



# SOURCES

An Educational Bulletin

Three issues annually

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## THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC WRITER

[Of Polish extraction, Magda Sweetland was born in Edinburgh and educated at George Watson's College and Edinburgh University. As well as having taught for some fifteen years in Britain, she has lived and worked in North America and Europe. Her first novel *Eightsome Reel* was published with the help of a Scottish Arts Council Grant and won the Authors' Club First Novel Award for 1985. She has published four further novels: *The Connoisseur*, *The Hermitage*, *Rich Hours* and *Tradewind*, and is currently working on her sixth book. She was co-founder of Sevenoaks U3A in 1994, and of Tonbridge U3A in 2000.]

### THE PRIVATE LIFE

Like any other performer, the professional writer suffers from having something of a split personality. This duality is only partly self-inflicted, and comes about for several quite practical reasons.

The actual process of writing is, of course, intensely private. Many readers think of a writer's life as exciting,



glamorous and rich. It is none of these. It is a slow, lonely and even an anti-social business. Writing involves being in a room by yourself for at least three hours a day and, in periods of intense work, which happens during revision or proof-reading, it may be for five or six. Personally, I still write a script in longhand, with a fountain pen in a notebook, and

dictate the revised work chapter by chapter into the computer, using a voice recognition programme. Working on a computer doesn't make the different stages any less laborious, however. This is all solo work

and, much as you would like to seek diversion at the end of a working day, you are probably not fit for human company anyway. If well-intentioned friends ask how the work is going, the reply is mostly gibberish.

Other kinds of creative work are much less isolated than this, or there's a communal and shareable side to them: a musician or composer can perform in a casual way for friends and family, outside the professional engagement: the artist can show off his easel work in progress: *This is what I do*. These processes are audible and tangible, or appealing in their initial stages. But nobody in his right mind is exercised about an unpublished manuscript. A writer has to go between covers before the work is acknowledged, and I don't mean the quality of the book - the acknowledgment of critical acclaim, or otherwise. Just the basic fact that you have spent two years, or much longer, pushing around one folder of ideas is finally proved only in the act of going public.

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## AND THE PUBLIC

Publication - this act of going public - is quite a shocking turnaround after so much solitude and inward analysis. Nothing prepares you for the 'exposure' because, until then, nobody has seen inside the folder of ideas and suddenly it is thrown wide open, is subject to scrutiny, the hype of the publisher's blurb, publicity nonsense, literary criticism, misinterpretation or, on the other hand, undue praise which can rise to levels of fanaticism! Fan clubs are all very well for pop stars, but can seem fairly inappropriate for writers, although there are some who enjoy the cult of personality and make hay with it.

Anybody who wants to be somebody can now set up a website, where casual callers leave their comments for other fans to read. There are festivals which literary groupies attend to hear their favourite author reading a page or two out loud. Dylan Thomas wondered about the sense in doing this: 'travelling 200 miles just to recite, in my fruity voice, poems that would not be appreciated and could, anyway, be read in books.' This has become an important part of marketing a book. Publishers will often add a clause in a contract stating that a writer must do a set amount of this publicity, or give a specific number of interviews. (In her successful years, Iris Murdoch agreed to giving just one.)

Does this make for a better book? Philip Larkin thought not. As early as 1977, he felt it was regrettable that writing was becoming just another branch of entertainment and that the writer could earn a living, simply by being himself, in the concert hall or the lecture theatre: 'He is bound to follow the market to find fresh audiences and fresh fees, and this will lead him from country to country and from continent to continent until his sense of cultural identity becomes blurred and weakened.' He quotes W.H.Auden's *On the Circuit*, about the miseries of the lecture tour:

Another morning comes: I see,  
Dwindling below me on the plane,  
The roofs of one more audience  
I shall not see again.

God bless the lot of them, although  
I don't remember which was which:  
God bless the U.S.A., so large,  
So friendly, and so rich.

## STRIKING A BALANCE

But there is another and more significant relationship between the inner and the outer life of a writer. Surely being with other people on a one-to-one level, being in circulation, is a necessary antidote to all that solitude? Yes, of course it is. A writer has to glean his material somewhere, touch reality or come down from the ivory tower. It prevents him from becoming self-obsessed, and other people provide a necessary

corrective to too much egotism. Also, doing things matters. A lived book is better than a thought book. Orwell was a painfully honest writer in that he set down only what he had experienced himself: his writing is first-hand and raw. Work that is all indoors soon becomes etiolated.

So, yes, the life of a writer comes down to a paradox. The source and the stimulus are often other people. When a writer is out and about, he is listening or interacting to an unusual degree. He is not looking for 'material' - that would be too cynical - but is engaged in other people's lives in a very searching way, wants to know all the details. Virginia Woolf would quiz her long-suffering friends for hours about their personal scenarios, wanting to get inside them, wanting the vicarious experience to be as powerful as her own and so expand it.

One downside of the cult of the writer, that results from intrusive publicity, is the too close identification between the author and his subject matter. Readers are led on to the assumption that much in a novel is autobiographical, and this gets in the way of evaluating the work as free standing, or a fully creative and imaginative exercise. A writer does lean heavily on his own experience, or point of view, and some books derive their essence from just that 'lived' quality (like Guiseppi de Lampedusa and his *Leopard*.) What is probably more true is that all novel writing is auto-geographical, is rooted in place just as it is rooted in local language. Readers also fall into the error of expecting their favourite authors to be interesting people *per se*. I was heartened to read recently that Louis de Bernières, asked how fame had affected him, replied: 'Sadly, I'm just as boring as I ever was.'

## THE AUDIENCE

The editor of my first book asked me who I had written it for, a proposition that had never struck me before. But it's a vital link in the process between private creation and public outing, and can help to bridge it. Imagining a readership is a useful construct, because it gives a sharpness to what kind of book you are aiming at: its intellectual field, its age and sex profile, the nature of its appeal. Publishers are too ready to narrow this down for the sake of sales, and say 'woman's book' (of *The Shipping News* and *Birdsong*), or 'historical romance' (of *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* and *Cold Mountain*), or 'detective thriller' about *Miss Smilla* and *Snow Falling on Cedars*, ignoring the fact that interesting books defy classification, and a personal booklist is likely to be as eclectic as any other kind of diet. Diversity is healthy.

The rise in the popularity of Book Clubs is a good sign that reading is suddenly a mainstream activity again, often fed by television and films, but not exclusively so. *The Common Reader* (Virginia Woolf's title) is a very important person because, in the end, it is that Everyman character who decides what is

continuingly good, and no other opinion matters. J.D.Salinger touches on this in a dedication that will give any writer pause: 'If there is an amateur reader still left in the world - or anybody who just reads and runs - I ask him or her, with untellable gratitude, to split the dedication of this book four ways with my wife and children.' Amen to that.

After nearly two decades, I have been able to identify my own audience at last. It is a Book Circle that has been meeting in Sevenoaks for the last ten years, and most of the members joined the initial group. They are very wise in their judgement. Not professional readers, or writers, they have still chalked up a lifetime of discerning addiction to good books. They are not fooled by fashions, or best seller lists, or much-hyped authors. They are impressively well-informed and astute, and pretty modern in their outlook. They'll tackle anything. If my fiction can ever come close to convincing them, I will consider it has truly succeeded.

*Magda Sweetland*



**WELCOME to this issue of SOURCES, the U3A Educational Bulletin which was billed last time as having Reading, Writing and Words as the main theme. Hope you enjoyed the insights provided by Magda's entertaining article above into the mind of the creative writer. Thank you to all our other contributors, whether you have chosen to write on the main theme or to stimulate us in other areas. Some of our recommended websites this time around have a strong link to the theme.**

*Editor*



## THE CHAIRMAN REFLECTS

**I**t is a pleasure to write a short piece for SOURCES for three reasons; (1) whenever I feel discouraged about some aspect of U3A I cheer myself by getting out the latest issue, (2) I have never written anything for the journal till now and (3) above all, because our main purpose is education.

In this short pre-Christmas lull I have been reflecting on the amount of time I have spent since this year's Conference and AGM discussing and often worrying about financial and constitutional matters. Perhaps it is inevitable that those of us who are most concerned with the affairs of the Trust are so involved, but it is good to think now about our radical educational experiment in the context of our own publication.

Most of the articles I read with such enthusiasm demonstrate the falseness of the alleged social/educational dichotomy which some note as a feature of the U3A. To my mind the merging of the two represents our strength. Our groups tend to fade away if participants are not learning from each other with enjoyment. Some which at first sight seem to be wholly devoted to 'play' are intellectually demanding and others which appear daunting are 'fun' to be in. The self-help, co-operative mode is difficult to explain to those who do not experience it and it has to be admitted that some people join U3A with little understanding of it.

At this year's conference where the fundamental Laslett principles were debated it was reported that many delegates arrived asking 'What principles?' Hopefully, following more detailed reporting back than we had previously achieved, the year-long discussions are continuing. That these basic statements are not 'set in stone' but are constantly evolving is another strength.

Perhaps I can end with a personal experience which demonstrated in a thrilling manner the efficacy of 'shared learning'. I participated in the first British Museum group to which much space was devoted in the last issue. The weekly meetings with members of many U3As who were following their individual object based research would have been enjoyable enough but each session began and ended with our reporting back, advising, listening and, yes, teaching each other. On some days members gathered sub-groups around them to explain novel presentation techniques or aspects of research methodology. I came to all this with minimal previous experience and, like many colleagues, left at the end of the term with withdrawal symptoms. 'Those who learn shall also teach and those who teach shall also learn' – the challenging principle was not an ideological statement but the unarticulated basis of a time of heightened living.

*Keith Richards (NEC Chairman)*



## IN THIS ISSUE

Contributions were thinner on the ground this time than for the last three issues. We lay the blame at the feet of the seasonal celebrations and hope that our readers will be contributing with renewed vigour for the remainder of 2004.

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of SOURCES (No.22) will be mailed to those on the database in June 2004. The special theme for this issue will be Current and International Affairs, Law and Government, Politics, etc.

**Please submit contributions to SOURCES via the National Office (see back page for address) not later than 9<sup>th</sup> April 2004.**

Looking ahead to Issue 23 (November 2004), the focus will be on Physical Activities and the way they impact on the spiritual and intellectual wellbeing of the individual. SOURCES hopes for contributions from the whole range from Tai-Chi and Yoga to Rambling and Dancing.

Despite the fact that SOURCES is always declared as having an overarching theme for any given issue, prospective contributors should not feel discouraged from sending in other offerings. The Editorial Board welcomes articles of interest that will serve to vary the diet on offer and make each issue a little more wide-ranging than the thematic approach might imply.

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

For technical reasons, the Editor will be more than grateful for contributions that take the form (in order of preference) of (a) a file on a floppy disk (b) an email (mikandel@tesco.net) or (c) clean typescript suitable for scanning – but please do not feel bashful about submitting other forms of contribution. It may not always prove possible to send out an acknowledgment, though every effort will be made to do so. Contributions are considered for inclusion by an Editorial Panel (including the Editor!).



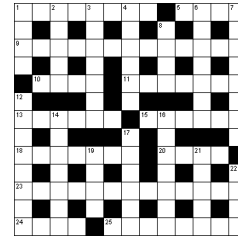
## CREWE AND NANTWICH

**"A few years ago I experimented by running two short courses for the Crewe and Nantwich U3A (730+ members)"**

### 1 How to solve cryptic crossword puzzles

Over twelve weekly sessions, of two hours each, sixteen members examined ten of the common types of clue, e.g. anagrams, hidden words, abbreviations, sounds like, lateral thinking, etc. With graded examples we learned what to look for and how to analyse a clue. We devised algebraic formulae such as:  $a = d (b+c)$ ; or  $a + b-1 (rev) = c$ .

"Seeing through" the answers caused so much laughter that a nearby group - painting or handcraft - in a large hall, wanted to know what was so *funny!*



### 2 Graphology

Graphology is not to be confused with any form of fortune telling! It is a fascinating pseudo-science used in the study of applicants for important positions, for character assessment, and in some aspects of criminal investigations.

Twelve U3A members studied examples of one another's handwriting while I explained some of the more general mental and physical characteristics that were revealed. The members were genuinely astonished at what came to light!

*Allan Whatley, Crewe & Nantwich U3A*

**[Crossword addicts: When in despair, go online to [www.slate.me.uk](http://www.slate.me.uk) for Grandma Alice's (!) efficient crossword finisher. It completed T-R-O-E-A-A-S-S (Clue: Bird's shank bone) for me recently. – Ed.]**



## BOOKHAM AND LEATHERHEAD PENNY READINGS

I wonder if any other U3A does "Penny Readings"?



We, at Bookham and Leatherhead U3As have revived the Victorian tradition of 'local entertainment for locals' with words and music. Instead of a private home, or cottage living-room, we perform in a Leatherhead bookshop, an easy venue, surrounded peacefully by bookshelves, mobiles of fictional characters and local leaflets, with two settees for cosiness. True, we do import local talented musicians, composers, singer, flautist or keyboard. A student, with a parent or tutor, not only widens the age range but also gives publicity to them and the U3A. The audience are thus treated to a multi-sensory evening. We were even invited by our leader's professional daughter to write words to her music, *Time For Us*, and she was delighted with our efforts.

The successful evening is the brainchild of the experienced and talented teacher of our Creative

Writing group which meets fortnightly. Edwina Vardey shares with us her expertise in journalism and literature, encouraging us to improve and to grow more confident. None of us are complacent but our contributions are warmly received at the Penny Readings. It seems that no sooner are we under way than the public are thronging around in the interval, asking when we can come again so that they can bring friends. People are obviously reminded of the times when drawing-room entertainment was the 'in thing'. This is the biggest accolade we could ever receive.

I feel so lucky to be a member of this unique group. I urge you all to try writing and not to be afraid of sharing your ideas. Go on, spend a penny, that's what we charge for the evening – not bad with wine as well.

*Vi Fairmaner, Bookham and Leatherhead U3As*



## ABERGAVENNY ETYMOLOGY

In Abergavenny U3A we have an Etymology group of about 35-40 members. The group was formed some seven years ago after I had given a talk to our general meeting on the study of proto-languages and theories of language development. My own interest had grown from informal study on retirement along with requests to run some weekend courses for a local residential college. As a result, I had acquired a large collection of dictionaries and reference books.

The U3A group takes a broad view of etymology, and we include not only formal linguistics and word development but also place-names, personal names, accent/dialect, idioms, word-play, etc. Meetings are monthly, lasting one and a quarter to one and a half hours. I usually develop a topic, such as trade names, number words, terms in wildlife/ecology, looking at the development of modern words from their classical or proto-language predecessors - the American Heritage Dictionary is an excellent source of Indo-European roots. Group members suggest topics or requests, i.e. words or phrases that particularly interest or intrigue them and our sessions are both interactive and interruptive, as one word leads to another!

We also arrange an annual 'Field Excursion' - an enjoyable scenic coach tour with refreshment stops on the pretext of exploring the place-names en route.

*Derek Bissell, Leader, Abergavenny U3A Etymology Group*

**[Derek has written previously on this Group in the May 2001 issue. Thank you for the update. – Ed.]**



## LITERARY JOURNEYS

I wanted to try something new. A long history of running travel groups and involvement in literature groups, bookshelves full of travel books and the answer seemed obvious: a Travel Literature group.

How to start? I needed a framework and none of the usual books on literary criticism had much to say about the travel genre, so I was delighted to discover that a new publication was due early in the year, and duly obtained Casey Blanton's *Travel Writing* to kick-start my thinking and also provide plenty of references to follow up.



Nine members enrolled for the group and we met to discuss how we wanted to pursue this shared interest. Using the historical perspective suggested by Casey, we looked first at the attitude of travel writers over the past 300 years. We decided that, rather than have everyone read the same book at the same time, each member would read a different book and present a synopsis and some comments at the next meeting. This developed into the idea of two members discussing accounts either of the same area by different writers or looking at two books written at approximately the same time. We started with Lady Mary Montague's letters from Turkey in 1716 and progressed to Boswell and Johnson's *Tour of the Hebrides* in 1770, glancing at Defoe's *Tour of the whole of Great Britain* 1734 on the way. A comparison between Mary Kingsley's visit to West Africa 1896 and Graham Greene's in 1935 proved fascinating and, when thinking about Liberia today, depressing.

Our next session will cover two different accounts of journeys along the Silk Road with a look at maps of the area, Marco Polo and the political and religious influences then and now. The format we are using allows a breadth of interest and diversity of approach, amongst both the authors and members of the group.

*Pauline Richards, Christchurch U3A*



**"The thing I like about a dictionary," said Richard Whiteley during a recent edition of Countdown, "OK, it hasn't got much of a plot, but it does explain every word as it goes along."**



## STORYTELLING NETWORK

Storytelling predates the written word. People have been telling stories for as long as we have had speech. Even after the invention of writing, only a minority had access to the written word. Stories passed from lips to ears, changing as each teller forgot things, or deliberately left them out, and replaced them with their own inventions. This is the 'oral tradition'. Even now we think in narrative and tell anecdotes, urban myths and personal stories almost without

realising it. Stories are learned image by image, rather than word by word, and are retold from the heart in gatherings with friends or in public performance. Each telling will be different as the teller chooses words to suit the audience. This is oral storytelling.

If you are in a Storytelling Group or interested in Storytelling, in any of its many aspects, please let me know. A Storytelling Start Up leaflet is available from the National Office. I intend to produce a Storytelling Newsletter and to run Storytelling Study Days.

Anyone interested could contact.

Howard Sherman, 61 Appleton Road, Upton, Chester CH2

1JH ☎ 01244 344117

✉ [hshermans@chester-uk.co.uk](mailto:hshermans@chester-uk.co.uk)



## BATH ETYMOLOGY GROUP III

No – it's *entomologists* who study insects; we etymologists love *words* (from Greek: *etymos* true and *logos* word) as all U3A **opsimaths\*** well know. Ours is the third Etymology Group and numbers about 25 members with an average of a dozen participants; we meet fortnightly in central Bath.

Having no previous experience, we first had recourse to “Word of the Day” on the Internet, with each of us researching for origins, pronunciation, meanings, uses, spellings, etc. in readiness for group discussion.

As our confidence grew, several of our more erudite members gave talks on their particular interest – musical terms, river names, Christian connotations, foreign acquisitions, Spanish and Dutch influences and amusing Australian slang. One member, a scholar in Anglo-Saxon, enlightened us on The Venerable Bede's writings, another on her struggles to convey English to Japanese students!

Guest speakers have given us fascinating insights into our language heritage: Greek was introduced via the Roman invaders who regarded it, snobbishly, as “classical”. We learned of the origins of vegetable names and how language families have evolved through countless aeons.

Our first birthday was celebrated by a coach trip to Newnham-on-Severn where, over an excellent meal and brew, etymology reared its head when a local forester regaled us in her delightful dialect with the history and language of the Royal Forest of Dean and their efforts to preserve it.

Ours is a lively and thriving group. A volunteer will usually chair the meeting and we are fortunate in having a regular Secretary and Treasurer in Hilary Elms. We all collect unfamiliar words and write up our findings ready for discussion. Most members are word fanatics in many guises – avid readers, crossword fiends, Scrabble® addicts, etc.

Our pursuit of Etymology is not restricted to self-satisfaction; we seek to preserve our linguistic heritage

and are considering taking the BBC to task, as the esteemed guardians worldwide of “English”, over its persistent dumbing down of our language. Also the average person's vocabulary is shrinking daily. How often do we brighten our conversation with a proverb, a quotation, a metaphor or a simile? And now that TextTalk has arrived, how long will it be before we are all using such soulless brevities as *cu2b4t*?

Katie Page, Bath U3A, Convenor Etymology Group III

**[\*opsimath (from Greek: *opse* late and *mathe* learning). What a wonderful word! Thank you, Katie, for introducing it into the U3A lexis. Ed.]**



## IN DEFENCE OF DISCUSSION

I am always impressed by the variety of educational subjects that many local U3As offer their members; it shows the range of expertise and knowledge possessed by our age-group and willingness to share with others. Because these groups thrive, it is clear that there is a need among our members to continue learning. In spite of what some folk say, you *can* teach old dogs new tricks.

What does surprise me, however, is that discussion groups are considered by some to be recreational rather than educational – an opportunity for a coffee and a chat. While, of course, this is true, it is also a chance for a clash of opinions based upon one's past experience and knowledge, an opportunity to hear and evaluate the views of others and to adjust your own views (or not) accordingly. After all, the study of history is mainly a debate among historians and society is rich with conflicting opinions – exactly what ‘art’ is these days is just one example.

I don't know of any college or university with discussion as one of its curriculum subjects, perhaps because of the age range of their students. After all, a group of twenty of those students might only have a combined total of 350-400 years' experience of life to draw on (most of that as children), while a similar-sized group such as ours at Torridge has some 1350-1400 years.

I maintain that discussion groups like ours are educational in the true sense of the word. We have a great deal of knowledge, experience, compassion, humanity, understanding – and even bigotry – to contribute to the companionship and the shared learning experience. The subjects we discuss are not constrained by any syllabus and the cost is a fraction of that charged to study at a college. Of course, the coffee is also first class!

Long may we talk and learn.

Ernest Scott, Torridge U3A



## SPINE TINGLING

Some years ago during a short holiday in Greece we travelled to Epidaurus to see Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Tauris*, performed in the amphitheatre at the ancient site. The night air was magical – freshened by the ever present *meltemi* and suffused by the scent of pine from the nearby groves. Epidaurus had also been a place of healing and there was much to tingle the spine even before the performance began. The voices of the actors were beautiful, the cadences of the classical Greek spoken by the actors unforgettable, all enhanced by the near perfect acoustics. The 12,000 strong audience of mostly Greek families seemed rapt in every nuance of the story.

There is a seminal moment in the play when Iphigenia and Orestes discover they are brother and sister and begin their fight back against the dark fate that the Gods have in store for them. The moment arrived; the expectation in the air was palpable. There was a collective intake of breath; and then a moment of pure, pure joy. As Iphigenia and Orestes embraced each other in recognition a spontaneous burst of applause rose from the audience, filling the night sky. Each face in the audience – from grandparents to grandchildren - shone with pleasure. Brother and sister in the drama were re-united. The ancient amphitheatre had borne witness; man would defy the Gods. All would be well. My spine tingles still in the remembering.

*Elaine Williams, Hastings & Rother U3A*



## ONLINE COURSES

**[As trailed on the back page of SOURCES Issue 20, a pilot course on creative writing entitled 'Creative Writing: Short Stories' by Ian Searle of Carrick U3A started last September. The author and two of his study group give their personal impressions of the experience.]**

### Virtually a Study Group

After sampling Jean Thompson's Creative Writing Course online and then helping to tutor its re-run, I decided to write a course myself. The pilot of *Creative Writing, Short Stories*, was launched early in September 2003 and is about to reach

(Jan '04) its last unit. The participants included five Australian and seven UK U3A members. Each was required to submit an original short story to form the basis of analysis and discussion by the others as the course went on. The result was delightfully varied. Each Unit of the course was allocated two weeks to complete: during the first week, participants responded to 'Activities' (written exercises) by emailing their writings to all the other members of the group, similar to a normal U3A study group of this kind. Everyone was invited to pitch in with his or her own comments.

The Activities became increasingly difficult and longer as the course continued. Inevitably we had some drop-outs, but they were due to such problems as ill-health or bereavement in the main, though in at least one case it was because of other commitments. By the beginning of December the number of active participants in the pilot run had dwindled to eight of the original twelve. This kind of attrition is a particular problem in U3A groups and needs to be acknowledged, since it cannot be altogether avoided.

However, the experience gained by the group, including the author himself, was remarkable, particularly for the close friendship which seems to have developed. We have learned a great deal about one another and, when one member is unwell, sincere good wishes for a speedy recovery rapidly result.

By the seventh Unit we were just about ready for some seriously interactive work. Pairs were yoked together to work by email on developing synopses and to edit each other's work. We succeeded in producing a whole series of about five or six examples of 'Literary Consequences' in which one member wrote an introductory passage to a story and three others added subsequent bits of their own: the fourth tried to draw the composite story to a satisfactory conclusion. The results were mixed but a couple of them are quite remarkable.

We are now approaching the last Unit in which participants are encouraged to rewrite their original stories in the light of comments already made by the rest of the group. If that is too daunting, they may write a completely new story or at least a summary of one. Finally comes the evaluation of the course. I am confident that it will get the thumbs up from everyone, but there will be one or two suggestions for amendments. There will also be, no doubt, a feeling of sadness at losing touch, though there is nothing to stop us from corresponding by email in the future. One of the students has already agreed to help me tutor the second run of the course in May, 2004.

It has been hard work, especially for the tutor, who has had to chase up late submissions and occasionally add his twopenn'orth of wisdom. The amount of work generated by the students is remarkable: I printed out most but not all the submissions for the first six units and have filled three ring-binders to overflowing. Much of it is excellent, original writing and some of it, I hope, can be kept on the web site for future reference.

Most of all, however, I have appreciated the friendships and collaboration of fellow members of the U3A from Canberra to Edinburgh. Well worth the work.

*Ian Searle, Carrick U3A*

## Objectives Achieved

I'm of an age when I might be expected to be content to sit back and view the passing parade. However, being a venturesome character, I decided to jump in at the deep end to find out whether I had the skill to become a writer of fiction. I attempted 'Autobiography and Journaling,' and this encouraged me to seek a greater challenge. Ian's course beckoned ('Creative Writing: Short Stories')

Misgivings surfaced when I read the profiles of the other members. Many had a long history of U3A writing groups and I sensed that I would be outclassed and shown up as the novice that I am. However, I soon discovered that by concentrating on course content I was quietly achieving my objective. Thus a lack of expertise or experience need not be an impediment to undertaking the course provided there is genuine commitment.

As one of Ian's guinea pigs I found the content of his course to be exactly what I wanted, providing challenge, know-how and example, and his handling of the diverse membership was of a high standard. Clearly, much thought and time went into the course development and, while some may seek revision (perhaps because of perceived difficulty), I would suggest that the basic thrust remain untouched.



'Creative Writing: Short Stories' is a serious course and requires serious treatment if participants are to gain maximum benefit. It is certainly not a course for 'dabblers'. A good feature was the generous amount

of student-tutor communication that benefited us all. However, in my opinion, an even better outcome might be possible if there was a greater exchange of views between students. Ian might consider revising some Activities to remedy this.

My conclusion is that Ian's course meets his objective of encouraging participants and giving them the groundwork to write fiction. I recommend it.

*Allan Cox, Canberra (U3A Australia)*

## Working with 'Down Under'

Taking part in a U3A Pilot Course for two or three hours a week sounded an excellent start to the autumn, although it entailed risking one of my own stories for vetting; having work critiqued is always unnerving. What would they make of it; how would I select something suitable? In the end it came down to time and availability - a recent story that was the required length, plus a personal profile. Ian kindly supplied two stories for us to "practise" on.

In early September we logged on to read each other's profiles and submissions. It was exciting to see the Australian names and to enter for a while the lives of people living on "The sunshine coast of Queensland, in a retirement village with 70 acres of parks, gardens, lakes and rainforest. Native birds and animals abound."

Although some said they had not written before, this was not apparent from the stories, which varied from fantasy to comedy, thrillers and tangled loves. I printed out the stories, as we had to refer to them regularly, together with an abridged version of the Units, which Ian gave me permission to use with my own group. My Short Course folder now holds almost a hundred files.

Each Unit was clearly set out and well researched. Unit 6 received almost unanimous disapproval - we were asked to think about violence and all denied wanting to read or write about it. Re-reading the Unit, I notice that violence was a minor component, with moral issues foremost. Digesting the contents of each Unit, completing the Activities, then commenting on others' responses took rather longer than the promised three hours and dialogue between us became rather restricted. One week I spent ten hours (not in one sitting) at my computer commenting on everyone's work, with disappointingly few replies apart from Ian, who has been an amazingly thorough and positive Tutor.

It was perhaps not surprising that, as Christmas crept up, our feedback got shorter, but we did manage frequent "asides" about our lives. Are others' surroundings, Allan's description of his early morning walks, Arthur's wry comments, his leaking washing machine, our concern over someone's ill-health, a legitimate part of a Writing Course? Certainly they were for me - writing is after all about life itself and I shall miss the group enormously. Re-reading all the files properly will be rewarding and I have the email addresses.

*Maggie Smith, Harrogate U3A*





## ● THE LANGUAGE SPOT

Apparently the word 'automynorcagram' refers to text in which the initial letters of successive words spell out the text itself. An example: "Ageism generally engenders ill-mannered spoken mutterings getting excessively negative ... .."

This form of composition is not to be recommended, as the writer is clearly creating a rod for his back. The longer the process is engaged in, the greater the task grows!

*Editor*



## WHY DID THE BOOK CROSS THE ROAD?

Many readers will have happened upon reports of an unusual initiative on the Internet that goes by the name of Book Crossing. Conceived and initiated in the US by a husband and wife team in April 2001, the scheme is now a runaway success. It is a simple but most effective concept. Donate a book you enjoyed, but have finished with, to the world at large by leaving it lying around in a public place with a label (obtainable from the website) that explains the scheme. If the give-away book is registered by the donor on the website and if a finder registers the find before passing it on in turn, then the possibility exists of tracking the book's travels as it benefits one reader after another. Sounds a fun alternative to car boot sales! The website to visit is: [www.bookcrossing.com](http://www.bookcrossing.com)

*Editor*



## HANDBELL RINGING

Three years ago two of us in Wokingham U3A decided we would like to try something new. One could read music and the other could not, but both enjoyed it. We decided to find out about handbells. We soon discovered that they were very expensive and beyond our means. After some research, we discovered belle plates, invented by an engineer, albeit a musical one, Maurice Davies ([www.belleplates.com](http://www.belleplates.com)). The belle plates are made from different sized, shaped metal plates which, when struck by the clanger, produce a very pleasant musical sound. It is sufficiently similar in tone to blend very well with "proper" handbells. We found we could buy a set for less than one medium-sized 'real' handbell.

We raised some money by having a couple of garage sales and obtained a small grant. These funds enabled us to purchase a set of one and a half octaves and we were ready to start. At first, we played simple music written in number form that enabled someone

with absolutely no musical knowledge to join in. We were invited to join a local church bell-ringing group one evening as they were curious about our plates and we were eager to try real bells. This was a turning-point for our group as we learned how they marked their music, with coloured rings around the notes – red for the bell in the right hand and green for the one in the left. This enables players to 'see' the flow of the music even if they don't read it easily. Unfortunately, it means more copies of the music are required so that each person has their own copy. Now we have accidental sharps and flats marked in blue and some juggling is required.

We have now purchased an extension to our set of bells to make it up to three octaves. There are twelve members in the group, meeting each Monday morning. It is amazing how much music we have learned whilst enjoying ourselves. We play bits of classics, Gilbert & Sullivan, old popular songs, carols and chants. Monday mornings sets us off to a flying start for the week, mostly humming the tune we played last. The concentration required drives all worries away.

We would be pleased to pass on our experience to other U3As.

*Beryl Page, Wokingham U3A*



## A GREAT DAY OUT FOR THE NATIONAL FOLK DANCE NETWORK

Following my recent appointment as network co-ordinator, in an endeavour to find out who is out there Folk Dancing, I invited all U3A Folk Dance groups to join in a day of dancing at Cecil Sharp House in London, home of The English Folk Dance and Song Society. (Cecil Sharp founded the English Folk Dance Society in 1911 and directed it until his death in 1924, when he left his private library to the Society on condition that it was suitably housed.)



As a result of my invitation, over a hundred dancers descended on the capital on 9th Oct 2003, to meet other groups, to enjoy each others' dances and to exchange ideas.

In true U3A tradition of DIY, all those who wanted to lead a dance were invited to do so. The resultant programme was as varied as the dancers themselves. Overall a pleasingly high standard prevailed. The programme varied from the Traditional through the Playford period, contras and more modern square.

Thanks were expressed to the society's Librarian, for his very interesting talk on the work of the Society and the priceless contents of the library. Special thanks were expressed to Barry Builimore, the leader of the Staines U3A folk dance group, for starting the proceedings and for supplying the music.

There were 22 replies to the two original invitations, from both groups and individuals, but there must be a lot more folk dance groups who are not on my database. I need your information. Please contact me through the National Office as soon as possible.

*Roy Phillips, Bath U3A  
and Network Co-ordinator for English Folk Dance*

**[See Forthcoming Events on the back page for information about a Dance and Walking Week at Halsway Manor, Somerset. – Ed.]**



## **U3A Sci/Tech Network at the National Institute for Medical Research - 25 November 2003**

About one hundred and thirty members of the Science /Technology Subject Network together with others from the Greater London Area U3As were given a rare treat with an afternoon of lectures by staff at the Institute which is the largest research establishment of the Medical Research Council.

After a warm welcome from Sir John Skehel, the Director of NIMR, the first speaker was Dr Robin Lovell-Badge who talked about 'New ways of refurbishing the damaged body'. In his talk he explained how stem cells can be used for repair work and described some of the limitations. He went on to hint at the possibilities of the benefits of using cells cultured from fertilised eggs which could be used to make many different kinds of cell providing they are exposed to the right stimuli.

The next speaker was Dr Anne O'Garra talking on 'Have we anything to fear from infectious disease?' In her talk Dr O'Garra outlined the improvements that had taken place in public health due to antibiotics, vaccination campaigns, etc. leading to a perception that there was nothing more to fear from infectious diseases! However, in the last half century more than ten new diseases have been discovered each pointing to a chink in our hygienic armour. To combat new dangers, such as SARS, new strategies are needed to manage public health and NIMR is working to understand more about how the body responds to these new infections in order to develop methods of limiting them.

After an interval for refreshments the final speaker was Dr Don Williamson who talked about 'The secrets of the human genome and what will we learn about human biology?' Using an analogy with a full set of working drawings for the production of a motor car, Dr Williamson described the sequence of the human genome. He went on to explain that we now have in our computers the basic information required to

understand the nature of human life in health and disease - even if it takes centuries. The information is very complicated but it tells us that the genetic make-up of each person is highly individual and suggests that medications can be tailored to our individual requirements. He also pointed out that like all new issues, the genome is full of dangers of an ethical kind that must be resolved.

The NIMR went to the trouble of giving everyone a summary of the talks together with suggestions for further reading. The feedback we have had as well as the 'buzz of excitement' as U3A members left at the end of the afternoon shows that the visit to NIMR had been a great success. It is hoped that this will become an annual event.

*Len Street*



## **A 'SNAPPY' IDEA FOR YOUR STUDY GROUP?**

The digital camera is now well-established as a successful item of home technology and it was this thought that led me to consider its potential in the context of U3A Study Groups, especially those that meet in the home. What I came up with was an idea for camera-to-videotape transfers. Imagine yourself to be a member of a Botany Group. Now imagine the pleasure of sitting in someone's home and watching images of meadow flowers for identification being displayed on the ordinary domestic TV. A sort of updated version of a slide show.

The simplest matter of all is to output the camera's digital images directly onto the TV screen – provided the digital camera has an AV output and the right lead is available to connect to the TV. (It may be necessary to ensure that the camera is putting out PAL signals, rather than NTSC, which is an American system.)

### **WHY COPY THE IMAGES TO TAPE?**

Transferring the images to videotape, on the other hand, does involve some preparation time. This approach, however, has two distinct advantages. Firstly, you can select the images from your camera in any order you choose for transfer to tape, whereas the direct method from camera to TV might involve a bit of fiddling between images. A point to watch is that if you use the camera as the 'projector' you would be advised to run it from the mains in case the battery gives out halfway through. This danger is avoided if you show a tape instead.

Secondly, once you have created a VCR tape containing your images in the correct sequence, you then have a more or less permanent visual aid at your disposal which could be used again on another occasion, passed from hand to hand, copied even.

## HOW IT'S DONE

The method for compiling the tape should prove relatively simple. The details will depend on your set-up at home but I found a way of switching my VCR to record when there was a digital camera image on the screen and capturing that image on tape.

At this point you have a choice. You could simply record the image for 1 or 2 secs (with the intention of pausing the tape when you show the video) or you record the image for longer stretches to avoid the need to pause the tape.

There we have it. A modern slide show, but one that can be lent out, passed around and used in your study group. Local history groups, archaeology, architecture, meteorology, nature studies, handicrafts, art appreciation, antiques and many other topics spring to mind as possible beneficiaries of this approach.

It might be worth experimenting with the digital camera's ability to take decent close-up pictures and see how illustrations from books show up on the TV screen. We can't expect superb quality because the TV screen itself has a fairly low resolution.

[Technical note: I was disappointed that my camera would not 'read' just any digital image (jpeg) transferred from my computer to the camera, thereby precluding the extension of the method to images from other sources. By way of compensation, though, I found that I could store the camera's images on the computer and then transfer them back (say, at a later date or in a different order) to the camera.]

Mike Williams, Hastings & Rother U3A  
mikandel@tesco.net

## SOURCES ONLINE

For those of you with access to the Internet, you may find it useful to know that back numbers of Sources can be viewed online, and printed off or saved to your word processor. Visit the Third Age Trust's website at [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) and click on **Sources Online**.

## PUBLISHING STUDY MATERIALS

Following on the publication of Eric Midwinter's *Novel Approaches: A Guide To The Popular Classic Novel* (see Sources Issue 20, p.14), Third Age Press would be interested in publishing other, similar course guides suitable for use by U3A groups. If you have been running a U3A study or interest group and think your material could successfully be reproduced in book form (with help, where necessary, from the Third Age Press team), please write to Dianne Norton, Managing Editor, Third Age Press, 6 Parkside Gardens, London

SW19 5EY or Email: [dnort@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:dnort@globalnet.co.uk) - with details of the course and the kind of material you use for the course.

## SOURCES PAST

The following appeared in Issue No.4, May 1999 in an article on Literacy and Libraries.

"An international survey has found that the level of adult literacy is strongly associated with age, education and employment status. Older people tend to perform less well and education is not always a good predictor of literacy."

## THE MUSEUM PROJECTS BECOME SHARED LEARNING PROJECTS

The four London Museum Projects (reported on in "Sources" in November 2003) were successful and fun, and many more projects have followed and will follow them. But the name seemed a bit limiting, so they have evolved into the "**U3A Shared Learning Projects**". After all, shared learning is what they are all about – learning shared with other U3A members and with the institutions who invite us to work with them.

These Projects are similar to Interest Groups in a single U3A; the difference is that the members of a Shared Learning group are drawn from a number of different local U3As. This means that people are working as a team with others whom they didn't previously know on a specific project for a limited length of time, with a clear agenda, suggested by or agreed with the institution where they are working.

The stimulation of new friends, new ideas, and the combined energy and confidence generated are all what U3A is about, sharing discoveries and giving and receiving support. All those who have been involved so far in these Projects have greatly enjoyed them, and most of them want to take part in another one. So it has been necessary to restrict people – in London, at least – to one Project a year, as otherwise it would become a large, self-perpetuating Interest Group, and new applicants wouldn't get a look in!

During 2003 there have already been successful projects at local museums in Salisbury and Brighton. In London, the British Museum has already invited another U3A group to evaluate their two new Galleries, "The Enlightenment" in the King's Library, and the Wellcome Gallery, "Living and Dying". And Projects are planned in 2004 in Somerset House, the Geffrye Museum in Hackney, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. There will also be new

Projects at the V & A and the National Maritime Museum.

There is every reason to hope that U3As all over the country will look at possibilities not just in museums, but all kinds of institutions with Education Officers or contacts who are open to the idea. There are art galleries, gardens, local theatres, churches and cathedrals, lots of National Trust and English Heritage properties (and English Heritage has already agreed that U3A Study Groups can have free admission to their properties).

If you would like to explore the idea further, contact your Learning Support Networker (see p.13), or the Education Committee via U3A National Office. There are some notes available with ideas for starting up, for specific projects, and with suggestions for those who would like to consider co-ordinating a Project; for these, contact me at e-mail [jenmal@connectfree.co.uk](mailto:jenmal@connectfree.co.uk) or 0208 346 3751.

*Jenny Clark, North London U3A*



## CHELTENHAM SUMMER SCHOOL '03

**W**e were greeted without delay by staff in the car park, guided to Reception, shown to our rooms and bidden to welcome drinks beside the modern statues and paintings. Welcome is the keynote to this; such very pleasant people, all clearly labelled with name and course. This simplifies conversation at meals immediately. The meals, I may say, were most generous with considerable choice. Oh, the bliss of no planning, cooking or washing up! Is it possible that only the most agreeable members of an organisation go on courses or does new company improve us? Whichever it is, the effect is wonder fully cheering.

In adult classes how sorry we should feel for those brave tutors who find their group contains an extrovert student bent on setting the rest straight, or others who nervously suspect their innocent seeming flock of concealing a D.Phil. modestly disguising her expertise. For example, in the Modern Literature group would a retiring Lithuanian be an obvious choice for an authority on James Joyce? At coffee time the group had a battered look suitable to those just driven over by *Finnegans Wake*.

Because the inside of a week is not long, and Time Wasted is not to be thought of, my calligraphy group was dealt a schedule to make one blanch. However our instructor was patience personified.

Meanwhile the opera group played Wagner, the embroiderers made little jewelled squares suggesting the sea, the architects visited Bath, the historians went to Gloucester Cathedral, while the gardeners admired the superb displays of shrubs and flowers round Cheltenham. Other delights were talked about. Genetics with Phyll Babb was one. If only we could,

experience them all. But there was more in store. That evening a string quartet played Haydn, Bartok and an enlivening medley. In the bar on the following night was an uproariously enthusiastic jazz band of USA calibre. At first their trumpets and saxophones were received with complete English calm until the strains of rock and roll proved too much and great aunts and grandfathers took the floor where they wiggled and gyrated and spun giddily. It was such infectious enjoyment that the chairbound waved and waggled and clapped.

It is not possible to praise too highly the organisation of this summer school. Such care and hard work and attention to detail are rarely met commercially. Even in torrential rain on the last day, kindly young students with golf umbrellas fetched our luggage, loaded it into vehicles, and came back soaked to do the same for the passengers. I can recommend it heartily. Let all who can go in 2004!

*Elizabeth Tindall, Salisbury & District U3A*



## NAME THAT TUNE!

**M**any years ago I both chanced upon and, pretty well simultaneously, pounced upon a hardback copy of a book entitled *The Directory of Tunes and Musical Themes* by Denys Parsons, published by Spencer Brown & Co., 288pp. (Sadly, it is now out of print but, for the record, the ISBN number is 0 904747 00 X.) Bernard Levin's Introduction begins with the words "If Mr Denys Parsons did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."

What Denys Parsons did was to devise a system which would permit even a musical illiterate such as myself to identify a song or piece of classical music that might be irritatingly on the periphery of recognition. All the user has to be capable of is determining whether successive notes of the piece go UP or DOWN or REPEAT and to write down a sequence of DDDs, UUS and RRRs that reflect the melody under investigation. (The very first note, having no preceding note to relate to, is a special case and is represented by an asterisk.)

To give you an example, the melody from Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March No.1 that we know as *Land of Hope and Glory* would be represented thus:

\*RDUUD DDRDU UDU

Denys Parsons breaks the sequence up into groups of five for ease of reading and never needs to use more than sixteen characters in a sequence to identify a melody. (If, as can occasionally happen, two melodies share the same sequence, then a little common sense must prevail to distinguish the Shostakovitch from the Vivaldi or the Edwardian music hall ballad from the Methodist hymn!)

The final piece of information you need to appreciate the simple and glorious beauty of this

system is that Denys Parsons then arranged all the letter sequences in alphabetical order to enable the user to locate his own compiled sequence of letters with ease, in the manner of a dictionary. The Elgar example above is sandwiched between a piece of Mozart and a piece of Verdi:

\*RDUUD DDDUU UURRU

\*RDUUD DDRDU UDU

\*RDUUD DDUDD

This book has intrigued and amazed countless friends and was an immediate talking point at a U3A music appreciation group. It is now one of my treasured possessions and, try as I might, I have never succeeded in tracking down a second-hand copy.

Imagine, then, my delight to find that the method has been incorporated onto an Internet website. It's free, you don't have to register, it's simple and it works like a dream. It found the Elgar immediately. If there are any U3A music groups out there with access to a computer, visit [www.melodyhound.com](http://www.melodyhound.com) and have fun!

*The Editor*



## WORLD WIDE WORDS

A couple of pieces above provide the perfect opportunity to mention a fascinating website for Internet-minded etymologists:

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

This site is all about English words and phrases—what they mean, where they came from, how they have evolved, and sometimes the ways in which people misuse them. It is compiled by Michael Quinion, a freelance with a fascinating job history that ranges from the BBC to a Cider Museum. The site has some 1400 pages on it, so there's no shortage of material for browsing. Michael is based in Thornbury, north of Bristol. He also publishes a fortnightly Newsletter that is emailed free to subscribers. All word buffs should pay the website a visit. They will be well rewarded.

*Editor*



## WEBSITES

Recommendations from readers on useful websites. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information. Apologies for any errors that may have crept in. Please send in your contributions to this corner.

Readers may remember the contribution from a colleague in one of the Spain U3As (Fuengirola) in the last issue (pp.7-8). To follow that up, here is a mention for the Costa del Sol U3A's website which can be found at

[www.u3acostadelso.org](http://www.u3acostadelso.org). Their LINKS page is well worth a visit. Congratulations to all concerned!

## HISTORY

[www.historyworld.net](http://www.historyworld.net)

Sunday Times said: "Chancing upon History World is like discovering a chest full of rare books at the back of the attic." The Whizz Quizz is highly addictive

## POLITICS/CURRENT AFFAIRS

[www.deadoraliveinfo.com](http://www.deadoraliveinfo.com)

Find out whether famous people are still with us or not (US bias).

[www.epolitix.com](http://www.epolitix.com)

Political and parliamentary news

## LEARNING RESOURCES

[icom.museum/vlmp/world.html](http://icom.museum/vlmp/world.html) This one looks like a good way in to museums around the world

[www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com)

Have fun finding out how to do things – a compendium of practical advice (NB: US flavored!)

[www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/](http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/)

Free online tutorials on almost every subject you can imagine. Poke around in it - it seems rather extensive.

The 'Links Basket' seems a neat idea

[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

The goal of Wikipedia is to create an information source in an encyclopedia format that is freely available. It seems to have an unusually organic format. For example, the entry for Saddam Hussein was updated to include news of his capture within 24 hours of the event

## MISCELLANEOUS

[www.metropla.net/index2.htm](http://www.metropla.net/index2.htm)

Metro maps and photos from all over the world. Fun for armchair travellers.

[www.guardian.co.uk/notesandqueries](http://www.guardian.co.uk/notesandqueries)

Aficionados need no introduction. Non-aficionados, go and introduce yourselves

## MUSIC

[Live365.com](http://Live365.com)

Gateway to the delights of Internet radio. Non-stop classical music, no adverts, no announcements. Or search for your own particular nostalgic memories.

## WORDS

[www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

British Library. Astounding. (Be sure you click on "What you can do on this Website" and view treasures like the Magna Carta, turn the pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels)

[See also **RESOURCE CENTRE NEWS** following]

[ds.dial.pipex.com/harden/weblibs.html](http://ds.dial.pipex.com/harden/weblibs.html)

For UK Libraries with a Web presence – a gorgeous (no other word!) website which advises you to pay an online visit to Gateshead Libraries, the best UK public library web site by far

[sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad](http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad)

An interesting website if you are trying to track down the words of folksongs.

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

A most extraordinary collection of the words of popular and folk songs from over 40 countries

[www.classicreader.com](http://www.classicreader.com)

Here you can read in full great works of literature by authors such as Dickens, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, and

many others. The collection currently contains 833 books and 1179 short stories by 215 authors. New works are added to the collection on a regular basis, many at the suggestion of readers. Very easy to use.



## SIGNPOST UPDATED

A year ago, SOURCES informed its readers about a U3A service known as SIGNPOST. One or two of the contact details have recently changed, so we are pleased to repeat the information. In the words of Tom Holloway, who devised and maintains the service ...

*What is SIGNPOST? Just a single page email listing some useful websites, plus the occasional National Office announcement. Hardly the sort of thing to clog up your mailbox, but handy enough to be able to include in your own local group newsletter. Some secretaries even print it up in a large format and just stick it up on their notice-board.*

*To subscribe (free of charge) simply send the one word message "subscribe" to this email address: [signpost-request@worldu3a.org](mailto:signpost-request@worldu3a.org). Back issues of SIGNPOST will be found at [worldu3a.org/signpost](http://worldu3a.org/signpost).*

Here is a taster from Signpost No.39 (Jan 2004):  
<http://ComputerAccessible.com>



## SOURCES PUBLICATION DATES

Sources currently appears three times a year, with publication dates in November, March and June. A subscription to SOURCES is free of charge. Please contact your local Committee or the National Office for an official subscription form.



## STANDING COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION REPORT - October 03

**The report covers only one meeting, that on 28 October, because the December meeting was cancelled due to problems with the venue.**

The newly appointed Chairman of the SCE, Shirley Thew, began the meeting by welcoming new members Jenny Clark and John Cook and also Audrey Jancovic who was attending as the representative of the Development Sub-committee. In her report the Chairman mentioned that she had attended a meeting to launch the new V&A group visit service; the 2004 Summer School preparations are well in hand; a Subject Networks Awareness Day is being planned for 19 February at a venue in Bath and a U3A

member had featured in a Daily Express/NIACE publicity project featuring opportunities for older learners.

The summary of the results from the first stage of the Survey of U3A Learning was discussed (reported above in Sources) and the comments included: - a 72% response was thought to be satisfactory; it was pleasing to note that U3As made very little recourse to the use of external experts/academics and that the U3A programmes were 'consumer led' rather than 'provider led'.

Further developments with the Museum Projects were reported covering the Greater London area (Jenny Clark), in Brighton (Sophie Deakin-Smith) and in Salisbury (Phyllis Babb). It was agreed that Jenny Clark's paper 'The U3A Shared Learning Projects - from museums and galleries to gardens and standing stones' should be included in the Subject Start Up Leaflets series available from the National Office.

Other items discussed included: -

- Revised 'terms of reference' for the SCE
- Fund raising projects
- 2004 Conference outline programme
- A programme of Subject Network study day programmes covering Creative Writing, Oral History, Jazz, Geology and European Studies
- On Line Learning developments including a new course by Audrey Loraine, entitled 'Visiting Artists in Rome'

*Len Street*



## "SHARING IDEAS" - THE LEARNING SUPPORT NETWORK

**(report from the Learning Support Group – a sub-committee of SCE)**

The launch of the Learning Support Network at the York Conference in 2003 was well documented in the last edition of SOURCES. In November 2003 the members of the Network met for their first annual meeting since the launch, in what turned out to be a very lively and interesting occasion. It was an opportunity to review progress and to look at ways of further publicising their role. In order to emphasise the dual nature of the Networkers' role – that of both advising and learning – it was decided that the phrase "sharing ideas" should be added to the name of the Learning Support Network. It is hoped to develop this notion of sharing ideas by the creation of an on-line, searchable resource with contributions from members themselves on all aspects of group learning. The members of the Learning Support Network will want to learn as much as possible about the U3As in their locality in order to help with the development of this Resource.

Further ways of publicising the role of the Network were also agreed. Information will be sent through the business mailings and more information will appear in U3A News. In addition, members will take part in Regional Contact meetings and hope to be invited to attend regional meetings also. Network members will explore the possibility of holding events in their locality as well as the practicality of setting up e-mail contacts where appropriate.

One of the most interesting parts of the day was the opportunity to learn of Learning Support developments in different parts of the country. Joyce Gibson reported on a very interesting and successful day event which she organised in Bangor, Northern Ireland. It was attended by 126 U3A members including 22 from Crossmaglen, a sensitive border area. The event was an opportunity to exchange ideas and had several aims, including clarifying perceptions of the *Objects and Principles* as well as emphasising the importance of "adult learning". Mike Long spoke on the subject of "Why U3A is different".

Doug Jones (Wales) reported on a planned series of Study Days, the first of which has already taken place in Bangor. The second is being arranged by the Borders group and a third by Cardiff and neighbouring U3As. The Welsh Assembly is developing a strategy for inter-generational learning and a Directory is being drafted to include both U3A and University provision.

Jenny Clark (Greater London) is also co-ordinator of the museum research projects and she explained her rationale for wanting the Learning Support Network to help with publicity, information and advice. These projects are developing rapidly countrywide and are extending their scope beyond museums. Jenny has prepared leaflets with guidelines for anyone wishing to set up a similar project. To reflect all these developments the future name for the projects will be "Shared Learning Projects".

Karen Cannon (Scotland) is hoping to hold a Study Day for group leaders when funds become available. We were particularly interested to hear of a pilot project in her locality to extend U3A provision to 4<sup>th</sup> Agers in residential accommodation. Karen will report on the progress of this pilot project.

The members of the Learning Support Network will continue to exchange ideas via e-mail and a meeting has been arranged for November 2004.

## CONTACTS

### **East Midlands: Ken Mursell**

Tel: 01455 556626 Email: kmursell@btopenworld.com

### **London: Jenny Clark**

Tel: 0208 346 3751 Email: jenmal@connectfree.co.uk

### **N. Ireland: Joyce Gibson**

Tel: 02891 462043

Email: joyce-gibson@UTVinternet.com

### **North East: Jean Riley**

Tel: 01904 633649 Email: jeanriley@ukonline.uk.com

### **North West: Eric Barnes**

Tel: 0151 6085885 Email: eric-f-barnes@tiscali.co.uk

### **Scotland: Karen Cannon**

Tel/Fax: 01738 840606 Email: bandk@tesco.net

### **South East: Edna Wright**

Tel: 01903 753696 Email: wrighton@freezone.co.uk

### **South West: Ian Searle**

Tel: 01209 210220 Email: ian\_searle@lineone.net

### **Thames Valley: Don Rankin**

Tel: 01844 346715 Email: don.rankin@tesco.net

### **The East: Shirley Thew**

Tel: 01268 761613 Email: shirleythewuk@yahoo.co.uk

### **Wales: Doug Jones**

Tel: 01656 657571 Email: jay3deekay@aol.com

### **Wessex: Anne Marie Seacroft**

Tel: 01722 324397 Email: amseacroft@onetel.net

For the **Mercia** locality please continue to contact the Learning Support Group via the National Office:

*Elaine Williams (Convenor)*

*Contact: Elaine Williams, U3A Learning Support,  
Third Age Trust, 19 East Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1QH or  
e-mail u3alearningsupport@tesco.net*



## ICT SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

The use of **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** is opening up exciting ways in which U3A study group leaders and members can be helped in their self-help learning. As the Chairman of the ICT Sub-Committee of the NEC., I have been very impressed with what is already being done in this direction by many U3As.

The Sub-Committee has recently set out a strategy for encouraging the use of ICT by the U3A movement. The NEC has agreed that, from time to time, a Newsletter should be issued setting out new ideas and developments in this field. The first such Newsletter has recently been sent to all U3As. Copies should be available from your local Committee. This article picks out those aspects of the Newsletter that seem especially appropriate for SOURCES.

**The case for the extended use of ICT.** The Sub-Committee has conducted a survey of how much use of ICT there is at present. Its use is widespread and developing. The case has already been established for using ICT to provide more educational material and support for study group leaders and for members. But there is still much scope for further encouragement, especially given the need to meet the expectations of future intakes of new members, who will certainly be more conversant with ICT on retirement than most of their predecessors.

**The Website.** The U3A Website is much visited but perhaps its full value is not widely enough appreciated. It already contains much valuable factual and ICT training material and the range of this is being increased all the time. It also provides continuing access to back issues of publications such as Sources and Chairman's letters. The Resources Centre catalogue can now be consulted on line and, subject to suitable security arrangements, Resources Centre material can be ordered through the Website. The Subject Networks are now able to take advantage of much improved arrangements for publicising their role through the Website. So, readers are urged to explore the U3A Website and to discover what might be in it for them.

**Material from the World Wide Web.** Many of you will have already discovered what a wealth of information there is on the World Wide Web. In such fields as history, geology, archaeology and art there is so much readily available information that can be drawn upon in our self-help studies. Those who have heard the presentation "Web Weaving" given by Jean Thompson and Tom Holloway will already know how easily this material can be downloaded and used in graphic and exciting group presentations. Incidentally, Tom Holloway publishes a monthly e-mail, u3a-signpost, which provides pointers to useful websites. To subscribe, write to tom@worldu3a.org and ask to be added to the subscription list.

**Online learning.** Good progress is being made in the provision, jointly with the Australians, of U3A developed online courses with an online tutor. But the number of tutors is limited and not all of us can find the time to follow a tutored course. So, increasingly, information used by the online tutors or of a more general nature is being made available online for downloading and use by U3A groups, thus multiplying the benefits of this programme. You can find out more from the U3A website and the back page of Sources.

**The U3A CD-ROM.** Much of the useful information available on the U3A website and much more has now been made available on a CD ROM with a sale price of £5.00. An updated version will be available from the National Office shortly.

**Multimedia Presentations to Study Groups.** The use of such programmes as PowerPoint to make multimedia presentations to Study Groups is already recognised as a very effective approach to education. Material drawn from the World Wide Web or from CD-ROM encyclopaedias can be embodied in such presentations, as can photographs or pictures from books when scanned into a PC. We must all be on the look out for improved techniques that could make such presentations easier and hopefully cheaper to mount. As regards equipment, many U3As have

received grants from Awards for All, often for the purchase of such multimedia equipment. Advice is available on how best to go about seeking such grants.

**To conclude,** we in the U3A movement are all trying to find new ways to help each other in our self-help learning. I am convinced that many of us have the ability to use Information and Communications Technologies to make our study groups that much more effective. I hope that U3A committees will continue to explore what is or could become available to develop this aspect of our educational work.

*Ivor Manley*



**The Editorial Panel of SOURCES has determined that, in future, Committees and Sub-Committees will be taking it in turns to report. This will result in there being only one Committee report per issue, thereby releasing more space for contributions on the activities of interest/study groups around the country. Please keep those contributions rolling in!**



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## U3A TRAVEL NETWORK

**T**he Committee of the Travel Network is a sub committee of the U3A National Executive Committee. Committee Members provide advice to the NEC and local groups about travel matters and also organise and lead holidays, with an educational or cultural theme, which are open to all U3A members and their travelling companions.

General advice to local groups has now been placed on the U3A national website and can be found at <http://db.u3a.org.uk/networks/travel/travel.htm>.

For further help and advice, please contact Tom Warren, 69A Freshfield Road, Formby, Liverpool, L37 7BG



## BBC LANGUAGE COURSES

**[Gloria Blackburne, Network Co-ordinator for Languages, has sent in this notice from the BBC.]**

**T**he BBC is constantly expanding and updating its range of language courses and resources on television (BBC2 night-time) and online (visit the website: [www.bbc.co.uk/languages](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages)). We currently offer materials in French, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese and Japanese and also, from 2004, in Chinese and Greek.



To help tutors and learners keep up-to-date with everything we offer, we have produced a free CD-ROM with a video sample of every course and further information on other materials and resources for tutors.

We would be pleased to send a copy, free of charge, to any U3A language group in this country which emails us at: [learning.database@bbc.co.uk](mailto:learning.database@bbc.co.uk). Please use Languages as the subject and remember to include the full postal address.

We are always grateful to receive comments about our television and online resources: just email us at [languages@bbc.co.uk](mailto:languages@bbc.co.uk)

David Wilson

Executive Producer, BBC Languages



## RESOURCE CENTRE NEWS

During the past year I have received several requests for materials to help Etymology groups who are studying the formation and sense of words. As a result I started to collect resources relevant to this subject. We have had, for some time, a set of nine BBC videos on the history and development of the English language entitled 'The Story of English'. We also have the CD and book set written by Melvyn Bragg and Simon Elmes: 'The Routes of English' covering the same subject.

Some groups enjoy listening to spoken language and we have examples of Anglo-Saxon, Middle English and Elizabethan English on tape or CD. You can hear Beowulf, the Canterbury Tales or the Faerie Queen



read as their authors expected them to be heard. There is also a video 'Knowledge About Language,' produced for schools, showing how much language has changed over the centuries and also looking at modern speech and its links with personal identity.

The study of the English language often leads to the study of literature and we

have a great deal of material to support this. Recently I purchased an audiocassette pack: 'The History of English Literature' read by Derek Jacobi and other actors. Even better than hearing an actor is the voice of

the original author. I have copies of the British Library CDs which caused such a stir when they were released this summer because they are historic recordings of writers and poets born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You can hear Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells, along with many other famous writers, reading their own work. All the material I have mentioned, and much more, is on our Literature list available free from the Resource Centre.

## HISTORY

The British Library is a treasure trove of resources and I have mentioned before, in SOURCES, the videos and CDs which they produce. One of the most interesting is a CD called 'The Century in Sound' on which you can hear the great events and personalities of the twentieth century, such as Christabel Pankhurst and David Lloyd George, or, live as it happened, a First World War battle and man's first landing on the moon. These are all recordings from the National Sound Archive and would be of interest to groups studying the history or politics of the twentieth century.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

We recently purchased the six video BBC set 'Exploring Photography'. This series, presented by Bryn Campbell, explores the creative possibilities of still photography and there are individual videos on Portraits, Landscapes, Social Documentary and so on. For a full list of our photography resources please contact the address below.

## U3A PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

During the summer the South Bucks U3A made a promotional CD-Rom, using PowerPoint to show to non-members in their area to advertise their many activities and interest groups. There may already be U3As making similar material but if it is a new idea to your group and you would like to see how South Bucks created their presentation, with a view to making something similar for your own use, I have a copy in the Resource Centre available for loan.

I am always very pleased to be offered resources, made by group leaders for their own members, which could be used by other U3As. They will be added to stock and promoted in our subject lists just like commercially produced material. The only criteria are that they should be of general interest and robust enough to withstand frequent postal journeys to our borrowers.

## USER SURVEY

Very many of our users will, by now, have completed a questionnaire received with their loans and asking about various aspects of our service. This

survey will continue until March 2004 but we ask that borrowers do not complete more than one form each and ignore any subsequent forms they receive. I would like to thank all those of you who have taken the time to answer the questions.

The Resource Centre has grown ever busier over the last five years but until now we have had no way of knowing how effective the service is, and how useful the material is for the groups who request it. The statistical analysis of the results will take place in the spring and I hope to report on the results in a later issue of SOURCES.

*Elizabeth Gibson, Resource Centre Manager, Third Age Trust  
The Old Municipal Buildings, 19 East Street Bromley Kent  
BR1 1QH  
Tel :020 8315 0199 (Tuesdays and Thursdays only)  
E-mail: resource.centre@u3a.org.uk*



## **Standing Committee for Education**

### **2003 SURVEY OF U3A LEARNING SUMMARY OF RESULTS FROM THE FIRST STAGE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

**The thinking that led to the 2003 Survey of Learning Methodologies using DfES funding.**

**A**t the time the first survey of the membership was undertaken in 2001 the Third Age Trust knew very little about the members of the U3As. The 2001 Survey, carried out anonymously, produced a snap-shot view of facts such as: the age profile, the gender balance, length of membership, number of study/activity groups individual member had joined, and so on. This will provide benchmark information if at some time in the future the NEC engages in a similar survey as the movement continues to grow.

During the last seven years the SCE has pursued a policy of encouraging learning in the U3As by developing existing support arrangements that underpin learning (such as the Subject Networks and the Subject Start Up leaflets). It has also initiated new support arrangements such as the Resource Centre, Sources, Group Leaders' meetings, Study Days, Group Leader Support, Summer Schools and, most recently, the Learning Support Group and Learning Support Network. If these services are to be sustained and continue to meet U3A needs effectively it is important to find out more about how U3As organise their learning activities and make use of the available

support as well as what further support would be beneficial to them.

#### **2003 Survey**

This survey is being undertaken in two stages. The first sought information from the U3A Study Group Co-ordinators about their role, the range of U3A study/activity groups, the use of external resources, leadership and the ways in which interests are pursued. The second part is to focus on a statistical sample of Study Group Leaders and a sample of their group members. A further report will follow.

#### **Some of the Results from Stage I**

A total of 517 questionnaires were sent out and 374 were returned – a response rate of 72%.

Of the responding U3As that were identified:

24% were small, 46 % were medium and 30% were large U3As

39% were formed in 1992 or earlier, 29% in 1993/97 and 31% in 1998/03

21% were located in the North or Scotland, 18% in Midlands or Wales, 60% in the South

#### **Study Group Co-ordinator**

At least a quarter of U3As have no one designated as Study Group Co-ordinator and rely on the chairman or secretary to carry out such functions as are needed. The five most common functions of Study Group Co-ordinators emerged as:

Help to set up new groups/encourage members to start new groups (40%), Support/encourage Group Leaders, give guidance/help with problems (39%), Find new GLs; encourage members to become GLs (22%), Produce list/programme of all group and their details (18%), Find and book suitable venues (17%).

The general view was that the job was fairly easy and 40% wanted no further support from any internal source. Of those that did want further support 46% wanted it from their own U3A with the commonest desire was more people willing to act as leader and or start a new group, 26% wanted it from the U3A Region and the commonest desire was for more sharing of information and experiences, 25% wanted more support from the National Office - a build up of the range of resources at the Resource Centre.

Over 7 out of 10 U3As combined with another U3A for one purpose or another and the three most common reasons were: To exchange information (44%), to run joint Groups or fill vacancies in each other's Groups (33%), to run joint outings (32%)

#### **External Resources**

Individual U3As have clearly benefited from links with institutions in their locality. Use of equipment,

rooms and other facilities, as well as the occasional provision of tutors, have been the main benefits. The percentage of responding U3As for various types of institution were: School (34%), College (30%), Museum (23%), University (22%), Public Library (15%), Church( 14%), Local Council (9%)

## Leadership issues

Finding Group Leaders was one of the SGC's key functions and when asked by which method they were most often found 'volunteering' was by far the most universal method. Of the pro-active methods there was a diversity of experience.

People volunteering themselves as leaders (88%), Announcement at general meetings (52%), Chairman/committee canvassing members (43%), SGC canvassing (43%), Willingness stated on new membership applications (40%), Recommendations to SGC (34%)

15% of U3As have had recourse to payments to find a leader but most commonly this was for activities such as Keep Fit, Tai Chi, Computing, Painting/drawing, Yoga, and Dancing.

7 out of 10 SGCs claimed that their U3A committee had a conscious leadership policy, with perhaps more effort going into encouraging existing GLs (67%) than into recruiting new ones (54%).

The vast majority of SGCs supported their GLs by being available for contact, if needed (84%).

## Ways of pursuing interests

Respondents were presented with a list of ten 'ways of pursuing an interest' and asked to give each a mark out of 10 to show their frequency of use within their own U3A. The average mark for each method across all responses indicates its overall level of popularity, as follows:

Informal study/discussion on an agreed theme with an input from all group members (7.3), Structured study/discussion, steered by one member but with input from all (6.9), Informal visits to places of general interest (5.8), Social/leisure activities in which learning is not really emphasised (5.8), Formal study led by a fellow U3A member (5.7), Visits to specific places as part of a structured programme (5.4), Sporting/physical activities (4.6), Formal presentations by a variety of outside experts (3.4), Planned examination of documentary or physical data (3.2), Formal study course led by an outside expert/academic (1.9).

## U3A Equipment

In response to the question asking about U3A ownership of equipment to aid presentations the commonest items were: -

Screens, Slide projector, Microphones, OHP, Video player, Music centre, Computer projector. Thereafter

5% of U3As or fewer possessed items such as laptop, scanner, photocopier, TV, keyboard, hearing loop, digital camera. Just over a quarter did not own any such items.

## Study/activity groups

Respondents were asked to list all the study or activity groups currently offered by their U3A together with the numbers attending each group. 8807 groups were listed by 320 U3As, giving an average of 28 groups per U3A.

The most popular groups were: Music Appreciation (498), Walking/rambling (492), French language (444), Painting/drawing (371), Bridge (314), Computing (291), Book reading (284), Needlecrafts (267), Gardening (251), Scrabble (223), Lunch club (218), Art Appreciation/Art History (214), German language (209), Literature (203), History, general (201), Poetry/Poetry Reading (197), Play Reading (196), History, Local (192), History, Family (188), Spanish language (181), Writing (173), Discussion (163), Theatre going (156), Dancing (148), Science (130), Italian language (127), Current Affairs (112), Singing/Choir (106)

## Size of Study Groups

1-5 members (710 groups), 6-10 (3299), 11-15 (2035), 16-20 (1076), 21-30 (739), 31-40 (317), 41-50 (158), 51-75 (116), 76-100 (33), 101+ (33)

This yields a figure of 15 as the mean size of all study groups covered here. Almost two-thirds of all study groups number between 6 and 15 members.

## Number of Study Groups per U3A (Total 320 U3As)

216 U3As (out of 320) have 30 or fewer study groups, while 103 have more than 30. The average is 28.

*Len Street/SCE/Oct03*

**[A fuller version of this report has been produced. The National Office has details. For purposes of comparison, the Chairman's Letter No.18 for November 2003 reported that there were then 526 U3As nationwide with a total membership of 131,000. – Editor]**



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### ART

Barber Institute Study Day (Birmingham)  
Tues 20<sup>th</sup> & Thurs 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2004  
Details: Lyndsay Orton 0121 4147111

### SCIENCE

U3A Explores Science at the Ri  
Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2004  
Details: National Office (NOT the Ri itself)

Seminar: Science, Transport & Trade (Abergavenny)  
Mon 21<sup>st</sup> to Thurs 24<sup>th</sup> June 2004  
Details: Ken Bates 0115-9241156

### SUMMER SCHOOLS 2004

University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham  
Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> – Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> July  
Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> – Friday 30<sup>th</sup> July  
Details: National Office

### NATIONAL FOLK DANCE NETWORK

Halsway Manor (Somerset) Dance and Walking Week  
Monday 24<sup>th</sup> to Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May  
Details: Roy Phillips 01225 420673

## UK U3A ONLINE COURSES 2004

Full details and application forms can be found on the National U3A Web site at [www.u3a.org.uk/~courses/online](http://www.u3a.org.uk/~courses/online)

### TUTORED COURSES [Fee £10 per course]

These have 8 Units issued weekly in which participants need to work at least 5 hours each week, in collaboration with each other and the tutor.

CREATIVE WRITING: Short Stories (2-weekly, from 2 May)  
ENGLISH: The Language of the World (Pilot, from 9 May)  
VISITING ARTISTS IN ROME (Pilot, from 16 May)  
ARTISTS OF SPAIN (From 23 May))

### UNTUTORED COURSES for Individuals or for Group Leaders [Fee £5 per course]

The Units of the two Pilot courses above can be downloaded as they are being issued.

The following are available at any time  
CREATIVE WRITING: FICTION  
CREATIVE WRITING: POETRY  
CREATIVE WRITING: SHORT STORIES  
DESIGN IN YOUR LIFE  
ITALIAN ART 1400-1600

VENICE AND HER ARTISTS

ARTISTS OF SPAIN

UNDERSTANDING COMPUTERS [with tutor for discussion only]

### COURSE FRAMEWORKS [Free]

These are topics suitable for group study but in note form only. Suggestions are given on how to search the web to fill out the details.

GENETICS  
LIGHTHOUSES

*The Third Age Trust holds the copyright of all the above courses; they must not be circulated without permission.*

### LINKS TO OTHER Free COURSE MATERIAL

WARTIME REMINISCENCES  
MEDIÆVAL TIMBER-FRAMED HOUSES  
VICTORIAN ART

## AUSTRALIAN ONLINE COURSES

Five places are reserved on each for UK members of U3A.  
Apply as above.

Course	Numbers	Start	End	Units	Course Leader
The Night Sky	5-15	3 May 2004	14 Aug 2004	8	Win Howard
Religions of the World	5-15	7 Jun 2004	18 Sep 2004	8	Gwen Banks
Autobiography and Journalling	10-15	5 Jul 2004	16 Oct 2004	8	Cate Russell

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19 East Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1QH

Tel: 020 8466 6139

Email: [national.office@u3a.org.uk](mailto:national.office@u3a.org.uk)

**[You're right if you thought the answer would be here (see p.4): It is 'TARSOMETATARSUS**