

# **WORDS AND WINGS: Still learning after all these years....**

**(A Guide to working in Creative Reminiscence work)**

**by Linda Sargent**

**November 2002**

department for  
**education and skills**  
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

**clmg**



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**LEARNING & CULTURE**  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**SEM  
LAC**

**....and thanks to:**

Barbara Bond and her Witney U3A Group

Ian Giles, Musician and co-worker

Jocelyn Goddard - whose belief in the project made it so!

Tim and Jo Healey for their work on the C.D.

Marston Group

Meadowcroft Memories Group

Joy Perkins, Artist and co-worker

Diana Senior

Mary Stiles

Wheatley Tell the Tale Writers' Group

Wood Farm Group

All the people from past projects and groups who have freely and generously shared their stories....

**Copyright:**

Archive photographs: Oxfordshire Photographic Archive, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.  
Cover picture: Joy Perkins



## **About the Project**

## **Foreword**

## **Introduction**

### **Sessions:**

- A Company of Birds
- This is the Hand
- Mapping our Place
- On Finding Old Photographs
- Putting Ourselves in the Picture
- They never flinched.....

### **Conclusion:**

The Seventh Mother of the House

## **Appendices**

## **References and Recommended Reading**



## Drawn from Memory

### **An Access to Oxfordshire Project**

This project aims to build on the work developed over several years by colleagues in different agencies in Oxfordshire. Reminiscence workers have been active in community education, arts development, libraries and museums. A loan collection of 24 reminiscence boxes was put together as early as 1993 and has been used by care assistants and activities organisers in residential homes for elderly people across the county. The introduction of this service was linked to a programme of training. Since then, reminiscence workers and their clients have gone on to develop new roles and talents, branching out into arts, crafts, ICT and other creative activities based on memory. These skilled practitioners have been recognised and encouraged within their separate disciplines, but have never been well-resourced and have had little opportunity to record and disseminate their work.

*Access to Oxfordshire* is a project grant-aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund to help a group of Oxfordshire museums to develop closer links with their communities. As part of this project, museums are encouraged to develop reminiscence and oral history work with older learners. In March 2001 at a meeting in The Oxfordshire Museum, it was agreed to establish an Oxfordshire Reminiscence Network. In August 2001, *Access to Oxfordshire* was granted £20,000 from the Department for Education and Skills for the *Drawn from Memory* project.

### **Aims of the project**

**To celebrate and disseminate work with older people which has been developed in Oxfordshire**

- To use examples of good practice to stimulate new work, particularly in relation to museums and heritage sites
- To use examples of good practice, both in the pack and in ongoing work, to further the professional development of colleagues in this field

- To encourage an awareness of the quality of work and the standard of facilitation achievable by skilled practitioners.

**WORDS AND WINGS:****Still learning after all these years...****FOREWORD:**

When I was describing this project to a colleague in community education she asked: “So how does this work feed back into lifelong learning?” At first I found it difficult to get my head round the question since it seems so obvious to me, but on reflection, perhaps it is useful to be made to address the seemingly obvious. Certainly it is something we have been considering when looking at our project; what has reminiscence to do with learning? What kinds of learning are we talking about and who is it for and how do we make it happen, what sort of skills and resources do we need? How can exploring our individual pasts lead into creative expression and – turning this round – how can creative expression help us in the field of reminiscence? These are some of the questions we shall be addressing in this guide.

In the twentieth century there was a growing interest in (and ability to record) the lives of ordinary people, those of us who do not make the history books, but nevertheless have a story – a history. It is our “lived experience” (White and Epston, 1990, p.9) that gives us this. It is part of who we are, the self we carry around and all we have to go on when we attempt to make connections on a human level. More enticingly perhaps, it’s all future generations have to go on in terms of getting to some kind of truth of how we live now; the repository of life and all its possibilities that we carry around in our heads. Being involved in working with others to give expression to these individual stories, the repositories of our heads, is exciting, revealing and informing, not only of their lives but of ours too. It is a form of mutual learning that means we all benefit. Victor Frankl (Radio 4 31.1.02) talks of rewriting the stories of our lives and learning from them in order to be able to move on, he also says that he undertakes his own search for meaning in his life by helping others find the

meaning in theirs. The creative reminiscence work detailed here springs from this personal impulse.

And so, before giving examples of how we have worked to give life to the stories of others, it seems only fair to give a brief outline of where this impulse sprang from.

On 22 October 1973, I went to a lecture given by that most inspiring of teachers, Sybil Marshall; she must have been in her sixties then and thus a living embodiment of her particular brand of education. The lecture was one of a series on *Images of Childhood*; hers was on "Creativity in Childhood". I was twenty-four, a so-called "mature" student studying Economic History at the University of Sussex; these lectures were not on my study schedule, but I went because the title drew me. I wanted to be a teacher, when I think about it I had probably always wanted to teach. As a child in 1950's rural Kent I cajoled gullible friends into attending my "school" during the holidays. I ran art competitions and displayed the pictures in our old outside brick lavatory. I started a book lending service complete with fines. I organised games based on Rawhide or the Lone Ranger, where I was often the Indian girl having to be rescued or doing the rescuing. I chose the camp sites and supervised the inevitable digs to Australia. Bikes became horses and I rode about the lanes singing at the top of my voice. Sometimes I wonder that I had any friends.

They were active, adventurous, bossy times and then at twelve I got arthritis.

That, as my Dad would have said, put the kibosh on many ambitions. Having what is perceived as largely an old person's disease on the cusp of adolescence was an atrophying and frightening experience. Life dimmed, possibilities were muffled. Dealing with prosaic everyday challenges saps the energy, even in the young. I was thrust unwillingly into a painful awareness of what it is like to feel old and less mobile, what it is like to be dependent on others, vulnerable and often under-valued

It is not what I would have chosen. However, I sometimes think that it may be one reason why I have developed an interest in working with older people. The empathy factor coupled with a kind of hopeful insurance and a realisation that it is in all our interests to learn to value the ageing process and to recognise that education is a wholly creative and continuing process: until the last breath.

Some years after Sybil Marshall's lecture, and two hip replacements later, I eventually became a teacher. Jobs varied from schools, further education, working with school refusers and, later, adults. Whatever the setting the most intriguing part of the work was the people themselves and their individual stories. I was struck by the fact that if you want to engage someone's enthusiasm and willingness to learn, you have to show an honest interest in them and their life. What I learned from my different kinds of teaching was that by identifying and being valued for our place in the world as individuals, we are better prepared to move outwards and learn.

A Native American myth tells how all of us living things began life underground until one day the badger dug a hole to let everyone out. It is because of this that we now live above ground, up here in the light, having our various "big adventures" until we die and return to the darkness below.

These big adventures make us special, they are the stories that connect us and involve us with one another. Some of the work described in the following pages is meant to show the value, skills and creative learning which can grow from the uncovering of such stories. A kind of learning that can enrich us all.



**INTRODUCTION:**

This guide is meant to be as much a toolkit reference for reminiscence work as a means of inspiring the development and expansion of the field. It is intended to emphasise a creative approach, rather than one that covers a more straightforward basic training. For the latter there are a number of excellent guides, such as that provided by Age Concern, Age Exchange etc. (See references and recommended reading.) These offer some useful practical frameworks and suggestions for setting up and running reminiscence groups, as well as the important ethical considerations.

The sessions described here are not meant to be followed slavishly, the whole thrust of the work is creative and this extends to the running of the sessions as well as the objects and stimuli suggested. Perhaps the 3 most important things to bear in mind when embarking on the work are (1) trust yourself (2) trust the group (3) make sure that you offer a truly compassionate framework for people to share their memories/thoughts in a safe setting. Number 3 is essential to the integrity of the work. It is also vital to remember that this compassionate and "safe" framework is dependent upon the group leader's skills as a facilitator. The group must be made to feel that the leader is in charge, that they know what they are doing. This requires confidence on the part of the leader and an ability to steer her/his group without pushing it in one direction. It means having the confidence to respond to individual needs as well as the overall group dynamics: knowing when to speak and when to keep quiet, judging when to be assertive and when to hold back. With these in place valuable learning can take place for both groups and session leaders.

For the purpose of the guide we applied some tried and tested ideas on both new and established groups, but we also introduced new ones. We always shared the running of the session, so that as is shown, there are usually at least two leaders - or one leader and good back up! This means forward

planning, but again need not dictate some rigid plan. What it does require is having a clear idea of what you are aiming for in the session, but being prepared to travel a circuitous route to get there.

This underlines the difference between a more straightforward sharing of memories and this - riskier - creative approach. The methods discussed here (and they are just variations on an infinite number of themes) are designed to get beyond a factual record of a life - and that is not to deny the value of such accounts. Here the aim is to show how our lives can still be involved in a making process; we can create something simply from how and when we have lived. We can learn to value our own and others' creativity and imagination. Our bodies may have slowed and become less biddable, but our minds are free to range, become creative, learn new skills perhaps, or re-awaken old ones. And in doing so we might be better able to communicate and connect with one another. The sessions are less about taking and more about making and are designed to be used across the generations as well as being applicable in a variety of settings.

So much of what we are describing comes from an ability to be willing to "play" and this ability and will has to be present in those of us leading the sessions. We all know (or think we do) that children are the great masters of this game and therefore are in a stronger position to let loose their imaginations and be uninhibitedly creative. But we can do it too! Given the right conditions and framework it is possible. It goes back to what I was saying earlier about trust, trusting ourselves to be creative as we go, knowing when to steer. If something doesn't seem to be working during the session be prepared to play around with the theme you have chosen, draw on your own strengths and interests and share them constructively. For example, if you have journeys as your theme, think about what inspires you, whether poems, prose, pictures, stories or songs. Blow some bubbles and watch their journey. If, as we often do, you are working with a musician and there seems to be a moment of drift or fatigue from the group, suggest a song or related piece of music in order to allow time for everyone to pause, to take in what has

happened so far, perhaps to dream. Always have something you might not have intended to use on this occasion tucked away for a creative emergency!

I have often found that the best sessions spring from my own willingness to share my creativity. For example, in the session **Mapping Our Place** the use of my very roughly sketched map of my favourite childhood haunts invariably inspires others. It is not a work of great artistic merit, but sprang directly from a personal memory and feeling for a place special to me. When I talk through it I recapture the raw enthusiasm I experienced when first doing the exercise and it is this that successfully conveys itself to inspire others to produce their own map. By exposing my emotions and memories, others may feel safe to expose theirs.

The objects and resources should be seen as inspirational signposts. However, essentially the answer lies in the application of the imagination to the ideas we take with us to every session and, more importantly, in being unafraid to reveal (but not impose) aspects of our personal creative self. If we can do this we are in a better position to encourage and support others. The sessions described in this guide are designed to enable and inspire this process of learning through creativity.



**Session using objects from the natural history collection to inspire memories, songs, stories and textile work.**

**Setting and group:** seven frail older people who are members of a reminiscence group that meets in the craft room of a residential home. The members range in age from late seventies to early nineties and are dealing with physical challenges associated with ageing and in some cases with the effects of Alzheimer's disease.

**Session leaders:** a musician/singer, a textile artist and a reminiscence worker.

**Objects:** (from the museum collection) a barn owl, a magpie, a wren, a robin; the session leaders also brought in; a concertina, some magpie feathers, two poems, *The Owl and the Pussycat* by Edward Lear, *Houlet* by J.K. Annand (from *Bairn Rhymes*) and *Aquila the Eagle* story (See Appendix 1) and *Maypoles Martyrs & Mayhem: 366 days of British myths, customs and eccentricities* Eds. Quentin Cooper and Paul Sullivan.

**Methods of recording:** photos, and audiotape using a Marantz recorder with a conference microphone. The group's permission is sought on every occasion with the proviso that the tape's contents belong to them and we use extracts on this understanding.

**Time:** 2-3 p.m. on a Monday, usually in six-week blocks as arranged with the Home. The session described is one example of the work that goes on with this group (which in various combinations has been meeting both in the Home and formerly across the road in the Community Education Centre for the past ten years.)

**Flavour of the session:**

When we arrive, we fetch and organise members to come, by wheelchair, walking frame and walking stick from various parts of the building. We have also brought with us all the items mentioned above.

The session opens with the usual “hellos” and we set the magpie and the barn owl on the table for all to look at. Then we hand round the magpie feathers. One of the session leaders brought these in because the museum birds are, as it were, untouchable in their Perspex cases and we felt it important for people to be able to handle something and get a real sense of its texture and colour – particularly important for those of us who go into residential care because many of the senses which we on the “outside” take for granted are often no longer available in such settings.

One group member who is relatively new to the Home talks about the magpies she used to see in her garden: “They liked cheese!”

As the feathers are passed around, we all comment on the wonderful, and somehow unexpected, mixture of colours: the emerald greens and the sapphire blues... We look afresh at the magpie in the case and compare.

There are lots of “Ooos” and “ahs” and remarks on the size of it when we take a closer look at the barn owl.



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council

One person remembers seeing the seagulls from her window the day before and how big their wings are when you really look at them.

I read the *Houlet* poem in honour of one woman who is Scottish and has been a member of the group since its foundation ten years ago.

Joy, a fellow session leader (also in her

70s) reads *The Owl and the Pussycat*, breaking into song as she goes and soon we all join in.

There is much happy repetition of “..the moon, the moon/And they danced by the light of the moon”.

Ian, our musician, describes seeing and feeding an eagle owl when he visited the Pyrenees. Soon, other people are recalling owl stories of their own. One

woman begins to talk about her father and tells us that he had an owl like the one we have on the table, in a glass case, and when she was a child how .."I thought it was wonderful.."

The woman new to the Home talks about the three bird feeders she had in her garden and the range of different birds that used to come there.

Ian sings a nonsense song for us about an owl.

We take another look at the magpie and discuss why the folk group that Ian is a member of, is called *Magpie Lane*. Some of us remember the visit of this group to the Home in December 1994, when they and the reminiscence group performed jointly to other residents and guests.

Superstitions about magpies are discussed. I read the Archer story (Appendix 1)

Ian plays the tune *Magpie Lane* on his concertina – which gets us all swaying and “dancing” with our arms!

We look at the smaller birds, the wren and the robin. Ian tells us the story behind and then sings *The Wren Boys’ Song*. Everyone joins in the chorus. We exchange stories about the wren, me from *Maypoles, Martyrs & Mayhem*, Joy’s story from Bali. We talk about the wren and how it has always been known as a cave dweller and was thought to represent winter and darkness. Ian sings another wren song .

We all talk about the kinds of birds we might like to be.... One man says why he wouldn’t choose to be a bird: “I’ve got me feet on the ground and I shouldn’t want to be a bird!” He then relates a story of a robin and its mate coming to collect worms from him once, long ago, when he was digging in his garden...

We remember one woman (who died two years ago) and who was part of our group and loved to watch the birds from the window of her room.

The session ends with Ian playing a tune on the concertina and as she is leaving, the woman (with fairly severe Alzheimer’s) again recalls the owl her father once had, similar to the one we have brought.

The man who told us the robin story leaves to return to his room singing – his trademark farewell after every session.

**NOTE:** Working with the group over a period of time the tutor/textile artist produced a textile and paper hanging reflecting the nature and woodland theme of the term's work. Among other things it shows buttercups – made from felt – which came out of someone saying “You never see buttercups like you used to..” and it shows runner beans from memories of times when some group members grew their own. The whole thing is hung from a tree branch.

**Evaluation:**

- The overall positive effect was clearly expressed by the lift in people's spirits at the end of the session as they left singing and chatting.
- The variety of objects and stimuli enabled everyone to join in and this was reflected by participation from new and established group members.
- Sharing of memories from group leaders was helpful in (1) giving an example of what we were after (2) breaking down any perceived barriers of "us" and "them".
- It created quiet moments of space and time for reflection for group members, as did the music.
- The evaluation would be more valuable had a staff member from the home been present with the group, since they know the individuals on a day to day level. This is an ongoing problem in this type of activity.
- When staff members are present the group has a more active and consistent place in the home's routine.
- Having a small team running the group has obvious advantages, but it is also worth noting that one person will need to take the role of co-ordinator, which means extra time has to be scheduled for planning.

**Reflections:**

- Introduce your resources gradually throughout the session and don't worry if some of them aren't used.
- Bring in your own stories/poems/songs, some familiar and some not, to be intertwined with the main objects.

- And remember you are going to be affected too; thoughts and memories will arise for you and therefore be prepared to respond intuitively.
- Many members of the group described in this session have a store of shared memories from living and meeting together over a period of time, and this in itself should be recognised and valued.
- Ending the session is very important; in this case music is a useful tool in that people are drawn together in a positive way to finish the gathering.

**Suggestions for future developments:**

- A few years ago when the group looked at the theme of birds and bird song (and working with Ian Giles) songs about birds, they made some masks depicting various birds. This has potential for some intergenerational work, perhaps leading to a drama/performance.
- More work could be done on nature and our environment too, which again might lead to good learning contacts being made between the different generations.
- When we take flowers, mushrooms, sloes etc we usually leave them to be displayed in the main common room. Perhaps this could develop into a more permanent habit and a nature table could be set up somewhere in the Home. Bird tables and feeders hung near windows and in garden areas are also an option. All of this could be especially beneficial when, as was mentioned earlier, people in such settings often not only lose their homes, possessions and a certain degree of independence. Also, going into residential care can bring with it a certain amount of sensory deprivation; we are no longer "out" in the world and so the next best thing might be take the world "into" the home.
- Other ideas for development of this theme might include looking at migratory birds and linking this in with journeys and life's journey too...



- With access to the Internet it is possible to find and explore various sources relating to a chosen, ranging from poems, songs, stories and examples of similar work in the same field.
- (Search for example for National Sound Archive, names of poems or poets, songs, stories etc....)



**Session using written (from an oral account) material to inspire creative activities based on recollections of working lives associated with Nuffield's car factory in Oxford.**

**Setting and group:** 7 women who meet regularly in the health education room at their local Health Centre as part of an over-50's group set up by Community Education Outreach. Ages range from early 50s to early 80s.

Session leaders: Museum Education/Project Officer and a reminiscence worker.

**Resources:** Extract of Lord Nuffield's maidservant's account from the 1930s, Jon Stallworthy's poem *Two Hands* + an example from a previous project – Stirlings, *Gwen's Hand*, my *This is the Hand* (See Appendix 2) Supply of A4 and a selection of coloured felt tip pens.

**Methods of recording:** photos (taken with a digital camera and no flash), an audiotape using a Marantz recorder with conference microphone with proviso as previously stated re: confidentiality.

**Time:** this group meets from 2-3.30 p.m. on a Tuesday during term time. Usually they set their own programme in conjunction with the Outreach Worker and they kindly allowed us to borrow three of their sessions in order to test our ideas!

**Flavour of the session:**

Since this is going to be just one of three sessions, we describe the project and how we are testing and re-testing ideas to be included in this guide. Jocelyn talks about the Museum of Oxford and also about Nuffield Place, which is now a museum but was once the home of Lord Nuffield. We are here to explore and share memories of Lord Nuffield and the early days of his factory in Oxford. One woman in the group has very vivid memories of Nuffield Place when it was still a house.

Jocelyn read the maidservant's account (See Appendix 2)

This prompts memories of Lord and Lady Nuffield and it is generally agreed that Lord Nuffield is remembered for his kindness but his wife was not so well liked. One woman recalls Lord Nuffield taking her to hospital when she had a broken leg and another describes him stopping his chauffeur driven car to give her a lift one rainy day.

"He was a very nice man. He was a man of our class, wasn't he? He hadn't forgotten his roots."

"Lady Nuffield sounds horrible. Everyone speaks well of him but not of her."

The group member with the particularly vivid memories of Nuffield Place recounts walking through the woods near there:

"...and when that pink stuff (*wild campion?*) came out I was so little I couldn't hardly see where to go to get to the school. All those young lads (*from the local young offenders' home*) were working on the land and nobody ever pestered me. Well, I lost my way home one day to my sister's bungalow – that was right in the woods, which was built by her husband and his brother – I was coming home one day and I put a tin where the path was, because there were two paths, and I went along the wrong one and ended up where all the boys were because somebody had moved the tin!"

This story makes us laugh and someone says it's like Hansel and Gretel.

There is more discussion about Lord Nuffield and again how kind he was. People remember stories about Billy Morris, as he was known locally; one person reminisces about her father working for him during the War, working on the cranes to fetch back crashed planes...

There are lots of memories about the way the landscape in the area has changed in recent times, now that the factories are, for the most part, gone.

Someone recalls the Duke of Windsor (then Prince of Wales) visiting both the works and also Nuffield Place. Another person says that Mary Pickford also went to Nuffield Place.

Finally, the woman whose sister lived in the bungalow in the woods says:

"I remember trudging through the autumn leaves and we used to pretend we were engines..."

She goes on to remember her childhood days in Wales as well as those with her sister in the house in the woods at Nuffield...

We move on to the *hand exercise* and as soon as we mention that we are going to talk about the life their hands have seen, people begin to reminisce about the hard work of past days, especially for their mothers on washing day:

“We used to scrub the tables and windows on washing day!”

“We used to have lines of damp washing across the room.”

“Always on a Monday...”

“My Mum used to wash the blankets in a bath with her feet – and then my Dad would use the same bath for his parsnip wine!”

“Did you have a copper?”

“My job was blacking the grate!”

I show them some examples from other work we have done on the subject of hands (See recommended reading and reference my dissertation for further discussion on this activity, including intergenerational work...)

We give out the paper and felt tips and ask them to help one another draw round their hands, choosing the one with, perhaps, a particular story to tell.

(See Appendix 2)

Maybe because of *Gwen's Hand* read to the group as an example, lots of stories about injuries surface: one woman remembers catching her hand in the mangle as she was putting a towel through and her brother was turning the handle. (Ouch!) Another shows her scar that she says was from the time when she and her twin sister were in the same pram and she snatched her sister's bottle and it broke. Someone else talks of getting water from the well and of her fear of wells ever since. One group member tells us that a flat iron fell on her hand. Another though, with happier recall, tells us that the hand has lifted a glass or two in its time!

Most interesting is the way people begin to share memories of the characteristics of their parents' hands and how they have inherited some of these:

“My hand is like my father's hand.”

“I can't compare myself with my Mum's because I was only two when she died, but I am supposed to be like her.”

I read the Stallworthy poem *Two Hands* and one woman tells us that JS's father delivered her first baby – “But I lost that little baby and he was very kind.”

We talk about the kindness of hands, a good way to finish the session.

### **Evaluation:**

- Although we had expected memories from people about the car factory and Lord Nuffield, it was an added bonus that one person had a more direct personal connection and her vivid memories were sparked by the reading.
- The hand exercise seemed to help draw out people's personal memories in a more immediate way.
- Conversely, people did seem to become fixed on the various injuries their hands had suffered - perhaps influenced by the environment of the health centre.
- This exercise also revealed new things to the group about one another and they left the session chatting in a very lively way; they recognised this themselves when they said "You really got us talking today."
- It is worth noting that this group had lost their established leader and therefore they seemed to be experiencing difficulty with their focus and their group dynamics. There were occasions where there were two conversations going on at once. If we had known, perhaps a talking stick\* might have been useful and, on reflection, continued work with this group would benefit from this approach. (\*Everyone has to listen to the person holding the stick.)

### **Reflections:**

- Although this was a group we hadn't met before and this was part of three one-off sessions, we had made contact with the Outreach Worker prior to the first meeting to prepare the ground and ensure we brought resources relevant to them and their experiences.

- Since this is a community group who meet regularly and set their own agenda, we were essentially guests and before we could start the session we had to fit in with their routine pre-meeting tasks, such as collecting tea/coffee money etc. But this gave us time to get to know them on an informal basis.
- Beginning with someone else's biographical account helped to create a more comfortable atmosphere to prepare the group members to share their individual memories.
- The hand part of the exercise where we ask people to draw round each other's hands immediately creates a shared non-threatening physical experience; the resulting drawing acts as a useful tool, enabling us to talk about the hand in the third person....."this is the hand" rather than...."I did....". This comes back to trust and means that people are more likely to feel safe enough to share painful memories and through this learn more about each other. And painful memories will arise, as happened at the end of this session, but this enabled us to end with the "kindness of hands".

**Suggestions for future developments:**

- Examples are attached (See Appendix 2) from previous projects using our hands as a starting point.
- It is a good basis for intergenerational work as shown (See Appendix 2)
- There are many possible themes to be explored, for example the one on which our session ended, "the kindness of hands" – this hand at sixteen, or whatever age, the creativity of this hand, the games this hand has played, the changes this hand has felt, for our hands are a tangible link with the past.
- One could look at the way hands have inspired works of art (painting, including cave painting, poetry, music/song, sculpture, jewellery, stories, etc) and what they might tell us about the time and culture they reflect.
- Children's rhymes and games where hands play a central role could be explored and recorded.

- The session described above also provides possibilities for further exploration of local history (this was developed in another session using photographs from the photographic archives (see section **On Finding Old Photographs**).
- Artefacts relating to some of the topics, such as wash day – mangle, flat iron etc – could be brought in to a group such as this for further discussion. The fact that the artefacts are brought in during a subsequent session *after* the initial discussion will invariably give them more power.
- On another note, since the story of Hansel and Gretel was mentioned arising out of a group member's own experience, this could be used as a starting point for work relating and arising out of this Grimms' tale.
- There are many more possibilities!



**Session using a personal example of a rough sketch map of a favourite childhood place to evoke similar memories with a group of older people.**

**Setting and group:** the same 7 women and their meeting arrangements as described in previous session; the community education outreach worker was also present.

**Session leaders:** Museum Education/Project Officer, Reminiscence Worker Project Assistant.

**Resources:** Supply of A3 paper, felt tips and the Reminiscence Worker's own rough sketch map.

**Methods of recording:** photos (digital, no flash) and audiotape using a Marantz recorder with conference microphone, with proviso as before.

**Time:** as for previous session.

#### Flavour of the session:



Figure 1

As this is our second meeting, although with a lapse of a couple of months, the group seems more comfortable with us – less apprehensive about our experimental designs probably! I explain what we would like to do and show them my map (see Figure 1), talking through it as I go. What is especially useful about this “visual aid” is that it has a naïve and definitely un-artistic style to it and thus is not intimidating. Most people having seen it always feel confident to have a go at producing one of their own. I stress that they can choose any favourite/remembered place – something



along the lines of the farm depicted in mine, to a swing, or a room, den or camp. To date no one has ever said that they couldn't think of somewhere.

In this session we give the group about 20 minutes and everyone quickly becomes absorbed. This activity really does seem to touch a core, some piece of childhood recaptured in most people.

See Figure 2 for the first map discussed. Second square: "This is my Dad in the hut in the garden, because he had TB – that's me with him, talking... This (first square) is after he died. I went to live with my Gran, she had a four poster bed and we used to play kings and queens. This (third square) is where we used to go swimming. And this (fourth square) is Shotover. Here

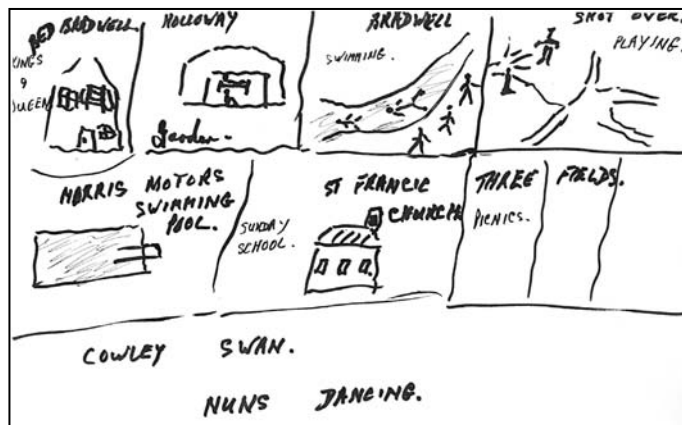


Figure 2

(fifth square) is Morris Motors – my Dad worked there. And (sixth square) is St Francis Church where we used to go in the evening." The final square shows "Three Fields" where this

woman remembers going for picnics when she was a child

and this is now the site of the Health Centre where we are meeting, surrounded by a housing estate, but still with some of the trees from that time. The reference to "Nuns, dancing" is where she is recalling going to learn dancing from the nuns. The map provoked many memories, but none, perhaps more poignant, than describing the day her Dad died: My Dad died on Christmas Eve – I was only five and I was wiping my eyes on our dog's ears when Lord Nuffield called round. He'd brought me this double-jointed doll – I never took it out of the box and eventually it rotted away..... all my Dad's stuff had to be burnt after he died."

Figure 3 (see middle part) shows our next group member's memory map. "That's our house, where we lived in the 30s and 40s for 13 years.... And there's the double garage and the concrete piece where we used to hang the

washing. There were five steps – jumping one, then two, three four, five, down on to the lawn...with a pond at the end and that's the main path down to the railway line, there was a little stream along there...And that's me hanging

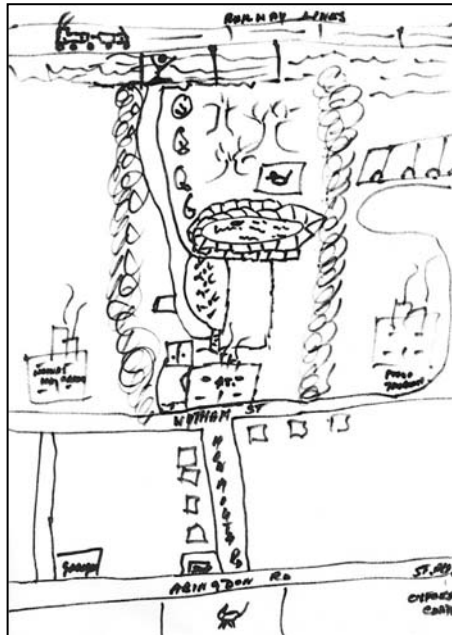


Figure 3

on the wire waving to the trains!”

Figure 4 shows a little village by the sea in South Wales in 1923. “I lived in a little cottage along Church Road – and here was the village green and here was the sea. You only had a quarter of a mile to get to the sea. And this was the church on the village green – and when there were weddings we used to put a rope from that side to this side and when the cars came we wouldn't let them go until they threw some money out!....Us

children always went down to the sea and there was never a soul about, now it's all caravans! One day they found a bomb that hadn't exploded washed up on the beach from the First War – higher than I was it was...that was the day I found a shilling in the sand and took it home to my Mum. It was wonderful – we were so poor.....I remember all the (*hunger*) marchers came through our village from somewhere up north...”

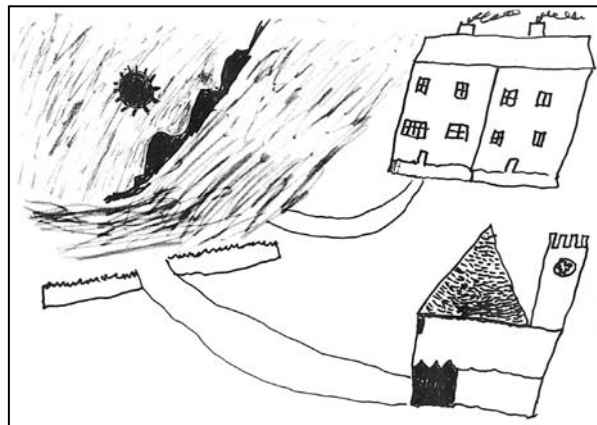


Figure 4

Figure 5 – schooldays in London. “Our school holidays were always spent in Regent's Park, there was a lake there and you could go on it. The school took us to the Tower of London quite often... and that's supposed to be the Royal Albert Hall, we used to go there quite a lot with the school and they used to take us to the docks as well



Figure 5

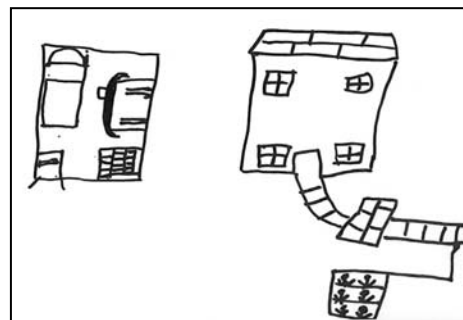
....my father was a policeman in the Met....”



**Figure 6**  
all gone now...”

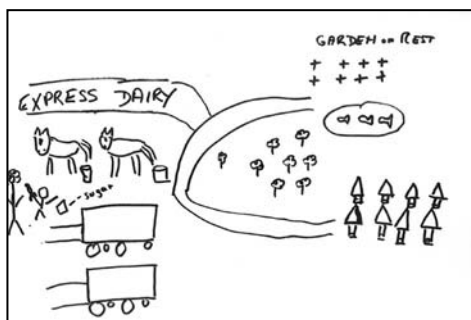
Figure 6 – Near Croydon – during the War. “There was a big horse place here and an old archway. That’s the air raid shelter they built after the War! My Dad had dug a hole the garden for us before then...and there’s the swing, that’s what my Dad made for us....the as turned into allotments during the War.....it’s

Figure 7 – Bedroom in a house in Wales. “That’s my bedroom. That’s the bed. That’s where I kept my books, Black Beauty, Little Women, oh and the first book I had was a Mickey Mouse book for Christmas in 1933... That’s my house....my father was a miner...That’s the steps going down to the garden and that’s the garden with the flowers in it! We had a mountain at the front of the house... “



**Figure 7**

Figure 8 – London 1934. “This is supposed to be built-up London – round the corner from us was the Express Dairy. We lived next door to some Norwegian people; they had a girl, we were only children. We used to go round to the dairy and feed the cart horses...take carrots and sugar...and then when we’d finished round there we used to go to Golders Green Crematorium and feed the fish in the pond



**Figure 8**

there....My friend went back to Norway before the War and I never heard from her again...”

The extracts shown on the maps represent just some of the stories shared with us during this session.

**Evaluation:**

- So much can seemingly come from so little and when the group met the following week they were still talking about the maps and the childhoods they re-invoked.
- As with the hand exercise, no one complained that this was a childish activity because we took a straightforward and confident approach in allowing playfulness to take its proper place in a learning activity.
- Having their individual maps meant that people had, and were given space, to take turns in the session to share their memories.
- The maps and the accompanying text give people the satisfaction of seeing something that they have created.
- Giving people a choice of a "special" place means that they are in control of the memories they share.
- It is important to allow enough time for this activity; ideally it is something that could be extended to two weeks if the sessions are ongoing.

**Reflections:**

- The nature of this exercise and the form it takes, allows people to, as it were, play with some basic materials (paper and coloured pens – although charcoal is also a good medium, there is something flowing and freedom-making about it..). And the resulting drawings, because of their simplicity, provide an excellent memory trigger.
- It is worth noting that like all exercises of this nature, there is the possibility that some of us may remember negative or difficult experiences and so it is important – as always – to provide a supportive setting, to acknowledge the dark and light sides in our recall.
- Usually, though, in my experience to date, entitling the map a secret/favourite place, means that people's approach to this activity is positive even if the content uncovers painful episodes in their life stories; and this is because like the hand exercise, the map provides an external way in to our secret selves.

**Suggestions for future developments:**

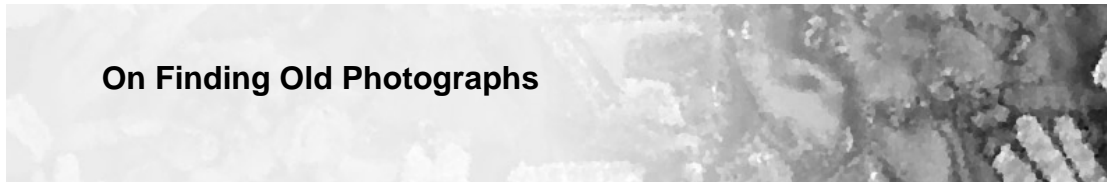
- In terms of intergenerational work, perhaps children and older people from the same area could compare secret/special play places, which could link in with personal and childhood objects/toys to form the basis of an exhibition – developing the importance of “place” in our lives, the similarities and differences between different groups and different generations. Stories about journeys (for example, *How the Villagers Found Wisdom*, *The Pedlar of Swaffham* - see Crimmens pp129 & 72 in reference section) and stories relating to specific localities might be researched and shared, new stories, perhaps stimulated by personal and museum-held artefacts, might be created.
- It might be interesting and revealing to look at local ordinance survey maps from different periods of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as well as looking at archive photographs covering different periods – and taking new ones.
- Working across cultures could also provide a rich source of activities, historical, geographical and personal.
- The “map” could lead you anywhere!

One previous project, the Potts' Luck Group, combined both the work on hands and a development of the map idea. This sprang from a group of older people, seven women and one man, who met in the common room of a village sheltered housing complex. Initially they worked from photographs of the village, tracing and copying pictures of various places, houses as well as local characters. They then transferred some of these to textile and embroidery work – although they



had not done this kind of thing before, their skills soon grew. Members themselves and the village upholstery firm too, donated much of the material. We then did the hand exercise (see **This is the Hand** session) and they transferred their “hands” to textile, embellishing with rings and nail varnish! These hands were sewn on around the edge of the map to indicate who had produced the work. One group member was inspired to write a poem (See Appendix 3) about the project and the whole thing is now framed and resides in a village common room, soon to be permanently housed in the Neighbours’ Hall.

Again, the playful naivety – but nevertheless dedicated – nature of the piece lends it great inspirational value and it is often borrowed for talks and exhibitions. It is also a fitting testament to some of the particular people of this place at a particular moment in time.



## On Finding Old Photographs

**Session using photographs, both personal and from the archive to stimulate memories and creative expression.**

**Setting and group:** As for previous sessions with group leaders Museum/Education Project Officer and her Assistant.

**Resources:** photographs, both personal and from the archive.

**Methods of recording:** as before, photos and tape.

**Time:** as previously.

### **Flavour of the session:**

This being the third (and final) meeting for the purposes of our project, the group is lively and ready to respond. Most have them have brought along some of their own photos and postcards and soon memories are being recalled and stories shared. From a postcard of the Jolly Sailor's Pub dated 1946, one woman is inspired to give a vivid account of the time when she and her family lived in a row of cottages behind this pub. This leads her to recall how she came to live there when her husband was called up, which meant that their income dropped and they couldn't afford to pay the 17/6d a week rent in their house in Oxford. So,

"...I got on my bike, with my boy on the back and we cycled round all the old villages and that's how I came to this little old cottage. But I had to pay 10/- for that....It was dreadful, you had to pull all your water up the well, every drop of water...."

Another woman has brought in a photo of "...when I was three years old.." and says that she remembers the picture being taken. She has also brought in school and Sunday school photos from the late 1940s and early 1950s; since she grew up locally much discussion ensues about the area then and now.

Someone else has brought in details of the ration card allowance from a wartime paper. She also has a photo of her father when he was twenty-one and we remember him from her map in the last session, as the man who had

TB and lived in the shed in the garden. She has also brought in pictures of her mother.

“...and this is my Mum when my Dad died.....and this is me when I was a Guard on the railways, best job I ever had!” Even though, she tells us, that before this she was “petrified of trains!” And because of this job she rapidly learned the facts of life. Not having realised before how babies were born, in this job she encountered a sixteen year old girl about to give birth on the train. On asking the ticket collector for help his advice was, apparently to “..tie her legs together until the train gets to Paddington....!” Fortunately the baby waited of its own accord.



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

Many more stories of this remarkable time in her life are shared and remembered with the group – all from one photograph.

The woman, who in the first session had described her sister’s bungalow

in the woods near Lord Nuffield’s house, has brought in a photo of this house, as well as some of her home village in Wales (featuring in the map exercise from the last session). She also picks out a photo of Reading Station where she arrived when she went to stay with her sister in the little house in the woods; and another of Lord Nuffield himself, which brings forth negative comments from the group again about Lady Nuffield...”..she was only a shop girl when they met...”. There is unanimous disgust about what they feel is an inappropriate memorial to Lord Nuffield and his good work in the local area. Again his life and work are recalled and someone sings a snatch of a song about him.

Someone else has brought in a printing template for nursery rhymes found in their garden (in Cowley) originally from Blackwells publishing company....

After having time to look and think/write about some of the archive photos the following emerged:



(Photo i of two ladies in the Elliston & Cavell packaging department). “ I’ve put, `working in the Trim Shop in the War 3/9d for a complete frame....It took me three days to make the first one – and I got the sack for singing...!”



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

Photo (ii) Brings back memories of shops that sold everything – the general stores and the value of such places and the way in which shops have changed..

People begin to reminisce about their working lives and the hard

times when they were laid off for three months of the year, and of having to take any job offered in order not to lose dole money....

”You had to go to the dole office. You had to go Wednesday to sign on and you had to go Friday for the money....And if you laughed or anything, or talked in the queue, she used to shut the doors up and turn us away – *That’s it, come back this afternoon* – and we’d been down there at nine in the morning...”

The session ends with people still discussing the shared memories that have arisen: so many stories from a handful of photographs.

### Evaluation:

- Having got to know and trust the group leaders, people were perhaps more willing to bring personal photographs.
- Since this was known to be the final session there may have been a tendency for participants to be overly enthusiastic in sharing their photographs, to the extent that the group was difficult to manage at times. This meant that it was not always easy for some people to have time to tell their stories. (See **This is the Hand** session evaluation section on group dynamics.)

- Also, if more sessions had been scheduled the archive photographs might have been better used at a later date and perhaps usefully linked to an ongoing project.
- Finally, there was very positive feedback from Community Education who said that the group's response was, "It was the best thing we've done all term!"

**Reflections:**

- When you ask people to bring things in to the session be prepared that some will bring in carrier bags full and others may bring nothing at all.
- Surprising objects and artefacts may be brought along, particularly if the group knows that a session leader is connected to a museum, as shown here with the printing template.
- It is worth mentioning that although the photographs from the archive are going to be local to the area, this should not prohibit non-local group members from feeling involved if the subject matter is chosen carefully in order to make a common connection. People and their activities will do this where a bare street scene will not.

**Suggestions for future developments:**

- There is potential here for linked work with local schools or local history societies, sharing photos of the same areas both modern and from the archive – with visits, in this particular example, to the museum at Nuffield Place and what remains of the car works.
- Research into other local businesses and industry (and this could date from earliest times; Bronze Age, Roman, etc.) the marks they have made and left on landscapes and communities and the implications for the future.
- Perhaps a similar project to the ICT/calendar (as described in Appendix 4) could be set up. In relation to this, if people bring in especially small photographs or ones that may be of poor quality, scanning can overcome these problems.

- In the past we have used poetry, such as Wendy Cope's "On Finding an Old Photograph" as a starting point for similar written/creative pieces.
- Other work could be developed using personal photographs. (See Cat's Cradle piece in Appendix 5.)
- On a deeper personal level, looking and talking about people's faces can be richly revealing. (See the Lily Smalls inspired pieces in Appendix 5)
- It might be interesting to encourage people to collect together family/household objects (or things dug up from the garden as with the template in this session) to make, as it were, their personal museum.
- Work could be developed from traditional stories on homes/houses, such as *The Water of Life* story (see reference section, Crimmens p. 109).
- The theme of life's journey could be explored – again a rich field of discovery.

## Putting Ourselves in the Picture

**Session using local photographs from the 1930s, 40s and 50s to encourage a creative response.**

**Setting and group:** 8 older women who meet at their local primary school, as part of Community Education's Outreach work.

**Resources:** local photographs from the Oxfordshire Photographic Archive – plus one bought in by the Reminiscence Worker (found in a shop near Leicester Square!). Paper and felt tip pens.

**Time:** Thursday afternoons during term time.

**Methods of recording:** photos (digital, no flash) and Marantz tape recorder as for the previous sessions.

### Flavour of the session:

We have two aims in mind here; one to share the photographs and allow memories and comments to surface on a more straightforward reminiscence level, the other to push people into thinking more about the people in the pictures, the what ifs..?, the getting into someone else's shoes.

Initially as the photos are examined and discussed someone remembers working at Debenhams in Oxford in the 1950s. The picture showing evacuees with their gas masks round the necks provokes much comment:



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council  
Photographic Archive

- "It brings back lots of memories – those gas masks round their necks.....I can't stand the smell of rubber, even now..."
- "We had a whole family (*of evacuees*) at one point."
- "My mother spoilt them..."

- “One always wanted to be going out with the soldiers.....And they didn’t know what blackberries were...” Laughter here. This photo brought forth a real depth of feeling.

The picture showing the milkman prompts one woman to say;

“I don’t remember this (*delivering milk in pails*) but I do remember the baker, he used to come with his big basket...” And another person recalls deliveries by horse and cart.

The photo ..... Of the queue outside a shop gets people talking about queues:



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

“To me it brings back memories of always queuing for something, sweets probably!...Being dragged off by my sister...Queuing for sweets on a Sunday morning...”



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

It isn’t obvious from the photo in question what the queue is for or exactly what sort of shop it is and consequently this caused some lively discussion and reminiscence.

The same thing happens with the photo of the 1937 dance band; we are not sure where it is and this

brings back memories of dances and other bands.

From the photo of Starlings workshop where the girls are sewing carpets, one woman tells us, “I had a friend who worked there...” While the picture of the soldiers in the street causes a



minor disagreement, one person saying, “They’re obviously coming from the station...”

the other saying, “No, look, they’re going to the station because they’re coming up the High Street.”

Interesting to note here, that only someone who knows the place would recognise this fact – so, these soldiers are most likely returning to active duty and what a difference that makes to their possible story!

There is also another serviceman in the picture and one woman declares: “They’re RAF – I know because I wore that uniform for two years! It’s different to the soldiers’ uniform, more posh!”

And another spots the man wearing a hat:

“See that old boy in the trilby? My Dad used to wear a trilby, just so as he could do that (she mimes the action) to the ladies. When anyone came to the door it was ‘Where’s my hat, where’s my hat?’ He would not go to the front door without his hat on!”

We move on to the next part of the session, handing out the prepared sheets with blank speech and thought bubbles, ready for them to choose a character in a photo to give words/thought to. One member of the group is reluctant, but we encourage them to work in pairs and tell them not to worry it’s just for fun. Once people begin the activity everyone joins in and the allotted 20 minutes soon passes.



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council  
Photographic Archive

The following examples show some of the results of this imaginative leap:

- “She hasn’t eaten all her crusts she won’t have curly hair!”
- “It’s not fair, they’re eating all the cakes and leaving all the sandwiches..”
- “I want my Mum!”

It is obvious by the end of this sharing process that people have thoroughly enjoyed this part of the session: there is applause, cries of “Well done...Oh, I like that!” as well as a healthy amount of laughter. There follows some

discussion about workers' rights during this period, time for tea breaks etc.



Copyright © Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

and memories are shared once more.

We explain where the photos are from (the Oxfordshire Photographic Archive, part of the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies) and how the Centre is keen to

collect photos (for borrowing and copying), especially those featuring people, and that people can go and look at the contents of this archive too. I tell them how I came across the photo of *Botley in 1933* and bought it for a friend who lives there. One woman tells us, after looking at the picture (of a thatcher at work), that her grandfather was a master thatcher. Another recalls having found, "...a smashing picture of the street where I was born – 'course it's all gone now..."

We move on to the feedback from them as to how the session felt; the following are some of their comments:

- "Good, once we got the hang of it!"
- "Well, a bit different.."
- "Which bit did you prefer?"
- "Not the captions!"
- "Oh, I think they did very well over there!"

And there followed some discussion on whether it is better to know more about the photos for this sort of exercise, or not. We talk again about the value of what they are giving us, their memories, but also their insights and experiences. To illustrate this I tell them *The Finger* story (see Appendix 6).

As the session closes there is still much lively conversation going on....

**Evaluation:**

- The above feedback part of the session was undoubtedly easier with this particular group because the remit is more clearly defined as educational and the participants are more used to reflecting on their learning.
- The "Good once we've got the hang of it" quote reflects how people will do things that they are not necessarily initially comfortable with and will then feel a sense of achievement, once they have tackled something apparently challenging. This exemplifies a real learning experience; at the end of the session we have arrived at somewhere different from where we started. We have progressed.
- Interestingly, no one in this group questioned the use of historical photographs in a creative exercise, and didn't have a problem moving between this and real memories. For example, the "I want my Mum!" quote might appear to be an unimaginative response to the picture, but in fact arose from that person's real experience of seeing evacuee children arrive at the local station.
- The positive feedback from the community education team included a request for us to return for more sessions.

**Reflections:**

- It was interesting to compare the two parts of this session, the more straightforward reminiscence aspect where people were undoubtedly stimulated by the photographs to recall aspects of their own lives and the periods evoked there, also the underlying emotions it brought forth, particularly for example when discussing evacuees. And of course it is revealing to hear another side to this story from the viewpoint of those on the receiving end.
- The more creative aspect was fascinating and it was gratifying to see how readily people responded to this once any nervousness over the "writing" dimension evaporated.
- Essentially the idea was to encourage a more imaginative response to photographs than we sometimes allow ourselves, to put in the "what ifs", to just for a while, get inside the heads of those others whose real stories we



may never know, but whose lives we can still honour and value through making a compassionate and imaginative leap.

**Suggestions for future development:**

- Work could be followed up here linking with schools and looking at the history of the periods depicted in the photographs.
- The same kind of creative exercises could be developed and tried with different ages and different groups.
- There is potential for other complimentary activities through drama, the visual arts, and other archive material.
- Some of the thoughts and words created for our characters could be expanded into longer stories.
- Working conditions are mentioned, there is room for research here.
- Any theme could be picked up from the subject matter in the pictures. For example, in our session, hats were mentioned; not only is there a whole range of possible creative/historical possibilities here, but there are also relevant traditional stories – *The Three Blue Hats* (see Crimmens, p. 67).
- *The Finger* story too, told at the end of the session, raises a number of issues, not least the one mentioned here about valuing the older generation; and there are other useful stories on this theme, such as *The Seventh Mother of the House* (see page...) and Grimms' *Faithful John*.
- Some of the suggestions mentioned following on from **On Finding Old Photographs** session could also be useful here.



**They never flinched.....:**

**Sessions using rural life museum objects with text extract from *Lark Rise to Candleford* (see Appendix 7) to stimulate creative writing. The objects used were: a nonmatching pair of butter pats, a pair of shears, a sack hook, a drenching horn and a chog. (Most of us needed the latter explaining to us. A chog is a weighty piece of wood with a hole in the middle used for tethering horses, giving them freedom of movement without getting tangled in the rope.)**

These two sessions differ from the preceding ones and will be dealt with in summary form.

The first session was held with an older writers' group, (6 in all) known as Tell the Tale, who have been meeting regularly during term time at their local village library for the past 12 years. Initially the group



was formed with the intention of producing audiotapes for the library service containing material based on their lives and memories. (See Appendix 7 *Telling Tales*). Since that time TtT have self-published three booklets of their writing as well as being involved in creative spin-offs such as storytime at the

library, exhibitions of their work, attending other related courses and also giving talks to various organisations about their experiences as members of a community based writing group.



The other group in the second session, (18 attended the meeting and 11 pieces

of writing resulted) are all members of the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age from Witney, most of whom were not from a creative writing background, although



some people had recently been involved in an apparently more straightforward and intergenerational reminiscence project. They sportingly responded to the call from their organiser to undertake the same exercise that TtT tried. And really it was the energy and enthusiasm of this

organiser who helped to produce such a successful outcome. When she advertised it to her U3A members she entitled it *Country Cousins* and invited them to: "Come and join us for an afternoon of reminiscence work, looking at mystery objects from the Oxfordshire Museum Store, sharing the memories they evoke and writing stories about the people who used and treasured them" (see Appendix 7).

The experimental nature of the project was also made clear.

For the first session, the organiser of the U3A group and one of her members came along to observe and in order to take notes for use with her group in the second session. (See Appendix 7 for feedback sheet). Both sessions followed roughly the same format. The main difference was that the Museum Project Officer and the Reminiscence Worker led the first and those in the U3A group were led by their organiser.

The Museum Project Officer gave some detail on the project and explained that eventually both groups would meet up at Cogges Farm Museum to share this experience and samples of their work. She then went on to tell us about the *Eagle of the Ninth* by Rosemary Sutcliff and the museum object that inspired this novel.



She also talked about the objects being used in the session so that we didn't spend time in guessing games, but got to the point of the exercise.

The session continued with us looking at and handling the objects, followed by people brainstorming associated/connected words and phrases, thinking about the *people* behind the objects. There was much discussion and reminiscing. The phrase "They never flinched" from Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* was given to the group as a theme to build their pieces around. (The appropriate extracts were read aloud.) People were asked to choose some of the brainstormed words as well as this suggested theme in order to write a creative piece on the people behind one or several of the objects. TtT did this for their homework and posted their pieces to the Reminiscence Worker. (See Appendix 7 for two especially moving poems from each group).

I think it is probably true to reflect that both groups found the exercise challenging. Although TtT were initially less daunted by the idea of "creative" writing for obvious reasons, it does seem that the objects themselves almost presented an



obstacle. Real objects were once used by real people and therefore there was a certain amount of respect for them and, I think, a feeling that entering them into a piece of fiction might somehow be dishonourable or untrue. Certainly the U3A group had a strong debate on this aspect of the exercise, as can be seen from their feedback sheet (Appendix 7). And it is interesting to note that they felt that perhaps some time on warm-up exercises might have been valuable. Again, the Rosemary Sutcliff example mentioned in the TtT session might have been helpful here too, as might other writing similarly inspired. However, what is worth noting is that in spite of the struggles mentioned,

people produced some good, inspiring and sometimes moving writing. If a longer project was planned then indeed this exercise could in itself be the basis of the required “warm-up”.

The final sharing and meeting at Cogges Farm Museum proved to be especially helpful. (And made possible by the provision of transport.) This meeting began with a guided tour of the barns and farm house, with the added bonus of passing through the kitchen just as Welsh teacakes had come warm from the oven. It seemed people felt the closeness of the occupants of the place very closely and immediately started to speculate and imagine the lives lived out there.

Back in the café afterwards, we shared some of the work out between the groups and there was a real buzz of shared achievement and praise. The discussion and short feedback session that followed again raised the truth/fact debate and we talked about the continuum along which truth/creativity/imagination/fact lie. One example given was the idea that we don't necessarily believe (for good reason) all that we read in the press now so why should it be any truer because the newspaper is, for example, dated 1895? We shared an extract from Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Urn* and there was a lot of nodding and smiling as this touched a real chord with people.

But maybe the best part of this session was the fact of the two groups who had never met before, coming together to share some of their creative work. Both parted feeling they would like some kind of follow-up to this “experiment”!



## Conclusion

Perhaps the best way to end this part of the guide is with a story about a traveller who is given both shelter and nourishment and is thus able to continue her journey, but only after she has found and received permission from the Seventh Mother of the House. It tells us something of the importance of honouring the generations and also of the sustaining and necessary power of creativity.

### **The Seventh Mother of the House**

The traveller had been travelling for some time, following her path through the forest which seemed to be growing thicker by the hour. Not only was she hungry, thirsty and tired, but night was approaching and she began to think that she might have to spend the hours of darkness alone under the trees with no one but the wild beasts for company. It was not an enticing idea. Just as she was thinking she would have no choice but to stop and sleep where she was, she came out into a clearing. And in the clearing was a very welcoming looking cottage; there was a comforting spiral of smoke twirling up from the chimney and outside came the sound of Chop, Chop, Chop. A very old woman was chopping wood from a huge pile, no doubt to feed the fire inside.

The traveller stepped into the clearing and called out: "Excuse me Old Mother, but I've been journeying through this forest and I was wondering if I might stay the night in your cottage and refresh myself for the rest of my travels?"

The old woman stopped her chopping and looked up: "Well, my child, of course, you'd be very welcome - if it was up to me, but first you must ask my mother. You'll find her inside tending the fire."

Once inside, the traveller saw there was indeed an even older woman tending the fire, just as her daughter had described. "Excuse me Old Mother," the

traveller said, "I'm looking for somewhere to rest my head and perhaps some food and water, would it be possible to stay here for the night?"

"Ah," replied the woman, "if it was up to me you'd be very welcome, but first you must ask my mother. You'll find her at the table there, making bread."

And sure enough, as the traveller turned round, she saw an even older woman, kneading and slapping what was clearly going to be a fine and wholesome loaf. Once again she asked the same question, already picturing herself sitting in comfort by the warm fire, eating some of this bread.

"Well," came the reply, "if it was up to me, but first you must ask my mother, she is just through there working at her loom."

This woman, despite her obviously great age, was deftly weaving a blanket of the most vivid and inviting colours. The traveller began to imagine herself once again dozing in front of the fire, having eaten the warm bread and wrapped in this beautiful blanket. "Old Mother," she began, "your - daughter, making the bread out there, said that I must ask you if I might stay the night and rest here until tomorrow?"

"Well, my child, of course, if it was up to me, but first you must ask my mother. You'll find her upstairs in bed."

Now the traveller wasn't at all surprised to hear this and so she climbed the stairs, and on opening the bedroom door she saw an ancient woman propped against the soft pillows reading from a huge book of stories.

"Old Mother," she began again, "your daughter, downstairs, said that if I wish to stay here and rest for the night I must first ask you. So, would this be possible? I have stories to tell." She saw herself in front of that fire, fed and rested, warm in the newly woven blanket, telling her hosts, all those daughters and grand daughters and great grand daughters, stories of her travels.

The old woman peered at her from over the book and smiled: "Well, my child, of course, if it was up to me, but first you must ask my mother. You'll find her over there in the cradle."

The traveller, by now becoming used to her own amazement, looked and there in the corner was a cradle and from it came the sounds of soft whistling songs. She went across and knelt down beside it. "Old Mother," she

breathed, "I wish to stay in your cottage for the night and your daughter told me that first I must ask your permission. I have songs to sing too and stories to tell." Once more the picture of herself in front of the fire sprang into her head.

The ancient woman stopped her singing and looked at her. "Of course my child - if it were up to me - but first you must ask my mother. You'll find her up there," she nodded her head, "in that woollen pot."

The traveller got up and there hanging on the wall was a tiny woven pot, no doubt made by this woman's great grand daughter downstairs. She leaned towards it and looked inside. And there, staring back at her, was a tiny, tiny figure, no bigger than a wren. "Old Mother," the traveller whispered, "I have come seeking food and shelter for the night and your daughter tells me that first I must ask you if this is possible."

After what seemed like many long moments, the bird-like old woman answered gently: "Well, of course, my child. You are most welcome to stay in our home, in front of our fire, eating our bread, wrapped in our blanket, listening to our stories and songs. Of course," she repeated, "you are most welcome for you have found the Seventh Mother of the House."

And so the traveller was able to rest there for the night before setting off once more the following day - with another story to share.





## APPENDIX 1

### AQUILA THE EAGLE

Two bright stars can be seen in the night sky during the summer, separated by the Milky Way. This is their story:

Once upon a time a poor boy Aquila fell in love with Lyra, a girl who was as beautiful as the spinning she worked. Unfortunately her father did not approve of their love and separated them so far apart that they were at the opposite ends of the sky. He was kind enough to allow them to meet but only once a year and to do that they had to pass over the Milky Way. The friendly magpies took pity on the couple and every year on the 7<sup>th</sup> night of the 7<sup>th</sup> moon, the birds make the lovers a bridge of feathers across the heavens.

**APPENDIX 2****Autobiography: Ivy Vernon****In Service at Nuffield Place in 1935**

I was born in 1921 and grew up in a cottage at Huntercombe End, across the woods from Nuffield Place. When I was 14 in 1935, my grandmother told me I should have to go into service as this was respectable work for a young girl. I would have preferred to work in a shop in Henley, but I was taken on by Lady Nuffield at Nuffield Place as a “between maid”, doing all the rough work, cleaning upstairs and downstairs, cleaning baths and lavatories, washing up and serving at table. There were two other servants working at Nuffield Place. One was Kathleen Francis, who was Lady Nuffield’s personal maid and she also did the cooking. The other servant was Dorothy Sellars, the gardener’s wife, who lived in the gardener’s cottage and did most of the cleaning.

I lived in Nuffield Place and slept in a room on the top floor. I was allowed to use a bathroom. I started work at 6.00 a.m. and finished around 10.00 p.m. every day, with no regular day off. Sometimes I was given permission to walk through the woods to visit my parents. I was paid five shillings a week and I had to wear a blue dress which Lady Nuffield made for me out of one of her old dresses, but she stopped two shillings from my wage to pay for it.

I didn’t like working at Nuffield Place. I didn’t like Lady Nuffield because she watched me all the time. When I had a bath she would come to the top floor to make sure I hadn’t taken too much hot water. I always felt she didn’t trust me and she kept the larder door locked. I was always hungry because I was only given very small portions to eat. I used to have to smuggle in my grandmother’s bread pudding to keep me going. When I was sent to the local farm on my bicycle to get threepence worth of cream, Lady Nuffield used to wait for me and would lock the cream away before I could dip my finger in it.

She also used to count the tomatoes in the greenhouse to make sure no one could take any. She also wound up my alarm clock in case I broke the spring.

I thought Lady Nuffield was very penny pinching over housework. I had to clean the windows with plain water and the baths with hard soap. When I polished the furniture I could only use a smear of polish out of the tube and when Lord and Lady Nuffield went away I had to turn the mattresses. Lady Nuffield used to hide an evening bag between the mattresses to check I had done the job properly.

Lady Nuffield spent a lot of her time on needlework and always made herself numerous evening gowns. She would ride into Oxford with Lord Nuffield every Friday to go shopping and she would often buy special cakes to entertain people to tea over the weekend. When dinner guests came, I had to serve at the table to clear the plates away. In the winter months, Lord and Lady Nuffield would take a cruise and would return in the spring.

I liked Lord Nuffield. He slept on the verandah in the sun room for his health and always had a bottle of Vichy water on a table nearby. He was very kind and often gave me a pound note for my mother. When my brother got knocked off his bicycle and was in hospital in Wallingford, Lord Nuffield sent a car every day to take my mother to see him. He also paid for a specialist from London to treat him and he made a full recovery. Every Saturday and Sunday, Lord Nuffield would play golf and he would often bring people home for afternoon tea. I would have to light a fire in the drawing room grate and Lady Nuffield would entertain the guests with sandwiches, toasted crumpets and cakes.

The work at Nuffield Place was very hard and I left after a year and got a job elsewhere.

**GWEN'S HAND**

This is the hand  
that knitted and sewed  
and cooked and picked  
flowers, baked pies  
and cakes.

This is the hand  
that had its index finger  
broken, "When I was a bairn."

This is the hand  
that held a skipping rope,  
hung on to that tree in the quarry,  
and waved to meet Mum from the train.

This is the hand that  
puts on my glasses and  
takes them off again.

**THIS IS THE HAND....**

...that until it was six months' old must have felt the first lonely brush of a children's home blanket, but that soon was held in the warmth of chosen love.

This is the hand.....

...that held on to Judy, stroked her soft copper spaniel coat, waved goodbye to her at two years, never knew why.

This is the hand.....

...that tugged at the doll as the pig tugged too, that afterwards stroked the one-eared favourite and never forgot or forgave.

This the hand.....

...that conducted an orchestra in the front room, that felt the grass under a cartwheel, performed in the circus under the branch of the big pine, dug a hole part-way to Australia, the hand that grew rough and green under the rich spell of September's hops.

This is the hand.....

...that played three ball, four ball, held on to a skipping rope, rang a bicycle bell, turned the pages of book, after book, stole the gooseberries, threw the cherry stones, played cat's cradle, held the Baby Jesus, posied violets and primroses for Mothering Sunday.

This is the hand.....

...that dug down into the soft bubble of Seasalter sand and found the cockles, that was stung by a bee, that flew the kite, that sent a letter to her love and on her way she dropped it.....

This is the hand.....

...that at twelve became an old lady's hand, that couldn't play ball, the hand that is ugly and swollen, that can't lift, or stretch or clench without feeling the pain...

This is the hand.....

...that makes the bread, will hold yours if you'll let it, this is the hand...  
that tells the story

**A SHOW OF HANDS**

This is the hand that takes the dog for a walk  
This is the hand that picked the parsnips this morning  
This is the hand that scrubbed the parsnips  
This is the hand that mops the floors  
This is the hand that got broken twice  
This is the hand that washed the artichokes  
This is the hand that takes the sweet  
This is the hand that painted the plate  
This is the hand that tickled my sister when I was four  
This is the hand that makes the apple crumble  
This is the hand that unloads the plants  
This is the hand that got jammed in the door  
This is the hand that I pick flowers with  
This is the hand that puts the flowers in the vase  
This is the hand that unhooked the fish  
This is the hand that feeds the cat (!)  
This is the hand that buys milk and bread  
This is the hand that unlocks the door  
This is the hand that changes the light bulb  
This is the hand that ties and trims the willow  
This is the hand that soothes the child  
This is the hand that stokes the fire (and strokes the cat)  
This is the hand that ties my shoelaces  
This is the hand that got caught stealing the apples  
This is the hand that combs my hair  
This is the hand that answers the phone  
This is the hand that opens the book  
This is the hand that puts money on the church plate  
This is the hand that locks the door  
This is the hand that turns the radio on  
This is the hand that switched the lights off  
This is the hand that does the ironing

This is the hand that scrumped the apples when I was ten  
This is the hand that paints the pictures  
This is the hand that has its palm read  
This is the hand that puts my daughter's make-up on  
This is the hand that I boxed with when I was a kid  
This is the hand that played three-ball when I was eight  
This is the hand that plays with the dog  
This is the hand that brushes my teeth  
This is the hand that dug my Dad's garden for half a crown  
This is the hand that backs the horses  
This is the hand that planted the seeds  
This is the hand that takes (and makes) the wedding vows  
This is the hand that used to pump the organ (unless I fell asleep....)  
This is the hand that writes the cheques  
This is the hand that sews on buttons  
This is the hand that caught the frogs when I was eight  
This is the hand that fed the rabbit  
This is the hand that used to pick buttercups, daisies and bluebells on  
Shotover Hill  
This is the hand that harvests the fruit in the autumn  
This is the hand that I use to scratch my leg!  
This is the hand that dyed my frock a different colour when I was thirteen  
This is the hand that shaves my face  
This is the hand that shakes the hands of others  
This is the hand that makes a good cup of tea  
This is the hand that trims up my beard  
This is the hand that tosses the pancakes  
This is the hand that said goodbye to the family and friends I left behind.....  
This is the hand that has helped to build houses  
This is the hand that puts on gloves in the cold of January  
This is the hand that bears the scars  
This is the hand that phones up to save a life  
This is the hand that cut the cake  
This is the hand that held on to the handlebars

This is the hand that played with the rattle  
This is the hand that cuddled my teddy bear  
This is the hand that wound up the string of my toy crane  
This is the hand that played with a yo-yo  
This is the hand that played with toy trains  
This is the hand that pulled me out of a ditch when I was nine  
This is the hand that played with a Meccano set  
This is the hand that was always fidgeting  
This is the hand that mowed the lawn  
This is the hand that lit the bonfire  
This is the hand for giving  
This is the hand that cooks the lunch  
This is the hand that makes the apple jam  
This is the hand that caught the football  
This is the hand that makes the other half of a prayer  
This is the hand that calls TIME!

**The Elder Stubbs Group**



In order to form a contact between a Day Hospital and a local primary school, we talked about hands, drawing round the younger and older hands and sharing the memories that came from them. This is an example of one of the older hands, followed by an extract from a song which the children composed.

### **Larry's Hand**

This is the hand that:

started work at fourteen  
and a half  
tending poultry,  
the hand that learnt to lay bricks;  
that went with me as a conscript  
in the airforce, Second War,  
this was, general duties,  
I never held a gun:  
this is the hand that went with me  
to Bombay, Burma, Rangoon,  
building dummy aircraft, dyeing tents  
to fool the Japanese...

This is the hand that:

after the war was given £120  
(from the grateful forces!)  
that put on a demob suit,  
that knocked on lots of doors  
selling insurance, gift of the gab  
I had,  
it was my great asset,  
then.

Now:

this is the hand that  
holds lists of words;  
Tabasco, Tahiti,

Tacoma, tonnage,  
Tuxedo, Tuscany,  
tussle, tusk - teaches.

**Song extract**

"From age to age we all have hands  
Unique but all the same  
With big hands, small hands, old and young,  
We all can play the game..."



## APPENDIX 3

### OLD TREASURES

We're a group of old treasures from Milton  
That's "Great" if you see what I mean.  
Our venue's Potts Close on a Wednesday  
Where we're learning to sew a fine seam,  
Some of the ladies are ancient,  
Born in that First Great World War,  
They bring us photos so old, coloured sepia  
Showing a village still minus the car:  
So from photos we're making a collage  
Of Milton, that's "Great" to be sure.

We've a Church, a school and a manor,  
One pub, but there used to be four,  
From memory we see very clearly,  
Things our grandchildren will certainly miss,  
Hopscotch, five stones and marbles  
Too many to put on this list.  
As we stitch the Church to the collage,  
The old school with children at play,  
We remember the things that are all lost in time,  
The Great Milton of our yesterday.

Norma Walters



## APPENDIX 4

### **They'll never believe what I've done!**

Adding an ICT element to a project with older learners

The Florence Park Community group was formed in January 2001 with the help of the Museum of Oxford's Education Officer and Oxford City Council's Community Development Officer. Members of the group are all over 65 and the majority had grown up on Florence Park, a city housing estate, built in the 1930s to provide affordable housing for workers at the new Morris Motors car factory. Many of the families had travelled from Wales and the North of England to find jobs. None of the group had received tertiary education and they saw the opportunity of recording their local heritage as a new and exciting challenge. After visits to the Record Office, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies and Oxfordshire museum store, a small travelling exhibition was created and launched at the Agewell conference in Oxford's Town Hall.

The group meets monthly and it was agreed that the final meeting of 2001 should include work towards the production of a *Memories of Florence Park* calendar. The group was invited to the Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock to look round the new galleries. They were also asked to bring a photograph that had a special meaning to them. Emphasis was placed on the visit as a whole to prevent the group from feeling anxious about using the ICT equipment.

Our Objectives were:

- To celebrate the completion of the *Memories of Florence Park* exhibition
- To provide the group with the opportunity of using ICT in an informal setting
- To give a fun and non-threatening introduction to ICT to reluctant and non-users

- To enable the group to record a personal memory to take home with them after their visit

The group was welcomed to the museum with tea and mince pies. This time was used to reflect on their exhibition success and to introduce the programme for the afternoon. They were then split into five groups of three and times were given for each group to turn up at the Research Room.

In the Research Room they were taught how to use the scanner and save their image, including typing in their chosen filename. This exercise provided many of the members with the opportunity to use a mouse, computer and scanner for the first time. These scanned images were used for the calendar and personalised front covers were produced for each member of the group.

The afternoon proved to be a great success. Spontaneous comments from the group included “They’ll never believe what I’ve done!” and “My daughter’s always asking me to have a go on her computer – I think maybe I will now.”

Our learning points were:

- This was a one-off activity without specific provision to follow up the learning that occurred during the afternoon. However, if the group expresses a wish to develop their skills in this area, our existing networks with the community education team could enable this to happen e.g. at the community centre in Florence Park.
- The session was free (including transport) and very enjoyable - it may, therefore, lead to individual members going on to develop these skills either in a formal setting or with their family (e.g. grandchildren)
- The existing relationship between the group and the education workers helped ensure success. This was supported by the positive relationship between the education and community workers. In addition to this,

group members felt comfortable approaching a potentially 'threatening' experience as they were supported by their peers.

- This kind of activity requires at least two members of staff to support the group through the learning process.
- The project focused on producing a desirable product which gave a clear incentive to encourage each person to complete their task. The project had a clear goal and a means of celebrating the learning undertaken, i.e. the calendar.
- ICT skills were used as part of the process, not as the focus of the session.
- Members of the group compared learning to use a computer with learning to drive a car. This was considered to be an unhelpful analogy, as it does not encourage experimentation and some older people e.g. with failing eyesight, are no longer confident or able to drive. Are there other, less-threatening analogies which might be suggested?
- Some members of the group considered their physical needs to be a barrier. "I get a crick in my neck from this" and "I'm no good at this with these bi-focals". Their attitude was that the problem was with themselves, rather than the equipment. However, some were pleasantly surprised by how easy they found it. "You don't have to press down hard [on the keyboard], do you? You only have to touch it."

The whole afternoon was very enjoyable and full of learning for all involved. We would definitely run a similar session again and will be looking for other ways to introduce ICT into our work with different groups in the future.

**Natalie Chambers, Education Officer, Museum of Oxford**



## APPENDIX 5

### On Finding an Old Photograph

I must have been scarcely more than a child  
When I came across an old school photograph.  
Sepia, framed in cream, hanging from a piece  
Of brown knotted string.  
We were in a junk shop,  
I had asked my father to lend me 50p.  
"Of course, but why?" I wonder why now.

I never look too closely at old photographs  
For sale as antiques, as junk;  
Other people's families, loved ones, long dead  
And now detached from where they once belonged.  
A superstitious dread, perhaps. I shudder.  
What if one day my daughter's face  
Changed hands in an Oxfam shop.

This photograph is different.  
Four rows of country children are lined up  
With white pinafores and starched collars,  
Rickety legs in the front row,  
Headmaster at the back with handle-bar moustache.

I study the faces, look for family resemblances;  
Three boys wear identical striped shirts and sit in a group.  
Are they brothers? Did they die in the trenches?  
Are their children living now? Would they be interested  
At all in this old photograph?

Would they treasure it, who have more right than I?

Someone, a mother, perhaps, set this photograph  
Into its frame, sandwiched it between  
Thick glass and the back of an old calendar.  
1908. 17 March. First egg layed by old brown chicken.  
It was several years before I found  
That simple message, recorded for posterity.

Did one of those children, with those solemn  
Frozen faces, run laughing in  
With shining eyes to show her  
The small brown chicken's egg? Did her mother  
Boil it and give it to her for breakfast  
The morning she wore her pinafore to school  
Because the photographer was coming?

**Jocelyn Goddard**

(written as a visiting participant in the  
Wheatley Tell the Tale Writers' Group, 1990/91.)



(In this exercise we were asked to choose a photograph of ourselves as a child, write about it simply from the child's viewpoint and then write a longer, adult reflection.)

### CAT'S CRADLE

*I am sitting on the floor of the porch, next to Oby Love's sister. We are making cat's cradles. Susan Smith is trying to step past me; Carole is standing behind me. You can just about see two coats hanging from the pegs in the cloakroom. Today Mum has done my hair in one plait. I am wearing my white sandals and I am smiling, looking out into the school playground. Someone is taking my photograph.*



Copyright © Linda Sargent

If my memory is right it was Thelma Luckin who took the photo, this black and white faded charming snatch of Nineteen Fifties' history – no, history is too big a word. Moment is better. This is just a moment and under it is another and another and another. Thelma and me were big pals for a long time – she was considered crazy by some of the grown-ups around us and together she and I played some magical pretend games. She knew all

the wrong ways into places;

the back route from the school through people's gardens to the post office, the way down from her bedroom window and out and out to freedom, the gap in

the “No Entry” fence to the castle grounds, leading to the old disused pig sties. And Thelma had plaits too, only she was blonde and I dark. Snow White and Rose Red.

But when I look at this picture now what I feel is a sense of bereavement for the child who was me. I must have been about ten and so this was eighteen months - that vivid fixed time - before everything changed.

In this photo is a child who, with no thought, sits easy peasy on the ground. There she is legs curled comfortably under her, arms out and those slender, straight fingers holding the wool to make a cat's cradle. She doesn't even have to look at what she is doing. Her open face is happy and unshadowed by pain. She climbs trees, appears regularly as a trapeze artist on the swing her Dad made, she runs, skips, does cartwheels, is good at crab, handstands and loves rounders. When lively music comes on the wireless she gets up and dances, people say she's a natural dancer. The man in the shop in Faversham, where her Mum and Dad took her to buy a pair of delicious red shoes said she had dancer's feet. He did. His words are branded in her memory, sharp as a broken promise.

When she cycles round those Kentish lanes on the last bit of journey home from school, she gallops her bike into its true horsiness and sings and sings all the favourite songs from Friday afternoon's singing lessons. Blow the Wind Southerly, Westering Home, He who would Valiant Be. She who would?

And when it begins to hurt, when she can't put her head down on the pillow at night without her Mum holding it to take the weight of the pain; when familiar distances stretch to sudden, impossible lengths, when the stile is too high to climb and the rounder's ball too hard to catch, when she can't ride her bike: this is the time. Still's disease it is called in children, a cruelly apt name, since this is what it does so efficiently. Juvenile Arthritis more commonly, which really does sound like something that might soon bring the police knocking at the door to take her away.

Instead it is the doctors and an altogether different journey begins.

But in this photo the bright-eyed lively child is preserved, fixed in the past. And no matter how hard I search for clues, for the might-have-beens, I see no soul-touching crippling ghost lurking, unless that blurred tremble of light in the left-hand corner is she. What I do see is me eager and healthy, smiling into the future. Unafraid.

## Lily Smalls from "Under Milk Wood" by Dylan Thomas

I have used this extract on many occasions and in a number of ways for example:

- with mirrors, where we look at our face in the mirror and go through the same process of questions and answers as Lily, however this can be tricky and should only be done after good consultation and mutual agreement with all the participants
- by giving group members copies of the extract and then working in pairs (either with each other or members of staff - but be prepared to do your own!) to come up with our "there's a face" (see D's Face overleaf)
- by playing a recording of this piece (the edition narrated by Richard Burton is especially lively and evocative!) and then working on the same form, again in pairs, and if necessary scribing for participants
- it might also be useful (if appropriate) to expand on the theme and bring in other poetry and prose on the subject of faces (for example traditional tales such as "Snow White", and the Narcissus myth, "The Ugly Duckling" and so on...)
- it is important to bear in mind - as with all aspects of this work - that upsetting and sometimes painful memories may be evoked, especially when looking at such a direct link with our ancestors as our facial features; it is as well to be prepared
- the exercise can be developed too, in order to encourage us to look at one another's faces and to find interesting words to describe ourselves (see overleaf "Let's take a second look at L")

**D's Face**

Oh there's a face!  
Where did you get that nose from?  
Must have been from me Mother.  
What about those big blue eyes?  
I must have got them from me Father;  
he went to the 1<sup>st</sup> War  
and never came back

Where did you get that soft hair from?  
(Go on, tell us.)  
From me Mum,  
she had lovely hair;  
it was black and she pinned it up,  
round and round and round,  
put pins in you see -  
every morning.

Where did you get your mouth from?  
From me Mum, I think.  
And your silky skin?  
My Mum; she had good skin.  
You're like your Mum, then?  
Well, more like my eldest sister -  
I'll bring the photo.  
I had fair hair, you know -  
like the golden corn....

**Let's take another look at L's face...**

(extract from a group exercise)

Little round face,

pale,

friendly,

painstaking.

17<sup>th</sup> century Flemish, I should say,

as far as I can see,

and very beautiful

gallant and

intellectual.

That of a happy person.



## APPENDIX 6

### THE FINGER

There was once a young man idling his time, hanging about in his local market place. He was, as young men often are, waiting for something to happen, something exciting. His life seem to stretch endlessly and unknown ahead of him. Then he spotted an old man who was making his way quickly and surely between all the stalls. The young man said to himself, "That old man knows something. I'll follow him and see if I can find out what it is."

He caught up with the old man on the far side of the square, where the market was less busy and went and stood in front of him.

"You know something," he accused. "Tell me what it is. Give me something!"

The old man looked at him for a moment and then pointed at a pigeon that was fluttering near the roof-top. While the young man was staring at the pigeon it fell into his hands - and it was heavy, gleaming bright. Pure gold.

Meanwhile the old man had gone on his way. The young man threw the pigeon aside and rushed after him, catching his arm. "it's not enough," he said. "I want more!" The old man once more looked at the young one and then quickly drew his hand from under his cloak and pointed at a cat that was creeping along a roof. It too turned to solid gold and fell into the young man's hands. But he threw it aside. "It's not enough! I want more!" The old man pointed to a dog digging among the litter in the nearby side street. The dog was transformed into gold and the old man swept past the young man and hurried on.

Finally the young man caught up with the old man in a deserted square. "It's not enough," he repeated, "I want more!" The old man looked at him for a long moment and then pointed at the beautiful fountain in the middle of the

square, which was surrounded by four stone lions. All turned into a huge dazzle of gold.

"It's still not enough - I want more!"

"More?" asked the old man. "What more do you want?"

"I want the finger," the young man said.

*(But the question is: What for?)*





## APPENDIX 7

### TELLING TALES

Once again the storytellers gathered together  
to record their pieces, poems  
                  fragments  
of themselves.

The scene:

an evening in mid-December,  
fizzed with chill  
excitement and nervous chaos;

"Can't seem to find..."

"When is it my turn?"

Rustle of papers,  
scrape of chairs,  
coughs and laughter,  
wine and crumbs,  
doors closing softly.

"Did you have a copy of...?"

"Time to go, it's late."

"Thank you!"

"Thank you!"

"For what?" I ask.

"For keeping us sane."

And so the storytellers  
unravelling and went home.  
Afterwards, I stood outside  
in the stillness, gazing up  
at the black star-crowded sky.  
For a moment nothing moved:  
just then the wind blew sharp  
and suddenly I seemed to share  
in all the sharp winds blowing  
elsewhere in the world,  
and in the stories held there.

**WITNEY U3A****"Country Cousins"****Ideas for a resource pack on reminiscence work****2-4pm Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January****Congregational Church, Welch Way, Witney**

Come and join us for an afternoon of reminiscence work, looking at mystery objects from the Oxfordshire Museum Store, sharing the memories which they evoke and writing stories about the people who used and treasured them.

\*\*\*\*\*

We will meet up again at 2pm at Cogges Farm Museum on Wednesday March 13<sup>th</sup> to share our work with the "Tell the Tale" creative writing group from Wheatley, who have been through the same exercise. (It was good fun!)

There is no charge for these two events. A guided tour of Cogges Museum on 13<sup>th</sup> March, where most of the mystery objects would have been put to daily use, is included.

Your help with this experimental project to test out ideas for the resource pack would be greatly valued. Please let me know if you would like to join us on the 31<sup>st</sup> January.

Many thanks. Contact:.....

**Witney U3a Feedback Notes:**

- Unwrapping artefacts stimulated great curiosity - created a real buzz
- At times discussion became political and way off task; time element didn't allow all 18 people space.
- Creative writing element difficult for group to grasp. Much more time needed to understand different possible approaches here
- Brainstorming of appropriate words helpful
- Lots of ideas did come, however, including one person who wrote the story from the point of view of the pair of butter pats on the grocer's counter
- More time to split the exercise into two parts would have helped, more time to reflect on the objects and words brought to mind by them
- Greater explanation of "creative writing" and what was envisaged, perhaps more examples from books and articles
- Second attempt would be useful with different artefacts and more emphasis on descriptive words and different possible styles of writing.
- Overall, more time in sharing and planning stage.

(Note: the resulting writing now produced in their "Country Cousins" booklet, was both stimulating and varied in style and content, especially impressive as these amounted to first attempts in the creative writing field for many in the group!)

**Lark Rise to Candleford**

Two extracts from Lark Rise to Candleford by Flora Thompson explicitly make reference to the virtue of endurance, using the expression “they did not flinch”. Penguin Books (1974) pages 50, 247.

**Forests and Timber  
(Looking at artefacts)**

Think of our forebears when the world was young;  
Days were hard and work was long,  
Life not easy and they unsung  
Save by their own kin, brave and strong.

Amid the great forests of the land  
Tools were fashioned, homes were built, men taught their own  
To live and work by craft of hand  
With the lifeblood of great trees alone

Man and nature in perfect blends  
Supplying food and such sweet shade.  
Timber and forester as always friends,  
Working where deep roots were laid.

The majesty of trees, the hope of heaven by man:  
Therein lies one small but perfect life-long plan.

**Joan Perry November 2001**

**At the master's bidding**

Childhood dreaming, playing, fishing,  
Watch the ploughing, sowing, reaping at the master's bidding

Then a young man, strong and tall and willing  
Do the work of two old men at the master's bidding

Courting, marriage, children too, aye happy times to be  
A favoured worker at the master's bidding

Older now, not quite so strong, the children need to help  
To show the work can still be done at the master's bidding

Winter's day is cold and short, summer's warm but longer  
Either way it's up at dawn and bed at dusk at the master's bidding

Spring brings hopes of lambs well born, Autumn harvest thankful  
Otherwise the future's bleak at the master's bidding

No work in prospect for the children now they're past their childhood  
Might one even learn a trade to do the master's bidding?

Daughter now a kitchen maid, washing, scrubbing, cleaning  
Maybe one day be a cook at the master's bidding

Sons must leave for city lights or factories or fighting  
Wars not understood, it is the master's bidding

Work is over now it seems, too slow, too old, too weak  
Too frail to do the master's bidding  
Once a family, now alone wife and husband ponder  
Was there humour, joy of living in the master's bidding?

**John Hobday (Witney U3A)**



## References and Recommended Reading

(These are just some of the many sources I have found useful and inspiring - start with your own bookshelf, music, pictures, then visit libraries, museums, galleries, beg and borrow....)

Age Exchange (1995) **European Reminiscence Symposium: Reminiscence and Dementia Care: Reminiscence and Intergenerational Activities: Making Memories Matter:** (Series of inspirational papers from workers in the field world-wide. Age Exchange also publish a series of reminiscence books and run training days and conferences. See list of organisations.)

Annand, J.K. (1998) **Bairn Rhymes:** Mercat Press Edinburgh. (Aimed at children and therefore rich in the language and memory of a Scottish childhood.)

Briggs, R. (1998) **Ethel and Ernest: A True Story:** Jonathan Cape. (Briggs' powerful cartoon biography of the life and times of his parents, full of simple yet evocative details of working class urban life from the 1930s to the 1970s.)

Causley, C. (1997) **Collected Poems:1951-1997:** Macmillan. (Since so much of his work is a poetic form of remembering his family, friends and younger self - see "Who" for example - it is particularly useful and the musical immediacy of his ballad form is excellent for reading aloud in group settings.)

Cooper, Q. & Sullivan, P. (1995) **Maypoles, Mayhem and Martyrs:** Bloomsbury in Association with Country Living Magazine. (Lively and informative yearbook with entries for 366 days covering myths, festivals and customs of Britain.)

Crimmens, P. (1998) **Storymaking and Creative Groupwork with Older People:** Jessica Kingsley. (Excellent introduction and section on "Why Groups?" setting out the aims and methods most useful and appropriate, whilst at the same time examining pitfalls and unexpected joys. Also contains a selection of stories with helpful guidelines and appropriately themed - for

example those which contain an older person as a central older figure, the theme of loss, marriage and union and so on.)

Fox, M. & Vivas, J. (1984) **Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge**: Puffin Books. (The strength of this beautiful picture book lies in its simplicity. Wilfrid is a small boy who befriends a lady in the residential home next door. On hearing that she has lost her memory he sets out to find what memory is and in doing so collects up some of his own special objects and takes them to her, so sharing in her moments of recall. It encapsulates the theme of using objects to stimulate memory and I have used it successfully in many different settings.)

Frances, F. (2001) **The Arts and Older People in Yorkshire and the Humber**: Yorkshire Arts. (The loose-leaf folder design and straightforward approach makes this an accessible guide, covering examples of practice - in this region - how to set up a project, training, contacts, a very useful section on books, pamphlets, videos and relevant organisations.)

Gould, H. (2002) **What Did We Learn? The Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative (MGLI) 2000-2002**: Department for Education and Skills. (Report on this and the six other projects funded by the Dfes throughout the country, ranging from social inclusion - work with young people - family learning and older learners.)

Heaney, S. & Hughes, T. (eds) (1982) **The Rattle Bag**: Faber & Faber. (Varied and rich collection of poetry from all eras and countries, from Anon to Zabolotsky.)

Holub, M. (1977) "A Boy's Head": In Summerfield (ed) **Voices 3: an anthology of poetry and pictures**: Penguin. (This three volume collection is packed with inspiring poetry and pictures from all cultures and periods; like the bubbles useful in times of creative emergency!)

Hunt, C. & Sampson, F. (Eds.) (1998) **The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing in Personal Development**: Jessica Kingsley. (In two parts this book looks at the practical and theoretical nature of using creative writing as a therapeutic tool. The first section is a series of articles by practitioners in the field, based on work in various healthcare settings, as well as workshop and research projects, with very useful practical ideas. The

second part looks at the psychoanalytical, literary and philosophical basis for the work. )

Luke, H. M. (1987) **Old Age: A Journey into Simplicity**: Parabola Books. (An uplifting philosophical study of what it means to grow older, with insightful and stimulating references to five classic texts, including "The Odyssey", to "The Tempest".)

Marshall, S. (1972) **An Experiment in Education**: Cambridge University Press. (A very readable mixture of personal and professional development in the field of education, Sybil Marshall combines a fascinating account of her life and outlook, with her particular symphonic way of teaching. The book contains an invaluable range of practical examples which, although aimed at children, I have used to great effect across the ages.)

Moskowitz, C. (2001) **Playing with Poetry**: The Arts Council. (Full of inventive examples of group work with adults and children, where both come together and learn about one another by sharing their thoughts, feelings and memories through the medium of poetry.)

Opie, I. & P. (Eds.) (1992) **The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes**: Oxford University Press. (A comprehensive guide, which along with their other books on children's games provides a useful prompt when we recall our childhoods.)

Sargent, L. (2002) **Still Learning After All These Years: Writing a Training Guide in Creative Reminiscence Work**: Unpublished dissertation for Postgraduate Diploma in Creative Writing and Personal Development, University of Sussex. (Some overlap with the Guide but aims to examine the academic rationale behind the writing of this Guide, as well as providing a wider context to the work on which it is based, going back over a number of years.)

Sutcliff, R. (1970) **The Eagle of the Ninth**: Oxford University Press. (Story of the Ninth Legion, set in Roman Britain and inspired, the author says, by a wingless Roman Eagle excavated in Silchester and now in Reading Museum.)

Thompson, F. (1974) **Lark Rise to Candleford**: Penguin Books. (Her three volume autobiographical account of rural life on the Oxfordshire/Northamptonshire border at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Full of useful detail and insight into working class life and culture of this period -



including songs and games from the period - it effectively marks this period of change in English rural society.)

Thompson, J. (2002) **Bread and Roses**: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE). (A powerful testament to the importance of art and culture in lifelong learning, as well as looking at what is meant by social exclusion. She examines government policy, makes recommendations and also cites practical examples from the field.)

Ward, S. (1991) **The Countryside Remembered**: Cameron Books. (An evocative collection of photographs, from the Institute of Agricultural Life at the University of Reading, depicting British rural life from the 1930s-1960s.)

White, M. & White, D. (1990) **Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends**: W. W. Norton, New York. (An erudite discussion of the function of narrative in rites of passage, and the role it can play in promoting our psychological and social wellbeing.)

Worvill, R. (ed) (1973) **The Stars and their Legends**: Ladybird Books. (The stories behind the stars, combining astronomy and myth in a straightforward, accessible way.)

(Other useful texts include, old versions of the London A-Z, Picture Post collections, anthologies of traditional stories, such as Grimm's Tales, song and music collections, local and archive photographs.)