

AGE EXCHANGE: THE STORY SO FAR



1982-2002

A twenty year retrospective
by Pam Schweitzer

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Message from Paddy Ross, Chair of Age Exchange

I have only recently become Chair of Age Exchange and learning about our history has been illuminating and humbling. In twenty years Age Exchange has developed what at first seemed an interesting but rather marginal concept, using theatrical performances based around people's reminiscences as a means of brightening the often drab existence of 'pensioners', into a huge range of inter-related activities and techniques.

Age Exchange's work now makes a significant contribution to enhancing the lives of many thousands of older people and enlarging the experience of the young. We have always been based in South London and we have a tiny staff - and, regrettably, constant financial problems - but Age Exchange has built up a worldwide reputation for excellence and innovation.

On behalf of Age Exchange's Council of Management, I would like to express my thanks and admiration to Pam Schweitzer for her pioneering efforts in establishing Age Exchange in 1982/83 and for all her dedication and creativity in the years that followed. We also owe huge debts of gratitude to our staff and the many volunteers (including our trustees) who have helped with our work in so many ways. I should end by emphasising however, that Age Exchange could not even have been started - let alone continued to develop over the years - without the generous support we have received from our funders and other benefactors.

Message from our patron, Sir Sigmund Sternberg

I welcome this opportunity to congratulate all those connected with Age Exchange on the vital work they have been pioneering over the last 20 years. I am very proud to be associated with an organisation which has made such a significant contribution to society. They have worked to change the way we view older people and indeed the way older people view themselves. They have demonstrated in all their many wonderful reminiscence projects that older people are a resource with a vital contribution to make to a healthy society and that involving young and old in joint creative exploration of the past is a way to prepare a better future.

I wish to pay special tribute to Pam Schweitzer whose highly original and imaginative idea this was. I know she has worked tirelessly over the years to keep the charity going through good and bad times. She and her devoted staff have fought for the funds to maintain Age

Exchange's ambitious programme both at home and overseas. They richly deserve financial support and recognition so they can continue to deliver their unique service for the betterment of society.

Message from our patron, Glenda Jackson M.P.

Many congratulations on twenty years of truly innovative and ground-breaking work. The element of oral history, which is intrinsic to the work Age Exchange has always engaged in, is of benefit not just to those who share their memories with us, but to the much wider society for whom such a direct link with the past which is too often disregarded in great events, can be both revelatory and life-enhancing for all whom it touches.

Message from our patron, Dr. Richard Stone

For me, Age Exchange is amazing for the way performances never fail to move me to tears. I suppose it has a lot to do with war-time evacuation which took me away from home and father when I was three years old until I was six.

But the authenticity of acting based on words and memories of older people, directed by Pam and co-directed by the reminiscence contributors, is at the heart of Age Exchange. This creates a theatrical experience which is only rarely matched in an 'ordinary' theatre.

Age Exchange's recent therapeutic drama work with older people is not necessarily to an audience - who may or may not be moved to tears. The roots of this work are not far from the original exchange between professional actors and people with valuable memories.

Mrs Doreen Lawrence told the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry about her son Stephen: *"Had he lived, he might have been the one to bridge the gap between white and Black. He didn't see people as Black or white. He saw people as people"*.

And that is the secret of Age Exchange's magic. For Pam and all members of the team who gain inspiration from her, people of every and any background or age are seen as people, individuals each with his or her own value and his or her own story.

Age Exchange deserves wider recognition even than it already gets. May it continue for many more years. In our fragmented world we need more emotional maturity and courage like this.

Age Exchange Theatre: An idea takes shape

Theatre in Education

My own background was in theatre and education. The 1970s was a period when Theatre in Education, led by the Belgrade TIE team in Coventry, was at the peak of its achievement. This was theatre with an educational and social purpose, which used story, character, direct encounter and moral dilemma as a means of engaging children's interest in areas normally considered beyond their intellectual and emotional grasp. Alongside my teaching work, I was responsible for selecting and editing the finest productions in this field from across the country into three anthologies for different age groups published by Methuen in 1975. During the preparation of this series, I had the privilege of seeing skillful actors engaging even the most 'difficult' children and I was convinced of the value of theatre as a means of education, development and change.

Educational Drama

Alongside my TIE work in the 1970s, I was an English and Drama teacher in London comprehensive schools. This was a period when the educational drama movement was in the ascendant, led by two fine minds, Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. They perceived it as a means of personal and social development for children, as an invaluable learning method to be applied across the curriculum, as well as an area of artistic endeavour. Inspired by their ideas, working with a range of pupils, boys, girls and mixed classes, I enjoyed creating learning opportunities which were not dependent on academic accomplishment, but maximised young people's intuitive understanding, empathy and emotional intelligence.

Working with older people

In the early 1980s, I worked as an education officer in a voluntary organisation, now long gone, called Task Force. It was a forward-looking project based on the notion of working *with* pensioners (as older people were then known) rather than *for* them. However, the concept of empowerment was in its infancy at that time, and the majority of project work linking old and young was still firmly rooted in the old 'good works' tradition. Young people dug old people's gardens and painted their kitchens, often without the requisite skills, and left with a warm glow, feeling they had helped. I felt uncomfortable about this young-old relationship which reinforced the stereotypical view of old people as passive recipients of charity, bringing only their neediness and gratitude into their relationships with the young.

Discovering reminiscence

It was only when I had my first encounter with a reminiscence group (a very new idea at the time) that I saw how different a young-old co-operation could be. A group of rather frail women in their 80s and 90s were sitting in a sheltered housing unit lounge recalling their youth, their first experiences of the working world and their courting days. Their animation and their skill as storytellers, summoning up detail of dialogue and action from decades ago, effortlessly prompting one another in bringing it to life in the present, impressed me very greatly. It was as though I was actually meeting the 17 year-olds still alive inside them, and I felt sure that young people today could enjoy these stories and relate to the tellers. Further, the stories had great dramatic potential, and I knew that the process of dramatising them would require the young people to consult with their 'sources' as experts, thus reversing the more conventional relationship.

Inter-generational reminiscence drama

Working over a number of weeks with a group of sixth form drama students in the local comprehensive school, I watched them improvise scenes, check them back with the original story-tellers, develop them further and then perform to all the tenants of the sheltered house as the culmination of their project. Their authentic but original play delighted their older audience, and succeeded in generating further pleasurable exchanges of long-forgotten memories. Through this celebration of the older people's lives, the young people helped them to view their remembered experience as a positive asset with value and meaning in today's world. And the young people learned a great deal in the process.

The basis for a new kind of theatre

It was a short step from this and other early experiments with school students to the idea of a company of young professional actors making theatre from older people's memories. They would be able to perform far more widely than groups of school pupils who were strapped down by curriculum requirements. I wanted to make a new kind of professional theatre: Reminiscence Theatre, which celebrated the past in the present.

1982-3

Funding

After a year of preparation, Age Exchange Theatre Company is established in April 1983 with a GLC grant of £17,500 for 6 months. The grant is awarded through Ken Livingstone (GLC Leader) and Tony Banks (Chair of Leisure), with support from the TGWU (Transport and General Workers Union) and the National Pensioners Convention.

SHAPE, Help The Aged and Task Force subsidise performances for older people. Greenwich and Lewisham Arts Councils support performances in sheltered housing units.



***The Fifty Years Ago Show**, Age Exchange's first production, is a look at unemployment in the 1930s through the eyes of a south-east London family, based on extensive interviewing in sheltered housing units in Greenwich. The play is devised by the group of five professional actors with Pam Schweitzer, the director. It features material on the Blackshirts and Jarrow Marchers and songs from the 1930s. It tours local community centres and sheltered units, opening at Greenwich Festival. We receive brilliant publicity in all the local papers and two twenty-minute features on national television on the process of making the show and on the eventual product. We publish our first book of verbatim edited reminiscences collected during the research period and photos donated by our older contributors.*

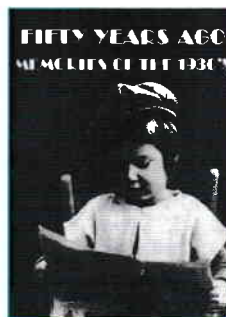
Age Exchange's Artistic Policy 1983

Our policy is to work with pensioners devising theatre programmes around their reminiscences and their current concerns.

Our secondary aim is to use theatre skills as a bridge between old and young in the form of creative and enjoyable activity.

We aim to involve pensioners in all aspects of our work, such as research, devising, production, performance and follow-up.

We also intend running practical reminiscence workshops in day centres, homes and hospitals.



Organisational developments

We audition actors and start rehearsals in Charlton House, a local community centre, on our first professional production.

We decide from the outset that we must preserve the wonderful memories we collect, so we produce our first book of memories and photos, to come out at the same time as the show.

This involves learning in a hurry about editing, photography, laying out pages, pasting up galleys and printing procedures.

1983

Funding

The GLC renews its grant to Age Exchange Theatre Trust. Co-operative Retail Services (CRS) provides funding for Age Exchange to produce a professional theatre production and a publication of memories and photos to mark the centenary of the Co-op Women's Guild.

Organisational developments

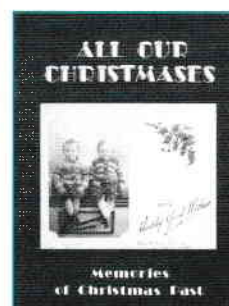
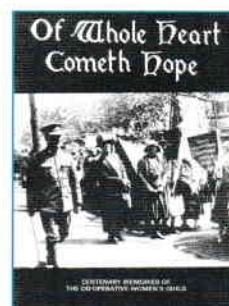
The CRS loans Age Exchange an old furniture van with windows cut into it for the professional theatre company to use on tour.

Age Exchange appoints its first administrator, working from Pam Schweitzer's house.

We now have a steering committee of supporters which meets quarterly. We are applying for charitable status.



***Of Whole Heart Cometh Hope** is a specially commissioned show to celebrate the centenary of the Co-operative Women's Guild (a social reforming and welfare organisation which was particularly important to working women in 1920s-30s). The show is specially designed for large venues, including Central Hall, Westminster. This piece, researched by Pam Schweitzer and Chrys Salt, is written by Chrys Salt from verbatim transcript. We produce a commemorative illustrated publication.*



***All Our Christmases:** written by Chrys Salt from the verbatim memories and writings of members of Pam Schweitzer's reminiscence class held in the local adult education institute, plus interviews with residents of local sheltered houses. The play is a look at a family Christmas in the 1920s - 30s, featuring social background and neighbourhood celebrations and much music of the period, plus Christmas songs. The cast plays to community centres and old people's units. We make a book of Christmas memories to take out with the show, sponsored by the Midland Bank.*

1984



Organisational Developments

Age Exchange appoints a permanent stage and company manager for the first time.

Development of campaigning shows:

This is a period when the Pensioners' movement, led by Jack Jones and supported by the TUC and the GLC, is at its most active. They commission us to write and perform new shows for their rallies and conferences.

The Return of the Bad Old Days is a satirical musical extravaganza opening in Jubilee Gardens for a huge crowd of 10,000 pensioners, then playing to pensioners' groups across London and for the Labour Conference in Brighton.

Alive and Kicking is a musical satire based on Little Red Riding Hood with the Granny as the heroine fighting to retain her independence and gain concessions for pensioners. Performed for the Greater London Pensioners' Rally at Jubilee Gardens in front of thousands of OAPs.

A Place To Stay: a multi-cultural show featuring memories of older Caribbean, Indian and Greek Cypriot people living in London. The show is in English, Punjabi, Gujarati and Greek with specially composed music and a touring Musical Director, Jo Richler. We perform for ethnic elders' groups in UK, in the Purcell Room and at the Frankfurt Festival of ethnic minority theatre. We produce a book of memories in 8 languages (with English translation) with support from the Commission for Racial Equality and Greenwich Leisure Services. We make our first Photo Exhibition with text of memories in all languages for touring to libraries, ethnic elders' groups and schools.



My First Job is a group-devised show based on verbatim reminiscences of starting work in the 1920s and 30s given by residents of sheltered housing units in Greenwich and Lewisham. We are featured on BBC TV. We produce a book of memories and photos with financial support from Help The Aged and practical assistance from students at Goldsmiths College and Essex University.

1985

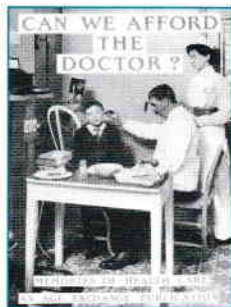
Funding

The Nuffield Foundation funds 2 professional productions with researchers, a writer, designer, musical director and a cast of 5 players.

Charities Aid Foundation give us £5,000 for a fund-raising consultant to help us map out a future.

Publications

We publish two of our most successful titles this year, with help from the Nuffield Foundation. These edited reminiscences and photos are used in homes and schools to stimulate dialogue and exchange and as the basis for reminiscence work.



What Did You Do In The War, Mum? A musical show on women's wartime work. A verbatim reminiscence script is written by Joyce Holliday for a cast of five women. Paula Gardiner is our musical director for the first of many collaborations. This show tours nationally to great acclaim. Extracts are featured on TV and performances given at the Royal Festival Hall as part of the London-wide Exploring Living Memory Festival supported by the GLC. In the photo, Iris Gange, an ex-Waaf, works with the cast in rehearsal.



Can We Afford The Doctor? A look at family healthcare before the National Health Service, researched and written by Joyce Holliday, directed by Pam Schweitzer. Musical direction by Sandra Kerr. Age Exchange is televised throughout the rehearsal and performance period by Television History Workshop. We co-operate with them in the making of a 90 minute TV documentary.

Organisational Development

We hire a rehearsal room at 11 Blackheath Village (the current exhibition space) and a small office upstairs for the administrator, so that the organisation can be independent of the Schweitzer household

Computers, printers and on-going support are supplied to Age Exchange by the GLC

New Photo Projects

Two exhibitions of photos and text are prepared by Pam and Alex Schweitzer for display in libraries, schools and homes to stimulate reminiscence conversations with users of these facilities. This gives an added dimension to each new project.

Reminiscence Theatre & Publications

Evolving a working method

By 1986, Age Exchange is a well-established professional touring theatre company with a national reputation for creating original Reminiscence Theatre productions of a high artistic quality. We attract plenty of media interest, with reviews in national, local and specialist press, and several television and radio features. A working method has evolved with key stages, each of which need planning and funding. Topics are chosen with care; they must have a wide appeal and relate to the lived experience of our older audiences. They must reflect the important changes in society over the twentieth century, as seen through the eyes of 'ordinary' people. We focus on the big themes: health, housing, employment and unemployment, the war years, migration, love and family life.

The research period

The research period of an Age Exchange theatre project involves tape-recorded group reminiscence sessions and in-depth individual interviews. Through the local press and through older people's clubs and organisations, we recruit up to about 80 interviewees. Most of the people we interview have not previously recorded their memories and see it as a welcome opportunity to look back over their past lives, focusing on particular periods or issues which they may not have spoken about for decades but which were important for them. For our interviewers, often the writers and actors who will make the eventual show, it is a privilege to listen to and record these stories and to have access to a wealth of new dramatic material. Having contact with the 'sources' sharpens the actors' sense of commitment to the project as well as giving them ideal background for the characters and situations they will play.

The verbatim approach to scripting

We transcribe verbatim on to computer all the stories we are given, and from this material we create a dramatic scenario and the play text. This decision to use the actual words of the interviews in the play script gives it a specially authentic feel for our audiences. They recognise the phrases and speech style of contemporaries, and identify strongly with the material.

The rehearsal period

The director appoints a designer, musical director and stage manager and then the play is cast with

professional actors, and goes into an intensive rehearsal period like any other professional theatre company. But there are significant differences too. The original story tellers attend rehearsals to see how their story is being presented, to help the actors perform with maximum authenticity and to recommend appropriate songs, props and costumes in what is essentially a collaborative process.

Our touring circuit

We have developed a very unusual national touring circuit of small venues such as homes, day centres and hospitals, which are not normally associated with live professional theatre, interspersed with large town halls and civic centres where several groups of older people are bused in to see the show together. Our scenery is light and adaptable to suit different venues. We devote a lot of thought to costumes and props which will stir memories.

The role of music

All the music in our shows is live and of the period, as this is such a powerful trigger of memories and emotions for our audiences. We work very closely with musical directors and we always recruit actors with vocal and instrumental skills. We look for actors who can adapt well to the performance challenges presented by playing for older audiences and coping with the often surprising and spontaneous responses of older people whose memories have been suddenly awakened.

Sharing memories after the show

The performances are always followed by informal discussion over a cup of tea between the actors and the audience concerning the memories evoked by the play, and this makes the event more rewarding for all concerned.

We decided early on that we must make the fascinating stories we collect during the research period available to a wider audience in a permanent form. So every theatre project has an illustrated book of edited memories to go with it, even though this is a huge additional undertaking, requiring separate funding. The very old people who have recorded their memories for us have the satisfaction of seeing them in print as well as on the stage. It also greatly increases the likelihood of care staff taking up the opportunity for further reminiscence work after the players have gone if we can leave behind us copies of the book which contains all the stories in the show.

1986

Funding

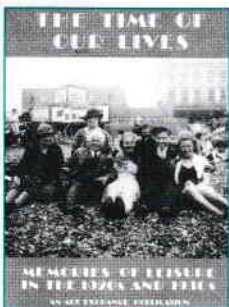
The Nuffield Foundation start an endowment fund of £50,000 for Age Exchange and we aim to raise a further £200,000 through a coherent fund-raising policy.

The Kings Fund and City Parochial Foundation support the new Age Exchange Reminiscence Project, so we are able to appoint our first Reminiscence Co-ordinator, Caroline Osborn, to support and develop this growing area of our work.

The London Boroughs Grants Scheme funds a 6-day reminiscence training course for our reminiscence project workers who will work in pairs across London in residential homes and hospitals.



Many Happy Retirements, a series of cameos based on interviews with recently retired people about adapting to their new situations. This show is devised for pre-retirement courses. Age Exchange collaborates with the Pre-Retirement Association, the Greater London Association for Pre-Retirement, the Institute of Community Studies and a writer and two actors. A book featuring the material collected on this theme, plus exercises and scripts is published by Age Exchange, including specially commissioned cartoons. This turns out to be our longest running show. It is regularly updated to suit contemporary experience and is still on the road in 2002.



The Time of our Lives, a new musical show about leisure and romance in the 1930s written by Pauline Devaney, from stories told by older people in the reminiscence class (run by Pam) through the Greenwich Adult Education Institute and in the Eltham Middle Park Look Back Group. Guest director is Barrie Wilmore.

Organisational Developments

The Reminiscence Project is launched following successful pilots in south and east London. Our 16 newly-trained project workers introduce 8-week reminiscence projects to homes across London.

Age Exchange takes on 3 **young unemployed people** through the Manpower Services Commission to help with office tasks and stage management duties on the road.

We launch the **Age Exchange Youth Theatre** with 2 groups aged 10-13 and 14-18 under direction of Julian Waite. They start with a Christmas memories show and a play about hop-picking

Reminiscence Projects & Training Days

Changing attitudes to Reminiscence

Since Age Exchange began touring reminiscence theatre to older people, the climate surrounding reminiscence work has changed radically. In the early days, it was not uncommon for exhausted care staff to respond to our arrival by instantly grasping the opportunity for a much-needed rest in a very busy day. But increasingly over the years, care staff and nurses have recognised that by enjoying a performance with their patients, they can see what they respond to and follow up our stimulus with more rewarding dialogue in the days afterwards. Many studies over the years have shown that reminiscence work benefits care staff as much as older people, increasing their respect for clients and their own job satisfaction.

A surprising response from carers

Sometimes our actors have come back to base feeling that they have not managed to communicate effectively with an audience apparently too frail to engage with the fast pace of the action in their performance. But often the staff in these venues have told us that the reaction of the audience was way beyond what might have been expected, and that we have laid a foundation for further reminiscence work on which they would like to build. This strong positive response to our theatre work impels us to develop an alternative form of reminiscence which is directly tailored to the needs of small groups of frail elderly people in residential homes across London.

The basis of the Reminiscence Project

Following three pilot projects in a home, a day centre and a hospital ward, we are ready to launch the Reminiscence Project. There are two purposes behind this project. The first is to stimulate the older people and give them an enjoyable time. We would hope to encourage past memories they may have in common and maybe, as a result, help them to make new friendships in what can be a rather lonely environment. The second is to offer on-site training and support to care staff by running eight sessions with their client group, gradually passing responsibility over to them in the hope that they can then continue the work.

Training a skilled team

We raise separate funding for a Reminiscence Project Co-ordinator and to subsidise the sessions so that

homes can afford them. We also raise the funding to give reminiscence training over a six-day course to a group of sixteen arts-based freelance workers. These Reminiscence Project workers then go out in pairs to a particular home, day centre or long-stay hospital ward, exploring memories with the older people and their care staff in a variety of ways. They demonstrate many activities through which memories can be explored, beyond just talking about the past. Artists with complementary skills (drama and art; music and dance) work together, so that care staff can take on the methods which feel most comfortable to them. In the de-briefing periods after each session, the next one is planned and staff are given support to continue the work.

Reminiscence Arts Residencies

The Reminiscence Project has been running since 1986, with many permutations to suit particular venues and situations. One of our most successful recent projects, which we hope to repeat and develop in the future, has been an extended reminiscence arts residency. 'Transformations' is a 3 month project supported by Arts, Libraries and Museums in Bournemouth and Bournemouth Social Services. It results in a new play, 'The Journey', in which frail older people from Alumhurst Day Centre perform their early 20th Century memories sensitively supported by David Savill, Bernie Arigho and Age Exchange Reminiscence Project workers. New horizons open up as to the creativity of the frailest of elderly people, and we are planning to explore this potential further in the coming years.

Training courses for professionals

From 1987 onwards, we have offered short training courses for health and social service professionals at the Reminiscence Centre. People travel from the farthest ends of the country to meet others with a similar interest and to receive specialist training to sustain them in their often lonely home patches. They return for further training courses in different aspects of reminiscence, and we gradually build up a national network of practitioners.

The Age Exchange Training programme now runs at the Reminiscence Centre on about 35 days a year, and we are currently running about 40 training workshops annually in the regions. We have a loyal team of freelance trainers, many of whom have gained their own reminiscence skills through working with Age Exchange. New specialist areas, such as hospice care and refugee work, are opening up and will be explored in the future.

The Reminiscence Centre- A new chapter

A high street presence

In 1987, we have the opportunity to lease the shop and remaining offices attached to our rehearsal space. Now we can have a high street presence and open our doors to the public, especially to older people and those who work with them. We invent the idea of a Reminiscence Centre as we go along. It must be a hands-on museum full of objects and images of everyday life in the 1920s to 50s to jog the memories of our older visitors.

It must have a gallery space for changing exhibitions so we can invite our visitors to co-operate actively in creating new displays around their reminiscences. It must offer practical suggestions and ideas for professionals seeking to develop reminiscence work. It must be a stimulating environment for the general visitor, with a café to attract local people to drop by and see what is going on. We aim to attract visitors of all ages and cultures by creating a new centre as far removed as possible from any known institution.

Age Exchange is 'at home'

It is a big jump from being a touring theatre company to being a museum and community centre open six days a week with visitor facilities and adequate staffing. Instead of a single office housing the administrator and director, with the rest of our workers fully engaged 'on the road' with touring theatre work and outreach projects, we now need to be 'at home' to all comers. We recruit Centre workers and we call on all our older supporters who have participated in reminiscence projects to help us prepare the centre.

All hands on deck

There is a period of frantic activity between January and May, with an enormous amount of building and refurbishment work led by Alex Schweitzer and a team of volunteers. An MSC community project agree to take on the decorating work, including the shop frontage. A local film maker is full of disbelief at the time-table we have set ourselves, and she makes a documentary film of the run-up to the opening, when the museum and its contents, the gallery and the first exhibition, the café, the loos and the retail department must all be in place.

Two lucky chances

We have a real scoop when the fittings and contents of an old Hackney corner shop going back

50 years are donated to us by the Davis family, who even help us set up the shop display in the way they remembered it from the early 1930s. We are lucky too with our opening exhibition. In the thirty years before the war, the building was a photographer's studio and many local people now in their 60s to 80s had their photographs taken there. They now bring in these portraits and their associated memories, and through the resulting exhibition, they re-meet other local people of their generation.



A grand opening

The grand opening of the Reminiscence Centre arouses considerable media interest, helped by Glenda Jackson, our patron, and we get off to a very lively start. Within our first year, we win the top Brightening Up London award and attract thousands of visitors of every generation and culture.

It takes some time for local people to understand the Centre. Some try to buy the old items in our display, others consider it a junk shop where they can conveniently empty their attics. In fact we are given so much memorabilia, that we proceed to make up from it a series of thematically arranged Reminiscence Boxes that we can hire out to reminiscence workers across the country.

We are 'discovered'

The local schools discover we are a good place for their children to visit, whether to take part in a theatre project with older people and professional actors, or just to listen to older people talking about their own childhood in the days before television. Day centres for older people get to hear about the Centre, especially when it has full disabled access added after the first few months. They like to bring their older people for an outing to a place which is guaranteed to stimulate them and where there are friendly volunteers to chat with them over tea and traditional cakes. It is particularly pleasing that health and social service professionals visit us to brighten up their ideas and gain new energy for their work with older people.

Can we keep it all going?

The challenge is for our still very small staff to keep all the Age Exchange balls in the air. Can we add the Reminiscence Centre to our theatre, project and training work and make out of all the different parts of our project a coherent whole?

1987

Funding

Age Exchange buys the lease on 11 Blackheath Village in January, with help from Help The Aged and The Baring Foundation. We start converting the building straight away from a card shop into the world's first Reminiscence Centre. Alex Schweitzer designs and refurbishes the ground floor, with much volunteer labour. The Manpower Services Commission undertake the decoration as a youth employment project.

Centre Exhibitions

Jewish East End Weddings
Health and Beauty in 1920s-40s
Caribbean Health Remedies
The Heyday of Bakelite

Shows

A Merry Little Christmas

A new professional touring show traces a family through the 1930s, their separation in the war years and their post-war Christmas together. Musical direction by Paula Gardiner.

Hopping Mad

A new Youth Theatre project directed by Julian Waite based on hop-picking memories.

Books

Health Remedies & Healthy Remedies, reflections on Caribbean health and diet collected by Community Project workers on 6-month training scheme with support from the Commission for Racial Equality.

Organisational Developments

Volunteers help to run the Reminiscence Centre which is now open to the public. Two part-time workers take responsibility for running the Centre and dealing with visiting groups. Disabled access to the Reminiscence Centre is provided by the Peter Minet Trust and the London Boroughs Grants Unit. The Gallery provides a light flexible exhibition space.



Opening of the Reminiscence Centre, May 29th by Glenda Jackson, filmed by BBC and ITV. We also have a film made of the lead-up to the opening, called *A Place To Remember*. The opening exhibition is of photos taken in the building when it was a photographer's studio before World War II. Many local people lend photos and attend the opening.



From Stepney Green To Golders Green, a new Jewish reminiscence show with Yiddish music. It is devised by the actors with Pam Schweitzer from verbatim reminiscences collected in London's Jewish day centres and care homes by Pam and several Jewish friends. The cast, Charles Wegner, Linda Polan and Gillian Gallant, tour nationally to Jewish communities in synagogue clubs, day centres and residential homes.

1988

Organisational Developments

A very run-down neighbouring building is leased. It is converted by Alex Schweitzer to give a theatre scenery, props and costume store and a rehearsal space. This is necessary now that we have our programme of changing reminiscence exhibitions in the main building and no space closed to the public to prepare our shows.

The Reminiscence Boxes Project is launched.

Caroline Osborn and Pam Schweitzer work with Age Exchange volunteers to create resource boxes of thematically arranged artefacts and documents for use by older people and their workers in schools, homes and hospitals.



Good Morning Children is a Youth Theatre production by Pam Schweitzer assisted by Community Project workers. A book of schooldays memories and photos is produced with financial support from the Inner London Education Authority and the older people read their stories as part of the performance. Lisa Wilson joins Age Exchange as resident designer for the next eight years.



Across The Irish Sea, a verbatim professional production based on interviews with older Irish people in London Irish clubs and churches. We explore childhood memories of family life and schooldays in Ireland, of leaving home to find work in London, marrying and growing old over here. This play also tours Northern Ireland and Ireland. A book of Irish reminiscences and photos is prepared for publication. Top to bottom in the photo are Donal Cox, Denise Hirst and Mandy McIlwaine.

1989

Organisational Developments

Reminiscence Training Days

now take place on a regular basis in the Centre, co-ordinated by Caroline Osborn. We host around 30 training days each year for health and social care professionals and for community arts and museums workers. The Department of Health now supports our reminiscence work.

The Reminiscence Project is now well established with financial backing from London Boroughs Grants Unit and the City Parochial Foundation.

We run about 20 placements per year across Greater London, with eight sessions for each placement. We train the staff and help them to set up reminiscence work with their frail elderly clients.

Exhibition

A Day in the Countryside is our new centre exhibition about cycling and rambling in the 1930s, designed from memories by Lisa Wilson with Alex Schweitzer.

Youth Theatre

Streetwise, a new Youth Theatre production by Julian Waite, with giant masks designed by Jez Allerton, based on stories of the streets where our volunteers grew up in Greenwich and the surrounding area. We perform in the Blackheath Concert Halls.

Professional shows

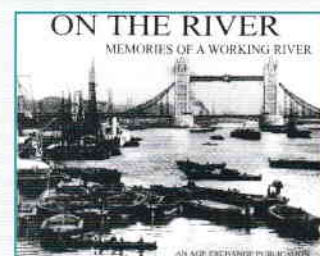
Christmas At War, a new professional touring production devised by Andy Andrews and Pam Schweitzer with Rebecca Clow and Clare Summerskill, all long-serving members of Age Exchange Theatre Company.



Good Morning Children, our first Theatre in Education project for primary schools supported by the Inner London Education Authority. Whole classes of children spend the day in the Centre experiencing 1930's classroom life and learning, with professional actors in sustained roles in the morning and older people as witnesses in the afternoon. The exhibition space becomes a classroom with old-fashioned desks, ink-wells, teaching aids, raised teacher's desk, etc and this is also the set for the play.



On The River, a new professional production based on memories of the River Thames as a working river, marks the centenary of the Dockers' Tanner Strike of 1889. A hard-backed book is researched and edited by Pam Schweitzer, Andy Andrews and Alex Schweitzer with financial support from the Transport and General Workers Union and London Docklands Development Corporation and News International.



1990

Funding

The Baring Foundation supports Age Exchange with funding for a Press Officer and promotional materials.

With support from the London Borough of Lewisham and London Boroughs Grants Unit, a photographic darkroom is built at Age Exchange and disabled access created to the basement of the building.



Books

A hard-backed book of memories and photos of wartime evacuation is produced by Pam and Alex Schweitzer, Andy Andrews and Pat Fawcett with support from the Inner London Education Authority.

It is launched at the Imperial War Museum by David Jacobs who wrote the introduction.

Show

Fairground is a new Youth Theatre show by Jezz Allerton, based on memories of the fair on Blackheath in the 1930s.

Exhibition

We launch a new exhibition entitled '**A Day At The Fair**' to coincide with this and publish a new book of memories on the same theme.

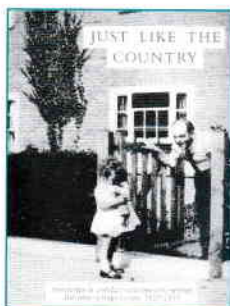
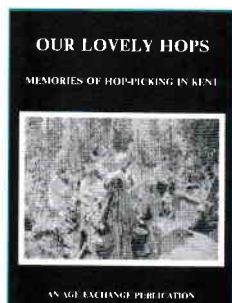


Goodnight Children Everywhere, a Theatre in Education programme at the Reminiscence Centre. Children from local primary schools spend the day at the Centre experiencing the evacuation of wartime children in 1939 and meeting real-life evacuees. It is featured in a 15 minute item on BBC TV, introduced by David Jacobs. A 3-dimensional exhibition is created in the Centre on the same theme, followed by an exhibition of schools' work arising from the project.



When We Were Young was our first rural reminiscence project. Based in South Somerset and sponsored by the District Council and South West Arts, Age Exchange works throughout the year in village schools, libraries and residential homes. The work is co-ordinated by Sarah Clevely and Paul Swatridge with Pam Schweitzer. The project culminates in a festival of reminiscence and a book recording the work of the project.

1991



Several New Productions and Publications

Dear Mum, a new one-man show on evacuation by Andy Andrews tours sheltered houses, homes and clubs.

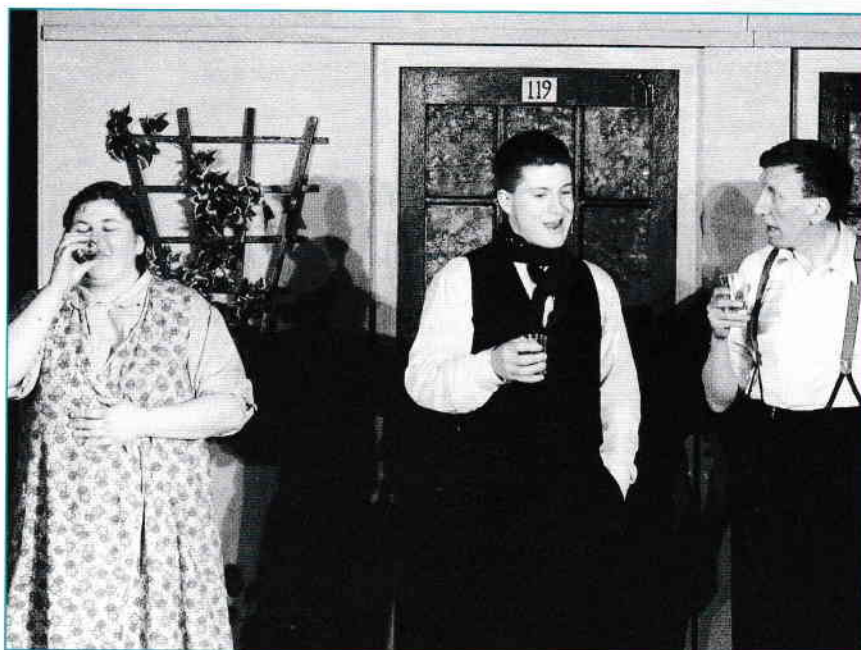
The Blitz Show, a reminiscence show by the Youth Theatre produced by Neil Appelt and Pam Schweitzer, with scenes by our older volunteers who perform their own memories for the first time. Scenes by young and old are alternated in the production and interspersed with readings by the older people from their new book, **Living Through The Blitz**, funded through a special award from Age Resource.

Christmas At War plays in London and in Freies Werkstatt Theater in Cologne where we participate in an international festival of older people's theatre with groups from Germany, France and the USA and begin a long-standing relationship with Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz, directors of FWT.

Keeping Warm In Winter, a specially prepared sketch by our volunteers for the Department of Health and Help the Aged for the launch of their Winter Warmth Line.



Hopping Mad, a new Theatre in Education Programme for junior schools by Dianne Hancock, involving whole classes of children in a day-long visit to the Centre to work with professional actors and older people who went hop-picking themselves. We have a special Centre Exhibition on the same theme and publish a book of photos and memories entitled **Our Lovely Hops**. The project is supported by Thames/LWT Telethon.



Just Like The Country, a new show by Joyce Holliday with an accompanying book, based on interviews with residents of the inter-war 'cottage estates' built by the London County Council on the outskirts of London between the wars. The book is launched at the Royal Institute of British Architects by Rod Hackney, Community Architect and President of the RIBA. The show tours the council estates which now have a large elderly population. Subsidy is given by the Doron Foundation, London Boroughs Grants Scheme, Ford Motor Company and Marks and Spencer.

1992

Capital Projects

This year we manage to buy the freehold of all our buildings and acquire the adjoining Old Bakehouse building for use as a training and development centre. Support is forthcoming from the Nuffield, Baring and Lankelly Foundations, the Tudor Trust and St James's Trust. The Nuffield Foundation agrees a £100,000 mortgage. The Bakehouse is tenanted until 1995 but in the meantime, the rent helps us pay off the mortgage

Age Exchange goes into Europe

Following an exploratory discussion with Rosemarie Golze of the European Commission, Pam Schweitzer is commissioned to carry out a feasibility study into touring reminiscence theatre and workshops across Europe. This is in anticipation of the 1993 European Year of Older People.



***Routes**, our first Indian show is devised by bi-lingual performers from the memories of older Indian people living in south east London. The workshops leading up to this production are filmed by Tartan TV, an independent TV production company and shown as part of the Look East series. **Routes** travels to Cologne where it is extremely well received at the Freies Werkstatt Theater.*



***A Day at the Seaside** is a popular exhibition designed by Lisa Wilson (top left) to coincide with the opening of our summer touring show. We invite some of our new European friends to visit the Centre and participate in our activities. This leads to many return invitations to Denmark, Ireland and Northern Germany.*

Popular shows receive a second airing

***The Time of our Lives** (summer) and **Just Like The Country** (autumn) are revived for national tours, directed by Pam Schweitzer with musical direction by Paula Gardiner. We create a new exhibition in the Reminiscence Centre on the theme of **A Day at the Seaside** to go with the summer show.*

A new Youth Theatre show

***Clara's Story** is based on one older woman's autobiography featuring her childhood in an orphanage. She travelled to London from Devon to see what our children had made of her story and was very moved by their celebration of her life.*

The Centre five years on

A week in the life of Age Exchange

In the five years since the opening in 1987 of the Reminiscence Centre, considerable changes have taken place in the day to day running of the organisation. In one week chosen at random in 1991, we monitor the numbers and kinds of people with whom we work. We record the following:

- 400 people visit the Centre to see our collection and visit the hop-picking exhibition
- 200 telephone calls are received regarding shows, books, training, centre visits and projects
- 50 mail orders for our books are dispatched
- 150 schoolchildren participate in our Theatre in Education show on hop-picking at the Centre
- 10 health and social service workers attend a follow-up training day by one of our freelancers
- Andy Andrews performs his one man show on evacuation to 30 old people in Enfield and 60 pupils at Abbey Wood School
- Andy gives talks on our forthcoming show on inter-war housing estates to 2 Greenwich groups
- Pam talks at Greenwich Teachers' Centre about our resources
- Our older volunteers perform in Whitehall for the Department of Health Winter Warmth Launch
- Weekly meeting with 7 staff members and monthly meeting with about 30 regular volunteers

Touring professional shows

Two or three new professional reminiscence theatre productions are still being created each year, and these shows tour nationally. Each one has a publication of memories and photos to accompany it. The tours need to be planned and supported from the base and accommodation found for our players wherever they are performing. We have recently expanded our theatre work with ethnic minority elders and we perform our first two-language production, 'Routes' in English and Punjabi to ethnic elders groups across the country.

Reminiscence training and projects

We are running up to 50 reminiscence training days a year and a wide-ranging programme of reminiscence projects in homes and hospitals across London. We are also generating a wide range of new reminiscence resources, including boxes of thematically arranged objects and images for use by practitioners in what is proving to be a rapidly growing field in the UK.

We go international

Friends abroad

We have had increasing contact with groups from other countries, and we have occasionally performed abroad, especially through La Flamboyance older people's arts movement in France and the German Freies Werkstatt Theater in Cologne. There is news circulating in London in 1992 about a forthcoming European Year of Older People and this seems the right moment for Age Exchange to go international.

A commissioned feasibility study

Pam Schweitzer sets off for Brussels and is lucky enough to make contact with an official at the Commission who is fascinated by the potential of reminiscence theatre to heal old wartime wounds and foster new collaborations. Pam is commissioned to conduct a feasibility study, visiting projects in several countries to establish links and ascertain genuine interest.

International touring funded throughout 1993

Age Exchange is funded to provide a year of touring theatre and workshops in Germany, Denmark, Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The professional company tours shows during 42 weeks of the year, playing in seven countries to approximately 20,000 people. Alongside these performances, Pam Schweitzer offers 25 reminiscence training workshops to interested professionals in all these countries.

The Good Companions

We also buy in expertise from abroad in making theatre with older people around their lived experience. This work has been highly developed by the Cologne company and we invite their directors, Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz, to train us and our older people in the necessary devising and performing skills. We now have our own older people's theatre company called The Good Companions. They are an instant success and give performances to enthusiastic audiences in Cologne, Brussels, Lille, Dublin and Roscommon.

Our first International Conference

In the autumn of 1993, we host our first international conference, entitled 'Reminiscence: A Celebration' and we attract practitioners from across Europe, thus laying the foundations for the European Reminiscence Network. The Commission is greatly impressed by our year's output and agrees to fund us to develop what we have begun.

1993 The European Year of Older People



"Reminiscence: A Celebration", our first international conference, is held in Blackheath (at Age Exchange and the Blackheath Concert Halls) in September. Over 4 days we explore key themes in reminiscence work as applied to different contexts: health, education and community arts with 250 delegates from across the world. Left to right: Caroline Osborn, Professor Faith Gibson, Pam Schweitzer, Joanna Bornat

Organisational Developments

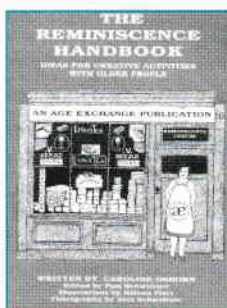
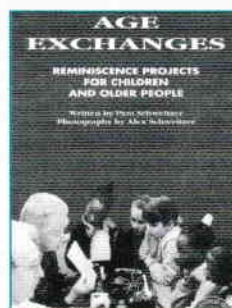
In response to requests from many trainees, Age Exchange produces 'How to do it?' books about reminiscence work:

The Reminiscence Handbook by Caroline Osborn is published by Age Exchange with financial support from the London Boroughs Grants unit and the Helen Hamlyn Foundation. This offers would-be reminiscence workers practical advice and examples and has been selling well ever since.

Age Exchanges, Intergenerational Reminiscence by Pam Schweitzer, published with support from the European Commission, RSVP and Help the Aged is launched by John Bowis, Minister of State for Health at our international conference.



The Good Companions, our new theatre company of older people, set up with help from our Cologne colleagues, Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz who direct their first show, **I Remember When...** This show plays to much acclaim in Belgium, France, Ireland and Germany as well as in the UK. For most of the group this is their first experience of performing and, for some, their first time out of England.



"A splendidly practical 'how to do it' book which contains innumerable creative suggestions about how to encourage older people to recall their own past history and share it with others."

Professor Faith Gibson on The Reminiscence Handbook

People and Solidarity between Generations



This is an extremely busy year for our professional theatre work with 5 touring productions: **What Did You Do In The War, Mum?**, **Can We Afford the Doctor?**, **Across The Irish Sea**, **A Merry Little Christmas** and **Dear Mum**, a new one-man show on evacuation by Andy Andrews. These productions tour the UK and Europe reaching new audiences and creating many important international friendships and working links. Age Exchange gave over 200 professional performances, reaching approximately 20,000 people. Wherever the company perform, Pam Schweitzer gives reminiscence arts workshops and introduces the idea of creative inter-generational reminiscence projects.



Centre Exhibitions

It is a busy year for the Centre too, with 25,000 visitors and exhibitions around the theme of women's war work and the role of the co-operative women's guild in working women's lives.

European Training & Skills Exchanges

International Training Days are held at the Centre offering UK trainees the chance to work with skillful practitioners we have met on our European visits.