



RANSACKERS

RANSACKERS ASSOCIATION

Welcome to the Ransackers Association Newsletter

Winter 2016

www.ransackersassociation.org.uk

11+ exam – grammar schools – Back to the future?



There is a new debate going on about grammar schools; many Ransackers were adversely affected by the 11+ exam selection process back in the 40s, 50s and 60s. In later life they took the chance to go back to college, via Ransackers courses at several colleges, and for many of them this was a transforming experience.

Memories of the 11+ Hilary Farnworth

You've been told it was going to be a test, you were herded into a large room possibly in a strange school hall, allocated a desk, and you sat the test. Sometime later a letter arrived which affected your long term future: you either passed and went to grammar school, or you didn't, and most children went to a secondary modern. This divisive test came in with the 1944 Butler education Act, and the first exams started in 1945. This process lasted for some decades, fading in recent time with the comprehensive schools, although still thriving in some areas. The present government wants to bring back grammar schools across the country.

We have been surprised by the depth of negative feeling the 11+ still invokes in some seniors taking part in our current research "Serious study" in later life: Ransackers Research project 2016-17 (Funded by Averil Osborn fund, linked to British Society of Gerontology). Unsolicited comments from our interviewees when talking about their school experience included:

"I just felt a failure"

"I had felt over the years that my education wasn't what I would have liked it to be".

We have a lot more analysis of the 18 interviews to do, plus the data we collected in 2015, and will be running a final project event on February 20, Toynbee Hall, (London , Aldgate, 10am – 1pm) when we will report fully on this research project and its findings.

Our experience as seniors is vital to inform policy makers so that the upcoming generations get the best opportunities for themselves and the country as a whole and our generation is viewed as an asset not a drain.

What was your experience of the 11+? What is your view about the current proposals to have more grammar schools?

We'd love to hear your views for our letters page.

To book on the Toynbee Hall event contact or contribute your views on the 11+ topic

Contact: Hilary Farnworth harnworth@gmail.com 0208 341 0023

News from the Committee

We hope you will enjoy this winter issue of the Ransackers Newsletter. Unfortunately the Committee has been beset by illness or deadlines applying for grants to provide research opportunities to promote Ransackers. Obviously grants, if we are able to get them, involve a lot of work and we are very grateful to the Committee members and Friends who give their time and energy to support Vi Hughes vision of education and research opportunities for seniors. We would also like to thank Gillian & team at the Camden City Learning Centre for all the help they have given us with IT issues over the last few years. This newsletter is produced by us so let us know what you think and as always please let us have items for the next newsletter. In closing, good wishes to Sandra Barlow, Ransacker, who is on the final year of her creative writing degree, and any other Ransackers studying for degrees.

The Committee would like to wish you all a happy and peaceful 2017.

'AGE DOES NOT MATTER' a 4 day festival run by AGE OF NO RETIREMENT, a Community Interest Company

The aims of the festival were to

- Bring together designers, citizens, brands, government and organisations to share thoughts about how to make the most of the future.
- Share exclusive research findings on age across ten key sectors
- Run design labs to create real world solutions arising from the demographic shift

Three Ransackers delegates attended different workshops.

Vanda Carter attended the Housing and Home workshop which was facilitated by architects, housing associations, designers, policy researchers and a housing developer who talked about their work. Delegates were to prioritise their ideas for housing and the main theme focused on home sharing i.e. inviting older home-owners to share their home with a younger person in return for some help in the house. A home sharing co-ordination body 'Homeshare International' has existed since 1999, so this idea is not New:

"I felt it would have been more interesting to analyse why the 'homeshare' concept has never really 'caught on' before developing a template for an almost identical "new" scheme".

Vanda was also concerned about the presentation of the research which claimed - *"findings from our research of over 2000 people, aged from 18 to 99 looking at attitudes and shattering stereotypes"*. However, the views of anyone over 75 were not listed and when questioned the presenter said numbers of people over 75 was too small to be significant!! Also the upper floors of the venue were inaccessible to delegates with limited mobility.

Hilary Farnworth attended the Transport Workshop and her group came up with the concept of an electronic mobility buggy hire project in a similar vein to the bike hire available in many cities. Hilary found the event innovative with a "let's find out what's possible if commerce, inventors, funders and users all collaborate". Admittedly, such a scheme is not going to happen overnight but mobility buggy hire schemes do already exist for periods of a week or longer and in some holiday resorts abroad but the concept of hiring a suitable mobility buggy that will enable onward travel on buses, trains and trams will need a bit more thought. Although this should not be beyond the wit of people and companies committed to mobility for all.

Maureen Childs attended the Media workshop which mainly comprised delegates from media companies. Maureen reported a statistic given that 83% of the population believe the media reinforces the concept of the age divide and that the Advertising Standards Authority should have age discrimination adverts rules and introduce 'Common Age' criteria Awards for specific products/adverts. Does our education system encourage discrimination by separating young people at an early age? A simple solution could be to invite seniors into schools and there was also a suggestion to 'Bring your Parents to Work' similar to the children's' scheme. There was much work to do but Maureen concluded that there needs to be recognition that seniors do have age related problems but these are not ones that should isolate us as a group.

Overall, in spite of some reservations, delegates felt that the Age of No Retirement is to be congratulated for putting together this mini-festival, a good opportunity for discussion and networking around intergenerational design, a new platform encouraging the corporate sector to get involved, a great photo exhibition and a free event. There are not enough forums for discussion of intergenerational issues and this was an interesting festival.

A couple of stereotype defying pictures from the event



Fire eating - at any age



Hildegund Buerkle, Athlete

And ... Pat Bentley with her herd of alpacas, Penrith



A Roller- coaster Ride for Any age

By Dr Marianne Markowski

"I haven't been on one for at least 50 years, but this was good and I would do it again" a participant in his late 60s explained after taking a virtual ride on a wooden armchair. On 26th October 2016 day centre clients at Age UK Barnet were invited to take part in the thrill seeking experience but the ride wasn't at an amusement park but in the safety and comfort of their day centre! Professor Brendan Walker from Middlesex University designed the V-armchair with the aim of providing people of any age a virtual reality experience. The V-armchair consists of a head-set to show a 360degree video of a wooden roller coaster ride combined with a wooden armchair fixed to a motion platform. The thrill seeker climbs into the chair, puts the seat belt on and positions the head set. Then after 30 seconds the immersive experience starts, where the chair moves in motion with the video of the 3 minute roller-coaster ride. Older participants, who tried the ride, were overwhelmingly positive with their feedback. They felt that it was close to being a very real experience. When the research team asked what else participants could imagine the V-armchair to be used for answers ranged from any experience that involves speed (such as racing and canoeing) to simulating other types of journeys involving cultural institutions e.g. museum visits, theme parks etc.



From my point of view virtual reality combined with movement is certainly an effective way forward to provide stimulating tangible and corporal experiences. It could be used either to re-create experiences, which we may have had a chance to experience when we were younger or it could be used in preparation or training for certain situation. I was amazed how positively this technological intervention was received by the daycentre clients. However, daycentre clients with a pacemaker were not allowed to use the installation due to manufacturer's health and safety regulations.

Read more on Prof Brendan Walker projects:

<http://aerial.fm/docs/projects.php>

Information from the pressure group TRANSPORT for ALL

If you live in or need to visit London and rely on the lift service to get you to the platform, check with Transport for London (TfL) before you travel to ensure that there is lift availability. **Transport for all** (a group promoting accessible travel for all) has discovered that in the eleven months to November 2016, the number of lift closures was up by 118% on 2015. This obviously negates TfL's policy of Turn-Up-and-Go for people who need support.

According to TfL, as well as for obvious mechanical failure, station lifts are closed for safety reasons when a trained member of staff is not present. Staff are required to have training and licences to operate lifts in the event of fires, etc. While such training is of course welcome, management should ensure that there are sufficient staff at each station to support passengers.

However, if you do get to a station and the lift is out of action Transport for All points out that TfL offer the following help:

"If you arrive at a Tube, TfL Rail or Overground station and the lift is unavailable, staff will help you to plan an alternative journey to your destination. If there isn't a reasonable alternative route, TfL will book you a taxi (at TfL's cost) to take you to your destination or another step-free station from where you can continue your journey."

<http://www.transportforall.org.uk/>



Curiosity is the stuff of life- the Searchers project in Oxford

Katherine Hughes

There is recent research which shows a correlation between curiosity and living longer. Wanting to know why things are happening, who did what to whom, how things work is energising and keeps you socially engaged. Hence Ransackers and also hence Searchers, a programme derived from the Ransacker experience.

I established Searchers eight years ago after being thoroughly enthused by my experience of establishing Ransackers at Ruskin College.

Searchers is different in that it runs with an open door and includes a programme of discussions designed termly by participants. However, research and trying to reach some sort of truth about things is at its core.

A few years ago we moved under the auspices of the Museum of Oxford with whom we had formed a friendship. They give us a free room and support what we do. Colleagues at the Museum have been a pleasure to work with and very encouraging especially as Museums need to be seen to be encouraging wider access and education.

Searchers is busy and covers a lot of ground. We have regular weekly sessions which between 15 and 20 people attend. Last week we discussed the politics of Putin, this week a participant gave us a talk on the History of Art she had researched and next week by popular demand we will discuss the meaning of Trump's election. The programme is designed collectively and combines exploring issues with developing research topics. Current topics students are pursuing include Kindertransport, Art appreciation, Conscientious Objectors and aspects of the Spanish Civil War. People can choose to do whatever they want and at whatever length.

Currently some of the group, as well as being involved in individual projects, are busy investigating the movement of people from the Welsh valleys in the 1930's to Oxford and the car factories, where they made a considerable impact politically and culturally. The Museum of Oxford with whom we form part of the Adult Learning Programme, is launching a major exhibition in June 2017 entitled Journeys to Oxford. Many community groups are involved including ourselves. We plan to produce a 4,000 word pamphlet and wall placards. Most people in Oxford only know a little bit about Welsh migration so we hope to increase their knowledge about an exciting example of cultural integration which is highly relevant today.

The group is open so anyone can join us whenever they want. We advertise through the Museum's What's On information and produce our own leaflets. There is no charge, and we only ask for small donations to cover handouts and occasionally books and our home produced publications. Paper work is pleasantly minimal. All ages are welcome though in practice most people are over 50 as we run during the day. Each term of ten weeks is different from the previous term and as its organiser it keeps me on my toes intellectually as well as giving me the pleasure of working with cooperative and enthusiastic people as well as with a public institution. If you are interested in setting up your own Searchers group we would love to help and I have developed printed materials on research methods which I can send out online.

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Housing for All – part two! John Miles

On June 22nd Hilary Farnworth, Barbara Clarke and Robin Brown took part in the second of this year's Conversation into Action workshops on the theme of 'Housing for All?' It was facilitated by Jonathan Hughes and John Miles at the Open University regional office in Hawley Crescent. Participants took part in several workshop exercises.

We considered our 'neighbourhood geographies' – who lives around us, how well we know them, and the implications for quality of life and social support. For some of us neighbourhood life is a source of involvement and satisfaction. For others, it's a domain we get on pretty well without. Either way John suggested we might examine more carefully some of the common assumptions about breakdown of community and inevitable social isolation.

In the afternoon we heard a compelling presentation about the housing crisis by planner and economist Michael Edwards of University College London. Not only are too many people homeless or living in insecure or unfit dwellings but the overall national economy is dangerously distorted by inflated property values. Ransackers is keen to support Conversation into Action which connects later-life learning and study with 'activism', focused both on individual benefit and on the common good.

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Women's co housing project: the first occupants (women 50+) move in during December 2016

<http://www.owch.org.uk/>