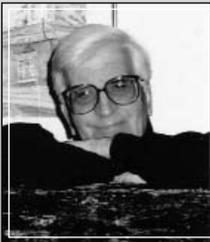


'The architect can only advise his client to plant vines': Frank Lloyd Wright

Shapes and Shades in Architecture

When setting up a North London U3A, we had to decide what interest groups to offer. I had been a practising architect so my contribution was obvious. However, grave misgivings began to materialise in the wee small hours



By
Wilson Briscoe
North London U3A

Teaching full-time students, intending to qualify, and supported by libraries, visual aids, workshops, studio and technical support was one thing, but what did 'architecture' mean to elderly people meeting in a small rented room?

I decided that a group of six to twelve members run on a seminar principle, working on projects and reporting back, would be the answer. At the enrolment, 28 students registered. Back to the drawing board!

Not wishing to disappoint anyone, I realised it would have to become some kind of informal lecture. However, the information aspects of our work would be a problem.

Required reading was out. I could not expect members to buy books, and local libraries could not cope with the demand. The answer proved to be illustrated handouts relating to the subject matter under discussion. This tended to be time consuming but much appreciated. Obviously this does not inhibit the recommendation of books where applicable.

Videos and slides are excellent in communicating some ideas and images but are not always appropriate for a particular course. Also, I did not have enough of either to cover our range – and turning off the lights invites dozing.

So I decided to draw to illustrate a topic, initially with felt pens on pinned-up lining paper until we could afford a whiteboard.

However, the thrust of our interest is best served by experiencing a building at first hand. It may not be St Peter's in Rome or the Taj Mahal, but a modest town hall or a Georgian terrace can tell us a great deal about the spirit and ambitions of the Age.

So yet another principle was established. We would go out as a group as often as possible, but each topic would be structured to encourage members to look closely at the buildings in their day-to-day lives.

So much for how to run the group, but what were we going to learn? The first thought was to introduce members to various definitions of architecture by famous, and infamous, experts.

An art for all to learn because all are concerned with it

John Ruskin. Not a bad start – that is why we are here.

The masterly correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light
Le Corbusier. Could this be a definition for sculpture as well?

I call architecture frozen music

Johann Goethe. Nice and poetic but what does it mean?

(Is music melted architecture?)

Moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself

William Morris. A kind of Fabian view, people ordering the environment for the benefit of people.

Stone documents, an expression of the utility and power of the nation

Adolf Hitler. So that is why Hitler's and Stalin's architecture looks so awful. Does that suggest that glowing plastic can represent the economic power of McDonalds?

Architecture is the decoration of building

Sir George Gilbert Scott. Does that mean that a Homebase garden shed is not architecture?

Commodity, Firmness and Delight

Sir Henry Wootton, 17th century diplomat and spy with taste. Still the best, but whose delight?

So where are we now? Clearly architecture is a complex process, probably including a wide range of influences and inputs: political, religious and cultural factors; technical options depending on the availability of materials and labour; climatic factors (increasingly with a 'green' shade); siting and location of a building; planning and building controls; furniture; landscape; cost/time.

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In the next issue

The next issue of *Sources* (No 31) will be posted to those on the database in June 2007. The special theme will be Music.

Contributions are considered for inclusion by an editorial panel. Please submit them not later than 13 April – via the national office or direct to the editor at:

Gelt Mill House, Castle Carrock, Brampton CA8 9NQ

You can send them by e-mail to tony.thornton@virgin.net (preferred), on disc or cleanly typed suitable for scanning (but hand written words are also acceptable). Every effort will be made to acknowledge them.

Looking ahead to Issue 32 in November 2007, the focus will be on Crafts.

How to receive *Sources*

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You can also subscribe online at u3a.org.uk

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

Feedback

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

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In my view

Tony Thornton

Editor

There is a journalistic ratio that says that: for every one person that contacts a publication to voice their opinion, 1,000 others agree with them.

During the past year, I have received several kind messages from people who have 'discovered' *Sources*, so there must be a large, hidden endorsement for our efforts.

National Office has also received hundreds of requests from U3A members that want to be put on the mailing list.

The print run has increased

from 3,000 to 8,000 in two years so here's a good opportunity to welcome our new readers.

The thing that will strike you (as it did me when I became editor) is just how active our groups are. There is a vast army of them that the others don't know about, which *Sources* is revealing.

But it isn't just education that U3A is providing for its members. It has also given a certain type of individual a new lease of life. I refer to those who are skilled in

organisation and planning.

In this issue, and the last, the stories show how groups could not function without those capable of handling the logistics of educational visits.

The underlying thread that runs through these stories is that the impetus for U3As comes from just a few people – the organisers.

Without their efforts the U3A would never have got

started, and continues only because of the hard work they put into it.

Of course we do know this, but I'm so pleased that *Sources* can spotlight them.

In the next issue we are focussing on Music. This was last done four years ago so there must be new groups that have started – whose exploits will be eagerly awaited by our new readers.

Continued from page 1

It can go on and we have not yet mentioned 'Art' or 'Taste', where Architectural criticism can get quite nasty. The Prince of Wales's 'carbuncle' comment springs to mind and, more historically, Wren's 'inverted piss pot of a dome', as it was reported.

Out of this confusion came the decision to deal more fully with the built environment. The title *The Shape of London* enabled us to look at local architecture from different angles: geology, geography, transport, materials, current political decisions, or indeed any other topic that appealed to the group. Another advantage is that within the group there may well be someone with expert knowledge able to contribute.

It may be of interest to illustrate some of our topics. Firstly, the overall pattern of architectural development, which can be undertaken either by a chronological study of style development, or by a typological approach.

The former is a traditional survey of building from prehistory to the present day. Nowadays the Open University, Internet and a variety of excellent books are available.

A useful book I recommend is *Architecture, A Crash Course* by Hilary French, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-84022-7. It's aimed at the layman. In 140 illustrated pages she covers the range of Western architectural development.

Typology is a study of the evolution of a particular built form, such as churches, houses or railway stations. Popular in our group is the study of theatre, which involves comparing the development of the function, acting and scenery in Greek, Roman, Shakespearian, Restoration, 19th century and modern theatre. Afterwards, perhaps, a visit to the National where all three stages provide for any production. Typology is a spatial study, nothing to do with style, though connections can always be made.

For us, geology/geography studies introduce the last Ice Age. 10,000 years ago the glacier over north London melted and left 'the northern heights' – the hills of Highgate and Hampstead, and the yellow clay of the Thames valley. This is why north London has an underground transport system and the south an overhead railway.

London has no stone and so began as a timber framed, wattle and daub environment up to the Great Fire. Then it turned to the yellow clay for bricks.



The architecture group visits the new Court 2 at Wimbledon

Roofing had to be made from expensive imported tiles from Sussex until the Industrial Revolution, when the new transport systems roofed London in cheap Welsh slates.

Development of the different materials in building, stone, brickwork, slate and metal is of particular interest. If you look at glass, it starts with early medieval efforts of assembling small pieces into a framework of lead.

You then carry on through the Georgian period, where larger sheets can be held in a timber frame, up to the unlimited size and variety of the all-singing-and-dancing glass of today.

Each development radically affects the appearance of building. The same approach can be used for any other architectural material or feature such as roofs, doorways and staircases.

And now to Sir Henry's 'Delight'! Those of us who belong to architecture and similar groups do so because we are interested in the character and quality of our environment, though we may not agree with what we find.

That is unsurprising, and we are entitled to our opinions. By the same token, most of us feel happier making judgements based on knowledge or reason, even if we end up backing our heart and not our head.

Part of the group's work attempts to identify some of the options available to the architect in the design process: framed structure versus load bearing structure; heavy or light weight construction; steel or concrete frame; classic overall shape with detailed planning within it (Millennium Dome);

or various volumes assembled together to create a shape (National Theatre).

We tend at some level to be conservative, taking comfort from familiarity. In design terms this would be seen as 'iconic'. A young Eskimo (Inuit?) sees his father build an igloo, and when he grows up he builds one exactly the same – that is what a house looks like.

In the 19th century the internal combustion engine replaced the horse in carriages. It is put exactly where the horse used to be and its power is measured in horses (4HP). It takes a goodly time before people exploit its versatility and produce a modern 4x4 with the driver inside.

So I hope the bottom line in the group is never to say that it does not look like a church (house/prison/airport) until they have thought it through, when they can then say they hate it.

A number of architecture interest groups have sought advice on their study methods and patterns without the help of someone with a building background. It may be that our experience at North London will generate ideas, some of which can be summarised as follows:

- a) Think built environment of which architecture is a part.
- b) Wherever you live, there is a quarry of information and interest around you.
- c) Think of the different topics which can be used to develop an awareness for groups or individuals.
- d) Reading, videos and slides are fine – but as Martin Funnell said in the November 2006 issue of *Sources*: "It is essential to get inside buildings to feel, hear, smell and touch them."

Architecture, Architects and U3A

I wonder what image the word Architecture conjures up in your mind



Martin Funnell:
Merton U3A

Architecture
Network
Coordinator

Classical wonders like the Taj Mahal or Modernist visions like The British Library

For me it can be a mêlée of classical and antique ruins, in bright colour under a Mediterranean sun, ready for the perfect camera shot.

They invite me to wander amongst arcades and domes, from cool dark corridors, up grand staircases, into vast sparkling ballrooms, glancing at vistas through windows and hearing the distant sounds of splashing fountains – and perhaps classical music as in one of those overblown BBC2 productions.

Or it can be a ‘Modernist’ vision with thin columns, glassy walls, abstract modern art, and endless spectacles through carpeted spaces to manicured lawns and calm lakes.

As a student it was the latter, for we regarded the past as outmoded and misguided. We dutifully copied the examples drawn on the blackboard by our tutor, but admired only the Gothic style – for its structural integrity, (though I still question the sense of building soaring cathedrals out of tiny stones).

We were looking to the future – to clearing the rubble and building a new life after the war, creating cities and towns where everyone was happy and life could blossom.

Our inspiration came from the iconic sketches of Le Corbusier and a sprinkling of new concrete and glass houses that were built in the 30s, mostly seen from illustrations – only Bexhill pavilion could be visited.

For us the 1951 Exhibition was an eye-opener, with the Festival Hall, soon to be followed by Coventry Cathedral,

Leicester University Engineering Block, Millbank Tower – new masterpieces that kept our spirits soaring.

But life in an architect’s office soon changed our view of architecture. Only after five years of struggling to detail and build other people’s designs did we get the chance to design a whole school from scratch. Eventually this took only a few days, but it still took three months with an assistant to produce the mountain of drawings that were necessary to build it.

At the same time we were constantly on the phone with contractors, talking about variation orders, plodding across muddy sites in gum boots, puzzling with a friendly clerk of works over a drainage problem and having cosy chats with the contractor in the pub after a meeting.

Things could get legal too – claims, counter claims, tense meetings and explanations to the boss.

Later in life it was Cost Yardsticks, Planning and Building Regulations, guaranteed to dampen the inspiration of all but the maddest amongst us.

I escaped eventually to the sane world of surveying, and eight years scrambling across the joists of many of the most intriguing of historic buildings. But that’s another story and another absorbing branch of architecture.

Since then architecture has gone a bit wilder, freed by computer to do almost anything, and inclined to whimsy and meaningless complication. Much of the new stuff continues to be designed by brash commercial firms, but there are good new designers and a few old

‘names’ that still get it right every time.

However, retirement and U3A have enabled me to catch up with what we missed as students. The process of ‘mugging up’ things for talks has strengthened my awareness and enjoyment of the past. Travel too has enabled me to climb around and inside many past wonders from the Americas, Asia and Europe – getting close to buildings is the only way to enjoy them.

I cannot speak for the visions of the other U3A architecture groups, but I suspect that many of them enjoy working their way through European History using the standard books, and that others like to explore the byways connected with buildings.

Personally, I chose to get my group to look to the future, and to the attitudes of the creative architect of today. This we did (for my wife and I had some good contacts) by inviting ex-colleagues to talk to us and by visiting the new buildings emerging around London.

Open House and the Twentieth Century Society offered more examples across the country, and *Grand Designs* on Channel 4 showed for the first time how good things were made.

The great British public has been confused by the media (including the BBC) about *design*, and I have felt a sort of missionary obligation to try to close the gap of awareness.

Retirement and U3A offer a wonderful opportunity to explore the multi-faceted delights of architecture – past, present and perhaps future.

For project suggestions see page 19

By David Howell
Wellington U3A
Architecture Group

This popular group was formed five years ago. There are about 100 members with a usual attendance of 70

From September to April, monthly illustrated lectures are offered on a far-ranging list of subjects.

Recent examples include: Historic Churches of Somerset and Devon, British Castles, The Railway Age, The Victorian Legacy, Classical Architecture of Greece and Rome, Local Style in English Architecture, French Cathedrals, Baroque and Palladianism in England, Wren and the Rebuilding of London, Georgian Architecture, and The Arts and Craft Movement.

Our current programme is entitled *English Odyssey*, a journey through the architectural styles of England.

During the summer months we visited the Cathedrals at Exeter and Wells, notable houses in the South West, and Prince Charles's township at Poundbury.



ALWAYS LOOK UP

A successful week's coach tour of East Anglia took place in September 2006 to visit some of the region's architectural treasures, including the ancient towns of Lavenham, Long Melford, Saffron Walden, Thaxted, Bury St Edmunds and Ely, with their wonderful churches and cathedrals. Perfect weather throughout was a real bonus.

Elsie Howell: "We believe in good publicity and careful organisation, and without doubt this has contributed to the Group's success.

"We are looking forward to another year of interest and growth, including a further coach tour in the late summer. The venue will be either Norfolk or the Welsh Marches."

The Art Nouveau Church

There is a varied programme in our East Anglian Studies Group that meets monthly at the local Brentwood U3A

It has been running for more than ten years and during each year, there have been many interesting talks and trips. These have taken the group of about 12 people to dozens of buildings, towns and villages in this part of Essex, which probably they wouldn't visit alone.

Last month we arranged a trip to the one and only English Art Nouveau Church at Great Warley near Brentwood.

We began the morning with a talk I gave on the difference between Art Deco and Art Nouveau, to get an understanding of the style they were to see on this conducted tour of the church in the afternoon.

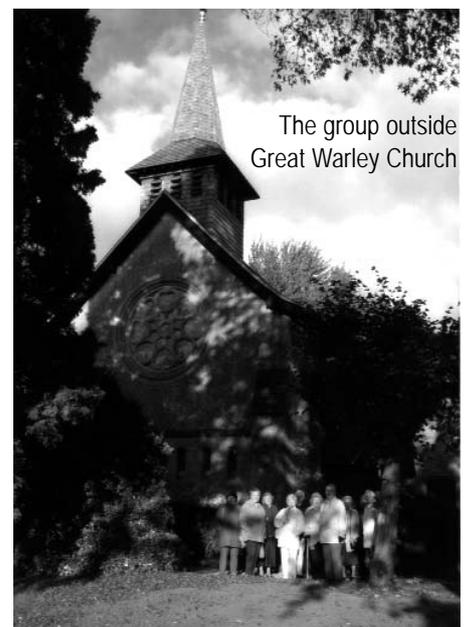
A Mr Evelyn Heseltine financed the plans for the construction of this building in memory of his brother Arnold who died in 1897 aged 45.

Irene Briscoe: Brentwood U3A

The design is based on a church in Guildford, Surrey, but this church was to be decorated in Art Nouveau style (a rather quirky idea!) and not in the style of the period. He employed the architect Mr Harrison Townsend and Mr Reynolds Stephens, both members of the Art Workers Guild.

Mr Fuller Clark and sculptor Henry Poole designed the stained glass windows, and the mother-of-pearl butterfly decorations and mosaics throughout the interior – all in extreme Art Nouveau style.

The Great Warley Church is referred to locally as the Art Nouveau Church, and in the *Art Journal* of March 1905 as: 'the most beautiful building at unity with itself'. Nikolaus Pevsner states in his *Essex Building of England*: 'there is no better example of an Art Nouveau building of its type, one of the most



fascinating church interiors anywhere - the ensemble is a triumph'.

I am sure that everyone enjoyed this memorable visit, and look forward to another interesting programme of visits next year.

Architecture and Town Planning

More and more people are travelling for pleasure. Often that includes visiting cities, villages and buildings that look distinctive in some way.

For decades people have gone to York for its circuit of city walls, so rare in this country, and for its splendid Minster, and to Norwich for its Cathedral, its Gothic churches and harmonious streets.

Others enjoy visiting the towns and villages of the Cotswold Hills with their houses built of yellow stone.

The grand, timber-framed halls of Cheshire and Lancashire, like Little Moreton Hall, are known to some, together with the timber-framed houses of Lavenham and Ipswich in Suffolk.

Yet others prefer Elizabethan and Jacobean brick country houses, or stone-faced 18th century palaces such as Blenheim and Houghton Hall.

Why should there be such a variety of building materials?

Why should a little Essex town, Thaxted, have a huge church? Delving into architectural history reveals that Thaxted in the 14th and 15th centuries was one of the most prosperous towns in Essex. Its church and its splendid Guildhall were just built to match.

Why should London, with its immensely long existence, have scarcely a single timber-frame house surviving within the boundaries of the city?

A visitor's interest in what he or she is looking at becomes better directed and more likely to fix itself in the memory, upon discovering that, after the great fire of London, a city ordinance forbade new construction in timber-frame.

The observant walker begins to notice more paradoxes. Why in London were enormous and magnificent churches, designed by one of the most brilliant architects of his time, Nicholas Hawksmoor, built in poor industrial districts which could never have afforded them – Christ Church Spitalfields or St Anne Limehouse?

This makes sense when it turns out that a change of government at Westminster in 1711 brought in a party determined to demonstrate the prestige of the Church of England, where only non-conformist communities had until then bothered to build chapels.



Why should a little Essex town, Thaxted, have a huge church?

Why was it that at Berwick upon Tweed, guarding the main route from Scotland into England, but remote from invasion by a Continental army, Edward I's town wall was supplemented in the 1550s by arrow-head bastions of the latest Italian Renaissance design? Four of them are still in evidence.

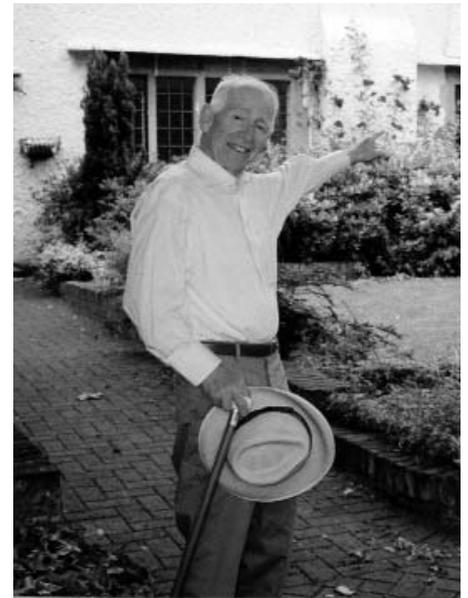
Probing reveals that Mary I took England into a war with France to support her husband Philip of Spain. Philip, one of the most powerful monarchs in Europe, would have had the advice of the most advanced military architect-engineers. Scotland's French regent, closely allied to the King of France, could have sent an invading force into England. Hence the up-to-the-minute precautions.

Today's visitor to the fortress of Palmanova, laid out on this pattern to protect Venice, and still complete, would recognise the link with Berwick.

Comparison with architecture in other countries can be an exciting way of taking a second look at buildings in Britain. The crowstep gable appears on several Norfolk country houses such as Oxburgh Hall of the 1480s and Kirkstead Hall of the 1610s.

The feature is common in Flemish and North German cities such as on the guild houses of Ghent and the Plantin-Moretus printing works in Antwerp.

A large part of English commerce was tied up in Mediaeval and Tudor times



Peter Gotlop
Lecturer at U3A London

with the export of wool, and later cloth, to these cities. Is it not likely that Flemish building ideas rubbed off on the builders on this side of the North Sea?

In the Venetian republic in the 1540s-1570s, Andrea Palladio evolved types of classical country villa and city church with a columned portico suggesting a Roman temple. The style spread. In the 1630s it came into fashion in the Dutch republic, but there for substantial townhouses. Many survive in Leiden and Amsterdam.

Later still, from the 1720s, the restraint and sensitive proportions of Palladio's designs were adopted and adapted especially for great country houses in England and the spa resort of Bath.

On the other hand, you can contrast comparative British restraint towards the exteriors of these show houses with the more spectacular use of concave and convex surfaces, elaborate stucco work and declamatory statuary on the palaces and abbeys of Baroque Austria at the same period.

The difference of spirit reflects differing social and religious conditions. It helps us to put architecture in this country in context instead of just taking it for granted.

Studying the history of architecture and town planning stimulates our ability to evaluate what we see around us and to use our eyes more effectively.

“We must strive to advance by arousing interest in and understanding of the work the architect does. The basis of competent professionalism is a sympathetic and knowledgeable group of amateurs, of non-professional art lovers. It is not my intention to attempt to teach people what is right or wrong, what is beautiful or ugly. I regard all art as a means of expression and that which may be right for one artist may be wrong for another. My object is in all modesty to endeavour to explain the instrument the architect plays on, to show what a great range it has and thereby awaken the senses to its music.”

(Experiencing Architecture by Steen Eiler Rasmussen 1959)



Alan East: Ilkley and District U3A

Down the Ages

This is a statement with which I can wholly concur and which provides the basis for leading the local U3A group who wish to know something more about the development of architecture down the ages.

The subject is one of endless fascination and importance and also one from which we can derive great interest, be it the cottage round the corner or the latest concert hall on the other side of the globe.

Down the ages, the appearance of a structure – a building, a piece of engineering or a painting – has been the predominant basis of judgment or assessment by the man and woman in the street. Today the situation has hardly changed despite the vast amount of information now available via a plethora of electronic devices and global communications on a scale not imagined even ten years ago.

When I retired (or changed direction as I insisted), the opportunity emerged for me to try and demystify slightly the architect's role in society. Sixty years ago when I was a student, society and education provided a setting for my training that today seems like an old sepia photograph in comparison with the marvels of digital photography.

Communications are now instantaneous and global. Travel has become easier and more available to most people



The group at The Craven Arms in Appletreewick, Wharfedale where a cruck barn was being built using traditional local materials and authentic construction methods

and as a consequence, education in the broadest sense is more widely spread, in western society at least. In this context a U3A group leader looking at architecture will without doubt be working with a well informed body of people – to the benefit of all concerned.

One of the other important factors with which we are familiar, is the proliferation of literature on architecture coupled with a growing interest in the subject on popular television.

So where do we start when ‘studying’ the subject in the U3A?

“Start at the beginning and go on to the end then stop,” said one wise guy. And that is what I believe we have to do – the difficulty being finding the beginning and realising that the end is out of sight.

In my U3A, it has been interesting to start literally with the brick. This humble product of ancient origin makes a fitting introduction to all that follows down the years. Society, geography and climate have shaped our built environment from the beginning and we can say this as long as we survive.

To build a course on this fundamental understanding is fine if you have the time and opportunity, but with finite resources of both, a degree of condensing is inevitable. The net result in our experience has been positive, our combined experiences making for much more participation in a

natural way than would be the case with much younger students.

An aspect of the study of architecture which we try and absorb is the fact that no piece of architecture is properly understood if we see just the exterior. Think of the number of times we see a new building in the media from the outside only, relying upon the journalist's description for the inside and an opinion of the success or otherwise of the project.

There is no substitute for experiencing a place for yourself. We hope that a whetted appetite will result from our architectural journeying so that in the years ahead we shall see much more than we may have done in the past, whether it is in our home town or village, or some exotic place at the far ends of the earth.

Off to a flying start!

We are in our fourth year and have steadily increased attendance at meetings to an average of 60 people. We meet monthly with presentations by members and visiting speakers, and we go on coach visits.



Rob Lane

Farnborough U3A Architecture Group

The group has moved to a position where most of the presentations are by members even though we do not have any architects.

We are based in Farnborough which is recognised as the home of British aviation, so we were able to get the director of the architecture company which designed the new airport facilities to come along and present his designs. Some of the buildings have won awards.

Our U3A has multi media equipment and this has made it much easier to prepare presentations using a digital camera, images from the Internet and scans from books.

The only disadvantage of having a large group is that it tends to restrict discussion and may deter volunteers from preparing for meetings. We do need to resolve this issue.

Now that the group is more mature, the programme this year concentrates on 19th century British architecture rather than on topics that presenters chose to offer.

As a part of this study, a small group visited the area of art, science and technology in South Kensington which was developed following the successful Great Exhibition of 1851. The surplus funds (which were substantial) were used to purchase the land and assist the development of museums and for the study of science and the arts. The number of buildings of interest is so large that only a sample could be visited.

We started the day at the Natural History Museum – an imposing building on the Cromwell Road. The tour included information on how architect Alfred Waterhouse was appointed which led to a design contrary to the fashion of the time of Gothic style. He proposed a round-arched style based on German buildings.

Terracotta is used internally and externally (which enabled the ornamentation to reflect the contents of the museum). The Cromwell Road elevation is most impressive and the terracotta ornamentation of living and extinct creatures tells you immediately of what is to be found inside. The main hall gives the impression of a cathedral and is similar in scale.

We had lunch at the nearby Polish Club, a Victorian family house previously owned by the Duke of Kent and given to the Polish people in recognition of their support for the Allied Forces in World War II.

Suitably refreshed we went for a walk to see buildings designed by Norman Shaw, another fine architect of the period. These included the Albert Hall Mansions on Kensington Gore which were developed when the area became fashionable after the construction of the Albert Hall and the scientific institutes.

After looking at the recently built southern porch to the Hall (which we thought gelled well with the existing building), we visited the Royal College of Music (see picture) which was designed by AW Blomfield on



Royal College of Music

the recommendation of Alfred Waterhouse. The main elevation is of red brick as are the Shaw buildings.

The need for small rooms for tutoring and recitals presented a problem because there was a need to create a monumental elevation given its symmetrical relationship to the Albert Hall. He overcame this by constructing towers at either end. We thought that the architect was successful in this respect but the reviews at the time stated otherwise.

The visit was concluded with tea in a building owned by Imperial College, again designed by Norman Shaw as a private residence. The principal rooms have been renovated in the original style for use as common rooms.

On our way back to the tube station we passed the Queen's Tower, the only remaining part

of the Imperial Institute which was designed by TE Collcutt in the Neo-Renaissance style. We decided not to climb the 300 steps to enjoy the view across London.

The visit provided no more than an insight into the development of this outstanding area rich in architectural styles. The post war developments for Imperial College are unfortunate but there remains much to be appreciated.

If you plan a visit to the area I recommend you borrow, through your library, Volume 38 of the *Survey of London, GLC, 1973*. This contains a wealth of information about the development of the museums and institutes.

The programme for this year is full and it looks as though another year on the 19th century might be the best plan.

Resource Centre News

Since issue two of *Sources*, I have written an article in every newsletter about the growth of the Resource Centre and the new and interesting material we have added



Elizabeth Gibson

to stock. In this issue I have to do just the opposite because, as many of you will know, there was a devastating fire in the National Office and Resource Centre on the evening of Friday 1 December.

Although the fire door was locked, the flames spread over the roof from room to room, and the burning beams and collapsing ceiling fell on to and between the shelving – burning the stock.

When the fire brigade arrived, they needed nine appliances to deal with the blaze. A vast quantity of water was pumped into the room and, of course, this did as much damage to the collection as did the fire.

By the following morning, when staff were allowed limited access to the building by fire brigade forensic staff, the major part of the building was a ruin with no roof, and a thick layer of muck and broken glass lay over the floor.

As soon as the building was released to us we made a decision to save whatever we could from the Resource Centre. Volunteers bundled videos, DVDs and other shelved material into plastic bags as quickly as they could.

There were some areas of the room we could not reach because of the debris or because it was clearly unsafe for anyone to be in that area, but we did retrieve a considerable amount of material, although at the time we had no idea if any of it was usable.

As I write this we have made good progress. Using a metal storage container, which was the only place we could find that would accept wet, foul-smelling, fire-damaged stock, the Centre staff and helpers from National Office worked for many days in gloves and masks to salvage what we could from the collection.

Undamaged items have been removed from their containers and stored in bags

Fire Devastates Resource Centre



Burning beams and collapsing ceiling fell on to the shelving

until we can re-box and re-label them in clean cases.

The fire-damaged computers have been replaced by our maintenance company and the library operating system transferred to a new machine.

We have moved into temporary premises and are working out what we have lost and what we can replace – if funds permit.

We will also need to test every item we salvaged to make sure it is safe to send out to our users. Most of the slide collection was saved. The filing cabinets protected their contents efficiently. A lot of stock was out on loan at the time so this will be returned to us in due course and be available for others to borrow.

We shall restart the service by supplying the pre-ordered items. If anyone has ordered something which no longer exists, we shall contact them as soon as we can to let them know we cannot supply what they requested.

Our next step will be to produce temporary lists of what we have



A thick layer of muck and broken glass lay over the floor.

available and what has been lost. When we have these printed, we should be in a position to restart our normal service.

I cannot say exactly how long this will take but we shall work as quickly as we can. We will post notices on the website and send messages in the *National Office Mailing to Business Secretaries* to let you know when we reopen.

Elizabeth Gibson

Resource Centre Manager

Temporary address on page 2

Good Times

Art for Older People



By Ann Barlow
U3A South London

A Shared Learning Project at Dulwich Picture Gallery

On a Wednesday afternoon at the beginning of October 2006, I joined eight others at the Dulwich Picture Gallery for the initial meeting of a U3A SLP team led by Irmgard Tonolo from Bromley U3A. There were members from Bromley, Luton, South London and Wandsworth U3As, and Jennifer Anning, the SLP Coordinator.

The group was invited to assess facilities and activities from an older person's point of view. One of our members was in a wheelchair and another suffered from mild Parkinson's disease and the staff were keen to hear the views of disabled visitors.

Susan Ghosh, the project coordinator from the education department, introduced us to the Gallery and explained that she wanted the team to provide feedback, ideas and suggestions relating to all sections, including the permanent collection, temporary exhibitions, tours, events, signage, publicity and the café

The Linbury Room was to be our base, and we would meet there fortnightly for two hours to do our research.

On the first afternoon we were introduced to a volunteer guide who gave us a 20-minute tour of the permanent collection (it usually lasts an hour). It was pleasant to find the guide was someone in our own age range. He selected certain pictures to bring viewpoints of the paintings and their artists to our attention. We learned about symbolism, technique and the life of the artists. We had a chance to sit down for part of the session which was much appreciated.

For our second visit we used the workshop which is usually full of eager school children. Peter our tutor was a retired teacher who explained techniques and encouraged us to draw a portrait which we painted in watercolours. His tuition was excellent and no one was made to feel inadequate.



The busy enfilade last summer

I was amazed at what I achieved. I failed O Level Art and have never touched a paint brush since. The lighting, seating and tables were suitable for the purpose and Peter supplied Thelma with a board to balance on her wheelchair.

The third session was more technical and involved testing the DiGIT palmtop. This is a hand-held computer with information and questions devised for school children. The work they do can be fed to the teacher's computer to monitor their progress.

The children love them but we of an older generation were not so keen. Some found it difficult to hold while others didn't like looking down at the screen and then up at the paintings. At first I found it hard to control but improved with practise. I tried three programmes: *Stories in paintings*, *Portraits*, and Joshua Reynolds' *Mona Lisa*, but foolishly omitted trying the one produced for adults. The only time that palmtops are available to the general public is during family sessions at weekends.

We were expecting a lecture on the Special Exhibition for our fourth session



Thelma Howe with the DiGIT palmtop:
'hard to control but I improved with practise.'

but unfortunately the lecturer was unavailable. But we saw the room being prepared for a talk as, at the touch of a button, the floor dropped into tiered levels for the seating, leaving the platform and screen for the speaker.

There was a talk by a member of the marketing department who explained how the Gallery contacted the general public with information and to acquire financial assistance.

The Gallery does not receive any Government funding and has only a small amount left in trust by the founders.

Between the sessions we assessed the facilities. One team member sampled the café and I explored the gardens which prompted me to suggest larger signs for the interesting tree collection.

We visited the shop, the main gallery and commented on the special exhibition. This was Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610): *Devil in the Detail*. He painted miniatures of religious subjects and was good at conveying light and shadow.

We were given a small plastic magnifier to examine the paintings but I found it of little use. Apparently, larger ones made of glass damage the paintings.

Our fifth session was used to discuss our findings and prepare our report, to be compiled by Irmgard Tonolo, the project leader.

At the final meeting we presented it and six members of the team conveyed its contents to the staff. Jennifer also attended. Each member reported on an aspect of the Gallery and its facilities including the palmtop, the website, publications and publicity. We recommended improvements but overall there was nothing but praise.

Thelma gave her view as a disabled person in a wheelchair, commenting that many of the pictures were hung too high and were difficult for her to see.

My colleagues and I thought that the project was a worthwhile and pleasurable



SLPS are fun say Clare Barry and David Griffiths

exercise. If you are thinking about taking part in a Shared Learning Project, I would encourage you to do so. You will meet members from other U3As which is always stimulating.

You also have the satisfaction of knowing that you are researching a project for an organisation which it might not be in a position to undertake.

Jennifer Anning is always pleased to hear from people who might be interested in joining a Shared Learning Project – or, indeed, in setting one up themselves.

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www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk

The Dulwich was the first purpose-built public art gallery in England.

In 1790, art dealers Sir Francis Bourgeois and Noel Desenfans were commissioned by the King of Poland to assemble a collection. Five years later Poland lost its status as an independent state, leaving them with a bunch of paintings and nowhere to hang them.

A home was found in the 'clean air of Dulwich' in the magnificent building designed in 1811 by Sir John Soane. It contains a superb collection of 17th and 18th



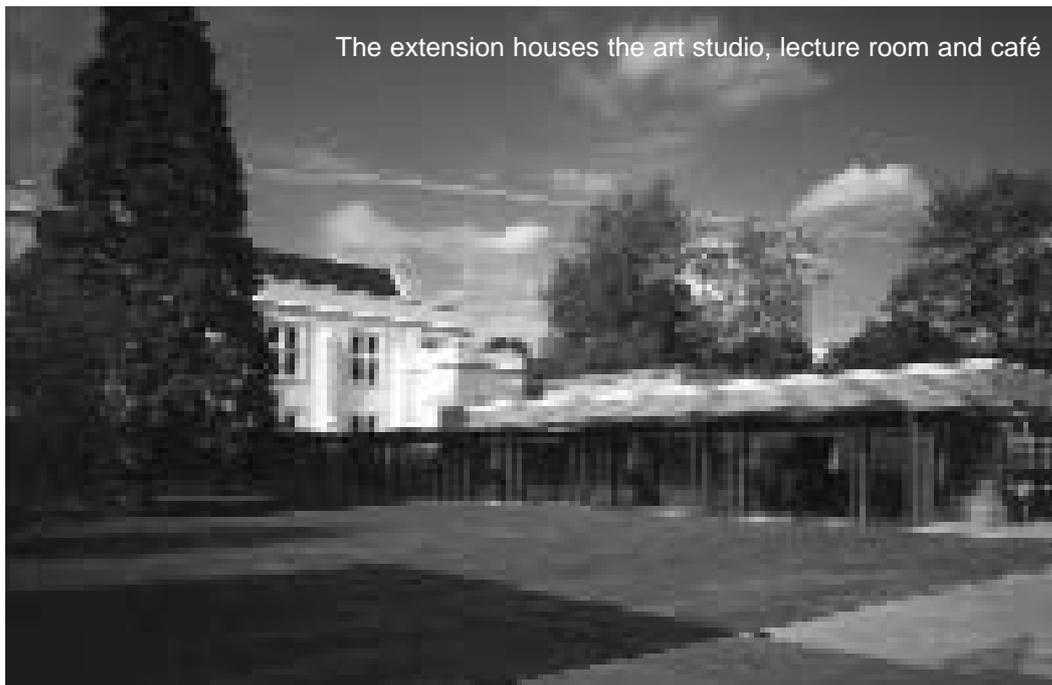
Founders Sir Francis Bourgeois and Noel Desenfans

century European masterpieces including Rubens, Rembrandt and Caneletto, as well as critically acclaimed temporary exhibitions.

The Gallery was refurbished in 2000 to include an art studio, café and lecture room.



Project developer Ingrid Beazley makes a point to Brenda Colman



The extension houses the art studio, lecture room and café



Jenny Clark

The Shared Learning Projects are four years old

The project at the **F**oundation Museum in Coram's Fields is a popular one. There were more than 50 applications to take part – a lot of people were disappointed.

Jennifer Anning, who is taking over from me in London, will be looking for several other projects this year.

Nothing else is settled yet, but we hope to look at: the Museum of London, the Wallace Collection, and another Royal Opera House project in 2007, apart from those which are just ideas at the back of someone's mind at the moment.

I plan to go to the regions to talk about possibilities there. We need different ideas here – a regional project is a different animal.

One successful example is the Sussex region, where groups of various sizes (U3As, interest groups and individuals) looked at *Entertainment in Sussex*. They examined piers, village halls, racing, Glyndebourne, hand-bell ringing and lots more, and produced an exhibition of their findings after a year.

Another example, which was country-wide rather than region-wide, was the *Older Women in Film* project, reported in the last issue of *Sources* (Nov 2006).

In London, the four autumnal projects (the Hunterian, Dulwich Picture Gallery, the British Museum and the pilot project at the Royal Opera House) concluded in fine style before Christmas, with presentations to their teams and an ever increasing number of members of staff at the various institutions.

But I would like to explore other ideas which might be appealing, for example:

Cooking: regional foods, how long have they been there? Have they changed?

Gardens and gardening: has what you can grow affected what you eat?

Tourism: the effect on our lives?

Incomers: their contribution.

Global warming: how is it changing the region?

Renewable resources: what are they in this region?

Music: dance, folklore and festivals.

Language and dialect.

The coastline: changes? ownership? (NB BBC's *Coast*).

A regional project will probably be coordinated by a regional rep, though not necessarily, and could be based not in a local institution, but in someone's home, or in a central meeting place where U3As meet anyway.

The groups taking part, as in Sussex, could be entire U3As, or interest groups, or individuals, but they will need to be coordinated in a particular timescale.

These ideas are new. I am hoping to learn from the regions I visit in 2007 (so far, visits are planned to Launceston, Newark and Gateshead), and to see whether we can work out a formula. This will be difficult, because regions vary widely in size, area and scope, so the formula will have to be flexible.

If you have any ideas about regional SLPs, please let me know. And do tell me about any in institutions outside London. I know there is a Heritage Trail planned for Hoddesdon Museum, but I am sure there are others out there too. The exchange of ideas is what makes them so exciting.

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By Margaret Hay

The Architecture Group, which started in 2001, is thriving.

During the winter months we had two talks given by Ian Hill, a retired architect from Cambridge.

The first was on the building of Bedford County Hall, with which he was involved, and the second was on Georgian architecture, of which we have many examples in Hitchin.

Also one of our members gave a talk about early Christian architecture, in this country and in Europe.

Then our members contributed by giving short talks and illustrations of their favourite buildings. This proved popular and successful, so we plan to repeat it this year.

During the summer months we went to London. The first visit was a guided

Hitchin U3A Architecture Group

walk round Highgate village, given by the architect who runs the U3A Summer School course. Highgate too has a great deal of Georgian architecture.

The second visit was to Clerkenwell for a walk round this historic but little known area of London – it proved extremely interesting.

In Cambridge, instead of looking at medieval architecture, we went to see some modern buildings. The lecturer who takes the architecture courses at Maddingley Hall showed us round the Sedgwick site, which has examples of modern architecture spanning the post-war period by some well-known architects.

Nearer home we visited Welwyn Garden City, a modern town, which we could compare with our previous visits to Letchworth Garden City.

On a hot day in September we walked round Hitchin with local architect Brent Smith, who gave us his thoughts on the best and worst buildings.

Finally, we had an interesting tour of Gorehambury House at St Albans, a Neo-Palladian building that replaced the original Tudor house of Sir Francis Bacon.

So it was another successful year for the group which we celebrated with an enjoyable Christmas lunch at the Sun Hotel.

The Portsmouth U3A Architectural Group is in its third year, and is flourishing with a dozen lively students. More would like to join, but more than 12 make outside visits difficult to arrange and the group tends to fragment into smaller groups.



Group coordinator: Beryl Denny

From Past Historic to Post Modern

At the beginning of each term, we decide where we would like to explore, and spend part of a meeting organising the trip. After the visit, at our next class, our talented scribe, Gilly Zefferett, provides a resume of the day and we share our opinions.

Being mature, fearless souls, we look at the architecture of everything we see, even if it's not on the agenda. We don't regard it as crazy to study an Elizabethan house and a Saxon church in the same afternoon. Quite often, as you will see, different periods are incorporated in one building. That's a bonus!

We're lucky to live in an area of great historical and thus architectural interest. Nearby Chichester has been a rich source for our explorations.

Recently we came across one of these unexpected discoveries in a quiet back lane behind a row of modest almshouses with blue front doors. Behind a final blue door is a roofed passageway leading to a tiny courtyard and a puzzling building. Is it a domestic house, an agricultural building or a moot hall perhaps? No, it's the unique St Mary's Hospital – the only example in England of inhabited almshouses built inside a church.

Holistic medicine in the Middle Ages included God and daily worship as well as herbal remedies to cure the soul and the body. St Mary's was built in 1290 by decree of Edward I and was a hospital with a chapel until 1680, when the bed spaces were converted into little cottages built within the aisle space.

Viewed from the outside it resembles a tithe barn with a deeply pitched tile roof, sweeping to within seven feet of the ground. Inside, the timberwork is robustly massive with a kingpost and trussed-rafter construction. Beneath, the almshouses nestle like chicks under a hen's wings. You could call it the ultimate in sheltered accommodation.



The group inspects the well at Titchfield Abbey

In contrast, we visited the new extension to the 18th century Pallant House Gallery, also in Chichester. It was built to house the generous donation of 500 postwar artworks, owned by the architect Sir Colin St John Wilson who was also involved in the gallery design.

Despite local controversy and after many changes, the modern but restrained brick and tiled exterior blends well with the surrounding Georgian streets. The airy interior provides an inviting combination of public service rooms at ground level and surprising spacious but intimate galleries on the first floor, where the natural light can be maximised.

You can step directly from the new building into the delightful Queen Anne Pallant House and the styles, although three centuries apart, complement each other subtly, through the similar proportions of the rooms in both buildings, and the thread of 20th century modern art displayed in both.

This mix of styles happens all the time because history and people make changes. It makes for fascinating contrasts and the unravelling of puzzles

and anomalies – just another of the reasons that architecture is the ideal subject for U3A study.

It doesn't appear on school curriculums and there are no tiresome examinations. It's a subject where experience is paramount, although we do use two basic textbooks: *A Crash Course in Architecture* and the *Penguin Dictionary of Architecture*.

Our group is disparate, the men favouring brick and stone, the women leaning towards more decorative styles. As such we enthuse each other.

Often, someone will bring a newspaper cutting, video, book or magazine article that they think will be of interest. We also follow relevant Open University TV programmes. This material leads to lively discussions in a genuine thirst for knowledge. However this diversity of interest can make it difficult to plan a study year and follow it meticulously.

Most of our site visits take place within a 50-mile radius of our base, usually in the summer and autumn terms but, whatever the season, the weather never dampens our enthusiasm.

We started meeting monthly with only a layman's knowledge of the subject, and a foundation course in architecture. We had a lot of help from a lapsed architect who joined the group and gave invaluable help on presentation and on understanding structures.

The monthly time lapse enabled me to read about the next topic and keep one small step ahead of the members who were ready to bring in relevant material. Building on this slightly insecure foundation, in subsequent winter sessions we developed whatever took our fancy.

We are free to devise our own curriculum, wandering from French Gothic Cathedrals and Stained Glass Windows to the Tapestries of Arras and Mortlake. Early this year, the Art of the Low Countries came under our scrutiny, and we kept an eye on the buildings depicted as well as the composition.

Last year during the summer months we went in to the field to look at relevant places of interest. Perhaps this is not the best way to conduct fieldwork but interested adults seem able to cope with the time lag. Memory may be hazy but it soon returns.

We have had no difficulty in Derbyshire and neighbouring counties in finding examples of building styles – from the Saxon remains at St Wystan's, Repton to the present day Modern in the Lowry Centre and the Imperial War Museum in Salford.

Our visits are arranged for the day, meeting at an arranged point and car sharing. We have not yet failed to find a suitable hostelry for lunch or coffee stop. With a group, someone usually has prior knowledge of the area and several have lived in Derbyshire for a number of years, so they suggested venues.

Dena Lewis
Buxton U3A

Seeing is the start of understanding

The Art and Architecture group in Buxton has met only once a month for three winters so is a relatively young association



Buxton U3A looking for geometry at Little Moreton Hall in Congleton, Cheshire

There are several publications which have been useful reference guides: *Derbyshire Parish Churches* by John Leonard, *The Derbyshire Country House* by Craven and Stanley, Hudson's *Historic Houses and Gardens*, and the *Pevsner County Guides*.

Also *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the N.W. of England* by Barrie and Wendy Armstrong, the books on Buxton by Langham and Wells and both National Trust and English Heritage handbooks.

These plus the local reference library and Tourist Information Office are useful indicators of buildings of merit. *Country Life* has illustrated many houses of note and back copies are held in some libraries.

The other source of information is the Local Authority Conservation Officer. We have found Manchester willing to offer free guided tours of the Town Hall, the Castlefields area and the Northern Quarter. These tours have taken us into areas unexplored even by Mancunians, and provided an insight into the buildings at risk and their change of use to a new life as trendy apartments.

They have also facilitated contact with independent groups renovating buildings such as the Pugin Monastery at West Gorton.

We have come away from these visits with a better understanding of the history of Manchester, and the ingenuity of architects such as Alfred

Waterhouse, the designer of the Town Hall.

It is important not to study architecture in a vacuum. The whole ethos of the era is vital to understanding why buildings were conceived in that way – hence the consideration of paintings that add to the feel of the period.

Most of our field work has been of the look-see-hear-and-let's-go-find-out-together variety. Some guides give indications of what to look for and some publish useful sketches of particular features.

But no book can replicate the feeling of being in a majestic or even humble building, of seeing the size of the masonry, the method of construction and feeling awe and respect for the early builders.

One of the dire warnings from our Latin teacher was: 'It will be vocab that lets you down'.

How right she was. I thought my days of learning new vocabulary were long gone but no, new terms keep appearing.

Having just about understood the use of triforium arch, the next ones crop up. Terms like chevet and polyhedral apse are well beyond basic ones like buttress and capital, much more like degree level than the 11+.

However, if the master builders of the 13th century Gothic cathedrals mastered them, there must still be hope for us thirdagers.

Or is there more than just new terminology? On a recent visit to West Gorton Monastery, designed by Pugin, we were given a conducted tour by a volunteer guide, an enthusiast who went into great detail about the maths behind its design.

This has opened up a new dimension. The west front of Notre Dame cathedral is not only awe-inspiring, it is based on four overlapping squares, each twice the area of the smaller square and the whole

A Cautionary Tale

It started innocently enough. What could be more pleasurable than meeting with a few like-minded souls once a month to share our interest in buildings? It turned out to be a steep learning curve

making up a rectangle in proportion of 2:3. I must have a closer look next time.

The rose window in the north transept of Chartres cathedral isn't just beautiful, it is constructed according to three sets of superimposed geometry.

One is based on the Fibonacci series – a mathematical and geometric phenomenon that governs, among other things, the growth and positioning of the leaves and flowers of certain plants. (Well, that will make a gripping topic for the next garden group meeting.)

The above are not isolated examples. The master builders must have had impressive knowledge to design and construct these buildings.

Dena Lewis: Buxton U3A

Of course I blame the Greeks, but they learnt their maths from the Arabs and passed it on to the Romans. Just as in later centuries, the Crusaders brought back new ideas about many things from the Middle East.

So readers take note.

Who knows where your interests will lead you and what learning from the dim recesses of your memory will have to be brought to light.



Project 1: eLSe

Mention has been made in a previous issue of *Sources* of the Third Age Trust's involvement in an EU-funded project known as eLSe (eLearning for Seniors), headed up by the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany.

The aim of the project is to produce a series of easy-to-follow online learning units directed at seniors, particularly isolated seniors, seeking to acquire basic internet, e-mail and word processing skills. Five countries including Lithuania are taking part. Much of the material has been written and is being pre-tested by volunteers in the UK and Germany.

The next phase of the project will take place this summer when small teams of seniors, all computer novices, in Sweden, Germany, Spain and the UK will put the course through its paces, prior to its submission to the European Commission for final approval. The project is scheduled to end on 31 December 2007. The partner organisations can then make widespread use of the material in their own countries.

More detailed information about the eLSe project can be found at: www.el-se.org/en (the hyphen is significant)



Mike Williams

Project 2: SenTrain

The second, smaller project to involve the Third Age Trust and again led by the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, is entitled SenTrain (Seniors Training).

Four other EU countries are participating, including Poland and the Czech Republic, and this project is also due to be completed by the end of 2007.

The outcome of SenTrain will be a short course of ten lessons aimed at providing training skills for seniors with a good grasp of ICT who have an interest in training other seniors wishing to improve their computing skills.

More detailed information about the SenTrain project can be found on the Internet at: www.sentrain.org

The Third Age Trust and two European Projects

Volunteers sought

In the summer of 2007, these SenTrain materials will be piloted in several countries. There will be a need for volunteers to help with this process of checking and validation.

If you are interested in taking part, are on broadband, have audio and video capability on your computer and will be available in May/June, do please send an e-mail, including your phone number, to Mike Williams at: mikandel@btinternet.com

Critical and Creative



l-r: - Dorothy Widdes, Durham and Margaret Walker designing the primary school

Mike Quinton
Lancaster and
Morecambe
U3A
Architecture
Group



Our group has been running for more than ten years and is currently capped at 30 members. We have done the obvious things: materials, construction methods, famous architects, and the historical and contemporary stuff.

A couple of ideas might be worth sharing with other U3As.

First. We must encourage interest in the architectural quality, or lack of it, of what is being built around us.

The things that have strengthened that conviction are: a lifetime's interest in architecture, informed many years ago by a half-completed architectural course; recent experience of poring over planning applications for our Civic Society; and being married to a member of the local planning committee.

Any serious study of architecture, past or present, ought to translate into heightened judgment on the latest office block, housing estate or whatever.

We have made it part of our staple diet to look each month at one or two recently completed buildings in the district. The subjects are announced in time for members to go and have a good look before the meeting. Photographs are taken to be used as the basis of deliberations.

I recommend not taking this too seriously. We have to stay friends and opinions can differ widely, not least between some members and the leader.

So we copy the old *Juke Box Jury* format: Is it a Hit or a Miss? We split into groups, each with a check list of questions, giving marks out of ten for: first impressions, appropriate materials, relationship to the surroundings, bland or interesting, etc.

It can be fun, although we find far too many misses. But 30 or so articulate citizens taking a lively and critical interest in what is being built locally can't be a bad thing.

My second wheeze was to get our members to try a spot of designing.

One of the ways an architecture group can miss out is if the members spend too much time as an audience – looking at pictures, visiting buildings, or listening to talks. They need involvement.

Another is that so much architecture, particularly in books, concentrates on outward appearances and not enough with the nuts and bolts – how buildings are put together to meet human needs.

I see little architectural value in any building that does not 'work' for its occupants. So, can ordinary folk get a feel for tackling the practical problems that architects face: access, circulation, orientation?

We have had three attempts. The first was a simple shot at sorting the plan of a village hall. The second, much more adventurous, involved arranging various cut-out shapes of the main components of a new primary school on a simple, to scale, site plan to devise a viable layout.

This was based (unbeknown to the members) on plans obtained of a new school in our locality.

Members worked in four groups during several weeks. The result was four layouts, each one viable which, after a bit of tidying-up, generated believable three-dimensional outline drawings. The mystery school was then revealed and a members visit arranged. They didn't think much of it.

Later, we had an interesting project premised on finding a new location for a library in the centre of an imaginary town where the only option was to fit the library into the vacated ground-floor premises of a multiple store.

We used an imagined outline floor plan and map of the town centre, so factors such as access and outlook came into the reckoning along with the internal layout of the various sections and furniture.

Members spent several weeks researching the nature and design of libraries today and we had the generous help and advice of our county librarian. The value was perhaps as much in the research as in the end results, but certainly worthwhile.

Admittedly, remnants of architectural drawing ability helped with these projects but there will be other leaders or group members with similar skills. A school and a library were obvious choices because most people are reasonably familiar with them.

What next? Maybe a health centre. At our national coordinator's prompting we tried designing a U3A centre but strangely the idea failed to take off. Perhaps U3As are too adept at being cuckoos in other organisations' nests.

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Peter Carter
Alnwick U3A
Architecture
Group

I suppose that, like many U3A groups, our group started because there was someone who had an interest in the subject and wanted to share their enthusiasm. In this case it was me.

Bone up Beforehand

I am not an architect nor was I involved in any way with buildings during my working life. I have just been interested in, and enjoyed looking at, buildings for a long time.

I know that my enjoyment has been enhanced by knowing something about the history of the building. It was this that I wanted to share.

I had been fortunate to discover Pevsner's *Buildings of England* series in the 1960s and I still remember coming across the County Durham volume in a shop on a visit to Barnard Castle. It was 4/6d well spent!

So the Architecture Group appeared in Alnwick U3A's annual guide for 2004, and eight of us got together to decide what to do. We wanted to visit local buildings but felt that we needed some sort of theme.

For our first year we had two: Anglo-Saxon buildings and towns that had been described by Alec Clifton-Taylor in his *Six English Towns*, and the two subsequent series, on TV in the 1970s.

Clifton-Taylor had covered two towns near us: Berwick and Durham. We failed to find videos of his television series but did get his books and these provided a background to two enjoyable visits.

But the chronological theme was the one which continued into 2005 (Norman) and 2006 (Gothic). Next year we are jumping forward to Victorian buildings. We had seen so many examples that Victorian architects had altered, often to our eyes for the worse, that we thought that we should see some that they built from scratch. This is certainly going to be an education for me and I think for most of our group.

In our first year, the numbers coming on our visits were small, but during the second year we hired a coach rather than use our own transport and numbers increased. We now get 25 to 30 people on our visits. For a small U3A, this is a large number (a quarter of the members).

But were we just turning into an outings group? I don't think so.



Above: The Alnwick group visit Durham Castle and below: Trinity House



Firstly, on each of our trips we visit a number of buildings – some we wouldn't visit on just a day out. Secondly, for each visit, everyone is given notes about the buildings we see. These notes are an important part of the visit.

I include photos (usually my own) and where appropriate, plans. I aim to make them understandable to anyone and they are fairly brief – usually on two sides of A4. We have meetings at the beginning and at the end of the year when we plan the programme and review the visits as well as discuss the annual theme.

This year we are having an extra meeting to discuss Craggside. The house and estate is well known to our members – it is only a few miles from Alnwick.

It incorporates so much that is best in Victorian architecture, engineering and technology, that it will provide an excellent background to the programme for the year.

I hope that my aim of making visiting buildings more enjoyable by knowing something about them beforehand, is being achieved.

T.C. Hine and the Cowboys

Nottingham U3A uses the International Community Centre on Mansfield Road. The buildings, previously the Bluecoat School, were abandoned 40 years ago when a Ring Road threatened to make mincemeat of the area. There was opposition and the plans were dropped, but there followed a long period of neglect and wild trees became established in the brick walls. The story of *Sleeping Beauty* comes to mind.



The Masters House

In 1853, the Bluecoat School had relocated to Mansfield Road from a house near St Mary's, Nottingham's main church. It was one of the first schools in the Industrial Revolution for children of the poor, and was intended for 40 children who were to be instructed in Christian knowledge to save them from 'vice, immorality, indolence and intemperance'.

The story of the Charity School is well documented, as is the gross squalor of a Nottingham confined to an area scarcely larger than its medieval boundaries but with a growing population.

By 1846, the Bluecoat Charity was selling land in exchange for the southern part of a block on the Turnpike Road to Mansfield. The big land grab took about 20 years to finalise, and inevitably some plots were disputed. For some plots there was more than one version: for example, the proposed Bluecoat School block. Clearly it was bonanza time for lawyers, developers, and architects.

Architect Thomas Chambers Hine was in his early 30s when he was invited to tender at a sum not exceeding £1,500. His estimate of £1,099 was accepted. The school opening in July 1853 was reported nationally. Even the *Illustrated London News* produced a well-

known picture (apparently a bit prematurely. The clock was missing, the belfry incomplete, and the house 'at present a sort of lean-to on the north side of the school').



By Beryl Whittaker

Did he give an unrealistic estimate and run out of money? He and his brother John had taken out substantial loans, and by 1853 there were problems with repayment.

T.C. Hine became one of Nottingham's best known architects, famous for his magnificent factories in the Lace Market, and grand houses in The Park.

Most of his creations have Italianate features, and are usually built of red brick with shaped gables, outlined by cream stone trimming and finials, string courses, diaper work and pierced stone panels around the door.

Quoins were a recurrent theme, and there are terraces where alternate pairs of houses are set back just to provide exposed corners. Venetian windows are often used, and there is one big house where windows are set in the chimney stacks (which looks odd).

During my photographic survey I found some curious

anomalies. For example, at the junction of the old School and the Master's House there is a hotchpotch of brick bonding, and windows with bull-nosed brick surrounds that don't match anything on the highly visible south and east sides.

Some of the bricks are badly worn, and the 'outshot' roof seems an afterthought. I've examined modern plans, but not those of T.C. Hine, so I can't tell whether the original completion was scamped, or if these are later necessary alterations as indoor plumbing was installed.

The school, as a charity school, was dependent on voluntary donations and subscriptions, and there is confirmation of the school's known financial vicissitudes from the appearance of new premises on their land in trade directories and on street maps.

It wasn't until 1938 that an administrative block was added

to the north-east corner of the Hine building to link to a large ex-lace factory contemporary with the Hine building, followed in 1945/6 by a second factory (printworks) added next to the lace factory.

These had floors at different levels and one roof was lowered by one storey, (alterations that would have been expensive except that the pupils seem to have comprised the larger part of the labour force, as I saw on photographs at the Bluecoat Old Scholars' open day for the 300th anniversary of the School).

Now it is set so far back between buildings on Mansfield Road that is easily missed, though a rather melancholy view of the tops of gables can be glimpsed between foliage from the far side of Bluecoat Street.

We of course, are able to enjoy it each time we gather within its walls.

The wide range of subjects tackled by Architecture Groups

Martin Funnell: Architecture Network Coordinator

This list was made up from a fairly random selection of programmes sent in by architecture groups of all sorts some time ago. There are many more possibilities, and the advantage of U3A is that you can do what you like and be creative.

Alton U3A

Traditional House Design and Decoration, Places of Work and Assembly, Buildings for Worship, Renaissance and Gothick, Modern Times.

Bromley U3A

Oxford Buildings, Pre-war Modern, Kent Historic, Hong Kong Airport, Beijing, Energy Conservation, Georgian London, American Skyscrapers, English Castles, French Romanesque, Italian Architecture, Russian and Baltic, European Townscape, Gaudi, Florence, Venice, Seville, E. Anglia.

Peterborough U3A

TV Programmes, Members' Slides, Industrial Archaeology, 20C Architecture, High Rise, Fortified Sites.

Purbeck U3A

Dorset Cast Iron, Local Landmarks, Langton Maltravers.

Reigate U3A

Regional Influences, Townscape, Durham, Montepulciano, Window tracery, Chios, Salisbury Cathedral, Garden Architecture, Bridges, Rood Loft Parapets, Reigate, Egypt.

Stour Valley U3A

Sustainable Buildings, New Housing and Modern Landscape.

Merton U3A

Sydney Opera House, Sound of Architecture, Ladakh, Local Architect's Problems, Reading Plans, Roof Trusses, Japanese Landscape, Housing Elderly People.

Miscellaneous

Materials and Constraints, Building Types, Medieval Cathedrals, Church History, Local Building, Interesting Planning Applications, Archaeology, Engineering, Acoustics, Architectural Theory.

Discussion Groups

Don Drew of Carmarthen U3A is in his fourth year of leading the Discussion Group. The members have dealt with nearly 40 topics during that time.

A few of those came from the original start-up leaflet and a couple or so from other U3As, but the rest were dreamt up as they went along. Below is their list.

If other group leaders send in their lists we could create a pool of topics that might encourage the creation of new groups and help them in their early meetings.

Is an increased uniformed police presence needed?

Has compensation become a disease?

Has the emancipation of women caused family break-up?

Is the British legal system fair? : Is the UK a democracy?

Has sport on TV taken away the idea of sportsmanship?

Competition or cooperation - which is best?

How has Nine-Eleven affected us?

World trade and subsidies : Crime and punishment

How do we feel about Christmas? : Political correctness

How ought our taxes to be spent? : Identity cards

What do we want from U3A? : Speed limits and speed cameras

Do good manners matter any more?

Britain in the 21st century - monarchy or republic?

Organ donation : Wind farms : Privacy and the Press

Ought we to celebrate Christmas?

Does it matter what our politicians get up to in private?

Religious sensibilities and the performing arts

Detention without trial : Vote? Who me? (election turnouts)

Can the small shop survive? : What's in the news?

CCTV in public places (and its implications)

PR or First-Past-The-Post (Elections)

Is modern journalism just info-entertainment?

The worst invention - the best invention

Televising court proceedings

The most serious problem(s) facing the UK

The zoo in modern society : Women in parliament

The most influential person so far this century

Which person (living or from history) would you like to meet?

Don Drew: 01267 234773 : dondrew@tesco.net

Thinking Peter Young: Crawley U3A

I think like a tortoise. How do you think? It's fundamental to know if you're going to obey the Ancient Greek injunction 'Know thyself'.

Composing my thoughts in an easy chair, I watch Timothy tortoise contemplating a leaf. This she'll do for at least half an hour, then she'll make a decision. Eat, stomp into the shade or whatever. No rushed action without thinking, especially the older she gets. If eligible, she'd make an ideal U3A member.

Wisdom comes with age and, I believe, tortoises have accumulated an ancient wisdom. They've evolved and survived for some 225 million years. In that time they've endured aeons of major changes, geological upheaval, volcanic activity and climatic swings.

Dinosaurs, at one time lords of the earth, couldn't cope. They died out about 65 million years ago. There's much speculation why. Environment? Some disastrous impact from outer space? Limited brain power?

I favour that last suggestion. There came a point when they

ceased to evolve creatively. Creative evolution is the key to survival. So what's the key to that?

Memory. The Greek goddess of memory was Mnemosyne. With Zeus, supreme in the Greek pantheon, she was the mother of the nine muses, who presided over the arts and sciences: astronomy, comedy, flutes and music, heroic epic, history, hymns, lyric poetry and dancing, mime and tragedy. Above them was the Olympian god Apollo, whose main concern was light and learning. Socrates believed that knowledge is simply recollection.

In *The Act of Creation* Arthur Koestler deals at length with the process. Essentially it amounts to two independent perceptions in which somebody has the imagination to see a third possibility, a fusion or confrontation of ideas that leads to discovery, a eureka moment. As Pasteur put it: 'Fortune favours the prepared mind'.

That's how a computer makes decisions. It takes in new information, compares it with its memory, anything from a critical figure to a simple reminder, and acts accordingly. Of course computers work in strict logic whereas humans, unwittingly or deliberately, are capable of straight and crooked thinking.

Peter Young is the author of *Tortoise* (Reaktion Books)

U3A Online Courses

The courses listed are available online. Visit the website, www.u3a.org.uk and click on the link to Online Courses.

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

Course Titles

Tutored courses (£15)

Maintaining Independence (Aus)
The Romans (Aus)
Continents on the Move (Aus)
The Shaping of the Modern Mind (Aus)
Design in Your Life (Aus)
Introduction to Western Philosophy (Aus)
Renaissance Italy (Aus)
Digital Imaging
Creative Writing: Short Stories
Creative Writing: Poetry
Writing for Publication

Untutored Courses (£8)

Artists of Spain
Italian Art
Venice and Her Artists
Visiting Artists in Rome
Great Northern European Artists
Ageing and Retirement (Aus)
Antarctica (Aus)
Astronomy (Aus)
Autobiography and Journaling (Aus)
Botany for Knowledge and Enjoyment (Aus)
Continents on the Move (Aus)
Creative Writing: Fiction
Creative Writing: Poetry
Writing for Good Effect
Writing for Publication
Writing Family History
Digital Imaging
Design in Your Life (Aus)
Garden History
Genealogy (Aus)
Intro to Western Philosophy (Aus)
Maintaining Independence (Aus)
Religions of the World (Aus)
The Night Sky (Southern Hemisphere)
The Romans
Understanding Computers

For details check the websites:

www.u3a.org.uk/online_courses

www.u3aonline.org

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

U3A Summer Schools 2007

North School 9-12 July

University of Chester

Courses:

China – Life & Language
Cinema : History : Heraldry : Literature
French for Fun : Industrial Heritage
Local History : Castles of North Wales
Philosophy : Storytelling : Writing

South School 20-23 August

The Royal Agricultural College Cirencester

Courses:

Cotswolds Architecture (2 courses)
Art : History : Botany : Literature
Crime & Society : Music Appreciation
History Ancient & Modern (2 courses)
Please ask your U3A committee for further details and apply as soon as possible to The National Office at:
The Third Age Trust (Temp address)
Unit 3, Carpenters Court
4a Lewes Road, Bromley BR1 2RN
Tel: 020 8466 6139
Details are also available on the U3A website www.u3a.org.uk

So far yet so near

Ron Jones: U3A Southern Highlands, Bowral NSW

Geoffrey Blainey, one of Australia's most distinguished historians, wrote a book called *The Tyranny of Distance* describing the effect of geographic separation from Europe and internal distances within the continent, since 1788, on Australian institutions, attitudes and culture. But that was before U3A.

As the sole Australian student on Ian Searle's online course, *Creative Writing: Short Stories*, I can confirm there is much to be gained from having my own personal time zone.

While my UK-based colleagues filled the ether with creation and controversy I slept, and when they retired exhausted I had available a full day's debate – point and counterpoint, argument and rebuttal.

I had 12 hours in which to consider my input, secure that contrary opinions were not already in the pipeline.

Unfortunately, most who read this will not be so fortunate, but don't let that deter you. Even if the other students eat their breakfasts at the same time as you, the course is still a wonderful experience.

It does, however, require the exercise of a certain degree of tolerance on the

U3A/Ri Out and About

Tuesday 3 April 2007 1.30pm for 2pm

The Friends Meeting House

173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Each year the Royal Institution and the U3A team up to produce an afternoon of the best speakers from the Ri's programme. On 3 April 2007 this event will return with another line up of fascinating science.

Writer and broadcaster **Vivienne Parry** will tell: *The Truth About Hormones*, letting our audience in on what's going on when we're tetchy, spotty, fearful, tearful or just plain awful.

Biomedical researcher Professor **Salvador Moncada** will tell the story of the mopping up that antioxidants do in your body, and how an imbalance in the body's defences can lead to risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

Professor **Bill McGuire**, Director of the Benfield Hazard Research Centre, will tell us how researchers are dreaming up ways to protect the planet from danger. It's a tough world out there, with economy-busting earthquakes, giant tsunami, volcanic super-eruptions, threatening asteroids and climate changes to worry about. Bill will reassure us with some possible solutions to the threats.

Places are limited. Admission is by ticket only at £14 per person. Apply in writing to:

The Third Age Trust (Temp address)
Unit 3 Carpenters Court
4a Lewes Road, Bromley BR1 2RN
enclosing a sae and a cheque payable to The Third Age Trust.

(You will be notified if the event becomes over-subscribed and asked if you wish to be on the waiting list.)

Details are also available on the U3A website www.u3a.org.uk

part of those around you and they must become aware that you will, on occasions, burn toast, forget birthdays and scribble on the backs of whatever important documents are closest to hand – but that is a small price to pay for creativity.

You will also meet some adventurous, generous-minded fellow students because it is the contrast in opinion and experience that makes you want to log on each morning to find out what they have been up to – but does U3A have any other kind?