

'History is just the portrayal of crimes and misfortunes': Voltaire

The Value of History

History courses are among the most popular in U3A

History is one of the most accessible of subjects for all sorts of reasons.

Many members of U3A want to learn new skills, and may attend a language course or a science course from scratch. In those cases there is a lot of groundwork to be laid before you can make any real progress.

But for those who are not quite so ambitious, a history course requires no special preparation – you don't have to acquire any special skills.

You can jump in at almost any point although you do have to have studied the 18th century before you can study the 19th or 20th. And of course it would deepen your appreciation if you could relate the period you are studying to an earlier one – or indeed to a later one.

History is a form of story telling, an ancient art that casts spells over young and old. And this particular form of story telling is not only fascinating, but also necessary to give us a sense of who we are and how we got to be what we are.

The necessity of this has been felt down the ages. Even pre-literate societies appointed remembrancers to satisfy this need. The fact that they often were praise-singers of their own societies had its dangers. Today's remembrancers should have wider responsibilities.

Every field of human activity can be embraced by history. The Roman playwright Terence wrote: *homo sum: nil humanum mihi alienum est*: 'as a human being, no area of human activity lies outside my range of interest'.

So it should be with the historian. It is not only political and economic history, but also the entire history of culture, of the arts, of the sciences, of religion, of philosophy, that should engage his interest. Whatever knowledge you have,

whatever surroundings you live in, it is life-enhancing if you are aware of these in the extra dimension of the past.

In this respect, local history is especially rewarding. A landscape, a townscape, a village, a river or a mountain range, a railway or a cathedral, acquires a special resonance if you can appreciate each one in that extra dimension. And when we engage with the thoughts of the great figures of the past, we cannot help gaining in some wisdom ourselves.

True history is also excellent training in citizenship, because it should broaden our perspectives and our understanding, and possibly widen our tolerance and appreciation of ways of thinking and of living that are different from our own.

There is no subject like History to teach us that there are many sides to every question – to acquire empathy for different points of view seen from within. History should help us to understand the values of past civilisations or of the civilisations of other parts of the world in their own terms, and not judge them by the standards that we may hold ourselves.

This kind of understanding is particularly needful in today's multi-racial societies and in an increasingly interdependent and international environment.

If in the end we reject a particular point of view, it will not be out of narrowness or prejudice, but will be after we have understood as fully as we can what it is that we reject.

Where conflicts in the world are unavoidable, it helps us to understand their often-ancient roots, and if we do have to confront opponents, that confrontation will be the more intelligent for that understanding.



By Ralph Blumenau

Ralph Blumenau was head of the History Department at Malvern College until retirement in 1985. He is now involved with U3A in London, running courses on the History of Europe, the History of Philosophy and the History of the Jews. Author of *Philosophy and Living* (630 pp paperback, Imprint Academic 2002).

While some history courses will teach us a deeper appreciation of the culture of our own society, we should learn to avoid cultural jingoism, and see through the distortions and abuses of history that serve propagandistic aims.

It is not surprising that the pursuit of genuine history has always been anathema to dictatorships.

To sum up: History should open up wide perspectives, show the interrelation of fields of study and provide encouragement to explore them. No one can possibly hope to cover more than a small part of this wealth, but we can hope to do enough to make us aware of the infinite variety of man's activities and achievements on this planet.

It should prevent our thinking from being narrow, compartmentalised and insular. It should make us citizens of the world. It is a grand aim, but then, History is a grand subject.



Sources is published by the Third Age Trust
19 East Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1QH
Tel: 020 8466 6139 E-mail: national.office@u3a.org.uk
Sources is copyright to the Third Age Trust and is
circulated only to subscribing members. Nothing may be
reproduced without permission.

In the next issue

The next issue of *Sources* (No 27) will be posted to those on the database in February 2006. The special themes will be on the two topics of Philosophy and Religion, but any articles of interest are welcome.

Contributions are considered for inclusion by an editorial panel. Please submit them not later than 8 January 2006 – via the National Office or direct to the editor.

You can send them by e-mail to 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 28 in June 2006, the focus will be on Producing a Newsletter, and Information and Communications Technology.

How to receive Sources

U3A members may receive *Sources* at home, free of charge, by completing a subscription form (obtainable either through their local Committee or from the National Office) and submitting it to the National Office. Please mark the envelope 'Sources Subscription'.

You can also subscribe on-line at u3a.org.uk

Sources is published in March, June and November. If you enjoy reading it, please tell your fellow members that subscription is free. Back numbers can be viewed on-line and printed. Visit the Third Age Trust website at www.u3a.org.uk. More recent issues require Adobe Acrobat Reader which can be downloaded free from the website.

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

In this issue

- 1 The Value of History: Ralph Blumenau
- 3 Frost Fairs on the River Thames: Glenys Tuersley
- 4 Baddow and Galleywood U3A: Family & Local History
- 5 Resource Centre News: Elizabeth Gibson
- 6 Shared Learning Projects: Jenny Clark
- 7 Looking Sideways at History: Jenny Clark
- 7 Plymouth Museum Project: Barbara Goodyear
- 8 History of the Jews: Max Nohr
- 9 The People's War: Audrey Lewis
- 9 A Holistic Approach to History: Joy Daniels
- 10 An Abergavenny Adventure: Colin Mitchell
- 10 The Appeal of Local History: Alan Whatley
- 11 History Needs a Mature Mind: John Symonds
- 12 The History of Science & Technology: John Smart
- 12 Living History is for Everyone: Barbara Bond
- 13 Local History at Newport: Mary Walker
- 13 The 1930s Decade: Barbara Turner
- 14 What is History?: Robert Taylor
- 15 Names From the Past: Nick Mason
- 15 Virtual U3A: A New Development
- 16 Resource and Learning Support Day
- 17 Older Women in Film: NFI Project
- 17 Astronomical/Space Exploration
- 17 Music Appreciation Network
- 18 The Last Issue
- 19 Language Loss. Does it Matter?: Maurice B Line
- 20 On-line Courses and Events

In my view *Tony Thornton* Editor

I have been catapulted from obscurity into the U3A eye. When I offered to become editor of *Sources*, I didn't realise it was such a high-profile position.

Since taking it on, I have visited London more times this year on U3A business than I have during the last 20.

I received an invitation to sit on the panel for the Standing Committee for Education, and join a tele-conference with the U3A News editorial panel.

I was even asked to consider standing as the North West

Area Representative that would have meant (if elected) a seat on the NEC.

I hastily declined when I learned just how much time and effort is expended by these devotees that get nothing in return other than the satisfaction of furthering the U3A cause.

My inauguration culminated in my first visit to a U3A conference – the one in Leicester last August.

I was pleased to represent Carlisle U3A and cast our votes at the AGM. I later

attended a committee meeting to report on the outcome.

By definition, a conference is a meeting for discussion. The 300 or so people there had a lot to discuss because they were mainly officers representing U3As – chairs, secretaries, and so on.

There were few members from the ranks and files. I wonder why. Could it be the expense? Maybe. But the numbers weren't noticeably

swelled by the AGM day-only visitors.

My discussions were with people that have an input into *Sources*. The message that came through was the need to increase circulation – by the introduction of new ideas that won't jeopardize its integrity.

The editorial panel would be pleased to read your views on this matter. If *Sources* is changing, then let this be with your approval.

Frost Fairs on the River Thames



By Glenys Tuersley

To be involved in Shared Learning Projects is to live with one eye open for the opportunity and one ear listening for the contact.

So it happened that, on a casual visit to the Hermitage Rooms at Somerset House last summer, I discovered their learning centre. I was introduced to Volunteers Coordinator Lottie Vinson and a meeting was arranged between Jenny Clark (the then coordinator for U3A Shared Learning Projects), Lottie and myself.

The idea of the Frost Fairs Project was born. U3A provided the research team and Lottie defined the project, provided the meeting place and supervised our endeavours.

The project ran from October to December 2004 – with group meetings at Somerset House at fortnightly intervals. We enrolled as volunteers for the duration. This gave us access to the administrative areas of the building, and entitled us to free access to exhibitions and other London museums – and expenses for travel and food when on Somerset House business.

Our team of 12 was joined by a temporary intern who offered her computing skills to set up a website and a Yahoo e-mailing group.

The River Thames has frozen on a number of occasions during the last millennium due to the vagaries of the British climate and the restriction on the flow of water caused by the design of the old London Bridge. It was decided to research these occasions. Their spontaneous organisation and restrictions on the normal life of the river provided a recurrent theme.

A list of research sources was allocated to our group members, who worked in pairs to prevent the duplication of our findings. But we found that even from different sources we duplicated facts and images. There was a finite amount of recorded information on the subject that is repeated in the major collections.

A U3A/Somerset House Project 2004



A Frost Fair on the Thames at Temple Stairs by Abraham Hondius, 1684

In 1564, archery and dancing took place on the Thames, but the first Frost Fair came in 1683. The river stayed frozen for two months. Londoners took to the ice and enterprising businessmen cashed in by providing entertainment for the visitors. Traders set up two rows of stalls. A whole ox was roasted on the ice, and even Charles II and his family visited the fair.

Once we had brought together the history of the fairs, we allocated areas of interest to our working pairs.

As leader of the project, I could not have wished for a more appropriate selection of enthusiasts even if I had asked for CVs and held interviews beforehand. Our team had a wide range of skills, experience and interests that perfectly matched the specified areas.

In some areas it was necessary to deduce the style of the day from other sources. There was little factual information available. For example, we were confronted with pictures of tents with no indication of what went on within. The pictures of musicians couldn't tell us what they were playing, nor the pictures of drinking men tell us what they were quaffing.

This project offered us a wonderful opportunity to utilise highly specialised sources, to which we would otherwise not have had access. We were helped by specialists who seemed delighted to have eager learners share their expertise.

Few of our group knew each other before we started, but we grew together into a happy, supportive team.

The crowning piece of good fortune was when we found that one of our group, who had been prevented from doing research because of ill health, was an expert in computerised book production and spent days producing our research document. This is held in the Resource Centre and available to interested groups.

We finished our project with a presentation to the Somerset House staff and U3A guests. It was held just before Christmas in the excellent lecture theatre. This was followed by refreshments which included gingerbread made by one of our members from a Frost Fair recipe.

Each winter, an ice rink is staged in the courtyard of Somerset House. If sponsorship money is available it is intended to join in with a Frost Fair on the terrace overlooking the Thames.

We earnestly hope that our researches will help to bring this about.

We started our Family History group at the beginning of 2005 and meet monthly, in either members' homes or on visits to resource centres. We have a dozen regular members who have varied levels of expertise in this subject.

This is useful. It allows some of the more experienced to pass on their knowledge to the novices. From a computer clip art package we designed our group header.

We started the group by asking everyone to complete a simple questionnaire, which established their experience and the geographical areas they wished to research.

Most of us have Internet access, but we vary the meetings to include paper-based research. We visited our County Record Office and the County Library Historical Reference Centre, to view old local newspapers and maps.

Some have joined the Essex Society for Family History and use the search rooms in the records buildings. We also have an Essex Churches Group.

There is a variety of speakers at our monthly meetings, including the leaders of our neighbouring U3A Genealogy group. We hope to arrange visits to The Family Records Centre, and The National Archives.

The Internet access at members' homes enables us to help each other in our research, and to become more confident in conducting personal research at home, or in local library Internet centres.

We found a useful booklet produced by The National Archives in association with the BBC for the *Who do you think you are?* series. It gives many websites and addresses to help in our fascinating quest to discover where and how our ancestors lived.

During the winter we hope to spend

Family History

By Di Angel



Di (in white) with members of the Family History Group

more time searching for information and organising our material. Some of us may attend Adult Education classes to expand our skills.

Our U3A is holding an Open Day in November to provide an interesting display of our work.

Baddow and Galleywood U3A

In 2000, I formed a small team from our Local History Group to carry out a history project within our village. The objective was to produce a book entitled *Great Baddow Oral History*.

We had advice and training at the Essex Record Office, and then set to work interviewing about 40 long term residents using tape recorders. This took several months. We had to give them notice and fit in with their various interests and family commitments.

The oral interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word in tabular format, with the chapter heading noted alongside the entries (such as Family Life, School, Religion and Leisure). A copy of the completed transcribed interviews was put on CD for each member.

I showed them how to cut and paste the entries so they could produce chapters by subject, which we then edited to get the book down to the required size of about 200 pages.

Three local printers provided estimates for reproducing text and photographs. Colour photos within the text would have been preferred, but this increased the printing costs significantly so we settled on black and white pictures added at the end of each chapter.

Oral History

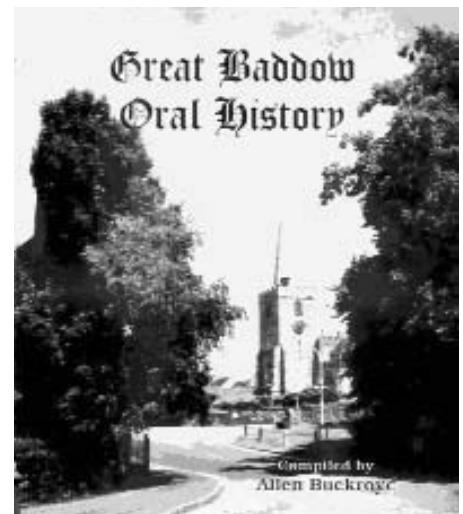
By Allen Buckroyd

Funding was sought from nine sources, and was eventually obtained from Local Heritage Initiative (which includes The Countryside Agency and Nationwide), that covered the costs of printing (£6,000 for 1,000 copies), and a laptop and digital projector to spread the word via PowerPoint presentations. Finding the funds took nine months.

The books were printed in December 2003 and the first batch of 1,000 took eight weeks to sell. Another 1,000 were printed using the proceeds from the first batch, and approximately 700 have been sold so far – at an attractive price of £7.00 each + p&p.

Most sales were local, but following gifts from Baddowites to relatives, sales have been made to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, USA as well as Europe. We had zero help from retailers in Chelmsford, relying on sales by the team, local libraries and organisations.

Last year we participated in a Study Day in London. This was organised by



Barbara Bond, the U3A National Coordinator for Oral History. Several participants asked for 'How to do it' document packs and CDs, which I provided.

The follow-on phase is to create a History Centre in the village and a repository for Baddow memorabilia and personal reminiscences.

A website to publicise the village history is also being built. We hope this will promote sales of the book around the world to ex-Baddowites eager for stories of the old days in their village.
www.greatbaddowhistory.co.uk

Resource Centre News

It is several years since we focused on History in *Sources*. In the intervening period we have added a great deal of material to our stock

By Elizabeth Gibson

Where video and DVD versions of material exist we are buying both whenever possible. For example, we have films on the *Tower of London – 1,000 years of History*, the *Battle of Hastings* and the *Spanish Armada* in both formats.

Some material is being produced in DVD format only, such as the *Time Team Special* on Ightam Mote, a beautiful medieval manor house that has been restored by the National Trust at a cost of one million pounds.

Another fascinating DVD is *The British Empire in Colour* covering 100 years of British history and subjects as diverse as the Mau-Mau Uprising in Kenya and Partition in India. There are written biographies of key figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Lord Mountbatten and David Ben Gurion, with letter and diary extracts on the disc.

We have a series of CD sets entitled *History of the 20th Century in Sound*. Every three-CD set covers ten years of the century and examines the role and life of the British people in each decade through the voices of those influential in society at the time. The material is from BBC archive recordings with a commentary by historian Joanna Bourke.

Because 2005 is the year we celebrate Trafalgar, we have had a number of requests for relevant material. We have a set of 24 slides on *Nelson and Trafalgar*, and also a BBC video biography of Admiral Nelson that is 60 minutes long.

Finally I would like to draw your attention to a DVD on the films of Mitchell and Kenyon. You might have seen a series on these amazing films recently on BBC2.

Our pack is produced by the British Film Institute and entitled *Electric Edwardians*. The films were made between 1900 and 1906 and advertised as 'local films for local people'.

They cover subjects such as workers at the factory gate and on holiday, marching in civic processions, football matches and other amusements – a visual tour of everyday life in Edwardian Britain.

Family History

Until recently, we had no audio-visual material on Genealogy but in the last few months we have acquired a number of DVDs on the subject.

Researching Your Family History is presented by Julian Richards, well known from the *Meet the Ancestors* series on TV. *Trace Your Ancestors* gives tips and advice to help you create a family tree and *Handling and Preserving Family Records* by the Public Records Office gives advice on caring for documents and objects from the past.

There are also two American DVDs that have valuable information on writing a family history, publishing and distributing it, and on using common image software and devices to digitally preserve and enhance old family papers and photographs. The sources of historical material in these films are from the US but the methodology is still useful for U3A members.

Poetry

Many U3As have groups studying poetry and the Resource Centre has a lot of material they can use. We have many cassettes of poets reading their own work, and of well-known actors reading poetry. We also have some video films covering historical periods such as the poetry of the First World War.

From Naxos Audiobooks we have obtained CD sets of the *Faerie Queen* by Spenser, *Paradise Lost* by Milton and *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.



From the films of Mitchell and Kenyon, *The Electric Edwardians* Opening of the Ambulance Drill Hall in Accrington by General Baden Powell, 1904: British Film Institute 2005

Penguin has produced a two-cassette pack *101 Poems To Remember* chosen and read by Ted Hughes as being especially suitable to learn by heart.

Another two-cassette pack is *Verses of the Poets Laureate - an anthology*. This covers works from John Dryden to Andrew Motion and has an introduction that outlines the history of the Laureateship and its development during three centuries. For a list of our poetry material please contact the Centre.

First Aid

Early in 2005, several U3As contacted us to ask for videos on First Aid. At that time we did not have anything in stock but we have since obtained video and DVD versions of the Red Cross information film *Save a Life*. This is advertised as an easy guide to first aid and gives basic but vital information for dealing with emergencies.

Ballet

Another subject area where we had little material to offer was Ballet. We have bought some videos and had others donated so now we have a short list of items available for loan. If you would like to borrow from us or to suggest Ballets that you think we should acquire please get in touch.

Elizabeth Gibson

Resource Centre Manager

Third Age Trust, 19 East Street

Bromley, Kent BR1 1QH

Tel: 020 8315 0199 (Tues and Thurs only)

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

By Jenny Clark

That first project at the British Museum involved people researching objects that meant a great deal to them.

We met weekly and discussed what we had discovered. We shared our ideas about progress, offered and asked for advice and help, and suggested other avenues and resources.

Before Christmas 2002, we went round the Museum and each talked for five minutes in front of our objects. This was a trailer for our presentations the following week to the education staff and each other. We used different ways of presenting and enjoyed it immensely. We were allocated 15 minutes each but found this much too short a time to get in everything we wanted to say.

The projects that followed were similar, except that in the summer of 2003, the National Maritime Museum provided a chance for each person to work on a theme rather than an object.

Gradually the scope of the projects widened. Our hosts asked us to work in their archives, to evaluate a particular gallery, to research an aspect of their history, and so on.

Some of the projects were more successful than others. Some that we planned didn't happen. Some were over-subscribed and some interested only two or three people.

We are learning all the time, and because I have been involved in coordinating most of the London projects, I thought I would draw some of the threads together.

The excitement generated comes from the sharing of ideas, discoveries and intellectual stimulation, sharing with the institutions, with each other, and with our own U3As

We learned several lessons. The projects must be worked out in detail before being announced and they must be advertised as far in advance as possible. A great deal depends on the Coordinator and the Education Officer – both must be committed and enthusiastic.

The topic for each project is crucial in recruiting participants – one will attract a lot of people, another only a few.

Shared Learning Projects

This autumn, the Shared Learning Projects celebrated its third birthday. In October 2002, 17 of us assembled at the British Museum and found objects to research. Since then, the ideas behind these projects have developed in ways we could not have imagined, so it's time to take stock and see where we are.



Keith Richards with the U3A group in the British Museum: Gallery 23 Rome

The time of year the project starts matters, as well as the travelling, and whether there is a convenient cafe for meeting before or after each session.

The idea behind the projects is a distillation of a U3A Interest Group, and it is this that makes them work so well. We are researching a specific topic for a specified length of time, sharing our knowledge, supporting each other, and

sharing with the institutions, with each other, and with our U3As.

The sheer variety of the projects during the past three years – 15 of them in London, with more than 100 participants – is an indication of the possibilities that are waiting for us.

Organisations that have welcomed us include: The British Museum, Somerset House, the Geffrye Museum, the V&A, the National Maritime Museum, the Royal Opera House, the London Metropolitan Archive, the Science Museum, the Imperial War Museum, and the British Film Institute.

We now know that almost any institution can host a Shared Learning Project. Its success will depend on the amount of planning, hard work and enthusiasm invested in it by U3A and the Education Officer or curator involved.

If you would like to start a project in your locality, do ask your Learning Support Network Representative, your Regional contact, or National Office.

I have documents and leaflets that can help with starting up – ideas for projects, and so on. Please get in touch.

Tel: 020 8346 3751

E-mail: jenmal@onetel.net

Looking sideways at history



I have always been intrigued by the idea of looking at history horizontally rather than chronologically.

When we were fighting the Battle of Hastings in 1066, what was happening in Constantinople?

When Jesus was born, the terracotta warriors of Xian in China were 200 years old. When they built Stonehenge, were the Pyramids already there? And so on.

At school, we were taught history chronologically – starting at primary school with the Roman Invasion, and following through, though by no means comprehensively, to 1066, the Tudors, the Civil War, and on to Waterloo and the Victorians and the Second World War.

Not a lot of history seemed to happen outside Britain, let alone outside Europe, for all we knew – how sad.

I also missed out on the 18th century in *any* part of the world, and I have been trying to fill it in ever since.

This autumn we started a group in my own U3A (North London) with 1500AD – not just the Renaissance in Europe, but China, India, South America, North America, Africa, the Ottoman Empire, Japan, Russia and Australia.

We started from a similar blank page, although one member of the group already knew about the Silk Road, so we shall have lots of ideas to share.

Some people use the Internet, and others put their local libraries on their mettle. We are discovering all kinds of new worlds, comparing and connecting them, and relating them to each other.

Is anybody else in U3A looking at history this way? If so, do get in touch with me and let me know what you have discovered.

Jenny Clark: 020 8346 3751
jennal@onetel.net

Searching?

www.cornucopia.org.uk

Cornucopia is an on-line database of information about more than 6,000 collections in the UK's museums, galleries, archives and libraries. Try entering your postcode to learn of collections of interest near you.

www.victorianlondon.org

A guide to social history

www.statistics.gov.uk

Home of National Statistics

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

Museums, galleries and heritage

www.teacherxpress.com

Links to sites including newspapers, libraries and museums.

Need Ideas?

Local U3A History groups looking for new research projects might look to the BBC's TIMEWATCH for inspiration.

Go to:

www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/timewatch

The Plymouth Shared Learning Project

Barbara Goodyear: Plymouth U3A

Our members that carried out the shared research project with the museum, completed the project with talks to an appreciative audience.

They gave an enjoyable descriptive narrative accompanied by excellent slides. This was such a successful result from our first shared learning project that we shall be repeating it.

I think this letter from researcher Ann Thurstans says it all.

"I participated in the museum project, which involved researching paintings from the Maritime Exhibition in the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

"I thought it would develop my perception and appreciation of an artists work and character. I chose a charming painting entitled: *The Launch of the 'Clarence', 74 guns at Turnchapel, 1812* - signed John Rogers.

"It clearly told a story. This gave me an excellent starting point for researching the subject matter and artist.

"I worked hard to trace John Rogers but came to a dead end. However with help from a professional member of staff, and looking in the right place, the attribution has been given to a J Rogers, Coachmaker of Bretonside (Plymouth),



Napoleon on the Bellerophon, in Plymouth Sound
One of the paintings researched by Ann Thurstans

recorded in the Plymouth directory of 1812. This was an important discovery.

"I obtained a great sense and appreciation of Plymouth's historical inheritance by tracing Turnchapel and its people, and Nelson's navy and his sailors, back to the time of the Napoleonic wars. It was immensely interesting and enjoyable.

"The new friendships formed have

been an added bonus. The only drawback was finding enough courage to talk about the work to an audience."

We shall continue in the autumn with more research into maritime paintings and local buildings, (harbour, quays, etc.) built with locally quarried stone. Also, we have been invited to help the library with recovered documents about the ancient Barbican history.

History of the Jews

Max Nohr: U3A in London



Our coordinator Ralph Blumenau is justly renowned, not only for his extensive sapiential authority on so many subjects, but also for his pedagogic ability to transmit his learning in a highly absorbable manner.

Even when stumped for an answer, a quick smile and a promise, always kept, to revert to the matter, silence the awkward squad. And in this class, there are many 'specialists'.

Whilst most of the students are Jewish and presumably not too ignorant of their history, Ralph supplies interesting snippets as well as solid factual background data. He has to be wary of treading on too many toes, especially when religious matters impact on the specific facet under discussion, often a potential minefield indeed, as well as impacting on and from other religions, including Moslem and Christian.

Although many of his students are atheists and agnostics of all sorts, others are deeply religious and could quickly take offence against any presumed, unintentional slight. Diplomacy, with a smile, thy name is Ralph.

The program starts way back in the deepest recesses of human history – more than four millennia. The sheer scale of Jewish history from pre-Abraham to the present day covers most of so-called civilised human world history. Jewish history not only spans a huge time space, but also most of the areas of the world.

Name any country. Not only did Jews live there, they contributed greatly to its progress and well being, far out of proportion to their numbers.

The Jewish contributions are kaleidoscopic: intellectual, commercial, military, medicinal, educational, and scientific from the earliest astronomers to the space age – the stuff of history, when combined with their terrible trials and tribulations.

This massive program is spread over six to seven years. So, who is in a hurry? We sit back, some take notes and we enjoy the privilege of participating in a well run, masterly rendered, comprehensive series of lectures.

The Lecture Series

From Babylon to ancient Israel, from Egyptian slavery back to Israel, again to Babylon and back.

Prophets ever prophesising, wars won and lost.

The Temple(s), the Greek and Roman occupations, the Maccabees and martyrdom.

Herod and Augustus, the Messiah, Christianity and the Dispersal, anti-Semitism in antiquity.

The Exilarchs: Babylonian, Yabneh, North African, Iberian, Central and east European.

The rise of Islam – the Golden Age and Dhimmis, experiences in the Arab worlds of the Middle East and the Iberian peninsula.

The Crusader slaughters, ongoing Christian depredations. Maimonides, the Cairo Gheniza, medieval Jewish rationalism and irrationalism.

Mysticism, the Kabbalah, the Zohar, magic and the Messiah, Shabbetai Zevi.

Blood Libels. Tax farming. The Disputations. Conversos and the Inquisition. Ghettos.

Renaissance and the Reformation. Spinoza. The rationalisation of money.

Extensive coverage of Eastern Europe and Germany/Austria. Napoleonic influences.

The Emancipation and its vast impact throughout Europe. Ashkenazim.

The early Americas. Acculturation, assimilation and conversion.

Massive pogroms, discrimination, WWI, Balfour Declaration, the Mandate and the Mufti. Zionism.

The Nazis, Hitler, WWII, the Holocaust. Israel and its wars. Soviet anti-Zionism and Arab terrorism.

The U.N.

Check your classroom facilities

Bob Boyd: Bromley U3A

When starting a group for a large number of people, it can be difficult to find a suitable venue. In Bromley we have nearly 1,500 members and groups ranging from under a dozen to more than 200 members.

We have found that church halls, libraries and local schools often have rooms available for hire. With each member paying a small charge, we can cover the hire cost, and if necessary, finance an outside speaker.

It is worthwhile contacting your local schools or library to see what facilities are available. We ran successful Computer, Genealogy and Language courses in local schools, sometimes with the use of their equipment.

One of our schools was given a grant for a new computer suite on the understanding that it would also be used by the local community. Another school approached us to ask if we could make use of their Art Department when it was not being used.

Adult Education organisations often take up these facilities, whereas we can benefit at a much-reduced cost by not having paid instructors. Unused school classrooms or halls can become available during the week or on Saturday mornings.

Try them. You have nothing to lose.

Local History Group

Brian Barker: Baddow and Galleywood U3A

The Local History Group was one of the inaugural groups formed in 1999 when it was decided that a monthly programme of meetings during the winter should develop into visits of interest during the summer.

This has continued, with members giving talks with photographs and slides, on historical aspects of this area, including the Romans, Essex buildings, villages and people, through to WWII.

Summer visits include guided walks, museums and buildings under renovation. Thus a wide range of interest has enabled members to learn something of the history of their surroundings even though they are not researching.

The definition of 'local' can be wide in a large county such as Essex, but if we run out of ideas we have interesting aspects of Suffolk, Hertfordshire and even London that we can explore.

The People's War

BBC WW2 People's War is an Internet history archive. Anyone can post their stories for others to read. But Audrey Lewis of Easingwold U3A found that some were not able to do this so she decided to do it for them

Audrey writes: I am one of many who went to the People's War website because of my interest in family history and the experience of growing up in wartime.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII and thousands of wartime stories have been published on the website – about the blitz, children and evacuation, prisoner of war camps, etc.

My young life was spent during and after the war years when slogans were used: *Make do and mend*, *Dig for victory*, *Careless talk costs lives*, *Come into the factories* – and later, *V for Victory*.

I remember Princess Elizabeth making her first broadcast to the nation in 1940 and my mother with her first wartime cookbook.

The average weekly spending on food was £1 14s 1d. Rent was 10s 10d, clothes 9s 4p, and fuel and light 6s 5d.

There were daily broadcasts on the wireless about German raids over London, shipping losses in the Atlantic and how many enemy aircraft had been shot down.

Although we didn't understand the implications of war, we children felt its tensions. Rationing, shortages and air raids were part of our upbringing. We had good times too: Hollywood films, the theatre, dances, and songs like *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, *White Cliffs of Dover* and *Blues in the Night*.

I soon realised there were people with wartime stories to tell who were not able to post them on the website.

Audrey is interested in WWII because it had a profound influence on her life as a child and teenager. The experience led her to join the WRNS.



She later became a teacher and lived and worked in Kenya for some years. She also taught all ages in UK schools. She has two sons, three grandchildren and is retired in North Yorkshire with her husband.

lewispearmain@aol.com

Audrey's contributions are at:

www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/U231954

It was then my computer became busy recording the accounts of their sacrifices, the service they gave and the courage they showed. I am proud of their trust in me and recommend this valuable resource to your attention.

A holistic approach to history

We are a young, self-help history group with a holistic approach. We are interested in everything relating to the period on which we are focusing. At our meetings we share the knowledge gained in our individual research.

Our framework is based on the contenders for power and the extent to which their aspirations were fulfilled. But more interesting to us are the lives of ordinary people and the ways in which they were affected by economic, political and social change.

We discuss, we ponder, we speculate and we digress, but during the past months we have meandered through the years to the early Middle Ages from our misty start in Iron Age Britain.

Now and then, when faced with conflicting accounts of events, we remind ourselves that monastic chroniclers were writing less to satisfy the curiosity of 21st century researchers than to demonstrate that God was on the side of the victors in medieval warfare.

Joy Daniels: Bromsgrove U3A

We have emerged from the reign of the absentee Richard I, when contemporary maps showed Jerusalem to be the centre of the world – the meeting place of heaven and earth.

Feudalism is in decline and there are the beginnings of the market economy with the growing importance of payment in cash in place of goods and services.

We are now concerned with Magna Carta and the troubled reign of King John. We are proceeding to his death and his burial in Worcester Cathedral.

The succession was uncertain and John's diminishing band of supporters hastened to his nine-year-old son at Gloucester to proclaim him king, beholding 'a tiny spark of minute beauty'.

John lost most of the royal regalia in the Wash so they crowned Henry III with an improvised gold circlet and dubious legality. Snails progress through the ages, but satisfying.



King John: lost the royal regalia in the Wash

An Abergavenny Adventure

**Colin Mitchell: Wokingham U3A
Science and Technology Network**

Fifty U3A members from across Britain came together recently in Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, to enjoy Science, Environment and Industrial Archaeology.

The event that brought them together was a three-day residential seminar organised by the U3A's Science and Technology Network in collaboration with the Environmental Network.

The seminar was a blend of talks, discussions and outings led by U3A members. It demanded no special knowledge from those who took part but with 50 members sharing their collective enthusiasm, opinions, and experience, it was a stimulating few days.

This was the third annual seminar organised by the Science and Technology Network.

For further information contact Colin Mitchell: 0118 9782824
colinmitchell@hotmail.com

My wife and I joined 48 other members from 25 U3As at the Abergavenny seminar. We were accommodated in the Ty'r Morwydd Outdoor Pursuits Centre and went on various coach-transported outings to Hereford and the Forest of Dean.

The outings were sandwiched between lectures and we took our meals at large round tables.

The accommodation though basic was comfortable, and the food plentiful and well cooked – also lots of coffee breaks and biscuits.

The subjects of the lectures included Chemistry, Water, Energy, Fossils, Peru, Climate Change, and Environmental Impact, and challenged us to reconsider our set ideas.

The friendliness of the Abergavenny



Hereford Waterworks Museum: where the history of water comes alive

U3A hosts was appreciated and the reception they arranged for us was most enjoyable.

Many thanks are due to Colin Mitchell and his team for organising this event.

Gordon Riocreux: Wokingham U3A

The fourth seminar is planned, again at Abergavenny for the 21-24 August 2006

The appeal of local history

Looking back at *Sources* for February 1999, I noted the analysis of the History groups existing at that time.

Local History was the most popular aspect of history. There were 153 groups compared with the next popular Social History studied by only 60 groups.

The reasons are well known: personal interest in one's locality; a knowledge of the immediate past; and memories passed down from parents and grandparents.

So in my classes, which I have been running for 12 years on a weekly basis, I offer the members a choice. Shall we study a period, say, the Tudor period? Shall we study one street, one event, one building or one person?

There is, of course, much overlap, but the most popular form is the study of one street and the buildings in it.

We play the onion-peeling game. From what can be seen today, we work backwards decade-by-decade building up a chart.

It's a long journey from the Windsors, Victorians, Georgians, Tudors and Normans, to the Romans. Most members have an OS map of the area and a magnifying glass.

The snag is that the further back we go, the harder it is to find the evidence. Yet members show such enthusiasm that they go to considerable trouble to search in libraries, museums and archives.

Or they comb the Internet and bring back astonishing finds from the most unlikely sources.

They learn how difficult it is to separate the wheat from the chaff – surprised at the mistakes uncovered, e.g. dates and spellings as well as facts. They make photocopies, bring in newspaper cuttings, show maps, pictures, even heirlooms.

Members present what they have found – either ad lib or by reading a piece. We discuss it. We ask for the sources. Some will want to see the same documents and go off happily to study

more and bring back sequels next week.

Slowly, members are acquiring the knowledge and management skills that can be useful elsewhere. They get enormous pleasure in contributing to the group's work.

Sometimes there is a queue of people wanting to say their piece.

Possible reasons for choosing the single item study is that it is easier to grasp and keep hold of. Also, if anyone has grandparenting duties and has to leave early or is absent, it will not be too difficult to see someone's notes and hear what happened next time.

Once a term we go for a guided walk or explore attics in Elizabethan houses. We stray into cellars under public houses looking for ghosts or supposed tunnels. We climb the tricky steps up a church tower to survey the site of a battle or see an ancient moat.

Is it any wonder that a member once said: "I can hardly wait for next week."



Allan Whatley
Crewe and
Nantwich U3A



John Symonds: Christchurch U3A

History needs a mature mind

“As far as history is concerned I think it is best left to the universities. The subject is beyond children and needs a mature mind.”

Few of us today would agree with this sweeping statement that came from an adviser to the 1902 Education act, but there are many who would agree that there is still an element of truth in it. As one of my group put it: “To appreciate real history, you need a bit of history yourself.”

The U3A age group often got little from school history. You do not need to go back far to find school history concentrating on battles, kings and queens and dates.

In a lifetime of teaching history over a wide age range, I have heard this complaint many times. Of course it is different today when children use primary sources and learn the skills of the historian. But even with a modern approach, no child can compete with the 60-year-olds able to bring their own particular experiences and understanding to the subject.

It is often said that the reason for studying history is to gain a glimpse of why we think as we do and how our culture developed. Others see it as a search for national identity. While it would be difficult to argue with either option, there is no doubt that the media interest in narrative history has raised the subject profile in the last 20 years.

Scarcely a week goes by without a television drama documentary on some aspect of history – often one of the great stories. This is backed up by monthly magazines and the Internet.

Such a high profile cries out for every U3A to have at least one history group, but concern over how to do it is sometimes a stumbling block.

There is no way a U3A group leader can compete with the techniques and resources of the professional media, but there is a way forward by tackling history from a different standpoint.

Top of the list might come primary sources – letters, diaries, journals and eyewitness accounts.



Members of Christchurch U3A History Group

There is nothing like hearing from those who were there. It brings history alive and helps us to appreciate how people were thinking at the time.

But what sort of history will attract members? The answer is: almost anything provided it is presented with enthusiasm and in the right way.

The history group is bound to have wide interests (they would not be in U3A otherwise), so a nucleus of members can usually be found. However, if you are looking for a larger group, then a good starting point might be to concentrate on social history, but include the personalities and events of the period.

If that does not appeal, then look at the possibility of taking one set theme and looking at it down the ages. Women in Society perhaps, or the changing world of the Man in the Street

An aspect of the subject that is sometimes overlooked is that history also has great value as a companion group to another subject – perhaps science, music, foreign languages or literature.

A group might be studying the works of Jane Austen on one day and the history of the period on another. The variation is endless and interconnecting groups often attract new members.

It's impossible in 2005 to forget family history, which has an enormous following. Many U3As have such a group running (including my own). Those investigating their own family are often intrigued by general life at the time

they are investigating, which presents another opportunity for a U3A group.

Other groups might tackle oral history with members recording their own memories. Many historians think that the oral history movement is vital for the future and a big innovation of the 20th century. Think how exciting it would be if we could listen to people who lived during the reign of Henry VIII.

Oral history is not always plain sailing. It is sometimes difficult to persuade people that their memories are of lasting interest. I was talking recently to a lady in her 80s who could not see why there should be any interest in her memories of trams in Bournemouth.

But it does not need to be memories of long ago. Childhood during WWII, school in the 1950s, holidays in the 60s, retiring in the 80s – even the Pop scene could make an interesting group.

If your U3A doesn't have a tape recorder, then present your oral history in written form – it can be recorded later. We have a Living History group at Christchurch using this technique and it is a great success.

Once started, history groups tend to expand. National history is followed by local history. Local history becomes part of travel groups and church architecture – the development goes on.

Experience shows that history groups encourage new members. This is not surprising because: History needs a mature mind.

The History of Science and Technology

If you are looking for an idea for a new study group, why not try the history of science and technology?

A useful starting point is to examine a popular belief. For example: that James Watt invented the steam engine or that Mr Singer invented the sewing machine.

Another idea is to choose something that members are familiar with, such as the cooking stove or the supply of water, and trace its development.

This can lead to other things – the history of the gas stove on to the making of coal gas and its chemistry, and methods of water purification and the biochemical processes involved.

If there is a science or technology museum nearby then this would be a good place to begin. Many provide talks or demonstrations given advance notice. Even more general museums may well have collections that are relevant to your enquiries.

Local central libraries often provide a service for lists of books to read covering a specific subject.

John Smart: Southend U3A

The great standard work to consult is *A History of Technology* by Holmyard, Singer et al, published by the Oxford University Press in several large volumes. Volumes III, IV & V cover periods from medieval times to the 19th century, and volumes VI & VII deal with the 20th century.

Science since 1500 by H T Pledge (HMSO), though long out of print, is still an important source.

An author who has written many books on technology is L T C Rolt. A good example is *Victorian Engineering* which has a useful bibliography.

Eureka edited by Edward De Bono Thames and Hudson (1979 paperback) covers many inventions and is a good beginning for studying a particular subject or theme.

If you have an important local industry this would be a worthwhile study. A written history may exist but this may not cover recent developments.



James Watt

Didn't invent the steam engine

A valuable activity for a U3A group would be recording the memoirs of workers in that industry. Accounts of working practices on the shop floor often differ from those given in textbook descriptions.

A look at the History of Science and Technology shows how much this has influenced our lives and those of our ancestors.

Living History is for everyone!

Do you want to write your life story but can't find the time to start? You would have enjoyed the *Living History* course at the Cheltenham Summer School

Fourteen U3A members from around the country came together to share their memories and explore some interesting ways to make the daunting task of writing a life story more manageable.

The course was designed for group leaders as well as for individual members and there was a wide cross-section of experience to contribute to the discussions.

We started by creating a framework for our individual memories using a Milestones exercise – and began writing there and then.

This was relatively easy for some people who had joined creative writing activities in their own U3A, but not all members in a new group had this kind of useful background experience.

The memories which emerged, however, were so typical of our age group – descriptions of the disruption

caused by WWII, and the struggle facing girls who wanted to train for a career and the prospect of a better life than they had known as a child.

We experimented with the sounds and smells that bring back memories, and drew up a Life Celebration supper list to identify the friends, family members, neighbours, pop and sporting stars, etc. who had influenced our life stories. We could have spent the whole course on written memories but we planned to work on recording memories too.

Many people have asked about making recordings in the community for local history projects, and we were fortunate to have a detailed presentation on the Marlborough *Living Memories* project by one of the U3A participants.

The end result of this Local History Society project is an excellent CD, and as well as hearing about the stages that led up to this, we also tried recording each other on the topic of 'School Days'.

This was great fun and certainly diminished any apprehension about talking into a machine.

Look out for the 2006 Summer School programme and a possible repeat at Chester

Barbara Bond

Oral History Network Coordinator

The course concluded with a display of work in progress, including Memory Boxes, personal research into family history, treasured scrapbooks and Victorian exercise books, extracts from current and published writing, a demonstration of how the camera can definitely lie, and the activities of the splendidly named 'Dodo Group' in Plymouth.

Sounds interesting and sorry you missed it? Look out for the 2006 Summer School programme and a possible repeat at Chester. You could also contact U3A National Office for a copy of the new booklet *Getting Started in Living History - Oral History and Life Stories*.

Barbara looks forward to hearing about your work too.

Tel: 01993 771292

barbarabond@tiscali.co.uk

By Mary Walker Newport U3A

When I joined Newport U3A in September 1996, Bill Miles had just become Local History convener. On three Thursdays in the month, Bill invites speakers (members and non-members) to give talks (some illustrated) about Local History. I then produce resumes of the talks for our members newsletter.

To start with, we were a select band of 25 but we soon moved to a bigger room as we grew to more than 90.

Recent topics included: Churches in the Black Mountains, Llanover Country, Aberystwyth National Library, Ancient Gwent Churches, the life of a Cistercian monk, and the History of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

On the fourth Thursday in the month, Alf Williams organised a coach trip to a historical site. Our 100+ trips included: Salisbury, Margam Abbey, Brecon Cathedral and Museums, The Shambles at Newent (memorable because three inches of rain fell that day), Great Chalfield Manor and Bath, Lacock



Newport U3A members on a recent visit to St Donat's Castle
Mary is standing between kneelers Maureen and Bill Niles

Photographic Museum and Abbey, Pontypridd and Rhondda Heritage Park ('down' a coal mine).

But sadly, Alf died at the end of May aged 74 and we greatly feel his loss.

Some speakers 'try out' a new subject

on us and we tell Bill if we have come across a good speaker elsewhere.

Bill doesn't reveal how he persuades them to come along. He researches inn signs and hints that some are cajoled whilst sampling the wares.

The 1930s Decade

In 2004, we had no History Group in Stockton U3A, although several years earlier, a popular Local History Group had to be discontinued owing to the illness of its leader.

I wondered if there would be enough interest to form a new group to study the 1930s decade (prior to WWII). We have many members with personal memories of that period.

It seemed such a shame to ignore readily available, first-hand knowledge of an era that was distant enough to be of 'historical interest' – one that I was enthusiastic about. The matter was raised at our monthly meeting in May 2004 and a dozen members showed interest.

As a result, our group has been meeting for a two-hour session each month since September 2004. Between eight and 12 members attend and contribute to our increasing knowledge of the subject. I act as coordinator, rather than leader or lecturer, ensuring that the class can function satisfactorily even if I'm absent.

Barbara Turner: Stockton U3A (with original 1930s swimming costumes)

At the initial meeting, members offered to talk about their childhood memories, or to choose a particular topic to study (e.g. education) that they would research and present for discussion in class. Later, I prepared a large topic chart that illustrated other possible subjects, such as transport, pastimes, sociology, work, personalities, events in Britain, etc. as a guide for further choices.

Our topics have been wide-ranging. They have included: fashion, radio, transport, music, fascism, toys, royalty and the abdication, the depression (particularly in the North East), events leading up to WWII, and personal memories of the decade from various parts of the country.

To enhance our presentations, we have used tape recordings, illustrations, personal 'relics', and contemporary newspaper reports. (Unfortunately, hi-tech facilities are somewhat limited in our rented study room.)

Contributions vary in length according to the presenter. We have found that, to

allow for discussion and do justice to the subject matter, one or two topics are normally sufficient for each session.

We have enjoyed comparing and contrasting our memories and attitudes regarding this decade, and I am pleased by the interest shown by members too young to remember much, if anything, about the 1930s.

Future planned topics will include literature, homes, design, work, Jewish refugees, and more personal memories.

Next term, we hope to have the use of a computer and video machine to enable us to show videos.

There is much enthusiasm and participation within the group and I look forward to more gaps being filled in our knowledge about the 1930s.

If anyone is interested in starting a similar group, I would be pleased to provide further information.

barbara@almondbury4.fsbusiness.co.uk





What is History?

When I was asked to lead the Crawley U3A History Group, I used my first meeting to explain history as I see it and my credentials for leadership. I have no formal degree or qualifications, but a broad-brush knowledge developed from a deep interest and preferred reading over a wide spectrum

Robert Taylor: Crawley U3A

Browsing in libraries, I read perhaps just a paragraph or a chapter before fixing on something that holds my interest.

One week I might read about the Persian invasion of Greece, religious movement in 16th century Europe, perhaps the achievements of Rameses II and the New Kingdom, the following week about the inception and growth of railways and so on.

What emerges is an interest in the How and Why of history rather than the Who and What.

I have also been privileged to travel to some interesting places in Europe and the Middle East.

Thus as I see it, history can be said to be a narrative of real events and real people playing their several parts in these events whether good or bad.

Historians may draw their own conclusions and place their own interpretations upon the mass of information collected, but whatever else they do they must and will have authenticated their data bases.

Unfortunately an original mistake or biased interpretation may be perpetuated from one book to another.

I have come to understand history in terms of evolution, rather than isolated events and episodes.

For example, Elizabethan England in the cultural sense did not come to an end with the death of Elizabeth Tudor in the early hours of 3 March 1603. Nor did Jacobean England begin with the accession of James VI of Scotland as James I of England.

Thinking of history in this way derives from the custom, unavoidable perhaps,

The trigger must have been the stimulus of the need to channel the floodwaters to generate the maximum benefit from the silt-laden waters. At first, no doubt each separate community did its own thing. They probably then realised that they could achieve still greater benefits by planning and coordinating their efforts. This resulted in the peoples of ancient communities discovering the skills of organising, administrating and engineering that allowed them to develop into highly complex social structures with powerful central governments and with the right to call themselves civilisations. Though these societies have long since died, they have left behind monuments admired by the modern world.

I consider that history is the story of the confrontation between groups of people, even communities or nations, and a multitude of stimuli, which can be environmental, social, economic, ethnic or political. Events tend to echo down the following decades and sometimes even centuries, influencing people and events long after the original happenings have passed into history.

History can be compared to a great river whose source is unknown and whose destination is a sea beyond our imagining or knowledge. The river flows as most do, steadily to the sea.

On its way it is joined by various tributaries, large and small. It will break up into different channels, some of which it may rejoin. It will form islands and may even wash some away. Some branches will continue in full flow, others may silt up to form stagnant backwaters.

The river can do many things in the course of its journey, but there is one thing it cannot do. It cannot flow back on itself. Thus events great and small come to make up what we call History.

History can be compared to a great river whose source is unknown and whose destination is a sea beyond our imagining

For many centuries the approach to history was to transmit either by word of mouth or in writing, stories, legends or myths about events or people in whom the editor was interested. Such stories may be true, may have a kernel of truth in them or may even be false, but are used to explain or illustrate an aspect of tradition or thinking. No attempt is made to eliminate obvious contradictions and inconsistencies.

The other category of history is the modern view which may, for convenience, be called the 'scientific'. On this basis, historians will not normally accept any fact unless it can be verified from other independent sources. Statements are analysed and checked. Sources are verified whenever possible.

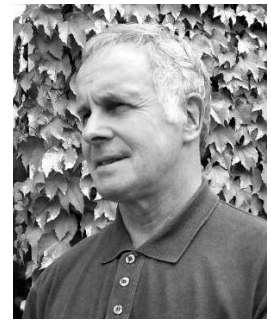
of teaching history in blocks, e.g. Tudor England, Europe from the Battles of Waterloo to 1914 and so on.

I took my first steps in evolutionary thinking when I pondered the origins of ancient civilisations. I refer to that of Egypt in the Nile Valley; Mesopotamia in the lower valley of the Euphrates; Indic in the lower valley of the Indus River; and the Sinic in the valley of the Yellow River in China. (The terms Indic and Sinic were coined to distinguish these civilisations.)

These nations had one thing in common. Each was situated in the basin of a river system subject to annual flooding. Not the ideal location for the foundation and development of highly sophisticated societies.

Names from the past

Last winter I started a group in Evesham on the history and interpretation of English place names. It attracted much interest and ran successfully for its allotted six weeks. I'm sure it would work equally well anywhere



Nick Mason: Evesham & District U3A

It began as a post-retirement enthusiasm. It found a sympathetic audience for an hour-long talk at Evesham's Local History group, and eventually it evolved last winter as a short-course group of six fortnightly classes called *Names From the Past*.

The subject was English place-names, their origins, development and interpretation, and what they can tell us about the country at a time for which written evidence is sparse.

The place-names of England, both locally and country-wide, led us back through the traumas experienced by the languages of North-western Europe during the course of five separate invasions of our island – Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Viking and Norman.

These kept our 20 or so regulars guessing throughout the course.

Why, we asked ourselves, was the English word hill (which means hill)

added to the Anglo-Saxon word *dun* (which means hill) and the Celtic word *bre* (which means hill) to form the name of our local landmark Bredon Hill? (Answer: three separate linguistic traditions that didn't understand what had gone before.)

Or why is Keswick (which means cheese farm) in the Lake District not called Chiswick (which also means cheese farm), as is the place in London? (Answer: the Norse invaders who took over Cumbria a thousand-plus years ago couldn't pronounce the 'ch' sound.)

Our journey took us through Celtic river names like Windrush (which has nothing to do with wind or rushes); legacies of the Romans like Chester-le-Street; Anglo-Saxon pig farms (like Everton); Viking racecourses (like Hesketh); and Norman beauty spots (like

Bewdley) – up to the committee-coined hybrids such as Wychavon, the district of Worcestershire where we live.

Where we go from here is a tricky question. We may go much more parochial this winter with a study of field names and street names.

We will also take a step further back in history to look at the origins of first names and surnames. It is tempting to suggest a trawl (if not a crawl) through the treasure trove of British pub names.

This is a fascinating way of tackling history – something I'm sure would work equally well on your doorstep.

If anyone were interested enough to attempt something similar, I would be happy to share our ideas, tips and pitfalls. 43 Greenhill, Evesham Worcestershire WR11 4LX Tel: 01386 442187

The aim has been to create an autonomous U3A, offering its members as many of the benefits of full membership of a conventional U3A as is practicable by making use of computer technology and the Internet.

Those who took part in the pilot study have made an invaluable contribution to this project and we are grateful for their insights and commitment.

The Third Age Trust is ready to move to the next stage of this development and the NEC has approved the establishment of the Virtual U3A as a U3A in its own right. This phase will last for two years and then be evaluated.

Volunteers sought

Would you like to become involved in the project in some way? We are seeking help in three areas.

- Establishing a small steering group that will develop the concept
- Finding experienced people who would like to become Group Leaders/Facilitators
- Disseminating information about VU3A to establish a viable membership

Virtual U3A



A pilot study was set up a year ago to explore the possibility of developing a Virtual U3A to help older people who are isolated (for whatever reason) and who would like to participate in U3A activities, in particular membership of Study Groups

You may be aware of members of your own U3A who can't attend meetings. Perhaps your U3A has contacts with other organisations that are involved in ICT provision for older people. Please spread the word.

What will be required?

Volunteers as well as potential VU3A members will need to have access to a computer, be able to communicate by e-mail and use the Internet.

If you would like more information or would like to volunteer to join the steering group, or if you are interested in

becoming a Group Leader then please contact:

Elaine Williams:
jem2121@btinternet.com or:
Mike Williams:
mikandel@btinternet.com

Enquiries from potential VU3A members should also be directed to Mike and Elaine. It is important to stress that VU3A is intended primarily for people who find it difficult to attend local U3As.

Work is in progress on the design of the VU3A section of the National Website: www.u3a.org.uk/vu3a

What motivates you to be a leader, what satisfaction do you get by running a group and what is the most challenging aspect of leadership?

People become leaders to give something back and return the pleasure they receive from other groups.

Some feel satisfaction at seeing members achieving things they hadn't done before. It was felt also that supporting members on the social side – which is good for mental health and gives people a reason for getting up in the morning – motivates leaders.

The informal and uncomplicated structure of the U3A also helps leaders to pursue their groups in their own style and hence help their motivation.

Group leaders are challenged to bring enthusiasm to their groups, and bring a sense of belonging, sharing and team effort to an activity, so that everyone feels they are sharing in the learning experience. They should bring a sense of fun to learning.

Why do groups that start enthusiastically sometimes fail?

Sometimes we are impatient while groups and leaders take time to gel and find a comfortable level. Some groups may feel that the leaders should have all the answers and become disappointed when they don't.

It is important to gauge the level that a group wants to operate at – whether it's in-depth or a general overview. Leaders should help members feel at ease and encourage the quieter ones to share and not let a few dominate the group.

Leaders should be flexible with their agendas and be prepared to change depending on the nature and interests of the group.

Is finding cheap suitable accommodation a limiting factor? What do we do if groups get full?

If accommodation costs become too expensive then it will make the U3A less available to those on lower incomes.

Ways to overcome this are to have more classes run from people's homes. It is possible to raise the fees for everyone but that was felt to be unfair to groups that incur low costs. Groups should, where possible be self-financing. Of course fundraising, bidding for grants etc. will help and even if groups incur no costs, a fee of say 20p per meeting might be levied to support general funds.

Resource and Learning Support Day

A summary of the group discussions

The Peterborough U3A invited local U3As to listen to presentations from Elizabeth Gibson on the Resource Centre and to learn from Don Rankin about regional Learning Support.

These were followed by group discussions and the results are summarised here by John Hucklesby and Lyn Hare.

We hope you will find these useful. There were certainly some pertinent observations made by those taking part.

Sometimes groups become too big for their accommodation or for the nature of the interest being pursued. This problem should be tackled before members are turned away.

Some members may be encouraged to start a new group either from within the group or separately. (It is important to liaise with the current leader if this is the proposed solution.)

Another idea would be to alternate two smaller groups using the same tutor. (This might encourage one group to set up on their own.)

Of course, finding a bigger venue funded by increased subscriptions is another way out.

How do we encourage more members to understand that the U3A is run by its members for its members?

The U3A should accept that although it is a self-help organisation, not everyone will help. Many just want to rest and retire from involvement after long and stressful careers.

Pressurising members might turn them away from helping. Some feel reluctant when they join but acquire confidence later to join in and help – we should encourage confidence building.

Some aspects of our organisation can deter people – monthly meetings can be too formulaic (too many male leaders?) and not attract members.

It was felt that meetings such as this study day are useful. Perhaps they could have broader themes to attract people such as *The U3A and television*.

The pastoral side of the U3A – i.e. visiting people who were ill or doing the shopping – was an important aspect and some U3As have welfare groups.

How can we attract and support new leaders?

The concept of 'tutoring' often deters people from taking on a group. We should talk more about coordinating.

Getting people together with a shared interest is the first priority rather than finding a coordinator. Bringing a group together for the first time often results in a leader coming forward.

We need to support and bolster up leaders, talk to them and encourage groups to have helpers. These may run classes for a session or two and bring variety and a rest for the leaders.

Some members feel they do not have the time or wherewithal to run a group. But groups do not have to be run as a formal class. Running them as informal groups of like minded people from your home is a good way of attracting leaders.

Running courses and seminars for proposed group leaders can help but it is important to not deter people with too many do's and don'ts.

Finally, what was learnt from the presentations?

The group was pleased with the information available and also that so much more information was available on the website including information on the Learning Support Network.

There was a lot of interest in the on-line courses which would be helpful to disabled members. Many members were unaware of the scope of information available and this has encouraged people to use the service in future.

The use of DVD players will grow but at this moment not many U3As seem to have access to them, although for groups running from home, there was a greater chance that they would be available.

Can You Help?

The British Film Institute and U3A are undertaking a joint research project

This project will culminate in a study day at the National Film Theatre in London during Adult Learners Week next May. Members of U3A are invited. We hope to present the findings to a panel of people involved in the film industry, encourage discussion then assess a relevant film.

The theme is about what opportunities there have been and are available to older women in film (defined as those over 60 years) and the extent to which suitable parts are created for them. Similarly, what storylines and themes have been dealt with satisfactorily on the subject of women of older age.

The objective of this research and the study day is to produce a joint document which the parties involved hope will influence film makers, encourage further research by students of film and help



provide wider opportunities on such themes and for mature actresses.

Final documentation will include details of literature on the subject and a database of relevant films internationally which might be viewed.

U3A local film groups already

A U3A Shared Learning Project goes nationwide

established, new groups, one-off groups and individuals are invited to take part. We ask you to review three films (from a list of seven) by next February and comment on a number of questions. The responses will then be collated with others nationally for presentation of findings at the event in May 2006.

A full pack with the information you need is available from David Tinker on: dgt@tinker7.freemove.co.uk or:

Rina Rosselson: rinaross@mac.com

We need an e-mail address for each location to save postage and resource costs. The pack can be downloaded and the completed review document returned by either e-mail or post.

This project is intended to be fun and we hope that many members and groups around the country will take part and put U3A on the film map.

Ask for a pack now and join in.

Astronomical/Space Exploration

In Ferndown and neighbouring U3As we are fortunate to have two knowledgeable tutors.

Following the success of their classes this autumn, Ferndown U3A has started an Astronomy/Space Exploration club. It meets monthly with speakers and field meetings to view the night sky.

Whilst I feel certain there are plenty of other U3As who are equally fortunate, doubtless there are many others who as yet have nothing organised but have members who are interested. The intention is to try and cater for both groups by producing a newsletter.

Can I ask for any helpful suggestions on how to get started, perhaps drawing from the experience of those U3As where a class or club is flourishing?

There are Start Up leaflets for many subjects but, as you might guess, there isn't one for our topics, therefore it would probably be a good idea for us to create one.

The proposed newsletter is not intended just for beginners but will be of interest to enthusiasts of long standing.

In U3A there are many subjects with a National Coordinator but no one for Astronomy or Space Exploration. So I decided, in a rash moment, to put myself forward

Gina Pointing: Ferndown U3A

Suggested features could include an exchange of information, recommending books, useful websites, giving tips on the best telescopes and cameras, as well as some articles on a variety of topics including specific areas of interest.

It's for anyone who has had a connection with space technology or just a personal account of what aroused their curiosity in the first place.

Other ideas would be welcome. A couple I thought of are: an up-to-date list of space launches (I'd be grateful if anyone would take this on) and a few questions and answers.

Tel: 01202 880362

ginapointing@yahoo.co.uk

U3A Music Network

Tony Middleton: U3A Coventry

The music activities of U3A grow at a rapid rate. There are more than 400 groups and an ever-increasing number of members involved in music making.

Tony: "I am trying to keep my records up to date and I will shortly be sending out a questionnaire asking for details of the music groups."

The Music Network Newsletter informs members of interesting venues such as composer birthplaces: The Holst Birthplace in Cheltenham, The Elgar Birthplace in Broadheath and The Handel House in London.

Another interesting venue is Dean Clough Halifax, a former Victorian carpet mill which is now a vibrant arts complex.

The distinguished pianist Angela Brownridge will be conducting a master class there on the weekend of 26-27 November and giving a recital on Thursday 24 November.

Box Office: 01422 255266

Tony Middleton: 024 7630 4122



The Last Issue

Since the last issue was published, we have had a number of submissions so we are including them here for your interest

National Centre for Languages (CILT)

There is strong demand for adult language classes, and the English are learning a wider range of languages than ever before, a new survey of LEA provision has found.

Adults are learning 36 different languages in LEA classes and 75% of them are at beginners or at Level 1.

Spanish is the most popular language, with one third of learners opting for the world's most commonly spoken language after Mandarin and English.

CILT director Isabella Mooreof: "The figures show that there is a will among the English people to overturn the monolingual stereotype. We are becoming more open to the idea of being global citizens and needing to communicate in a range of languages other than English.

Tel: 020 7395 0822
tamzin.caffrey@cilt.org.uk

CILT has relaunched the National Languages Forum as a news service for those wanting to keep abreast of the issues concerning languages in society. It's a weekly bulletin with news alerts.

The service includes policy and funding announcements, language initiatives and research results.

To subscribe go to:
www.mailbase.org.uk/lists/natlangs-forum

Free language lessons

Lots at www.word2word.com
www.studyspanish.com/freesite
www.deutsch-lernen.com
www.bonjour.com
<http://assyrianlanguage.com>
www.gaelg.iofm.net/LESSONS/LESSONS

The BBC has greatly improved its Languages website, with many more free courses and learning aids. Highly recommended. Go to:
www.bbc.co.uk/languages

Sailing Group visits Holland



Non-sailor Maggie Barron (pictured) of Hertford U3A joined 11 members of the sailing group on a trip to Sneekmeer

We assembled at Luton Airport on the Monday morning. After a short flight to Amsterdam, we took a three-hour train ride to Sneek, and to our destination – a youth hostel on the outskirts of this charming country town full of typically Dutch gabled houses and canals.

With a wry smile I pondered the 'youth' label – even more so the next day after discovering that the sailing base was two miles away. We borrowed bicycles from the hostel and rode along the cycle tracks to the boat port.

There we were allotted our boats and skippers. Four of the sailing group were assigned the task of skippering by our leader Geoff Preshner, affectionately known as The Admiral. The boats were four handsome 21ft Falcons.

After gearing-up and donning life-jackets, we cast away from the moorings and motored along the creek out into a broad canal, hoisted the sails, and away! I was surprised by the quietness – only the lapping of the water and the sound of the wind in the sails.

It was truly peaceful and I began to understand the enthusiasm for the sport. But it didn't stay like that. The wind grew stronger and the teams worked hard to keep the boats on course.

I was apprehensive about staying in a

youth hostel, but the bed was comfortable and the meals were good. From the breakfast of cereal, bread, sliced cheeses and meats, we made up sandwiches for a packed lunch.

We travelled carefully across the huge lake following the marked channels to avoid gigantic commercial barges. The Dutch still use their waterways for transportation.

Every day Geoff chose a different route. We sailed up channels, around various lakes and under lifting bridges.

There was the odd glimpse of a steep-roofed farmhouse, red-tiled or reed-thatched, snugly surrounded by wind-breaking trees.

A windmill or two, and plenty of modern wind machines, generated electricity and helped to keep Holland so beautifully neat and clean (if a trifle boring visually).

By the end of the three days I had become familiar with the procedure and could unravel the odd rope and help tidy away the rigging, but I suffered a bit from sore knees and b.t.m.

It's a physically demanding sport – the sailing group members are a tough lot that work as a team. They are a friendly bunch too and made me welcome. I felt part of it all. So, thank you to everyone on the holiday, I had a great time.

Estimates for the number of living languages in the world range between 5,000 and 13,700 – the figure depends on how a ‘language’ is defined (see McWhorter). The number shrinks – some 50 die every year. On one estimate, 90% of the world’s languages will be dead by 2100.

There is a concentration on just a few languages – only 20 account for languages spoken by 96% of the world’s population:

Chinese, Bengali, French, Korean, English, Russian, Punjabi, Telugu, Spanish, Portuguese, Javanese, Tamil, Hindi/Urdu, Japanese, Bihari, Marathi, Arabic, German, Italian and Vietnamese.

These have so many speakers that they are under no threat. But the rest are vulnerable.

At the same time as languages die, new ones are born. Some births are induced for nationalistic reasons. Past examples are Afrikaans, whose differences from Dutch were deliberately exaggerated in the 19th century, and Hebrew, a unique example of a recreated living language.

There are recent cases: the language known as Serbo-Croat has been split into Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian following the break up of Yugoslavia.

Dead languages need not, and should not, be lost. Latin and Ancient Greek are still read and enjoyed

But most births are natural and gradual. French, Spanish and Italian grew from Latin in the so-called Dark Ages. Some, of which English is a notable example, grew from the merging of different languages (Anglo-Saxon, Norman French and Norse, with a later infusion of Latin).

Creoles are real languages with their own grammars – compromises between different languages and developed from pidgins. These [pidgins] arose as a means of communication between people of different origins (e.g. West Indian slaves from different African tribes) and are not real languages.

Languages evolve but they are subject to human interference. Existing languages change, with spoken versions

Language loss: does it matter?

Languages was the subject of the last issue of *Sources*. The Current Affairs Group of Harrogate U3A recently discussed the question of language survival and disappearance

Maurice is a Professor Associate of Sheffield University. He was Chair of Harrogate U3A 2001-2003 and is leader of its Current Affairs Group. This paper is a summary of a talk given to this group earlier this year. Before retirement, he was one of the two Directors-General of The British Library



Maurice B Line:
Harrogate U3A

leading the changes ahead of written versions.

Indeed, the invention of printing slowed the process of change by ‘fixing’ a language at various points. This is the main reason why Shakespeare’s is closer to our own after 400 years than was Chaucer’s to Shakespeare’s after only 200. As English has spread around the globe, variations have appeared to an extent where it is more correct to speak of several ‘Englishes’ rather than one.

Deaths of languages greatly outnumber births. Factors that promote their disappearance are urbanisation, suppression, education, telecomms, television and radio, migration and travel, and the globalisation of trade and commerce.

history, and I see little more case for preserving a dying language than for preserving customs like cannibalism or female genital mutilation.

The argument that the study of language gives unique insights into how parts of the brain work is a weak one.

Dead languages can still be studied, though the study of corpses is not as revealing as that of living bodies.

Dead languages need not, and should not, be lost. Latin and Ancient Greek are still read and enjoyed. Nor need we fear that language will be homogenized or that variety will be lost. As noted above, changes occur all the time.

It is tempting to compare the disappearance of languages with that of species of plants and animals. But languages differ in being a product of human nature, and, more importantly, vanishing plants may contain some vital medicine.

As for non-human animals, they surely have as much right to live as human beings do. I feel impoverished by the extinction of a species of animal in a way I do not when a language dies out.

The case in favour of the death of dying languages is obvious. Communication is made easier. We would find foreign travel much simpler if other countries spoke a mutually intelligible language, and international understanding would be greatly facilitated. Arguments for and against are irrelevant, since no one has found a satisfactory way to preserve a language that is truly dying.

Thus I do not agree with the language preservationists. Nor did the Current Affairs Group when we discussed it, though I hope I presented the arguments on both sides fairly. It would be interesting to know what others think.

U3A Online Courses

The courses listed are available Online. Visit the website, 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 title

General

Ageing and retirement

Antarctica - the frozen continent

Astronomy

Autobiography and journaling

Botany for knowledge and enjoyment

Continents on the move

Design in your life

Digital imaging

Garden history

Genealogy

Introduction to Western Philosophy

Religions of the world

The night sky

(NB: relevant to southern hemisphere)

The Romans

Understanding computers

(tutor available for discussion)

Writing family history

Writing courses

Creative writing: fiction

Creative writing: short stories

(level 2 - requiring some knowledge)

Creative writing: poetry

Write to good effect

Writing for publication

Art history courses

Italian art: 1400-1600

(level 1 - suitable for beginners)

Artists of Spain

(level 2 - requiring some knowledge)

Venice and her artists

(level 2 - requiring some knowledge)

Visiting artists in Rome

(level 2 - requiring some knowledge)

Frameworks: free study material

Development of lighthouses

Art, Genetics

Wartime history/Reminiscence

Oral history/ Languages

History/Architecture

See the website for course charges

Australian Online Courses

Australian courses are available to U3A members in the UK. See the website for up-to-date details and how to apply.

These can also be found on:

www.u3aonline.org.au

Click on Courses

Applications from the UK are made through our own www.u3a.org.uk

Click on Online Courses

WANTED

Online Course Writers

We want to expand our range of Online training courses so we are looking for authors to write them.

We have gained much experience during the last four years and can offer help with structure, approach and level of competence to suit our student members.

Course writers are likely to be the course tutors that will guide the students through their material.

Your hard work would be rewarded by the enormous sense of achievement gained by the participants. Many of them cannot attend normal groups and would jump at the chance to learn from you.

Please contact Ian Searle who will explain the procedure.

Tel: 01209 210220

E-mail: isearle@btconnect.com

U3A Travel Group

The tours for 2006 have been arranged. There are three in the UK (Northumbria, Ulster and Scotland), four in Europe (Rome, Croatia, Istanbul and Sicily), and five worldwide (India, Egypt, Hawaii, Uzbekistan and China).

These are educational and cultural tours for members of the Travel Group. All U3A members can join.

Send your annual subscription of £5 (cheques payable to U3A Travel Network) with SAE to: Margaret Ward

33 Masons Ryde, Pershore, WR10 1JG

A list of the tour organisers is also available.

You can also join on the website:

db.u3a.org.uk/travel or:

E-mail: u3atravel@btinternet.com

Summer schools 2006

Chester Summer School

11-14 July University College, Chester

Courses may include:

Architecture, Calligraphy, Craft

Exploring the local area

France: language, life & culture

History of Cinema, Oral History

Philosophy, Writing

Cheltenham Summer School

18-21 July

University of Gloucestershire,
Cheltenham

Courses may include:

Architecture, Art history, Botany

History, Literature, Opera

Philosophy, Poetry

Russia: language & culture

Science, Writing

Please join us for a variety of
stimulating courses

Details will be sent to U3As
at the end of November

Living History Summer School

You would have enjoyed the *Living History* course at the last Cheltenham Summer School organised by Network Coordinator Barbara Bond.

Barbara and colleagues have produced a booklet: *Getting Started in Living History - Oral History and Life Stories*. It offers a range of ideas for writing and recording Life Stories based on experience of members of the U3A Oral History Network. Contact U3A National Office for a free copy.

Why not join the Network and share your ideas with the 50 or so other U3A groups working in this field. Add your name to the mailing list for the Newsletter by contacting Barbara Bond. Tel: 01993 771292

barbarabond@tiscali.co.uk

Jazz Appreciation Network

The holiday to the Jazz Festival in Ascona, Switzerland will take place on 24 June-2 July 2006.

There is much interest in this event. For details and brochure contact: Robert E Jones: 01189 413889
r.e.jones@waitrose.com