



AEA DIGEST

Association for Education and Ageing

Issue no 23

Spring 2008

FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker



Dear Friends,

The development of the Association is well underway, supported by grant aid from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and a strategic vision for the next few years. We are already benefiting from having extra human resource available in the shape of our Development Coordinator, Jim Soulsby. New members have joined us and some old friends have renewed their membership;

we warmly welcome you all at this exciting stage of our growth.

Our first major project was to survey the current state of research, policy and practice regarding later life learning, in order to call a conference to discuss the state of our field of knowledge. This Review has been active since February and its findings will be reported first at our annual conference to be held at Leicester University on 22 May, under the title *The Latest on Later Life*

Learning'. See the further information inside this issue (page 3). This will also be the occasion for the fifth annual lecture in memory of our founder, Frank Glendenning, which is given this year by Professor David James, our president. Do come and join us if you possibly can.

The Review's findings will also enable us to participate in debates at all levels, with increased confidence in our understanding of current trends and evidence for our recommendations. We are already receiving more invitations to take part in Government consultations especially, lately, those concerning informal adult learning. The case for enabling older people to continue learning, both for personal development and for economic outcomes, is at last fairly well established. It remains to be argued about how best this can be put into practice and who should pay for it. But since these are by no means insignificant questions, much remains to be done.

We therefore urge members to take the opportunity to respond to the UK Government's latest consultation document on Informal Adult Learning, and we provide an article in this issue giving more detail and guidance on this (page 4). We would also be pleased to hear from any non-UK members who can tell us how informal adult learning is provided and funded in their communities, since this could contain valuable evidence that we could pass on. Do write to me or to any Executive Committee member (contact details page 12).

The AEA has always attempted to raise its voice about later life learning within the field of social gerontology, as well as

that of adult education, but with less success. Now this year, we have played significant parts in getting 'educational gerontology' onto the agenda of those who study ageing. Conferences in Bristol, Barcelona and Montreal will all include symposia or themes on later life learning, in which AEA members are playing a part. Perhaps you may know of other events where similar contributions are being made; if so, do let us know and we can circulate information to help promote them.

The national celebration of adult learning will be taking place in the UK from 17-24 May, and several AEA members were involved in selecting a national 'Older Learner of the Year' and a number of regional winners as well. The applications were inspirational, testifying not only to older people's tenacity and contribution to society, but also the huge impact of learning in lives that had been turned around and enriched in so many ways. (See www.niace.org.uk/ALW/2008 for more information.) Again, we would love to hear of your examples, from research or from practice, in other countries or localities.

On a more personal note, we record in this issue our sadness on hearing of the death of Geoff Ford, but also our gratitude for the huge contribution he made to third age learning, especially in the area of educational guidance. This has been a greatly underrated area within (older) adult learning, and now that its significance is better appreciated, I'm sure that anyone searching for relevant literature today will unearth a wealth of material that Geoff generated. He was a gentle giant of a man and will be much missed.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
The Latest on Later Life Learning
Frank Glendenning lecture
AGM
Tuesday 20th May 2008, at 9.30 for a 10am start – 5.15pm

Those of you on e-mail will already have received your invitation to our conference. If you receive this digest in hard copy form, you will find full details of the programme and a booking form enclosed with this.

The seminar will include input and discussion on latest research and policy issues on later life learning and a full hot buffet lunch. Included in the day will be the 5th Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture delivered this year by our president Professor Emeritus David James, University of Surrey, a co-founder of the AEA on the theme of “Living and Learning - Exploring our Biological Roots” . Proceedings will conclude with a brief annual meeting of the Association, followed by a drinks reception. Full details of fees for the seminar are included in the invitation. There is no charge for the Frank Glendenning lecture or the AGM. Published copies of last year’s lecture given by Eric Midwinter and the previous year’s by Brian Groombridge will be available free of charge at the seminar.

*The event is being held at **University of Leicester (main campus) Gartree & Rutland Rooms, Charles Wilson Building.***

***Travel details** If travelling from London, trains go from St Pancras station. The university is about twenty minutes walk from Leicester Station or a short taxi ride. If leaving the station on foot, turn left (uphill) on to London Road, until you come to University Road to your right, (there is a church on the corner). Continue down University Road until you come to Entrance 2 on your left - the Charles Wilson building will be directly in front of you at the top of the hill. Buses 47 and 48 from St Margaret’s Bus station and 80 from Charles Street go to the university, stopping at Entrance 2. Parking facilities on campus are very limited. If you are coming by car, please contact **Isobel Woodliffe on 0116 2525914** or at ijw3@le.ac.uk*

*For an online map go to <http://www.le.ac.uk/portals/maps/mcampusaccess.html> Pan to the right and you will find Charles Wilson building near the top of the page. (NB for the cartographers amongst you, North, direction Leicester town centre, is at the bottom of the page!) For a map showing the campus’s relationship to the station go to www.multimap.com and put in the postal code of the university - **LE1 7RH**. Carol has a number of hard copy maps courtesy of the University. If you would like one, please let her know when submitting your registration form.*

If you require overnight accommodation, the Ibis Hotel is near the station and charges £58 plus breakfast. 0116 248 7200 or www.ibishotel.com and search for Leicester

AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD

Informal adult learning – shaping the way ahead is the discussion document from the Department for Innovation and Skills on the future of all adult learning not associated with skills development. www.adultlearningconsultation.org.uk.



**The Right Hon John Denham MP,
Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills**

*This is an important initiative for all who are concerned in any way with older learning. **Jim Soulsby** emphasizes here how vital it is for AEA members to respond.*

Context

With a background of over 1.4 million adult learning places lost from publicly funded adult education over the last 2 years, this seems an odd time to be asking for comments on the place and value of what used to be known as non-accredited learning and about the Government's role in promoting/funding it. It might be construed as an opportunity for the Government to argue that, as so much adult learning actually already takes place in so many different parts of the country and is funded in so many diverse ways, there is no need for the Government to fund or promote it.

However from the Foreword by the Secretary of State, John Denham, there is a sense that this is a real discussion. He says:

“All forms of good adult learning are valuable. Whether vocational, or simply for personal enlightenment and fulfilment, adult learning contributes immeasurably to the well-being and health of our society.”

The document has the feel that it was very much driven and perhaps even written by the Minister himself following his agenda.

For older adults it is timely. For many years Older & Bolder at NIACE has been arguing that learning in later life does take place in so many different locations and is funded or encouraged by many diverse organisations – Government and others. It has maintained that there needs to be a much more strategic promotion and funding of learning in later life through local area agreements, strategic partnerships and the key role of directors of adult services. Not only would such approaches make better use of available resources but also provide opportunities

for older people to better influence how and where any monies are allocated.

Sadly the review does not question the current skills and funding strategy that has caused the drastic decline in numbers of older people participating in state supported learning. Perhaps it is worth informing the Government that many, many older people get their first step on to the learning ladder (or climbing frame) through other means and funding support. Perhaps it might be time to assert that in most instances the learner knows best and that narrowly focused and targeted provision aimed at satisfying targets in a limited number of skills areas don't always deliver.

The AEA has a diverse membership – older learners themselves who need to emphasise the value of their learning; providers who are seeing their funding squeezed and in some quarters seeing their learners simply melt away; and those engaged in academic research who are striving to critique a rapidly changing educational world. All these audiences need to respond to what is in the minds of many, the most important consultation for many years.

What to do?

There are twenty seven questions to respond to, but answering these can often sidetrack respondents from saying what they want to say. There is no need to answer every question but it is vital to tell Government why all forms of learning in later life are valuable. Many people believe learning in later life is a key element in encouraging older people to live the empowered, active, positive and fulfilled lives that Government wishes them to. Such learning in many instances requires resourcing.

The original deadline for the consultation of 15th May 2008 has now been extended due to the fact that local elections are being held in many parts of the country on 1st May and a recent tightening of Cabinet Office rules governing consultation activity in the weeks preceding elections. The new deadline is **12th June 2008**. The document can be accessed at the following website: -

www.adultlearningconsultation.org.uk .

Responses can be made on line and in writing to the following address: -

Informal Adult Learning Consultation,
Department for Innovation, Universities
and Skills,
4th Floor,
Kingsgate House,
66-74 Victoria St.
London SW1E 6SW.

If you do respond you may wish to copy your response to the AEA either in writing to the Honorary Secretary or by e-mail to: - jim.soulsby@btinternet.com

Why should older learners respond to this review?

It is an opportunity to inform the Government how important their learning is and that the current budget for personal and community development learning is insufficient.

It is a chance to show just how much learning takes place outside the formal system and how valuable it is.

The Government should be encouraged not to reduce expenditure on learning just because so much is already going on that they are NOT paying for. For older learners there is a need to better coordinate some local provision where different Government departments fund some learning – like NSF & POPPS

from Department of Health, LinkAge Plus from DWP etc.

The consultation praises the self help concept epitomised by the U3A. It is important that such belief is affirmed but at the same time there are many other models of self help education, - several of them showing great ingenuity in extracting funding from very diverse sources for their work – that need to be made better known.

Why should providers respond?

There is a constant demand for evidence of the value of later life learning. Usually this has to take the form of research evidence developed by academic researchers undertaking surveys or evaluating practice or innovation. NIACE consistently used the actual testimonies of older learners themselves. In addition over the years Older & Bolder at NIACE collected examples of (good) practice, which in itself is a form of evidence, as it showed a wide range of provision – with much of it led by older people themselves – and a huge range of providers from many sectors – adult education, libraries, museums, arts organisations, cultural providers, historians, environmentalists, conservationists etc. Why do they do it? Because they believe in it! Because they know there is a need! And because they have many, many satisfied customers! Is this not evidence in its own right? The Government needs to hear of this breadth and experience.

Equally it is important to state clearly how transient funding often is and how much time and ingenuity are expended seeking funding to perpetuate work.

The Government will only accept the importance of this debate, if they get

many responses. There may also be problems with the Department getting the agreement of other Government departments with an interest or responsibility in this area. This can only be achieved if those who benefit from such funding emphasise the value. The consultation suggests a move for local authority providers towards facilitating learning as opposed to actually providing it. This has merit and where examples exist they need to be made known. Equally there are many (older) learners who really require the appropriate intervention and support of a skilled and experienced teacher – this requires emphasis – supported if possible by testimonies of some of those beneficiaries.

If learning in later life can help older people gain confidence, provide an opportunity for new skills and appraising old skills, then there has to be a recognition of the whole area of advice, information and guidance (IAG). The Government has several sectoral based advice services – pension's advice, mid life health checks, skills audits that do not appear to be interconnected. The LinkAge Plus programme was thought by many to be an ideal opportunity to test an integrated and inclusive IAG service linked to learning but this did not deliver. The currently developing local area agreements (LAAs) in response to Public Service Agreements (PSAs) provide an opportunity for better integration in response to need expressed by older people. The value of effective and timely IAG, where examples are known and how it closely links to learning in all sectors and for all purposes, needs to be stressed.

Why should the research communities respond?

There have been several projects in recent months attempting to ascertain the health and social benefits of learning in later life. There is very little such (UK based) evidence. What there is of it needs to be much better communicated. It is argued by some that the interface between research, practice and policy around later life learning does not appear to be effective. Research programmes around ageing and being older seem to overlook the potential of later life learning. This consultation presents an opportunity to argue for more research, closer associated with policy and practice developments.



*In addition to the DIUS consultation, NIACE is currently hosting the **Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning**. Chaired by Sir David Watson, the inquiry was launched on 25 September. While the deadline for some of the areas of the enquiry has passed, written evidence is still being solicited on Lifelong learning, citizenship and belonging (deadline 22nd May 2008) and Lifelong learning and poverty reduction (deadline 8th May 2008) Full details are available on the enquiry website <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry> and evidence should be submitted by preferably by e-mail to lifelonglearninginquiry@niace.org.uk*

*Yet another opportunity to make our voices heard has been brought to my attention in the **Spring U3A News**. The Guardian will soon be publishing a supplement on adult education and wants to hear from some of the million-plus people, who have dropped out of publicly funded education. Their correspondent Peter Kingston is asking people, who have given up evening classes to get in touch with him with their stories. He can be contacted at peter.kingston@guardian.co.uk*

Membership news. *Due largely to the publicity drive by our new Development Co-coordinator Jim Soulsby we are currently experiencing a healthy growth in the membership of the association.*

Welcome to new individual members:

Chris Minter: Jonathan Hughes; Jean Thompson; Barbara Walmsley; Ken Bates; Nicholas Walters; Tony Maltby; Trish Hafford-Letchfield; Malcolm Sargeant; Joanna Bornat; Sandra Chalmers; Malcolm Ball; Jackie Richards; Pauline Swanton; Jean Prior; Sheilagh Burnell; Kathleen Lane.

And welcome back to Robin Gray, who has resumed membership after being away for a while.

We also have the pleasure of welcoming a number of new organisations to AEA as corporate members:

*The Beth Johnson Foundation
Quality of Life Partnership at the Elders
Council of Newcastle
The Genesis Community
Help the Aged
Age Concern Stockport
Learning – Difference*

Congratulations to long standing member Jill Manthorpe, who has now taken up a new post as Unit Director of the Social Care Workforce Research Unit at King's College, London and has become a corporate member on their behalf, and to Anne Jamieson on her promotion to Reader within the Faculty of Life Long Learning at Birkbeck University of London. Brian Findsen sends greetings from New Zealand, where he is settling in to his role at the new University of Waikato and tells us that he and his family have bought a house near the campus and will be moving in in May. We also hear that Father Martin O'Fathaigh of University

College Cork is currently on sick leave. We wish him well.

Thank you to all of you who responded so quickly this year to my reminder that subscriptions were due. There are however still some of you, who appear to have not yet got round to it. With the association at such an exciting point of expansion, it is important that we keep our books in order and get subscriptions in efficiently. So if you're one of our loyal members who just hasn't got round to sending me your subscription yet, you know where to find me! (Page 12)

AEA Current subscription rates

Individual membership

Waged	£20
Retired, Unwaged, Student	£10

Corporate Membership

£60

*This year we received the sad news of the death of **Geoff Ford**. With the assistance of Tony Watt's obituary published in the Guardian on 31st March, **Jim Soulsby** remembers a much esteemed friend and colleague.*

“Geoff Ford, who has died aged 69, was passionate about the role of career guidance in helping to develop and transform lives. He had a particular concern for disadvantaged people, both young and old. His research was diligent and painstaking; his knowledge of his

field was quite encyclopedic.”, writes Tony Watts in his tribute.

Geoff's death earlier this year did not come as a surprise, as most of us knew of his ongoing fight with illness. This knowledge did not lessen the loss however. What helped us all was having the opportunity to celebrate all Geoff's achievements - not just in his professional life but simply in his being Geoff.

Geoff was a pioneer in the area of guidance and its vital role in helping

enhance the employability of older people. He was an associate researcher with NICEC – The National Institute for Careers and Counselling - and an adviser to the Third Age Employment Network (later - The Age and Employment Network) - TAEN. His main publications about older people were groundbreaking reports – “Career Guidance in the Third Age: a Mapping Exercise” (1996), “Challenging Age” (2003) and “Am I Still Needed?” (2005) I first met Geoff in 1997 at the time of the publication of his first work in this area. That meeting led to many others and we worked together on two research projects in the East Midlands mapping education, training and guidance opportunities for older people across the region. It was then I discovered for myself the extent of Geoff’s output. He enjoyed writing and every word was a gem, but he left editing, précising and summarising to others – in itself not an easy task, as I found trying to reduce over 300 pages to something more succinct.

Geoff and I met regularly and we attended events at which we both spoke. He was always very generous with his comments and observations and I found him an enthusiastic supporter and promoter of our work on Older & Bolder at NIACE.

All those who attended the celebration of Geoff’s life following his funeral shared my experiences. Without exception everyone had found Geoff attentive, enthusiastic and a thoroughly nice man. Tony Watts spoke for us all when he emphasised the importance of Geoff’s work and what a vital pioneer he had been. It was largely that work, which established the critical role of guidance services in relation to older people and their employability. Nigel Pendleton spoke of Geoff’s warmth, friendship and encouragement - assets of the man we knew, with which we could all identify. Geoff will be missed by many. His life’s work however remains with us and is essential in helping us cement the interface between education/training and employability in its widest sense.



<http://www.silversurfers.org.uk/>

The logo above refers to a site I found, which offers a wide variety of services and information for older people. I haven’t used it myself but it might prove of interest to those of you are already enthusiastic users of the internet. But for those who have only tipped a tentative toe into those waters or haven’t

*even tried at all, **Silver Surfers’ Day 2008** is hoping to change your mind. The event is organised by **Digital Unite**, in partnership with Ofcom for the seventh year running and takes place on the Friday of Adult Learners’ Week, **May 23rd.***

This the biggest annual media literacy campaign aimed at older people – media literacy meaning the ability to use e-mail and internet.. It galvanises an army of organisations, large and small, around the country to give good 'taster' experiences of the Internet and email.

Although Silver Surfers' Day makes a difference every year, there are still millions of people in Britain who are unable to enjoy an online life. Most are over-50 and, as the rest of the country gets ever more digitally literate, they fall further behind and their task in catching up seems more daunting.

Digital Unite, media literacy experts for older people, offers free resources for Event Holders, large or small, on www.silversurfersday.org, a comprehensive Learning Zone, full of tasty, bite-sized morsels of learning from the basics of keyboard and mouse manipulation to the wonders of BBC I-Player and Facebook. We are also planning an online support network for sharing of knowledge in this field.

The great news this year is that more, larger and more various types of organisation are realising that they need to 'train' their audiences to interact online. Virgin Media, Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Ofcom, for example, are showing the way by holding an employers' version of a Silver Surfers' Day called 'Invite Your Parents to Work'; employees use the learning facilities of www.silversurfersday.org to offer an online taster session to older friends and family - everyone profits and everyone enjoys themselves.

We know that a good, first-time experience of online life in a safe,

trusted environment is what makes the difference to someone becoming digitally literate. Once someone has had a first good experience, they can progress, whatever their age: "I love a challenge," said 92 year old Dora Pegge of Tameside, a Silver Surfer of the Year runner-up for 2007 who started her online life at 90 and now emails routinely.

Robin Blake, Head of Media Literacy at Ofcom, says: "Our research shows that, when older people use the Internet, they find it invaluable for staying in touch with friends and relatives, for getting the best deals when shopping and for finding information."

All enquiries about Silver Surfers' Day 2008 to Digital Unite

Contact: gill.adams@digitalunite.net /
T: 0870 241 5091 www.digitalunite.net
For information about events in your area on Silver Surfers' Day ring 0800 100 900 (Freephone)

*For those of you working in the field of lifelong learning Alex Withnall reports that a website well worth visiting is **E-learning in Later Life – e-lill** www.elill.net*

Here you will find details of a recently completed European two-year project involving partners from Germany, the Czech Republic, Finland, Slovakia and Spain. The project was co-coordinated by Carmen Stadelhofer and Gabriela Körting from the University of Ulm, both long-standing friends of AEA. The aims of the project were to contribute to the digital literacy of older adults (aged 60+) in Europe with a special focus on new media in lifelong learning; to

stimulate the application of Information Communications Technology by providers of later life education; to promote active co-operation between seniors' educational organisations within the LiLL European and other networks; and to contribute to the active participation of older adults in all spheres of life across Europe. The website is very well laid out, easy to navigate and highly informative. There is a very useful database of good practice that is worth exploring and the facility to link to a wide range of other relevant resources as well as details of the activity carried out in each participating country.

Forced retirement of academics.
*New member Joanna Bornat has drawn our attention to a disquieting situation with regard to older academics post 64 who, following the Age Discrimination Act, are being dismissed from universities. Her colleague **Professor Henry Wynn** of the London School of Economic explains the situation.*

A new group UKACE - UK Academics for Continuing Employment - has been formed by a group of academics in the UK. The aim is to encourage universities to take a positive attitude to the continuing employment of its staff. Although at face value ageism is outlawed in the EU, the UK Employment Equality (Age) Regulations, which came into force on 1st October 2006, has taken a rather narrow interpretation, which is being challenged by the organisation Heyday in the European Court of Justice. The result is expected in late 2008 or early 2009. Meanwhile many universities are hiding behind the UK regulations and building a version of them into their

internal procedures. Thus one can "request" to stay on but that request can be refused. Essentially one will have to apply for one's own job with a very small chance of success.

UKACE wants UK universities to withdraw their regulations and follow the lead of the USA, which has abolished retirement for academics in the normal sense. Although some academics look forward to the freedom that retirement can bring, many still want to remain fully active in their present job and UKACE is concerned with the latter. The threat of retirement puts a kind of blight on applications for research grants (well before age 65), for which at least according to some funding rules one needs a full time job. It is also a tremendous waste of a major national asset to sack active academics at 65. There are cases of UK academics seeking posts in the USA and Canada, where one can continue to work normally. But what is most shocking is the ageism inherent in the approach of the senior staff of universities, who can think of labelling a cohort of active colleagues as being "over the hill". These are the same senior staff, who would not tolerate other kinds of discrimination. All the usual arguments used, such as the need for "new blood", are thoroughly discriminatory. Whereas one might have hoped that universities more than most would and should have taken a moral lead in abolishing age discrimination.

The UKACE campaign is still very much in its infancy. If you would like any further information or to be put in touch with Professor Wynn, please contact Carol, AEA Secretary.

Living in the Past When a leading advertising agency recently asked some thousand British adults, which time period in the U.K. from 1967-2017 they would prefer to live in, almost half of them said they would wind back the clock at least 30 years with close to one third choosing to go back 40 years. **Carol Allen** has a look at some of the survey's findings.

The average age of those answering the question was forty two and a half and perhaps predictably, the 1960s and '70s appealed most to respondents over age 50 . But some younger respondents also saw the appeal of the past. Among the 18-29s, a total of one-fifth chose the pre-Eighties decades and that went up to one-third for the 30-39 age group.

Music and fashion were certainly part of the appeal, but respondents also saw the past as a simpler, less stressful time, characterised by a greater sense of security, morality, freedom and community. A young woman in the 18-24 age group, who chose 1967 explained, "People actively protested against things they didn't like and were much more concerned about the world and other people than I think they are today. I also think it was safer and people were happier and less stressed."

A man in the 45-49 age group put it this way: "The economy was more stable,

crime was low, people lived in communities and cared for those that lived in their community, jobs were available for everybody, illicit drugs were rare, gun crime was extremely rare, the cost of living was far cheaper, politicians were not as corrupt, politicians had a high moral standing and were an example to follow and society had a high moral standard compared with today." Hmm, not totally as I remember it.

The survey wasn't all about looking backwards though. Almost one-fifth opted for the present and a fair percentage (14%) wanted to fast-forward 10 years. In fact, the year 2017 was preferred by a quarter of the under-30s and even 10% of the over-50s.

Excitement about technology was a big factor in favor of 2017. A man over 50 observed: "Technology is progressing at such an enormous rate, I think it will be a very exciting period to live in despite the current problems in the world."

So if anyone tries to argue that older people just look back to a time, when "the past was another country, where they do things differently – and quite right too", you now have some statistics to throw into the pot.

The Association for Education and Ageing

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


President: Professor David James

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Tel: 020 7385 4641

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Elected members:, David Crossan, Mervyn Eastman, Brian Findsen, Anne Jamieson, Carlie Newman, Jim Soulsby, Glenys Tuersley, Dr Alex Withnall

<p>Trips for Older Females and Fellows</p> 	<p>Carlie & Stephen Newman 5 Straffan Lodge Belsize Grove London NW3 4XE Tel & Fax: 020 7586 6440 Mobile: 07973 932 665 Email: carliesteve@yahoo.co.uk</p>
<p>Treasurer: John Kay</p>	<p>Website: www.toffs.org</p>

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- Cape Town - encompassing Cape City, Table Mountain, with a visit to Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.
- Kirstenbosh Botanical Gardens ● Winelands including tastings
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- Knysna and the Featherbed Nature Reserve and tractor ride to top of the mountain
- Cango Caves in Swartberg Mountains ● Plettenberg Bay
- Buffalo Hills Game Park drive
- Nature's Valley and Tsitsikamma National Park, "Big Tree," Storms river Bridge
- Port Elizabeth ● Montague
- Arrangements to meet those responsible for older people's affairs in hand

AND LOTS MORE!

See:

- Penguins at Boulders Beach ■ Ostrich farm ■ Cango Crocodile and Cheetah Ranch
- Monkeyland ■ Addo Elephant Park
- FAUNA, FLORA and lots more!

12-27 NOVEMBER 2008

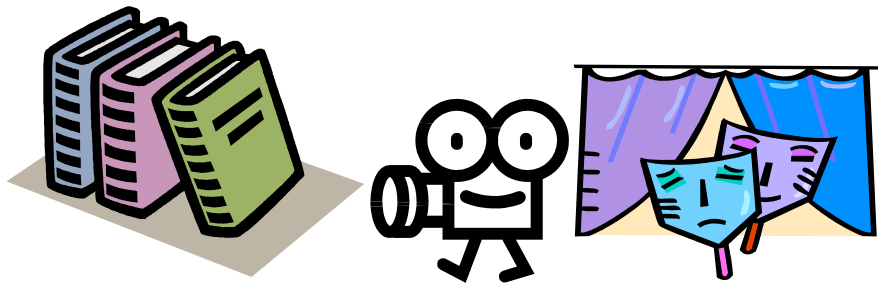
Included flights and coach in SA, all breakfasts and dinners, some lunches, and, of course, the wonderfully exciting programme, some of which is outlined above!

£1740 per person. Single supplement £164

The deposit of £250-00 can be paid in two installments and you can pay the rest by installments also.

Connecting flights from your local airport to Heathrow can be arranged subject to surcharge.

Interested? Let us know and we will send you the brochure.



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

“The Arts and social justice”

Re-crafting adult education and community cultural leadership, edited by Darlene E. Clover and Joyce Stalker, published by NIACE, £19.95 This publication looks at the arts in the context of education and the community. **Brian Groombridge** has been reading it with older learners in mind.

A third age activist, whom I met on a Help the Aged research project, told me she'd joined a course at Morley College 'For Those who Cannot Sing'. It didn't altogether surprise me to learn that she's now a member of one of the best classical music choirs in her neighbourhood. There was a kind of social justice in Morley's helping her find her voice and giving her the self-confidence to take part in music making of a high standard.

Some of the stories and references in this book make the connection even clearer and more political. Apart from two New Zealanders and one Brit (Media Studies Lecturer Dr Isabelle Fremaux from Birkbeck College), most of the contributors are from North America (six from Canada, two from the US) - so it's almost predictable that such a book might refer favourably to Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, and to 'popular protest

anthems such as "Blowin' in the wind" or "We shall overcome". At this point I found myself humming another, even more militant song by Pete Seeger - "If I had a hammer". It's a pity there are no matching references to such British groups as The Levellers (indeed it's a pity that NIACE didn't get more British material included).

In "The Arts and social justice", co-editors Darlene E. Clover (University of Victoria, British Columbia), and Joyce Stalker (University of Waikato, New Zealand), set out to illustrate the many ways in which different arts can help people increase their self-respect and self-confidence as citizens wanting greater control over their own lives. Eight chapters in four sections deal with Teaching and Learning Art; The emancipatory potential of arts-based adult education; Arts-based learning and democracy; and Art and community development.

One of the many examples used in the book to highlight the various connections between art and social justice is a case study by Stalker and her colleague Nora West on fabric making and design in Aotearoa New Zealand (proof readers please note: no comma needed after Aotearoa - Aotearoa is the

Maori name for New Zealand and the two names side by side indicate the country's increasing sense of bi-cultural and even multinational identity.) The writers observe that 'discussion of fibre practice inevitably invokes this age-old art/craft debate', since working with fabric is commonly regarded as a 'mere' craft and a domestic one at that. Because of this history, 'fabric is often the medium of the oppressed and disempowered, practiced in *old folks' homes* and mental hospitals, in prisons and refugee camps...[It is] *the ideal medium for creative resistance to social injustice*'. The italics are mine, making the point that while the index doesn't include 'older people, seniors, ageism' or any related terms, much in this book relates to AEA's concerns. Older people are also mentioned in other chapters, along with other often politically vulnerable groups. Making protest banners is one of the clearest examples of fabric's many uses in the name of good causes. Banners were hung from the walls of Auckland's Aotea Centre to support the Greenpeace protests against French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Clover explicitly relates the fabric craft of quilting to adult education. She describes a project in which (mostly young) women from a family services centre on Vancouver Island were taught to make squares out of old costume materials, odd buttons, ribbons, needles and threads. The task they were set sounds daunting: they were to make patterned squares, which put together answered the question: What does sexual exploitation convey to you? Using appliqué and other techniques, the squares were joined to make a quilt for display at a Conference on Democracy

and Citizenship (CIVICUS). It went later to New Zealand, for an exhibition called The Subversive Quilt. I write as the proud owner of a quilt made in the profoundly nonconformist Amish community, Pennsylvania, but I have never before thought of quilts themselves as potentially subversive.

This book is full of such stimulating ideas arising from a wide variety of projects, using many different arts - music, theatre, poetry and stories of course, but also carnivals, and - Fremaux's speciality - rebel clowning, involving women of all ages. All of it worth considering with AEA's priorities in mind.

Oliver Sacks has become the world's best-known neurologist, not only as Professor of Clinical Neurology at Columbia University, New York, but also as the author of several best selling books such as 'The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat' and 'Awakenings' (which inspired the Oscar nominated film). Glenys Tuersley reviews his latest book "Musicophilia - Tales of music and the brain" (Picador)

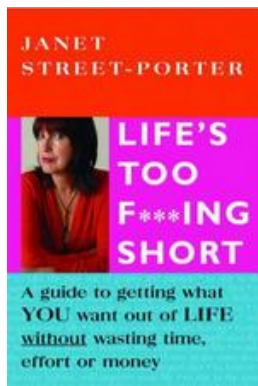
In this one Sacks explores the effect of music on the human brain. Music, it appears, occupies more areas of our brain than language does. Humans uniquely are a musical species.

The knowledge of how the brain responds to music has been gleaned for the most part by studying the dilemmas of his patients struggling to adapt to different neurological conditions. In "Musicophilia", he examines the powers of music through the individual experiences of patients, musicians and everyday people - from a man who having been struck by lightning was

suddenly inspired to become a pianist and composer at the age of forty-two to an entire group of children with Williams' syndrome, who are hypermusical from birth.

Sometimes our sensitivity to music can go astray. Sacks explores how catchy melodies can lodge in the brain for hours on constant replay and how surprisingly frequent is the condition of 'musical hallucination'. Music can animate patients suffering from Parkinson's disease, who cannot otherwise move; give words to stroke patients, who cannot otherwise speak; and calm memories ravaged by Alzheimer's or amnesia.

His anecdotal style makes Sacks always very readable and interesting, even when dealing with clinical language and intricate diagnoses. If music is important in your life, it is fascinating to find out why what is sublime to one person is intolerable noise to another.



It's kind of comforting really that as we all get older, so do the so-called "celebs", who have been around as long as we have. Journalist Janet Street Porter is now 61 and when Alex Withnall picked up her latest opus with

its provocative title, it was with a certain amount of trepidation.

Oh no! Not another media luvvie turning sixty and feeling a compulsion to foist the dubious benefits of her experience on the rest of us. That was my initial reaction to this attention grabbing title, that has already received a considerable amount of publicity in the press. Produced in garish colours with in-your-face illustrations and snippets from the author's early years, it certainly leaps out at you from the bookshelves.

JS-P is one of those people you either like or loathe and I do have to admit to a sneaking admiration for her outspoken views and the massive success she has made of her career. Admitting to four husbands and three long-term relationships, you might feel she's possibly not the best person to offer advice on understanding your partner, but if you can cope with the author's massive ego (I suspect some insecurity is lurking behind it) and coarse language, there's a lot of good sense in this highly cynical take on different areas of life.

Aimed primarily at women, the book is essentially 'a guide to getting what YOU want out of LIFE without wasting time, effort or money' and 'to help you feel good about yourself' by establishing your own rules for what you want to do and sticking to them. This seems somewhat incongruous in view of the author's stated loathing for rules of any kind (although she does explain that these are to be seen only as personal goals not edicts). And she hardly comes over as a committed feminist, showing no mercy for the likes of Victoria Beckham and the various other women on whom she heaps undisguised scorn. I

did love her scathing attack on the beauty industry ('lying cows') and the insecurities it generates in women through its constant peddling of pseudo-scientific gobbledegook. Strange then, that in the section urging us not to be slaves to fashion, she boasts of her designer coats and recalls an unfortunate encounter with a 'snotty' Bond St saleswoman, when attempting to buy an Alexander McQueen dress she'd spotted in a magazine. Doesn't she go to M & S like the rest of us? Other notable sections deal with dieting, cooking (supermarkets and posh restaurants serving over-priced food get short shrift here), boring people, dreary jobs, spas and interior designers. The concept of 'choice' also comes in for some vitriol.

However, the friends with whom I discussed it actually loved the section on 'men and time'; and the assertion that 'what men say and what they mean are two completely different things' brought forth some very loud cheers, as did the advice that it's useless to try to change them – you just have to deal with them as they are. We all also agreed with the wise observation that 'far more important is a shared sense of humour, kindness and considerate behaviour'. Perhaps JS-P has learnt something from her many relationships after all.

Some readers may find the tone of the book offensive but I thought it was enormous fun and in parts, dispensed some real wisdom. Maybe we need more of this cynical approach to life as we grow older – but I wonder when we're actually going to hear from an older man? John Humphreys must have plenty to say!

*Janet Street-Porter (2008) "Life's Too F***ing Short" publ. Quadrille £12.99*

In March I drew members' attention to a one off performance, in which the Beijing Elderly Art Group from China were combining forces with the headline grabbing UK group The Zimmers, who produced a hit record last year with their version of The Who's "My Generation".



The Zimmers, recording their hit record at Abbey Road Studios, London

*In return I received this meditation from **Brian Groombridge** on the subject of **Arts and Older People in the limelight***

Fame or celebrity are not what this part of the story is mainly about. It is essentially about everyone discovering their voice and giving special pleasure to those around them, enriching communities and strengthening their own sense of wellbeing in old age.

Positive attention by the media can however highlight the potential for older people from all walks of life to remain creative - even to discover new ways of being creative. Two recent television documentaries demonstrated strongly that the arts can continue to bring benefits and enjoyment to people whatever their age. The key is opportunity, and the difference, which various organisations - including tutors and other professionals - can make in enabling people to see and use the opportunity.

The documentary “Young at Heart” was screened in 2006 on Channel 4. It followed a ‘rock chorus’ of American senior citizens with an average age of over 80. The programme’s director had gone to see the group rather reluctantly, when they had performed at the Lyric Hammersmith but then, he says, “something extraordinary happened. Eileen Hall, a British-born 93 year old ex-GI bride, stepped up to the microphone and yelled out the opening lyrics to ‘Should I Stay Or Should I Go?’ by The Clash. The audience – mostly in their twenties and thirties – gasped in astonishment, as she belted out the song at full throttle backed by the chorus. The words took on a whole new meaning. She was singing, not about relationships, but about life and death. I was hooked. Here was a film I just knew I had to make” (and it won two Rose d’Or awards).

The Guardian critic Michael Billington also saw the Hammersmith show in 2005 and was excited by their ‘tonic gusto’. His review ended with these words: “The heartening thing about this show is that it takes age out of the twilight zone and puts it back centre stage.”

Since then a group of very senior British people have shown what can be made of an opportunity. Including a handful of centenarians and with their combined ages totalling some 3000 years, they have had an immense impact, running vividly counter to stereotype. Improbable though it may seem, they had a cover version of The Who’s 1960’s anthem “My Generation” high in the charts. They were discovered, assembled and inspired by television producer Tim Samuels, who called them The Zimmers.

There were three distinct programmes in Samuels’ 2007 BBC documentary series, Power to the People (itself a John Lennon title). Samuels wanted centre stage to be taken dramatically, possibly mischievously, by disenfranchised groups fighting back and in the last of those three programmes, he took them on what he called ‘a rock ‘n’ roll journey that would challenge all our preconceptions of OAPs and give them a great time’.

These men and women were in no way privileged people. Viewers first saw their everyday lives in often harrowing scenes, some filmed with a concealed camera, of their being badly treated in care homes or feeling isolated and trapped at the top of tower blocks. Yet The Zimmers - 40 senior citizens, originally from all over the country - recorded “My Generation” in the Abbey Road studios made famous by the Beatles. They were now united as a rock band making a bid for chart success just to prove that older people have still ‘got what it takes’. They enjoyed themselves hugely and the disc sold well on the internet and the shops (from May 2007). Lead singer, 90-year-old Alf Carretta, said: ‘I can’t believe this is happening. For me to have recorded a song in the same studio as the Beatles is just so exciting... I feel like the whole experience has brought me back to life. I was stuck in a rut and now I feel alive again’. The other performers were tired of life in old age homes or suffering social isolation in their own communities. One of them, Winifred Warburton from Derby, had moved 16 times, trying to find an old people’s home that kept her stimulated. She describes the Abbey Road recording as ‘the best day in her life’ (she’s 99).

Samuels had the support of his producer Mike Hedges, and others in the production team had elderly relatives and could identify with a programme, which championed senior citizens. "Power To The People" was screened on BBC Two on May 28, 2007.

Many may share the reservations of Jane Rackham, who wrote in "Radio Times" that, though she was appalled by what it showed about many older people's lives, she was 'not convinced by this gimmick of having them do this recording with nothing like it in their background'.

I take a more positive view: Tim Samuels is not manipulative; he treats everyone with respect. As he said: 'This is about old people sticking it back to the society that has cast them aside'. In order to make the point within this one programme, they only had an afternoon to do the recording - and yet it sold really well. If they had had longer to prepare, it might have been even better.

The potential and power of older people as artists were revealed in this case in a quite exceptional media-based way but the actual process of discovering creativity and talents could be much more common. Not only is nobody too old to become in some way involved with the arts; by becoming artists, they become - dramatically in this case - socially included. Such creative behaviour also utterly subverts an all-too familiar stereotype: old people are said to be 'past it'. The scholarly heroine in Alison Lurie's novel, "Foreign Affairs" puts it well: she blames the literary convention that 'nothing can happen' to older people 'except through subtraction.' They are seen as set in their ways, 'like elderly apple trees, and as permanently shaped and scarred by the

years as they have weathered... They may be struck by lightning or pruned by the hand of man; they may grow weak or hollow; their spare fruit may become misshapen, spotted or sourly crabbed. They may endure these changes nobly or meanly. But they cannot, even under the best conditions, put out new growth or burst into lush and unexpected bloom'.

This prejudice so well expressed by Lurie is nothing like as widespread as it once was, so some progress has evidently been made, but nowhere nearly enough. There are many (including older people themselves) who still expect old age to be a time of withering, not of growth.

Many years in adult education convince me that far more of us could be making and enjoying arts and crafts. What matters is opportunity and self-belief in the face of such historic negative stereotypes, made worse by those deep-seated social inequalities, some hitherto seriously inadequate and underfunded public policies and of course teaching and other practices that could be improved.



Keira Knightley as Dylan Thomas's childhood sweetheart Vera and Sienna Miller, his wife Caitlin in "Edge of Love" (see "On Screen" next page)

On Screen
Carol Allen

Producer Rebekah Gilbertson knew as a child that there was a connection between her grandparents Vera and William Killick and the poet Dylan Thomas and his wife. While a student at the National Film School she found out more about that connection and the result several years later is ***The Edge of Love***. Vera (Keira Knightley) was the poet's childhood sweetheart in Wales. She and Dylan (Matthew Rhys) meet again in London, where she is working as a cabaret singer during the Second World War. They are still attracted to each other but Dylan is now married to Caitlin (Sienna Miller), with whom despite their unspoken romantic rivalry Vera forms a strong friendship. Vera marries her devoted admirer William (Cillian Murphy) and while he is away fighting, joins the Thomases, now in Wales. When William returns home a war hero and a changed man, the situation explodes into violence. This is very much a story about young people and youthful passion but primarily about the implicitly ambiguous friendship between the two women. Miller is particularly good as the free spirited and perceptive Caitlin but well matched by Knightley, whose pure singing voice also fits the "Vera Lynn" period style. Rhys captures Dylan's charm and selfishness and Murphy is moving as the gentle but later emotionally scarred William. The script is by Knightley's mother, playwright Sharman MacDonald and director John Maybury gives the film a great physical beauty, while never losing sight of the drama. The film opens in June and should give today's young people an insight into the time, when their grandparents were young.

Set in today's wartime scene the just opened ***Stop-Loss*** stars Ryan Phillippe as Brandon, also a battle scarred war hero in this case of the Iraq conflict. It takes its title from the US government policy of forcing soldiers, who have finished their tour of wartime duty, back into the army if required for further service – a form of enforced draft cum press ganging and a policy from which Brandon goes on the run. There's been a plethora of films recently showing how war destroys young men's lives. This one too does that effectively but the basic injustice behind the story gives it an extra edge.

Back to the Second World War again with ***Female Agents***, a French film, which celebrates the contribution of France's women to the resistance. Sophie Marceau leads a team of five parachuted into occupied France to eliminate the Nazi intelligence leader and protect the D-Day landings plan. While not quite in the class of "Odette" or "Carve Her Name with Pride", it's a strong story of courage and Julie Depardieu (daughter of Gerard) shines as a prostitute "press ganged" into the operation, who proves her fighting mettle.

John Sayles' ***Honeydripper*** is set in pre civil rights Alabama 1950. Tyron (Danny Glover), proprietor of the broken down shack that is the Honeydripper Lounge is desperate to woo back the crowds, who used to come listen to the blues. Gary Clarke Jr plays the drifter with the guitar, whose new fangled rock n roll eventually saves Tyron's bacon. There is some great heart lifting, toe tapping music, including from elderly blues singer Mable John and its poetic yet ironic script about the need to embrace change in both life and music is acted out by a perfect ensemble cast