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Talking about Technology

The History of Technology Research Unit at Bournemouth University has been running an oral history programme since the mid-1990s. Initially concentrating on the field of electronics, more recently it has widened its scope to embrace any and every aspect of technological development and change in the 20th century.

Our mission is to explore, through oral history, new ways of understanding technology as part of our material cultural heritage and to harness the power of the internet in presenting the history of technology in the `virtual museum` environment.

Three years collaboration

It is three years since the seeds of the idea for *Talking about Technology* were sown, and the possibility of a collaboration between the U3A and Bournemouth University was discussed with the then chairman – Len Street. We have had links with the U3A locally for many years and welcomed the opportunity to extend this association. U3A members have the potential to contribute to oral history gathering in our field on two levels: as sources of diverse and valuable experience of technological change and as active groups capable of conducting effective oral history interviews.

This combination appealed to the Heritage Lottery Fund, to whom we made a successful application in 1999. As anyone who has walked the tightrope of HLT funding will know, projects must be able to demonstrate a clear public benefit, and are more likely to succeed if they can also demonstrate an active engagement with local communities and volunteer groups.

With U3A as our partners we had a winning combination! Confirmation of the success of the bid was received in February 2000 and the two-year project got under way in August of that year. The aim of the project was to work with a number of U3A groups around the country, each of which would identify a technological theme of significance either to their particular U3A group, or to their local area. Research staff from the University would then train them in oral history techniques and support them in the process of gathering oral testimony on the topic of their choice.

Output from the project was to be primarily in the form of web-based multimedia presentations. These would tell the story of a particular technological process or development from the point of view of those associated with working or living with it, in an effort to identify and illustrate the diverse ways in which people interact with technology and integrate it into their lives.

Our initial `advertisement` for interested groups

via the chairman`s letter produced an overwhelming response. Around 18 U3As across England expressed an interest and we only had funding to enable us to work with three groups!

After a round of visits to give presentations to groups and much thought on both sides, the field was eventually narrowed to five groups.

Rather than stifle this enthusiasm, we decided to stretch our resources and take on all five groups.

The groups participating are Basildon & Billericay, Stamford, Melton Mowbray, Wokingham and Southampton.

The next stage was to identify the project themes. All the groups entered into this debate with enthusiasm and suggested an interesting and stimulating range of topics mostly, but not entirely, based on local or regional themes. Thus Southampton selected shipbuilding. Wokingham chose computing.

Melton Mowbray considered pork pies but settled for agricultural and industrial technological change!

Stamford opted for building technology in relation to stone conservation and Basildon decided to take a broadly based look at the impact of technology in the home.

Necessary Training

Training the interviewer teams began in November 2000 and involved a one-day workshop which dealt with interview techniques, developing interview frameworks for the specific theme of the group, managing the recording technology (*a study in itself lurks there in terms of adjusting to new technology!*) and included roleplay practice interviewing. All the

sessions went well and the teams said that though the day was demanding and tiring, they had thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Well, that`s what they told us anyway! Then, armed with their Sony mini-disc recorders, the teams set forth to conduct their interviews.

The results of the teams` endeavours are now beginning to flow in. Each group has conducted between 10 and 20 interviews on their theme and compiled summaries, and in some cases full transcripts as well. Some interesting additional material has also been gathered, including photographs and related documents. We have even received a roof slate and an oolitic limestone paperweight, as donations from interviewees!

Research staff at Bournemouth are now busy analysing the interviews and putting together the `virtual` displays which will communicate the results of the project via our website.

The first presentation to go live will be from Southampton, on aspects of technological development and change in shipbuilding. The remaining displays will come onstream during late Autumn this year and in early Spring in 2002 .

More to see

You can view the developing presentations by following the link to *Talking about Technology* on http://histru.bmth.ac.uk/Oral_History/Sound_Room.htm

Whilst the project is far from over for us, most of the U3A teams have now completed their contributions and can justifiably relax and congratulate themselves, secure in the knowledge that they have made a significant contribution to future generations` awareness and understanding of some key technological developments of the 20th century.

It is gratifying and encouraging to hear from some of the teams of their plans to develop their projects further and in some cases to use the skills they have acquired to undertake other oral history projects in their areas. For our part we have thoroughly enjoyed working with U3A and are beginning to think about ideas for future projects. Watch this space!

Frances Cambrook
Research Fellow

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Thank you David

Since 1998 when the first issue of Sources was published, David Ensor has been the editor of what is a most helpful educational bulletin and guide for U3A members. It draws together the experience, knowledge and ideas of interest groups from all over the UK and adds information from many sources about learning materials useful to members. It is greatly appreciated.

David agreed to edit the new NLCB-sponsored publication and brought his wide knowledge of newspaper printing and publishing, his own enthusiasm for learning and his capacity to inspire contributors into this invaluable service. He was successful in persuading some eminent outside authorities to write for SOURCES. His thoughtful contributions to committees, notably the Standing Committee for Education and the Finance sub-committee, were always much appreciated by the members.

David was always generous in sharing his knowledge with colleagues and U3A members alike. The success of SOURCES owes much to this quality as well as to his capacity for hard work. His integrity, courtesy and clear judgment added to the respect in which he is held. The U3A is very fortunate to have had David as editor and we owe him sincere thanks.

We wish him a happy "retirement" from SOURCES, and continuing pleasure as a member of Salisbury U3A, of which he is past chairman.

Kate Wedd

Chairman, Third Age Trust

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Going back in Time

Our current oral history project at Great Baddow, Essex, is part of a larger historical guide to a village which, despite having roots pre-Domesday and probably being the largest village in Essex, has no written history.

The overall project includes historical walks around the village and a written historical guide.

To achieve this we formed a small team of interviewers, all of us having followed a one-day course conducted by the county Sound Archivist, who will be available for ongoing advice.

Recording

Our own record forms, based on those which he provided, enable us to give details of the process to prospective interviewees; arrange dates for a meeting; receive sign-over of their copyright to the Sound Archive and record the reference number and other details of the interviewee.

In addition an index sheet carries the written content of the interview, recorded against a

subject discussed and an index name, eg

Tape count; 131; Subject; Flood relief project started; Index; work -- or

Tape count; 138; Subject; Hearsay re shafts and secret passages to Baddow Brewery; Index; local legends.

When most of the interviews have taken place the data will be sorted and collated, possibly via a customised version of Microsoft ACCESS.

We have highlighted the extracts that look most interesting, which will be fully transcribed from the tapes before being edited, ready for inclusion into *The Book* which is our objective

The book will have chapters on subjects (home life, school, war, legend, shops etc.) and on people. One can quote individuals, or make a statement without giving the author's name, eg. "A resident told me that there was a tunnel between the church and the local hostelry".

(this might be the safest way in some cases!)

We obviously take precautions against libel and anything hurtful and where possible check statements -- not easy where there is no corroboration or where one is dealing with the differing, subjective views of people about something that happened 70 years ago. The foreword should alert readers to this fact.

How should we publish? How best to reach a wide audience? What in fact is the potential market for a *local* book? How much will it cost? What selling price should we aim at?

An Essex village of 2000 sold 1000 copies of their oral history book. We have a population of 16,000, but I doubt that we could sell 8000 copies!

We could of course go to DIY publishing – less cost, but harder work.

A valuable contact is Dr. Robert Perks, the Curator, Oral History Director, National Life Story Collection, British Library Sound Archive, 96 Euston Rd. London, NW1 2DB:

His e-mail address is rob.perks@bl.uk

And the relevant websites are:

www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive

& www.oralhistory.org.uk

Allen Buckroyd

Gt. Baddow & Galleywood, Essex U3A

Memories of being 16

No queues formed when someone suggested to Witney U3A members that they should exchange teenage memories with `A`-level students at a local secondary school!

"Nothing interesting happened to me – and I can't remember much anyway", was a typical initial response, but a wonderful display of memorabilia from the last 50 years, organised by our `Project 16` co-ordinators, revived so many forgotten memories that 22 members were soon involved and working hard to contribute to this two-year intergenerational oral history project.

The project was based on an idea from the West Oxfordshire Arts Development Officer and was built on considerable existing contacts with the school – working on curriculum projects in art/photography, drama and English.

The U3A participants had an age span of 55 to 84 years and met together for ten sessions during the first part of the project, identifying significant milestones in their lives, looking at the development of their families, the influence of inherited characteristics; the world events in their "year 16". Discussion included films, music and the war and there was a gradual re-awakening of their teenage memories.

Particularly interesting was the clear indication of increasing opportunities for girls between 1935 and 1955 and the very different lives people led in the cities and rural areas. The first edition of our *Book of Memories* followed. We also put together individual *Memory Boxes* -

collections of everyday objects through which to tell our story. One member used a collection of books to describe her life, someone else used the contents of a sewing basket and others used a mixture of photographs, ornaments, tools, embroideries, certificates, letters, even medical equipment in one case. We worked with the `A`-level students

for a total of seven sessions over the summer term, exploring and contrasting the experiences of being teenagers and discussing the whole topic of "Memory".

The students also made *Memory Boxes* and, sitting together, sharing our life stories as we unpacked the boxes, was a very moving experience.

We would have been happy to spend more time with the young people but curriculum requirements prevailed. More than 40 students and adults had become involved in Project 16 which peaked with two evening presentations by the drama students, a display of U3A work and the students` art/photography exhibition – subsequently displayed at two public galleries in the area. The project, costing about £1500, was covered by a grant from the West Oxfordshire District Council Millennium Fund.

Was it worth it?....definitely!

Everyone agreed that it was "really interesting and enjoyable".

The Students *"Talking to members of the U3A made me realise just how similar the ladies had been to us when they were 16 or 17. The same kind of things mattered to them that matter to us now"* .

"The stimulus helped me understand where I am now; the history that has made our world what it is today."

The Staff -- *"The students in drama have achieved at or above their potential in most cases and being part of the project enhanced their process and performance marks.----- discussing the Memory Boxes provided many insights into social and cultural changes over the years"*

U3A Members – *"The school has been so good to us, it`s nice to give something back. It certainly created a lot of interest and there was no shortage of volunteers to work with a primary school on similar topics a few months later."*

Barbara Bond
Witney, Oxfordshire U3A

A full report and a copy of the *Book of Memories* is available from Barbara

Bond at 221 Farmers Cl. Witney, OXON OX28 1LH ---- £2 (p & p.)

Onward and upward

Four changes of location, an increase in membership from ten to eighty plus a waiting list, and more recently another group in Nantwich, is the story of the growth over the past six years of Crewe and Nantwich U3A Local History Group.

Weekly meetings are punctuated monthly by a visit or a guided walk, with an outside speaker once a year.

The weekly meeting divides into three – each with a leader. After coffee, all meet together in the hall and there are presentations on subjects the groups have researched such as a village history, or evacuees in Nantwich. Other times the groups study maps, old newspapers, heirlooms, or play tapes recording the lives of members.

The recently formed Nantwich Group, founded by *Allan Whatley*, who sent us this report, has had to close at 30 members and already has a waiting list. Can you beat it?

HISTORY AND TRAVEL

Many tours organised by the Travel Network have history as their focus. Such tours have included visits to the Crimea, Hungary, Sicily, Western France, Corsica and Sardinia, India, Africa and America. I have participated in three such tours. They were to India, East Africa and the Western USA.

The following tours planned by the Travel Network in 2002 have a history content. **Further information is available from National Office:**

1 February – Venice (carnival, history and architecture); 22 February – Southern Portugal (history and architecture); 19 March – Gardens of

Malta; 27 March – Corsica and Sardinia (Napoleonic history and culture); 11 April – Provence ; 4 May – Rhodes, Greece (history and architecture);

22 May – Alaska and Vancouver history and geography of NW America); 9 June – Prague (East European history); 16 June Western France – Wines, medieval history and architecture; 1 October – Canada; Toronto and Niagara Falls – architecture, natural history;

23 October – Malaysia, Sarawak, Western Australia – Malaysian culture, Western Australia geography and history.

Dennis Johnson
Travel Network Co-ordinator



Resource Centre News

In this issue of SOURCES the focus is on history, especially oral history, and on computers.

Groups studying oral history record, either on audiocassette or by printed record, the recollections of their own members or other individuals in the wider community. This work often connects with local history as people remember their town or village as it was in the past and the many changes that have taken place there.

Sometimes the scope of memories relates to much wider issues and we have some audiocassettes in the Resource Centre relating to the memories of servicemen and women from Britain`s overseas empire, who served in the armed forces during the second world war. They were made by the Imperial War Museum and BBC Radio 2 and include the experiences of Lilian Bader, a U3A tutor, who donated them to our collection .

We are also grateful to Morfydd Adamson from Wirral U3A for donating six of her wonderful historical lectures with accompanying slides. As a self-taught historian she has researched the lives of various royal personages and the lectures tell their story with much humour and many unusual facts. The subjects of these biographical lectures are:

Catherine of Aragon, Elizabeth I, Charles II, William and Mary, Queen Charlotte (Mrs King), the wife of George III and my own favourite -- `Poor Fred` - Frederick, Prince of Wales 1705 – 1751 whose parents treated him so unkindly as a child and did everything they could to belittle him as an adult – a sad but fascinating story.

All of these can be borrowed on three week loan from the Resource Centre

Gardening

In the past I have frequently been asked for resources on Garden History but have had little success in finding interesting material. I have now been given a video which covers the story of the English garden from Roman times to the present day. It has been produced by Thames TV and is divided up into a number of short programmes covering different periods and gardening styles.

Another new addition to our stock is the RHS Plantfinder 2000-2001 CD-Rom. It is easy to load and use and has illustrations and information on hundreds of plants, with contact addresses for specialist suppliers, garden centres and nurseries.

Computers

We have acquired a series of three CD-Roms which can be used to learn Word 97, which I know is very popular software with many U3A members. The tutors who originally recommended the purchase of these (at a very low price for the set) are currently running a training course using them with a group and are finding them very helpful. They could however be used by individuals at home as they are interactive and easy to follow. Each CD-Rom is at a different level: Getting Started, Intermediate and Advanced and should be borrowed singly and not as a set.

Can I remind you again of our `Pioneers of Computing` audiocassette series about the founders of computer science and their work. There are nine cassettes in the series, produced in the sixties by the Science Museum.

Art

Most SOURCES readers now know that we have a large collection of slides and videos related to art but we are always looking for new material to add as the demand for our stock is so great.

In the last month I have added some very interesting new videos – three especially spring to mind.

The first is `Oriental Brush Painting` by Kit Nichol who is a U3A member and a tutor in art and Japanese flower arranging. This is our second video on this subject and as the first has been so well used by many art groups I hope they will also enjoy Kit`s new video.

The second video I would like to recommend is quite unlike anything else we have in stock. It explains the meaning and background to aboriginal art – specifically dot painting. This has now become very popular in contemporary art around the Pacific Rim and the video also contains examples and interpretation of modern acrylic dot painting.

The video is called `Dreamings on Canvas` and runs for 18 minutes.

Many members who attended the National conference at UMIST in Manchester took the opportunity to visit the Lowry exhibition at Salford and very much enjoyed it. I now have a video of the collection, narrated by Harold Riley. I have had Lowry slides for a considerable time but this is the first video I have been able to obtain about his work. These videos and many others all appear on the new Art Resource List which is free to anyone in U3A who applies to the Resource Centre.

Jazz

There is a new subject network for jazz and its co-ordinator, Robert Jones, has obtained some CDs for the Resource Centre, donated by various record companies. These will appear on the general Music Resource List, but if you are only interested in jazz I can supply a short list of these CDs.

.....And Finally

Many thanks to everyone who returned Open University courses to the stand at the Manchester conference. A list of everything we have available, including new courses being offered this year from the OU, will be sent out in a general mailing to all U3As as soon as it is ready.

In the meantime, if you want to return unwanted courses or obtain new ones, please contact the Resource Centre and **not** Stan Llewellyn, who has now retired from SwapShop after many years of organising the loan of OU material for the U3A.

*Elizabeth Gibson, Resource Centre Manager
26 Harrison Street, London WC1H 8JW
Tel:020 7837 8838 (Tuesday and Thursday only)*

SCE Meeting Report

The newly reformed Standing Committee for Education held its first meeting under its new chairman, Keith Richards, on 2 October. The chairman reported on a recent meeting between himself, Kate Wedd (NEC Chairman) and Margaret Hodge MP, Minister of Lifelong Learning at the Department for Education and Employment. He also reported on a meeting with John Monks, Chairman of the Adult Learning Committee of the Learning and Skills Council, which had been arranged to explore the possibility of U3A funding from the L&SC.

One of the main items of the committee's business was a discussion on a WEA/U3A Joint Statement, in which Michael Freeston, the WEA Education officer took part. The document had been prepared by a small group of members from each organisation with the intention of clarifying the differences and complementarities between them. One surprising fact that emerged was that the majority of WEA general education courses were unaccredited. When a final version of the document has been approved, copies will be circulated to local groups in both organisations as a briefing paper to facilitate mutual understanding.

A full agenda also included discussions on the U3A membership survey; Conference, both 2001 and preliminary work for 2002; summer schools to be held in Cheltenham in 2002; the Resources Centre; SOURCES; continuing growth of the subject networks; online learning and other IT developments.

Len Street

Only Pictures please..

My family had lived in the same house for four generations. Our home had been built into a medieval tower at some time during the early 19th century. It was bombed and destroyed during the second world war.

Being the last of my family I thought my memories of the historical features of the building might be of interest to local historians and archaeologists. Part of the medieval undercroft might still exist under the street.

It was therefore disappointing to be told by an assistant archivist of the county`s records office that they would only be interested only in any photographs I might have. Had there been any, German incendiaries would have disposed of them!

How this attitude has changed for the better in recent years. Schools now encourage children to ask their elders to recount their experiences. My forbears took the idiosyncracies of the old house for granted, but now family history societies, local museums, libraries, county magazines and local newspapers are much more encouraging and appreciate the need to record the reminiscences of a way of life long past.

Future generations will no doubt be less likely to find part of a spiral staircase behind a lath and plaster wall, or a well where one would not expect a well to be.

Oral history is important to us and to the future. We need to encourage older people to tell us of their experiences when young. The domestic and social lives of ordinary people enable us to understand in part, our national history, but more importantly, to learn how our ancestors learned to cope with the rigours of life and death.

*Elizabeth Baker,
History group leader, Purbeck U3A*

YOUR CHANCE

Oral history projects are becoming increasingly popular in local villages and communities. A good example is the account of the U3A programme being undertaken at Great Baddow in Essex.

That, and similar contributions to this issue might spur on other U3As to undertake more Oral History exploration of the past. If so, and if groups could do with help in how to proceed, Elizabeth Rodger, who is Co-ordinator of the Oral History Network would be delighted to hear from them.

She can be contacted at 5 Rufus Close, Lewes BN7 1BG Ph.01273 471297.

e-mail elizabeth@rodgere.freemove.co.uk

Methods of Teaching

Being a conscientious tutor or lecturer in U3A is not really such an easy task. Teachers in Secondary schools work mostly according to well tested syllabi as well as according to the demands of examinations, and attendance is compulsory.

In higher education, be it further education leading to diplomas and qualifying examinations or university education awarding degrees, students are highly motivated to attend classes and lectures regularly because of their careers. The same type of motivation and compulsion may not exist in older groups where interest, learning for its own sake and intellectual curiosity are most important.

Because it is known from the recent neuropsychological research that learning new material is important to keep a mature brain active as new connections between neurones may be developing even in advanced age, the optimal method of learning would be the one requiring substantial participation. Of course, discussions would not occur in a vacuum but should be based on new materials that the tutor or members have to provide by reading specialised books.

For this reason, just passive listening to lectures may not be at all productive. It is true that many undergraduates have to study on a basis of lectures for large numbers without any opportunity for discussions. However they already possess pre-requisite knowledge, such as note taking which is quite a complex skill as one has to grasp, at a

considerable speed, the main points of the presented material. Also students are provided with extensive, relevant, supportive reading lists.

The knowledge that they have to pass examinations motivates university students to study their lecture notes as well as prescribed books. Above all, their young brains, sharpened by long schooling do not have the same needs as more mature brains.

The ideal method of serious learning for older people would be a seminar, a small group between six and 20 participants learning the new material as well as discussing it. The new material should be planned in advance; it should be systematic and have continuity.

It is known from the psychology of learning that it is difficult to retain disjointed, episodic bits of information and that efficient and enjoyable learning and learning something new, requires some sort of structure on which to hang the relevant data.

Teaching, tutoring or leading a group requires a certain amount of professionalism, respect for persons, knowledge of the material and ability to present that material in an appropriate form. In every U3A there are these skills and they should be made use of and appreciated.

An interesting and popular programme I was able to participate in was clustered around the subject of Democracy. A number of members contributed topics such as The Meaning and History of Democracy; Democracy and Education; Freedom and Equality; Media in Democracy etc. These approaches were professional yet not narrowly academic or specialised and were enjoyable.

It cannot be stressed enough that active participation is the most important element of U3A study groups.

Opportunities for learning were what U3As were created for and there are no better opportunities for social contact than sharing new interests.

***Dr. Katherine Sun
Sutton, Surrey U3A***



oo00000000oo

This is one of those situations Professor Joad might have relished – remember him, the Brains Trust – "it depends what you mean by.....", he'd say. It depends what you mean by `teaching` on the one hand, or by `education` or `learning` on the other; when you're quite young, the latter is taking in the basics, the need for self-discipline, how to live with your fellow beings in an increasingly crowded world. Later it could be college or university – more `education` or perhaps `training` -- preparation for work and parenthood.

At our time of life we can still be learning, often from our own choice to a level of our own choosing.

At the higher levels we need the skilled intervention of qualified teachers or tutors, sometimes with the help of information technology -- `distance learning` or television, the Open University or perhaps the `Learning Zone.

Does this apply in U3A?

Take a look at the results of the U3A membership survey conducted recently. Answering the question- "What was your main reason for joining U3A?", the majority of responses indicated "social contact, to meet people" (29%); to meet people with similar interests (10%); "to keep the mind active" (10%). "To follow a specific interest" was the response of 18%

Those wishing "to learn, gain more knowledge or learn new skills" totalled 26%.

The social element is by far the strongest. The fact that people have joined the organisation in the knowledge that they will be "taught" or "led" by fellow members of similar or perhaps greater age than themselves, indicates that an element of learning in a social atmosphere, rather than a strong dose of education, is what they are looking for -- learning in a relaxed friendly atmosphere, while making whatever contribution they can towards the objectives of their fellow members.

Again, question 13 asks, "What is it that you most enjoy about U3A?".

The response level indicates clearly that 53% favour "companionship/ social contact/meeting people".

"Keeping mind alert/mental stimulation" comes second at 19% followed in order by – meeting like-minded people; interesting talks; developing new interests and skills; outings and visits; the variety of interests available and finally, interesting discussions.

This is not to deny that, as Dr Sun says, teaching in general is an expert business.... But I have to say again – "It depends what you mean....."

T.C.

**Are you a group leader? What are your views on this subject?
Write or e-mail SOURCES at National Office.**

A Good Start

Study of some of the major turning points of history attracted Brentwood (Essex) U3A as a good way to start to start their new history group programme.

They launched a series of talks, beginning with Alexander the Great and continuing via the rise of Rome, the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the explosive rise of Islam, the Byzantines and on up to 1945.

Tony Holmes, their convenor writes:

"We have come to know some of the famous figures of the past, what they were like and why they acted as they did. Many things have become much more understandable, now we know more of the facts behind them".

The programme caught on. Private homes became too small and a hall was needed.

Notes, maps and illustrations were handed out to help understanding and soon the names of Genghiz Khan, Qin Shihuangdi, and Ivan the Terrible

were well known.

Next to come is Mao Zedong.

Languages Network

Gloria Blackburne, Languages Network Co-ordinator, has received enthusiastic reports from members who attended learning holidays at the two centres in France (the Beaujolais and the Tarn) and at the one in Italy (Milan) this year.

The two French centres will offer the same courses to U3A members in 2002 and will advertise in *U3A News*.

Anyone seeking information should contact them direct at the following addresses:

Les Ateliers Linguistiques du Tarn, `Fiolles` 81600 Brens-Gaillac, France **or**

Fondvielle Language School, Taponas,

69620, St. Vérand, France.

Gloria is offering to act as intermediary for the Milan courses and information is available now. These courses are not suitable for beginners. Send a sae to Gloria at the address above.

Gloria has also arranged inclusive language-learning packages with Saga Holidays in a number of specified weeks in France, Italy and Spain. Participants will be part of a larger group of similar interest and will benefit from having all travel, food and accommodation arranged along with available excursions.

The holidays are advertised in the Saga European Brochure. They are available at Intermediate and Conversational level only. The tutors (chosen by Gloria) are all native speakers experienced in adult

education, particularly with third-age groups.

Bookings will be dealt with by Saga Holidays

By the way, did your group join in

THE YEAR OF LANGUAGES?

If they did, please let the editor know

THE SUBJECT NETWORKS

From discussions at conference it was clear that this valuable facility, whereby study or activity groups with a common interest can exchange ideas and information to the benefit of their members, was far from fully utilised.

A recent bulletin from National Office to all U3A secretaries listed 30 such networks. Do you think there should be more? Are your groups involved?

If not or you're not sure and/or you think they should be, talk to your group leader.

Chris Dickson, U3A Subject Networks Co-ordinator, would be delighted to help on 01722

335223 or e-mail chris.dickson@ukgateway.net



European Studies

If you read the article "Pro-Europe? Not Us", in the Autumn 2001 issue of U3A News, it may lead you to seek some greater knowledge of what goes on across the channel and why.

Derek Stroud, European Studies Network Co-ordinator has contributed the following, referring to the interest engendered by the Plymouth Conference and the growing number of U3A European Study Groups.

Derek tells us what they do and what is involved in setting up and running.

"The title embraces a range of options, from travel and cuisine to cultural history. The main focus of U3A groups to date is however, on the European Union:--

What do those treaties – Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, really mean?

Should the UK join the Euro?

Is the enlargement of the EU a good thing, and for whom?

As this is complex and contentious territory there is of course a risk of meetings becoming simply rehearsals of long held (and conflicting) views. The risk can be avoided, or at least lessened, by ensuring that sessions start on the basis of fact (what, for example, are the powers

of the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the Parliament, the Court of Justice etc.).

Given such a factual basis groups can better tackle current controversies raised, for example, in newspaper cuttings but discussed in the light of their background study of the history, institutions, law and policies of the EU.

example Further illumination can be provided by inviting specialist speakers (on European law for) and by visits to the institutions themselves – particularly in Brussels or Strasbourg. Such visits require time in preparation but bring things to life in a way that cannot readily be achieved by "desk study".

Then there is a mass of useful literature plus material on the web about the EU, so much that navigating is often difficult. However, there are sources of information specifically designed for educational purposes that we find useful.

Anyone thinking of setting up a group or wanting further information is

very welcome to contact me at 01252 615816 or e-mail me at

derekstroud@csma-netlink.co.uk

*Derek Stroud, European Studies
Network Co-ordinator*

A century of women`s lives

As part of a course on *The Hidden History of Women* we decided in October 1995 to look at women in the 20th century through the lives of our foremothers. One of our group, particularly interested in oral history offered to record what we all said and to attempt some analysis, but it was soon obvious that this would not work; with a whole class of women participating, interrupting and asking questions it was far too confusing! So we agreed to write back-up material to our spoken contributions. This was successful and everyone became fascinated by the divergent experiences of our forebears

We developed guidelines about confidentiality and about members` rights to omit anything they would rather not talk about; this helped us to feel free to express ourselves, and our individual attitudes to self-revelation became more relaxed as time went on.

We agreed that all our notes would be kept as an archive for future reference. We also felt we needed to put our "stories" into a historical context, as we were a women`s history group. When we had all contributed, our `archivist` reported back on our work from a sociological perspective, and we saw the significance of this. Themes emerged which we developed for a Women`s History Network Conference in the spring of 1996, where our presentation was warmly received.

We were in the world of professional women historians, and it was evident that what we were doing was becoming a serious project.

During the second year we moved on to talk about our own life histories, which were even more enthralling. Then we took up topics which we felt we wanted to expand on, such as education, war, work and family, together with feminism, singleness and the social context of

retirement. Through all this, group relationships became more and more democratic.

At the end of this second year we decided to stop before we ran out of steam. The Women`s History Group continued, welcoming new members, while the `oral history` group, following strong encouragement from a woman lecturer at the conference, decided to make the material we had produced into a book.

We found our work had raised many issues about the nature of memory. The life history approach relies upon memory with all its patchiness, its avoidance and/or distortion of traumatic events. We found that it telescopes time so that childhood for instance, evokes an unspecific aura of happiness or misery, enlivened by occasional vivid incidents. We recalled memories of our foremothers from a child`s viewpoint and then drew away to reflect on them as adults. We had to make an explicit commitment to include material about our present lives, partly because we were focussing on `history` and partly because we found life in retirement more difficult to pin down.

We found that memory was not just a personal matter. Much of what we think we know was handed down and altered in the telling, often based on family `legends` and what might be called `cultural myths` which reach us through reading, broadcasting, storytelling, gossip. Entangled in our stories are memories of European persecution, economic depression and two world wars. One of our group, writing about her grandmother in Wales, evoked the nostalgia for a rural past. Even at our advanced age we have found we are not `free` of our mothers, but that the process of reflection was a means of working through family relationships.

There are two elements in our accounts: the historical, as we compared the experiences of three generations and related them to the circumstances of the time; and the personal, in which we tried to trace the influence of one generation on the behaviour of the next. This was much more difficult to tease out and much more subject to emotional blocks.

But as one of us said: "A good thing that has come out of this for me is the realisation that others shared the same experiences. I am not alone".

The same response was experienced by members of feminist consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s.

This paper is a paraphrase of the first chapter of our book

Our Grandmothers, Our Mothers, Ourselves – A Century of Women`s Lives, which we self-published in September 2000. A second edition has been published by the Third Age Press and is available from them at 6 Parkside Gardens, LONDON SW19 5EY. Tel.020-8947 0401, for the special U3A price of £8.00

Marelle Hill
London U3A



THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of SOURCES in February 2002 will focus principally on **Geology** and **Geography**. Groups involved in these or associated subjects are urged to send contributions to SOURCES at National Office by 31 December at the latest.

Interesting contributions concerning other groups activities are equally welcome.

At present it is intended that the May SOURCES will centre on **The Arts**

and **Mathematics, Astronomy and Meteorology** will feature in the August issue, both subject to confirmation in the next issue.

IT –The best is yet to come

Of man`s many inventions, the computer is perhaps the one that has touched the most areas of human endeavour; and it`s only been around for some fifty five years.

As with so many other developments its progress becomes ever more rapid.

The early computers were as big as a medium sized room and contained hundreds of valves – those big glass objects that we remember from earlier radios and hi-fi. How different they are today!

So how did it start?

How did this happen? It resulted from the invention of the transistor and subsequently the integrated circuit built on a thin slice of silicon – the now ubiquitous "chip".

The so-called personal computer – something of such modest size that it can sit on your desk – has been around for 30 years. I remember quite clearly somebody saying (probably Bill Gates of Microsoft) that every worker`s desk would one day have one. I also remember saying myself – "the man must be grossly optimistic, or even just plain mad!". But I was wrong, as everyone knows. Today people also have them at home.

The belief that you can ignore computers because you can do everything you want to do without one, is fast becoming an untenable position. For those third-agers who realise this and want to know more, the Third Age Trust supports Computer Aware Days at which some of the many things that computers can do are demonstrated in a relaxed and entertaining way.

(Contact National Office to find out more).

Among these is the use of voice-recognition software which enables you to talk to your PC rather than use a keyboard.

Flights, holidays and railway tickets can be bought on the internet.

You can keep personal accounts with special software, do your banking on the internet and download your bank statement. You can even update the prices of your shares automatically, though this is not always a pleasure!

Photography and image-making are entering the digital age. Already ink-jet printers (for around £100) can turn out a convincing photographic image and the computer is on its way as an alternative to the darkroom. Editing videos and composing, publishing and playing back music are also perfectly possible.

On the internet, you can send mail (e-mail) almost instantly to anywhere in the world, listen to your favourite radio-programme or read your favourite newspaper regardless of where you are. You can make a phone-call of any distance for the price of your internet connection (a local call) -- though the quality needs improving. Video-conferences can be held using a monitor-mounted "web-cam".

All this ease of communication will make the running of organisations -- U3A and the Third Age Trust included -- much more efficient and travelling costs can be reduced or even in some cases eliminated. These are powerful tools and are now widely available.

So what of the future? Nothing stays still for long in the computer world so we can expect more power and bigger memories for less cost. Many forms of remote control are already possible via computer and this area will grow, especially in the home. It will become commonplace to control domestic equipment of any kind from a distance.

And we can expect the unexpected. Be sure of that .

Paul Baron U3A Webmaster

p.baron@beeb.net

Don`t forget.....

The Internetwork Group: helping members (beginners included) towards learning and

communication on the `net`

Computer Aware Days: Showing you what can be achieved.

Webweaving: an entertaining and informative introduction to the "w.w.w"

National Office 020 7837 8838

U3A.org.uk

Webs Across the World

U3A`s `electronic links` with countries across the world, as many of you will know, come via www.harrowu3a.co.uk, one of the first local U3A websites – created by Peter Sinclair who today maintains our, now much wider, world-wide-web.

Peter writes:

"Having searched for and found similar websites overseas, I was able, via the generous response of their webmasters, to create reciprocal links on Harrow`s WWW LINKS pages. Later I was to establish contact and enjoy full co-operation with larger organisations in their respective countries – as for example, the Elderhostel Institute Network in the USA and Canada and the European network –"Learning in Later Life" (LiLL) at the University of Ulm in Germany.

"Because our website is now so widely listed, I often receive e-mail contacts from strangers asking me to include their sites in our links. If they fall within the definition "Learning in Retirement" and are non-commercial, I am always happy to do so.

"The encouraging aspect of this constant growth in international links -- now around 300 in 17 countries – is being able to bring people together. The fact that the Harrow site has had nearly 20,000 "hits" in five years speaks for itself.

"Increases in the past 12 months have brought local U3A websites up to 66 – more, I believe than any other European country, and convincing evidence of the wide use of the internet by U3As here and abroad".

You can contact Peter at
Peter@sinclair.tc

As a footnote to his article, Peter suggests the next step will surely be the development of local U3A e-mail registers for cheaper and more rapid communication with members. Harrow`s register now lists nearly 100 subscribers –seven per cent plus of their total membership



Learning ----- the future

Few schools, if any, these days do not have their own computer training set-up, so the future is plain to see. Learning and the blackboard are parting company.

The internet, digital cameras and multi-media projection will bring it all into the classroom to order --- even from thousands of miles away.

On-line learning is becoming the thing. It`s your "at-home" college or university via which you can access specific programmes as you wish.

Our first effort at U3A On-Line was Italian Art 1400 to 1600, which ran from March through May this year. Now we`re moving forward.

.... a note from Phyll Babb, Chairman of the On-Line Courses Group tells us how

It is quite a challenge preparing U3A online courses, so why do we bother?

The proportion of members able or wishing to make use of them must be small...but that is now. **The future will be different.**

Once online, the courses we develop will be there for future members too, and how many U3A members joining us in the next decade will not be computer literate?

How many retirement homes will not have internet facilities for their residents some of whom will be U3A members wanting to follow courses but unable to get about so easily?

Where U3As are small and without specialist tutors, they will be able to download a course subject of their choice and organise a group to use the material and work at their own pace. Others may wish to interact with the course tutor as well as fellow English speaking students; they might be in Germany or Finland, Canada or China. What fun for the tutor!....and for the members!.

Who`s game to join us? The Phoenix Fund Trustees thought it worthwhile to provide funds for technical and administrative assistance, and we believe it is none too soon to prepare more courses in our unique U3A style, so do help by offering to write for

us. You`ll enjoy it! *Phyll Babb*

One-day Conference

"Design for all Ages"

To be held at Hampstead Town Hall Tuesday, the 27th of this month, the conference will provide an opportunity for existing Design/Age Groups and prospective group leaders to hear more about what U3A groups have achieved so far and what opportunities there are for the future.

There is still a small number of seats available.

Contact Marion Bieber, U3A in London, Hampstead Town Hall, 213 Haverstock Hill, LONDON NW3 4QP (home tel:fax 0207 722 5399)

Luton is musical

Luton has a music club that goes back to 1946 and provides 23 concerts and recitals between the end of September and the beginning of April each year.

Luton U3a has followed up on this. Roderick Winfield writes:

Our small friendly group has been meeting once a fortnight for more than two years to enjoy recorded chamber music. With Music Appreciation (largely classical orchestral) and Opera (very wide ranging) we are one of three groups devoted to serious music in Luton U3A. None of us currently plays an instrument and some cannot read music, but our meetings are without exception an opportunity for a deepening interest in a branch of music that has engaged nearly all the great composers. Attendance is always excellent.

For our purposes chamber music includes all small-scale music -- typically trios, quartets and quintets -- but also larger works with a "chamber music feel", such as the Brandenburg concertos as well as works for a limited range of instruments eg. Mozart`s Serenade for 13 wind instruments. Solo instrumental music and songs also comprise a significant part of our programmes. It was felt that if we restricted

ourselves to chamber music "proper", interest might not have been sufficient in the first place, let alone sustained as it has been. We take it in turns to select and introduce programmes. We keep a detailed record of music we have heard. Since our formation we have listened to more than 150 works without once repeating – except perhaps individual lieder.

The great emphasis has been on the Austro-German classical and romantic composers starting with Haydn, and to a lesser extent with the music of the great French and Russian composers. Occasional ventures into the world of contemporary music included a violin sonata by Alfred Schnitke (1934-98) which was arguably the greatest challenge to our ears and minds!

We have all been surprised and delighted to hear new works eg. Charles Ives` "The Unanswered Question", and McEwen`s String Quartet (1913) was a revelation. Most of the music we have heard was however composed before 1900.

Roderick Winfield
Luton U3A

HISTORY.....

.....is a nightmare from which we are trying to awaken.....*James Joyce*

.....must not be written with bias, and both sides must be given, even if there is only one side.....*John Betjeman*

And we all know the one by Henry Ford!

U3A Group members, as well as Network Co-ordinators, and Group Leaders can help maintain SOURCES as a valuable publication, not only by looking to it for useful information, but by, in their turn, using it to pass on information.

Contributions are the lifeblood of publications like this. They make it interesting and ensure its future value. They will help us achieve the objectives set out in the first issue:

"To spread information on best-practice: To exchange information and ideas: To help U3As launch new groups and bring fresh ideas to those already existing".

Forthcoming Events.....

Languages Network

Latest developments in the Languages Network include a STUDY DAY 2002 AT Godalming on 4 APRIL NEXT.

Booking forms are available from Network Co-ordinator Gloria Blackburne, 20 Abbey Mill, Church St., Bradford on Avon BA15 1HB (please include s.a.e.)



U3A ONLINE COURSES

WORKSHOP

Tuesday 15 January 2002

For everyone wanting to know more about Online courses

Students – Group Leaders – Writers

At THE FRIENDS` MEETING HOUSE, Euston Rd., LONDON (opp. Euston Station): start 10.30

Discussions will include – the advantages of being online; the subjects available now; how to log-on; what technical help will be available; how to follow a course and interact with others; how to download and use for a group; how to prepare and tutor and online course.

There will be time for discussion, with workshops on specific aspects of production and use, individually or for groups.

Further information from and/or bookings to National Office, 26 Harrison street.

LONDON WC1H 8JG

SAE required for confirmation of bookings

Art Appreciation Study Day

At the Barber Institute of Fine Arts

Birmingham University

Wednesday 17 April

"Face to Face – the Painter`s Eye on Portraiture"

Cost approx. £20 - incl.refreshments and buffet.

Application forms available early in New Year

Forthcoming Events.....

Science at the Royal Institution

The second of this popular annual series of lectures will take place on the afternoon of Monday 22 April 2002.

Further information will be circulated to U3As later this year.

EXETER CONFERENCE

.....EARLY NOTICE

.....30 Aug. to 4 Sept.

U3A SUMMER SCHOOLS

At Cheltenham & Gloucester

College of Higher Education

Wed. 24 to Sat. 27 July

Provisional Courses: Architecture; Classics; Literature; Music; Philosophy; Photography; Portrait Painting; Earth and space Science; Watercolour Painting.

Wed. 31 July to Sat. 3 August

Provisional Courses: Art History; Birdwatching; Botany or Genetics; Embroidery; History; Hands-on Science; Mixed media Art; 19th Century Poetry; Website Design; Writing.

Final programme details plus booking forms from all U3As in November.

Gerontagogy!

An article in *Educational Gerontology* vol 26. July/Aug. 2000 proposed the concept of Gerontagogy --- education for older people or the training of teachers within that field. They located it within a model of education positioned after Pedagogy and Andragogy - phew !!

