



The Association for
Education & Ageing

AEA DIGEST

Issue no 29
Winter 2010



Cover for our forthcoming publication "International Journal of Education and Ageing
(see Notes from the Chair page 2)

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FROM THE CHAIR.....

Jo Walker

Dear friends,

2009 has been a busy and exciting year for the Association. Our international conference, held at Lancaster University, and a re-design of our website have both helped us to extend our communications and make new contacts and members. If you have joined us this year, I hope you have enjoyed being part of a network, where older learners are the focus but members' backgrounds are very diverse.

Later life learning has been more visible on the public agenda, with major UK and European documents being published on lifelong and informal learning and the ageing society. We have responded as an Association to relevant consultations and are increasingly being included on networks and groups who are consulted directly.

Announcement of new journal – and call for papers

Our most exciting venture has been to create a business plan and gather sufficient resources to once again publish a journal, in order to disseminate the excellent research and development that goes on regarding later life learning. This literature is currently distributed over a range of periodical outlets in many countries, but we hope that the appearance of a publication dedicated to this field will encourage even more contributions to come forward.

We have decided to be more overtly international in our coverage, prompting our new title: the *International Journal of Education and Ageing (IJEA)*. Long-standing members will recall 'Education

and Ageing' published by the Association through the University of Keele (and latterly by Triangle Publications) from 1985-2003. The new international journal will, we feel, re-launch the mission of the original journal, whilst responding to today's conditions and contexts.

A current feature of journal publication is a multiplicity of formats. Our intention is to print a first volume, starting in spring 2010 and aim additionally to offer an on-line version from 2011 – making back issues available. This way we hope to establish a strong visual identity for the journal, whilst creating a choice of formats. Without the overheads of a publisher and with the voluntary input of a dedicated editorial team, we hope to keep costs and therefore subscription rates low. We also hope that membership discounts will not only make IJEA attractive to all existing members, but will also be an incentive to others to join.

I would like to thank the three major 'sponsors' of this project, who responded to our call for an initial publication fund. They wish to remain anonymous, but their help has enabled planning and progress so far. Now other members and supporters can play their part by subscribing, disseminating information and encouraging others to subscribe – including workplaces and libraries.

You will have recently received an e-document about the journal and we would appreciate it if you could pass it on to friends and colleagues.

Information is also available on our website journal page

<http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/journal.html>

Importantly, please also consider submitting articles, accounts of practice, reviews of resources etc. yourself (see

page 24). We will be posting some guidelines and a description of the sort of material we want on the AEA website. I look forward to hearing from you.

With all good wishes for 2010

NEWS ITEMS

AEA Membership Survey.

*If you're on e-mail, you will have received an invitation to take part in a survey being conducted by AEA Executive Committee member Trish Hafford Letchfield. The object of the exercise is to solicit more information on what you would like from AEA. Because of the initial technical difficulties we experienced, which have now been resolved, we have decided to extend the deadline for completion of the survey to **midnight on Sunday 17th January**. The survey is available online via this link:*

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB229WXUN6NQ5>

Results will be published in the next digest and on our website.

Silver Surfers' Day is fast approaching again. The 2010 event will be held on **Friday 21 May**.



In 2009, schools, libraries, community groups, companies and organisations that work with older people ran 1,050 Events for Silver Surfers' Day to help

those who do not use computers and the internet to find out how digital technology can make their lives better.

This year the organisers are looking for even more Event Holders. The particular emphasis of SSD2010 will be on intergenerational SSD partnerships, involving schools and young people's organisations in spreading the word. But everyone is welcome, including people who want to run an event in their own home.

To find out more and keep up to date see <http://silversurfers.digitalunite.com>.

New Members

Welcome to new member Phil Whitehead of Staffordshire University and to new corporate member The Third Age Trust. Dr Alex McMinn, Chairman of the trust's newly formed Research Committee, has kindly agreed to serve as a member of AEA's executive committee, replacing Glenys Tuersley, who has unfortunately had to resign for family reasons. Glenys with her long previous experience of working with U3A made an invaluable contribution to the committee and will be sorely missed. The EC would like to thank her for all her hard work and for her continued support.



Professor Alan Walker
 Courtesy of Dept of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield

*Nominations are now being invited for this year's **Alan Walker Prize**, which was established in 2007 by the British Society of Gerontology in recognition of the massive contribution Alan has made to British and international Social Gerontology.*

The award is made annually to an individual or organisation that, in the opinion of the judges, has made a significant and lasting contribution to British Social Gerontology. This might be through for example campaigning, teaching, lobbying, service provision, fundraising, journalism and research. In particular the award is made to an individual or organisation that has made a significant impact on the policy process and through this helped improve the quality of life of older people. It is important to note that it is not intended for an academic contribution alone. Previous winners include Baroness Sally Greengross and Tessa Harding.

*Nominations should be made on the appropriate form by three individuals one of who **MUST** be a fully paid up member of the Society and sent to the secretary of the judging panel (Tony Maltby) by the advertised date. Please ensure you have your nominee's permission to nominate him or her. Nomination forms can be downloaded from the Society's website at www.britishgerontology.org.uk*

*Completed forms must be sent electronically to the secretary to the awards committee Tony Maltby at t.maltby@sheffield.ac.uk no later than **12:00 (noon) on 31st May 2010.***

Further details and a nomination form are available from the BSG website at www.britishgerontology.org.uk and from the AEA website news page http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/news_views.html

CONFERENCES

*Only a small proportion of the 50 plus age group is involved in formal educational study. Whereas the market for undergraduate study for older learners is largely untested in the UK, it is a major growth area in the US. With the proportion of over-65s expected to reach a fifth of the population by 2026, the market for older learners is likely to increase significantly. In February Universities UK is holding a one-day conference, **Universities and active ageing**, devoted to the theme of engaging older learners in education and training. One of the speakers is **Dr Chris Phillipson**, author of a new report examining the future potential of this market for the higher education sector, which will be launched at the conference and who writes here about this issue.*

What is the role of higher education in responding to population ageing? Although research into ageing has emerged as an important area of work for universities, stimulated for example by programmes such as New Dynamics of Ageing, provision in respect of education is highly variable. Consideration of older learners has remained largely absent from debates about the future of higher education. Yet although a tiny group on full-time undergraduate courses, people aged 50 and over are beginning to make an impact on part-time (p/t) programmes: comprising 15 per cent of all first-year p/t undergraduates in 2007/08 and 10 per cent of p/t postgraduates (taught courses). This adds up to nearly 62,000 students across the UK (an increase of around 18,400 since 1998/99). Those

aged 60 and over represent 6 per cent of first-year p/t students in the UK, a total of nearly 20,000 students (a slight fall though in percentage terms since 1998/99).

Those 50 and over at university subdivide into three main groups:

- those undertaking professional/vocational qualifications (sometimes supported by their employer)
- those taking non-vocational courses (for example in adult and continuing education)
- those studying for a degree but preferring a part-time route for financial, work-related or other reasons.

Formal provision aimed at older learners remains limited, when compared with the rapid growth of so-called 'informal provision', illustrated in the 670 University of the Third Age groups, representing around 190,000 older people. Yet the point might be made that informal learning has flourished in part, because the formal sector has either remained marginal or has substantially withdrawn from engagement with older learners: to give one example, the number of people aged 60 and over participating in further education declined by 38 per cent between 2005/2006 and 2006/07. In higher education, the problems facing older learners may be increased by the withdrawal of institutional funding for students studying for a qualification at a level equivalent to or lower than the qualification they already hold (ELQs).

Yet higher education has the potential to play a leading role in creating a new type of society in response to population change. It can achieve this in four main ways, by:

- playing a leading role in creating a new type of ageing for the 21st century built around extended economic, family and citizenship roles
- supporting women and men planning the two decades or more likely to be spent beyond their main work careers
- unlocking mental capital and promoting well-being in later life
- supporting a range of professional and voluntary groups working on behalf of older people.

Reviewing the implications of these arguments is the subject of a major conference in London on **February 17th, 2010**, sponsored by Universities UK and the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. The conference will hear the results of research, supported by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, investigating the position of older learners in universities. The study, *Active Ageing and universities: engaging older learners*, undertaken by Chris Phillipson and Jim Ogg, provides a detailed overview of formal provision for older learners within universities, evidence on barriers and motivations to learning, initiatives underway within universities, and proposals for developing further activities. As well as the authors of the report, speakers at the conference include: Dame Janet Finch, Tom Schuller, Sir David Watson and Stephen McNair, with workshops led by

Prof. John Benyon (University of Leicester), Fiona Frank (University of Lancaster) and Anita Pincus (University of London).

The conference will be held at **Woburn House Conference Centre, London WC1 and the cost is £180** (This event is exempt from VAT). Further information can be found on the Universities UK website <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Events/Pages/Universities-and-active-ageing-engaging-older-learners.aspx>

MORE CONFERENCE NEWS – AGEING POPULATION 2010

As some of you will already be aware, another major conference is being held in London in February. Govnet's Ageing Population Conference 2010, describes itself as "the UK's premier event for those involved with meeting the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society" and is being held on Thursday 25th February y 2010 at the QE II Conference Centre in London



Angela Eagle MP

With recommendations shortly due for the Building a Society for All Ages Report, Angela Eagle MP, Minister of State for Pensions and the Ageing Society at the Department for Work and

Pensions is scheduled to discuss the next strategies for implementation. The conference will include a number of key speakers involved with the delivery of support services for older people. Over 300 delegates from the public & third sector will discuss the impact of the Care and Support Green Paper, the recently released Pensions & Home Care Bill and the need to efficiently tackle fuel poverty. Representatives will also be on hand to discuss best practice case studies and seminars on dementia, adult education, independent living & reskilling.

As supporters of the conference, AEA is entitled to a discount of 25% for members who are working in the public sector. For details of how to apply for discount please contact aeasecretary@googlemail.com

A brochure giving details of the conference is available on our website http://www.associationforeducationandageing.org/pages/aea_events.html and further details can be found at <http://www.govnet.co.uk/ageing/>

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2010

A reminder to you all that subscriptions for 2010 are due on 1st January.

Subscription rates for 2010 were agreed at the 2009 AGM as follows:

Individual membership

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>- Retired or unwaged:</i> | <i>£16</i> |
| <i>- waged:</i> | <i>£32</i> |

Corporate Membership

<i>(to cover a number of members from one organisation):</i>	<i>£85.00</i>
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Please make cheques payable to The Association for Education and Ageing and send to:

***Carol Allen (Secretary),
132 Dawes Road,
LONDON SW6 7EF***

If you prefer to pay by BACS or require an invoice please contact Carol on aeasecretary@googlemail.com

COURSES RELATING TO EDUCATION AND AGEING

*King's College London in collaboration University College London and University of Surrey are mounting a new ESRC funded seminar series over the next two years on the theme of **The 'New' Ageing Populations***

There has been considerable public interest in the social and health-related effects of population ageing and increasing longevity on the developed and developing world. These impacts are not only demographic but also epidemiological, with the weight of disease and disability now being experienced largely by older people. However, contemporaneous advances in preventative and curative medicine, as well as changes in the social contexts in which health interventions are delivered, have enabled many people to live a longer and healthier life than was possible a few decades ago, either by surviving childhood due to these advances, living longer lives due to continuing medical advances changing the course and nature of disease or living past an earlier 'failure' of regulation.

There is now a greater realisation that what actually constitutes 'ageing' is becoming more difficult to demarcate, whether in terms of physiological 'normality,' cultural expectations, or social provision. Changes to the patterning and nature of 'old age' therefore raise important questions about our understanding of the contemporary circumstances surrounding ageing for

researchers, providers and policy makers alike.

The aim of this seminar series is to map the nature of the emergence of rapid recent growth and ageing of populations not normally associated with 'old age'; widen debates of health, identity, disability and ageing by examining and presenting from multiple perspectives the impact on and implications of biomedical science on the rapid growth of new ageing populations, focusing on those in mid- to later life; present these viewpoints through a number of perspectives; and address the implications that arise from this.

This first seminar, ***Why Study New Ageing Populations?*** will address the emergence of new ageing populations and the challenges for services and policy that ensue. Speakers at this event are:

Emma Lake, Expert Patient Advisor, Cystic Fibrosis Trust. *Growing older with cystic fibrosis*

Rosie Barnes, Chief Executive, Cystic Fibrosis Trust. *What challenges do adults with cystic fibrosis lay down for service provision and policy?*

Christina Victor, Professor of Gerontology and Public Health, Brunel University. *What challenges do new ageing populations lay down for social gerontology?*

The first seminar is being held on **Monday 25th January 2010 2.30 -**

5.30pm at The Council Room, King's College London, Strand, WC2R 2LS
Refreshments will be available from 2pm

There is **no charge** for attendance at the seminars. A limited number of travel bursaries for postgraduate students are available.

Please contact newagepop@kcl.ac.uk to register your attendance and for travel bursary enquiries.

For further information about all six seminars in the series, visit www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/geront/new/esrcseminar/programme.html, email newagepop@kcl.ac.uk or contact **Dr Karen Lowton 0207 848 2566**



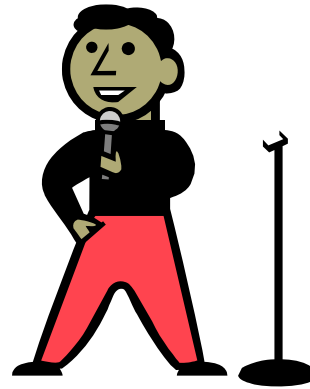
Dr Alexandre Sidorenko

The first seminar on 25th January will be immediately followed by the Institute of Gerontology, Age Concern and Help the Aged's 2010 David Hobman Annual lecture, to which all seminar participants are invited. The lecture will be given by Dr Alexandre Sidorenko, previously UN Focal Point on Ageing on the theme: **"Old age in a global environment: lessons from the UN programme on ageing"**.

Further information on the lecture is available at

www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/geront/new/s/annlec09.html

A wine reception will follow the lecture. So the organisers can plan for catering, please confirm your attendance at gerontology@kcl.ac.uk



Capital Age Festival and Silver Comedy are mounting a **free Comedy Sketch Show course** for anyone aged 50+. The course consists of eight workshop sessions every Monday afternoon (1pm – 4pm) at Oval House Theatre (tube: Oval, Northern Line) from **January 11th 2010**. The course culminates in a live recording session at City Hall as part of a special Capital Age Festival event, followed by a final follow-up session with an introduction to editing. The finished work will be put on the internet as a short series of podcasts and CDs or MP3s will be produced for everyone involved.

For more information or to enrol, call Capital Age Festival on 01895 675 389 or email course tutor Chris Head on chris.head@yahoo.co.uk And for further information about Silver Comedy activities, see <http://www.silvercomedy.co.uk>

A couple of reminders. The final date for applications at the Grundtvig National Agencies for the combined virtual and residential course "Manager for Virtual Learning in the Field of Seniors' Voluntary Work in Europe" is 15th of January 2010. The course is intended for those who wish to apply virtual learning in seniors' education and training for voluntary work.

The methods are also transferable to general adult education. For course flyer and further information: <http://www.uni-ulm.de/uni/fak/zawiw/seminare/en>

*AEA member Anita Pincas of the Institute of Education, London University will shortly be resuming her short course module on **Later Life Learning**. The wide ranging approach is not only of relevance to people interested in this theme but can also serve as a professional validation. There is still time to register for the start with an opening weekend on 27-28 February, followed by a few weeks of email discussions. Please contact Anita Pincas A.Pincas@ioe.ac.uk for full details.*

FEATURES

*Last year Age Concern Herefordshire and Worcestershire instigated an intergenerational oral history project with a huge ambition. The joint aims of **River Tales** were to help re-connect a whole county to their rivers and to connect the generations. The DVD which came out of the project was directed by **Katya Coupland**.*

The plan was to hold 50 River Tales reminiscence workshops, interview people on camera and involve three schools in the project. A DVD would then be distributed to groups - coffee mornings and care-homes; libraries, museums and heritage centres - to spark more memories and get people talking as well as a CD-ROM created for the schools of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, fulfilling national curriculum requirements as well as giving children an appreciation of their local rivers and showing older people in a whole new light.

The Heritage Lottery fund and European funded LEADER+ made the idea a reality and through sharing their memories nearly 600 people began to paint a picture of four of the rivers of their county through their lifetime. 36 interviewees were filmed for the River Tales DVD and wonderful archive film and pictures of wildlife were to add to the tales.



Some of the participants in River Tales, photographed at the Ross Regatta

The oldest participant paddled in the Wye in the first decade of the 1900s, some stories spanned generations into the nineteenth century and a geologist's

perspective rolled back millions of years - though not through first hand experience in that instance!

There are six tales - some shocking, some funny and some quite magical - made up of clips taken from interviews woven into conversations. The speakers bring with them a fierce passion, a depth of knowledge and dry sense of humour making for a hugely entertaining hour and a quarter.

The film was chosen for Borderlines film festival and has been shown regularly throughout villages in Shropshire and Herefordshire via 'Flicks in the Sticks'.

Part of the River Tales project can be viewed online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJSt8JUxHm8> For details of how to obtain a free copy of the River Tales DVD please contact Age Concern Herefordshire & Worcestershire, tel: 01905 740950, email: ageconcern@achw.org.uk <http://www.achw.org.uk>

*The growing number of older people and their improved health and life expectancy raises questions over the nature of our retirement. In this thought provoking piece, first published in Ode Magazine, **Marc Freedman**, CEO of Civic Ventures, a San Francisco organisation dedicated to defining the second half of adult life as a time of individual and social renewal, asks whether it is time to **“Reinvent retirement”**?*

Picture this: A fit, handsome sixty-something couple stretches out on a

sandy beach. Another silver-haired pair steers a sailboat toward the sunset. A grey-templed golfer watches his drive soar down the fairway. This life of relaxation and luxury, in which every day is one big happy holiday, has long been a powerful part of the American dream of retirement. Depicted in so many advertisements for pension plans and retirement communities, these scenes have become an indelible feature of the landscape.



But wait a minute: Who looks forward to endless retirement any more, 30 years of R and R? Who can afford it—even with the most diligent savings plan? For reasons of money and meaning, the golden-years vision being peddled by the financial and real estate industries is already obsolete. Stretched from a justified period of relaxation after the mid-life years into a phase lasting just as long, this version of retirement has been distorted into something grotesque, something that no longer works for individuals—or for society.

In the next couple of decades, more and more people will hit the traditional retirement age and become eligible for social benefits. This trend has experts

worried: Soon a quarter (or more) of the population will be spending a third (or more) of the time in subsidized leisure, squeezing investments in education, environment and economy and threatening to bankrupt society as a whole. The prospect alone has led some pundits to predict that aging boomers will be remembered as a self-absorbed, self-serving horde of over-indulgents, who used their votes and their dollars to shove their own interests to the forefront, posterity be damned.

But this troubling conclusion amounts to scenario-planning through the rear-view mirror. Retirement as we've known it is far from an eternal verity. In fact, it is already being displaced as the central institution of the second half of life, soon to be supplanted by a new stage of life and work opening up between the end of mid-life and the eventual arrival of true old age. Indeed, four out of five boomers consistently tell researchers they expect to work well into what used to be known as the retirement years.

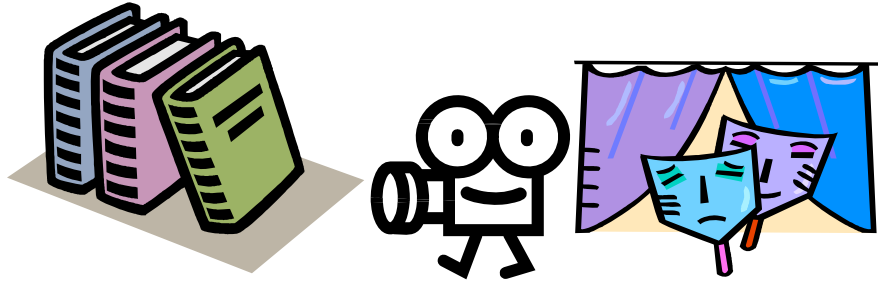
The emerging trend toward extended productivity needs to be supported at every turn, as individuals seek to make ends meet over longer lifespans and societies seek to balance the fiscal ship. But we can go one important step further, if we hope to make the most of the great gift of longevity. Aging boomers should be encouraged not only to continue contributing, but to rethink the purpose of that work—in short, to dust

off their idealism of the '60s and '70s, and get to work making the world a better place.

It is the perfect opportunity for the generation that set out to change the world and got lost along the way. Now, as tens of millions of boomers careen toward what were once the golden years, I believe more and more people are interested in living out a distinct and compelling vision of contribution in the second half of adult life, one built around the ideal of an “encore career” at the intersection of continued income, new meaning and significant contribution to the greater good.

It is a dream with the potential to work for individuals, for employers, for our fiscal health and for the society at large. Never before have so many individuals had so much experience—and the time to put it to good use. While financial-service companies keep telling us the freedom from work will satisfy our desires, we're better off looking for the freedom to work—in new ways, on new terms, to new and even more important ends.

Instead of accepting the notion of a career as an arc that rises in youth, peaks in mid-life, and declines into retirement, we stand poised to chart a new trajectory—one that for many will reach its apex of meaning and impact at a juncture when others in past generations were heading for the sidelines.



AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION

*Broadcaster **Brian Hayes** has been an avid reader since his youth and in the course of his career has met and interviewed many of his idols on the radio programmes he presented for LBC and the BBC. Writers such as Norman Mailer, Martin Amis, Joseph Heller, Lawrence Durrell, Gore Vidal, Margaret Drabble, Salman Rushdie, Keith Waterhouse, David Storey, Kingsley Amis, Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood, William Boyd and Michael Frayn, to name but a few. During the last year though Brian's sight has deteriorated due to a diabetes related condition, depriving him of one of his greatest pleasures, and he has found that **Provision for the Partially Sighted Reader** is woefully inadequate.*



Brian Hayes in the studio

I have always enjoyed reading for both professional and recreational reasons. It never occurred to me that one day I wouldn't be able to read books, newspapers and magazines because it was no longer possible to prescribe glasses that would enable me to. I have tried various forms of magnification but none has proved satisfactory. All I can really manage is using my computer to read online, where I can enlarge the print to whatever size I need. But of course this is only partially useful because many magazines are not online and it isn't satisfactory to read a book in such circumstances. The new E-readers such as the Sony Reader and Amazon's Kindle could be an answer if not *the* answer.

Friends often suggest audio books and I may have to rely on them in the future but I don't use them at the moment, because listening to someone else reading a book aloud is a totally different experience. Even a great book read by an excellent reader delivers someone else's interpretation of the author's 'voice'. I would rather not have the middle man. So, I imagine, would the author.

The truth is, there is no substitute for relaxing in an armchair with a favourite novel. My local library offered a

glimmer of hope with its ‘large print’ section and I have enjoyed a couple of the books from their shelves. The trouble is that they don’t have many of them. In several large bookshops in London, I have asked to be directed to their Large Print section. ‘I’m sorry, we don’t have one’ they replied. That surprised and disappointed me. A quick check of the site of one of the well known online booksellers revealed a quite lengthy list but, without being too picky, there were very few that appealed to me. I like contemporary fiction, biographies and books about society and politics. What I found was quite a few reference books, many crossword, sudoku and other puzzle books, Mills and Boon and other romances, lots of bibles, self help books and Harry Potter. If I was desperate I’m sure I could go through the complete list and find one or two that appealed, but that’s not good enough for a voracious reader.

Surely there are enough partially sighted readers to warrant a Large Print section in the big bookshops and a larger choice in our public libraries? Book lovers love browsing in a bookshop, handling the books, sampling a few pages of a new Philip Roth or Martin Amis novel or perhaps an old Graham Greene favourite for re-reading. There is a great feeling in taking a package of two or three choices and then on the way home, reading a first chapter on the train. I would like to be able to do that again.

*In the last edition of the digest **Jackie Richards** wrote about her experiences of working as a film extra. Updating that, she recently spent two days in Stoke-on-Trent appearing in a student film called “Young at Heart” about three old*

*people who escape for a short while from a residential home to a local children’s playground. In the summer she also returned to an early love of her life, dance, as a result of an AEA e-mail distribution about Sadler’s Wells, which drew her attention to their creative dance workshop programme. Jackie explains how dancing has given her a **Cheshire Cat Grin**.*



Jackie Richards and fellow dancers

I studied Laban creative dance as a student and taught movement and keep fit when I was young. I have always been “a mover”! However, I had not attended any dance classes as a participant for over 35 years.

I wanted to start dancing again once I retired from fulltime work. So, the Sadler’s Wells workshop was irresistible. I applied and got accepted. Over sixty people, mainly women, aged between 55-80 had a magical morning bonding, dancing and creating together. Simona Scotta who is responsible for the “Company of Elders” dancers is an inspiring, outstanding teacher, excellent choreographer, witty, engaging and an agile, beautiful dancer. She encouraged everyone to join in. We began by walking round the space and by the end of the morning were creating group

statues and group dance sequences that we performed to one another. The atmosphere was electric with warmth, joy and creativity. We asked to meet the outreach manager and unanimously demanded that session should be continued regularly. A month later this was agreed.

Sadler's Wells offers ballet classes in conjunction with Age Concern based at the Claremont Centre, Islington. Claremont is an arts centre for older people and has a regular programme of classes and arts events. The ballet and contemporary dance classes are both led by Simona.

Each time I attend the ballet class I am on cloud nine – grinning like a Cheshire cat and so very happy and joyful. I attended ballet classes when I was nine until I was seventeen. It was my solace during early adolescence and this happiness has been unleashed again. The students vary from those who have past experience to those who are experiencing it for the first time. The classes are well structured and we are all progressing well. This is not a class of “old people doing ballet”. It is very much “older people bringing their wisdom, bodies and brains to create beautiful ballet dancing”. The results are a pleasure to watch. As the weeks have gone by people have gained more technique, remembered steps and increased their poise and confidence.

The same can be said for the contemporary dance class. Some class members attend both classes whilst others have chosen to participate in one. Those attending the contemporary class are more “quirky” and creative. The same results are occurring –beautiful

sequences are being created by women, who are learning the joy of movement and creating together. Simona inspires us and builds upon our capabilities. She has encouraged us to create group movement phrases and uses a variety of stimuli such as music and art. Once again each person is developing as a dancer and the grace, humour and confidence is there for all to enjoy and appreciate.



The ballet class is funded and established. The creative dance class does not have permanent funding. A few weeks ago the class members made it known that they definitely wanted it to continue. Sadler's Wells has agreed to work with the Claremont Centre to create a contemporary dance workshop leading to performance. There will be auditions held in the New Year and those chosen will make a commitment to dance regularly and form a dance workshop that will perform publicly in the future. This is an exciting new project and another contribution to older people's performance arts. Meanwhile, the Company of Elders, the “jewel in the crown” of the theatre's outreach programmes will continue and their next performance at Sadler's Wells is in March 2010.

Reflecting on this experience at a personal level, I have reconnected with a part of my life that lay almost dormant whilst I was working fulltime in a demanding career. I have returned to the

love of my youth which I carried with me through adulthood and “like riding a bike”, I can still express myself through dance, love dancing and feel very fortunate that I have found the right teacher, dance classes and wonderful classmates. Although my muscles and joints are not the same as they were, it is surprising how I am gaining strength and more flexibility. Also, I am gradually losing weight which is no bad thing!!

Perhaps more importantly, I have more insight into the power of dance, especially for older people. Each of us as human beings can gain pleasure from moving and being creative. We can improve our health and wellbeing through dance. Through dance we can find new friendships, express ourselves, gain more confidence and self esteem. The shared support and encouragement is just wonderful. The social aspect and pleasure gained is so important. We laugh at the demands of remembering what comes next and realise our limitations as well as strengths. We are not getting our legs up to our ears as younger dancers do but we have a poise that comes from wisdom gained from the knocks, pains and pleasures of life.

Details of classes offered at the Claremont Centre can be found at <http://www.claremont-project.org/> while details of Sadler's Wells' education projects are at <http://www.sadlerswells.com/page/event-s-programme>



Photograph: Tristram Kenton

*Most arts organisations worth their salt now have an audience development and education arm. Harking back once again to the Autumn digest, **Brian Groombridge** mentioned there that he was to be one of the speakers at the Bolder and Wiser conference on **Older people and Culture** in October, which was organised by Audiences London. He promised to report back on the event, which he does below.*

The brief of the conference was to explore what an ageing population means to cultural organisations and how engaging with older audiences can be inspirational. Audiences London is an organisation which brings together theatres, museums, art galleries and other arts organisations, not just to market their activities but to involve audiences more creatively.

Although theatres and concert halls attract a great many older people, there are others who have not had the means or opportunity. Moreover, even those already in the audience don't always know about the related opportunities. Proms concert fans have benefited for some time from expert talks on the programme just before the concerts begin, and recently I went to the Lilian Bayliss theatre (Sadler's Wells) to see seniors in their 70s and 80s dancing specially choreographed ballets. Soon

after that I learned that such events are known in the trade as audience development (some AEA members probably knew that already) and then met Helen Ball who does it for Audiences London. She ran the risk of asking me to be the opening speaker at the Bolder and Wiser event on international Older People's day, October 1.

Among a hall full of much younger people (some from other parts of the country), I was surprised and delighted to see two U3A members - Jennifer Anning and Jenny Clark. Anning is the U3A's National Advisor for U3A Shared Learning Projects and Jenny Clark arranges such projects in London. It was also a surprise to discover that the first keynote speaker after my introduction, already on the platform with me, was responsible for that moving and fascinating show at Sadler's Wells - Fiona Ross. Other speakers included Director of the Baring Foundation, David Cutler, launching a fund of £3 million over five years for arts organisations working with older people (see:

www.baringfoundation.org.uk/AgeingArtfully.pdf) ; and Susan Langford, the Director and Founder of Magic Me, a leading provider of intergenerational arts activities, based in East London.

There were several workshop groups, including one led by Jennifer and Jenny. Development staff from London theatres and museums led other groups plus one that many AEA members will know about: Age Exchange, represented by Malcolm Jones, who creates its intergenerational theatre and arts projects (and also lectures for V & A's Adult Learning Department). You Tube

Videos of keynote sessions are available via

<http://www.audienceslondon.org/1286/symposia/bolder-and-wiser-older-people-and-culture.html> . That could be a website to keep an eye on.

*This autumn **Carol Allen** got involved in a new arts enterprise, when she was invited to take over as drama teacher at the New Horizons centre for Over 50s in Chelsea. She writes here about the **New Horizons Drama Group**.*



The New Horizons Drama Group in their Christmas show

It all came out of a conversation I had with Helen Leech of the Open Age Project at the AEA conference a couple of years ago, when I mentioned I was interested in doing some drama work with older learners. Open Age's brief is to "provide activities to enable older people to develop new skills and fulfil their potential" and they are one of the sponsors of New Horizons, which apart from drama offers a wide range of classes, ranging from IT to belly dancing. And when the centre was looking for a teacher for their drama class, they approached me.

I have nine students registered at the moment, though more are always

welcome and they range in age from mid fifties through to the most senior member of the class, Joan, who is ninety. She started in rep in the thirties and spent the war years touring in various musical comedies. Bit of a star, I gather. Some of the other students have little or no previous experience, others have quite a lot.

In this first term together we have worked on technique –relaxation, breathing, voice production, diction and movement - and on the more creative side, using those tools to develop a character and tell a story through drama using improvisation. Some of the class also contributed monologues and duologues which they had written themselves and which we worked on in class.

It is a bit of a New Horizons tradition for the various classes to show their wares in a performance at the Christmas party. So we chose a selection of six scenes from the above work, culminating in an improvisation involving the whole group – the 90th birthday of famous actress Dame Joan, surrounded by her family! (see photo previous page). Staging had to be simple –no curtain, stage or lighting with sound effects provided by yours truly from a CD player in the corner and very simple furniture, props

and costume. Rehearsal time was very limited as well. But after a bit of an iffy final rehearsal, come the performance the members of the New Horizons Drama Group rose to the occasion, and well deserved praise was heaped on them by all who saw them. I was very proud of them.

Helen, who was in the audience, also congratulated the cast and has promised to write a piece on the work of Open Age for a future edition of the digest.

As far as the future of the class is concerned, we have already established a relationship with the Bush Theatre in Shepherd's Bush, who have just started their own older learners' workshop project, in which some of my students and I are taking part. And I have long term hopes of involving my students and other older people in West London with a young people's group for an intergenerational project. Right now it's early days. But onward and upwards.

Details of New Horizons activities can be found on <http://www.new-horizons-chelsea.org.uk/nh/index.php?n=Main.HomePage>

Information on Open Age is at <http://www.openage.co.uk/>

REVIEWS

*Alex Withnall has two reading recommendations for the long winter evenings. **The Virginia Monologues. Twenty Reasons Why Growing Old is Great**, by Virginia Ironside and David Lodge's*

*latest novel **Deaf Sentence**. What they have in common is their focus on growing older and the issues it raises.*

The journalist Virginia Ironside hid her reactions to turning sixty in her hilarious novel *No! I Don't Want to Join a Book*

Club but now she's sixty-five and wants to come clean as to what that really means. Writing now in her own voice, she reminds us once again that she did all the sex and drugs stuff in the 1960s (considerably more so than most of us, I suspect) and now she's really enjoying being an old person. She certainly doesn't subscribe to the idea of sixty being the new forty – who wants to be forty when you can be old! Look at the benefits. Ailments? A fascinating topic of conversation, especially all those strange things that start to afflict our ageing bodies; and the drugs now come free, courtesy of the NHS! Memory getting worse? Who cares? Most of it isn't worth remembering anyway. Sex? Boring but lots of enjoyment still to be had in outrageous flirting. Funerals? Much more fun than weddings and as for all those things you'll never have to do again ever.....and so on.



Virginia Ironside, now aged 65

This is a hilarious read but it's a pity that Virginia still doesn't see any sense in 'getting a new life' and that includes 'starting up learning' the idea of which makes her heart sink. She's pretty scathing about all those older people, who are 'happy slaving away over hot essays with a mug of Horlicks by their side and some even go away for the odd week to attend seminars and lectures'. She also suspects that learning a new skill in later life is pretty difficult. Anyway, she points out that the problem with getting a new life is that you're liable to die half way through it. Maybe we should invite her to an AEA Conference!

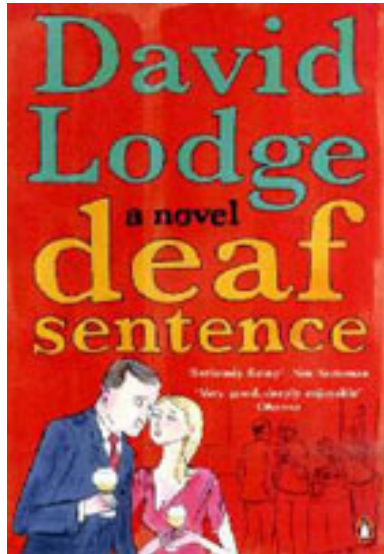
David Lodge's new novel is by turns very funny and deeply compassionate. The main character and narrator, Desmond Bates, a retired Professor of Linguistics is gradually going deaf with resulting confusion, not just for him but for everyone else in his life including his second wife, the improbably named Fred. Accordingly, he unwillingly gets involved with a predatory PhD student, Alex, whilst trying to cope with his own elderly hearing-impaired father who bitterly resents his son's intrusion into his life. The scenes between father and son are beautifully written, especially the account of visits to his father in hospital and the difficult decisions that have to be made.

Communication and the contribution of linguistics is the underlying theme of the novel but overall, it is death – whether through old age, suicide, assisted dying or genocide – that seems to guide the narrative. Academic interest in the language of suicide notes, Desmond's experience of the death of his first wife and a stunning and unexpected account

of a visit to Auschwitz help to make him aware that 'deafness is comic, death is tragic' as we leave him to the kindness and compassion of his lip-reading class.

This may sound a somewhat gloomy novel but Lodge manages to strike a brilliant balance between comedy and tragedy particularly through his superb characterisation. I particularly loved Desmond's ghastly academic colleague, Professor Butterworth; and the unpredictable Alex is cleverly developed from an apparently innocent young student into an unstable and dangerous threat to Desmond's reasonably comfortable life (shades of bunny boiler Alex Forrester here!)

Well worth reading and indeed, difficult to put down.



The Virginia Monologues. Twenty Reasons Why Growing Old is Great by Virginia Ironside publ. Fig Tree, 192pp. £12.99 and *Deaf Sentence* by David Lodge publ. Penguin Books £8.99

*Carlie Newman's theatre tip for winter is the new production of the classic **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** by Tennessee Williams at the Novello Theatre.*



James Earl Jones and Adrian Lester

I went into the performance wondering why it was being done with a completely black cast, but within a very few minutes of it starting, my view changed to a "Why not?" Admittedly a few aspects have had to be changed including the date, which now sets the play in the 1980s instead of the 1950s, and altering some lines, so that Big Daddy now refers to working as a nigger in the fields when the original spoke of working with niggers.

Director Debbie Allen has managed to invoke a real feeling of heat in her production. From the clothes and the movement of the characters to a set with wooden slats, through which the ever hot Mississippi sun shines and all windows are left open to try to get a little breeze, the whole atmosphere gives off heat. The play is set in Brick and his wife, Maggie's bedroom where he is confined since he broke his ankle during one of his many alcoholic periods (Brick is played by Adrian Lester). Now he drinks as Maggie (a very sexy Sanaa Lathan) desperately tries to get him sexually interested in her and they can begin to compete with his brother who

has five children with a sixth on the way. He tries to ignore her non-stop virtual monologue, paying frequent visits to the bar in their room and then hobbling with the aid of a crutch to the settee. They discuss Big Daddy and his 65th birthday, which they have come to celebrate. Neither Brick's father nor his Big Mama (a great performance here from Phylicia Rashad) are aware that Big Daddy is dying. The bedroom is far from peaceful, as other members of the family enter the room or listen outside including brother Gooper's (Peter De Jersey) "no neck monsters" as Maggie calls the kids.

The reason for Brick's lack of sexual interest in his wife and alcoholism gradually becomes clear, as we learn of his very close friendship with his dead friend, Skipper. The scene between Big Daddy and his favourite son during which each confronts the other with the reality of their lives – Brick with the idea that his friendship with Skipper was more than ordinary male friendship and Big Daddy that he is in fact not cured but dying of cancer – is the central core of the play and is put across with complete faithfulness to Williams' concept. The play of course depends on the central performances and in James Earl Jones we have a towering figure (even though he looks older than his character). His whole demeanour with little suggestive movements of the hips, as he remembers past experiences and above all his glorious musical voice aptly portray the patriarch, who realises that he is after all an imperfect human being. Adrian Lester is quiet at the beginning but becomes more emotional, as he has to face his own mendacity. It's gratifying to have a handsome actor play Brick. And Sanaa Lathan as Maggie, the "cat on a hot tin roof" beautifully

portrays her genuine love for her husband and failure to deal with his lack of sexual interest in an appropriate way. The surprise of the evening is Phylicia Rashad's sensitive Big Mama, who is also forced to deal with the truth of her husband's illness.

Great acting in one of William's best plays: I can't recommend this too highly.

"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" is at the Novello theatre in London until 10th April.

On Screen - Carol Allen

If Jeff Bridges' performance as ageing country singer Bad Blake in *Crazy Heart* fails to bring him a ten gallon hat full of awards and nominations, including a possible Oscar, I will be very surprised.



Jeff Bridges in Crazy Heart

The character he plays is frankly a mess, whose once successful career is now reduced to gigs in bowling alleys and bars. He's grizzled, sweaty, flabby, a chain smoking drunk yet still very attractive and charismatic and it's no problem to see why young, single parent Jean (Maggie Gyllenhaal) falls for him. This small but beautifully told and acted film captures the essence of what the

music is about - people's feelings and the emotional messes they get themselves into. Even if you're not a country fan, you'll find the songs very toe tapping and well performed and there are good supporting performances from Robert Duvall as Bad's loyal friend and Colin Farrell as his now successful former protégé, whose help the older man needs but won't ask for. The film is also very well shot, often mercilessly frankly in terms of Bridges, and is an impressive feature debut from Scott Cooper, a protégé of Duvall, who along with Bridges also co-produced the film. It's obviously a labour of love.

The Last Station deals with the last days of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (Christopher Plummer) and most particularly his volatile relationship with his wife Sofya (Helen Mirren). Although the time is 1910, Tolstoy is exhibiting signs of early communism. He has set up a commune for the serfs on his land and is under the influence of Vladimir Chertkov (Paul Giamatti), who is trying to persuade him to alter his will and leave the rights to his literary works to the people. Sofya is understandably strongly opposed to the idea. Contrasting with the story of this ageing couple, who still love each other deeply but disagree about everything – religion and politics as well as money – is the burgeoning relationship between Tolstoy's idealistic and shy young secretary (James McAvoy) and the girl he meets at the commune (Kerry Condon).

Mirren is magnificent at Sofya, an infuriating, energetic and passionate woman, who moves us to laughter and tears and gains our sympathy for her dilemma. Plummer is a powerful

presence with his shaggy beard and peasant dress and likeable in his desire to put right some of the inequalities of his society, while lacking the same arrogant conviction that Chertkov has of always being right.



Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela

If you're casting a part that calls for a wise and saintly black actor, the first choice inevitably it appears is Morgan Freeman. This time he plays Nelson Mandela in Clint Eastwood's *Invictus*. Faced with uniting a South Africa still racially divided in the wake of apartheid, the newly elected President Mandela homes in on the idea of using sport to unite his people. The Springboks are not only a hated symbol to the black population of white privilege and oppression but in the international world of rugby they are seen as a bunch of losers. But by gaining the help and loyalty of their captain François Pienaar (Matt Damon), Mandela determines that the team will not only win the 1995 World Cup, but will have the entire country united behind them and cheering them on.

What makes the film fascinating, even if you have no interest in rugby, is Freeman's performance, which shows Mandela not only as saintly but as an astute politician, who confounds the fears of the white civil servants and security services through his "hearts and minds" technique of recruiting them to his administration. The actor and the

film itself also exhibits a welcome touch of self deprecating humour, as when Pienaar describes his first meeting with Mandela as being “a bit like having met God”. The film does rather hammer its point home, teetering sometimes on the edge of worthiness, but it’s still a good and engrossing story.



Aaron Johnson plays John Lennon in *Nowhere Boy*

Artist Sam Taylor Wood’s debut feature *Nowhere Boy* is the story of John Lennon’s confused teenage years in Liverpool before the Beatles were even thought of. A misfit at grammar school, John (Aaron Johnson) has been raised by his strict Aunt Mimi (Kristen Scott Thomas) and loving Uncle George (David Threlfall). Then John discovers that his real mother Julia (Anne Marie Duff) is living a few streets away and he starts to visit her on a regular basis - a

situation which gives rise to a bizarre and disturbing tug of love between the two women with John caught in the middle.

The film is particularly good at capturing not only the look of the times but the social and emotional mores of respectable working class life, when family members formed close alliances, had bitter feuds and fiercely protected family secrets. This is particularly so in Scott Thomas’s performance as Mimi with her tightly permed hair and buttoned up personality - a woman who loves fiercely but cannot express her feelings. Duff as Julia is a much more flamboyant being than her elder sister - lively, flirtatious, including unsettlingly with her own son, emotionally unstable and on the edge. While Mimi buys John the guitar he craves, Julia is the one who unlocks his musical talent. Johnson is very good as the disturbed teenager who is father to the man. The wisecracking cynicism he uses as a shield and the outbursts of anger, all ring true, while the scenes of half remembered memories from his early childhood – a mystery which is unlocked towards the end of the film - are very effective.

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