

*'The fields his study. Nature was his book': Robert Bloomfield*

## Educational Visits

I have been organising field visits for U3A for more than 15 years. Although mainly geological, I have included other interests so that those not in the geology group can come and enjoy the outings and find things to interest them

**Isabel Markham: Geology Network Coordinator**

The preparation involves consideration of the area to be studied, the availability of accommodation, and mode of transport. Nowadays there are the legal requirements to ensure that U3A is not selling a package holiday.

The areas I chose included classical areas for geological field work, and islands. The classical areas included the Welsh borders, the Yorkshire Dales, the Jurassic coast and the Malvern Hills. The islands chosen were Malta, Jersey and the Isle of Wight.

These islands also provided other topics of interests for the non-geologists. On Malta there was archaeology and architecture, splendid churches and museums, and history from the Knights Templar to WWII.

On the islands, the tides influenced the sites and so our days were often in two parts – geology at low tide, then when the tide came in we visited the archaeological sites or museums.

On Jersey there was plenty to do when we were driven off the beach. The more energetic enjoyed cliff top walks while the others visited the zoo or discovered the archaeology.

On Malta and Jersey we contacted the local U3A and enjoyed social evenings with their members.

If the area chosen is in a tourist area, the most efficient arrangement is to use a package holiday.

Out of season we found reasonably priced holidays and the tour operator arranged for local coach transport. This meant we were covered because the operator was selling us the package.

On the Isle of Wight, I sent the deposit to the hotel and then each person paid their own bill. They booked their own railway tickets and on the island we used public transport. In this way U3A was not providing a package.

Public transport receives a bad press these days but with careful planning it can be used if the group is small.

On Jersey it was possible to run a full programme using the local buses, and three or five-day tickets were a great saving. This is possible if you choose a hotel in St Helier. On Malta the tour company arranged for us to have a coach until 4 pm for five days – the other days we used the local buses.

With the South London and Bexley U3As, I have organised walks along waterways. The idea is simple – walk as far as you want on any one day and then the following meeting get on to the train or bus to the point where you left off.

We have walked from Greenwich to the source of the Thames, discovering



The group visits Greensand Quarries In Kent  
Isabel front left

history from palaces such as Hampton Court to the lesser known Wallingford Castle and Dorchester-on-Thames.

We remembered and quoted from familiar books as we entered *Wind in the Willows* country and spotted the places we knew from *Three Men in a Boat*.

At Lechlade we walked under the avenue of trees where Shelley wrote a poem inspired by the church. Environmental studies would have been another area of study with both old and new ways displayed of managing the flood plain.

An ideal way to study industrial archaeology and the history of the canals would be to follow in our footsteps from Limehouse Basin where the Grand Union Canal leaves the Thames, and follow it through to the Midlands ending at Gas Street Basin in Birmingham.

We reached the end of this walk this summer but we are hoping to reach Bristol to learn more about Isambard Kingdom Brunel – we have set off so many times from Paddington Station.

If anyone would like details about the geology sites or the waterways please get in touch with me. If you would like to join us along the Kennet and Avon Canal we would be pleased to see you.

**Isabel Markham**  
**0208 850 1337**

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### In the next issue

The next issue of *Sources* (No 30) will be posted to those on  
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 Architecture.

Contributions are considered for inclusion by an editorial  
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You can send them by e-mail to [tony.thornton@virgin.net](mailto:tony.thornton@virgin.net)  
 (preferred), on disc or cleanly typed suitable for scanning (but  
 hand written words are also acceptable). Every effort will be  
 made to acknowledge them. Looking ahead to Issue 31 in June  
 2007, the focus will be on Music.

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### Feedback

If you have any comments on topics in this issue, please write  
 to the editorial panel, c/o U3A National Office or e-mail the  
 editor at: [tony.thornton@virgin.net](mailto:tony.thornton@virgin.net) Tel: 01228 670403

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## In my view

*Tony Thornton*

**Editor**

For seven years I ran the  
 Carlisle U3A Writers  
 Group. Now I'm  
 frustrated when people join,  
 attend a few sessions, then  
 don't come back

So what's new you might  
 ask. This happens all the time.

Well maybe it does, but  
 why? Periodically I raised the  
 matter with the regulars who  
 were as baffled as I was.

The group's activities suited  
 them so why not the  
 newcomers, who said: 'It's not  
 what I'm looking for.' or 'It's  
 not what I expected.'

A possible reason occurred  
 to me during a recent SCE  
 meeting. A discussion point  
 was the social aspect of group  
 meetings and how some  
 groups were preoccupied with  
 making tea and catching up  
 with the gossip.

I thought about what we did  
 and realised that the content of  
 our meetings has changed.

When we began, I concen-  
 trated on developing the  
 members' writing skills using  
 my editorial experience and  
 the notes from the evening  
 class I ran in Carlisle.

We met fortnightly and I had  
 enough material for a new set  
 of members each year, but it  
 didn't work out like that. Of  
 course, people stayed on year  
 after year and soon I had  
 nothing left to show them.

The educational aspect of  
 our meetings faded and we  
 were left reading our writing.  
 This was fine enough but no  
 one was learning anything. We  
 changed to meeting monthly.

So maybe that's it – new  
 members don't learn anything.  
 They just practise writing.

The ten members in the  
 group today haven't changed  
 in five years, while new  
 members have come and gone.

Incidentally, we don't have a  
 cup of tea or gossip (much).  
 Our meetings are a delight. We  
 enjoy each other's company  
 and our writing, but we don't  
 learn anything.

# Get to Grips

**Confining study sessions to sitting indoors talking and listening, is a second-rate way to get to grips with subjects. With architecture it is essential to get inside buildings to feel, hear, smell and touch them, and a visit inside a pristine, modern structure can change one's view of the subject entirely**

**H**istoric structures impress with volume, scale and size, and have the added interest of history behind them.

I think it is vital to hear music being played by people from time to time, and with most of the arts and crafts there is no substitute for the real thing – whether one just looks or has a go at making it. Even with the most cerebral subjects there is a thrill to be had from a manuscript or a famous person's home.

Most of the architecture groups I am in contact with try to get out and about, but only the larger ones organise more than day trips – there is a lot of work involved in these.

U3As in cathedral cities sometimes cooperate to organise visits to each other. Bromley and Hertford & District have run long coach trips of up to five days. The latter organises four, one-day trips by coach a year.

We in Merton made monthly visits to new buildings in London a few years ago. These were expeditions with a theme, supported with explanation and handouts – and occasionally with an expert on hand.

Few of the other groups in Merton organise trips away from the routine group in the front room, but one music group has made successful visits to student performances and to Glyndebourne Touring Opera (it's cheaper), and our stained glass group visits workshops and churches.

This group and the architecture group are keen to get to certain

buildings as part of their studies, and plan day trips where the transport can be combined whilst the studies are separate.

Some of our arts groups visit a museum occasionally – but although we are in London we make surprisingly little use of the dozens of museums at hand.

We have a monthly visits organiser who carefully picks unusual gems for us to visit. We also have a long-distance travel group that uses ready-

***Even with the most cerebral subjects there is a thrill to be had from a manuscript or a famous person's home***

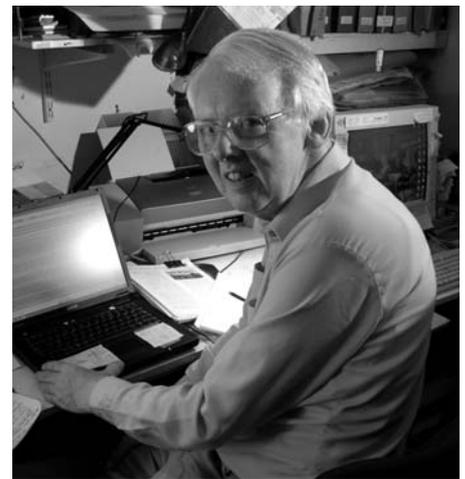
made travel agent offers, similar to U3A Travel but for only a few days and at low prices.

One of these was themed on Charles Rennie Mackintosh, but others are based somewhere in Britain and exploit the local interests – and are not strictly subject-oriented.

We have long and short walks groups that have a social and exercise content but do take note of things encountered on the way.

I like to go into subjects in depth, and use specialised travel agents and specialised societies that run imaginative one-off tours, though they can cost a little more.

The experts are up-to-date with good contacts and local knowledge – and the companions are more specialised too. Doing this is helpful to U3A. It can



**Martin Funnell: Merton U3A  
Architecture  
Network Coordinator**

suggest new ventures within our scope.

One key to getting out into the field is the transport, which lies outside the expertise of many group leaders, and might benefit from the assistance of a specialist transport adviser, based regionally perhaps.

We are fortunate in London to have free travel on the tube and rail, and this makes most day trips cheap and easy.

For longer trips and up to a dozen

people, we share cars (though many of us avoid night driving), but for larger groups we rely on travel agents – who want to fill large buses, which can oblige us to offer spaces to other U3As.

However, we have discovered a local transport charity which has mini buses and will take our normal eight to 16 size groups on occasional field trips. The charity is geared up for wheelchairs. This is much less hassle than going by train and facing long taxi trips from stations – but it costs.

I usually do a reconnaissance to sort out the vital toilet arrangements. Feeding is another operation which can waste a lot of valuable on-site time, solved elegantly by Central Surrey Region, who have discovered that bringing your own sandwiches solves the problems.

**W**e favour an eclectic approach – as happy to discuss our views on the latest modern constructions as we are to enjoy the lovely old Renaissance churches. So it may be no surprise to find our summer visits have included places as varied as The Gherkin, the old city of Southampton, and the collection of buildings old and new on the Cardiff waterfront.

Someone in the group will suggest a place, and perhaps offer a contact. Among our group we had the mother-in-law of ‘The Keeper of the Clock’ (Big Ben) so there was an entrée to Portcullis House, Westminster. By showing we had read about its new style air conditioning (on the way up in the train) we were treated with the greatest respect and shown everything from roof to double basement, and then escorted by underpass to the Houses of Parliament.

Only two of us managed to see the inside of the Gherkin (Swiss Re Headquarters) in the City of London on a free open day after queuing for more than four hours. The normal tour charge is £250 for eight with a maximum of 24.

One special memory is listening to Sir Edward Heath in his drawing room talk lovingly of his ‘Arundels’ in the Close here, proudly displaying his Chinese frescoes on the stairs and the models of his series of boats *Morning Cloud* in his hall.

Nothing could be more of a contrast to that than our award winning Victoria Park pavilion. The old one had been vandalised with such frequency, this one is made entirely of concrete, steel and brick with steel shutters giving total security at night.

Apart from the Houses of Parliament, Pugin designed Salisbury’s Catholic church, St Osmund’s. The priest displayed the plans for us.

# Out and About

**After a rather basic study of different periods of architecture, we moved through the wonderful collection of videos in the National Resource Centre, and recorded several Open University programmes on buildings and cities**



Phyll Babb: Sarum U3A Architecture Group



l-r: Jean McFarlane, Gloria Godbold, Olive and George Cork standing, Frances Lovell & Alan Reeve

As we toured the building, a knowledgeable member explained how Pugin interpreted his ideas in stone.

Among buildings of note which we visited in the Close is Wren Hall, once the chorister’s school.

Wiltshire has its share of Palladian homes. When we visited Pythouse, it was the grand views that most impressed us. At that time it was divided into expensive apartments with a communal restaurant but was soon in financial trouble.

Trafalgar Park, a few miles from Salisbury, was given to Nelson’s brother after the battle. The owner lives in one wing and uses much of the central part for artistic events.

He has been wanting to convert the other wing into a concert hall for years, but is frustrated by local planning and English Heritage who ban any structural change. Here is surely a case for moving on and living in the present.

This year we braved the snow with a past resident of the Royal Crescent (me!) and

walked around some of the lesser known parts of Bath.

Who would imagine Swindon could boast a building worth a journey to see, but it has. The new National Trust head office there is most impressive, with a functional beauty all its own.

Our success is largely due to small parties, usually not more than eight. We can stay together, hear the guide, and even agree to eat in the same restaurant. No picnics. We treat ourselves to a splendid day out.

# What Makes Lochaber Tick?

Bill Waugh: Chairman U3A Lochaber



U3A Lochaber is a new group. We had our first official meeting on the 23 of March.

As chairman, I decided to organise a series of monthly visits and talks with the theme: *What makes Lochaber tick?*

The idea is to look behind the scenes at important organisations in the region, to understand how they operate, how they contribute to the life of the area and how they are evolving into the 21st century.

We hope to cover commercial, public, and local government organisations, and come out as more intelligent citizens. Here, there are entrance gates that people pass, but unless they work there they have never entered, so the non-specialist doesn't understand what goes on inside.

The visits are led by expert guides, making them interesting and enabling members to learn more than they would with a simple look-round. U3A Lochaber contains several people who have recently retired into Lochaber and this programme is getting them out and about.

Setting up the programme has been possible via the network of contacts and experience within the group, an important U3A asset, but we have also found that the *University of the Third Age* name has been useful. The word *University* gives some status to the group and the opportunity to describe it fully.

The possibility of positive image building and a mention in the local paper have proved

attractive to organisations. Those receiving public money are aware that by saying they have provided this service, it could prove useful in their next search for funding.

This summer we visited:

## **The Auction Mart and Rural Education Complex**

This is important in a rural area, and is now diversifying from cattle and sheep auctions to include furniture auctions, a farm shop, a teaching facility with animals (even here we have town-bred children) and eventually a reconstruction of a historic village to attract the tourists.

## **British Waterways**

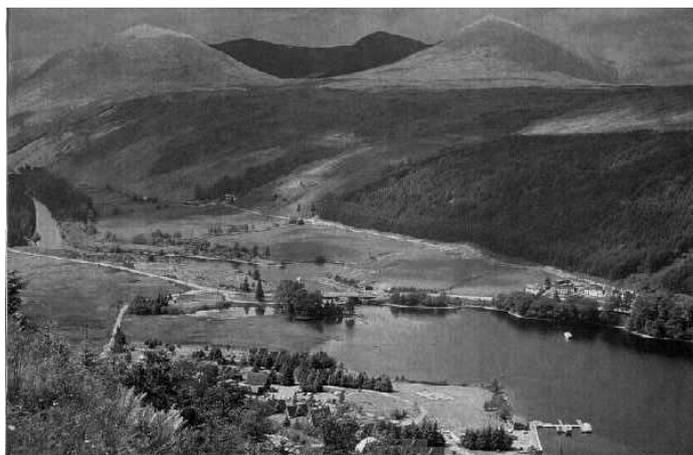
Lochaber has hundreds of miles of coastline, and the south western half of the Caledonian Canal that can take a 500-ton ship from the Atlantic to the North Sea.

Some years ago this was in a bad way with the decline of commercial shipping traffic, though it has always been popular with fishing craft and yachts coming from the East Coast and the continent to the cruising grounds of the West.

Now it supports a thriving hire fleet and the holiday-makers support the shops, pubs and guesthouses. British Waterways are conscious of receiving public money and keen to explain the rationale that justifies it.

## **The Forestry Commission**

They receive public money and are keen to distance themselves from purely commercial forestry organis-



**Lochaber has 20,000 people in 2,000 square miles – the secretary lives 50 miles away and the treasurer catches a ferry to attend committee meetings. Some find it impossible to attend anything, so a lot of communication is done by e-mail**

ations, and explain the additional facets of their activities in terms of ecology and in public facilities.

## **The Alcan Smelter**

The Aluminium Smelting plant is a large employer using the power from a hydro-electric scheme to provide electricity to produce large blocks of aluminium. Each one ends up as 50 miles of kitchen foil. Ex-employees act as volunteer guides to take parties around the site.

Future visits are planned to the *Underwater Centre* – a school for commercial divers, and two places focused on tourism: *Treasures of the Earth*, a display of rocks and precious stones, and the *Art Gallery*. We also have invitations from councillors to see local government in action.

The programme is popular. U3A attendance is rising, primarily by word of mouth – the Alcan visit had to be duplicated to keep down the size of the parties.

We will continue as the other interest groups swing into gear, although during the

winter more visits may be indoors, either on site or at the local college.

At school I was no good at sitting and listening. I remember the outings I took part in, and later I organised visits as part of my working life. They seemed to be appreciated and they provided the inspiration for these trips.

In training someone to acquire a skill it is appropriate to give the person items of knowledge one at a time, with frequent testing to evaluate the take-up, and frequent revision to fix it in the long term memory.

In a different situation it may be more appropriate to immerse people in a 'soup' of knowledge, a rich environment. They need enough training not to drown in it, but otherwise they can be left to swim, collecting what they want for a balanced diet.

I suggest that the latter model meets the requirements of U3A members, and that a local version of our programme makes a good contribution to this.

# Education:

by whatever name you call it

Albert Harrison  
Up Holland and District U3A

**Teachers teach, pupils learn. Teachers retire and pupils leave school. So that's that, end of story**

No it's not! I've never been a teacher but there are things I know that they probably don't. There are things you know that others don't.

That's an idea. Let's get together and swap this information. It won't be like going back to school and being taught or learning. We could enjoy it without the discipline (or homework).

It didn't start like that for me. I used to give slide shows to my family. Strange as it may seem, they soon got fed up with it. All they were interested in were pictures of themselves or their family. After that, things stagnated until I retired and then events evolved.

I began cataloguing my slides and found I had sets that fell into a theme. As I reviewed them I made up a story around them. I mentioned this to a friend who suggested I show some to his club. I agreed but there were holes in my story. I had to do a little bit of looking up. Not learning mind you, just looking up.

That first session went down well and I was asked back – but I had to make my narratives more interesting and ensure my facts were correct.

I needed to do a little research and that 'little' expanded into something big. My interests became wider and in some cases specialised. I soon realised that the deeper the specialised interest became the less I could inflict on the public or they would become bored. I threw in snippets to whet their appetite and to encourage them to ask for more.

From slide shows and talks I moved into guided tours. The slide shows, talks and visits complemented each other and on occasions one preceded the other.

My church was an ideal research subject and what I found out proved interesting to other people. My interest stemmed from what you could see but not understand. Dark round marks on the outside of the church wall were thought

to be from old lamps. It was suggested that curved markings on the pillars inside were as far as the cleaners could reach. What did it mean? There were many questions to be answered. Asking around brought in information and photographs.

Getting access to old records can be daunting, but once you have shown a responsible attitude then a door is opened to you. Central archives are fantastic. I've been to archives where material is available at the touch of a button.

Other archives seem to be their own archive. Here records have to be requested days in advance and woe betide if on your visit you find you require additional material. It can't be made available for a few days.

I have found answers accidentally, when on holiday in places as diverse as the Orkneys and Norway. I now write these down in the form of articles. What's the use of running around if I don't record them? They then become subjects for more illustrated talks.

To the vicar I suggested a guided tour around the church and he agreed. These have become a regular feature. A school invites me each year to show their pupils around. The innocent questions children ask keep you on your toes – have you noticed how macabre they can be?

'Are we walking on dead bodies?', is often asked as we follow the paths on the outside. What should you say?

Feedback is so important. You can enrich your knowledge and in turn retransmit it on your next presentation. It is so rewarding to be approached weeks or even months later by someone with a word of appreciation or constructive comment. You must be prepared for the occasional rebuke and contradiction and accept them graciously.

One of my ventures has been with a farm visit project. I have in my repertoire a talk on sheep farming as seen through the eyes of a 'townie'.



Albert Harrison with Kathleen Claybrooke

This intrigued a farmer friend who was considering a farm open day. We joined forces. The farmer provided the animals and equipment and I provided backup story/photo boards of the activities.

The farmer was surprised to see one of the boards contained an explanation of terminology. It had not occurred to him that outside a farming community, the words they used daily were not the words used by other people. This was predominately a sheep farm so what were tups, gimmers and hoggs?

I formed a cycling section for my U3A. The only rule is that we travel together and wait for each other. I have shown them roads, tracks and pathways that are relatively traffic free. They have gained a perspective of the countryside that cannot be appreciated from a car. The pace is easy and the cafe stops and chatter are as important as the cycling.

So, what I said at the start of this narrative about not being interested in education is probably not true. In fact, it is wrong.

What have I been doing? Self learning and passing it on to others. That sounds a bit like education to me and that is something I intended to give up when I retired. I don't want to be a teacher or a student. But this is different. I'm not paid for it. I can take it or leave it. I'm doing it for myself because I like it.

Whatever you call it, I'm doing it. If you are interested then join me. A U3A is a good starting point.

**Tel: 01744 893212**

# Recipe for Field Trip Pie

## (A Group Leader's Guide)



Carlisle Geology Group on Arran (l-r) Derek Hetherington, Janet Littler, Ken Parkes Pat Ross, Aileen Rosie, Shirley Leighton, Judy Suddaby, Ruth Howe (seated)

Get on the Internet and familiarise yourself with the place you are going to. Judge the most suitable place to find accommodation. Compile a list of hotels – finding single rooms can be a problem.

Compose a document explaining U3A and what you propose doing on your visit: how many senior citizens, single rooms, twins, car park spaces you need.

E-mail the likely hotels, tourist boards and such like. They might send you a brochure with more accommodation info and other useful stuff. Most hotels have e-mail but not necessarily a website.

Narrow the replies down to a shortlist. (On our trip to Northern Ireland there was a shortlist of *one*. It was the Harbour Heights in Portrush and it turned out fine. On Arran we had only the Kinloch Hotel. The B&B was good although their evening restaurant was overpriced.)

If you get two or more offers you can summarise what is available and e-mail it to your members inviting their comments. When you get a few replies expressing any sort of consensus over a preferred hotel, don't wait for the rest to reply. Go ahead and book it before you lose the rooms to some other party.

With say, 18 in your group, you can't dither around waiting for members who are not replying, possibly because they are away and not reading their e-mails.

Ring the hotel to make the booking and chat with the employee there to clear up

any questions that have been keeping you awake all night. Also insist that you want the booking confirmed in writing, with dates and prices.

Point out that you will be willing to pay a deposit *at some point* (£20 per person seems to be the norm). "...but will it be all right if we pay our (non-returnable) deposits at a later date?"

There might be members not able to go after all so you don't want to be asking them for their deposit money just yet. Explain this to the hotel and they shouldn't be too pushy about getting their money too soon. The hotel will want one cheque to cover everyone's deposit so your members will have to pay into your U3A account so that your treasurer can forward the cheque.

To avoid falling foul of the package holiday regulations, make sure that booking the accommodation is the only thing that any tour leader does.

Now you can put it on the back burner. It is probably eight months before the trip is going to happen. Nearer the time you can use part of your regular indoor meetings to prepare the ground.

The most time-consuming part is getting your own knowledge up-to-date so that you are a useful source of information on the trip. Plan routes, activities, stops for coffee, toilets, lunches (picnic or otherwise) cream teas or whatever, and work out a schedule to fit these in between the studying.

### INGREDIENTS

Approx 15-18 members: geology, natural history or other flavour that benefits from an outdoor airing

One group leader happy to lay on a spread of educational action with icing on the cake

This applies to a short away break of 2 or 3 nights, giving 3 or 4 days for the field work

### PROCEDURE

Give each member a tick box asking: Are you interested in going to .....?

Do these dates suit you? .....

Would you prefer to drive your own car and take passengers?

Would you prefer to be a passenger in someone else's car?

Would you prefer a single room?

Would you be prepared to share?

### Story: Judy Suddaby Carlisle U3A

Picture: Geoff Coe

Or is it the other way round? Anyway, your group will find it useful if you give them a copy of the schedule beforehand. Grid references of the meeting points will be included and a request for mobile phone numbers so that if one car gets separated from the convoy, a passenger can contact the command module.

It's better if the group leader is not a driver because he/she can navigate. Have a few Plan B ideas for bad weather e.g. museums. Coastal trips may need modifying to fit in with the tides. Use the Internet again for tide timetables.

Each group leader will have ideas on how to make the trip enjoyable and educational. If you have photography fanatics it's great if they produce a pictorial record of your visit and even turn it into an audio-visual masterpiece, set to music with clever captions.

You will get an inkling of whether your recipe has turned out well if the members start talking about the next trip before you have completed your current one. Yes I know it should be current – just continuing the recipe theme.

The next trip for Carlisle Geology Group is 8-11 May 07. Destination Yorkshire Coast and the hotel is (early September) booked in Scarborough. If anyone with local knowledge has useful suggestions I would love to receive them. [aandjsuddaby@aol.com](mailto:aandjsuddaby@aol.com)

# The Great Outdoors

Dena Lewis  
Buxton U3A



**Learning through the soles of your feet is a long-standing educational practice, tried and tested but not without debate as to the best approach. Should it be a Cook's Tour, with look, see, hear, as it was in the beginning, or should there be a more investigative approach, more in line with modern educational methods?**

The Garden Group in Buxton has met every week for ten years, so we have plenty of outdoor experiences to add to the information gleaned from books, videos and talks.

The members are willing to learn, to explore, and to have their curiosity aroused. We meet at each other's houses and the gardens there are used for educational purposes – soil testing, plant identification, pruning, taking cuttings, and seed sowing.

Problem solving is also on the agenda, with the garden owner coming up with topics. Which climbers will grow up these trees? Which bulbs will grow in these locations? Please will you draw up designs for this area of my garden?

In the summer, we undertake more serious fieldwork, with morning visits to local gardens, usually twice a month.

The problem is that there isn't always time to pre-visit the garden to see what learning opportunities it might present, so it's a case of 'let's go and find out'.

Many gardens in the Yellow Book (i.e. those open under the National Gardens Scheme) have owners who are keen to accompany us to provide information and to answer questions. Some even have questions prepared for us. What can I do with this area, which is under water in winter and bone dry in summer? How would you replant this bed?

Head gardeners are ready to share their knowledge. The benefits of these visits are manifold. The group now looks at gardens with a more critical eye. They appreciate the right-plant-right-place philosophy, and spin-off is seen in future meetings recalling a particular situation.

We don't go unprepared. With specialist gardens, such as those growing alpines, rhododendrons or a quality plant collection, the previous meeting is given to that topic, so that we have some prior knowledge of the growing conditions of these plants.

We visited Chatsworth House armed with worksheets illustrating all 14



The Buxton Garden Group have a problem with snowdrops - too far to bend down

divisions of Narcissus to identify the differences between them – we found most types there, of course.

We had less success with snowdrops at a different venue, probably because it was too far to bend down. From our visit to Wollerton Old Hall in August, we came back with a list of plants that provide colour at the end of the season.

At this time of year I think about next year's field trip away. We have a good coach firm who understands our needs and can organise a suitable hotel. It is up to me to decide where to go.

We are fortunate in the Peak District – there is a variety of soil types and a micro climate offering opportunities for gardeners within a short reach, but it is important to experience the problems of gardening in other parts of the British Isles.

We haven't been to all four corners of the country but we have visited gardens designed to cope with: drought in Essex; exposure in SW Scotland; a shorter growing season than Buxton at a higher altitude in mid-Wales; a one-in-three slope in the Welsh Borders; and soil-less slopes in the Lake District.

When planning this holiday, my aim is to find a variety of gardens in terms of size. People relate better to small,

privately-owned gardens. I look for variety of plant content and style e.g. arboreta, vegetable gardens, water gardens, so that we are not looking at a succession of National Trust herbaceous borders. I search for gardens of various ages, either of historic importance (we study garden history in winter) or recently established gardens where we are dependant on the gardener's vision to help us to see his ideas or to update ourselves on modern garden design. I look for variety of location within an area and finally I consider different methods of gardening. Quite a challenge but the response is rewarding.

I use reference work from magazines, newspapers, TV, the National Trust, English Heritage, the RHS and the Hardy Plant Society. Phone calls to the County Organisers of the National Gardens Scheme can be helpful.

I spend a week in the area, looking at gardens, timing journeys and organising lunch stops. We have been known to take the coach into the nearest supermarket to buy sandwiches. It is vital to pre-visit – our standards are high and every garden earns its place in our programme.

We have no time to waste. There is so much to see. We never fill the coach – we need the spare places for plants.

# Resource Centre News

## Elizabeth Gibson highlights the new additions to the DVD and Video collections held at the Resource Centre at National Office

### Crafts

In the June 2006 issue of *Sources* there was an article on woodcarving by John Crick of High Wycombe U3A.

To encourage other members who might be interested in starting a woodcarving group, John has advised on the purchase of three videos suitable for beginners: *Getting Started*, *Sharpening the Professional Way*, and *Carving the Human Head*.

If you are considering woodcarving as a group activity, it would be worth watching these for a comprehensive introduction to the subject.

Another new video of interest at this time of year is *Christmas – Decorations Recipes and Gifts*. The video has plenty of original ideas for things to make, some simple while others are complex.

The demonstrations on the video are supplemented by a small booklet of instructions.

### Journeys with Wildlife

For the past 30 years, National Geographic has produced television documentaries on wildlife exploration and discovery.

They have now produced an amazing set of 26 DVDs entitled *Journeys With Wildlife*. Each DVD focuses on animals such as tigers or gorillas, or deals with a specific geographical area and its wildlife such as the Kalahari or the Serengeti.

Running time for each programme is just under an hour and these items would be wonderful for a natural history group or an armchair travel group.

### History

Two years ago, the BBC produced a series entitled *Seven Wonders of the Industrial World*. This has become available as a three-video set. Amongst the subjects covered are the Panama Canal and London's Sewer System. If you saw any of these programmes you will know how good they are.

In addition, in DVD format we have various documentaries on the lives of Brunel, Stephenson, the history of railways, canals, narrow boats and working sailboats.

It has taken a while for good quality history material to be released on DVD but suddenly there is plenty available and we are steadily acquiring as much as we can. We have a substantial list of history material in all media formats but if you would just like a list of DVD material I would be happy to provide one.

### Poetry

At the Chester Conference in September we launched some subject lists, and one of these was poetry.

Until then, poetry material was included in the literature list but we have had so many requests from poetry group leaders that we decided to produce a list for circulation. New stock on this list includes two DVDs on war poets.

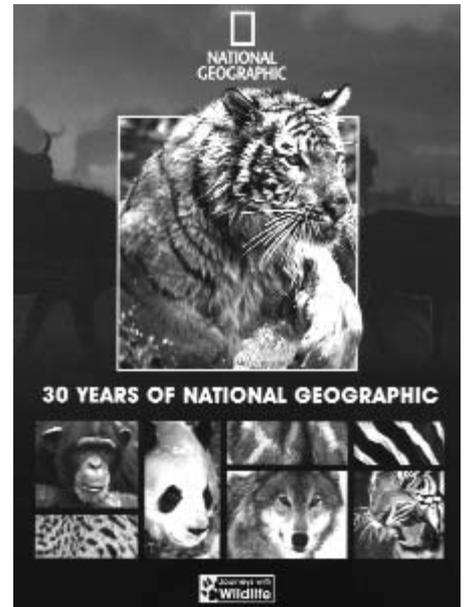
The first covers Poetry from Anglo-Saxon times to the Trenches, and the second is *In Flanders Field – The Story of the Poem and the Poppy*. The latter would be of general interest and useful to history groups that are studying the First World War.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to some rather unusual DVDs we have in stock. The first, bought directly from Australia, is the story of the Sydney Opera House.

Entitled *The Edge Of The Possible*, it is the story of Jorn Utzon and the design of this remarkable building.

The second DVD is *The Story Of Judas*. You may have seen a lot in the national press about the discovery of this ancient text, and the DVD gives historical information on the document and the efforts made to understand and authenticate it.

The Resource Centre produces lists on many subjects which are available free on request. These have been revised and the updated version appears alongside.



### Architecture

#### Art

(inc: artists, sculptors, collections and instructional material)

#### Biography

#### Environment and Transport

#### Gardening

#### Geography and Travel

#### Health and Exercise

#### History, Family History and Archaeology

#### Languages and Foreign Films

#### Literature and Poetry

#### Music: classical, opera, ballet & jazz

#### Philosophy and Psychology

#### Recreation

(inc: walking, sport, dancing, fashion, cinema, antiques, wine appreciation, photography)

#### Religion

#### Pure Science

(inc: chemistry, physics, astronomy, geology, maths and computers)

#### Natural Science

(inc: natural history, biology, zoology and anthropology)

To order lists or any items mentioned please contact:

Elizabeth Gibson

Resource Centre Manager

Third Age Trust, 19 East Street

Bromley, Kent BR1 1QH

Tel: 020 8315 0199 (Tue and Thur only)

E-mail: resource.centre@u3a.org.uk

# Older Women in Film

A U3A/BFI shared learning project



By David Tinker  
Wokingham U3A



The U3A/BFI working party

The cinema, or 'going to the flicks', brings evocative images to us at different periods of our lives – from the Saturday morning children's matinées, to the pleasure of seeing films during the day without the crowds. Film making is now an advanced art form, changed enormously since the first silent reels. This has led to serious study of the medium.

Rina Rosselson and Dorrie Bancroft of Brent U3A, made regular in-depth studies of film that led to a Shared Learning Project, utilising the British Film Institute (BFI).

Around 2002, the two were frustrated by the lack of appreciation and worthwhile work for older actresses in feature films. The BFI's Lifelong Learning team agreed a joint exercise with U3A to create a study guide and for an event to be developed for the National Film Theatre (NFT) in Adult Learners Week in May 2006.

## The research

U3A film groups were approached and a steering group formed to develop the project. A study pack would aid students of film and might also influence those who make feature films to deal with these issues more seriously.

The steering group allocated tasks, calling upon other volunteers where possible, developing the publication, cajoling members to create the

event through progress meetings.

Involving U3A membership was imperative. The main areas of contact were *U3A News*, *Sources*, the website, regional and national conferences and events, and the monthly branch mailings.

Film groups and individuals were invited to contact by e-mail. They reviewed three from eight listed films by questionnaire. The responses were analysed and included in the research.

The films were *Ladies in Lavender*, *The Mother*, *Tokyo Story*, *Central Station*, *Tatie Danielle*, *Harold and Maude*, *A Trip to Bountiful* and *Driving Miss Daisy* – an international mixture ranging from contemporary drama to black comedy, but all related to older women.

The result was surprising, with more than 50 U3A groups participating and nearly 1,000 reviews.

Further research was undertaken using library, Internet and other sources to create a useful catalogue of relevant films, reading material and opinion on the topic. The review looked at stereotypes of older women in film and investigated the attitudes and storylines by film

makers to this age group.

Significant themes included the accepted differences in age between actors and actresses, and the most common realistic and unrealistic storylines and portrayals.

## The event

This was held at the NFT on the South Bank on 23 May.

Around 200 members attended, enthusiastically listening to a panel of 'experts' in ageing, film portrayals and the production of feature films.

Dorrie Bancroft's U3A analysis revealed some divergent views from men and women of different lifestyles and ages, emotions and academic interpretations.

The involved interest by the U3A age group in cinema was particularly noticed, comparing the past and what it offers now. The full analysis is contained in the study guide.

The chairman, Philip Kemp, set the scene with concern about the poor state of film distribution in the UK.

Holly Aylett, a documentary film maker, emphasised that the concentration of youth culture (17 to 34-year-olds) is represented by 70% of the audience but only 40% of the population. The USA controls 97% of distribution with its own agenda and profit motive.

At present, only 25% of film income is from ticket sales, the rest comes from the add-ons – merchandising, catering and so on.

No recognition had been given to those people of the baby boom years and their desire for more storyline comedy and drama. Public policy has to change this market failure.

Modern digital technology in film making and distribution could offer wider choice for our age group.

Cinema reviewer Carol Allen was mystified by the interpretations of age in women. She noted that Maggie Smith was only 38 in *Travels With My Aunt*; Anne Bancroft 38 to Dustin Hoffman's 30 in *The Graduate*; Simone Signoret 38 to Laurence Harvey's 30 in *Room at the Top* – these women were supposed to be much older.

On the other hand, Clint Eastwood was 65 to Meryl Streep's 46 in *Madison County* and Sean Connery, Harrison Ford and other men reversed the age discrepancies in human relationships.

Is this acceptable to audiences? It is getting better – Glenn Close at 58, Jane Fonda at 68, Shirley Maclaine at 72 and even Eva Marie Saint at 81, getting juicier roles.

In the UK though, there is little apart from contributions from Maggie Smith and Judi Dench.

Liz Leyshon runs Strode Theatre in Somerset that specialises in targeted audiences. She believes that the over-40s are an informed, interested audience.

A policy of selecting properly considered films, with debate in a social environment (a bar afterwards?) and using sliding prices reflects their needs. Liz believes that as women become more powerful, attitudes may change.

Bill Blytheway from Open University, who specialises in age research, felt that the older generation has been dismissed as irrelevant and is only just becoming represented (e.g. Older Peoples Forum). There are now more mature students over 60. Trends can be found in the OU website under 'road map'.

The 'popular' representation of older women as a sex object started in the 30s with the likes of Hitchcock.

There is a crying need to change this and explore all aspects of life, with pressure put on the UK government and agencies (such as the UK Film Council), the theatre owners, distributors and the film makers.

The industry does not appear to understand the problem and must be lobbied. Jean Rogers from Equity stated that although equality started in the 70s, opportunities were still not apparent, and child rearing and family life still predominated for female actors, who disappeared in their 30s, then re-emerged in their 70s, with few roles in between.

Better dialogue is needed between factions in the industry, using modern technology to create a greater product range to satisfy this wider audience. A marketing opportunity is being lost.

Dr Josie Dolan from Bristol University analysed how women had been traditionally portrayed in the cinema, often as caricature – the feisty grandmother, the rich dowager, the batty granny, the nuisance, the comic figure, the cross dresser.

She used poignant film clips to effect. Where the older woman is the protagonist, for example, illustrations came from *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*.

Films and film parts for older women need to be challenging as well as entertaining, not just put on in the late hours on television, but in the theatres at realistic times and on video.

Financial risk with such themes was still not often taken. TV films, in contrast, had taken a more realistic step, with some excellent storylines and performances.

The afternoon finished with a showing of *The Whales of August*, which starred the enduring Lillian Gish (her last film at 89), Bette Davis well into her 80s, and Vincent Price at his smoothest.

The storyline was apt – the relationships between retired people who lived in an isolated community – so well acted that the U3A chairman had to postpone another meeting to see the end.



The film shown at the event: Lillian Gish and Bette Davis (left) in *The Whales of August*



Rina Rosselson and Dorrie Bancroft

### The future

Several suggestions have been made for a follow up. Older men? A national lobby campaign to try to redress the portrayal imbalance? A film study weekend for members – perhaps at Strode? What about U3A making a film?

The project format works on a national scale, given a few adjustments. Members have shown they like to be involved. New film groups have been started. Members like a debate and their views are relevant. The BFI regarded the exercise as an inspired success and wish to continue the association.

Shared learning certainly works within U3A, but some central, even financial, support would help. The end result has to be professional and rewarding for audience respect. In this case, film is definitely now on board. It has brought pleasure to many people – those participating and the organisers.

Suggestions for the future are welcome. Set up a film group – it's great fun and so rewarding.

**Rina Rosselson: Brent U3A**  
**rinaross@mac.com**

### Film strip key

Ruth Gordon: Harold and Maude  
Judi Dench: Tea With Mussolini  
Maggie Smith: Tea With Mussolini  
Jessica Tandy: Driving Miss Daisy  
Anne Reid: The Mother  
Eva Marie Saint  
Glenn Close  
Jane Fonda

A British Film Institute publication  
*Older Women in Feature Film*  
is available free of charge  
on the BFI website  
[www.bfi.org.uk/olderwomen](http://www.bfi.org.uk/olderwomen)  
Tel: 0207 957 8970

# Shared Learning Projects - Update

Jenny Clark produced a fine stand at conference

In the spring, the project at **Rangers' House Blackheath** produced an excellent presentation by each member of the team. A copy has been given to each member of staff there.

During the summer, the **Manor Gardens Centre** project was researching the information that will be needed for the permanent exhibition panels to describe the Centre's foundation and early history.

Two of the team had a fascinating afternoon recording a conversation with the grandson of the founder, Mrs Keen, and they also talked to Mrs Keen's granddaughter, who worked at the centre with her mother.

The **Older Women in Film** project came to a triumphant culmination with a Study Day at the National Film Theatre in May. About 150 people came, and the day included a discussion by a highly qualified panel, an account of the project, and a showing of a most beautiful Lindsay Anderson film called *The Whales of August* with Bette Davies, Lillian Gish, Ann Southern and Vincent Price, all in their 80s and 90s.

Marysia Lachowicz at the British Film Institute has suggested that we might consider a U3A Film Club at the BFI (as the NFT is about to become).

This autumn in London we had our 4th **British Museum** project, working with the Interpretation Team there on 'gateway objects', the single objects that draw the visitors into the galleries – the ones with the 'wow' factor – and how the visitors react to them.

At the **Hunterian Museum** we shall be working to create resource materials to enable families, adults and students visiting the museum to enjoy their visits.

The **Dulwich Picture Gallery** will welcome a team to evaluate what it is doing for its older visitors. There will also be a small but exciting project at the **Royal Opera House** – recording the living histories of people who have worked there since the 1946 re-opening. Our members will be trained in the necessary interviewing and recording skills by staff from the British Library.

There will be a project at the **Foundling Hospital** in Coram Fields in January, following the history of some of the Foundlings to find out what apprenticeships and professions they took up when they left the Hospital.

At the September Conference in Chester we had a display about the SLPs, with separate posters about some of the



past projects – fascinating material, which I hope we can keep at the Resource Centre and add to, so that it can be used for publicity and information at future events.

I am still hoping to work on publicising and promoting SLPs outside London next year. I know that ideas have been bubbling up in other parts of the country – one example is the **Aquarium in Plymouth** – and I have had e-mails from far and wide from people who would like to look at the SLP idea.

The new SLP Start Up Leaflets seem to be proving useful. They are available in leaflet or e-mail form. Do ask Jennifer Anning or me for a copy if you are interested.

**Jenny Clark: 020 8346 3751**

**jennal@onetel.net**

**Jennifer Anning: 020 8330 6931**

**jennifer.anning@btopenworld.com**

## The Marvels of Glyndebourne

Not the performance of an opera but an enlightening tour of the Opera House, enjoyed by 50 members of U3As in the Sussex Region. The experienced tour guide carried her 'soap box' to various vantage points, the better to speak to us.

From the stage, empty of its curtains, wings, backdrops and raked floor, we looked back, admiring the grandeur of the huge, horseshoe-shaped auditorium.

We peered towards the orchestra pit and heard how far it extends beneath the stage. Certain operas need an additional set of players and there is a formal order of seating for the extra instrumentalists.

New are the monitors facing the stage from either end of the upper circle. There are others backstage for off-stage singers to see the conductor, and for scene shifters to follow the performance.

A stage manager occupies a superior 'prompt corner' with a console from which he controls much more than the singers. It shows the progress of the score as well as the libretto. These words appear above the inner proscenium, explaining the absence of the little box centre front of the stage, where the prompter traditionally lurked.

The space behind the stage matches that of the auditorium in size – housing scenery, a rehearsal theatre, stairs to the dressing rooms, and access to the overhead flies and the buildings outside. In these, the scenery is made, painted and altered for other theatres when an opera goes on tour. Wigs and costumes are made there, always to measure.

We entered a dressing room, en suite of course, and the Green Room. Here there were some costumes on dummies and we

**Audrey Loraine: Arun Valley U3A  
Art Network Coordinator**

admired their fine fabrics and excellent workmanship.

There are several administration rooms and we became aware of the complexities of running the organisation. Added to the theatre, there is a restaurant, a shop, a booking office and a bar on a level beyond the main building, leading to the gardens, a lake and picnic area.

We learnt of the huge number of people employed at Glyndebourne, including a night shift of scene strikers, needed at rehearsals for a new production while one opera is playing.

In the afternoon we heard from an extra who had taken part in many operas, as a non-singing 'living scenic'. Clips from several works showed how styles of production have changed through the four decades of this theatre's life and rounded off our interesting experience.

# Going to Church

## June Thorne: Lichfield U3A

The group is now run by a small committee. The pattern starts with an afternoon meeting early in the year. Then from May to September, excluding August, there are three afternoon meetings and one all-day coach outing.

The committee decides which churches to visit for an afternoon within a 20 to 30-mile radius of Lichfield, mostly in Staffordshire with some in Derbyshire. Dates and the provision of guides and teas are arranged with the vicars concerned, and the amount of donations for the speaker determined.

Sharing car space is organised. For the coach outing, two churches within a 90-mile radius of Lichfield are selected. A specialist speaker is arranged for each church, along with refreshments arranged by the ladies of the parish.

We leave Lichfield at 8.45 am and arrive back by 6.30 pm. An hour and a half is allocated for free time for members to obtain lunch at a place of their own choosing.

The churches chosen to visit are mainly Church of England, and mainly old, but we had a good winter meeting at the local United Reform Church, and another two at Roman Catholic churches – one was newly built.

This year we had a Norman theme starting with a talk about identifying Norman features and then found a few in Lichfield cathedrals. We then visited an almost entirely Norman church in Melbourne, Derbyshire.

Churches are amazing buildings, probably the oldest place in wherever you are. The more you see the more you want to see, and they throw in some wonderfully interesting insights.

For instance, several churches have some notable benefactors. In Rolleston-on-Dove, Derbyshire, the local bigwigs were the Mosleys. Most of us remember Oswald as being a nasty person. Our guide to the church had met him and said he was a charming fellow.

In Ingstre, Staffordshire, a gem of the 17th century Renaissance, there is an unsolved mystery concerning its probable design by Christopher Wren.

(Did you know the stained glass window designer C E Kempe put a sheaf of corn in the corner of his windows?)

This group appeals to a variety of tastes – social, historical, architectural, ecclesiastical, spiritual, and aesthetical. The architectural members study their Pevsners and discuss restorations and possible changes. The aesthetical members love the monuments, the windows, and the carvings. The social members often find a pub.

Altogether it makes a satisfying and stimulating time out. Afterwards we find ourselves comparing the various attributes of churches, and forming preferences. We learn a lot about the place of the church in society and the changing nature of worship reflected in the interior arrangements of furniture.

How important is the infant baptism? Where is the font? Will the priest be standing before or behind the altar? Is the altar side or end on? Was the font in the sanctuary or in the crossing?

What can we learn about the people who worshipped in the church? What can we learn about superstitions?

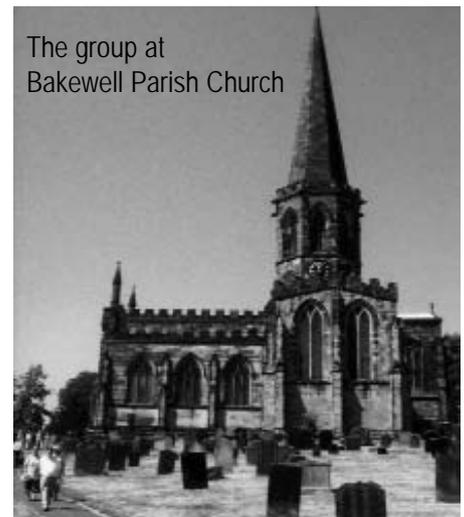
How much part did symbolism play? Did the Knight preserved in stone have his ankles crossed and did this mean he had been to the crusades? (alas, probably not). Who squinted through the squint?

The list seems endless because every church poses new questions. In Melbourne for example, we had to ask what is this large, powerful church doing in a small, insignificant town?

In Croxall, Staffordshire, the question had to be: who, out of a congregation of six, will keep this church from crumbling away? Should it be saved or should it crumble?

Should we, as a group, be producing some conclusions about the relevance of church buildings today? Should we be active in preserving and promoting these buildings? Is the point of our group to show that each church has a function as a notable historic building, and that a congregation of six does not reflect the number of students of all ages, interested in the preservation of historical sites?

This well attended group was started in 1997 by a member who was a Chancellor of the Diocese. He had a vast knowledge of old churches, some remote and not usually open for visitors. He wanted to share this knowledge with U3A



The group at Bakewell Parish Church

The stained glass window designer C E Kempe put a sheaf of corn in his windows



The tour was organised by the inventive management of the Rutland Arms Hotel in Bakewell, where our party of 37 was based.

An apt a name it was too. Sue King and Richard Henderson put together an imaginative series of visits to seven noble houses within easy coach ride.

Local guides conducted us round the houses or were on hand with fulsome explanations. Richard provided notes and slide shows to help us focus on architectural developments from the late 16th to the mid-18th centuries.

For once the old chestnut that: 'I learned a great deal but have forgotten even more' could not have been more wrong. The buildings reinforced what we had studied about architectural styles during the year, and a good measure of social history fell into place.

These houses had to be paid for and we learned much of the origins of their owners' conspicuous wealth.

At Kedleston Hall, the suite of barely altered Robert Adam interiors and the formidable 'Mrs Garnett', the 18th century housekeeper, remain memorable.

# Grand Houses Tour

**No, this is not the name of some newly-emergent travel company. It was given to our recent five-day Architecture Group's study tour of the prominent houses of Derbyshire**

**John Grisbrooke  
Hertford & District U3A**

The magnificent long gallery and tapestries at Haddon Hall are difficult to forget, while at Hardwick Hall, the spirit of the Countess of Shrewsbury, 'Bess of Hardwick' keeps memories alive. From peasant's daughter to the second richest woman in England via four marriages is remarkable in any age.

If the severity and formality of the exterior of Chatsworth are redeemed by the beauty of the gardens and the setting, Bolsover Castle, in an equally prominent location, is a conundrum. The older and smaller 'fantasy' castle, built simply to impress, still stands, whereas the later, splendid, two-storey house mournfully gazes in ruins over the M1 far below it – only the extensive stable block surviving as an echo of past glories.

For sheer charm, Old Moreton Hall across the border in Cheshire is without compare, as fine a half-timbered building as you could hope to find.

Not surprisingly the epithet 'as featured on TV' applied to so much of what we saw and our last call was on Mr Darcy's house in *Pride and Prejudice*, the elegant Sudbury Hall, where plaster work was at its finest.

Such study tours require a great deal of preparation and the thanks of the group go in considerable measure to Sue and Richard for ensuring that everything went off smoothly and apparently effortlessly. If only!

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## Mike Bakall: U3A Travel

Cyprus has woken up to its history. I was there 20 years ago and things have changed.

Suddenly sites across the island are being developed. The Archeological Museum in Nicosia holds a range of artifacts dating back 11,000 years that left me both bewildered and impressed.

The island has been occupied for 25,000 years alongside most of Europe, but evidence was thin on the ground, covered by later development and by the erosion of the sequence of invasions that the island has experienced.

Recent discoveries have added to the materials found in the 1930s to show us an advanced civilisation going back as far as 9000 BC. It had a complex religious structure illustrated by temple votive offering and sites scattered across the island.

By 2000 BC, the island was an entrepôt for traders from Egypt, Crete and Phoenicia, joined by the Mycenaean Greeks a few hundred years later.

The Greeks began settling the island about 1400 BC, absorbing the preceding population and building over many of their sites.

# An Archeological Experience

A major influx of Greeks about 1200 BC, in the aftermath of the Trojan War, established this as the dominant culture and language of the island, which is the position today.

Subsequent invasions by the Egyptians, the Romans, the Persians, the Frankish Crusaders, the Venetians and the Turks have added components to the culture and to the archeological sites.

Only the last, the Turkish occupation that lasted for 300 years from 1580, had the serious consequence of adding a new population whose distinct race, religion and language is at the root of the current division of the island.

Visiting the Greek section of the island, we saw the 'Tombs of the Kings', a series of Mausoleums for the families of wealthy Greeks in the Paphos region about 400 BC.

Closer to Paphos are the remains of the Greco-Roman city that was the capital of the western end of the island where an outstanding series of mosaics preserved in situ emphasise the wealth and

importance once displayed by this small town. A Greek theatre, temples and walls encircling 200 hectares complete a fascinating site.

On another day we went to Curium [Kourion] where again, a mix of Greek and Roman remains define a city area of 200 hectares containing temples, a stadium and a vast theatre, with more being excavated.

Our final visit to Nicosia, overshadowed by the boundary between the Greek and Turkish territories, was highlighted by the archeological museum where two hours were scarcely sufficient to view and understand the wealth of artifacts found.

What we missed was the Eastern Capital, Salamis, whose remnants are the most impressive on this side of the island, but somewhat isolated.

In passing we saw the crusader castle of Limassol, the Templars castle at Kolossi and the medieval walls of Nicosia built by the Venetians in the 16th century. Definitely worth another visit.

# YOUR NEWSLETTERS

In the last issue, Mary Peterson of Monks Brook U3A (and I) invited newsletter editors to send in copies of their publications to compare styles. There was no shortage as you can see from the list alongside

Producing newsletters is a lonely business – the editors and designers are on their own. Unless they are gifted or trained, their work might appear amateurish.

The best advice I can give is: learn from the experts. This is easy. There are examples all around, in newspapers and magazines.

Computers have made home publishing simple, but you still need flair to make your newsletter exiting and readable. Expert designers have long since decided how best to lay out words and pictures on a page, so copy them.

Study magazines to find out how they do it. Note how they blend images and text, how they assemble headlines, subheads and sidebars. Don't just leaf through them. Study them! Choose a style that suits you and reproduce it.

Go for a bold front cover with a picture, a nifty headline and a good story. Don't mess it up with the contents list – put that inside.

A good rule is to make sure everything lines up with everything else. Align the edges of pictures with adjoining text. Above all, line up text column bottoms.

My biggest criticism of the newsletters sent in is the excessive use of single columns across the page often containing massive paragraphs. This is so offputting (do I have to read all that?). Wide columns mean the eye can't find the start of the next line.

A paragraph should contain only one idea, otherwise split it. There is nothing wrong with one-sentence paragraphs. Look in your newspaper. Your newsletter is doing the same job so copy the style.

Of course, not everyone has a smart DTP programme to do their newsletters and are content to use MS Word. This shouldn't hold you back. Mike Williams has demonstrated how versatile Word is with his excellent manual that you can download from:

<http://www.u3a.org.uk/files/MSWordFeatures.doc>

There are three newsletter formats: A5 booklet, A4 booklet and A4 single sheets. Production methods vary from photocopying to professional printing.

**Bruce White** (South Leicestershire) uses Serif PagePlus. He saves the document as a PDF file and e-mails that to the printer.

**Denis Grant** (Plymouth) also uses PagePlus to produce a 28-page A5 booklet: "Ours is photocopied and stapled for 35p – £168 for 480 members. A few receive their copy as a PDF file. They have Adobe Acrobat to read it."

**Shirley Davis** is the newsletter editor of the newly-formed Roseland U3A and is highly critical of small print: "I had to read one with a magnifying glass. Mine is 12 pt. I would rather it be 14pt but it's already too long."

**Elizabeth Berry** is off to a grand start with the Fairford Newsletter: 12-page, two-column, A5 booklet. This is simple, tidy and so easy to read.

**Doug Barnes** (North London) is the editor of my favourite newsletter sent in. A 12-page, three-column, A4 booklet. The text is 13pt Times and the pictures are well-positioned. My beef would be the huge paragraphs.

Editor Tony Thornton

## Layout tips

Don't put text in frames

Use boxes only for special notices

Don't indent too far (old fashioned)

Use columns: two in A5, three in A4

Ensure column bottoms are lined up

Don't use fancy fonts for body text

Use 12pt if you have space

## Typo tips

Never use the word 'very'

Don't use long paragraphs

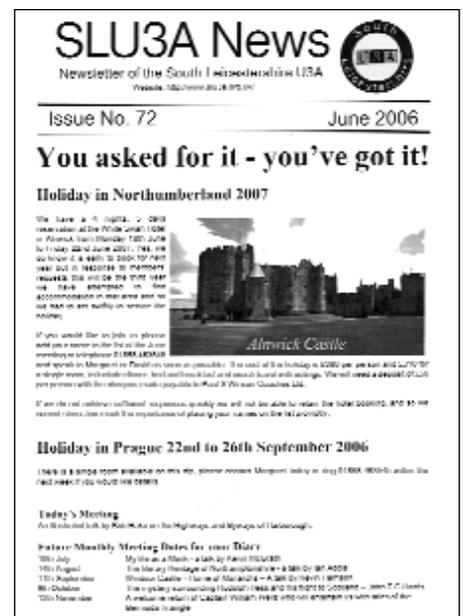
Only one space after a full stop

Don't use a hyphen for a dash – use an

En-dash (if you can't, e-mail me)

## Newsletters received

Newcastle: Ruth Lesser  
Carmarthen: Margaret Sweet  
Fairford & District: Elizabeth Berry  
Cheltenham: Judith Darongkamas  
Stroud & District: Ted Bishop  
East Lothian: Richard Morton  
Waltham Forest: Barbara Humm  
South Leicestershire: Bruce White  
Fetcham: John Wilson/Judy Osborne  
North London: Doug Barnes  
Plymouth: Denis Grant  
Roseland & District: Shirley Davis  
Chard, Ilminster & District:  
Janet Brown/Martin Shirley  
Reading: Eileen Attwell  
Monks Brook: Mary Peterson



A bold front cover from South Leicester

A well-designed page from North London



# IT Evolution in East Lothian

I was inspired by the interesting articles in the June issue of *Sources*, and by the excellent work done by Tom Holloway on the Internet. I thought that other U3A groups might like to hear about the evolution of IT that has taken place in East Lothian

Three computer-related courses have been running for several years: an Apple Mac Users group, a Digital Photography group and a Computer Forum for the more experienced PC users.

In 2002, I became aware that some of our members had a computer tucked away somewhere in a corner of their house – probably given to them or handed down to them by children – glaring accusingly at them asking: ‘Why don’t you use me?’

But new technology can be a terrifying thing to thirdagers and many of us are too proud to admit it. Several members had plucked up enough courage to enrol for a PC course (‘For the terrified’, ‘For beginners’, ‘For seniors’) but came away thinking: ‘No it’s not for me. I’m not interested’, when really they’d been frightened off by too much information.

It seemed to me that satisfaction and enjoyment should be something U3A members could get from that chunk of technology taking up space in their homes. They didn’t need to become experts, just confident about using it for whatever they wanted to use it for.

On setting up our ‘Computing for Beginners’ group, my focus was to observe what each member used their computer for, and what they had fun with. The aim was to encourage them to learn gradually, as individuals, improving the skills they had – however minimal – and get ideas from others about what they could do with it and how they could enjoy it.

The cardinal rule was and is: There is no such thing as a stupid question.

Meetings are held in members’ homes – usually a tight squeeze so numbers kept to four or five – and although sharing ideas, problems, and advice comes with the chat over coffee on arrival, I insist we sit in front of a

host’s own computer to watch them ‘doing their own thing’.

It has been amazing to find out the different things members use it for: one just for games, one for craftwork, one for e-mails only, one for official letters only, one for organising theatre bus group outings – but usually for that limited use and wary of trying anything else.

When the first group began to show more confidence, we collaborated with a local college of further education and arranged a course designed specifically for us. We’ve had two in three years. Although the members were happy with them, we felt an individual ongoing approach was still needed.

Beginners were now enthusiastic continuers and new beginners were waiting to start. The next stage of evolution involved setting up a PC Pals group for the continuers, run on the same lines as the beginners, meeting once a month to share queries, problems, successes etc. and learning more about what others now used their computers for. As numbers rise and we still need to keep the groups small, a PC Pals 2 will begin this autumn.

At this point we had six computer related groups running. Then I discovered the excellent resources provided by Tom Holloway: Signposts and Technical Support.

This gave me an idea about how I might develop a similar personal resource on a more basic level for our U3A members, so for the last year I’ve been setting up a Computer Support Group for East Lothian members – the next stage of our evolution.

The aim is to provide contact and mutual self-help support for East Lothian U3A members who use PCs.

By Margaret Gordon: East Lothian U3A



There are no regular meetings and communication is mainly by e-mail. It is intended to run alongside the other computer-based groups as a resource for individual help when the need arises, but also to provide a resource that does not place too many demands on individuals.

We have 22 members and are now up and running although still finding a few glitches that need sorted out. If anyone wants more details on this I will be happy for them to contact me by e-mail.

In ten years time, those of us who are still around will probably look back on this time and think: ‘Goodness, were there members who didn’t use a computer?’

Until then, encouragement without pressure is the key, and for thirdagers: ‘There is no such thing as a stupid question.’

[agordon@tollymore.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:agordon@tollymore.fsnet.co.uk)

## Comment

Susan England from Walthamstow U3A says: "It's encouraging to see just how many groups have people willing to start IT courses for fellow U3A members. However those who have no such person may be interested to know that Age Concern provide 'Silver Surfer' courses for older learners and are used to dealing with people who have no prior knowledge.

Silver Surfers  
57 Orford Rd  
Walthamstow E17 9NJ  
Tel: 0208 520 2283  
[r.sefton@ageconcernwf.org.uk](mailto:r.sefton@ageconcernwf.org.uk)

# Trying Computers

In the last issue, John Carpenter of Loughborough U3A wondered why some people take to computers while others 'wouldn't have one in the house'. He asked reluctant users to 'give computers a try' hinting that they would be better off for having done so. Well, not every one agreed with him...

Janet Brinsmead of Milton Keynes U3A has strong views. She says: "John states that people in our age group show a wide divide in attitudes but not always in ways that he would have expected. What does he find so unusual about this? It is natural for people to have differing opinions about all sorts of things, technology and science included.

"I am one of John's 'reluctant' users. To me the computer is a tool. It is useful but there is more to life than sitting in front of a machine even if it does give you the information you want speedily.

"Why the need for so much rush? There is nothing ruder than meeting someone who is too busy and flies off shouting, 'Oh, just e-mail me!'

"It's irritating when people like John give the impression (even if not meaning to do so) that we reluctant users are, in some way poorer, frightened or afraid of making fools of ourselves.

"The thought never enters their heads that some of us have chosen not to spend

our lives following something that interests us little. Talking to people, laughter, fresh air, pursuing hobbies that interest me are more important than tapping away at a keyboard.

"I don't expect John to live his life the way I live mine and to follow my interests. Why does he think it is imperative that I live his way and follow his passions? Why does he feel the need to exhort non-users to track down someone to encourage them?

"Encourage people yes – but first ascertain why they may be non-users. Don't patronise them by making assumptions. Recognise that people prefer to make their own choices about their lives. Why increase the pressure of modern-day life by making people feel inadequate by boasting about your prowess and how wonderful your computing life is and how much better theirs could be?

"If someone is happy being a dinosaur what is wrong with that?"

Eileen Hooper of West Dartmoor U3A is in her 70th year and could not imagine that a computer would feature in her life.

She says: "Then I noticed a newspaper offer of a year's free tuition on a computer course being run in the town. Not that I would purchase one, but at least I could converse with my grandchildren in an intelligent manner.

"The system was great. You worked with a book at your own pace and there was a tutor to assist. I attended three times a week and met many friends there, some advanced and others novices like myself. Sometimes I felt I had not achieved anything but other times I was pleased with progress.

"I used a friend's computer to practise

on, but of course I wanted my own. I chose a laptop and cannot imagine life without it.

"There was a test on word processing, spreadsheets and database and pride made me determined to pass, which I did just past my 70th birthday.

"Perhaps not a great achievement but having left school at 14 with no qualifications for me it was.

"I'm fortunate to have good health and live an active life so sitting for hours in front of the computer is not for me. But doing reports, letter writing and e-mails has made life so much easier.

"Perhaps when I am housebound I will take more interest in surfing the Internet. Should I need to move to residential care, being near a plug will be essential."

John Carpenter



Sophie Piggott of U3A Bexleyheath said that while reading John's article, she felt it was like trying to persuade someone to try a fast car when that person is happy with a small, reliable car, or to buy a microwave when they are first-class cooks with an ordinary oven.

She says: "To be 'willing to give it a try' (I quote) will not convince people to change a way of life they are enjoying.

"The article forgets that there are enjoyable and efficient ways to communicate with other people, to shop, to study outside the Internet.

"John's questions are put the wrong way. It is not that the Net or computers put people off. It is simply not a need and you can live happily without them – as you can without a car, microwave or a mobile.

"The answer to John's query is that people like contact with people face-to-face. They like to meet other human beings and this is why the groups offered by U3A are so popular."

Ken Trenerry of Swindon U3A finds it funny in the way people react to computers.

He says: "I know of two ex-heads of schools in their 70s who you would think would be the first to get PCs. One has a laptop but uses it only as a word processor. I have told her she could have a big reference library in her home plus sending e-mail to her family if she got on to the Net. But she is not interested.

"When I told the other one I had a PC, his reaction was: 'I don't want to have anything to do with those things.'

"When I was a small boy I had a Grandmother who wouldn't answer the phone. She hadn't been brought up on the phone and was frightened of it. I said to myself I hope I'm not like Gran when I'm grown up. This is why I have tried to accept modern technology. I bought my first PC six years ago and although I still don't know a lot about them I wouldn't be without it.

"It amazes me how intelligent people cannot be interested in the PC."

## Shakespeare Audio Tapes

Since our U3A began in 1992, I have been responsible for an English Literature and Language group.

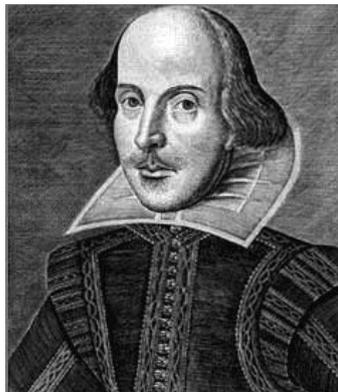
During the years we have received much help from the Resource Centre at the National Office. We have had frequent loans of audio tapes of Shakespeare's plays.

We find them so much more useful than videos when we are studying a play in detail.

While listening to the fine acting we can follow the text in front of us, and when, for example, we come to a passage that is difficult to understand, or is vital to the plot or to a character's development, it is easy to stop the recording and discuss or explain a particular point, or re-run a section of verse. It means we can discuss points as they arise and hear again a part of the scene.

The result is that we get much more out of the work we are studying. If we were using a video we feel we would be taking a more passive role in our study of the play.

**Ken Daynes:**  
**Northallerton U3A**



The Martin Droeshout engraving of William Shakespeare

### Resource Centre

Most Shakespeare plays are available on audio tape, although the Centre does not have them all.

If you would like to study Shakespeare in this way I would be happy to send a list of what we have available or to purchase a copy of a play we do not yet have in this format.

Elizabeth Gibson

## Surfing the Net

In Susan Radford's article on Google (Sources 28), she pointed out that even when you put "plasma display screen" into inverted commas, you still get 10,400 pages.

Not enough people know an excellent alternative, namely [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com).

Its advantage over Google is that it gives you only complete articles dealing with the subject (in this case just two articles), whereas Google would give you 10,400 pages in which the words appear in connection with other topics.

The two articles on [answers.com](http://answers.com) of course have cross links, and if none of this gives you what you are looking for, you can always go back to Google.

One of the two articles comes from:

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) which is a wonderful resource, although it is compiled by millions of users and there are occasional errors in it. (If you spot one, you can send in a correction, which, after checking by the staff, will replace the original.)

*Ralph Blumenau*

## Package Holiday Regulations

Because the regulations regarding package holidays are so complex, the Third Age Trust advises groups not to arrange their own holidays but to use a package holiday operator.

According to the DTI Package Travel Fact Sheet: URN 05/1724, the definition of a package holiday is complex but a package holiday must:

Be sold or offered for sale

Be sold at an inclusive price

Be pre-arranged

Include a minimum of two of the three elements of:

Transport

Accommodation

Other tourist services accounting for a significant proportion of the package such as acting as a tour guide.

Therefore, if a U3A member wishes to lead or guide a tour they can do so providing they do not also arrange travel or accommodation.

They should also make sure that deposits are not paid into their personal account but into a specific U3A account and any cheques issued to the tour organising company are paid by the treasurer.

This information, and much more, is supplied to Business secretaries by the National Office. If you are planning a trip and have not seen the regulations, please ask the National Office to send you a copy or go to:

[www.legislation.hms.gov.uk/si/si1992/ukjsi\\_19923288\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.legislation.hms.gov.uk/si/si1992/ukjsi_19923288_en_1.htm)

Or key: Package travel Fact Sheet URN 05/1724 into Google and use the link there to go direct to the regulations.

## Living History Research Project

Were your parents 'in service'? Could you help with a research project into the lives of the children of servants? There are few written records on this aspect of the social history of the 20th century, and we need to document it before our memories fade.

Do get in touch if you can help. It would be good to share experiences with other survivors of a system that separated parents and children.

**Barbara Bond**

Oral History Network Coordinator

Tel: 01993 771292

[barbarabond@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:barbarabond@tiscali.co.uk)

# A Tour to Remember

Last year a friend joined a U3A tour in France and enjoyed it so much that when mention was made of a forthcoming trip to Northumbria, I booked myself on it. It was one of the best decisions I ever made By Pamela Froud: Weymouth and Portland U3A



Many years ago I spent a few days in Northumberland and the Border country, so of course I had seen Durham Cathedral. Under Derek Robbin's fine guidance I realised that I had not seen anything.

This trip was so well planned and organised that it was an eye-opening joy. Castles (Richmond, Lindisfarne, Raby, Durham); museums (Bowes, Beamish, Eden Camp); gardens (Alnwick, Wallington) and small towns and villages were scattered sparsely in miles of open countryside. Then there were several glimpses of the Angel of the North, Newcastle's Millennium Bridge and dockside refurbishment.

The contrasts were interesting. Alnwick's recently created water feature (to rival Chatworth, perhaps) was spectacular, and the surrounding rose gardens and woods are beautiful, whereas Wallington is older, more formal, and with a timeless air of tranquillity and restfulness.

It would take too long to write about the Bowes Museum and our childlike enjoyment of that magic swan. By contrast, the Eden Camp brought back memories, both happy and sad, to those old enough to remember the war, especially the blitz.

The highlight of this delightfully mixed week was undoubtedly our tour of Durham. Probably the best guide I have ever encountered led us around the cathedral and opened our eyes to the cathedral's history and its emergence from a sacred shrine of St Cuthbert, to its present status as the seat of the See of Durham, and also one of the most magnificent buildings in Europe. A modern stained glass window offended my eye, but when the guide explained its meaning my view changed entirely.

Sometimes it seemed that there was too much to take in. I didn't even attempt Hadrian's Wall but when I returned home enriched by the whole experience, my overwhelming impression was that the people of Northumberland and Newcastle have made a miraculous recovery from the changes in their industrial environment.

There is an air of hope and achievement and a forward look to future opportunities. Everywhere we went, the people were friendly and spontaneous and, despite a lot of hard work, they had a carefree air and an enjoyment of life – it was infectious.

## **U3A** U3A NATIONAL TRAVEL Formerly known as U3A Travel Network

### 2007

Madeira Island Parks, Llevada walks, 8 Jan, 8 days, £340 Dep Gatwick/Regional Airports (MB)  
North India Hindu culture and architecture, 15 February, 18 days, £1925 Dep Heathrow (VL)  
Nepal Mountain walking, rhododendrons, 10 Mar, 20 days, £1470 Dep Heathrow/Manchester (TW)  
Canadian Rockies/Hawaii Geography, 16 Mar, 17 days, £1299 Dep London/Regional airports (VL)  
Alexandria Ancient sites, El Alamein, late March, 8 days, £800 Dep London (DZ)  
Dubrovnik Culture, Early April, 8/15 days, £450/680 Dep Gatwick (DZ)  
Peru Inca culture, 17 April, 14 days, £2343 Dep London/Regional airports (VL)  
Barcelona Gaudi, Miro and gardens, 18 April, 7 days, £625 Dep Heathrow (RG)  
Cyprus, Limassol Graeco-Roman sites, 9 May, 8 days, £450 Dep Gatwick/Regional airports (MB)  
Scotland, Western Isles Early Scottish history and scenery, 10 May, 8 days, £527 Dep Preston, (TW)  
Italy, Aeolian Islands Geology and vulcanology, 14 May, 8 days, £469, Dep Heathrow (VL)  
Norway Fjords, World Heritage Sites, 17 June, 13 days, £926 for Dep London by coach (DZ)  
Loire Valley History and Wines of the Area, 21 June, 9 days, £580 Dep London by coach (MB)  
Tuscany Architecture and the Puccini Opera Festival, 16 Aug, 6 days, £549 Dep Gatwick (KB)  
Cork Titanic Story, Irish Whiskey, early September, 6 days, £392 Dep London by Coach (DZ)  
North West India Buddhist Culture and Mountain Scenery, 8 Sept, 16 days, £1500 Dep Heathrow (VL)  
Oporto History, Architecture, 24 September, 8 days, £860 Dep Stansted (DR)  
Turkey Archaeology, 7 October, 15 days, £845 Dep London/Manchester (VL)  
Neapolitan Riviera Archaeology, 12 October, 8 days, £529 Dep Gatwick/Regional airports (MB)

### TOUR ORGANISERS (U3A MEMBERS)

(MB) Michael Bakall, Milcrest, Manor Lea Road, Milford, Godalming, Surrey, GU8 5EF  
(KB) Katie Butcher, 8 Newlands, Buckingham Close, Guildford, GU1 1TR  
(RG) Ron Gate, 32 Porthill Gardens, Shrewsbury, SY3 8SQ  
(VL) Vivien Lawrence, Cove Cottage, Sharp Rock, Morthoe, Woolacome, Devon, EX34 7EA  
(DR) Derek Robbins, Tour Organiser, 21 Schofield Road, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6FW  
(BS) Beryl Strong, Flat E54, Du Cane Court, Balham, London, SW17 7JL  
(TW) Tom Warren, 69A Freshfield Road, Formby, Liverpool, L37 7BG  
(DZ) Dawn Zeffertt, 125 Ruskin Park House, Champion Hill, Camberwell, London, SE5 8TL  
(MW) Margaret Ward, 33 Masons Ryde, Pershore, WR10 1JG  
(Chairman) Dennis Johnson, 12 The Huntley, Carmelite Drive, Reading, RG30 2SB

# Online Courses

The Online Short Story Courses attract talented, interesting and dedicated participants. Occasionally someone drops out, software goes wrong, holidays offer complications. Ian Searle, who wrote the course, is assisted by past course members. Maggie Smith and Derek Stevens are taking over from Ian in 2007 and with his blessing are revising the course, with suggestions from previous participants. A review from a course member is below.

## From Derek Stevens: Pembrokeshire U3A

We each submitted a short story to be posted on the website for course members to read. Daunting and fascinating. I needn't have worried. Comments and criticism were constructive, good-natured and to the point. Particularly valuable was the interplay between members, artfully promoted by the structure of the excellent course materials.

We didn't agree on everything of course, but I'm sure we now look at our writing – and our reading – in a new light. As snippets of personal lives emerged, I was almost convinced that the tutors enjoyed an existence beyond their dedication to our computer screens.

## From Maureen White: Banbury U3A

Studying Art History was a life saver. The autumn was bleak. My shanks pony was lame and I had no transport.

The courses were brilliant and tutor Audrey Lorraine was superb with prompt responses and encouragement by e-mail.

The artwork was easily viewed via the Internet. International museums provided access to artwork with the means to zoom in to a detail.

It was simple but enthralling to find the biographical detail that brought the artist alive. The psychology that made some artists move in diplomatic circles or the hardship of poverty in the gutter.

An alternative window into the people's history of the era – when the work was commissioned or wrought – was fascinating. The symbols

Writing an online course is hard work says Jean Thompson. It has to be knowledgeable but not boring, challenging but not too difficult. The Activities (or homework) have to be stimulating and varied. The writer/tutor needs endless patience and tact.

Jean's courses on Russia and China could be used by individuals or by a group. It would be helpful to know how many members are interested in taking them so we can plan ahead.

Jean: "But I can't do this alone so I'm appealing for tutors to work with me." Please register your interest at: [jean.thompson@pop3.hiway.co.uk](mailto:jean.thompson@pop3.hiway.co.uk)

People went away on holiday, moved house, visited their grandchildren, re-decorated (or so they said, but can you trust a story teller?).

Every two weeks a new batch of strange and unusual punishments was despatched to us, to which we responded with gusto. So can I recommend it? Only if you want to be thoroughly stimulated and engaged, have fun and meet some interesting people.

Too much navel gazing is no doubt bad for you, but the odd peek will allow you to clear out some of the fluff. In my opinion this epitomises what the U3A is about, and we owe a great deal to those who have given their time and expertise to provide this facility.

Thank you all. Must rush now, got my homework to finish.

used within the paintings were like solving a detective novel. Changes in society attitudes are echoed within art. Digs at authority were quietly hinted at – what people felt rather than what the history writer wrote.

This wasn't a lonely occupation. The contacts with the tutor and others doing the course were helpful and friendly.

So is there a downside? Tutored courses are easier – you have a real person waiting for the Units. It needs discipline when doing untutored courses. It's easy to be sidetracked so I set self imposed targets.

I took more than five hours a week. For group study it could take almost a year rather than eight weeks per course.

One upside was that these courses introduced me to the world of the U3A and some enjoyable local groups.

## U3A Online Courses

The courses listed are available online. Visit the website, [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) and click on the link to Online Courses.

The copyright to the courses is owned by the Third Age Trust or by U3A Online Inc in Australia.

### Course Titles

#### Tutored courses (£15)

##### Beginning in Jan/Feb 2007

Russia: an Introduction (New)

China: an Introduction (New)

Venice and Her Artists

Digital Imaging

Creative Writing: Short Stories

Creative Writing: Poetry

Writing for Publication

#### Untutored Courses (£8)

##### Available now

Artists of Spain

Italian Art

Venice and Her Artists

Visiting Artists in Rome

Great Northern European Artists

Ageing and Retirement (Aus)

Antarctica (Aus)

Astronomy (Aus)

Autobiography and Journaling (Aus)

Botany for Knowledge and Enjoyment (Aus)

Continents on the Move (Aus)

Creative Writing: Fiction

Creative Writing: Poetry

Writing for Good Effect

Writing for Publication

Writing Family History

Digital Imaging

Design in Your Life (Aus)

Garden History

Genealogy (Aus)

Intro to Western Philosophy (Aus)

Maintaining Independence (Aus)

Religions of the World (Aus)

The Night Sky (Southern Hemisphere)

The Romans

Understanding Computers

#### For details check the websites:

[www.u3a.org.uk/online\\_courses](http://www.u3a.org.uk/online_courses)

[www.u3aonline.org](http://www.u3aonline.org)

Courses available only to U3A members. U3A tutors and writers are unpaid volunteers.