

Add-Venture in Learning Newsletter

December 2018

Registered Charity 1124953

www.add-ventureinlearning.org.uk

The Committee would like to wish all our members a VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS and a PEACEFUL 2019.

We continue to plan exciting new courses and hope to see many of you during the year.

There have been some changes to the roles undertaken by committee members this year - see contacts at the end of this newsletter. Rita Allsop has retired after faithfully serving for many years and we thank her for her valuable input. Lyn Oliver is at present unable to help with producing memory sticks. Lyn has been involved in producing first tapes, and then CD's and then memory sticks for many years and continues to be a valued member of the committee. We welcome onto the committee Mary Collyer and also Cheryl Beech who was co-opted during the year.

As always we value input from both our Guides and Visually Impaired participants so don't be shy of coming forward if you can help in any way or have some brilliant ideas for viable courses.

WEBSITE NEWS from Doreen Tyler, Secretary

It gives me great pleasure to tell you that after many weeks of blood, sweat, tears and hard work, Add-Venture in Learning now has a revamped website which should go live in December.

Myself and Bob Bristow (Lyn Oliver's brother) have worked hard on this project since September of this year and as I write this piece it is hard to believe that our new website will soon become a reality.

On the website you will find committee contact details, a summary of this year's AGM plus the all-important information on upcoming courses. Also there will be some photos of students and guides who were involved in past courses.

If you have any comments or suggestions on the layout or content of the website please do contact me so that the possibility of including items not currently there can be discussed.

The URL of the website has not changed and it is:
www.add-ventureinlearning.org.uk

In closing I would like to thank Bob Bristow for his invaluable help, without him this website would not be a reality.

SUMMARY OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 8 AUGUST IN WORCESTER.

There were twenty-seven people present at the Annual General Meeting. Pertinent topics discussed: Course prices and venues continue to be discussed. University accommodation is basic which is why costs on this type of venue are lower. Hotel accommodation is more expensive and a fine balance of venue types is continuously under discussion at Committee level. Additionally, for the more rural locations coach travel is often necessary and this increases the course price.

It was suggested that course subsidies (if needed) should come out of Add-Venture's funds and this was agreed and voted upon.

Production of documents in accessible formats was another item that was discussed. Add-Venture in Learning is very aware of this issue and attempts where possible to provide documents in people's preferred format. We will continue to do this.

It was suggested that future AGM's could take place during the daytime, thus making it possible for those who were not attending the course or who were unhappy about travelling in the evening to attend.

A new Committee was elected to serve through 2018/19

ALL ABOUT ELGAR - a report by Rita Allsopp

We assembled for the AddVenture Course in New College, Worcester on Monday, 6th August, and were to remain here until Friday mid-day, 13th. The Course was lead by Julian Williamson, a lecturer we have enjoyed previously when the subject was Brahms. Andrew Hodgson, Chair of our Organisation, ably assisted Julian.

Following our evening meal Julian introduced us to the history of English music, going back to the 12th Century and taking us up to the latter part of the 19th Century and the early works of Edward Elgar, born near Worcester in 1857.

The following lectures, generally mornings and an hour in the evenings, took us through the development of Elgar's composition, most of which probably would never have happened without his wife's "persuasive" encouragement and the foresight of the publisher Jaeger, who forced the music on to the market. Elgar was a depressive character, easily distracted into melancholic inactivity. It was Alice, his wife, who encouraged him through the writing of his greatest choral work "The Dream of Gerontius", a piece of such magnitude that it would have exhausted him.

We made two trips out of the lecture room, the first to the birthplace of Elgar at Broad Heath and the museum alongside. The tiny living space was typical of many such in the Victorian era and the museum enabled us to see some of the manuscript and the instruments of Elgar's childhood.

The following day we saw an original Tudor house, complete with kitchen and work tools of the day. This was then followed by a visit to Worcester Cathedral, a most beautiful building. Like many of our cathedrals, this had been built in the sixth century but had undergone many changes over the years, with additions and some destruction, of course. This was the place where both Elgar and his father played as organists and we learned that Elgar Senior was more than a little jealous of his son's abilities. The AGM of the Organisation was held on one evening of the Course when Andrew Hodgson agreed to remain as Chairman with the proviso that more job-sharing would be set up within the Committee.

The free afternoon during the Course enabled Students and Guides to do something of their choice. Most chose to relax in the spacious garden, but undoubtedly some will have paid homage to the shops.

I believe it was a successful Course, Julian Williamson was a first rate lecturer the accommodation and the food were good.

DUDLEY INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE - A report by Paul Cripwell

This was another very successful and enjoyable AddVenture course. This time it was researched and led by Barbara Rickitt. We stayed at the Village Hotel in Dudley, which seemed to suit our needs very well. The meals were good with excellent service. The modern decor however, was rather strange to me with brightly coloured striped carpets both on the floor and continuing up the walls. The bar area had tables painted in stripes of several different colours and 'distressed' to make them look old. Not my taste but apparently the current fashion.

On our first evening after a very pleasant dinner we had a talk by Keith Hodgkins entitled "Black Country Memories". This was a lively talk which kept us all awake (important on the first evening after many had had a tiring day's travel). He defined the area of the Black Country as essentially the South Staffordshire coal fields, including the 4 main towns of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The first thing I had to learn was to pronounce Dudley the proper way. Not easy to spell phonetically but try saying 'Dood lie' with a broad West Midlands accent.

With its diverse geology the Black Country was renowned for its mineral wealth from its reserves of coal, limestone, ironstone, fireclay etc. and soon became a centre for industry. Stourbridge was internationally renowned for glass making and the transportation of this fragile product and many other things ushered in the construction of the canals.

Friday, the first full day, turned out to be wet and windy and not ideal for a canal boat ride. However, we all set out and walked to the Dudley canal and tunnel museum. Here we donned hard hats as protective headgear, which had the added advantage of keeping our heads dry. However, we got wet bottoms as the seats were wet (I wished I had remembered those waterproof trousers) and boarded a narrow boat for our 45 minute ride along the canal and into the impressive caverns. These limestone caverns had been carved out by miners

to gain access to the limestone which was a key part of the region's industry. As much of the half-mile stretch of the canal that is navigable is inside the rock we kept reasonably dry. Dave, our guide, gave us a useful commentary full of facts about its construction and how the limestone was mined, loaded on to the boats and shipped away along the canal. We were presented with a video, music and light show (not much good if you can't see anything). There was the Singing Cavern, which needed a bit of imagination to hear, that was formed by the sound of the wind blowing through the caverns.

We were also given a demonstration of 'legging', a traditional way of moving the boats through caves which involved 2 men, one sitting on either side, and 'walking' along the walls and thus propelling the boat forwards.

After the boat ride we entered the warm and dry and learned more of the tunnel and canal's history. When it was no longer profitable in 1960 the authorities tried to close it but mass protests by local enthusiasts managed to keep the waterway open. Thanks to these local 'anarchists', later known as the Dudley Canal Tunnel Preservation Society, we are able to visit this historic canal and tunnel today.

In the afternoon Max Keen, an enthusiastic history teacher and archaeologist entertained us. His talk was entitled "Dudley Castle from 1071 – 1932". The castle was originally a motte and bailey castle built shortly after the Norman Conquest but later rebuilt in stone in the 12th century. He gave a brilliant presentation of a knight in armour defending the castle. Dressed in period costume, he had lots of artefacts to pass round including protective clothing and headgear. He demonstrated how to put on and take off the heavy chain mail, actually just called 'mail' and passed round a suit of mail for us to try. He also had swords to handle and explained why there was a groove along its length. This not only made the sword lighter but also allowed the blood to escape from the wound and at the same time letting bacteria-laden air in. This would ultimately cause the attacked to die of infection even if the initial sword thrust didn't.

On the second day we had a whole day's excursion by coach to the Stourbridge Red Cone Glass Museum. Only one of the many brick towers, which contained the glass furnaces, built in 1794 remains today. At over 100ft high and shaped like a cone (hence the name) it is an impressive structure. Before exploring the insides of the brick cone we had a demonstration of glass blowing by Melissa who expertly produced a bowl from a lump of molten glass taken straight from the furnace. Despite the 1,200 degrees temperature she held the rod with the molten glass on the end without gloves. This seemed a bit dangerous but no doubt she was used to it.

After lunch we walked or took the coach the short distance to the Ruskin Glass Centre for a talk on 400 years of glass making.

Visit to the Black Country Living Museum - One could easily spend a whole day in this reconstructed village containing rebuilt shops and houses spanning 300

years of life in the Black Country. The street has a general store, chemists, a bakers and sweet making shop, radio shop, anchor and chain workshops and much, much more. Women in period costumes walked up and down the street to add to the scene. Next to the Providence chapel was a pub with an open fire where one could still buy a refreshing pint of beer. Then we had a 'back to school' experience in a Victorian schoolroom. Prompted by a Dickensian schoolteacher we had to recite the alphabet as written up on the blackboard. Those who got it wrong or did it too fast (Sally) had to go and stand in the corner.

A short ride on a 1950's trolley bus (which I myself can remember riding to and from school), took us to a reconstructed coalmine. This gave us a fascinating insight into the grim life of coal miners a century or so ago. We donned hard hats, which were very necessary as the roof was very low in places and torches for those who might need them, as it was pretty dark. There was a good commentary, which described the tough and dirty work the miners endured. Whole families worked the mine with the men and boys cutting the rock at the coalface and the women and girls sorting the coal at the surface. A "bowk" or bucket and chain was used to get the coal up the shaft and as there was no lift the miners themselves had to use this device to go down at the start of their shift and up again at the end. Three men could get into the bucket, three more with one leg in and one out with three more standing on the rim and holding on to the chain. No health and safety laws in those days!

The audio commentary included a very realistic explosion when the men were blasting at the coalface when even the ground beneath our feet rocked and vibrated. A memorable experience.

On the afternoon of the third day we had a surprise talk by one of our own members, Terry Wood.

Terry chose to talk about his passion for collecting mascots - not the large cuddly bears or pink elephants that people parade around sports events but those that adorn the radiator caps of classic cars, such as the famous "Spirit of Ecstasy".

The story goes back to 1909 when Lord Montague commissioned his sculptor to make a mascot for his Rolls Royce silver ghost. The original design featuring a lady in fluttering robes and a finger to her lips was called "the Whisper". Only 3 or 4 castings were ever made.

The mascot was later modified to the familiar figure of the flying lady with her arms outstretched and revelling in the air rushing past her. So it was termed "Spirit of Ecstasy" and remains in a similar design up to the present.

The next example was the iconic leaping jaguar on all Jaguar cars.

This first design, the "Leaper", appeared in 1938 and lasted until 1955 when the big cat was modified to have outstretched legs as if in the act of pouncing on its prey. It is also known as the "Growler". Thank you Terry.

A very big thank you to Barbara for all the hard work that must have been put in in researching this excellent course, finding a good hotel and restaurants, organising all the lecturers as well as leading it on the day.

Comment from Barbara - on the last evening Annie & I organised a fun quiz based on all we had learnt during our stay. I was amazed at how much information everyone had retained - well done.

FUTURE COURSES FOR 2019

MANCHESTER THEN AND NOW Organised by Michael Hartley

Monday 20th - Friday 24th May

This course will be based at the Britannia Hotel on Portland Street, which is quite close to Piccadilly Gardens, and the main shopping street. The course will include visits and tours of The People's Museum ... Peterloo and all that; Elizabeth Gaskell's House, The Cathedral, The Sciences and History Museum and Radio City, Salford. There will be a talk about 'Henshaws' - its history and work with the Visually Impaired, and a Surprise evening.

We hope this has whetted your interest so make a note in your diary and whether you are a United or City fan - or not a fan whatsoever, you will be very welcome.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK

Organised by Karen Colbourn 19-23 August 2019

This course will be based at Ampleforth College, where there are plenty of single rooms available, just to the south of the National Park. A modest degree of fitness will be required, not least to negotiate the many steps between our rooms and the refectory. For a few days we will immerse ourselves in the long history of sheep farming and grouse shooting that have moulded this isolated upland into the largest unenclosed heather moorland in the country. The heather should be at its best when we visit in August. We will get a feel for the terrain by walking about half a mile, from the high moor, down into one of the villages tucked into the narrow dales that divide the moors. We will visit the Ryedale Folk Museum to explore their wonderful collection of traditional cottages, farm buildings and equipment.

On August 21st we will be VIP's at the Egton Agricultural Show, where we will have special access to handle some of the show animals and expert guides to explain what the judges are looking for. If anyone wants to enter their dog in the (not too serious) dog show, please let me know. We'll also be able to talk to one of the shepherds who will be showing off their working sheepdogs in trials on the hillsides and learn about their different whistles and calls. Another must-not-miss is Rievaulx, one of England's finest Cistercian Abbeys, which once owned

and managed much of the surrounding moorland. I hope to find a local geologist, to tell us about the underlying rocks and soils and also about the long history of mining, some of which (controversially) continues today. As usual we'll also find time to discover the natural history of the National Park, so that we go home feeling that we have a rounded understanding of the life of the marvellous North York Moors.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF THE COMPOSER ROBERT SCHUMANN - planned to take place in Folkestone, October 2019.

More details and costs of all the above courses will follow when available.

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## **BOOKING ON COURSES**

To book on any of these courses please contact Isobell Phillips, Course-Coordinator. A non-returnable £50 secures your place and full payment must be made at least 6 weeks prior to the course. When booking by phone or email please give Isobell full details of your name, address, phone, mobile, email and next of Kin or emergency contact. These details are helpful when on a course. You should be able to download an application form from the website if you prefer.

Cheques must be made payable to Add-Venture in Learning and applications should be sent to:

Isobell Phillips

2 Holly Drive

Pen-y-ffordd

CHESTER CH4 0NE

BACS payments: Lloyds 30-00-01 a/c 02904643

Please let Isobell know if you have paid by BACS.

**PLANS FOR 2020** - There will be a course based on archaeology in YORK in August 2020 and exciting plans are now being made.

**HELP NEEDED** - Member Sandra Walster has sourced accommodation and interesting visits on a planned course on the history of Norwich for June 2020 but needs some additional help from a sighted person. Can anyone help? Reasonable expenses can be paid to help recce this trip. Please contact our Chairman Andrew Hodgson.

## **COMMITTEE CONTACT DETAILS**

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