

Essex Federation News Sheet

Spring 2007

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

It is time to look forward. That is the message driving your new Federation Committee, now that most of the changes to the National organisation, brought in to secure its finances and retain external backing, are in place.

Since its election at the AGM on 7th October, the committee has been examining how the federation can best support and work in partnership with our branches. Together with our General Programme Manager/Educational Advisor, Ann O'Toole, we are encouraging branches to develop programmes of high quality one day schools and similar one-off activities to attract new members ("Come along and bring a friend!") who might then be encouraged by their "taste" of the WEA, its friendliness and sense of purpose, to join the regular classes. Many branches, of course, are already "ahead of the game" – but the Federation is here to assist with publicity and organisation where needed and help branches with declining numbers, and perhaps already faced with the difficulty of filling branch officer vacancies, to renew themselves.

A Marketing and Publicity sub-committee has also been set up. In response to advertisements already placed, there have been a considerable number of enquiries to Ann from potential new members. Other ways of publicising our activities, some free, some quite costly, are being explored. We are grateful to the Benham Seaman Trust for help with the expense.

As most Branch officials know, two long established Trusts exist to provide financial assistance to Essex Branches and the Essex Federation. Where branches are in financial difficulties, if the problem cannot be solved by an application via Ann to the Region, the Federation will channel requests to the Basil Slaughter Trust, and help will be forthcoming, for example, with the costs of accommodation. Where a Branch or the Federation wishes to embark on a new venture, such as the running of a One Day School and the attendant publicity, other

special events, the production of a publication or the purchase of equipment, bids can be made to the Benham Seaman Trust, already mentioned, for help. The Federation Committee is very anxious to ensure that no Branches close or have their activities curtailed through lack of funds and, indeed, to promote the expansion of activities by securing the finances, where needed, and providing some organisational support, where possible.

It is time to look forward. Jane Dougan has taken on the new rôle of Federation Secretary, a post created to fill the gap left by the national and regional redefinition over the past few years of the County Organiser's, i.e. Ann's, job. We are very appreciative of the purposeful way in which Jane has gone about the job and of the many voluntary hours she has put into it. For the time being, she is also taking on the work of Federation Treasurer. Though her job description may have changed, Ann too has continued to contribute with energy and enthusiasm to Federation activities in the spirit of the volunteers whose dedication she is the first to sound the praises of.

It is time to look forward. But it is also time to recognise our huge debt to the past, to retiring Committee members and especially to Norman Towers for his six years' work as Federation Chairman and to Beryl Dartnall for her long service in the onerous job of Treasurer. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

At the end of the most recent Taster Day, organised by Ann and hosted by Felsted Branch, I was asked, as the new chairman, to give an outline of Essex Federation activities and sum up the work of your new Federation Committee since its election. Details of the Federation One Day Schools and the Week of Study were given as well as most of the information in this article. However, at one point a member interjected to point out that I had spoken for several minutes and mentioned "the Federation", I think he said, seven times, but had referred to "the WEA" only once. At first I was bemused because to talk about the Federation had been my brief, but then I realised that he was using the point to refer to the difficulty some branches found in communicating to many

potential recruits the relevance of “The Workers’ Educational Association” now to them – perhaps retired, perhaps averse to supposed hints of class warfare. One prominent member replied that in the past attempts at National level had been made, and rejected, to change the Association’s name; another asked, warmly, why we should want to change a name that represented a proud history.

Why indeed? While the initials may stand for an historic title, they also stand for what we, members, branches, tutors, volunteers, paid officials, federations, regions and the national organisation, all unite to do: participate in and promote the World of Education for Adults, indeed the Wonder of Education for All.

Time to look forward – to look forward to a healthy future.

Ron Marks.

Annual General Meetings and Affiliation Fees

Thanks are due to Branches for sending Jane Dougan details of AGMs and for paying affiliation fees. Ann or members of the Federation Committee will be very happy to attend any Branch AGMs. Details of the 2007 Federation AGM will be circulated shortly. Minutes of the last AGM will be sent out with the notice of meeting, but in future they will be distributed immediately after the meeting together with the affiliation fee request.

GREAT BENTLEY BRANCH
The Early Landscape and Dwellings of Essex
Tutor: Alan Bayford

When those of us who'd attended his previous course on Vernacular Buildings of Essex some two years ago learnt that Alan Bayford was to return to our Great Bentley WEA branch in September 2006, there was much pleasurable anticipation. We knew what to expect from a lecturer who combines the infectious enthusiasm of a mad keen amateur with the precise knowledge and rigour of a professional. We weren't disappointed. His subject this time was "The Early Landscape and Buildings of Essex from 10,000 B.C. to 1200 A.D.", which, like the earlier course, proved fascinating.

Now if that title sounds a massively wide period for a ten week course, the first date is really a location point, indicating the end of the last ice-age and the establishment of the landscape of East Anglia in roughly the shape we know it today. We were soon moving fast forward. Looking first at the methods we have today of establishing what we can say about the history of our landscape, we were taken through the methods that are now familiar through the "Time Team" programme: methods like geophysics and aerial photography. Of course the irony that arises here, as Alan soon showed us, is that, as these methods reveal our history ever more precisely, so we are forced to cast aside (as are professional historians and archaeologists) many conceptions we have taken for granted since our early days at school.

Amusing though serious moments were spent in discussion, reacting to a "True or False" questionnaire which asked us to examine some of our long held preconceptions like: the primeval forest lay undisturbed for many millennia; prehistoric people made little impression on the forest; the Romans lived in towns and villas, travelling between them on straight roads carved through the forest; the Romano-British were killed and/or driven into Wales by the Saxons; the Saxons lived in rude huts and cleared around their villages to make room for strip cultivation; the Normans found Essex still largely forested and began clearance in earnest, throwing up castles and rebuilding churches.

The consensus was that few of these described the reality, most at best half-truths, and that experts had also had to accept several "about faces". Clearly this can never be an exact science, much of its interest indeed coming from the juxtaposition of different possibilities.

We are fortunate in this county and area in having wide ranging examples of the changes wrought by various immigrant and invading peoples, and it is exciting to be made aware of the history of familiar places, even though that history may be lying well below our feet at any particular moment. Alan's fine store of photographs, taking us from his neighbour's back garden to far corners of the county where noteworthy historical and topographical features might be found, is another great aspect of his repertoire.

As we have done for most of our recent courses, we arranged a field trip, this time to the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village near Bury St. Edmunds. This reconstructed settlement has been well developed as a living museum with artifacts found in the surrounding area, and houses rebuilt within their original foundations. And if, as I've said above, this subject is often about rethinking and relearning, then a good example was demonstrated here when Alan came to change his view regarding use of the pits below the floors of some Anglo-Saxon dwellings when the evidence "on the spot" was examined. The facilities available there for all ages make West Stow a very worthwhile venue.

It is impossible to detail here the range covered from prehistoric to mediaeval times. Suffice to say that I now can't travel anywhere round this area without mentally referencing some aspect of the landscape to what this course taught me.

Everyone expressed an enjoyment of the course and an appreciation of Alan Bayford's skill as a lecturer. He was warned, however, that he would not be welcome back if he continued to tell people that ??? Green is bigger than the village green in Great Bentley. We don't care if it's true; how dare he ruin our claim to fame. (And ours is a proper village green with a cricket pitch and surrounding cottages, so there.) A fine course, well taught.¿

Reg Allington

WEA Go Back To Anglo-Saxon Times.

On Saturday 4th November, as part of their course on the landscape and buildings of Essex and its surrounding regions, the local branch of the WEA, visited the West Stowe ancient Anglo-Saxon Village near Bury St. Edmunds.

This is the site of an early Anglo-Saxon settlement on which the remains of a group of houses from that period have been excavated by archaeologists. Of course, because the dwellings from that time were largely constructed of wood, the remains are confined in most cases to various marks and layers in the ground where posts were inserted upon which the houses were built; but weapons and artefacts made of tougher materials have been found within these areas and demonstrate a surprisingly sophisticated level of technology compared with our normal view of this period following the withdrawal of the Romans. These finds are on show in the museum there.

Oddly enough, houses that burnt down at the time reveal more about their construction than the others. This is because charcoal resists the ravages of time and shows more clearly the layers of construction in the houses. This has enabled students from Cambridge and others to reconstruct the village with what they believe to be a good level of accuracy. You can go into all these buildings.

The visitors' centre at West Stowe has been set out so as to make it very user-friendly and easy to follow and understand. The facilities and the accompanying museum make it a place well worth a visit. On the fine sunny day we had, members were able to add a great deal to the knowledge gained on their course - as it happens the course lecturer, Alan Bayford, was able there to learn a number of new things about this ancient way of life. A period normally referred to as the "Dark Ages" is being made ever clearer by such excavations.

Reg Allington

WEST BERGHOLT BRANCH

Back to Your Roots

Tutor: Bill Tamblyn

This was such a good course that it deserves to be brought to wider notice and to dispel any doubts that it might concern genealogy, which could have been suggested by the title.

The course traced the growth of folk music from the Seventeenth Century, sometimes on audiotape and sometimes the tutor singing himself. Bill Tamblyn introduced us to intriguing dialects and haunting tunes of ploughboys, miners, fishermen and the like. Children's jingles made another interesting evening. Apart from enjoying the folk music, a new measure of friendship seemed to spring up within the class, which included an unusually large proportion of men.

Inspired by the simplicity of the narrative lyrics in such songs, one of our members dared to write one of modern times, sung to the tune of "Barbara Allen."

She lived high up in a Council flat.

Her husband, he had left her.

She met a swain, and brought him home

And there he tried to bed her.

But ere her raiment she would shed

She asked if he would wed her?

When he said "No," she bade him "Go"

And clout him round the head-o.

"A ghost!" he cried, "I see a ghost

A-standing by yon chair-o.

I will not leave this haunted place

But stay and be your hero."

Her eye did greet, she quaked from fear

And clung to him quite boldly:

"Pray do not go. Please stay with me

And be my brave defender."

And so he stayed the night along

And wide his smile became-o

He'd seen this "ghost" many times before

.....And bedded many a dame-o!

Irene Keates

ARDLEIGH BRANCH

Why Put Salt in Your Dishwasher?

Tutor: Roger Bawden

I went along to the first session of this WEA course wondering what it was going to like. This was my first "local" course and I was surprised that I knew a large proportion of the people attending and that other than the chairman I was the only man. I would have thought that a subject which was basically chemistry would have attracted more of my own sex. It was also a pity that more did not attend.

We found our tutor, Richard to be very enthusiastic about his subject, fun to listen to and with quite a wit to go with it. His presentation, using an overhead projector kept you interested all the time.

So what was it all about. Well we were, as the title indicates, looking at things we use in the kitchen and how chemistry comes in to it, so we looked at dishwashers, microwaves, pressure cookers and then everything that was involved in the use of these. So water played a major part of the first couple of weeks of the course. We learnt interesting facts about water, like other things it can be solid, liquid and a gas but it is the only liquid that when solid (ice) it is lighter than when it is solid and therefore floats and it also expands where most things contract. Because the ice floats when frozen it therefore never freezes all the way down, the water under the ice still being one to three degrees above freezing and so allowing life to continue under the ice.

We learnt quite a lot about chemical formula which when explained slowly and slowly built up to something that we knew in everyday life was not too difficult to understand.

As we went through the course we learnt about soaps, detergents, alcohol, sugar, starch, bicarbonate of soda, glucose, fats and oils, yeast etc. etc. All things we use in the kitchen but are of course all chemicals. We learnt how they worked in relation to how we use them in the kitchen, i.e. why detergents work better than soaps.

We then moved on to look at fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides which then moved on to explosives, TNT and Dynamite. So you could say that the course got more explosive as it went along.

Finishing the course off with a week on health and so covering things like penicillin, aspirin and the Thalidomide disaster you can see that the course was very wide ranging and the title of Why Put Salt in Your Dishwasher was really only a very small part of this very interesting course.

John Terry

WRITTLE BRANCH

Our Tuesday morning session for last autumn commenced on 12th September 2006. Roger Bawden introduced us to a course in chemistry. Was this 'back to school'? Not really, no enforced homework, no detention! Just fun in learning a serious and important subject affecting our lives.

The title of the course was 'Why put salt in your Dishwasher'. The course looked at chemistry in the domestic setting but also subjects such as the use of fertilizers and aspects of health were also covered. Roger referred to some of the great names in science for example Pasteur and Joseph Lister.

The lectures were well illustrated and prepared and held our interest throughout the 10 weeks and they were well attended.

At our Wednesday evening course we welcomed Andrew Norton with his course 'History of UK Agriculture from the Enclosure Acts'. The first of our ten lectures began on 27th September 2006. I understand that Andrew is new to the team of WEA tutors. I hope that he realised that his preparation in giving the lectures was well appreciated in Writtle. Huge changes in how land is farmed have taken place in the last 250 years. There have been many mechanical inventions, the introduction of fertilizers, crop breeding and animal nutrition which have improved output over the years. The effect on the farming industry on our country joining the EEC was dealt with in detail. The course gave us an insight into the problems and workload of farmers and made us realise how we rely on them for our food and well being.

Ernest Tully

LITTLE WALTHAM BRANCH
“Royalty or Revolution”
England from Charles II to William III
Tutor: Roger Cooke

Frankly, I was a little apprehensive as my wife and I made our way to the first session of the 10-week Autumn course. We are relatively new members of Little Waltham Branch. We had attended two excellent courses in succession and I wondered whether this new one could live up to the very high standards those courses had set.

The first evening very quickly set my mind at rest - I need not have doubted. The course tutor, Roger Cooke, had a lively personality and obvious enthusiasm for his subject, “Royalty or Revolution”, England from Charles II to William III. He introduced us to the England of the mid seventeenth century, where Parliament was not the same as the institution we have at Westminster today, the Sovereign, appointed by God, was at the summit of society and much more active in ruling, as well as reigning, and Religion was so much more important than it is now. Charles II was not really the ‘Merry Monarch’ I had in my mind, more a lazy, cynical man who called and prorogued Parliament as he needed money, and sought to use his Royal Prerogative to introduce measures in favour of Catholics. James II very quickly turned his kingdom fatally against him. William III, by contrast, was the monarch who was revealed to the course as ‘the most successful English King’, as our tutor explained his careful preparatory moves from the United Provinces, leading to his victorious invasion in 1688. His invading company, I was impressed to learn, included a printing press, to ensure favourable propaganda could be distributed as he advanced – slowly - on London. William’s principal aim was to bring Protestant England into the European struggle to restrict the power of France under the absolute, Catholic monarch, Louis XIV. To achieve his aim, he was prepared to accept a more institutional monarchy than his predecessors. In this, he was much closer to our present day position and his reign also saw the beginnings of many features of current life which we take for granted, including the National Debt, the Bank of England and regular sessions of Parliament.

Our tutor led us through this interesting period with knowledge, enthusiasm and humour, his previous existence as a history master in boys' schools standing him in good stead in this respect. The session on interpreting primary sources was particularly good, with a two-way exchange of opinions on the material studied. It is hoped that a field trip can be arranged later in the year to build on the interest the course has aroused.

A successful WEA course is one which is enjoyed by both the tutor and the group. In this respect, "Royalty or Revolution" was most definitely a success, thanks to Roger Cooke, the members who selected him as speaker, the members who attended so regularly (despite the building works on the premises!) and the excellent Book Box. Thanks to all concerned.

Ray Savage

SPRING ONE DAY SCHOOL

Saturday 28th April 2007

Manet to Picasso

the opening of an era of change in art

Tutor: Graham Slimming

The Geology and Building Stones of Essex

Tutor: Ken Newman

"Frustrate Their Politicks":

the emergence of the first two party system in England

Tutor: Roger Cooke

Feering Community Centre, Coggeshall Road, Feering

11.00 a.m. – 3.30 p.m.

Leaflets and booking forms available from Branch Secretaries

JANE BENHAM LECTURE

**Wednesday 9 May aboard sailing barge Hydrogen
10 am for 10.30 until 12.30**

Rita Phillips will talk about her experiences aboard the sailing barge
Thalatta.

Her husband, Peter, will give an introduction on sailing barges.

Tickets £5.00 (Please send s.a.e.)

From: Kevin Bruce 29 Mill Road Tillingham CM0 7SY

AUTUMN ONE DAY SCHOOL

**Saturday 24th November 2007
Feering Community Centre
11.00 a.m. – 3.30 p.m.**

The Indian Uprising
Tutor: Michael Bloomfield

A Beginner's Guide to the World of the Atom
Tutor: Roger Bawden

“All Things Kern”
the music of Jerome Kern
Tutor: Cecil Gleaves

Leaflets with booking forms will be distributed during September

THE ESSEX WEA SUMMER SCHOOL

Week of Study 2007
At the Wilson Marriage Centre, Colchester

Monday 9 – Wednesday 11 July 10am – 3.30pm

The Atlantic Slave Trade to Abolition
Tutor: Ann Greenslade

Exploring the English Language
Tutor: Dr Rosemary Williams

Exploring the Countryside
An investigation of landscapes managed for wildlife and people
Tutor: Fred Boot

William Blake
Tutors: Graham Slimming and Colin Padgett

Brochures and booking forms distributed via Branch Secretaries
in late February or early March

The Centre is a short bus ride from the town centre
and there is car parking

MUSIC AT COLCHESTER

Autumn 2005 and Spring 2006

Tutor: Peter Dale

Introduction

In his outline of the course on English opera, Peter Dale says:

"No musical experience is necessary, but an open mind and an adventurous ear would not go away unrewarded." This is the idea that runs through all our music courses.

Some of us have a sound musical knowledge, playing instruments and reading music, even translating French and Italian text. One lady made her own violin. In one session, when we were talking about the origins of some of the music in Gay's "The Beggar's Opera," some of our ladies sang an old carol to our surprise and great delight. All of us are not so knowledgeable but all of us share and learn.

English Opera

So, how to explore the "Highways and Byways of English Opera?" This ranges from Purcell around 1688 to the modern Britten and Berkeley and from the sublime and deeply moving to the "simply curious." As in any good exploration, we keep asking questions.

There is something that makes English music peculiarly English but we have to ask how does music relate to text? This relationship can be particularly rewarding because there are so many fine literary texts available in English. But why have British audiences, and opera houses, consistently tended to under-rate our operas? Perhaps there is no good musical reason for this.

Those of us who enjoy opera found insights in familiar "war horses" and discovered interesting rarities. There were some who started out thinking that the hybrid art form was a little disconcerting, being "artificial" or "undramatic" or having "impossible plots." They had their preconceptions challenged and changed. We were asked to consider possible "hurdles" when coming new to opera. Language could be one as early operas were sung in Italian. Also there were the settings in different times, strange places, and other attitudes to honour, virtue and religion. Stylisation was another hurdle and when one would expect speech, there was singing. For example, in Handel's "Julius Caesar in Egypt" of 1724, we have the parts of heroes and conquerors sung,

nowadays, by countertenors. (The original cast list would have had castrati.) This, at first, is disconcerting, even uncomfortable, to some listeners. But it is the composer's intent to show these as other-worldly beings. In Vaughan William's "Riders to the Sea," he sets to music almost the exact text of Synge's moving one act play. Then we have Gay's "The Beggar's Opera" first performed in 1728. This broke away from Italian and French opera and their higher planes. It has rogues, beggars and highwaymen, recognisable popular ballads and pokes fun at politicians of the day. Its bawdy realism made it a smash hit at the time. It then was neglected for about 200 years until a run of 1,463 performances in 1920. It inspired Weill's "Threepenny Opera."

In the event, we suspend disbelief in response to the beauty or gaiety of the music. Sometimes, there is only one scene or one song that comes down to us and, sometimes, we do not know the name of the opera from which the song comes.

The Concerto

"The Concerto" in ten weeks! Now that takes some doing and we had to decide on what a concerto is in its different modes. Is it an occasion for virtuoso display, or engaging soloists and orchestra in conversation, or debate, argument, discussion or, even, combat, a struggle? These elements can vary in intensity and may overlap. And how does it end ultimately in resolution? It is this resolution that gives such satisfaction for powerfully moving pieces of music.

"At one level, the concerto is all too easy to define, at another level, intractably difficult to pin down." Simon Keefe. The word "concerto" could come from the Latin *concertere* (to act together), Italian *concer-tare* (to contend), or the Latin *conserere* (to consort).

We looked at concertos for a wide range of instruments, from the humble to the very grand, from Holmboe's recorder concerto, piano concertos, double concertos to Tippett's concerto for double string orchestra. The virtuoso exhibitionism comes out in Paganini's work and, to a lesser extent, in that of Liszt. As Peter says: "exhibition for its own sake - and never mind the music." Other examples of modes are conversation in Bach's Double Concerto, discussion in Brahms' Violin Concerto, struggle in Liszt's 1st Piano Concerto and integration in any

concerto grosso. The "one" against the "many" may have suited the Romantic movement but the aim in the end for all (almost) is resolution. There have been arguments for a political dimension to music, with Power Relations involved. We can think of Shostakovich and, lesser so, Prokofiev under Stalin.

Coda

Not every session had the class leaving with a tune to hum or whistle (The Old Gray Whistle Test?) but, at the end of every session, we went away mentally stimulated and thoughtful, with our minds as pleasant places in which to spend time. Then, at the end of term, there was the challenge of "Chamber Music" to look forward to the next time.

Epilogue

We live in a society which has the privilege of having available to it the music of many centuries and many countries. Some of us are able to take advantage of that privilege.

However, since writing on "Music in Colchester" for Colchester Branch, I have heard a story told by someone who is a professional musician. (As we know, it is difficult to make living for many musicians.) They play the clarinet and joined a quartet which visited schools to introduce young pupils to a range of music and the instruments which help make music. One school was in an area that was run-down and poor. The children were attentive and asked bright questions but our idea of classical music was new to them.

As a final, "party piece" the group and the clarinetist decided to play the second movement of Mozart's clarinet quintet. When they looked up at the end, they found that some of the teachers were in tears. They were in tears because some children were in tears. They had never heard such sublime and beautiful music before in their short lives..

Would they ever have this chance again?

Ray Hedley