

Billericay WEA Branch – A Tutor's Perspective

Being invited to give a course by your home town WEA Branch has its obvious advantages but can also have potential pitfalls.

A five minute drive to a guaranteed parking spot is infinitely preferable to a slog up the A12 at either morning or evening rush hour. But what if your course doesn't go down too well? If this happens at the extremes of the A12 both you and the recipients will eventually forget itbut in your home town you are bumping into your students in the street, restaurant, the pub, or at some civic function and memories will be stirred!

Luckily such discomfort has so far eluded me in the Billericay Branch and I am in the happy position of being able to strongly recommend the Branch to other tutors. There are four factors which make attendance at a course in Billericay an excellent experience.

1. The current venue. The Billericay Reading Rooms in the High Street were opened in the late Victorian period by civic philanthropic instincts desiring to further educational progress for ordinary people. As such they are the WEA incarnate, the physical embodiment of all we stand for.
2. The nature and quality of the students. Mature people from a variety of backgrounds who provide a stimulating and lively forum of debate whatever the subject matter. The tutor learns from them. For instance, I can recall insights into the following: aspects of international law, 20th century farming techniques, relationships among the ruling dignitaries before World War One and nuances of Soviet - Japanese diplomatic relations. I will be forever grateful to those who provided them.
3. If the above sounds austere academic.....it wasn't! There is a definite sense of humour and fun which is engendered by participatory events such as quizzes, raffles and at AGM's members indicate their preferences with various colour coded charts. The buzz before and after a session is noticeable and the tea interval marked by debate and laughter and fuelled by wonderful cakes!

4. The atmosphere that is engendered is not accidental. The committee, ably led by Denise Fielding are superbly well organised and take care to ensure that each and every student is welcomed and encouraged to be engaged.

A very impressive, friendly and challenging Branch. I commend it to any future potential tutor without question.

WEA Tutor – Ted Woodgate