



Workers' Educational Association

WEA Essex Federation

News Sheet

Now in its seventieth year

S P R I N G 2018

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VICE-CHAIR REPORT

Those of you attended the Federation AGM back in October will know that despite last minute cancellations by our proposed guest speakers and the absence of Ron Marks, due to illness, the event went rather well. We did somewhat panic about how we would fill the gaps but thanks to Sarah Moore, we were able to give those present, time to ask questions about their Branch concerns and I think everyone went away satisfied. Unfortunately, we didn't manage to fill the Chair and Secretary posts at the meeting (Ron Marks and David Stubbs having resigned) but since then I am pleased to announce that we now have a Chair – Brian Gillion, and a Secretary – Lesley Naish. I'm very pleased and relieved that the positions have been filled. The largest Federation in the Eastern Region couldn't go on for much longer without all the Officers. I'm also pleased that Ron Marks is fully recovered from his heart problems. I hope he will take life a lot easier in the future although I doubt it! We have a lot to thank Ron for in promoting Essex at Regional and National level and filling his shoes is a challenge.

Over the past couple of years, we have moved the Federation meetings around the County to give local Branches the opportunity to attend and find out what the Federation does and give them a chance to voice their concerns. We haven't always had attendance from the invited Branches, which was disappointing, but those who did make the effort all said that they found it interesting and enlightening. The Federation works hard for all of you, representing your views/worries at Regional and National level so it is important that you use the opportunity to meet us. In addition, we organise events – Day/Summer Schools and Walks. How often have I heard someone say that they had to get information about these events from the website or even from a friend in another Branch, because their local Branch hadn't told them. Please pass out the information to your Branch members even if you don't personally fancy what is on offer and help us to continue to be successful. We are all volunteers and work hard to organise these events, so it is disappointing if they are not as well supported as they might be.

Finally, this issue of EF News will be the last one edited by Ray Hedley. The Federation wishes to thank Ray for all his dedication to the task over

many years. We now need to find someone to take over. Would you or someone in your Branch be interested in taking on this role? The Newsletter is produced twice a year and whoever takes over will have the opportunity to change the format if they so wish (in agreement with the Federation!) and may have innovative ideas about content. Do please ask around in your Branches and let us know if you or someone you know, would be interested in taking this on.

Joan Black – Vice Chair

ESSEX FEDERATION WEB SITE

This is worth exploring and is looked after for us by David Stubbs. The current edition of EF News Sheet will go on, alongside previous editions, giving it a wider circulation than the paper edition has shown to be practical.

Also, the photos sent in by branches can be shown in colour to better advantage.

Please encourage your friends to look it up.

It is www.wea-essex.org.uk.

Ray Hedley

BILLERICAY BRANCH

Autumn Course - Giants of the 19th Century

Tutor – Margaret Mills

Telephone and on line enrolment worked well with a full house signed up for this course. The process brought new students to the WEA and to the Billericay Branch. However, there is no doubt that Margaret is also a very well-known, highly regarded and popular tutor with a number of her own followers.

Margaret is extremely knowledgeable and in a variety of disciplines with possibly the unique feature and skill of being able to bring these together and contextualise events so that course members can relate to what was happening at the time and not just in England. She is a mine of information – such that other WEA tutors come to her classes and are happy to pick her brains as well as contribute their knowledge as well.

The Giants of the 19th Century selected from a range of options by the Branch ranged across literature, the arts, professions, science and politics – a number being less well known than others and even when we felt we knew a ‘Giant’ like Florence Nightingale or Disraeli, there was always something new or another angle or question to consider. Margaret has a knack for bringing each character to life with interesting snippets of information that you just cannot easily find from books. It is evident that she does her research and is still researching, always keen to learn any other facts, listen to and consider contributions from class members.

The tea break is a busy time serving up coffee/tea and biscuits to a full house. It is also a noisy affair as everyone is keen to discuss the course and buttonhole Margaret to find out even more and ask questions.

There is always food for thought - many are inspired to do their own research, visit places e.g. Hyland House or like me -read Elizabeth Gaskell.

Denise Fielding



Billericay Branch - Giants of the 19 Century



Mary Hawkins and the Glories of Three Italian Cities

BILLERICAY BRANCH

Autumn 2017: One Day Course

Glories of 3 Italian Cities: The Art of Padua, Sienna and Florence

Tutor: Mary Hawkins

The feedback for the ‘Glories’ was ‘Glorious’ complimenting the tutor, Mary Hawkins for her knowledge on this subject as well as her entrancing and engaging delivery of the topic. You could have listened to Mary all day and indeed she held our attention throughout this One Day Course. The Glories was one of the most illuminating, visual and colourful courses that we have offered in Billericay and not just because of the slides/pictures –in fact it was wonderful in spite of them given the sun streamed into the venue on the day making it difficult at times to enjoy their full glory. The new blind/blackout facility for The Reading Rooms is eagerly awaited!

Mary’s first- hand experience, descriptions and details relating to the art in these 3 cities brought the art and architecture to life. Those of us who had not visited these cities left vowing to go and those who had already been a tourist resolved to go back and see it properly. Mary shared some of her favourites from the 3 cities with nuggets of information and insight that are hard to find in those large and often intimidating art history books we have all seen on coffee tables! Padua perhaps has more to offer than many of us realise! This was indeed more than an art course such that many of us understood more about the times, history and biblical characters by the end of the course. We also learnt new words – thaumaturgical! Mary Hawkins came highly recommended to us – so much so that we were thrilled with the response posting a FULL notice on all of our adverts/posters and at the venue on the day. So, we would all highly recommend you to consider this course with Mary for the future.

Denise Fielding and Christine Townley

P.S. This is also a chance to thank Peter Naish for his support and help with the equipment –we could not have run this course without the delivery, maintenance and collection of the projector!

FRINTON BRANCH

Problems with Advertising

Frinton's efforts to advertise its courses seemed to be jinxed in the autumn of 2017. As usual, in preparation for the new term we submitted a notice for the 'What's On' pages of our local *Look* magazine, advertising Manwar Ali's course 'Islam and Muslims in the UK and the Modern World'. Late in the afternoon of the closing date, the manager's assistant rang to say that, as we weren't a charity, our entry had been rejected. I assured her that the WEA is a charity, gave her the charity number, and pointed out that *Look* had always previously accepted our entries without question. She said she would get back to me, but that she had not been able to find the WEA on the Internet. When she rang back she said she was sorry but it was now too late to accept our entry. We suspected that the real reason was that the manager had decided that we were a bunch of jihadists, bent on spreading sedition in Frinton. Undaunted, we submitted entries to the 'Local News' and 'Courses' columns of the *Frinton & Walton Gazette* - again nothing appeared, but in the second week of term we sent an announcement about our forthcoming day school, 'A Change is Gonna Come', to be given by Ted and Paul Woodgate. To our great surprise, when the paper came out, under 'Frinton News' was a belated announcement about Manwar's course - but not a word about the Woodgates'!

Despite these setbacks, the course on Islam attracted a record number of students (although some of our regulars stayed away). Clear and succinct, Manwar examined the true beliefs and tenets of Islam and explained how the religion has been hi-jacked by self-styled Imams and the disaffected for their own violent ends. The course prompted some lively discussion and all students found it interesting and thought-provoking. The day school, too, made a small profit, even though it clashed with two popular events in the Frinton calendar - a cinema matinée and the annual Autumn Fair. Ted and Paul Woodgate provided an entertaining day of music and social comment, showing how the arrival of rock 'n' roll from the USA in the 1950s prompted the breaking-down of class barriers and deference.

Towards the end of the autumn term it was time to prepare a poster for the spring term's course, 'Gardens in British Art in the 19th and 20th Centuries'. What could possibly go wrong? Using our usual layout designed by

a retired professional printer with experience of poster production, and the bold font and rainbow border decreed by the WEA four years ago, we emailed a poster to Cambridge for copying, not knowing that Cambridge no longer has copying facilities so the job would have to be sub-contracted. We were stunned when it came back redesigned and with such small drab green lettering that it would be illegible in shop windows. It looked so uninspiring that we decided to email the original design to Clacton Printers who quickly ran off copies in the style and colours that the people of Frinton and district have come to know and expect.

Whether it was that, or the uncensored notices in the *Look* magazine and the *Gazette*, I'm pleased to say that attendance at the start of the spring term has been good!

Katie Andrews

MERSEA BRANCH

Last Autumn Term we had a good turn out for David Prynne's fascinating course on "China from Mandarins to Commissars."

We learned that the Qing Dynasty, founded by invading Manchus, controlled China from 1644 to 1912, but that control was increasingly fragmented and in the hands of local leaders. Chinese attempts to resist Western powers led to their being forced to accept unfavourable terms and saw the creation of "Treaty Ports." These were Chinese ports controlled by western powers. I was amazed to discover that the Opium Wars were actually the British forcing the Chinese to buy opium.

1912 saw Sun Yat-sen set up the nationalist party and the beginning of a period during which warlords fought for control. Before long, China was invaded by Japan and, after that the country was engulfed in World War Two, when China suffered dreadfully at the hands of the Japanese.

Throughout much of this time a young Marxist, Mao Zedong, tried to promote revolution, mobilising farmers, and establishing the Chinese Communist Party. Driven out of Southern China, he led the "Long March" which covered some 6,000 miles. At this time Chiang Kaishek was a powerful force but Mao's day was soon to come and in 1949 the Communists came to power. Under his "New Democracy" land was redistributed and as many as two million landowners were executed. Not

all he did was bad; there were literacy and public health campaigns, arranged marriages were abolished and opium and gambling were outlawed.

“The Great Leap Forward” - Mao was convinced that everybody should be busy making steel in backyard furnaces, at the expense of farming, which actually gave rise to the “Great Famine.” He even organised a campaign to kill all small birds, which he thought were eating people’s grain. After this Mao was sidelined for a short period, but he was soon back again – this time with “The Great Proletarian Revolution.” Determined to defeat the moderates and to destroy the old ways and traditions, he launched the Cultural Revolution with its Red Guards, Little Red Book and the Cult of Mao. This was an appalling time of persecution and chaos, which ended with Mao’s death in 1976.

Since then China has made huge strides and become a world economic force to be reckoned with. It has established large areas of national parks and done much to protect wildlife, including the threatened Amur tiger and panda.

Hilary McMullen
Branch Secretary

GREAT BENTLEY BRANCH

The Friendly Invasion-USAAF in East Anglia 1942-45

A series of excellent lectures on the USAAF in East Anglia during WW11 were completed during the autumn term at the Great Bentley WEA. The lecturer Ian McLachlan from Norfolk became interested in the subject at the age of 9. This was when he came across at home a part of a gun turret salvaged from a plane crash site in Scotland where his father was serving during WW11. The wreckage was from the Messerschmitt Bf 110 that Rudolph Hess flew solo from Germany to Scotland during the summer of 1941.

The course explored the US air-power in Britain during 1942-45 and covered the social and cultural impact of the US personnel in Britain. The establishment of airfields, workshops and hospitals, including aircraft strategy and tactics were addressed. The USAAF bombed during the day and could send 300 aircraft on a single day's mission.

Over 450,000 USAAF personnel, mostly based in East Anglia took part in WW11 between 1942-45, of which 50,000 were either killed or reported missing in action. Approximately half of this total were eventually released having been POWs.

He also included personal accounts of heroism and tragedies affecting families. He has written several books on the subject and has made contact with air crews that took part both in the USA and in Germany. This course was well presented by a lecturer that is fully committed to the subject, and who spends as much time as possible in excavation of buried aircraft in Norfolk and Suffolk. We hope to invite him back to Great Bentley in the future for further lectures on this interesting topic.

David Gollifer
Great Bentley WEA

SILVER END BRANCH

Transports of Delight

Tutor: Steven Worsley

For our Autumn 2017 course we were pleased to welcome back tutor Steven Worsley for this interesting course. We continued with the hours change a few years ago and our courses are now only 9 weeks duration to help keep fees low. As Steven's previous courses were on Inland Waterways and Railways he was able to pass over these to fit in with this.

Steven began each session with handouts explaining a time line that showed the important developments of forms of transport and why some had declined. Each evening there was a different topic starting with the development of the road system then taking us through heavy haulage, trams and buses, private cars to air transportation.

The photos Steven uses are really interesting. They not only help explain these developments but as they have been taken by him he gave the context of where they were taken which has given some us the desire to visit these locations and festivals.

Our branch always enjoys an optional out of course field trip. For this course we visited the Ipswich Transport Museum which although their season had finished were prepared to give us a private tour. As an added extra we were able to find a vintage bus group who supplied us with a service bus to travel to Ipswich.

Coincidentally this bus is owned by a person who drove it when it was based at the Silver End garage. As a further coincidence it had been serviced by a student when he was an engineer at the garage and they enjoyed discussing old times.

Splitting into 2 parties we were given a guided tour of the museum, encouraged to get on and off some vehicles. Some of the party took delight in being "clippies" dingling the bells on the buses and some took pleasure in clanging the bells on the vintage fire engines. After an all too short visit we had a sociable pub lunch at the Golf Hotel before boarding the bus to Silver End.

Brian Gillion

EDITOR'S ENDPIECE

This is my last edition of the EF News Sheet.

The greatest challenge (and fun) as editor was putting together the reports from regular and occasional contributors. And getting the EF out on time. I am very grateful for the pleasure of reading these and the support and encouragement I have had.

I felt part of a group of students seeking the best. Praised by Richard Hoggart who referred to us as Arnoldists,

This is Matthew Arnold who put it that “culture can liberate us from system-makers and systems by turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits.”

Ray Hedley