight role. It is delightful to see a him as a thirties teenager showing the same enthusiasm for sheet music and the melodies of Richard Rodgers that kids would today for the latest indy rock band. And although shot entirely on the Isle of Man, it's visually very convincing in recreating the New York we know from 30s movies.



*Up*, the latest animation from Pixar, is a true family film, which has what has been hailed as one of the most inventive and beautiful opening sequences ever. To avoid the demolition of his home by developers, Carl, a 78 year old man (voiced by Edward Asner) takes off into the skies in his house, propelled by thousands of helium balloons. At the centre of the story though is an intergenerational relationship between him and the small boy scout, who has stowed away on his front porch and who shares his subsequent adventures. This is definitely one to take the grandchildren to and you should enjoy it as well.