



AEA DIGEST

Association for Education and Ageing

Issue no 22

Winter 2008

FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker



Dear Friends,

Seasonal greetings and all good wishes for a productive 2008!

A Year of Progress

Looking back over 2007, the Association has made great progress. This time last year we were only just starting our consultancy period to see how we might build our capacity. Beyond producing a business plan, there were no guaranteed

outcomes of this process. Yet, a year later, we have succeeded in being awarded a second tranche of funding from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation with which to start several modest projects, that will help us build a better profile. Membership has increased slowly but, as we become more effective, will hopefully expand more significantly.

Also during the year, and with the help of Birkbeck College, London University

we held a very successful day conference, with memorable contributions from research and practical projects involving older learners in London. Dr Eric Midwinter delivered a fascinating Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture, which we have just heard will be published by NIACE in a similar format to last year's lecture (given by Brian Groombridge at Brighton). Both are currently on our webpages, kindly hosted by Centre for Policy on Ageing, at www.cpa.org.uk/aea

In May we took part in an international conference organised by the Senior Studies Institute, University of Strathclyde. Several members gave papers, and AEA hosted a reception to launch the publication of Brian's FG memorial lecture. If you would like a printed copy of this in addition to the electronic one sent to members, please request one from the Older and Bolder team at NIACE or from Carol Allen.

In the autumn our consultancy period was bearing fruit and discussions with Esmee Fairbairn moved to the next phase, culminating in their offer of further grant aid to pay for a part-time Development Coordinator to help manage the projects proposed in the business plan. These projects include a literature review, regional conferences with older learners and conferences in 08 and 09.

The very latest news on this front is that we have been able to secure the services of Jim Soulsby in this development coordination role, as he will be phasing down his involvement with NIACE from February 08 and was looking for a new direction. This was a 'Kairos moment'

as far as we were concerned (the right thing at the right time) and, we hope, for Jim.

So in 2008 we are looking forward to being even more active, with a membership drive and enhanced means of communication. We are also seeking to be more involved in partnerships in order to extend our reach and effectiveness through new and existing activities. As ever, the real opportunities and experiences of older learners will continue to be our concern and focus, and we look forward to working with you and hearing from you in the coming year.

All good wishes and thanks for your continuing support.



Going home.

Professor Brian Findsen, who is a current member of the AEA's Executive Committee and Head of Department for Adult and Continuing Education

(DACE) at the University of Glasgow, is returning to his home city in Hamilton, New Zealand, in late March 2008.

In October while on annual leave Brian and his wife Catherine took a trip back home. While there he was offered and accepted the position as director of the Pathways College at the new University of Waikato. He takes up his new post on 1st April (see www.waikato.ac.nz). He will be responsible for the co-ordination of a diverse range of activities such as adult and community education, pathways into the university especially for non-traditional students (such as Maori, mature-aged and international students), student language support (including a Language Institute) and non-formal learning opportunities. Aside from the availability of the position the main reason for Brian “going home” is to spend time with his two adult children in Auckland and for Catherine to be with her parents in Hamilton. The new job is

also a serious challenge in terms of building on work that Brian has been doing in Glasgow. At the time of his departure, Brian will have worked for four years for DACE and goes with disappointment about leaving behind so many great colleagues in the Department and on the AEA Executive Committee.

Brian is keen to maintain his close links with the AEA in the UK and will be back from time to time. He will for example be returning to Glasgow in the middle two weeks of July to help in completing a research project on the engagement of older adults in FE and HE in the West of Scotland.

His interest in older adults' learning will continue in his new role, where he has a directive to enhance the research profile of the new College and he would welcome communication from members on issues related to the Association.



Department of Adult and Continuing Education BAICE Annual Conference 2008

4-6 September, 2008

Announcement and Call for Papers

Theme: Internationalisation in Education: Culture, Context and Difference

The 2008 conference of the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) will be held at the University of Glasgow, Kelvin Conference Centre, Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

In this conference the theme of internationalisation and its multiple meanings will be explored for governments, universities, further

education providers, schools and other education agencies. To what degree is internationalisation merely a convenient label for the commercial exploitation of

education? Does internationalisation mean the same as globalisation? How is local culture compromised or enhanced by an emphasis on international education? How is difference configured into an international social, cultural, economic and educational agenda? Is the idea of social justice subservient to economic considerations in internationalisation discourse? These and other related questions will be explored throughout this 2008 Conference.

While the over-arching theme for this conference is “Internationalisation in education: culture, context and difference”, the following sub-themes have been identified as contributory and a major basis for dialogue and debate:

1. Issues of globalisation: culture and context

How are globalisation and internationalisation connected and to what effects?

Can education help produce “global citizens”?

Can globalisation encompass a social justice ethic?

What are the dangers of globalisation and how might we confront them?

2. Universalist approaches to education

Are generic approaches in education still relevant?

How do or should Northern views of education relate to Southern perspectives?

What is the place of indigenous knowledge(s) in an (inter)national context?

3. Pedagogies of practice in international contexts

What variations of pedagogy are practised and with what impact?

Are there specific pedagogies based on gender, race/ethnicity, social class and geography?

4. Perspectives of lifelong learning in an international context

What is the meaning of lifelong education in specific cultural contexts?

To what extent has vocational education subsumed other forms of lifelong education across the globe and what might our responses be to it?

5. The interface of national and international educational policy

To what degree is educational policy development and implementation subject to global forces, and how is this reshaping the nature of education?

Do prevailing economic imperatives swamp autonomous national policy development in education?

How has privatisation been played out in both local and global contexts and to what effect(s)?

6. Methodological issues in comparative studies

What approaches are useful for international comparisons?

Is it really possible to validly compare across cultures?

What innovative methodological strategies emerge from international educational work?

7. Gender issues in the internationalisation agenda

To what extent is the plea for greater internationalisation based on a masculine agenda?

To what extent have gendered roles changed in education as a result of internationalisation?

How do cultural and/or political dynamics affect gendered identities in specific countries?

Offers of papers, including an abstract of no more than 250 words, should be submitted by **Monday 31 March, 2008**, to:

BAICE 2008

Faculty of Education

University of Glasgow

St Andrew's Building

11 Eldon Street

Glasgow G3 6NH

Scotland, UK.

Or by e-mail to Joyce Lang:

j.lang@educ.gla.ac.uk

Applicants should clearly indicate which one of the six sub-themes their papers are addressing or to which it relates most closely.

Conference Venue:

Kelvin Conference Centre, University of Glasgow, Garscube

Conference fees to be announced.

Accommodation is to be located on site at the Kelvin Conference Centre

The University of Glasgow, established in 1451, has a proud history for intellectual stimulation, creativity and first-rate scholarship. At this conference we intend to recreate and enact these qualities in the purpose-built venue at Garscube, situated just a few miles from the centre of Glasgow city.

The city of Glasgow is no longer the tired industrial city of the past. Today it is one of Britain's prominent cities of culture and a truly vibrant place for entertainment, many attractions and

exciting events. As the largest city in Scotland, established on the back of hard work and invention, it offers visitors excellent restaurants, a great theatre and arts scene and a friendly welcome.

The conference will endeavour to encapsulate aspects of Scottish culture. Expect to be involved in a ceilidh. A wee dram of whiskey will not get wasted. Come ready to meet plenty of people in kilts!

Getting to Glasgow

There are excellent public transport links to the West of Scotland via air, train or bus. Visitors can fly into Glasgow International Airport to the southwest (about 8 miles from the centre) or Prestwick Airport on Ryanair around 35 miles to the south. Train services from England are regular and bring visitors into Glasgow Central Station. The Buchanan Bus centre is the main point of access for buses.

Full details on tourism and travel can be found on the Glasgow City Council website (www.glasgow.gov.uk), the Glasgow Tourist Information Centre (www.seeglasgow.com) or the University of Glasgow Visitor Centre (www.gla.ac.uk/visitors/visitorcentre).

For further information.

Contact either:

Joyce Lang, DACE, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow

Tel +44 (0) 141 330 1833

Fax +44 (0) 141 330 1821

or:

Kathy Maclachlan, DACE,

k.maclachlan@educ.gla.ac.uk

Tel +44 (0)141 330 1848.

Be sure to check the BAICE website for updated information:

www.baice.ac.uk

*In October **Brian Groombridge** attended an international conference in London on the theme of **Human Rights in an Ageing World**. It was organised by the International Longevity Centre - UK (one of 10 such centres). The moving spirit behind the event was ILC-UK's Chief Executive and AEA's Patron, Baroness Sally Greengross.*

Sally chaired a related Parliamentary debate the evening before, hosted by Help the Aged in the House of Commons Grand Committee Room. Frances Butler, Vice President of the British Institute of Human Rights and adviser to the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, opened with a specialist contribution, followed by Michael Wills, MP, Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (since 28 Jun 2007), and Conservative Shadow Justice Minister, Eleanor Laing, MP. The Liberal Democrats withdrew at short notice because of the party's sudden leadership crisis. Many visiting international conference participants joined the audience of British participants in the ageing field.

There were frequent references to the UK's Human Rights Act on both days. The Westminster speakers mostly used familiar examples of abuses of individual older people's human rights in care homes and elsewhere. I wanted to test the water for education in the light of a specific statement by Michael Wills and one of Frances Butler's main points. Wills said that the Act meant that all government departments had to have human rights champions, while Butler said that "public bodies were not sufficiently aware of their positive duties", i.e. it was not just a matter of avoiding abuse of individuals but of

creating an institutional culture of respect for rights with policies that implemented them.

So when it was our turn, I asked about the damage done by the previous government to adult education and the loss of opportunities for many older people. Wills denied there was a problem. When at the DfES, for example, he had secured more access to computers for older people. Eleanor Laing was all too aware of the problem: one of the many places affected was an FE college in her own constituency, which had been forced to close.

Education featured next day in the main conference. The whole event was in fact a learning experience, with excellent speakers and chair people from Argentina, the Dominican Republic, France, India, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, South Africa, the USA and the World Health Organisation. British speakers included Michael Wills again and Trevor Phillips, chairman of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

Educational opportunities for older people was a concern for several participants, including Professor Stephen McNair (National Institute for Adult Continuing Education). Trevor Phillips asked one of the questioners to write to him. Education was given overriding priority in a speech by none other than the distinguished pioneering American, Dr Robert N. Butler, President and CEO of the first ILC, the man who brought the term 'ageism' into the English language. In his view, "education and access to health care (and food) throughout the lifespan" were "the ultimate human rights". They were the

prerequisites. “What is it”, he asked, “to have a freedom to speak if you have not had the right to education, to participate fully in an open society?”

Butler was of course fully aware of the political complexity of that claim. “Positive rights require communal commitment of the resources of society, made available through taxation, budgeting and spending as well as through a variety of alliances - ad hoc though they may be - of public and private sectors”. There was “no question that availability of resources poses a significant problem”, but he reminded us that “resources are also needed to secure negative rights - the costs of the judiciary, defence attorneys, etc”.

Nevertheless a rights dimension should strengthen the case being argued by NIACE, AEA and others. Supposing, for example there were another Secretary of State, who reckoned this comparatively rich country could afford to educate plumbers, but not people keen in later life on Pilates - or poetry, philosophy or politics. Maybe AEA should consider studying this still fairly recent Human Rights Act and the Equality Commission’s brief, in association with NIACE, the U3A and other interested parties such as Better Government for Older People, Age Concern and Help the Aged.

The Association for Education and Ageing

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

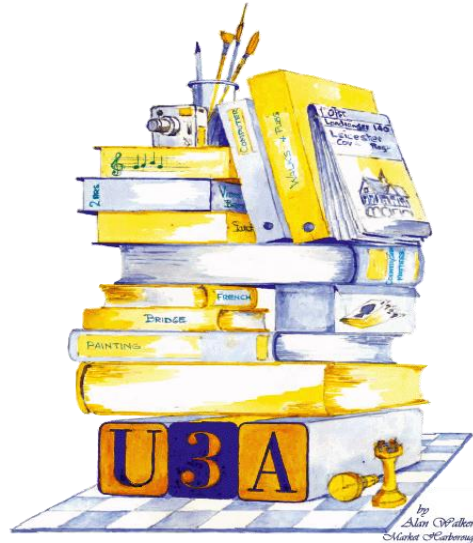
President: Professor David James

Chair: Jo Walker, jo.walker@cofeguildford.org.uk

Secretary: Carol Allen, 132 Dawes Rd, London SW6 7EF
aeasecretary@googlemail.com Tel: 020 7385 4641

Treasurer: Ron Speight, ronspeight2003@yahoo.com

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



*As a result of government policies, local authority adult education facilities have been dramatically reduced, classes closed and many older learners appear to have disappeared. What has actually happened is that many of them have removed themselves from the state sector with its now diminished lack of opportunities and “gone private”, including turning to the University of the Third Age. **Glenys Tuersley** of the Third Age Trust writes here about **The U3A Method of Later Life Learning.***

The Association Internationale des Universités de Troisième Age (AIUTA), with its global view of third age learning, has identified five styles of learning around the world. The UK version, which is also used by other English-speaking nations such as Australia and New Zealand, is innovative but not unique. Its roots date back to the Co-operative movement in the mid nineteenth century, the Miners’ Institutes and learning circles from various European countries. The idea of a University of the Third Age (U3A) was developed during the 1970s by our

three founders: Peter Laslett, a Cambridge don, Lord Michael Young, a social philanthropist and Professor Eric Midwinter, who describes the origins of the movement in his book, ‘500 Beacons’ as “a complex web of political, social and other strands.”

Having acquainted themselves with the French method, which was operating in Toulouse University, where Professor Pierre Vellas in the early 80s was offering later life learning opportunities within the university, our founders felt that this approach in the UK would restrict the growth of U3A to those towns fortunate to have a university. They therefore conceived the idea of a self-help learning co-operative, where local U3As operated independently, with the national support of the Third Age Trust. Following an Easter conference in 1982, the delegates dispersed around the country to set up the first U3A groups. Twenty five years on, there are now 650+ local U3As comprising some 180,000 members.

Some controversy has always existed over the term ‘university’, as the U3A has no entry requirements and offers no

qualifications. Many British people in their 70s have suffered bad educational experiences in their youth and reject the idea of any overly academic organisation. But this does not imply that academic intellect is not respected and sought as required. The term is used here in its original sense of the universality of learning.

The 'subject' or 'interest' group is central to the local U3A, and most U3As have a Study Group Co-ordinator, whose role is to encourage the formation of study groups and to offer some degree of support to the existing study group leaders. No official training is given, nor would the idea of "training" be tolerated in most quarters! U3A has always been extremely fortunate in attracting to its membership many from an educational background as well as others who, whilst they clearly possess the skills of a born teacher, have preferred because of the inequality of salary scales to spend their working life in other professions. The Third Age Trust in its supporting role is anxious to assist the endeavours of these voluntary leaders, who may feel a little isolated in their task. To this end a well-stocked Resource Centre of non-book materials for free loan is now used on a regular basis by 85% of U3As. An educational bulletin 'Sources' is published three times per year and distributed free by direct mail to all who apply. Study days are arranged around the country, devoted to particular subjects, where group leaders from surrounding U3As can meet to exchange ideas and a country-wide network of subject specialists exist to assist with consultations, provide occasional newsletters and help with the content of study days. Currently, the Trust is encouraging those Regions

which do not already have one, to implement a plan and policy of their own devising to support group leader activity. U3As around the country are so diverse in their membership and style of operation, that it would be inappropriate to direct this operation nationally.

In a stereotypical U3A situation, a group of like-minded people agree to meet. At the inaugural meeting a democratic decision is made on the course of study, the aims and objectives – the 'how' the 'where' and the 'when'. No group is too small and the maximum number is restricted by the size of the venue – often a member's home, but otherwise a hired accommodation – or the degree of individual participation expected within the group. If the group can produce an obvious leader, this is a bonus. If not, a 'facilitator' is essential to ensure dates, venues, equipment and attendance are all organised. After this different members will be appointed by agreement to research and present topics to the group on future occasions. This is what we refer to as 'Shared Learning' and is the heart of Peter Laslett's mantra: "Those who teach also learn; those who learn also teach". This is a great confidence builder and many members coming to this for the first time express their glee at the satisfaction of discovering new information and finding they have the ability to share this with the others.

There are many methods of study employed. For example: Appreciation – of art, music, poetry; Hands on – for computing, crafts, art, photography, music; Outside activities – such as walking, visits, field trips, theatre visits; Languages – as in grammar, conversation or reading; Discussion – applied to a wide variety of topics and

essential to most groups. It allows for the experience of members of the group to be shared, it clarifies issues which some of the group may find problematic, and it ensures everybody is involved and participating. In some ways the discussion element replaces the need for written submissions used in most formal study.

Without the restraints of a set syllabus, all manner of intriguing combinations of subjects may be investigated: Fashion in history, philosophy in fiction, mathematics in music - the opportunities are endless, and groups are at liberty to dally over items of particular interest or difficulty.

Conventional means of quality assessment are difficult to apply to this style of learning. Statistical evidence of the rapid growth in members shows the value placed on it by members and more recently by the educational establishment.

A recent survey of U3A activities showed that the majority of the sample (90%) had previously held professional posts, just over half of these had completed full-time education by the age of 16, and 23% had had no further qualification thereafter. Over 100

different activities were recorded, the most popular included walking, music, art, foreign languages, book circles, bridge, crafts, history, writing, discussion groups and science. There was a strong preference for fully or partially shared learning and 53% of the groups surveyed were operating in this way. The social element is considered very important and brings obvious health and well-being benefits to older, single people. Many report a transformation in their lives after joining U3A.

As well as the study provision within their own U3A, members are also offered a choice of nationally organised residential summer schools tutored voluntarily by U3A members, a selection of online courses, designed and tutored by our own members and several annual events such as a lecture day at the Royal Institution, the National Institute for Medical Research, and the Dana Alliance for Brain Research given by specialist lecturers from each institution.

To U3A members, amateurism isn't inferior to professionalism. The word 'Amateur' is derived from the Latin *amare* - to love, and many U3A members will express their love of this style of learning in later life.

REMINDER

Subscriptions are now due for your AEA Membership.

Current subscription rates are:

Individual membership:	waged: £20.00
	unwaged: £10.00

Corporate Membership

(to cover a number of members from one organisation): £60.00

Please send your cheques to Carol Allen, AEA Secretary at the address on page 7. And if you know of any friends or colleagues who would be interested in joining the association, Carol will be happy to send them membership details and a complimentary copy of the digest

*Leicester University Institute of Lifelong Learning is hosting a series of further research seminars in 2008 on the topic of **Older People, Learning and Society**. The first and introductory session was held in Autumn 2007, but the more specific ones are still to come.*

The aim of the proposed research seminars is to bring together a mixed interdisciplinary group of researchers and practitioners to share knowledge and understanding about ageing and adult learning, to identify gaps in research and to develop new agendas and collaboration. The seminars will aim to strengthen the theoretical and empirical foundations of educational and social gerontology and of related policy studies. The series will also examine different forms of provision and modes of delivery, and organisational and funding issues.

In summary, the objectives of the seminar series are:

- to enable researchers and users to exchange findings, information and ideas about the impact of various learning activities on older people, their families and wider society.

- to explore different types of formal, informal and non-formal adult learning activities, and the different forms of provision, that are available for older people in Britain and in other countries;
- to promote research in this field and to increase collaboration on research, between academics and users;
- to raise the profile of research on lifelong learning and older people amongst users and policy makers, to promote best practice, and to influence national and local policies.

The outcomes of the seminars will include reports and other publications, an edited book, dissemination through the press, magazines and the broadcast media. It is also planned to hold a self-financing national conference after the series has ended.

Papers, developed in light of discussions, will be published in electronic form and as articles in journals, and ‘key findings’ summaries of each seminar will be prepared and distributed to targeted agencies and organisations. Press releases will also be issued to the general and specialist print and broadcast media.

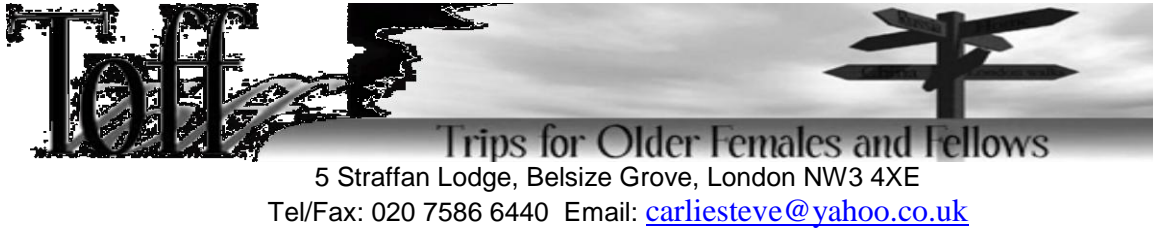
Seminar 2 (Spring 2008): Policy areas

Seminar 3 (Summer 2008): International session:

Seminar 4 (Autumn 2008): Modes of delivery: Seminar 5 (Spring 2009): Policy areas II:

Seminar 6 (Summer 2009): Looking forward

Further details from **Isobel Woodliffe, ljw3@le.ac.uk tel 0116 252 5914 Institute of Lifelong Learning, University of Leicester, 128 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PA**



European Parliament Tour

⌘ **6 Day Tour - 20th April 2008** ⌘

ITINERARY

ITINERARY

Sunday 20 April 2008

Meet opposite London Euston Station for 10.00 am departure by coach to Folkestone, where we will take the Eurotunnel over to Calais. Continue towards Paris, our base for the next two nights.

Novotel Paris Gare de Lyon Tel: 00 33 1 44 67 60 00

Monday 21 April 2008

Time at leisure in Paris with an included boat trip on the River Seine.

Tuesday 22 April 2008

We continue south towards Rastatt in Germany for the next two nights.

Holiday Inn Garden Court, Rastatt Tel: 00 49 7222 9240

Wednesday 23 April 2008

Depart for Strasbourg (less than 1 hr drive) and a visit to the European Parliament including meeting MEPs and seeing a debate. Sponsored dinner by Robert Evans MEP. Return to Rastatt.

Thursday 24 April 2008

We leave Germany heading back into France and on to St. Omer for our final overnight stay. This evening there will be a farewell meal.

Ibis Hotel, St. Omer Tel: 00 33 3 21 93 11 11

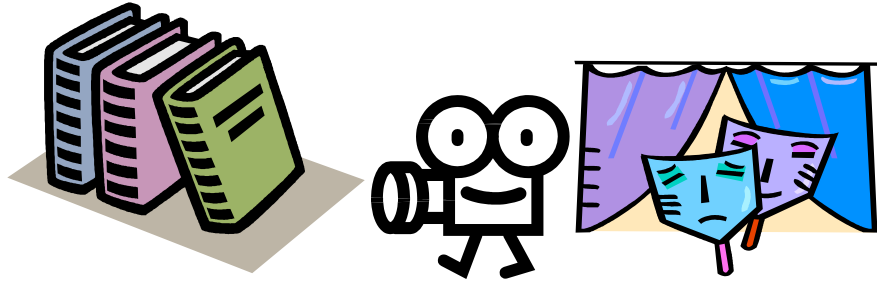
Friday 25 April 2008

After breakfast we depart for a visit to 'Le Blockhaus d'Eperlecques' at 10.00 hours before continuing to the Hypermarket near Calais for shopping. After some free time drive on to Calais for the return Eurotunnel to Folkestone and on to London for an early evening arrival.

£255 per person Twin Share
Single supplement £80
Deposit £115 by 10th February

Price includes:

- ◆ 5 nights, Bed & Breakfast accommodation at the hotels featured.
- ◆ 2 dinners
- ◆ Coach travel throughout.
- ◆ River Seine Cruise.
- ◆ Entrance to Le Blockhaus
- ◆ Visit to European Parliament



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

In November your editor was delighted to be invited to serve on the judging panel for Dianne Norton's second U3A Play Competition. And a fascinating exercise it proved to be. Dianne explains here the thinking behind the project.

Third Age Press was inspired by my work with the University of the Third Age and I always believed that U3A was the natural niche for many of our publications. So it wasn't much of a jump from that premise to notice over 10 years ago that many U3As had play reading groups. I had what I thought was the clever idea of running a play writing competition, looking for new plays that would lend themselves, in the main, to being read. So I announced my competition in the U3A news and sat back and waited. What a deluge! There were over 120 plays submitted. I had roped in some 25 U3A playreading groups to do the first vetting, not really realising how much work I'd let myself in for with all the photocopying, posting and evaluating the results.

In the end we arrived at a short list of 13 plays which were then read and marked by seven people all with considerable experience in various aspects of theatre. In 1996 we published *'The Play Reader:*

7 dramas by Thirdagers'. The chosen plays represented a fascinating variety of plot, setting and styles and have been read by countless groups in the intervening 10 years. The original book sold out and was re-printed and I then decided that it made more sense to produce the plays in an A4 format, ready to insert into a ring binder and photocopy as required. This too has gone on selling well year after year.

I'm not sure why it took me so long to realise that I should run another competition but this was launched again through U3A in 2007 and the results have just been announced. The difficulties of using as many adjudicators as I had originally convinced me that a small panel would be a lot less work and get just as fair a result. This time there were 'only' 57 entrants – again, fascinatingly varied. And again purely by coincidence we ended up with seven winners. There was a huge range of themes and styles ranging from biblical history to contemporary farce. One interesting aspect of the selection was the different views of life in a care home or other such 'retirement community' – gratifyingly these were almost all very upbeat! The winners are all U3A members – in fact, one is actually a U3A writing group!

The Wellingbourne Women's Guild
Locarno
Suitcases
Judgement
One Week in Jerusalem
When the Lights Come on Again
Radio 50+:Ransome Park – Bunkered

The plays will be published in March 2008. This time we'll go straight to the A4 format, which is obviously useful for groups who need to photocopy parts. It's a simple and economic way of publishing something that doesn't need to be embellished with graphics. In fact, we may even consider issuing it on disks, which would save on the postage. While all the plays are well suited to being read by groups, they could equally be produced on stage and will hopefully appeal to a wider audience than just U3As.

Details of the publication (and the title – to be announced) will appear in the new

Ian Leslie Brydon
 Mervyn Coverdale
 Susanna Gladwin
 David Lewis
 David Lewis
 Vera Roper
 U3A Watford

year on our website
 (www.thirdagepress.co.uk) and in a future Digest.

All in all it's been an interesting year for Third Age Press. starting with "*Defining Women*" (our anthology by older women writers); moving on, or perhaps we should say sideways, to "*The Amazing Mrs Shufflewick*" (a memoir of Rex James, a revered drag artist of the '40s and '50s); and finishing off with "*How to be a Merry Widow*" (candid, practical and witty). We're nothing if not versatile!

How to be a Merry Widow

Life after death for the older lady



by Mary Rogers

Illustrated by Mig

£12.50 paperback

166 pages ISBN 1898576 20 4 Published December 2007

Dianne writes further about “How to be a Merry Widow” by Mary Rogers.

If you are looking for a politically correct, objective view of how to cope with bereavement – do NOT buy this book! This is a book about coming to terms with widowhood after the shock of bereavement has begun to ease. Mary Rogers writes with candour and humour, in a deeply personal style. She manages to be funny, moving and at the same time, practical.

Mary says . . .” I am writing this in my first year of living alone. Although there have been times when I would have given the rest of my life for five minutes in his arms, there is a positive side to being single again and losing a husband sometimes means finding oneself.” The contents are a stimulating mix of personal reflection ~ both the author’s and other widows’ ~ useful hints on everything from taking control of your life on an everyday basis, developing new interests, keeping well in mind and body, and learning to appreciate the reality of being single again. Mig’s illustrations add just the right amount of spice to Mary Roger’s food for thought.

About the author:

Mary Rogers describes herself as an old lady but a young widow. Discovering there were no books on how to enjoy being single again, she wrote one. Her interests are rambling through muddy fields, losing at bridge and making friends with strangers. Mary started work in a knitwear factory aged 14 and later worked as a dress designer, and, after an OU degree, a lecturer in English and Drama. Her first novel, *Wounded Bird Of Paradise*, was published when she was aged 68. She is the author of

numerous stories, poems and articles including *How to be a Merry Widow*, which was published in *The Guardian* and led her to write this book.

The book is available from:

Third Age Press,
6 Parkside Gardens,
London SW19 5EY
Tel: 020 8947 0401 or 07932 981239
Fax: 020 8944 9316

Email: dnort@globalnet.co.uk
www.thirdagepress.co.uk

Price £12.50 UK post free, or on order through bookshops. For orders from outside the UK please add 20% for postage.

NOTE: Third Age Press is willing to negotiate a special offer for readers of “AEA Digest”.

Still on the subject of books, Alex Withnall has been reading “Diary of an Ordinary Woman” by Margaret Forster (publ. by Vintage: London (2004) ISBN 0-099-44928-5 £6.99 (pb))

I have long been a fan of Margaret Forster’s engrossing novels and although she first started writing in the 1960s, she has never quite received the recognition she so richly deserves. One of the themes that runs through her writing is family relationships and in particular, the sometimes fraught interaction between generations. Here, however, she explains that, in 1999, she received a letter from a woman whose husband was in possession of a series of diaries that had been kept by his aunt, a Millicent King, from the age of 13 to when she was 94 spanning the years 1914 to 1995; would Margaret be willing to edit them?

This book is the result. And as Forster asks, although Millicent was an 'ordinary woman', is there really any such thing as an 'ordinary life' at all?

Millicent begins her diary as a schoolgirl on the eve of the First World War and charts in detail the impact on her family life. As she grows up and gets a job, we learn of her experiences working in a shop, her early relationships with the opposite sex, her sojourn in Rome with an American family as Mussolini rose to power and her subsequent return. As the 1930s progress, Millicent faithfully records the minutiae of her life as a teacher and then as a trainee social worker. She becomes romantically involved with a number of different men; her real love is Robert who is unfortunately already married and unable to obtain a divorce.

The build up to the Second World War and its progress is vividly recorded. Millicent works with the WVS and is busy with evacuated children and their placements. She depicts life in London during the Blitz and, when she joins the WAAF, notes her satisfaction that she is doing something worthwhile at last. Sadly, Robert is captured and held in the notorious Changi prison. It is only some time later that Millicent learns the horror of his fate. Meanwhile, she records simply that a bomb killed her elder sister and all her family except her young twins in August 1942. There is nothing to be done but for Millicent to bring them up herself. For a while the little family lead a peaceful if lonely life in Gloucestershire, returning to London in 1946.

The fifties and sixties pass. Millicent retires from teaching in 1961 and is subsequently 'dragged into modern times' by Connie, her niece, who is now a teacher herself and who comes back to live with her, an experience that Millicent finds 'very peculiar' as she tries to come to terms with Connie's militant feminism. Connie does persuade her to enrol for an Open University degree and Millicent's lengthy account of her attendance at a summer school at the age of 70 will strike a chord. Meanwhile, when Connie later joins the Greenham Common Peace Camp, Millicent becomes very alarmed. Although she pays a visit herself and finds the experience moving, she is very concerned for Connie, especially as she herself is becoming increasingly frail. In 1992, having now lost most of her family, she moves to the country to live with her nephew and his wife. Connie seems to disappear from Millicent's life and the diary fades out in June 1995.

This book is superbly satisfying and a really gripping and moving read. Margaret Forster has done a wonderful job of bringing Millicent's diaries to life and filling in the gaps with her insightful commentary. The result is a narrative account of the dramas and tragedies of one woman's life and her perspective on the momentous events that shaped life in the 20th Century in which, as the blurb says, 'every word rings true'.

Or does it?

Before we go on to what's new in the cinema, here's delightful photograph that our Chair Jo Walker took while on holiday in Cornwall this year. Food for thought!



And indeed while we're on the subject of asserting our worth, here's a tip ostensibly but not exclusively for women from Mary Rogers' book. On learning to say "No". Bit selfish? You bet!

Don't let others talk you into doing things you don't want to do. If you want a happy life you have to be a bit selfish. We are programmed from small girls to be friendly to everybody, to smile sweetly all the time and never answer back. We say 'Yes' when we mean 'No'.

Here's how to refuse.

Look in the mirror, place the tip of your tongue behind the upper teeth, push the lips forward then release the tongue and say 'NO'. Practise it. If this is too difficult try saying, 'Nobody' then stop before you come to 'body.' You're trying it now aren't you? I can see you.

Keep your status by doing only what you want to do and only what brings you pleasure. Learn to say 'No'

On Screen
Carol Allen

As we are all living longer, sons and daughters in early or later middle age are increasingly faced with the problem of caring for a parent, who can no longer look after him or herself. In *The Savages* Wendy (Laura Linney) and Jon Savage (Philip Seymour Hoffman), who hardly keep in touch with each other let alone their father Lenny (Philip Bosco) have to pull together, when Lenny loses his place in a luxury Florida retirement complex with the death of his rich partner. Director Tamara Jenkins handles the subject with both humanity and humour, as in the early scenes in the somewhat gruesome Sun City complex, with women in their sixties and seventies making like cheerleaders and in a sequence where Lenny chooses Al Jolson "blacking up" in "The Jazz Singer" for movie evening at the nursing home his children have got him into, thereby offending the uncomprehending largely black staff. The focus of the film is on Wendy and Jon and their problems caring for a father, who did not always take good care of them as children. We don't get to know Lenny as well, but one feels for him in the humiliations of dementia, while also getting glimpses, when he lapses into aggression, of the not always pleasant man he once was.

One cannot help but feel for Jean-Dominique Bauby in *"The Diving Bell and the Butterfly"*. Bauby, a successful journalist, had a stroke in his early forties and woke from a coma to find himself a victim of "locked in" syndrome. He could see, hear, think and remember but the only part of his body still moving was his left eyelid – which became his sole method of

communication by which he dictated the book which became the film. The early scenes, which put us inside the head of Jean Do visually and aurally are very effective, as is the poignant moment when the film shifts perspective and he and we see in the mirror what this formerly attractive and vibrant man has become. Mathieu Almaric, who for most of the film apart from flashbacks has only his left eye and his voice to work with, is superb as Jean Do in a well made and very moving film.

Sidney Lumet's *"Before the Devil Knows Your Dead"*, which is told in reverse order of events, starts out as an apparent heist movie about a raid on jewellery store in a very tense and shocking sequence and develops into an almost Shakespearean scale tragedy about a father's relationship with his two sons. Philip Seymour Hoffman (again) and Ethan Hawke are the siblings and Albert Finney is outstanding as the father, whose grief for his wife, who is mortally injured in the robbery, and frustration over the police's inaction forces the dark dynamics of his family into the open. While not perfect – there are certain holes in the plot - it's a very elegant and constantly intriguing story, full of surprises and with dramatic irony in spades.

Roger Donaldson's *"The Bank Job"* is a real heist movie. Writers Dick Clement and Ian LeFrenais have taken the facts of an unsolved bank robbery in London in the sixties, embellished them with their imagination and made 2 and 2 add up to a very convincing 5 or even 6, involving scandal in high places and an MI5 cover up. It features a strong British team of actors and convincingly recreates the look and social structure of London in that period. A bit unavoidably violent at times, but gripping and frequently funny.