

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Following the March AGM of the WEA Colchester Branch, which I was privileged to attend as the representative of the Essex Federation Committee, John Morgan, now retired after many years as the site manager at the Castle Methodist Church, delivered a fascinating talk about his earlier life as a miner – a talk that was informative, entertaining, and also moving. Afterwards I asked him if he would like to write an article for EF NEWS about his experiences during the 1984 Miners' Strike, which he had touched upon without fully developing the narrative nor giving full rein to his views both as a participant and in retrospect. The article now appears in this edition. I am sure it will give rise to considerable discussion among WEA members. John, supported by Sarah, now also offers a number of other "True Life Stories, Told Straight From the Heart" on various topics based on his life experiences, including Tewkesbury Abbey, the Prison Service, A Medieval Adventure (which I suspect has connexions with his own enthusiasm for Archery), and Sea Shanties! Incidentally, the figure that appears after his name at the end of the article was his pit tally number.

The successful Federation One Day Schools in April featured the leading Shakespearian scholar Dr. Catherine Alexander, who supervised my own M.A. Shakespeare and Theatre course in Stratford a few years ago, on Shakespeare and Conflict, popular regular music tutor Peter Goodwin on Shakespeare's Musical Legacy: Song and Stage, and leading expert on Van Gogh, Professor Anthony Slinn, on The Post-Impressionists: the Origins of Modern Art.

Those who attended the Richard Waskett Memorial Lecture on 3rd April at the Oaklands Museum in Chelmsford were thoroughly entertained by recently retired ENO opera singer Lyn Cook's talk about her career and the personalities she worked with, and by her singing too!

The Summer of Learning programme of seven three-day courses in Chelmsford and Colchester was quite heavily subsidised by the Federation, as the courses, apart from one, were not as well attended as usual. However, those who did attend spoke very enthusiastically of the courses

and the tutors afterwards, and this news sheet features several reviews. In Chelmsford David Masters delivered an intensive introduction to Philosophy, Peter Maggs guided his group through the process of building and writing up Family History, and Honor Ridout packed a comprehensive and revealing History of Cambridge into the three days. In Colchester, Rosemary Williams returned from Wales to tell the True History Behind 1066 and All That, Lionel Sims demonstrated his expertise and skills in introducing Anthropology, Alex Bass fascinated his group with his illustrated seminars on the Natural History of East Anglia, which included a field day in Fingringhoe Wick, and a field afternoon even featured in Jane Pearson's exploration of the "Brothels and Beer Houses" of 19th Century Colchester...

As part of our "Voices of Conflict" programme relating to the First World War there was the 18th June visit to the Royal Gunpowder Mills in Waltham Abbey, Laurence Staig delivered a lecture on First World War Films in August, prior to the screening of Paths of Glory at FirstSite in Colchester, and the lecture and film show are being repeated at the Cramphorn Theatre in Chelmsford on 11th November. The three all-day study classes at Feering on Saturday 22nd November are on 'Living With Conflict: Essex and the Great War' with Dr. Paul Rusiecki, 'Women, the Great War & Achieving the Vote' with Valerie Morse, and 'A Fresh Slant on the Prose & Poetry of the First World War' with Colin Padgett and Ron Marks.

I attended an interesting WEA Association Council meeting in London in August, deputising for Gordon Vowles, where matters such as the format of the next National Conference were discussed. More later.

The new 2014-15 programme has of course started. Another busy and I hope successful year is ahead of us. The Federation, as well as Branches, need new committee members to help keep all these activities going and reach out to new audiences. And the WEA now sports a new national logo too...

**Ron Marks.**

# THE MINERS' STRIKE 1984 – a miner's account

## 1. THE POLITICS

March 1984 was the start of a tragic and radical change in Britain's coal mining industry.

In my opinion we were part of the McGregor and Thatcher attempt to denude this country of our heavy industries – steel, coal, engineering, the car industry – and the unions that supported them. Let us not forget the Fleet Street and Wapping fiasco which was the culmination of ten years of dissection and destruction of heavy manufacturing. I believe that politics from the government and unions, with their intransigence and failure to give and take, has been the main cause of the disappearance of a complete generation of working class artisans and blue collar workers.

My reasons for joining the Strike movement were very clear; I promised my dad, a real left-winger, that I would never cross a picket line and never work with “scabs” but I was also adamant in my opinion that the way government were intending to operate pit closures was wrong. Every pitman knew that the future for coal had now become limited due to the carbon emission situation affecting the ozone layer. Our main argument was against the rapidity of closure that McGregor and Thatcher were trying to push through. Let us not forget that on the financial side our industry was fighting against other countries where coal output was being heavily subsidised, in some respects by as much as 25%. We could not compete with our 4% subsidy, and imported tonnage could be shipped over cheaper than we could produce it!

45% of our electric today is fuelled by the black stuff.

It could have been with British coal.

In respect of the expected support from Mr Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party during the dispute, there was very little. What they did do was of no use whatsoever; there is no doubt he and his party straddled the fence; maybe they knew something we didn't.

Before I continue I think it pertinent to say how I feel about Arthur Scargill. Anyone who engineers things to make himself president of the National Union of Mineworkers *for life* must be treated with a certain amount of misgiving. There is no doubt that he was and still is a politically driven person. In my opinion his attitude, speeches and orations were old fashioned and stuck in the early nineteen seventies.

I remember very well the day at Newdigate Colliery when, during one of his long ranting speeches, I turned round to my rather enthralled comrades and said “I can’t listen to any more of this shit” and walked away.

I was booed and cursed at by many. I had been out on strike for four months at that time; after eleven and a half months I decided to leave the industry.

If Scargill had allowed a closed ballot, he would have got 60% of the vote; he decided on an open vote. This effectively split the union. He had played into Thatcher’s hands.

The lads who worked at Keresley Pit (Coventry) were basically moderate in attitude, but there was a small core of proactive strikers who caused a considerable amount of problems and damage to the cause.

I think I am correct in saying that 10 to 12% of the work force carried on working. These were called “*scabs*” and sadly they were treated with a great deal of hatred and resentment by all the strikers, including myself. It was not until my next door neighbour, Terry, came round to see me one day that I realized the dilemma some of those working were going through. He was a big six-foot lad. We used to play rugby together and go out drinking; we were good mates. He came round this day in tears and said “Moggy” [my nickname], “I have got to go back to work or I will lose my house and the missus and kids. I need to know where that leaves you and me.” So I told him that our friendship would stay the same but that I would not work with him when we went back down the hole. We shook hands on it and he went back to work. The mere fact that I was associating with a *scab* caused us many problems.

## **2. THE ACTIVISTS**

It was 3 a.m. when I first smelt the smoke and saw a flickering red reflection on our bedroom ceiling. I shot to the window to see Terry’s wooden shed totally engulfed in flames. He was already out in the garden trying to douse the flames with buckets of water, but to no avail. By the time the fire brigade came it was a smouldering ruin. The fire had been caused by an incendiary device. The activists had started. Four days later, on a Saturday morning, Terry went to clean his car. He noticed some black smudge marks on the wheel arch. He was very particular about his motor and was always cleaning it, and so he feared the worst. On removal of his wheel cover, he discovered the locking nuts had been loosened. Sadly the

police were, to say the least, very unsympathetic. Even when his children were threatened on the way to school, nothing was followed up by them. Terry eventually left the industry to work elsewhere. Our friendship lasted through many arguments and fights with some of our more aggressive colleagues, but it was a period of time we will never forget or like to repeat. Though the activists, some of whom were left-wing fanatics, were small in numbers they caused a lot of problems for the strikers and for those who carried on working.

I remember very well when several lads found out that one of the *scabs* had a static caravan on a site just north of Coventry, on the edge of a very steep slope. So one night, knowing he was on the site, they crept up to the caravan and pushed it over the edge. It was the wrong caravan. Luckily the gentleman who was in the van was not seriously injured but it could have been fatal.

Through the media, we were told of many terrible instances, of concrete blocks being dropped off bridges on to cars, beatings by police and strikers, riots and arrests, intimidation from both sides; but to me the real horror of it all was the breakup of close-knit families. Brother against brother, father against son, whole communities in turmoil. Some of these families are just as broken today.

### **3. THE OLD BILL**

I think we also need to look at the involvement of the police during the strike.

As I have mentioned, Keresley Pit was moderate in its attitude and well behaved when it came to the picket lines. The police insisted that only six pickets were allowed to be at the main gate at any one time. This was adhered to by the lads, but as many as three to four hundred, me included, would gather on the opposite side of the road to shout abuse at those going in to work.

The only time we had trouble was when the Metropolitan or Yorkshire police came to the pit. In both cases the senior officers stated that when the coaches of *scabs* arrived, two pickets would be allowed to go on to each coach to try and persuade those on board to stop working. However, when the coaches arrived they waved them straight through.

This caused outrage, and we all surged forward against the police cordon. I was pulled from the melee and arrested by two blue boiler-suited officers (neither of them had pip numbers on their shoulders,) They gave me a bit

of a beating, slung me in to Lock Hurst Lane nick, then threw me out at three in the morning with no shoes and socks on and none of my personal belongings. Luckily a friend of mine lived close by. I managed to knock him up and he drove me home. Most policemen, when confronted by anyone about the level of violence used during the strike, will say “We were working under orders”. It has been said that as an excuse is as good a reason as any to do what you want. I firmly believe that, as with the mining fraternity, a minority of bad police officers spoilt it for the rest.

#### **4. THE AFTERMATH**

As far as families are concerned, my family suffered also. During the strike we took in a young lad, a fellow miner who had been thrown out by his mother because he could not pay his rent. To cut a long story short, he ended up running off with my wife, leaving me to look after two children aged twelve and fourteen. Sadly they both suspected that something was going on but did not dare to tell me for fear of what I might do. After 17 years of a good marriage I was, to say the least, angry and devastated, but what it did to the children was terrible. They are now in their forties and the mental scars still show. I am now lucky to be very happily married, but as a family we will never forget the miners’ strike 1984.

*This poem was written after visiting Keresley Colliery north of Coventry, where I worked for six years after Bedworth Colliery had closed, in 1996, twelve years after the miners’ strike in 1984. I was initially employed as a plumber / fitter but then became face trained, working on the face and as a back ripper. I was devastated to see that there was nothing left of the mine, 24 square miles of working area flattened. There were no micro units to replace an industry that once employed 1,400 personnel. I walked into the village; the atmosphere was sad and depressing. It seemed that the heart of a once lively and vibrant community had been torn out, and indeed it had. I was so moved by this that I had to put pen to paper.*

#### **FLAT, FLAT GONE NOW!**

Flat, flat gone now! The pit that gouged the black diamonds by back-broken sweating miners, a mile underground.

Flat, flat gone now! The two great wheels Bess and Sue man rider and coal, one thousand, one hundred foot shafts, no on setting bell, no more miner’s silicosis bound.

Flat, flat it's all gone now! No smell of unburnt coal, no laughing, bad language or sharp loving banter, no camaraderie, no last cigarette before the drop.

Flat, flat it's all gone now! No more ears popping, the rushing of stink damp air and twenty-five crammed in the cage – gone now the emergency red button put on stop.

Flat, flat gone now! No more maiming, crushing of bones, slicing of fingers, no more blue scars left by falling coal.

Flat, flat gone now! No more methane blasts, suffocating buried bodies, gone now, no more bravery, no more scrabbling black on black, the politicians have closed the hole.

Flat, flat gone now! The smell of stale tobacco, coal and sweat inside the locker rooms, the steamy showers, horse play, bodies all shapes and sizes covered in carbolic soap.

Flat, flat gone now! The tinkle of the tallies, the rush for the canteen or the miner's social club, snooker, cards, beer and HOPE.

**John Morgan 1162.**

## **SILVER END BRANCH**

### **Field trip to Walton on the Naze**

The Silver End branch likes to include an optional field trip to a relevant location for any course. So in early November we visited the Naze at Walton to see some of the things that tutor Fred Boot spoke about during our Autumn Course "The Effect of Climate Change on Human Evolution".

Meeting in the Naze car park, Fred escorted us down to the beach and explained how the recent sea defences made from Norwegian granite blocks weighing up to forty tonnes differs from the normal type of concrete sea wall. This new wall gives more protection to the cliffs from erosion by the sea and allows rain water from the cliffs to seep through to the sea. A walk along the top of the wall has been established which allows views of the different strata in the cliffs including the renowned Red Crag that is over 3 million years old and a bottom layer of London Clay that has been exposed.

The weather before our walk was very wet and as we continued we were able to see actual erosion taking place by water in the cliffs bringing

down sediment to the beach which will then get taken out to sea by wave action. We got a surprise when a lump of cliff fell to the beach. At the headland we climbed to the top of the Naze and walked back to the car park passing evidence of WW2 defences. After a leisurely, sociable lunch in the Queens Head in Walton, we then walked along the prom and to the end of the pier before returning to Sliver End.

**TIPTREE BRANCH**  
**Conflict in the 19th Century Essex Countryside**  
**Tutor Ted Woodgate.**

I have been researching my family history for many years and have rarely found anyone with any kind of claim to fame or notoriety. Until by chance that is, when I discovered a reference to a John Cracknell (my gggg grandfather) who was sent to trial at Norwich Assizes for taking part in the Agricultural Workers Riots of 1816. He was accused of assault. I discovered this in a fascinating book called 'Bread or Blood' written by A. J. Peacock in 1965. It describes The Agrarian Riots in East Anglia.

In the newspaper report of the trial my ancestor was described as a 'yeoman'. He certainly paid tithes, which suggests that he owned or was tenant of a small amount of land. The report of the trial records that Cracknell, and 3 other farm workers, had roamed the village, breaking down fences and destroying dams which had been built across some land drains. They had also demanded money from various farmers, shopkeepers and business people which had then been spent at the local pubs in the evening. Interesting!

All this had happened in the village of Feltwell where I grew up. I began to wonder why a member of my farming family, living in a quiet village in Norfolk, had been involved in such antisocial activity.

Our course at Tiptree with Ted Woodgate certainly helped me to understand why my gggg grandfather had become frustrated with his way of life. Although Ted's course concentrated on Essex, the problems were no different in other rural areas. Farm workers were suffering from so many different issues. The tithes they paid to the church authorities had become a crushing burden, both for the tenant farmers and for the landowners. Labourers were convinced that tithes were indirectly responsible for low

wages. As the century moved on there was also antipathy among labourers for the established church. Following the Corn Bill of 1815, the price of corn and therefore bread was high. It also appeared that my ancestor was incensed at The Enclosure Award of 1815 which had just taken place in his village.

Ted's course mainly dealt with the later events of the century and began in 1830 with the story of James Ewen of Rayleigh. James was publicly hanged at Chelmsford for a crime of arson, as were 3 other men in Essex around the same time. Ted has done a study in depth of James Ewen which goes some way to suggest that maybe he was used as a deterrent to other farm labourers. In 1830 there had been an explosion of anger and protest by the agricultural workers. We learned of the relentless deprivation caused by poverty and bad housing and how incendiarism seemed to be one of the only means of protest which really had an effect on the landowners.

Ted took us through the century and although farming practices improved, the plight of the farm workers did not. The gulf between the farm worker and the farmer was greater than ever before.

During the course we discussed The Swing Riots, The Great Reform Act of 1832, the Poor Law reforms of 1834, the story of The Tolpuddle Martyrs and The Chartist Movement. Taxes, tithes, poor rates and the Game Laws all had an impact on the life of the farm worker. Some workers emigrated or moved north hoping for a better life in the industrial towns.

Spurred on by the efforts of Joseph Arch and even strikes by the farm workers, the formation of the National Agricultural Labourer's Union was eventually achieved in 1872. By 1885 labourers had the Parliamentary franchise and by 1894 they could have a seat on Parish Councils.

It had been a century of conflict for the agricultural workers. They had achieved some rights and responsibilities, but life was still not easy and working conditions for the farm workers continued to be harsh, even into the early part of the 20th Century,

So back to my ancestor John Cracknell. Subsequently the rioting spread from his village to the next and on to Downham Market, Littleport and Ely where severe rioting took place. These offenders were tried at Ely and the authorities were determined to make an example of them. Eighty had been involved in the riots, (some of them women.) They were tried at Special

Assizes in Ely. Twenty four were sentenced to death; all but five of whom were commuted to transportation for 7 or 12 years. Some were jailed. At one point in the proceedings the judge announced that enough cases had been heard to set the populace an example and the labourers who had not already appeared were sent away. Five men were hanged at Ely; only 2 of those could read or write. Their bodies were delivered to the families on the same evening. The trials at Ely were held before John Cracknell's trial at Norwich. Luckily for him (and for me,) he and his confederates were acquitted! They seemed to have a very good counsel.

Grateful thanks to Ted for his informative, sensitive and thoroughly enjoyable course which helped me to understand my gggg grandfather's actions. We now plan a visit to Ely to pay tribute to the 'fallen five'.

P.S. Co-incidentally my husband's great grandfather, as well as being an agricultural labourer and a Primitive Methodist Minister at Great Massingham in Norfolk, was also a prime mover in the formation of the Agricultural Workers Union and a supporter of Joseph Arch. But that's his story to tell.

**Chris Gunton**

## **WRITTLE BRANCH**

As we are based in Writtle (near Chelmsford) we are rather short of National Trust properties close by, but we have managed to get to quite few in recent years (Ightham Mote, Ickworth. Standen). We have made use of the 'group ticket' paid for by the WEA, which means that all Branch members on the trip are able to enter the property for no charge.

I suggested Oxburgh as a venue after a family visit when we felt in love with the beautiful moated Tudor house (built in 1482). This castle-like manor with its moat has been lived in by the Bedingfeld family for over 500 years. It contains a priest's hole, rooms where a king and queen stayed, and a striking Tudor gatehouse. The owners have remained Catholic through the years, in the face of persecution. We Essex people were reminded of the Petre family of Ingatestone Hall near Chelmsford, who have had a very similar history.

Oxburgh is not an enormous property, so we were keeping our fingers crossed for good weather when we set out at 9.00 am The journey was pleasant, and took many people into areas which were new to them.

On coming through the gate in the car park wall we all pulled out our cameras and took our own versions of the trademark picture of the house surrounded by its moat. We then worked out our own itineraries from the information in the introductory leaflet and the coach-load quickly scattered and disappeared into the landscape.

Some people made immediately for the refreshment kiosk in the car park for a quick coffee, and some headed straight across the moat into the courtyard of the house and the main Tea Room, while we and others, decided to stretch our legs after sitting in the coach by trying out the woodland trails on the other side of the house. Guided garden tours were available as well

The trail we followed took us past the family Catholic chapel near the house, built in 1836 by the 6<sup>th</sup> Baronet, at a time when the restrictions on Catholic worship had been lifted. The magnificent altarpiece is one of the treasures of Oxburgh - the upper section being a retable probably made in 1520-30.

We enjoyed wandering along the trail in the sunshine until we suddenly realised that we would have to hurry to take in the rest of the attractions. (and lunch!) The Tea Room was full, so we decided to tour the house next. The fascination of the house lies in the fact that it has been a family home for so long, and has been altered by the owners along the way.

The main rooms open to the public are situated in the Gatehouse, and the style of most is basically neo-Classical, dating from the 18th century when the 4th Baronet altered the interior to reflect the taste of the time. The mediaeval Great Hall, opposite the Great Hall, was demolished in 1775. However, by the 19th century, neo-Gothic was the rage, and the 6th Baronet altered the King's Room, where Henry VIIth stayed in 1487, to look more mediaeval, with linen-fold panelling and large tapestries. A priest's hole, converted from a former garderobe, is accessible from here. Only for slim and agile visitors though!

We then managed two more flights of the circular brick stairway to the exit to the roof - well worth the effort for the views!

Finally, we got to lunch in the Tea Room, situated in the old Servants Hall and kitchen. The Tea Room was open from 11 am - 5pm, and we just managed to get there by 2.30pm for a hot light lunch.

We then had to rush to see the old, partially ruined, parish church of St John the Evangelist, which is accessible from the Oxburgh car park, and

contains the tombs of pre-Reformation Bedingfelds. This is a must, as, off the restored chancel, is the Chantry chapel of the Bedingfelds. Well worth the rush!

This chapel contains terracotta work which is said to be the best to be seen in England and dates from 1525 to 1550.

Finally, a quick look in the second-hand bookshop in the Gatehouse, and the NT shop in the former billiard room, and we were able to head for our coach. We paused at the gate into the car park to buy some plants and then dozed most of the way home after a very enjoyable day.

**Jane Daniel**

## **WRITTLE BRANCH**

In January 2014 the Tuesday morning class was “**Myth, Magic and Folklore: Decoding Stonehenge and Avebury through magical tales**” with **Lionel Sims**.

This fascinating course covered subjects such as anthropology, archaeology, archaeoastronomy and the interpretation of myths and fairy tales which were used to help us to understand the Stonehenge and Avebury monuments. It also included a simulation of the change in power relations from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies.

Lionel Sims was an inspirational and stimulating lecturer who provided us with a wealth of information. Weekly he e-mailed each of us a copy of his presentations, which included texts, maps, diagrams and photographs. We also received self assessment quiz questions and homework.

Some of his ideas were controversial and thought provoking, leading to many discussions amongst the class members. We found ourselves talking about this challenging and unforgettable course whenever we met.

**Brita Smith**

On Tuesday afternoons, we were delighted to welcome back **Ted Woodgate**, whose new course was entitled “**Turbulent Half Century: British Society 1919-1969**”.

Whilst the core of this course analysed the experiences of the British People during WW2, it started with post WW1 austerity. The pre-war

problems were still there, waiting to be dealt with – Ireland, Suffragettes and an ageing industrial structure. In the 1920's politicians had to grapple with the consequences of the collapse of three empires which had destabilised Europe and the emergence of the 'long shadow of Bolshevism'. The strikes which impacted on industry meant that the common people suffered widespread poverty, hunger and despair as 'the Depression' took hold. Monarchies across Europe had fallen and in the 30's Britain had to come to terms with the political stress of the Abdication. The vindictive Treaty of Versailles would come back to haunt Europe with the rise of Fascism and we studied this and the policy of appeasement.

Ted always draws out contributions from class members and when we reached the 1940's it became moving as people recalled their own stories of evacuation and bombing. Ted highlighted the tactical mistakes that Hitler made and discussed the major pivotal points during the war. We spent a memorable session on the nuclear conclusion to World War 2. The quizzes of 'Which year did this happen?' proved entertaining and we ended on a happy note with 'the 60's'.

Another course please Ted.

On Wednesday evenings we studied **“Inland Waterways” with Steve Worsley.**

Steve started back in the 16<sup>th</sup> C with the river trade and the awful turnpike roads. Transport of goods was a problem before the canals and the financial boost the economy experienced after they were created was hugely significant.

They provided a catalyst for the Industrial Revolution and were a vital method of transporting heavy raw materials and then fragile finished products. Their raw products included coal, agricultural products, bricks and timber. The ceramic industry near Stoke on Trent could at last send out the pottery on a gentle journey to market.

Steve has a wonderful collection of slides of a variety of features like locks, bridges, tunnels, toll booths and warehouses used to illustrate the week's theme. We studied the development and financing of canals and the growth of the network. The boats moved by horsepower and we looked at the life of the community of bargees who cared for the horses and at their beautifully decorated boats.

We ended with the sudden decline once the railways were developed. Ironically the civil engineering skills developed by the canal builders allowed the speedy development of the railways. Now the canal system is experiencing resurgence in a new role ... as a delightful leisure facility. Steve covered our local Chelmsford canal system and finished with the much larger canals in Europe.

We look forward to welcoming Steve back for his course on Railways next term.

In June the Branch organised a delightful day at the London Canal Museum. We enjoyed a trip on a canal boat and an excellent, nostalgic video. The collection of memorabilia in this canal side building (which was once an icehouse) provided a fascinating supplement to our course.

Mary Roberts

## **FELSTED BRANCH**

Once again Felsted Branch has provided its members with a great programme!

### Ten week courses

Autumn 2013

Haydn and Mozart, given by Bill Tamblyn. As anticipated, a quirky and entertaining Tamblynfest.

Lives of Great Scientists, given by Roger Bawden. An eclectic personal journey among the groves of scientific genius.

Spring 2014

History of Documentary Film given by Laurence Staig. An entertaining yet didactic mixture of film history and tools of analysis. Excellent.

Political Philosophy Part 1, given by Ian Pirie. A popular course which inspired much class discussion, vigorous debate and a desire to engage with the lecturer.

### One Day Schools, Spring 2014

Origins of Empire, given by Roger Cooke. A true Cooke's Tour de Force! To address such a topic by means of reasoned discourse and clear examples was phenomenal.

Winifred Nicholson - Artist and Colourist, given by Paula Armstrong. With the help of group work, Paula skilfully helped us to deconstruct the muses and methods of this artist, previously little known to most of us.

### Internal Taster Courses, Autumn 2013

Our energetic Chairman of the Felsted Branch, Dick Frost, was able to arrange two very popular ‘Taster Sessions’ at the end of the 2013 Autumn Term, one in each of our regular Monday evening and Thursday morning slots. They provided a fascinating closure to the term.

Mohammed Manwar Ali addressed a packed URC Hall with a very apposite talk on ‘Islam in The Modern World’ which covered some of the varied aspects of Islam he offers in his range of courses. This was a most stimulating and thought-provoking evening. In the light of more recent events in the Middle East we were indeed fortunate to have managed to engage such a busy and erudite speaker.

Our Thursday ‘Taster’ was given by the expert on all things horticultural, Andrew Sankey. His chosen theme, to give us an overview of the content and style of his lectures, was ‘A Garden for a Peasant, a Garden for a King. There was much to interest, educate and entertain his audience in this event. It included many unexpected etymological and philological references which intrigued minds which would otherwise have been dulled by managing preparations for the very imminent festive season!

### Upcoming Ten Week Courses:

#### Spring 2015

Ian Pirie – ‘From the French Revolution to the Present’ (Monday evenings)

[Political Philosophy Part 2]

Laurence Staig - ‘An introduction to Film Studies’ (Thursday mornings)

#### ONE DAY SCHOOL, SPRING 2015

We are delighted to announce a one day school with a difference. Roger Cooke will explore disease and medicine in history, supported in all technical details by our own resident expert:

Dr David Walmsley, who was Senior Consultant Anaesthetist for Mid Essex Hospitals.

The details are as follows:

Disease in History

Roger Cooke

(assisted by Dr David Walmsley)

We are all affected by illness but in the past diseases have changed the course of human history. We shall look at examples, some large and some small that have changed the course of human history.

The medical as well as the historical implications will be explored.

Date: Sat April 18th, 2015

Venue: Felsted Memorial Hall, Braintree Road, Felsted CM6 3DY.  
(Parking on site.)

Time: 1030 - 1530

Cost: £16 per head, to include a buffet lunch.

Bookings: please contact Dick Frost on 07909 526713, or 01371 820824,  
or email: richard.j.frost@btinternet.com

Places will be booked on receipt of a cheque: please include contact details with your cheque! (Confirmation by phone or email only)

## **LAWFORD BRANCH**

We were lucky to get Rosemary Williams on her last term for the WEA. She was very interesting as always. The subject was large, the history of Norway, Sweden and Denmark from earliest times, with particular attention to their links with Britain up to the present day. It was very enjoyable and memorable and we learned a lot.

We were sorry to say “Goodbye” and wished her well in her transition to Wales.

We started the new year with Frances Boardman giving us a condensed history of the world in one hundred buildings, from prehistory to the present times – caves to pyramids to temples – and then on to modern high rise buildings. As always, highly informative and enjoyable. We learned a lot and finished with a day trip to Thaxted to see the Guild Hall (early), then to Sible Hedingham to see Alderford Watermill (industrial) then to Cambridge Institute of Technology to see gas engines (industrial).

A fitting end to the term.

**J. Wrobel**

## COGGESHALL BRANCH

### A History of Coggeshall Branch

Recently I took over as Secretary of the Coggeshall Branch This was quite an undertaking because Stephen Williams had been in the post for 25 years. Also, not having previously been a member of the Committee, I was not familiar with their ways of working. But Stephen and our Chairman Wendy Brown, a local resident who was volunteer tutor-organiser for the area. Perhaps because of his influence a local history booklet "The Story of Coggeshall 1700 -1900' was published as early as 1951. Profits from sales of a second, 'This Coggeshall' were donated to the Essex Federation towards the purchase of a typewriter in 1959. In 1974 the 25th anniversary of the branch was celebrated with the publication of 'The Coggeshall Witch'. The issue of a combined version of the local history booklets was also planned but this had to wait until a grant from the Benham Trust supported printing costs in 1988. A revised History of Coggeshall was published in 1993 at three-quarters of the cost of the 1988 print. Also members of the branch wrote the first guide to a 'Walk around Coggeshall', since republished by the parish council.

In 1954 a ten gallon electric urn was purchased for £10 5s 0d (£10.25), followed six months later by the purchase of four dozen cups and saucers. These were used by the branch at its various meetings for a number of years and a modest income made from hiring it to the Women's Institute and others. Similarly, a slide projector and screen were purchased in 1972 although it was agreed not to continue to lend the projector in 1980 'in view of likely damage and repair costs'.

Among the books that Stephen handed over were three Minute Books which recorded the business of the branch since its formation in September 1949. The first two, covering the period to December 1995, seem much more suited to an archive than my cupboard. But first I decided to read them to learn something more of our history.

The books gradually get bigger the first is less than A5 in size, the second is 'letter size' and the latest is about A4. I was surprised to find that the minutes had been typed up and then pasted into the book from as early as 1957.

The branch has certainly been blessed with a number of very long serving officers although it didn't start that way. The inaugural meeting on 28th September 1949 was chaired by Captain Frank H Shaw of whom there is

no further mention. It appointed Mr JH Pegram as Secretary / Treasurer but he stood down just seven months later (at the first AGM) due to ill health. In the ensuing years there have been just 6 Chairmen, 4 Secretaries and 6 Treasurers. The post of Secretary was served by Mr GRJ Blackwell for 31 years (he retired after 25 but his replacement only lasted 2 years so Mr Blackwell returned as 'acting' secretary for a further six years). His final replacement was Stephen Williams from whom I've now taken over. The longest serving chairman was Miss PEG Wood (1980 to 2000) and Mrs Christine Haynes was Treasurer from 1984 to 2004.

Our current Chairman and Treasurer have each already clocked up 10 years service whilst our Class Librarian was appointed in 1980 having joined the Committee seven years earlier.

Initially the branch was very active with outings and local walks through the summer in addition to the winter and spring courses. Over the years Kelvedon Players were helped to bring their Pantomime to Coggeshall for one night, exhibitions were arranged, visits by other branches and the Essex Federation hosted and individual lectures or one day schools. The last one day school in June 1998 was judged to be good but attendance was less than expected and it made a small loss. Since then running a one day school has not been deemed to be worth the effort.

Now we simply run two ten week courses each year, both in the afternoon but for the first 50 years all the lectures or 'terminal courses' were held in the evening. An afternoon course was tried for a couple of years in the 1980s with a creche to attract young mothers but failed to attract enough members. It was at just such an arrangement that I had my first introduction to the WEA in Witham as a mother with two preschool children.

Finally in 1998 it was agreed that the projector could be disposed of because, although still in good condition, it was not easy to use.

With the help of computers with delete buttons, e-mails and a significantly reduced level of activity, the task of branch secretary should be a lot easier for me than it was for Miss PEG Wood in 1950. However, it is unlikely that I will be able to serve for as long as Stephen because of my age now.

**Nancy Powell Davies**

# ESSEX FEDERATION SUMMER SCHOOLS 2014

## **Cambridge – Fenny outpost or technology powerhouse?**

**Tutor: Honor Ridout**

What a great way to spend three days! My first ever course with WEA was at their Summer School in Chelmsford, held at the Essex Records Office. There was a choice of subjects and I chose ‘Cambridge – Fenny outpost or technology powerhouse?’ The lecturer was Honor Ridout and her knowledge of both her subject and historical matters further afield was wonderful. She approaches history with humour, making the subject come alive.

The course followed the growth of Cambridge, from a relatively insignificant Roman settlement on the banks of the Cam, through to the present day University City. This was a multi-disciplinary course which covered architecture, social history, chronological history, literature and even some geology.

In addition to studying the growth of the town in its physical form, starting with the original settlement to the south of the bridge, the course also covered the life and times of both the townsfolk and the University and how the two became intertwined, sometimes causing rivalry.

We were also given a summary history of the founding of the University and Colleges of Cambridge, which started with an overspill from Oxford University, due to that same rivalry between town and gown. The first Cambridge College in 1284 was Peterhouse and the last in 1977 was Robinson College. Our tutor, as a Cambridge graduate herself, also covered the history of the admittance of women to the ranks.

The maps supplied covered the area from the early days to the C19<sup>th</sup> and these were just so interesting, especially the one showing the houses drawn in 3D. I think all the students will be looking at these maps for ages, as there is so much detail – I know that I will.

We learned about the architecture and art of King’s College chapel, as well as many other university and town buildings. This was well illustrated with slides. Students were inspired to plan a visit to Cambridge, in order to try and pick out the lesser known gems which remain and which they did not realise were there, prior to attending this course.

Extracts from literature were used to add interest to the social history of the time, starting with an extract from the Domesday Book, showing the

wards and dwellings in the borough of Grentebrige and the income due. It was interesting to see that three Frenchmen occupied three of the dwellings but paid nothing! We also learned how 'Hobson's choice' appeared in our everyday language, through the system of changing horses at inns. Hobson (who had the monopoly over the area's livery stables) forced the next applicant to take the next available horse, which may have been an old nag rather than a good young horse – hence the saying 'Hobson's choice'. How amazing that this saying has stayed in our language since the C17th.

This course was interesting and informative; with lots of humour and some pathos. It was delivered by a lady who knows her stuff - what more can you ask! It gave us an incentive to visit Cambridge again and view it in a different, more informed light.

I liked the question posed by John Steegmann in 1940. What is Cambridge for? His answer – it is for those who want to go there. Even though his statement refers to students, it could equally sum up the appeal of Cambridge for us all, especially now that we are so well informed. (John Steegmann – 'Cambridge' pub. 1940, revised 1945).

We, the students, would like to thank all those who work behind the scenes in order to make these courses possible. I will be back for more of these interesting and informative courses – the only problem will be which to choose!

**Alayne Smith**

**An Introduction to Philosophy  
Tutor: David Masters**

Discussions on the existence, or not, of God to the philosophy, construction, meaning of art. Should art be accurate, should it make us think, should it be about feelings and emotions? We heard about some of the well known philosophers and also some of the lesser known - Albert Einstein, Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Sigmund Freud to name a few.

We learnt about Empiricism and Rationalism and how to use an Inductive or Deductive argument. The ins and outs of Thinking, no that's not a rude word - "it is a beguiling question about everyday things that stops you in your tracks and helps you start to look at the world in a whole new way". Is a broken-down car parked? If we borrow every book in a library, is it still a library? Who owns the dust in a supermarket? We questioned our

morals, looking at what is the right thing to do. Although this was a difficult one because rarely is there just one course of action or an easy answer.

This was a fascinating three days guaranteed to make you use your brain and think outside the box. David Masters guided us, directed us, cajoled and mediated our arguments and discussions with his calm influence. I think I can safely say everyone enjoyed the experience. A big Thank You to David.

**Linda Vowles**

### **Myth, Magic , Magic and Folklore. Decoding Stonehenge and Avebury through magical tales.**

**Tutor: Lionel Sims**

I don't think any of us had much idea of what to expect from this 3-day course by anthropologist Lionel Sims, and we were certainly in for a surprise.

Mr Sims is a truly Renaissance Man, in that he draws on a multitude of disciplines to research his topic, which was in this instance the function of Stonehenge and Avebury Ring. We looked at geology, archaeology, astronomy, the culture of Neolithic herders and similar contemporary cultures, myths and fairy tales, Neolithic art and how these all help to explain why these two famous sites were situated where they were and were aligned as they were. His conclusions were unorthodox and very convincing.

What I found particularly valuable was the way Lionel Sims encouraged us to ask questions, come up with hypotheses, and then rigorously test these. He taught me a lot about how to conduct research. Whether or not one believes that his conclusions are correct - and I, for one, am convinced that they are - the whole process of investigation, supported by excellent diagrams and visual reconstructions, was absolutely fascinating.

Thank you, Lionel.

**Gill Robson**

During this excellent course, we were introduced to the varied methods used to study the lives of people who lived long before anything was written down. This included Malinowski's studies of matrilineal societies

in the Trobriand Islands; Levi-Strauss' structuralistic examination of myth; and archeology of ancient sites, such as Stonehenge.

Anthropologist, Lionel Sims, took us through the evidence that the female, lunar based calendar of hunter/foragers was superseded by the male, solar based calendar of cattle herders (although hunting was still important). Cattle herding overtook hunting and foraging because of the problems faced by the ice age and decreasing numbers of large prey.

There are thirteen dark moon phases in one year. This is the crucial time when women, with synchronised menstrual cycles, would seclude themselves, and men would do likewise for a bit of male bonding, and to plan the next hunt, which always took place during the days leading up to a full moon. With cattle ownership and competition for resources, came tribal conflict, and male, warlike behaviour.

Sims' theory argues that Stonehenge and Avebury were built for men-only ceremonies that synchronise just one lunar dark phase with the winter solstice. In this way women no longer dictated the timings, and men could set the agenda. It is a complex argument, which can be followed by reading his paper, The 'Solarization of the Moon: Manipulated Knowledge at Stonehenge 2006.

We also had fun finding ancient, hidden meanings in myths and fairy tales. Can you think why Sleeping Beauty's Dad had only twelve golden plates, so couldn't invite all thirteen wise women?

The answer just might be linked with Stonehenge

**Susan Baines**

## **ORBITUARY**

### **Alan Wood**

Alan was born in Writtle in 1925. He was educated at Writtle Primary School; and later at King Edward VI Grammar School.

After National Service in the Fleet Air Arm he took over the family business of Market Gardening in Highwood. Here he introduced many successful innovations and still managed to keep a happy and loyal workforce. He joined Writtle WEA and was an enthusiastic supporter for many years. When he retired he moved to Hatfield Peverel where his talents did not go unnoticed! He served on the Committee for ten years during which time he took his turn as Branch Secretary and then Chairman. He was a very enthusiastic member of WEA - it appealed to his sense of community learning. And he always wanted to learn more! He was not uncritical of the WEA, particularly the last few years when he often complained that all we were offered were courses in history. He wanted to be looking forward, to visualise how things would develop, and to argue how they could be brought about!!

His most enduring hobby was sailing and he was always on the lookout for a suitable crew to help him sail his 32' Dualist, not just in the summer months but all year round. He was a kind, generous, out-spoken man, firm in his humanist beliefs, a good raconteur and great company. We do miss him.

**Catharine Voysey**

**Sally Ridealgh**  
**Course Co-ordinator – Essex**

I have worked for the WEA for ten years delivering their National Careers Service contract, providing careers advice to many of the WEA's partners, including the homeless, drug and alcohol and mental health sector. Over the past 3 years or so I have been responsible for the day to day management of the project including ensuring that all quality processes are followed. The service we deliver was recognised as good practice in the 2013 WEA Matrix report.

In the last five years I have also managed the Neighbourhood Learning Fund Project, setting up short courses, which has led to new partnerships being formed. I have also delivered short courses around employability. I have been home based for many years, which has given me the ability to manage my own workload and to prioritise tasks to reach targets and deadlines.

Outside of work, I like to keep fit through walking the dog and exercise. I am very much looking forward to my new role and working with my area of branches in East Essex. I will be in touch with each of you very soon.

**PATHS OF GLORY**

As part of the Essex Federation commemoration of 1st WW, on 11th November, Laurence Staig will be giving a 2 hour lecture at the Cramphorn Theatre, in Chelmsford entitled - 'Paths of Glory: how the 1stWW has been remembered in film'. This will be followed by a showing of Paths of Glory in the evening. This has been arranged as a collaboration between Essex WEA and Chelmsford City Council.

Bookings for the lecture and/or the film should be done directly through the Cramphorn theatre not ourselves. Their phone number is 01245 606505

The lecture (cost £5) should be booked through Joan Black -01245 354644