



Essex Federation
News Sheet

Now in its sixty-eighth year



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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

This article is followed by one by Peter Threadkell on the occasion of his vacating the Eastern Region WEA Chair to enable him to take up his post as a National Trustee of the Association. His story, like those of so many others who, over the past **113 years** have benefited from WEA courses of one kind or another, is surely an inspiring one. As Peter writes, he has been the senior volunteer in the Eastern Region playing a major role in the democratic processes of the WEA in both the Region and the national organisation. There follows an appreciation of the 47-year service of a member of staff, Kathryn Coles, whose working life has been devoted to the Association and who has hitherto been the fount of all WEA knowledge in the Regional Office. To replace her has been a stiff challenge for the remaining office staff, her roles now divided between them. The appreciation has been written by another very long-serving, devoted and often outspoken volunteer, Gordon Vowles, a Trustee himself until a year or two ago.

Founded in 1903, twelve years before the WI, the WEA is now the largest volunteer-governed, professionally run, provider of adult education in England and Scotland, dedicated to lifelong learning, with links to WEA Cymru in Wales and to a number of international sister associations. It does have a national profile, strong connections to a number of MPs, is often referred to in news programmes such as Radio Four's 'Today' and 'PM', in radio plays and serialised stories and autobiographies, with tutors such as our own historian Patrick Denney appearing as an expert in the documentary 'The Reclusive Skeleton of Fingringhoe' on radio and on television in Michael Portillo's Great Railway Journeys when he stopped for a drink in The Hole in the Wall pub in Colchester. Yet so many people still know little or nothing about it, a constant complaint of our members.

A lot of work has actually been going on behind the scenes to improve our national profile, led by our General Secretary/Chief Executive Ruth Spellman, but little knowledge of this seems to have filtered through to our local students, volunteers and even tutors and we need to emerge from behind the proscenium arch and take centre stage. We need to do this

soon, and I believe optimistically that we soon shall. For if we are to survive as an organisation, with its government funding always at risk as the political landscape changes, we urgently need to ‘reach out’ to attract new students and members, indeed, new generations. National as well as local publicity and marketing, together with experiments with new and adventurous course offers, and communication where it is needed of the service we provide to the health, welfare and social life and cohesion of our community, are the keys to this. But we all have a role to play in ‘spreading the word’.

The WEA, faced with constantly changing challenges, is inevitably an ever-changing institution. A huge review of all our procedures, processes, communication and publicity, with the given name SWIFT – which is, unusually, not an acronym – perhaps more an expression of hope! – is currently taking place. Some changes have indeed been swift, and even successful, notably to our website and intranet, some not so swift. But many volunteers, tutors, education and administrative staff have been involved in reviewing progress and proposing changes. Little by little we shall see the results.

Our structure: a complex framework involving voluntary national and regional governance, professional educational and administrative staff, sessional tutors, branch committees and other volunteers, class members, and the interplay between them, with the occasional inevitable stresses and tensions. As an educational charity, governed by Charity Commission rules, we have the Trustees with whom ultimate responsibility for policy rests, the national Association Council with Regional representation which advises the Trustees, the nine Regional Committees responsible for regional governance within the parameters laid down by the Trustees, democratic Branches, and a National Conference which also suggests the direction of movement to the Association Council and the Trustees. And we are subject to the demands of our government funders, the Skills Funding Agency, tax and employment legislation. A complex web indeed. I believe we work best when we work cooperatively rather than hierarchically, with mutual respect of course, and as democratically as we can.

Yet there is a huge lacuna in this account so far in that it has not referred to more than half of our educational programme: the work we do in contracts and projects for our Partners in providing adult education for the disadvantaged, the deprived, the people with inadequate literacy, numeracy and practical skills, asylum seekers, people struggling with mental health. These are areas of work that we always receive reports on in the Federation Committee and at our AGM, and those who attend the latter for the first time are often astounded and humbled by the work that is described. We need to find ways to build more connections between our Branch work and that of these classes, which in towns often take place just yards away from where Branch classes, totally unaware of their existence, meet. We need to try to find ways of involving these students in our democracy and ensuring they are also aware of how their education might continue in Branch classes that catch their interest. Just as Peter discovered what was on offer in Norwich.

Ron Marks, September 2016.

NEW BEGINNINGS

An article by the outgoing Chair of the Eastern Region WEA

September 1st 2016 was a different day in my WEA life. For the first time since November 1992 I was not part of the Regional Governance team. For 24 years I served at various times as a Regional Committee member, member of the Regional Education Committee, Regional Vice Chair and latterly as Regional Chair. I had to give up my position as Regional Chair on becoming a National Trustee of the WEA as Trustees are not allowed to hold other offices within the Association though they can still be students! My successor as Chair will be elected at the Regional AGM to be held in Cambridge on Saturday 5th November. I hope that whoever is elected to be the senior volunteer in the Region will enjoy this position as much as I have. You meet many interesting people and deal with various challenging issues. We are supported by a hard-working and committed Staff team led by Sharon Watson, our Regional Education Manager for the past year. Obviously in any organisation there is always room for improvement and development but I feel that the Eastern Region is a very

effective provider of Adult Education in this part of the UK .thanks to both the staff and the hundreds of volunteers. Hopefully in the future our volunteers who have suitable skills could be used to support and enhance the skills of our Tutors, especially in our Community Programmes amongst the disadvantaged in our Region.

Well, how did I get to become a Trustee? I feel my story illustrates the ability that the WEA has had, for over 100 years, to transform lives. I left school at 16 with few qualifications (my teenage years were very traumatic) for a low level clerical job. In my mid-20s I was attracted to a Norwich Branch Local History course with a brilliant tutor. This stimulated my interest in education and my desire to do more challenging things in my life. Fortunately the Insurance qualifications I had studied for were regarded as being at the same level as A levels when I applied to my local College of Education as a mature student training to work in the Primary sector, i.e. Key Stage 1 & 2 On qualifying I spent many happy years teaching, on the way getting a B.A. degree from the Open University. In tandem with my career in teaching I was involved as a WEA volunteer, starting as a Class Secretary, becoming Branch Secretary then Branch Chair before becoming part of Regional governance.

Peter Threadkell
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KATHRYN COLES
an Extraordinary Servant of the WEA
- a tribute on the occasion of her retirement after 47 years' service

It is almost impossible to think of 'the office' of WEA Eastern Region without Kathryn. And yet after over forty years she will no longer be there to respond when troubled branch officers have queries and problems which they require help with.

Her service to the Association has been truly unique and is unlikely to be equalled in the future. Kathryn spent all her working life in the Eastern District/Region beginning as a shorthand typist straight from school in the days of the legendary and indomitable Frank Jacques as District Secretary. Since then she has fulfilled many different roles but has always remained calm and quietly efficient whilst providing a never failing helpful service to her colleagues, officers and voluntary members alike.

Some little time ago her unparalleled contribution was recognised by the Association at national level and at the Regional Council in July, immediate prior to her retirement, she was presented with a cheque for a handsome sum from all her friends in the Region. A little later in the same month at the Regional Committee I was privileged to present her with a certificate conferring on her honorary membership of the Region with the right to be invited to Regional Council meetings. Hopefully, we shall have the opportunity of continuing to see her on these occasions. In the meantime, we all wish her a long, healthy and well earned retirement as she goes 'dancing' into a new part of her life.

Gordon Vowles
former Eastern Region Representative on
the Association Committee and national Trustee.

BRAINTREE BRANCH

Spring Course: Great Gardens, Famous Gardeners Tutor - Andrew Sankey

It is good to discover a new interest, or revive an old one, especially if it promises to take one out of doors and to parts of the country one is not familiar with. This has been the effect for me and I suspect for many of the other branch members who attended Andrew Sankey's course.

Andrew took us to a different garden every week and by the end of the course we had visited the formal gardens of the Tudor and early seventeenth century periods, noticed the brief fashion for Dutch gardens and passed on to the landscape gardens of the eighteenth century. From here we went on to Victorian gardens created to show off the wealth of new plants coming into the country and finished in the twentieth century at Sissinghurst.

The earliest garden we looked at was Levens Hall in Cumbria, where much of the formal 17th century layout remains intact. The designer, Mr. Beaumont, was quite possibly a Frenchman - this being the time when all things French were in fashion. The garden is divided into squares (parterres), themselves divided into smaller squares. Like all good gardens of the time it had an orchard, a nuttery and spacious vegetable and herb beds, as well as a lot of topiary and the first ha-ha in England.

When William and Mary ascended the throne Louis the Fourteenth became the enemy and French gardening went out of fashion. We looked at Westbury Court in Gloucestershire, almost the sole survivor of the vogue for Dutch type gardens, laid out along two canals with a quaint two story summer house at the end of one of them.

In the following century fashion changed again. Wealthy men went on the Grand Tour and returned with the desire to emulate Italian gardens, with vistas leading to classical type temples and fountains, and plenty of classical statuary acquired on their travels. They created winding, sinuous lakes to replace boring straight canals for an altogether more natural look and opened up wide vistas over parkland. This movement culminated in the creations of Capability Brown, who did away with flower beds altogether and had grass growing right up to the entrances of his houses. Eventually people grew tired of endless grass, notto mention the expense

of employing men to mow it, and flower beds around the house came back into vogue.

At this time Charles Hamilton, a private gentleman, created his own Elysium at Painshill in Surrey. He created a walk around the lake which took the visitor to a number of features, not just classical temples but a gothic tower, a ruined abbey, a grotto and even a Turkish tent. From now on anything went in terms of what you could put in your garden.

The Victorian era saw vast numbers of new and exotic plants coming into the country, particularly from South America, South Africa and eventually from China. The invention of Wardian cases meant that tender plants reached Britain alive, so naturally keen plant collectors wanted them, which meant that they needed somewhere to keep them. Joseph Paxton showed the way with the wonderful 'Lily House' he built at Chatsworth, where the grand Georgian garden had already been almost completely swept away and remodelled. Landowners now indulged in collections, separate areas given over solely to one type of plant- pines, ferns, roses and dahlias among them. Labour was cheap, lawn mowers had been invented and there were plenty of newly rich industrialists, as well as the established landowners to provide work for gardeners.

The two newest gardens we looked at, Sissinghurst and Hidcote showed a more relaxed attitude to planting. Both included features from earlier times, long vistas and parterres among them, while the owners created spaces which were unique to them.

I have scarcely had space to do justice to the wealth of knowledge Andrew brought to this course, not to mention his excellent slides. There are plenty of other gardens for him to talk about, so I hope we will have him back in the not too distant future.

Thank you, Andrew.

Christine Burden

BILLERICAY BRANCH

Spring Term Course - Italian Renaissance: Baroque Architecture Tutor: Brian Adams

A course on the Italian Renaissance -what a wonderful way to start a new year and brighten Wednesday afternoons!

Brian Adams is a practising architect who brought extensive knowledge and enthusiasm to his delivery as he introduced us to the underlying principles of the styles of Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

Having visited Venice on many occasions, I joined the course hoping it would include a look at Venetian architecture. This wasn't to be the case but the disappointment was short-lived as Brian introduced us to the delights of Renaissance and Baroque architecture in Florence and Rome. I am now planning visits to both cities!

Covering the period from the beginning of the 15th century through to the end of the 17th century, Brian showed us the significant influences on the development of Renaissance and Baroque architecture. Families such as the Medici in Florence were major patrons. The architecture of churches changed following the Reformation and the Catholic Church's response in the Council of Trent. Artists such as Brunelleschi, Leonardo da Vinci, Bernini and Borromini brought their own influences to bear on the styles.

I learned a whole new glossary of architectural terms including facade, entablature, pendentive and the different types of columns which Brian sketched for us using his excellent drawing technique.

Our tutor used his extensive library of photographs to show us the buildings which represent the best of the styles including St Peter's, San Andrea della Valle and the Duomo. His photographs were amazing and covered visits to both cities over several decades. This enabled him to show the changing environment in which buildings exist.

I took copious notes during the course - because it was interesting and informative - but I would have welcomed a couple of handouts from Brian to help structure my learning.

This was a very enjoyable course and it certainly left me wanting to learn more about this interesting subject. I will now be looking at buildings from this period with a whole new insight!

Denise Fielding

BILLERICAY BRANCH

Summer Course - 'We've got the Power'

Tutor: Bill Tamblyn

After a fantastic start to the academic year at Billericay WEA, when we were lucky enough to have Peter Goodwin guiding us through the music maze from the reign of Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, there was eager anticipation of Bill Tamblyn's course enlightening us on world music as a tool of the people; either for spiritual strength or to tell their stories of struggles and oppression.

We were intrigued from session 1 when he spoke, in depth, about some very meaningful lyrics from the 20th Century by 'poets' such as Bob Dylan and Paul Simon. Many of us agreed that we had never thought much about the lyrics but had simply heard the music as the soundtrack to our youth!

We have journeyed with Bill through many lands: Britain, the U.S, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. It has truly enabled us to appreciate the power of words (often handed down and not often highbrow) to describe life's trials. He has shown us that sometimes the tune is simple, sometimes almost irrelevant maybe? Any story can be told with the power of emotive wording (this was frivolously demonstrated when we suggested that Bill use his voice to tell us why he deserved his mid-session cup of coffee and he obliged!).

Most of the powerful music we heard was sung by ordinary people recounting their lives, whether struggling with slavery, religious conflict, unemployment, harsh working conditions, war and terrorism. We noted on many occasions that the lyrics from the past still resonate with current world situations. As Bill often said 'Nothing has changed' for some people and lands.

Bill touched on his extensive knowledge of so many genres of music from different periods of history and different cultures and countries. I urge you to look at his website, as I have done, to learn more www.billtamblyn.co.uk

Sandra Martin

BILLERICAY BRANCH

**One Day Course: “Forever Changes – Worlds of Confusion”
(Change and continuity in music and society 1964 -1970)**

Tutors: Ted & Paul Woodgate

Billericay WEA branch welcomed back Ted and Paul Woodgate for the first performance of the latest chapter of their popular “music and society” course. Ted considers change and continuity in society during 1964 and 1970, while his son Paul presents the musical aspects. Their complementary presentations provide variety that holds the interest of the group.

Ted selects specific events and adds insight, clarity and detail to hazy memories. He brings out the historic context and impact of events and reforms. The specific themes include; 1960s counter-culture, civil rights, Vietnam war, protest movements, the short-lived hippie culture and the liberal reforms of the Wilson government. Paul provides a musical chronology supported by soundtrack for the period. His style is clear and straightforward and he does not resort to tenuous links or over-analysis of lyrics. Unsurprisingly, The Beatles and The Beach Boys feature significantly in the music section. Sensing the competitive nature of the group, Paul set a brain-teaser music quiz before the lunch break.

Geographically, our journey covers the USA, London, Paris, Prague and Dagenham (an Essex triumph!). Photography and film footage is used sparingly but effectively, notably the moving footage of the first (attempted) Selma to Montgomery civil rights march.

In summary, this is a very informative and entertaining course. There was a slight tease at the end when Paul referred to the music of the early-70s... I feel another installment in the pipeline.

Kevin Radley

BILLERICAY BRANCH

One Day Course – Extracts from Essex History Tutor: Margaret Mills

Billericay WEA held its first One Day Course on a Saturday: ‘Extracts from Essex History – Houses, Gardens, Stories and Characters’ and was delighted with its success in every sense. It clearly was what local people and indeed some from farther afield wanted and supported.

Success can certainly also be credited to the tutor, Margaret Mills. Our One Day Course went so quickly that it felt like one hour, but we also covered so much that it could have been one week.

Margaret set the social and historical context for the Country House – the Manor House or Hall – and then gave edited highlights and some lesser well known facts about Ingatestone Hall and Easton Lodge so that more time could be spent exploring Audley End.

Her slides gave us a tour of house and gardens picking out key features, important detail and a new perspective. All were encouraged to investigate books and websites to find out more, and to visit e.g. on Snowdrop Sundays.

Margaret’s course was scattered with little gems of information – golden nuggets – and the sort of stories that you would not easily find in a book. She has the skills to bring facts and history to life. Indeed had this been history when I was at school then I might have enjoyed it.

We all loved the handout of ‘Essex Men and Women’ - characters with personalities that helped to bring a smile as well as change history. The Course finished with some local traditions related to folklore cures and remedies – a number of which we will not be trying, preferring the cough mixture that was supplied on the day to that of the past!

Margaret encouraged us all to participate and there were some great contributions and indeed one such snippet of information adding to Margaret’s extensive knowledge on this subject. She fielded every question and could always add an extra bit of information to keep us thinking. A great tutor and course with excellent feedback such that we can recommend to all.

Denise Fielding

COLCHESTER BRANCH

The Magic of the Musicals Tutor: Chris Green

I was attracted by this course as I enjoy a good musical and find them ideal escapism. I thought I knew a fair amount about them, but Chris Green clearly knows an awful lot more and tells us about it with enthusiasm, wit and humour.

He commended a DVD called "Broadway -the American Musical", introduced by Dame Julie Andrews. It has interviews with many big names and experts and there is plenty of archive footage. This was not his only source, however, and we heard or watched much other material.

I did not know the depth of history of musicals. Chris explained the links back to Greek and Roman theatre, the threads coming in from opera, operetta, music hall and burlesque from Europe, from America's deep south there were contributions from minstrel shows. Not the sanitised Black & White Minstrels from BBC but shows supposed to represent the heritage of the slaves, involving cakewalks, Mr Interlocutor, Bones and ? To modern eyes, they have a sinister edge to them.

Musicals have political aspects. "Showboat" - a milestone in the development of the musical in 1928 - had black and white people on stage at the same time and a plot involving miscegenation - marriage between races. The next milestone, "Oklahoma" (1943) had edge as well, as it told of the development of mid America. Before this most musicals had a slight plot, but memorable songs. Other landmark shows were covered such as "West Side Story" and "Hair", the early rock musical, also about youth culture. Chris taught us to look at the structure. Many musicals have narrators, in some shape for form, staircases are frequently used, the choreographer grew in importance and I had not realised how often there is an outsider, sometimes really sinister.

However Chris was not uncritical of his subject. He is not keen shows that are just favourite songs strung together, and I could not persuade him that "Salad Days" has a naive, period charm. Whilst he praised Sondheim and Bernstein, he was more muted over Lloyd Webber. We had plenty of opportunity to discuss this sort of thing and consider evidence.

It was appropriate that we finished this enjoyable and challenging course with an excerpt from a very funny musical about musicals, "The Producers" by Mel Brooks. (Chris had already pointed out that "Babes in Arms", by Rogers and Hart, was the original "Let's do the show right here" musical) Typical of his approach, we went home humming, and indeed thinking, "I wanna be a producer". Thanks Chris.

May be I will try some more serious musical study.

Peter Evans

LAWFORD BRANCH

The Tower of London

Tutor: Roger Mannion

October 2015 was the start of a very interesting series of tutorials on the Tower of London by Roger Mannion. It began as the White Tower built by William the Conqueror as a symbol of his power, it then became a zoo housing lions and tigers among others, being one of the first in Europe. Later it became a prison for many famous people and also a place of execution, for example, Anne Boleyn.

We continued up to the present day. The Crown Jewels are housed there. It also provides accommodation for the warders and the yeomen.

A very informative and interesting course, enhanced by a very good tutor.

Colchester (Part 2)

Tutor: Patrick Denny

We welcomed back Patrick Denny in January 2016 to present the next part of the course on Colchester. As usual, this series came up to expectations and took us from the Civil War to the present day. Colchester has evolved so much and is still on the change today.

Influenced by the Dutch weavers, East Anglia being the centre of the wool trade, it was certain that Colchester was a centre of trade over the years. An excellent and informative series and we have all learned a lot about the town as it was and its progress through the years. A very good presentation as usual.

Mary Wrobel

COLCHESTER ONE DAY SCHOOL

T.S. Eliot and the road to Four Quartets

Tutor: Caroline Phillips

“April is the cruellest month.....”

Prologue

T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965) is one of the most important poets of the twentieth century and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. Challenging as it was to be, we were to see how his poetry portrays his journey towards ever-deepening insights. It would not be an easy journey. Starting with The Waste Land, we moved on to Ash Wednesday, before embarking on an appreciation of the beauty and profundity that is Four Quartets. Caroline opened the course by “borrowing” from Bette Davis:

“T.S. Eliot, like old age, is not for sissies!”

The Waste Land

There are five parts (cantos?) to this which was published in 1922. The first line is well known but it is necessary to read the first seven lines to understand the poem and the poet. It is about the past people, not the present, and the inference of the dormant underground. Throughout the poem there is the association with the desert and aridity. For example, the impotent Fisher King ruling over a sterile land waiting for the right person to come and ask the right question to give him peace and restore fertility to his land.

Eliot uses all kinds of source for his text, some quite homely, others exotic, all to give the drive to his poem. This is illustrated in the last verse of the last part, “What the Thunder Said”, ending with the chant:

“Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. line 433

Shanti shanti shanti “

(The chant translates as “Give. Sympathise. Control. Peace, Peace, Peace.” It is from the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad)

He is also occupied with time, as were some of his literary contemporaries, such as J.B. Priestley. Our tutor associated this with zeitgeist. She referred us to Kipling's “There” and the mysterious companion sometimes experienced on desolate journeys:

“ Who is the third who walks always beside you? line 360

There are no heroes, no quests, just many voices and many events. Caroline described this, rather mischievously, as "hopping about like a bunch of monkeys." (A reference to the Bagavadgita?).

Is this, as Eliot said "a piece of rhythmical grumbling"?

Ash Wednesday

There are six parts to the poem and the whole poem was published in 1930. It opens with the threefold cry of despair:

"Because I do not hope to turn again"

Then the speaker goes through resignation and submission to God, seeking salvation through renunciation, appealing on the way either directly or indirectly to the Virgin. As the poem develops, complete lack of hope changes to the possibility of hope (line 185):

"Although I do not hope to turn again."

It ends with:

"And let my cry come unto Thee."

Many acclaimed the poem but some disliked it because of the religious context. We were to see references and allusions to Christianity in Four Quartets. Eliot was a very private man and this poem is, I think, the nearest we will get to his inner person.

In this, of all the challenging poetry, there are some beautiful lines expressing the sense of loss (line 195 ff):

"And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth."

Four Quartets

Line 42 in East Coker) "....human kind
Cannot bear very much reality."

There are four parts to this and they were published together as Four Quartets in New York in 1943 and the U.K. In 1944. (Publishers seem to like to do this). Looking at all four quartets, we find strong Christian allusions and references which seem to be carried over from Ash Wednes-

day. Are the quartets an autobiography or a philosophical statement? It looks like an account of very intense personal experiences: joy, pain and hope; and tries to recall and present such experiences through the medium of words.

In the last quartet, Little Gidding, Eliot's concern with language tells of a strange dawn meeting with a ghostly figure as a composite of all his dead masters (from America). In London the dead master discusses poetry and the process of time:

Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
to purify the dialect of the tribe
And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight.,

He is the only human figure we have come across since the sense of the children in the garden at Burnt Norton.

The specific musical qualities are established in the title and the metaphor runs throughout, for example in “the stillness of the violin while the note lasts” in Burnt Norton and in “the complete consort” in Little Gidding.

Eliot's music is not just “verbal sound” but unity and diversity found in the musical form. Eliot was writing with many voices and bringing them together at the last in a unity so the quartet form served better than any other as a model.

Epilogue

We were given a master class in poetry appreciation. Our tutor brought together her wide knowledge of English and North American literature, her insights and her passion for Eliot. Also she brought in references to her previous courses. This all showed how, through the three works we studied, the poet had grown in his humanity and insights into the complexities and demands of the world we live in; the awareness of loss and emptiness; how his continuing exploration of religion and spirituality can open up a way to a place of harmony and fulfilment. Eliot was describing his view of the world and the spiritual trials of mankind, progressing from The Waste Land, through Ash Wednesday and into Four Quartets. All three poems are challenging and Eliot himself acknowledged Ash Wednesday as the most difficult. My personal take is to quote from Peter Dale's “Of Life Studies” in his “A Poetry of Place”:

“Surely this spirit is not of the damned.
April, cannot now be so cruel.”

Ray Hedley

TIPTREE BRANCH

Islam and Muslims in the UK and the Modern World

Tutor:Muhammed Munwar Ali

The thriving Tiptree WEA branch has enjoyed yet another excellent course. Various committee members had attended a Taster Day, where they were very impressed with the presentation from Muhammed 'Munwar' Ali, a Muslim scholar who had been involved in Jihad in the past, but is now chief executive for JIMAS, a Muslim educational charitable organisation. Could our members be enticed by the prospect of a course on Islam, which looked to be interesting and enlightening, and would help to further our understanding of this religion in these difficult times? As it turned out, this course proved to be high on our members' selection list; and it more than fulfilled the expectations of 30+ members. Each weekly session flew by, often resembling a university seminar because of the high level of presentation and debate offered by Manwar, and his skilled method of course delivery.

We were fortunate that the course materials were provided to us totally free of charge by JIMAS. Each course participant received a comprehensive booklet of more than 70 pages, containing the course content. This covered many topics, including the core beliefs of Islam ; Mohammed the prophet and his legacy; the position of women in Islam; Jihad; Islam and the Muslim presence in Britain; the qualities of the Muslim faith We also received 3 paperback books each - a translation of the Koran; a History of Islam; and a biography of Mohammed. Those who wished to do so were able to go into each session fully prepared through background reading - although it was perfectly possible simply to sit and listen to the course content, as delivered by Manwar, and to join in the often lively course questioning and discussions. Manwar was happy to respond to any of our searching questions and comments. We finished the course with a better understanding of Islam and its different effects on the lifestyles of its adherents; a vision of its similarity in many ways to Christianity; and the knowledge that many Muslims are peaceful, law-abiding citizens who wish to live in harmony with their neighbours.

In summary, it was a privilege to meet and be taught by such an enlightened tutor. As our chairman remarked, 'This course has been all about tolerance.'

Beverley Smith

WRITTLE BRANCH

In January 2016 the Tuesday morning class welcomed back **Graham Platts** with a course entitled '**Language, Lore and Legend – The Story of English**'.

Graham started with an analysis of the anatomy needed to make sounds and how this ability might have helped early hominids. We touched briefly on the migrations out of Africa and on early inhabitants of Britain. Invaders and trading networks would have stimulated the development of grammar as well as vocabulary. Graham provided us with sample texts from Bede and from Beowulf (with translation) and then we tried to reproduce an Anglo Saxon dialogue. The many dialects in the country added to the rich variety of our language.

We studied the impact of the change to a Norman French elite, with a clergy speaking Latin whilst the people continued to speak Anglo-Saxon. We explored the importance of Chaucer, writing in English at the time of an emergent 'English' nation. Graham talked about the Tyndale translation of the Bible in the 1530's and the huge contribution by Shakespeare, at a time when the arrival of the printing press would standardise spelling. This report only gives a few of the many threads which developed our language. Soberingly, some languages are dying out in places where the children see their future speaking a language like English, rather than that of their forefathers. We finished with some thoughts on the latest changes with the arrival of the Internet and spelling for emails. Graham condensed 1500 years of our language into a series of enlightening topics. Many thanks from us all.

On Tuesday afternoons, we were welcoming back another popular lecturer, **Frances Boardman**, with '**A History of the World in 100 Buildings**' What a challenge, housing for men and gods from the Neolithic to the present day and Frances delivered! She has a wonderful collection of images of caves, troglodyte refuges, stone circles and ziggurats. We revisited the Fertile Crescent and the pyramids of Egypt (familiar from her earlier courses on Egypt and Iraq) and then into new territory with fabulous Chinese pagodas. One lecture covered the Greek Temples, the Egyptian temples and the early Christian basilicas. More wonderful slides

Showed towers and spires and style changes in English churches. More recent architecture included Glasgow tenements and American skyscrapers, with some details on building techniques. We finished with some striking examples of the work of living architects from the wacky to the sublime. We enjoyed the Quizzes designed by Frances to check that we were listening! And, we have her brilliant illustrated handout. A brilliant course Frances, thank you from all of us.

We were all devastated to learn that Frances has withdrawn from the WEA lecturing circuit, what a loss for our Region. Why are these lecturers leaving? We have just been told that the lecturer we had booked for September has also resigned, so no fascinating science course!!!

On Wednesday evening we were delighted to welcome a new lecturer who introduced us to the rich cultural heritage of China - **David Prynn** “**China, Land and People.**”

David has a lifetime love of China and has travelled there widely so he illustrated the huge variety of terrain in this massive country. The twenty provinces are large, on a par with countries in Europe. He used some beautiful examples of Calligraphy and gave us a starter course in Mandarin, with its tonal variation. David provided us with excellent maps to guide us through the ebb and flow of the Empire under a succession of Dynasties from 221BC to 1912. At last I can now attach a little more than beautifully decorated pottery to the evocative names of ‘Han, Tang, Ming and Qing’. During our coffee break there were pictures of the diverse dress of the different ethnic groups. The course suited people who had been to China and those of us who had not. We were united in our amazement when seeing the Terracotta Army (many of us only at the British Museum). David is keen to preserve the magnificent endangered Amur tiger, so part of his course covered the huge Nature Reserves and their varied wildlife. His signature note was the roar of the tiger.

David returns to cover the more recent history of China in the Autumn.

Mary Roberts

SILVER END

A Nostalgic Trip Back 90 Years Guides: Brian and Penny Gillion

On the 21st May on a cloudy Saturday morning, nineteen WEA members and friends visited the unique conservation village of Silver End. Our tour of two and a half hours was led by Brian Gillion, who was ably assisted by his wife, Penny – she showed us photographs at appropriate times. Brian is the Secretary of the village's WEA group and also very involved with Silver End's Heritage Society. This society has been paramount in documenting and helping to preserve the flat-roofed buildings of this model village. With his knowledge of the Crittall family and the history of the company, Brian gave us many interesting and illuminating facts behind the ninety years of this pretty garden village's life.

The founder, Francis Crittall, chose the location as it was equidistant from his existing factories at Witham and Braintree. His aim was to provide the workers with modern, spacious homes and facilities for their leisure. His son, Walter, better known as MR. PINK, was instrumental in involving many of the top architects of the time. We discovered that Heron, the Printers, were relocated from London to continue to print all the company's literature in a purpose-built factory. From there we were able to enter the thatched church of St. Francis and also the Congregational Church with its large hall and outside space for many activities. A gentleman kindly invited our group into his immaculate back garden, where we could see in practice the maxim which Francis Crittall held, that all the properties should look out onto open areas, be it playing fields, allotments or fields. Sad that this can't be the case today.

We entered the wonderful, delightful Memorial Gardens with the beautiful gates dedicated to the Crittall family. After that we crossed the road to the largest village hall in the country, which includes a social club, different committee rooms, children's groups and the Heritage Society's centre. There we were shown artefacts that had been collected by the society concerning the village and the factory itself. Some of the group purchased literature regarding the village and Brian explained that the Society is hoping to have many other opportunities to show people round the area.

Outside, the tour continued, and we were shown the site where a three-storey department store stood. The twenty-six different parts of the shop provided for every possible purchase. This remarkable building was destroyed by a fire in 1952. Now the area has several smaller outlets. Opposite is where the Silver End Hotel was, which had eleven bedrooms and an excellent restaurant. It is now a care home, Valentine House.

As we made our way back to the start, Brian pointed out the cornerstone on the first house built, dated 17th April 1926. The final building we saw was the school, which again overlooked open fields and has recently had a large extension.

These few lines tell only a small number of the fascinating facts of this unusual place (I haven't mentioned the many individual listed houses, etc.) but more detail can be obtained by visiting the iconic red telephone boxes, in their second lives as information centres!

Many thanks to Brian and Penny for a most enjoyable and informative morning – and yes, the rain did stay away!

Gillian LePage

SIVER END BRANCH

A Kick Up the Eighties

On 16 April 2016, 22 village organisations came together to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the laying of a foundation stone at the first house to be started in the new factory garden village of Silver End for the Crittall Window Co.

Under the title of "Nine Decades of Village Life" each organisation chose a decade to promote their activities in nine venues around the village.

As Francis "the Guv'nor" Crittall was a keen supporter of the WEA, but with the demise of the family involvement in the company the branch folded, restarting in 1986, so our branch chose the 1980's.

We had previously contributed to the 70th celebration with a legendary one day school, including the launch of Susan King's book Voices from the Guv'nor's Village (copies still available to buy) and an evening talk by William Tyler for the 75th celebrations in 2001 and we decided to do another talk which would be held in our unique thatched church St Francis, as the Church were also celebrating the 1980 decade.

Sally Ridealgh suggested tutor Ted Woodgate for the talk and we were delighted when he agreed as we knew him from two excellent previous courses. During initial discussions we came up with the title “A Kick Up the Eighties”. In a previous edition of EF I had read that Ted had done a talk for his local branch that included some recorded music by his son Paul and suggested that they might do something similar for us, which they readily agreed to do.

The 1980’s was an eventful decade including amongst others the rise of Thatcherism, the Falklands War, the miner’s strike, Live Aid, Yuppies, the fall of Communism not forgetting bad hair styles.

From the outset it was obvious that they researched the decade well. Ted divided the talk into three sections: early, mid and late and between each section Paul played some music that struck chords with those who attended.

Ted told us about these and other events from a historical perspective that removed the propaganda and hype that surrounded them at the time, with Paul explaining the political inspiration that behind some of the music.

It was an excellent talk reminding us of events that we have lived through that are now becoming history.

Given the amount of these 1980’s events and their importance that may still influence our life today, the talk deserves to be expanded into a full one day school. Perhaps the Essex Federation ODS committee could consider engaging Ted and Paul for one.

Brian Gillion

FRINTON BRANCH

A Busy Year

The past academic year has been a busy one in Frinton, starting in the autumn with the challenge of David Prynne's intensive course on the history of Russia from the earliest times to the 1917 Revolution, followed in the spring by a more leisurely look at some of the romantic poets with Ron Marks. We ended the year with a triumphant day school on Essex Gardens and Gardeners with tutor Judith Williams. Judith came from Southend armed with maps, timelines, biographies and posters and a whole shed-full of antique garden tools for us to identify during the lunch break. She took us back to the start of gardening for subsistence with the monks of Essex's monasteries, then led us on to the development of gardens as ornament and symbols of wealth and status. We looked at changes in fashion as new plants were imported and technological advances helped their cultivation and survival. And we learned about the contrasting personalities of two of Essex's powerful lady gardeners, Miss Ellen Willmott of Warley Place in Brentwood and Lady Daisy Greville of Easton Lodge near Great Dunmow. We finished with Beth Chatto and her dry garden in Elmstead Market. It was a tour de force to cover so much (metaphorical) ground in one day and all 44 students (a record for Frinton), from a wide area, were most appreciative and enthusiastic.

During the summer months we enjoyed some of Joan Black's interesting walks round familiar and less familiar places in Essex. We joined an atmospheric walk along Clacton's prom in a thick sea mist, trying to imagine it in its heyday when Butlin's Holiday Camp brought thousands of visitors to the town; and we followed a detailed guided tour of the model town of Silver End - the creation of Francis Crittall of Crittall Windows fame - which is now struggling to maintain its modernist buildings and adapt its streets to contemporary life. Both towns prospered with the vision of one man, and both have declined with changes in lifestyle, industry and job opportunities. We chose these walks from Joan's programme because we knew the terrain would be flat and suitable for a mobility scooter, but she went to many other places and her initiative was a great addition to the WEA's extra-curriculum activities.

Katie Andrews

HATFIELD PEVEREL BRANCH

Catherine Voysey



In March this year, at the Branch AGM, Catherine Voysey stood down as Branch Secretary after a long and happy association with the WEA. There had been a group in the village in the late 40s/early 50s which had ceased. At the instigation of Dr Arthur Brown, then chairman of the Essex Federation, in 1974 Catherine revamped the group and it was her enthusiasm and drive that has kept it going until this day, forty-two years later. The WEA has had many homes, including the cellar of a local house, the library/kitchen of the old village hall, the new village hall, and currently the local Scout and Guide HQ. In the early days there was a crèche for pre-school children, run by a couple of delightful volunteers, which attracted young mums, and some of us are still members, even though our children now have children of their own!

As well as her work with the Hatfield Peverel Branch, Catherine was Secretary of the Essex Federation Committee, and in 1989 she became the Essex County Organiser, a post which she held until 2002. During this time, she organised annual Summer Schools. The first were a "Week of

Study” and held at the Essex University campus. Latterly they are run in Chelmsford and Colchester, and are still attracting first class lecturers and students. Another feature of her time with the Federation is the Tutor’s lunch at the Day Schools at Feering, still continued, but she’s a hard act to follow!

The branch are delighted that Catherine will continue as “member without portfolio” on our Committee. She has been a leading light of WEA, the Eastern Region, Essex Federation, and our local branch, and her knowledge of the workings of this ever-changing organisation is invaluable – and will remain so.

We all enjoyed a slice of Catherine’s special birthday cake, beautifully decorated with a picture of the village sign on The Green commemorating the millennium (which Catherine helped put in place during her time with the Parish Council). We also presented Catherine with a picture of Ulting Church in appreciation of the work she has done, for WEA, and the village.

Lesley Naish

**NEWS SHEET
SPRING 2017
Reports, please, by 4 February 2017**



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Company limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales (number 2806910) and
Charity Registered in England and Wales number 1112775 and Scotland (number
SC039239)