
AEA DIGEST

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Elixir Festival at Sadler's Wells celebrating older creativity through dance (see page 13)
Photograph: Tony Nandi

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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jonathan Hughes

This is a modified version of the report I provided for the AGM and Conference on 11th September 2014. For the second year running we held the conference at Walton Hall which is the 'HQ' of the Open University in Milton Keynes. The Conference theme was '*Understanding and supporting learning for older people: Insights from Europe and the UK*'.



Jonathan Hughes laying out the conference agenda

From a personal perspective I thought the conference provided a great opportunity to reflect on the value of European work. This was achieved by considering the benefits that AEA has derived from working with the Forage, Memory and Wellbeing projects. Keith Percy led this part of the day. This consideration was assisted by Judith Robinson and Chris Minter of the Educational Centres Association (ECA), who led an interactive workshop session focused on two ECA European Projects, TEAch and Teddy Bear. I would also like to thank my Open University Colleagues Verina Waights and Caroline Holland for helping me set the scene and to Astrid Wissenberg (Director of Research, Scholarship and Quality) for

formerly welcoming the conference on behalf of the Open University.

The conference also, of course, includes the annual Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture which was given this year by Dr Carol Holland (Director of the Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing at Aston University). Her lecture took as its topic, *New directions in memory and ageing: changing the story*.

It is no coincidence that I have referred to the Open University a number of times, as I work full time as a lecturer there. So for me one aspect of the involvement I have with AEA is the personal juggling I have to do between paid work, and indeed other aspects of my life. I'm not claiming this sort of juggling is unique; everyone I know who is involved with AEA is doing their own version of a juggling act. However, I hope that AEA provides opportunities where we can come together to promote the value of learning throughout the life course, but particularly in later life.

Last year's AGM (in 2013) saw a number of new executive committee members. Not only did we welcome Diane Sawyer as our new treasurer, we also welcomed Caroline Holland, Josie Tetley and Jane Watts as new executive committee members. I think this has strengthened an already formidable executive.

However, this AGM was the last one for Sasha Anderson as AEA Secretary. I would like to place on record my appreciation of Sasha's input in this role as well as her work on the Forage project (which will continue for a few months). Sasha's expertise, efficiency and knowledge will be sorely missed as she

moves with her family to experience life in the frozen north (Norway).



Sasha, Keith and Jonathan sharing an AEA conference table for the last time

Thanks to Jane Watts, AEA is now represented on the National Older Learner Group (NOLG). On AEA's behalf, I have attended a number of NOLG meetings. There are a number of people with AEA links who attend these meetings, which provide a useful forum for information exchange and possible partnerships. Increasingly, I find myself representing the Open University as well as AEA and I am finding that there are more links than I anticipated between my 'day job' and my role as AEA chair. Jane played a key role in organising a co-badged AEA/NIACE seminar (Older people, Careers and Learning) in May 2014. Josie Tetley is working with fellow AEA member, Chris Phillipson, to develop a seminar focused on the research and educational issues around older people and sexual health, which will take place in Manchester in on 6th February 2015. These two seminars represent AEA's activity in two of the broader areas of later life learning which were apparent in our conference in 2013 and which I think should continue to provide a broad basis for how later life learning is seen within AEA. The first relates to older workers and the transition into retirement. The second relates to learning linked to health and care needs. In addition to the conference planned for next February, this strand

has been well supported by two of the European Projects in which AEA has been a key player –the Memory Project and the Wellbeing Project.

There is of course a third strand, which focuses on 'active learning' in what is sometimes referred to as the 'Third Age' and has been widely covered in both this year's and last year's conferences. These strands do of course cross cut, in that for example a particular individual may well be an older worker but need also to find out about health or care needs too.

The second strand has been well represented in terms of both activity and supporting events. In particular the AEA has been active in two Grundtvig Learning Partnerships; WELL (Well-being in later life: education, creativity and physical activity) and Memory in Later Life. On both these projects AEA Executive Committee member Keith Percy has taken a leading role. I would also like to place on record the sterling work done by AEA member Val Bissland (on Memory in Later Life) and Lynne Wealleans (an AEA Executive Committee member) on WELL. Both these partnerships were discussed in the course of the 2014 conference. They have involved international 'mobilities' of educators and learners to meet, share best practice and learn from each other. I regret that work and personal commitments have meant that I have been unable to participate in these.

However, I was able to attend a well-organised and well-attended conference in Lancaster in June of this year which marked the final mobility of Memory in Later Life. One of the speakers was Dr Carol Holland who gave this year's Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture.

I also look forward to the dissemination event for WELL later this year. I know that both WELL and Memory in Later Life have worked well. They have been relatively easy to manage and have led to productive contacts in Europe. I also look forward to reading the handbook on memory that Keith Percy undertook to produce. *(see pages 9-10 for further information on this).*

The third European Project that involved AEA is ForAge. (ForAge for later life learning: Building on European Experience). ForAge is a Grundtvig Multilateral Network (rather than Learning Partnership) which is led by the University of Leicester. The aim of Forage was to create a website and database to capture what has been learned about later life learning. The work of Keith Percy and our secretary Sasha Anderson has been crucial in ensuring that this project has made progress. Their input has ensured that there is invaluable content on the website relating to policy, practice and research that relates to later life learning in the European context.



Keith Percy speaking on AEA in the European context

Keith's work has also involved liaising with other partners and engaging in discussions that have been required to

respond to the not inconsiderable issues that have related to this project. Sasha has been central in helping to resolve the issues that arose when one partner (unfortunately the partner who developed the ForAge website) was declared ineligible by Brussels. The intention is that the Forage website will continue to be maintained by AEA after the end of the project. This will give AEA a unique position and ensure that it remains a key player.

However, these three projects have either ended or will end soon. AEA must identify new projects in order to maintain its presence in Europe as well as ensuring that the work put in by AEA members continues to have currency.

In addition to securing funding by involvement in projects (whether European or not) the other source of funds that AEA relies on for its survival is income from membership. Clearly, AEA does not just want members for their income they provide. We want to increase the number of people who are engaged with the importance of learning in later life. The task for AEA is to contribute to realising the importance of later life learning within the three strands I have identified and involving all of our 'constituencies' (older learners, practitioners and academics). To do this, we have done significant work on developing proposals that were approved at the 2013 AGM in relation to a range of benefits for different categories of members, including student, corporate and associate membership. This work needs to continue over the next year on the basis of agreed subscription levels. Time and energy from both the executive and from the membership is required to make this happen – without

these inputs they will remain membership offers on paper only.

A key aspect of this is how AEA and the members engage with each other. We already have some well-established channels of communication. These include our journal, *International Journal of Education and Ageing*. The editor-in-chief is Keith Percy and one of the two editors is AEA member Jim Soulsby. AEA member and previous chair Jo Walker is Associate Editor (Book Reviews). The AEA also produces a regular, informative and varied Digest, thanks to Carol Allen. In addition Carol, Sasha and Alex Withnall have also been developing AEA's presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Linked-In). Trish Hafford-Letchfield has also agreed to develop how we attract and interact with student members. I would like to see AEA engaging in parallel activity with our corporate and associate members.

What else would I like to see happen in the next 12 months? First, I would like membership to increase as a result of a clear and compelling offer across membership categories. This offer will include regular communication on issues of interest, the opportunity to participate in exciting (and very reasonably priced, or even free) seminars and conferences and the provision of opportunities via AEA to establish the value of later life learning. This also implies sharpening up our social media presence. Second, AEA needs to be involved in new projects to draw on its expertise and to keep this current. There are significant financial implications if we do not. Third, I think we all need to work out what the synergies are between our personal and professional lives and our involvement

with AEA. This thought only occurred to me as I wrote these notes (although I have been writing a blog called *Personal and Professional* for over 12 months). For me these personal synergies stem from the fact that I am myself an older learner and older worker and have had to learn about health issues. The professional synergies stem from my work on Open University modules relating to ageing and my work on badged open courses to support the journey from informal to formal learning.

If you have a moment perhaps you could reflect on how you might link your personal interests to furthering the work of AEA. If you do, and if you feel you have an idea for furthering the work of AEA, please do get in touch with me. (contact details page 24).

The conference presentation given by Prof. Keith Percy, Learning, memory, well-being and older people: lessons from AEA's three European projects can be found in the Conference news on our Events page in both .pdf and Power Point format
<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/aea-events.html>

*As Jonathan mentioned above, this year's Frank Glendenning Memorial lecture was delivered by Dr Carol Holland, Director of the Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing at Aston University). The lecture series is in memory of AEA's founder and we were delighted that Mrs Angela Glendenning was able to join us once again. Dr Holland took as her topic **New directions in memory and ageing: changing the story.** Report from Jo Walker.*



“Marbles and mates, mediated by movement”. This is the recipe for keeping and enhancing cognitive and intellectual functioning in later life, according to Dr Holland. Dr Holland’s opening image of marbles (standing for what we’re all afraid of losing) led quickly to an explanation of how our activities – social, physical and intellectual – are linked both to the health of our brain and specific components of its functioning such as executive function, involved in allocating attention, updating information to be processed and task switching according to the demands of the environment and so having an impact on so much of what we do.

Studies of brain health using neuroimaging have demonstrated that older brains do look different from younger ones (less dense, more gaps) but are still able to support normal behaviour. Functioning can be improved, however, by physical exercise which has been shown to increase blood flow specifically to the frontal lobes, improve the connectivity of neural activity and can even promote the

increase of grey matter, contrary to popular belief. In even better news, the benefit of physical exercise ‘trumps’ the potential for brain pathology in those with a genetic pre-disposition for dementia (as shown by a biological marker). This raises the possibility of therapeutic intervention in the form of exercise programmes for carriers of dementia genes.

Intellectual exercise is also beneficial for maintenance of cognitive functioning. This could be found in taking part in demanding mental tasks and learning new things. Self-reported diaries of daily activities have provided evidence that higher cognitive activity has a positive effect on ‘cognitive reserve’. Those who demonstrated current and recent past intellectual exercise appear to have benefitted from a protective effect, though detailed studies have still to be done.

Another major element in keeping your ‘marbles’ healthy is having ‘mates’. Social engagement has been linked to reduced stress and isolation, both of which can have a negative impact on functioning, via for example the impact of our body’s stress response on parts of the brain that support executive function. The protective effect of social networks has been shown to modify the impact of neuropathology on actual experienced declines in cognition. On an everyday level, it can be seen how social engagement might relate to memory. An important aspect of social interaction is story telling and narratives of various sorts. Whilst there is some evidence that being able to recall specific events may get more difficult past the age of 75 with some people becoming quite general in their recall, the value of practising

‘autobiographical’ memory could help sustain more rewarding social relationships, which in turn would support memory and have an impact on mental wellbeing. The ability to recall specific personal memories in detail is important for developing and maintaining relationships, for informing and advising others and for problem solving. Lack of it is a risk factor for depression.

Dr Holland has been studying the effects of social, intellectual and physical effects on functional cognition, using autobiographical memory as an indicator. A study of the effect of a rise in activities for 65-99 year olds, caused by moving into a retirement village/ExtraCare facility, showed that social and functional memory was positively associated with such stimulation.

The message is clear – whatever your age, get moving and active on the social, intellectual and physical exercise fronts to keep those marbles healthy!

More detail on Dr Holland’s lecture can be found via the Annual Lectures page of our website. It is an informative and well illustrated piece which will fill you in even if you weren’t able to attend the lecture.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/frank-glendenning-memorial-lectures.html>

*Tying in with the theme of Dr Holland’s lecture we have news from **Janet Whitehouse** of U3A about their ongoing focus on research projects, which are also exploring the beneficial effects on*

health of mental and physical activity and social contact.

The national U3A has reformed its Research Committee under the chairmanship of Gwen Dawe, the regional trustee for Northumbria. The Northumbria region of U3A has a record of commitment to research. In 2012 it signed a Concordat with the University of Newcastle which created RITA – Research Ideas from the Third Age. This is an annual competition in which U3A members put forward ideas for research projects and are involved with researchers in taking forward the successful ones.



Winners of the 2012 RITA competition, seen here with Professor Jim Edwardson.

Many U3As in the region have Research Ambassadors who attend seminars at the university and promote research in their U3As. It is hoped to establish Research Ambassadors in U3As in other parts of the UK.

At the national U3A conference in September the demand for places at the Research Workshop was so great that it was offered twice. As members shared information about their U3A’s involvement in research, sometimes a project within their U3A, sometimes with a university, it was clear that more was taking place than we were aware of.

It is well known that keeping mentally and physically active and having social contact helps to maintain health. U3A offers all three. Gwen mentioned a university project which plans to

measure the effect of being a U3A member on the use of health resources, such as visits to the GP. We hope that the university will be successful in getting funding for this.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

December 2014 (date TBC), Stoke-on-Trent
Seminar relating to the ‘Active retirement’ strand
Details to follow as soon as they are available

6 February 2015, Manchester
Older people and sexual health – research and educational issues
Details to follow as soon as they are available

*AEA member Professor Brian Findsen returned to his native New Zealand some years ago to take up a position at the University of Waikato. He is currently back in the UK as a visiting professor at the University of Leicester and will be presenting a seminar at the end of October on **Learning in later life: Concepts, exemplars and issues.***

Ideas of what later life learning is or might be are quite problematic. This seminar will provide insights into a conceptual framework for understanding learning in later life before focussing on specific instances of different provision and practices of older adult learning. These examples will relate to the presenter’s knowledge of international exemplars of “effective” learning in later life from different national/cultural contexts. The seminar will conclude with identifying and discussing current learning/educational issues that face adults in later life.



Professor Brian Findsen from the University of Waikato, New Zealand, has an extensive background in adult and continuing education in his homeland of Aotearoa New Zealand, as a postgraduate student of adult education in the United States and as a staff member and Head of Department in

Adult & Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow, 2004-2008. His book publications include *Learning later* (2005) and *Lifelong learning in later life* (with Dr Marvin Formosa, University of Malta) (2011). His primary research interests are in later life learning, international adult education, university adult education and the sociology of adult education. He is also a board member of Age Concern (Hamilton).

The seminar will take place in the Main Hall at Embrace Arts, Lancaster Road, Leicester LE1 7HA on **Friday 31st October, 11.00am-12.30pm**. The Centre has a café, and any guests wishing to buy refreshments/lunch before or after the seminar would be welcome to do so. It is free to attend and all are welcome, so please do forward this to any friends or colleagues who may be interested.

For further details and to confirm your attendance please contact Isobel at ijw3@le.ac.uk or by telephone on 0116 252-5914

*As reported in the last digest, The Grundtvig Learning Partnership project on **Memory in Later Life**, in which AEA was a partner with other European organisations, ran from August 2012. It was completed in July 2014. Here are some examples of the work done from **Val Bissland**, who with Keith Percy was a major participant in the project – and who also took the photographs.*

The topics of autobiographical memory, attitudes to memory, lifestyles and memory and aesthetics and memory were researched, discussed and debated in local groups of older learners (in

AEA's case in Lancaster and Strathclyde) and in international meetings in Rome and Athens.



Here above for example in Athens the Memory XL project explored the memory through aesthetic experience. Keith (centre) is studying a Byzantine picture intently. Through asking ourselves questions about a work of art - what feelings does it stir? what is going on in the picture? what sort of message do the colours convey? - we can build our own interpretation. In so doing we lay down lasting memories. This is more effective than listening to long explanations from a guide, who fills the mind with facts soon to be forgotten.



Another example, this time from the Lancaster group. Irene McGill reads her autobiographical memory at a Memory XL workshop in Uptar University in Rome. The group listens intently to each other's stories and identifies the

emotional significance and why it is important to the person. Our personal experience creates enduring memories that do not easily fade compared to information we have learned in a classroom. This is prone to fade rapidly unless rehearsed and revisited.

Launched during the European Year for Active Ageing 2012, Memory-XL was a Grundtvig Learning Partnership of six organisations from Poland, Germany, UK, Hungary, Greece and Italy. Its aims were to explore various practical memory and mnemonic rules, methods and techniques. Partners conducted a programme of local activities with groups of older adults and teachers. International meetings were then held, during which partners, learners and teachers discussed, and evaluated the outcomes of learning activities and developed plans for further activities and methods.

A bank of these materials has now been gathered for dissemination in the *Memory in Later Life Handbook*, edited by Keith Percy. The handbook can be downloaded free here from AEA website.

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/news-views.html>

“Stick Your Neck Out” is a short film, which was made for the Beth Johnson Foundation by one of their trustees, Lorna Easterbrook. It tells the story of John, now 65 years old, who faced a life crisis ten years ago and worked through it with the help of the foundation.

"Life is what happens while you are busy making plans", John Lennon famously said. In *Stick Your Neck Out*,

another John talks about how his life changed dramatically. John Davies lives in Stoke-on-Trent and his life changed for the worse in his 50s and then, by the time he reached pension age, for the better - helped by the work of the Beth Johnson Foundation.



At the age of 55, a lifelong anxiety disorder left him without work, with his marriage at an end and needing a new place to live. Unable to cope he asked his doctor to 'keep him safe' by admitting him to psychiatric care. Ten years on, and now 65, John's life has changed again, this time for the better - helped by the work of charity the Beth Johnson Foundation. BJB focuses on what is possible from midlife onwards - even when dealing with illness, caring roles or low incomes - to plan ahead and learn how to get to grips with transitions in life and difficult life changes in order to have as good a future as possible in older age.

John says “I stuck my neck out, tried new things and didn’t give up. I wouldn’t be where I am today without the wonderful help of the Beth Johnson Foundation”.

Follow this link to view Lorna Easterbrook’s video *Stick Your Neck Out* <http://vimeo.com/99621628>



*How do you feel about the increasingly likely prospect that you could live to be a hundred? An exhibition mounted by Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton, which is touring the country for the next few weeks, looks at the prospect with the cheering title **How to Get to 100 and Enjoy It***

What does it take for us to get to 100 years old? What are our chances of living beyond a century? How do our early years, lifestyle, work and where we live affect our lifespan? These are just some of the questions raised in a new exhibition being taken around the UK by population experts at the University of Southampton.

The ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC), based at the University, will launch the exhibition *How to get to 100 and enjoy it* in the West Quay Shopping Centre, Southampton. The tour aims to get people across the country thinking about the challenges posed by an ageing population and how this will affect their lives.

Professor Jane Falkingham, Director of the CPC and the University of Southampton's Dean of Social and Human Sciences, says: "The number of 100 year olds is growing and researchers

believe that in the future ageing will occur at increasingly later stages of life. It's estimated one in three UK children born in 2014 will live to be 100 years old. An ageing population poses both challenges and opportunities for societies. We hope we can get people in the cities we visit to think about this social change and what it might mean in the long term for themselves and their communities."

The project to develop and promote the exhibition across Europe is led by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Germany. The CPC has taken the lead in the UK creating content specific to this country in conjunction with Population Europe – a network of leading European experts specialising in communicating demographic knowledge to a wider public.



The installation is divided into 10 topical areas allowing visitors to explore demographic issues through interactive activities, games and information displays. The exhibition will showcase cutting-edge demographic research in an interactive and engaging format and will allow visitors to consider:

- What are your chances of living to 100?
- How do your early years, your family life, where you live, your

lifestyle and your work affect these chances?

With one in three children born in 2014 expected to live to 100, these questions have never been more relevant. Using the latest iPad-technology, you can learn up-to-the-minute research findings via interactive games, quizzes, pictures, interviews and easy-to-understand graphs and texts.

Some key facts highlighted include:

- The United Nations estimates the number of centenarians worldwide will increase tenfold by 2050, from 320,000 today to 3.2m.
- Our genes only make up a quarter of the factors determining how long we live. Many other factors influence our longevity, for example lifestyle and diet.
- In Europe today there is one retiree for every four people of working age. By 2060 this is expected to rise to one in two.

*The tour dates for the exhibition are:
West Quay, Southampton*

20 - 26 October

gallery@oxo, London

29 October - 2 November

The Lowry, Manchester

10 November - 14 November

Silverburn, Glasgow

17 November - 21 November

Millennium Point, Birmingham

25 November - 28 November

*Pierhead, National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff*

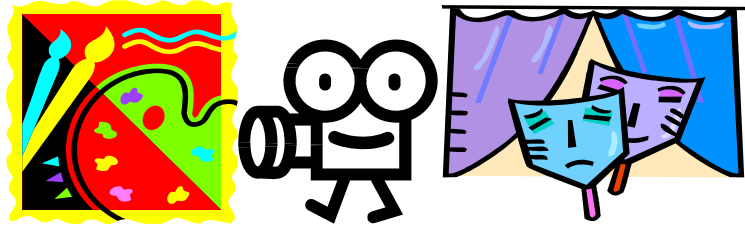
2 December - 4 December

Admission is free. Opening hours 11.00 am to 6.00 pm. More information at www.liveto100.cpc.ac.uk Sounds like a good one to take the young people to as well.

Some other websites you may find useful

MATURE – Making Adult Teaching Useful, Relevant, and Engaging
A Grundtvig multilateral project on theme of making adult learning engaging for disadvantaged learners <http://matureproject.eu/>

Later Life AGenda – round up of news stories affecting older people's lives
<https://paper.li/f-1409134528>



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION



Memory performed by Ana Laguna & Mats Ek
Photo Stephanie Berger

*In September Sadler's Wells presented its largest ever celebration of lifelong creativity and the contribution of older artists with the **Elixir Festival**. Over four illuminating days, the festival featured a range of performances on Sadler's Wells' main stage and in the Lilian Baylis Studio. One of the dancers taking part was **Jackie Richards**.*

KnowBody was a variety of works created and performed by international and British older artists – choreographers and ex-professional dancers including Sadler's Wells own The Company of Elders. In the Lilian Baylis Studio, there was “Elixir Extracts” featuring older dancers and companies from across the UK and beyond. There is growing interest in performance work for mature artists. Three programmes involved twenty companies and I performed in two of them.

Twenty-six dancers who attend Mercury Movers, two different weekly dance sessions at Rambert's new South Bank building, volunteered to do intensive extra rehearsals to perform *Terra Ignota*. We created and learned dance motifs and sequences and how to dance together as a group. The movements were created from ideas, texts and images of travel across the sea to mysterious lands and inspired by journeys of 15th century explorers and Shobana Jeyasingh's new work *Terra Incognita* to be premiered in Rambert's Autumn 2014 programme. Our choreographer, Jane Woolley was patient and encouraging enabling the large group to become a unified company. Challenging!

Me Amongst You was different. Damn Fine Dance, a new dance company directed by two young choreographers Molly Wright and Luke Birch has twelve dancers many of whom have danced together before. Molly and Luke are both laid-back and relaxed and wanted the piece to be natural, quirky and anarchic. The piece explored what it means to be part of a group and to stand alone. Using group structures and relationships between voice and movement, we created a shared experience which unfolded in the moment using improvisation within a choreographed framework. It was fun to do and idiosyncratic.

Both experiences were wonderful! The chance to perform in front of appreciative audiences, to dance at Sadler's Wells, was exhilarating and joyful especially after all the time and effort rehearsing. Everyone wanted to do their best and fears concerning memory, going wrong and letting others down evaporated as we performed. We were confident. Both pieces were well received with cheers and applause.

The other companies were wide ranging with differing dance styles and themes. One downside was not having the opportunity to see others' work. There is a growing community of older dancers in the UK and abroad and it would have been a good learning experience to see others work. We will have to wait for the videos!

I left City & Guilds six years ago "to see what life brings". I am now doing a work-based doctorate "Active Older People Participating in Creative Dance – Changing Perceptions" (More another time). I founded and manage Creative Dance 60+/ No Dance! No Joy! a local grassroots organisation and performing group. I am preparing for TEDxTottenham and "my idea worth sharing" is the importance of participatory arts for individuals and social cohesion called *Sing, Dance and Smile*. There are just not sufficient hours in the day!

*It would appear the whole country has been alive this autumn to the sound and sight of older people celebrating their expertise and achievements in the arts. The **BOLD** festival, which took place in September and early October described itself as an "exciting and provocative programme which has older people at its*

heart, celebrating their creativity and rich variety of experiences, challenges all of us to think about ageing differently."



The festival took place in Bradford, Deptford and Stockton on Tees, and it's aim was to look beyond the label of 'old age'; a label that encompasses 10 million people in the UK over 65, to explore individual human stories and explode some of the stereotypes of age; to inform the thinking of policy makers, the public and participants; and to confront and overcome our fears and assumptions about growing old.

From unpicking the politics of the care system to plays, storytelling, singing workshops, musical performances, photography and other activities, BOLD included new work, collaborations and international projects that presented a new way of looking at old age. Woven into the Festival were the energies and imaginations of older people from the communities where it was taking place. It was a real celebration of older people centre stage taking place in theatres, libraries, churches and cafes, residential homes, sheltered housing communities, shopping centers and in one case a shop window.

The centre-piece of the Festival was *Home Sweet Home*, a new immersive

theatre production that explored the experience of growing older and the ageing process in contemporary Britain through individual human stories.



Created in Bradford, where it had a sell out initial run earlier this year, the show then toured the BOLD venues as part of the festival.

The cast featured seven professional performers including Jean Rogers (Dolly Skilbeck in *Emmerdale*) plus a lay-cast of eight older people aged between 60-82 years old drawn from the communities around each of the three venues. The ending of the piece was different for each venue, drawing on the creativity and talents of local groups such as in Bradford, the Ukrainian Women's choir; in Stockton the Silver Ukulele band and in London, the Entelechy Arts elders.

*There was another celebration in October, this time at the **Dulwich Picture Gallery**, which celebrated this year's U.N. International Day of Older Persons with **Full of Life**, a site-specific, collaborative installation both created and curated by older people.*

In an ambitious project, nearly 100 older people attended outreach sessions at local community centres and residential care facilities and created watercolours and collages inspired by the Gallery's exhibition *Art and Life*, which ran throughout September. A selection of the work was then curated by a management team of older people and integrated into one large vinyl artwork with guidance from glass artist Binita Walia. The installation was displayed along the Gallery's cloister windows creating a dazzling light and colour spectacle.

The management group of 13 was made up of older adults aged between 60 and 93 who live independently in South London. As well as selecting artwork to be included in the installation, they also designed the outline for the final piece using maps of the Gallery and their own journeys. Across five sessions, this network of lines became pockets to place a selection of work from the outreach sessions. Discussions about scale, site, light and what the viewer will see in the final artwork led to an eye-catching design for Gallery visitors to enjoy.



Participants in action during the curating process

“The rich and diverse experience of the participants has made a strong impact on the quality of the outcome” says Walia. “The cloister windows were transformed into a colourful celebration of individual

artistic expression that created a talking point for Gallery visitors and inspired them to see the Gallery landscape and building in a new way.

Ottis Edwards from the management team says: “*Full of Life* has highlighted that there needs to be far more activities for the elderly, especially artistic and creative ones. The friendliness and camaraderie that was encouraged by the group leaders made this project most enjoyable.”

*In the Autumn 2012 issue of the Digest in relation to a story about the **EAC Over 60s Art Awards**, we featured a piece about AEA member **Howard Gilbert**, who took up painting again after a gap of 58 years and had started working with acrylics. In the last two years Howard has been continuing with his painting and now has now received some well deserved acknowledgement of his work.*

It was my artist daughter who suggested I try working with acrylics. Short four or five day courses encouraged me to be adventurous and indeed skilled in producing pictures that I was proud to show friends and neighbours.

The Digest piece about the EAC Art Awards annual on-line competition encouraged me to enter, so last year I did for the first time and again this year.

The rules allow five paintings created during the previous two years to be entered, each in A4 photo or laser print format. Of about 1600 entries, nationwide, my picture *A Shaded Corner in a Hot Land* is one of 22 that received

a Highly Commended award, and an invitation to the House of Lords.



Howard Gilbert's award winning painting
A Shaded Corner in a Hot Land

Many congratulations to Howard. The trip to the House of Lords he mentions was a celebratory afternoon tea event on 8th October, hosted by EAC's President the Countess of Mar. 38 Award winners and highly commended artists were able to join the celebration, many with a partner or companion, and receive their Awards in person.

Welcoming the guests, Lady Mar reflected on the founders of EAC, Angela and Michael Farnell. It was Angela, along with her lifelong friend Dorothy Kershaw and early Trustee Jennifer Finegold who had created the Awards, which were now in their 21st year. In her view the quality of works submitted had never been higher, as evidenced in this year's brochure.

In his presentation John Galvin, EAC's Chief Executive, reflected on the success of the *Art and Wellbeing* theme introduced into the Art Awards last year. Nearly a quarter of entrants had taken up the invitation to write a few paragraphs about what led them to take up art, and what their art means to them. The many moving stories submitted illustrated

vividly how art had helped them overcome or simply live with challenges they face in later life.”

The intergenerational drama project organised by Age UK North Kensington and Holland Park School is a much looked forward to annual event in the area. Carol Allen’s New Horizons drama group has been taking part in it for the last four years. This year though it was something completely different – Hip Hop Shakespeare.

The previous shows the group took part in were made up of rehearsed improvisations and such arising out of on issues of concern to the participants – everything from problems with the buses to bullying in schools. This year Age Concern decided to go for something a bit different and commissioned the Hip Hop Shakespeare Company to head up the project, in which both young and older people in the area took part.

Artistic director and founder of the company is former football star turned hip hop artist Kingslee “Akala” Daley, known in the rap world just as Akala. I’ll admit I’d never heard of him but the young people and some others of my acquaintance who are “into” rap were mightily impressed, as he is, it appears, a bit of a star. He’s also charming and good teacher, who goes all over the country with his team leading workshops and creating performances on the Hip Hop Shakespeare theme, mostly with young people. So working with us olders must have been an experience for him as well as us.

The thought behind the project is that, far from being poles apart, there are

many similarities between Shakespeare and hip hop. Both are full of poetry, word play and lyricism. Both deal with what it is to be human and issues from people’s lives, and of course just like Shakespeare’s work hip-hop is all about the rhythmic tension of words. As Akala puts it, “As a media-savvy popular entertainer and talented businessman, we think hip-hop would have been Shakespeare’s thing” – were he alive today, that is.

I was so intrigued by the idea, I decided to join in myself this year. The idea was to create riffs on the play “Richard II”. In two weeks of daily workshops, participants wrote and performed raps around the story, gave a hip hop style spin to speeches and short scenes, put some of them to music with the support of Akala’s musician/actor colleague Josh and wrote and performed our own scripts around the story of the play.



Working on a song version of a speech from Richard II

In an early eye opening exercise we were given cards with a quote on them and had to guess whether this was from Shakespeare or a hip hop piece, which made its point. None of us were able to get all of them right, proving Akala’s point about the similarities.

What else did I learn? That not having had to learn lines for something like 30 years, it was nothing like as easy as I remembered. That hip hop does indeed have something to say – though I still have difficulty in hearing all the words. And I was reminded once again of what great results you can get, when you have young and older people working together.



Planning a tv news bulletin on the murder of Richard II

It all culminated in a performance at the Electric Theatre in Portobello Road, North Kensington. And I'm glad to say I didn't forget my lines!

*Professional theatre too is giving more stage space this autumn to the older generation. Visible Ensemble is a new company of older actors and theatre professionals on a mission to create exciting, contemporary work that reflects the desires and dreams, frustrations and joys that characterise the lives of people of all ages. Their first production opens shortly at the Southwark Playhouse in London. The title – **Who Do We Think We Are?***

Drawing on an incredible set of personal histories and memories, the UK's first professional theatre ensemble formed entirely of older performers debut in this

new work, directed by longtime RSC and National Theatre collaborator Sue Lefton

In the year of the centenary of the start of the First World War, this debut production offers a very personal take on the last hundred years of history, from 1914 to the present day. Based on the incredible family histories, photographs and memories of the cast, *Who Do We Think We Are?* draws on real life experiences such as a life in a Siberian prison camp during the Russian revolution, childhood experiences in India under the Raj, an escape from the Warsaw Ghetto, surviving the atomic bomb in Nagasaki, experiencing the harsh reality of life under Ceausescu and London in the swinging sixties and the present.

Visible Ensemble is made up of professional actors of many years standing with an array of credits in high profile productions across theatre, film and television.



Photographer: Nadia Otshudi

Highly international, its members include Togo Igawa, the first Japanese actor at the Royal Shakespeare Company; Ruth Posner, a child survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and original member of the London Contemporary Dance Company; Imola Gaspar, who has

performed extensively with the National Theatres of Hungary and Romania; and Ann Firbank, recently in *The Crucible* at the Old Vic and with a long and prestigious history of work at the RSC and the National Theatre, including the original RSC production of *The Hollow Crown*, as well as film and TV.

The company is founded on the belief that tapping the energy and talent of older theatre performers can reap rich artistic rewards and serve as an inspiration for audiences. Following the run at Southwark Playhouse, Visible is planning an adaptation for an older cast of *La Ronde* by Arthur Schnitzler, highly controversial in its time, exploring its themes of love, sex and death.



Sonja Linden and Sue Lefton

Writer Sonja Linden says “It’s been my dream as a writer to be part of an ensemble and to work collaboratively from day one in creating a piece of theatre. Inspired by the imaginative and high quality work of European ensembles, I have been privileged to gather stories from ten amazing actors and fashion them into what I believe is quite a unique piece of theatre.”

Director Sue Lefton says “Directing a show with ten older actors from ten different cultures each with their highly contrasting stories - told in 40 swift

moving scenes - then add dance, movement, projections, video and live music, and you have an epic and exhilarating piece of work to undertake.”

Who Do We Think We Are? is at the Southwark Playhouse Wed 29 Oct - Sat 15 Nov, Box Office 020 7407 0234

And talking of theatre, here are our regular **Theatre Reviews** by **Carlie Newman**.

I don’t know why I was surprised to find **Great Britain** so amusing. Its credentials should have told me that it was going to be funny. Richard Bean, who wrote one of my favourite recent comedies, *One Man, Two Guvnors*, is the writer and the play has transferred from the National Theatre, directed by Nicholas Hytner.

When it first opened this new political satire was bang up to date, referencing, as it does, the so-called Rupert Murdoch trials when former Murdoch journalists were tried on charges of phone hacking. But the play is much more than the phone-hacking scandal – it deals with the relationship between the press, politicians, the police and the public (or ‘civilians’ as they are described in the play) using current news stories and celebrities to show how they interact in a corrupt manner. Even as we laugh at the very funny lines, we also squirm as we recognise our part in the scenario. The central character, the journalist Paige Britain (Lucy Punch) describes directly to the audience – her public - the role of the tabloid press, “That’s what we do – we destroy other people’s lives on your behalf.” Here we see the story of dead twins and their father being used in a hacking episode.

Lucy Punch in putting across the ambitious journo shows how she will stop at nothing to get to the top of her profession; at one point she sleeps with the Prime Minister and the smoothly handsome Assistant Met Commissioner almost at the same time. A lovely exuberant performance, Punch suits the role – or does the role suit her? Either way she will make you laugh and at the same time feel uncomfortable at her antics.



Lucy Punch in Great Britain
Photograph: Brinkhoff Mögenburg

There are many characters from the different sectors being satirised. One of the funniest is the extremely stupid Met Commissioner (Aaron Neil) who shows his incompetence through a series of very amusing gags. Another comic character is Scott Karim as Marcus Hussein, a freelance undercover reporter who puts on some awful disguises. There are other characters, obviously based on real people, who appear exaggerated and yet one can discern truthfulness beneath the satire. All the parts are very well executed and Hytner makes sure that the fast pace never lets the words down. As usual with National Theatre productions, the set is superb

with desks and posters at the back advertising the 'Free Press' tabloid offices. This very clever satire deserves to be seen and with its transfer to the Haymarket you now have the chance. Grab it!

Great Britain is at Theatre Royal Haymarket (until 10 Jan 2015.) Box office 020 7930 8800

It's amazing to find out that that many of the boys in the large cast of the ballet *Lord of the Flies* are complete amateurs. At each venue creator Matthew Bourne and his choreographer Scott Ambler, have recruited and trained local boys aged nine to 22 (some of whom have had hardly any dance experience) to work with professional dancers. The show then becomes a community project. This was evident at the performance I saw at Sadlers Wells, where there were many family and friends of the young non-professionals in the audience.

Bourne has changed the setting from that of a deserted island in William Golding's novel to a deserted theatre. The basic story remains however: a group of schoolboys find themselves left unattended and they create their own rules. But the longer they are there the more savage their rituals become until the boys begin to harm each other.



Photograph: Helen Maybanks

One group of young lads, led by the aggressive Jack (Danny Reubens), attacks the weaker members including poor Piggy (Sam Plant), who can barely function when he loses his glasses.

The main cast from the New Adventures dancers is well supported by the local lads and the choreography is exactly suited to the rising savagery. The energy of the cast - particularly in the drilled dancing at the beginning and later on as they leap around - is remarkable and gives this new interpretation of the classic story a vibrant immediacy. While it is frightening at times it is always mesmerising to watch. Catch it somewhere!

Lord of the Flies is currently on tour:
 5th to 8th November 2014 - Theatre Royal, Newcastle upon Tyne Box Office 08448 1121 21
 19th to 22nd November 2014 Theatre Royal, Norwich Box Office 01603 6300 00
 3rd to 6th December 2014 Alhambra Theatre, Bradford 01274 43 2000)

Film News

Fans of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* may be interested to know there's a sequel on the way, called – wait for it – *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*.



It has many of the same classy actors from the first film - Judi Dench, Maggie Smith, Bill Nighy, Dev Patel, Penelope Wilton, Celia Imrie and Ronald Pickup, who have now all got themselves well dug into the Marigold society.

The *Second Best...Hotel* is the expansionist plan of young Sonny (Dev Patel), who has his eye on a promising property now that his first venture, 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel for the Elderly and Beautiful', has only a single remaining vacancy – posing a rooming predicament for fresh arrivals Guy (Richard Gere) and Lavinia (Tamsin Greig – who's a little young for retirement, I would have thought, as she's only in her forties!). Evelyn and Douglas (Judi Dench and Bill Nighy) have now joined the Jaipur workforce, and are wondering where their regular dates for Chilla pancakes will lead, while Norman and Carol (Ronald Pickup and Diana Hardcastle) are negotiating the tricky waters of an exclusive relationship, as Madge (Celia Imrie) juggles two eligible and very wealthy suitors. Perhaps the only one who may know the answers is newly installed co-manager of the hotel, Muriel (Maggie Smith), the keeper of everyone's secrets. As the demands of a traditional Indian wedding threaten to engulf them all, an unexpected way forward presents itself.

It's rare for sequels to live up to the original, but in some cases they do. Some are even better. Should be worth seeing anyway just for the actors.

Finally our usual round up of some current and forthcoming releases On Screen from Carol Allen

The much anticipated *The Imitation Game* stars Benedict Cumberbatch as

Alan Turing, the maths genius whose work at Bletchley Park code breaking centre in cracking the German Enigma Code made such a contribution to the outcome of the Second World War and later to the development of computer science.

Cumberbatch plays Turing as a socially withdrawn, largely humourless and arrogant figure, who initially alienates his team mates but wins them round with the help of the only woman on the team Joan (Keira Knightley).



Photograph: Jack English/AP

The film tells its story in a dramatically effective way, illuminating its central character with flashbacks to his unfulfilled love for a fellow pupil at boarding school, and flash forwards to his arrest in 1951 by a keen copper (Rory Kinnear), who believes he is uncovering another Russian spy scandal, but who inadvertently exposes Turing as a homosexual – an exposure which leads to his tragic suicide at the age of 41.

The screenplay fictionalises the facts in terms of creating conflicts such as that between Turing and his co-worker, chess genius Hugh Alexander (Goode) and at times leans over backwards to reconcile the story with our contemporary attitudes to homosexuality and sexual equality. For example, despite a charming performance from Knightley, her role as Turing's co-worker and sort of girl friend doesn't really convince.

But it works well as a piece of story telling, and Cumberbatch's very effective performance is well supported by a strong cast, which also includes Charles Dance as the crusty naval Commander Denniston, in charge of the project; Mark Strong as the man from MI6 who really pulls the strings and *Downton Abbey*'s Allen Leech, as the team member who rumbles the fact that Turing is gay.

Men, Women and Children deals with two themes. The first is the effect of information technology – texts, emails, websites, online porn and dating etc – on contemporary relationships as seen through a group of teenagers and their parents. The second theme is the total insignificance of humanity in the context of the vastness of the universe. That aspect is dealt with through a voice over from Emma Thompson, whose cool English accent over shots of the vastness of space effectively distances us from frenetic activity amongst this group of people.

The film is tricky to get a grasp on at first because there are so many characters and their relationships to each other to sort out. Once you have though, they are interesting, interlinking stories and director Jason Reitman makes his point well about how we are becoming separated from each other by technology.

The only ones who seem to be able to make a connection in the real world are two of the youngsters involved in an adolescent romance. All the characters make a strong impression, particularly Patricia (Jennifer Garner), who is monstrous in her obsessive checking of her daughter's social media posts and texts – the 21st century equivalent of

reading a teenagers' diary. So out of order but ultimately rather sad.



Jennifer Garner and Kaitlyn Dever

Adam Sandler gives one of his best performances as the porn obsessed father, whose marriage is dying. The resolution of his relationship with his wife (Rosemarie DeWitt) is very touching. Others in the group include anorexic teenager Alison (Elena Kampouris) and pushy lone mum Donna (Judy Greer), who is unknowingly prostituting her daughter on her website and who forms a tentative relationship with single father Kent (Dean Norris). Well acted, written and directed, this an entertaining movie with some good meat on the bones.



Hook (Jack O'Donnell) on the run in Belfast

'71 is a classic war thriller story about the soldier who finds himself alone and marooned behind enemy lines and has to find his way back through the jungle under constant threat of death from his foe. Only in this case the war is the

conflict in Northern Ireland in the 70s and the setting is the urban jungle that was Belfast at that time.

This is a terrific and gripping movie, which recreates realistically and authentically the terrifying situation in Belfast at the time of a city at war with itself. The volatile anger of the crowd against the soldiers. The miserable, already war torn city and the depressing Divis Flat tower block estate where the young soldier Hook (Jack O'Connell) is hunted like a rat in a trap. It also fills us in effectively on the complicated and unpredictable different factions – the IRA; the tearaway Provisional IRA, whom the official IRA cannot control: the Loyalist Protestants; the British undercover agents, whose motives and methods are at best a bit murky: the British army, carrying out orders; and the young soldiers caught at the sharp end, most of whom have no idea why they are there.

One of the most touching and tragic aspects of the story is the youth of those involved – Hook himself and the two young provos, Sean (Barry Keoghan) and Haggerty (Martin McCann), who are on his trail determined to kill him - mere boys believing they are proving their manhood.

My Old Lady is the feature film directing debut of American playwright Israel Horovitz, which he has adapted from his play of the same name and features an impressive double act from Kevin Kline and Maggie Smith. Kline plays hard up and feckless New Yorker Mathias, who inherits an apartment in Paris from his father. But when he arrives there to claim his inheritance, he finds elderly Mathilde (Smith) living there. Under an ancient French law, he will not actually gain possession of the

apartment until Mathilde dies. The film deals with the relationship between the two of them and Mathilde's prickly and protective daughter (Kristen Scott Thomas).



Kevin Kline and Maggie Smith

The film is worth seeing for these three first class performances but it does show its theatrical origins particularly in its revelations of the past, which are dealt with in well written but overlong dialogue sequences, which would work well in the theatre but sit uneasily in the context of a film.

The Association for Education and Ageing

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