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What's that in English?

We British are an insular race. Surrounded by water, hedges and lace curtains, we like to keep ourselves to ourselves. Despite the Eurostar to Paris and Brussels, and the internet to wherever you choose, we jealously guard our language, demanding that other nations get to grips with it.

Its spelling can be tricky with its thought, bough and cough. Its grammar changes within a generation. Even the split infinitive is no longer cool. Bad language is in and the Queen's English is out. What on earth is the world coming to when continental

menus have no English translation for each item?
“What’s that in English, waiter?”

The European Year of Languages 2001 aims to break down some of these linguistic barriers and stimulate the learning of a language different to our own. “We need to cast off the idea that Britain is essentially a monolingual country whose inhabitants are poor language learners or reluctant to learn languages,” says Sir Trevor McDonald. Are we a nation of monoglots or a multilingual society? According to a survey published last year, 307 different languages are spoken by London schoolchildren alone. This melting pot of words and sounds often deters us from discovering the cultural heritage of our European neighbours as well as ourselves.

The better we can communicate, the better we can relate to other people. When we recognise the context of a phrase or the meaning of a special word, we get closer to understanding what makes others tick. The programme for EYL2001 has these telling words. “There is much more to discover in learning another language than simply how to transfer information from one code to another. A new language brings a new way of seeing the world, of sharpening our perceptions and challenging our assumptions.”

The Languages Challenge, a feature of EYL2001, speaks not only to the 600 U3A language study groups. It challenges anyone to set a target, say, read a page of a German newspaper or present a short sketch in French or sing in Italian. It has the added incentive of raising money for charity (or U3A funds)

by engaging sponsors. Go for it!!

Take up the Languages Challenge, with details and a sponsorship form, accompanies many, but not all, copies of this issue. To obtain further copies, send a stamped, addressed C4 envelope (229 x 324mm) to National Office.

Language groups

Welsh – Newtown U3A

In a village among the hills above the Severn in mid-Wales a small group meets once a fortnight to study the oldest living cultural language in Europe. Its earliest poetry dates back to the sixth century AD and the influence of the Roman conquest of Britain is to be found in many of its words, as in the French language eg. Ffenestr - French fenetre, the word for window.

The number of people who still speak Welsh in this area has declined, but what is remarkable is that despite the proximity of Wales to England and the great influx of English people over the last couple of centuries, the Welsh language has not died out, as did the Irish and Scottish forms of Gaelic to a large extent. Our group hopes to be able to hold conversations with friends and acquaintances who speak Welsh naturally, and to be able to understand radio and TV programmes.

To acquire this level of Welsh it is, of course, unnecessary to go too deeply into the grammar, syntax etc., and this is what was decided at the

beginning of our meetings. Naturally, one expects some difficulties in learning a new language, but some have been quite a surprise and have caused much amusement. We expected to find that the endings of words alter as they are used, but what has intrigued our learners is that the beginnings of words may alter too! Now and then someone gently complains that they have spent ages with the dictionary only to realize that they have forgotten this, and have been searching vainly under the wrong letter of the alphabet.

We spend quite a lot of time laughing heartily at some of the funny-sounding words and at the ingenious and often hilarious tricks we dream up to try to memorize other words, such as rhyming or giving well-known characters a mixture of Welsh and English names.

To our delight, we are beginning to see a new world around us. Road signs and advertisements on vans and in shop windows now make sense; names of hills, streams, farms, and houses, and the reasons for them are understandable. Given time and perseverance, we shall progress into reading and understanding the various forms of literature which are available, for we know that this will open a whole new world to us, a world of a different culture, an ancient world of romance, of myths, folk-tales, of visions and dreams. **L. Parry Jones**

Welsh – Cynon Valley U3A

This Welsh Learners group meets twice a month at the museum in Aberdare. It includes native Welsh

speakers as well as learners. Our programme is varied, members taking turns in leading the discussions. We all have practice in reading, translating and speaking the language.

Levels of competence vary, but the weak are helped by the strong. The atmosphere in the group is excellent, due largely to the good humour and sense of fun which prevails; learning is a pleasure not a chore. The common bond that binds us together is love of our mother country, its language, history, literature and traditions. We grapple with the complexities of the language to express our views on a multitude of subjects. We enjoy each other's company and visit Welsh institutions such as the National Eisteddfod and the National Library of Wales.

On March 1st, St David's Day, we arranged a luncheon of Welsh fare: cawl, caws Caerffili, bara brith, picen and tisen ar y maen, to be held in the museum cafe. Welsh harp music was played in the background, daffodils decorated the tables and the only language spoken was Welsh. Some of us were thumbing desperately through our dictionaries at times.

We are not narrow nationalists, but we are loyal patriots, dedicated to keeping our language alive, as summed up in the phrase "Cymru am Byth!" (Wales Forever) and all that it implies.

Tydfil Thomas

Spanish – Soar Valley U3A

Our Spanish group started a year ago. Initially we met fortnightly but after the summer break we decided to meet on a weekly basis in order to make more progress.

We are a mixed ability group of six: two are absolute beginners, two are past 'dabblers' whilst our only gentleman has considerable linguistic ability. Our leader, who studied Spanish when she first retired, decided it was time to reawaken her interest. She has motivated and encouraged the group even to the extent of giving us some regular homework.

We are following a varied but structured course, based on the BBC publication *Buenos World Spanish*, together with a Readers' Digest set of tapes. Occasionally we have original worksheets, which provide the opportunity for further practice and to realise how much more we still have to learn.

Etymology – Abergavenny U3A

We have had a Latin group since about 1989, engaged mainly in studying Latin literature and contemporary history. A Welsh study group also operated for a couple of years. My own interest in etymology resulted in my being invited to give a talk on “A thousand centuries of language” to the U3A in 1994. This aroused a surprising amount of interest, and I was asked about the possibility of starting a study group.

This has now run for six years, looking at topics from proto-language reconstruction at the academic extreme to word play and idioms at the light-hearted

end. In between are the development of Celtic languages, place names, personal and family names, trade terms and product names, the development of number words and their etymology (who could believe that five, cinq, pimp, coig and the kind of punch one.drinks are all from the same source?), scientific terms and eponyms, with forays into the sometimes risqué areas of euphemism and solecism!

Basic sources are the numerous dictionaries devoted to the various subjects. As far as English etymology is concerned, tracing words to origins earlier than the classical languages, i.e. to Indo-European roots, requires some of the items listed below, along with newspaper or journal articles devoted to the topics - with the occasional TV programme for good measure.

We have found the study of the origins of words fascinating, rewarding and often surprising - but not for the prudish! Its appeal is wide for we have 20 - 30 members attending once a month. Other U3As may like to follow our example. *Derek Bissell (01873 854456)*

Italian – Cheltenham U3A

We practised Italian by making a narrative for a performance. We chose a period of Italian life that involved many British people and about which little is known, 1943-1945. The Allies had landed; the Italians had deposed Mussolini and the Germans had invaded. Eighty thousand Allied prisoners were at large with big rewards on their heads, succoured by the local people and trying to make their way either to escape to Switzerland or to rejoin the troops by

crossing the German lines, or simply to hide till it all ended. For the Italians life was dangerous and confusing.

The stories in English, the Italians' memories, the German proclamations, our own members' recollections of fighting and working, made a tale that was interesting, and often amusing and moving. We read it in English to our U3A, taking parts, and in Italian to the Italian Society. We used Harold Macmillan's dry recollections as a linking narration. The interest and pleasure of making the story was almost more in the search than in the result, but it was nice to have others prepared to listen to it.



Italian – Peterborough U3A

We started an Italian group three years ago. I was dubious about the results, since I had no training as a teacher. Although I spoke the language fluently, I had never studied it properly. Three years later my Italian has improved considerably, and my fellow students seem to have come to no harm either. We now have three classes, Beginner's, Intermediate and Practising Italian. This last class has some of my first students and people at various stages, including one chap whose mother was Italian and who speaks it better than I do.

Our main textbook is the BBC *Buongiorno Italia*. We used the audio tapes from the beginning and later added the videos. I have found the videos extremely good, with lots of repetition for our failing memories.

To this material I add odds and ends of my own and bits and pieces culled from various textbooks.

Our local library lets me have each month the file of an Italian newspaper, then thirteen months old. I go through this and pick out material for Practising Italian. We are constantly amazed at what was being served up for our attention a year and more ago.

Ron Hall

Portuguese – Dorking U3A

In autumn 1999 all U3A language groups throughout the country were invited to send millennium greetings to a similar group in the country of the language they were studying. We were given the address of the UATIP University of the Third Age College in Oporto in Northern Portugal. We had a warm initial response from them, but after that contacts weakened. However I am happy to report that after persevering for a year we have now finally made a firm contact with them.

Their college was started in 1991. It offers thirty subjects, more in line with those offered by Adult Education Centres in the U.K. Their 480 students are mostly aged between 50 and 75. They have 27 young teachers and a long waiting list of students for whom they have no room at present. They organise trips abroad and study days and conferences at home. English is studied at several levels but they seem astonished that anyone in England should want to learn Portuguese. We have now established contact with the students of English themselves, and letters

are being exchanged between individuals and the class as a whole. The subjects studied at the College are very similar to those studied by Dorking's twin town of Gouvieux, north of Paris. They include pottery, choral music, nutrition, fine art and the history of art, theatre, fashion, and dance, as well as more academic subjects like psychology, sociology and other European languages.

We are now in our sixth year and one of our newest interests is Portuguese Scrabble, bought at Grant & Cutler, which is an excellent game to play by the winter fireside when some of the group are away or ill. We were each armed with a good dictionary and were amazed how many words we learnt from playing. In fact one afternoon we went on playing for nearly an hour past our normal departure time because we were all so absorbed by it.

Gay

Fraser

Russian - New Forest/Waterside U3A

Like many other U3A groups we had a serendipitous start and we suffered from an excess of democracy. The group comprised one retired primary teacher who was studying for her Russian GCE and one who wasn't, a couple with a daughter living in Moscow, the mother of a British diplomat with Slavic expertise, an amateur water colourist who had attempted the BBC Russian Course a decade before, a retired BBC sound technician and an octogenarian lady who shamed us all with her clarity of mind and ready grasp of what was for her a totally new subject. After starting as a group we were joined by a Latvian born Russian lady

with a beautiful speaking voice and a mountain of tolerance.

Our reasons for joining the group and our expectations, ranged from being able to listen to Moscow radio to reading *War and Peace* from the original text. Unfortunately we did not have a single clear, achievable goal, acceptable to everyone. This affected our choice of textbooks and took us into a long period of experimentation. We invented our own card games and board games. Our Russian lady created a Russian family and laboriously wrote and photocopied episode after episode of their lives while we struggled with the alien script and rules of grammar. We acquired an Everest of tapes to which none of us listened enough. We all knew what we had to do but life in retirement is so full we all fell short.

There are now seven of us including our long suffering Russian lady. We just want to be able to gossip (which we do in English a lot) in Russian, play Russian scrabble and come closer to thinking in Russian. One thing we have gained is the Russian ability to keep going when a favourable outcome seems remote.

John Moore

Russian – Guildford U3A

The group consists of five regular members. We have been able to arrange visits by a former professor of Russian and another proficient Russian language speaker, who let us see how far we have to go! We have collected some songs and texts and we have almost completed our grammar studies. In a Russian newspaper we were able to read critical domestic

reaction to the Kursk submarine disaster. Russian is not an easy language for older people to start learning from scratch but more members at the intermediate stage would be welcome. **Jeff Church**



Latin - Perth U3A

This class is now in its second year and is led by a former teacher of Modern Languages, Hector Calder. The nine regulars have recently been joined by a former Classics teacher who aids the group in its studies. So far, study has been by means of *Ecce Romani*, a course for schools produced by the Scottish Classics Group, and students are now approaching the end of Book 2, having covered all cases of nouns in the first three declensions and all five active tenses (not yet the Future Perfect) of all four conjugations. The books centre on the lives of an imaginary Roman family, the Comelii (father, mother, son, daughter, uncle, freedman tutor, slaves and the children's friends), and so offer more than normal Latin practice in first and second person verbs and in the vocative case, since there is a lot of dialogue in the passages.

Students will soon be transferring, at the end of Book 2, to real Latin passages, using *Short Latin Stories* by Peter Dunlop, published by Cambridge University Press: history and legends will become the new vehicles on the road to greater skill in Latin. All of us are indebted to Margot McKinnon, a recently retired Latin teacher in Lanarkshire, who has written the Latin course on which our learning is based and

which is available now on the internet at the following address: www.webscotland.co.uk/latin .

At present, only Book 1 of *Ecce Romani*, with supplementary work, is covered on the internet, but new materials are currently being produced. For those students with an internet connection, the online course materials will be a major asset. Margot has also provided supplementary materials on paper, at a nominal fee, which students use to enhance their knowledge and skills. The repeat of *I Claudius* on the UK Drama digital channel on Sunday nights should also provide lots of video material on imperial life at the time for our new Classical Studies background work.

Group members are presently giving very serious consideration to taking the first examination, National Unit 1 provided by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Students can also sit National Units 2 and 3 at a later date.

Bob Gillespie

Leek U3A Latin Group add: “The reasons for learning Latin have been many and varied: never had a chance at school; there wasn't room in French; love words and love ancient history; started it at school but dropped it after a year; wanted to refresh ancient memories; a challenge; startles people when you tell them what you are studying.”

Latin - Abergavenny U3A

Some years ago two members were anxious to study

Latin inscriptions and, knowing that I had taught Classics, I was asked to start a small Latin group with some having done Latin at university and some none at all. With the help of *Latin for Latecomers* (Sheffield University) and Kennedy's *Latin Grammar*, we began. We kept pure grammar to a limit and attempted texts, starting with the Creed and the Mass. Everyone wanted to get on to real texts.

I decided to limit the texts to 100BC – 50AD. We did historical and archaeological research before we began each section and tried to relate all the texts to modern life. We have read Virgil, Ovid, Horace and Catullus. Ted Hughes' modern version of Ovid has been compared with great interest. Virgil's *Georgics* has convinced us that we do not need weather forecasters.

We live near Caerleon, so Tacitus' *Agricola*, describing life in Roman Britain was essential. Satire is popular in modern writing so we found Juvenal's satire on life in Rome was interesting as were Cicero's letters and speeches.

The enthusiasm of the group is tremendous. Good translations, Open University courses and now the internet challenge us still further.

Olwen

Tuckwell

Latin – Sheffield U3A

As there was a Latin Group 1 meeting in Sheffield, which was full when I enquired about membership, I was encouraged to co-ordinate Latin Group 2 in April 1999. There were only two or three of us at first, with faint memories of learning Latin many years ago and

with a love of language and literature. We struggled on without a tutor, knowing we could not go much further on our own, until a retired classics teacher agreed to come in October 1999 to teach us.

She changed our course book to *Oxford Latin Course* by Balme and Morwood (OUP 1999, full colour second edition), which we can heartily recommend. I quote from the Introduction. "This course tells the story of the life of the Roman poet known to us as Horace. His full name was Quintus Horatius Flaccus, but ...we call him simply Quintus." This framework gives immense scope for background material, including some of the Greek myths, Roman education, religion and society. The illustrations are in a variety of styles and bring vividness to the text, and cartoon humour to the points of grammar being taught.

Five of us meet every week. Our tutor listens to our homework and we correct it, with much good humour and laughter from everyone. We read the next story in Latin in turn and translate; the grammatical points are analysed and next week's homework looked at. The tutor talks over a wide range of related topics filling in our background knowledge - architecture, politics, history.

Dorothy Hill-Wilson

Hebrew – Harrow U3A

Since the Autumn Tern 1999 I have been taking the Hebrew Conversation class. We meet on alternate Tuesday afternoons. This group has proved to be

most friendly, small in number but very dedicated to improve their standard of reading and writing. We study from a variety of Hebrew books, and with the aid of a blackboard, I write unfamiliar words, which we find to be a clear and helpful way to learning. I also encourage everybody to use the books they have at home, to bring them to the class, so that I can help wherever necessary. The students find that by coming to the classes, it refreshes their memory of the Hebrew which they learnt many years ago.

Jews are in the main divided into two groups: the Aschkenazim come from the western world, the Sfardim from Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The Aschkenazim pronounce the letter T as S. For example, Shabat, the day of rest for Jews, as Shabbos. Sfardim and Israelis use the traditional pronunciation. Hebrew should be read and pronounced as it is written in the Tanach, the Old Testament. As an Israeli I am greatly encouraged that there are people who wish to learn my language and that of the Jewish people.

Jack Greenholtz

Russian – Buckingham and District U3A

When the Buckingham and District U3A was formed three and a half years ago a small group of us expressed the wish to learn Russian. Each of us had her or his own reason. One member of our group had been appointed to represent the Girl Guides in an advisory capacity to Russian guiders in St Petersburg. I had connections with that city. There were two former language teachers in the group, so from their

experience we knew that Russian would not be an easy task.

As we were to be a self-help group, it was important to choose the right course book. To some extent we were working in the dark, but we knew we wanted something with a modern flavour which would promote good communication skills. In the end we chose *Ruslan Russian*, a communicative course for adults and teenagers by John Langran and Natalya Veshnyeya, complete with audiotapes. It proved to be a good choice and a strong stimulus for learning. We took just over two years to complete Books 1 and 2. The main character of the course was the charming Ludmila whose company was constantly being sought after by a cluster of young men. We had to finish the course to see which one of these hopefuls would finally become her *Ruslan*.

One or two of the group felt they needed something a little more traditional to help with the grammar. Hugo's *Russian in Three Months* seemed to fill this need, though the three months proved to be somewhat optimistic. Everyone chose their own dictionary, then more recently we each purchased a graded reader with short, humorous stories and potted biographies of famous Russians.

It has the advantage of encountering real Russian, written by native writers, and is proving popular. Other useful aids have been the Berlitz *Russian Workbook* and a book geared to oral practice called *Speak Russian*, which is published by the University of Texas Press.

Audiovisual sources for learning Russian are perhaps less in evidence than for West European languages. However, one discovery has been an excellent CD-ROM for computer buffs called *Learn Russian Now!* which covers all the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It provides four separate programmes of dialogues and informative texts as well as a grammar back-up and lots of exercises and games. It is produced by Transparent Language Inc. and is available in this country for around £50, in the USA for between \$30 and \$50.

Each member makes a valuable contribution of one sort or another, whether it be previous experience of learning the language or current contacts with Russian people. We meet every fortnight in one another's homes and continue to look forward to meeting a new challenge and surmounting new linguistic obstacles. We should be most interested to learn of the existence and progress of other Russian groups.

Roy S Walker



Looking At English – York U3A

Looking At English is an open-ended, loosely structured, informal survey of all aspects of the history and structure of the English language, and presupposes no special technical expertise whatsoever. Topics include the language of literature, the history of the English language (from *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf), the politics of language and of language education, dialect, regional varieties of English, 'Colonial' English, standard vs non-standard

English, 'popular speech', written and spoken language, (British) English vs American (English), 'grammar' ("What is 'grammar', and where does it come from?), and so forth. Meeting once a week for two hours, an enthusiastic band of four regulars discuss any ramification of the theme under consideration, following our noses, so to speak, into any related or unrelated corner of the topic.

The course has been running since October 2000, and looks set to run until the participants feel they have had enough, but there seems to be no flagging of interest. The leader is a retired university teacher of English language, who welcomes the opportunity to try out his pet ideas on a new and evidently appreciative audience.

David A. Reibel

Basic Japanese - Warwick U3A

This group was formed in January 1998 and lasted some two years. The participants had various reasons for tackling Japanese. Some regarded it as a bit of fun. One was intrigued by the possibility of exotic grammar. Another member of the group had friends in Japan who were only too willing to speak English and did not really need to know any Japanese.

Another group member was a part time teacher of English as a foreign language. She wanted to experience the sort of situation faced by her students. The most committed was a married couple whose son had married a Japanese and now lives in Japan. They wanted to be able to communicate with their grandchildren both in speech and writing.

How difficult is it to learn Japanese? At a basic level you can learn to book a hotel room, instruct a taxi driver, buy things in a shop, engage in small talk about the weather, your family, your hobbies and your job. Written material can be presented in our ordinary Roman letters. Given an equivalence of effort Japanese at this level is not really more difficult than the standard European languages, French, German, Spanish, and Italian. There are, of course, swings and roundabouts but the phonetic system of Japanese is very simple; the grammar is highly regular in the manner of a constructed language like Esperanto and there is a useful reserve vocabulary of English loan words. Indeed in comparing English and Japanese one might have sympathy for Japanese students tackling the complexities of English.

There is no shortage of suitable teaching material. We used the BBC text and tapes *Talk Japanese* modelled on similar courses for French, German, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

The difficulties mount further down the line. There are grades of politeness built into the grammatical system. The different forms of 'you' in various European languages is a minor problem in comparison. Japanese factual prose tends to be complex in style and this is compounded by a different sentence structure compared with English. Of course, very few students get this far. Many Westerners who have lived in Japan for some years and learned to speak with some fluency still cannot read effectively.

When all is said and done the biggest and overriding barrier to learning Japanese is the script. If one tackles Spanish, say, at the basic

level described above one can expect to understand public notices in Spain or even make some sense of a newspaper. For Japanese such things would be impossible. It is precisely this lack of reinforcement from authentic written materials which makes the language so difficult to learn.

Ronald Johnson

French Conversation – Fleet U3A

The interest this year, having been in existence for six years, has increased so much that we now run two parallel groups at the same time so that we are able to join together for special events or to revert to one group if numbers drop off. We now have 20 members, all with an average to good fluency in French. A few members take it in turn to lead the group meetings for two or three weeks; this works out quite well because each person uses different sources for their information. We have followed parts of BBC courses such as *French Experience 2*, we have read articles from magazines such as *La Vie Outre-Manche*, we have watched French films, listened to live French radio broadcasts and held many discussions on topics of current interest. The whole objective has been to practice and hopefully improve our oral French whilst having some good laughs at our own and other peoples' mistakes.

A young French lady comes to group meetings about once each month to give extra tuition and is very

helpful with improving our accents and extending our vocabulary, especially in the way words are used in different situations. Members pay a small extra amount each week to cover the French tutor's fees. We have dined at a local French restaurant to celebrate Christmas and Easter and have had the brother of the restaurant owner to talk about the food and wine of the Toulouse region. At another recent meeting we welcomed the daughter and French husband of one of our group members.

We started a French Beginners group three years ago with keen members who subsequently moved onto an Intermediate group. In this group, we have been following the BBC *French Experience I* course, covering such topics as transport, hotels and holidays, food, health and even a section entitled *Vive la Retraite*. Members have given, received and refused invitations, written about their leisure pursuits and designed enticing "For Sale" notices for their own houses. We listen to native speakers on tape and aim for maximum communication. The magazine *Le Rendez-vous francais* provides stress-free grammar and entertaining articles. Sometimes we watch a language video and have enjoyed a visit from Gilbert Louis, Bishop of Chalons en Champagne, a friend of one of our group members. **Rosalind Kemp & Ray Oldham**

German – Fleet U3A

German conversation gives opportunities to discuss the latest news, both personal, national and international and many lively sessions have ensued. German spelling reform, Schroeder's cabinet, the

Euro and German attitudes to immigrants as well as the unification of east and west have all been grist to the mill. We always remember that 'Lachen ist gesund' and compare English and German jokes with much hilarity. Two members of this group have been encouraged by their progress in this group to take the Open University Diploma in German. The German-born leader is an inspiration to all who attend her groups.

The beginners group follows Peter Sutton's book *Let's Talk German*, with supplementary material supplied by the leader and from BBC *Deutsch Plus*. Adult learners appear to prefer a more structured approach than modern methods recommend, probably because this is what they were used to in their schooldays, and this book approaches grammar without threatening and frightening. At the end of the year members are confident enough to try their German when on holiday or with German friends and families. Many original beginners are now in the intermediate or the conversation groups, which is very rewarding for all concerned.

Janet Pulley

Classical Greek - Lewes U3A

The Greek course, now in its ninth year, was offered in 1992 to provide Classical Greek for beginners with a view to reading the literature in the original, and studying Greek mythology, history, philosophy, archaeology and drama as these related to our reading and to looking at derivations from Greek in English and European languages. This year's group of nine

people has five of the original participants and three beginners who are taught separately at present. Our reading has included plays by Euripides and Sophocles - we are currently reading the *Antigone* - books from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Thucydides, Heroditus and Xenophon. There is some very lively discussion of the issues raised from a group with wide and varied experience and knowledge.

We go to play productions in Greek at King's College, London, annually, Cambridge, Bradford and Oxford, and read some part of the play in Greek before we go. There are other trips to Greek related productions; we went to the Ted Hughes *Orestia and Metamorphoses* and will see *Tantulus* in May. We also have links with the Sussex Association of Classical Teachers and the Sussex Classical Association, which means that we can attend lectures on Greek subjects and the annual Sixth Form Conference: all these have very good speakers from the universities.

These are some of the comments from our group:

“I wanted originally to read New Testament Greek but this group has introduced me to the wealth of Classical Greek literature and the archaeology and history which underpins it. It is a real challenge and learning is tremendous fun.”

“Learning Classical Greek has enormously enriched my life. Reading Sophocles in translation is just not the same transforming experience as getting to grips with the original.”

“Greek sounds very exotic until you realise how much

Greek vocabulary is embedded in English, botany, medicine, biblical and everyday words. Fascinating, exciting and making historical sense of the language we use all the time.... the group is vital and delightful... great to be part of it.”

Caroline Wilson



Learning Languages

Many U3A members have learnt something of Classical subjects in their younger days, perhaps from the formal study of Latin, or possibly Greek, or from exploring the classical references in Shakespeare and elsewhere. You may have enjoyed the Greek myths, or Macaulay's celebration of the heroic Horatius defending the bridge over the Tiber. If you would like to explore any of these subjects further, the Classics Network may be able to help. The network encourages all kinds of classical subjects in addition to language teaching, for example, Classical History, Civilisation, Mythology and Literature.

There is much to be gained from these subjects without having any knowledge of the ancient languages. However, for those who have the time and dedication to learn something of the Ancient Greek and/or Latin languages, the enjoyment of other aspects will be enhanced. One group leader told me that he once taught an adult class whose members wanted to learn Greek because "We want to read Plato in the original". Others may want to read Sappho or Homer, Virgil or Catullus - or perhaps

New Testament Greek or Mediaeval Latin.

It is preferable for the group leader to have some expertise in the subject, but one U3A group is learning Ancient Greek on a self-help basis. There is excellent modern teaching material in both languages for adults, with guidance for the learner (or learning group) who has no trained tutor. There are tapes available to give confidence in the basic principles of pronunciation and, in any case, absolute certainty about the original usage is impossible.

I will gladly try to help any U3A member interested in making a start on Classical languages or other Classical subjects. If appropriate I can put you in touch with one of the experienced leaders who have taken the trouble to write to me – my thanks to all who have done so already.

Ann Grubb, Classics Network Coordinator

Resource Centre News

As this issue of SOURCES goes to print we reach the end of three years of funding from the National Lottery. A further, small grant has been obtained from the Lloyds TSB charity fund to cover salaries, but purchase of stock, postal and running costs from now on will be found from U3A funds. For the present there are no plans to charge for any of the Resource Centre services that thus far have been free, but stock purchases of very expensive items will be reduced.

Fortunately three years of good funding have allowed us to build up a wide range of useful material in many subject areas, and its value to U3A members has been proved by the huge increase in loans of our resources over the last two and a half years. We are currently conducting a user survey to enable us to evaluate the service. It has been established that 66% of the 455 U3As in the country use the Resource Centre, and over two hundred different groups contact us for loans every month. We have now written to the chairperson of every one of the 33% of groups who have no borrowers registered with us to remind them that the service exists and asking them to encourage their group leaders to obtain subject lists of stock so that they are aware of what is available for loan.

This is an appropriate time to thank all those members who use our stock, offer suggestions for purchase of new material, and give generous donations of slides, tapes and CDs. We know from your many letters and phone calls that you value the service and we are grateful for your continuing support.

Open University Course Material

For many years the Open University has offered us printed course material they no longer need and being discarded from their warehouse. Often these are not complete sets, but the material can be very valuable to group leaders.

This material has been circulated around groups who want to use it through Swap Shop, run by Stan

Llewellyn, and advertised in *U3A News*. In September this year he will hand over all the records and course material he has to the Resource Centre. The Swap Shop system will cease to exist and OU material will be loaned to group leaders for a set period of time, either 3, 6 or 12 months, by agreement at the beginning of the loan. Those leaders will be responsible for its care and safe keeping and will be required to return the material to us at the end of the loan. They will also be required to cover all postage costs.

We have some OU material available in the Resource Centre for loan now and if you are searching for a particular course we may be able to help. Lists of everything we have will not be sent to groups until the autumn when we have had a chance to assimilate the Swap Shop material into our existing stock.

Many U3A members will have had contact with Stan Llewellyn over the years while he has organised Open University material voluntarily on our behalf. They would, no doubt, wish to join us in thanking him for the wonderful job he has done in keeping this complex system running for so long.

Half a Brain

I mentioned earlier how much we value donations of good quality material, and this has to be the most unusual so far! Crewe and Nantwich U3A have donated half a brain - not a real one in a jar, but an excellent plastic model which comes apart to show the different parts of the human brain. There is a pamphlet to accompany it, and it is light enough to

send in the post on loan to any group.

Another donation, from an individual member, is a set of ten audiocassettes called *Pioneers of Computing*. Each tape is an hour long and contains interviews with some of the most distinguished scientists involved in the early days of computing. These tapes were made in the mid-1970s by the Science Museum, with the support of the National Physical Laboratory. They are, in fact, of historical interest in their own right, but they also give a fascinating insight into the origins of the amazing machines that permeate every aspect of our lives.

Sometimes donations come from organisations outside the U3A. An architecture group leader was using our video *Developing Structures* on the work of the architect Michael Hopkins. Needing further information, he wrote to the architect's practice in London and received, in reply, a set of illustrated articles and the book *Hopkins* by Colin Davies. There was also a letter saying that this material was to be donated to the U3A library when he had finished with it. As the video we have was made some time ago the additional material brings information on this influential architect right up to date. The whole set of video, pamphlets and book makes a useful pack for groups studying modern architecture.

Languages

Finally, as this issue of SOURCES focuses on languages, I would like to remind you that we have audiocassettes and videos on French, German, Spanish and Italian for language groups and videos of

foreign films (with subtitles) in each language. We also have extension material published by the BBC to be used with the courses they broadcast on the Learning Zone, which you can videotape from your own TV.

We have not forgotten our own language, and have a wonderful set of videos entitled *The Story of English*, covering the historical development of the language and its changes as it spread across the world. All this material appears on the Language Resource List, available free.

*Elizabeth Gibson,
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Natural History and Conservation

The underlying motivation for the formation of this new group goes back to the UK's signature of the Rio de Janeiro Convention in 1992 which committed us to the conservation of biological diversity. Such diversity can only be preserved if we know precisely what species are still managing to survive alongside us, where they are to be found and how many there are. Given that massive government funding is unlikely this task can only be carried out by enthusiastic and caring amateurs who send their records to the local environmental record centres which will be connected together by the National Biodiversity Network, a forward looking computer system which is likely to be funded! Since it is well

known that yesterday's common species (e.g. the water vole) become tomorrow's rarities it is vital that we have reliable records of even well known creatures which are not impossible to identify. Besides the great enjoyment to be found in studying the conservation of wildlife our group plans to become actively involved in the vital process of recording.

We started by building up the identification skills needed for us to participate in the important garden recording projects run by the British Trust for Ornithology and Butterfly Conservation. Next we aim to contribute to the Dorset Environmental Centre's moth records by running traps in our gardens. Our summer programme was to have involved building up our understanding of the ecology of chalk downland, deciduous woodland and ponds via field visits, but the threat of foot and mouth disease may yet force us to be content with honing our identification and map reference skills in a more home based setting while we wait for the countryside to open up again.

The great dream for the future is that other like-minded groups may start up in U3A centres all over the country so that the hard pressed environmental record centres will be backed by armies of enthusiasts capable of monitoring the changing distribution of our wildlife.

Bill Shreeves, Shaftesbury U3A

Oldest Learner in England

A competition was run by the Dept. of Education and Employment to find “The Oldest Learner in England 2000,” but with a minimum age for applicants of 85. The competition offered regional and national prizes for the oldest learner and the most inspiring learner. The name of Dorothea Pryke of Great Baddow and Galleywood U3A, was submitted. She is 93 and taking lessons in computing. She got the bug from her daughter and grandchildren in Vancouver, Canada, whom she visited last year. They got her playing bridge on the internet with players in New Zealand and Japan, and she thoroughly enjoyed the experience. When she returned home she determined to get online, and

approached me as the coordinator of our computer group. I give her lessons in her home, as she is not mobile enough to come to our meetings. She has grasped word processing, basic internet activities, including playing Internet Bridge using Yahoo, and can send e-mails to her family spread around the world.

She won the Eastern Region Oldest Learner award, which carries with it a crystal plaque and £250 worth of training vouchers. Awards were presented by Malcolm Wicks, then the Minister for Lifelong Learning. Out of the 155 entries, 21 mentioned the U3A as the main or only provider of their learning activities and 3 were winners. The oldest learner in England was Fred Moore (107), so there's hope for us all!

**Allen Buckroyd–Great Baddow and Galleywood
U3A**



Computer AwareDays

More and more these days one is reading in the press or hearing on TV about the spread of home computing, especially in the areas of the Internet and Email. These developments are proceeding apace and third agers up and down the country are realising how important it is to be “in the swim”, if not as an active protagonist, then at least to have an overall understanding of what is going on. That is why, since November 1999 U3As have been offered a free introduction to the world of computing - courtesy of the Third Age Trust.

Computer AwareDays are an initiative devised by the NEC’s ICT Committee (Information and Communications Technology). Our presenters visit your U3A, equipped with a laptop computer, printer and projector and deliver an entertaining and informative programme to bring you an awareness of computers, what they can do for the individual in the home and for U3A committees and study groups.

These Computer AwareDays are very strictly aimed at beginners and it should be understood that there is no teaching. The idea is not to impart skills but to show what people with computers get up to. Topics covered include word processing, spreadsheets, databases, the Internet, electronic mail and graphics. A typical AwareDay will begin at 10 a.m. and end at 4 p.m. with morning, lunch and afternoon breaks and opportunities for questions and discussion.

Any U3A wishing to arrange a booking for an AwareDay, however, should contact the National Office on 0207 837 8838. We would stress that bookings should only be sought by a U3A member representing their U3A and not by individuals.

AwareDays are best arranged for audiences of 30-70 in number in an appropriate hall or other location.

On occasion, it may be worthwhile for one U3A to link up with a neighbouring U3A. Ideally, the host U3A will be able to provide (a) a large screen, (b) a projector stand, (c) adequate power points and (d) (if at all possible) access to a BT telephone socket. There is a mobile phone we can use but its performance is disappointing compared to a landline. If there are any queries regarding the content of an AwareDay, please contact either Paul Baron or Mike Williams.

AwareDays are proving a popular attraction and an early enquiry is advised. So far we have presented some 40 AwareDays to about 1350 people.

Organisers should also be aware that one outcome of an AwareDay can be a heightened interest in computer courses or training of some kind. U3As may find that they have the expertise within their own ranks to mount these or that they may have to buy in some training. There will also be a need to negotiate for the use of suitable premises and equipment with educational providers in the area.

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