

Part 1

1.1 By extension: a Cambridge perspective

Extension lectures, extramural studies, lifelong learning, continuing education: the labels change over time. Partly, this is because the very concept of extramural studies keeps evolving; partly it is because each earlier label carries connotations later to be thought unfortunate. In some corners of every university, the very idea of extramural studies is treated with condescension: how do part-time adult learners, studying for personal fulfilment or for professional development, really fit into the modern world of the research-intensive university? The condescension can be heard trickling down the walls of Whitehall too: the last Labour Government dismissed university continuing education as ‘recreational’ or ‘lifestyle’ learning — implying that a weekend spent by mainly well-heeled, mainly white middle-class, often elderly, students studying Latin, say, or Forensic Archaeology, was a lifestyle choice no different from spending a weekend improving your golf or enjoying ‘treatments’ at an expensive health farm.

The term ‘extramural’, though now out of favour, is still apt and reasonably accurate. I shall stick with it. Universities — especially old ones — do often resemble medieval walled towns with their gatehouses, towers and halls. University College Durham, where I spent five years as a student, is housed in a castle dating back to the earliest years of the Norman Conquest. Trinity College, Cambridge, boasts an intimidating turreted and crenellated gatehouse. Even the twentieth century Wills Tower of Bristol University echoes the great cathedral towers of the fifteenth century. The cliché ‘ivory tower’ is itself redolent

of an exotic, exclusive world, one that is out of date and out of touch. So, the idea of scholars leaving their research to go and take their scholarship to those outside the academic community is well summed up in 'extramural'. Indeed, the University of Cambridge defines the function of its Institute of Continuing Education as 'a conduit for the transmission of the University's research and scholarship'. However, this 'top-down' definition of extramural study is inadequate, both as a description of what actually happens in extramural studies within Higher Education (HE) and as a manifesto for what ought to happen. The work of continuing education departments involves both less and more than this.

Such a form of educational outreach is not simply a kind of Victorian paternalism, though the genesis of extramural studies in the modern sense certainly stems from the 1870s and had its origins in Cambridge. As early as 1112, the Lincolnshire Abbey of Croyland, in those days one of the great European centres of Benedictine learning, sent monks out across the Fens to give lectures in local barns — anywhere in fact that could conveniently house a group of eager listeners. Where did the Croyland monks come first to deliver courses on Philosophy to the benighted locals? To Cambridge. According to this tradition, then, Cambridge begins its university life as a Local Centre, an extramural outpost of Croyland, which already had more than two centuries of academic study behind it.

Is an extramural department, is extramural study itself, compatible with the ideals of a university? There are those in Cambridge (and probably in other places too) who doubt it. 'Open-access Cambridge qualifications' sounds a contradiction in terms. Again, Cambridge is one of the few universities to insist upon the uniqueness of what it offers as having something to do with its location, with Cambridge itself. There is no Cambridge campus in Kuala Lumpur or Calcutta or Qatar: why, then, should there be extramural outposts of Cambridge in Clacton, King's Lynn or Colchester?

This sounds amazingly parochial in an age when the concept of an 'Open University' has won almost universal acknowledgement, and when 'online learning' is taken absolutely for granted. Today Cambridge itself acknowledges 'blended learning', the combination of online tuition and support with face-to-face teaching. Part-time qualifications — at least at postgraduate level — are becoming a fact

of life here: students jet in from all over the world for regular teaching sessions (perhaps for a week or for a summer school) during, say, a two-year Masters' programme. At other times they keep in touch with their course director, their supervisor and their fellow students through a VLE, an online 'virtual learning environment'. Nevertheless, the University takes the view that all courses and qualifications offered in its name should have some element of 'Cambridgeness' about them. No doubt, those other universities still offering formal extramural teaching and learning opportunities feel the same.

Faced, then, with these tensions and changes in the way part-time adult higher education is perceived and provided, especially when seen from a Cambridge perspective, the following questions need to be asked: *What is continuing education (in the sense of extramural study)? Where did the idea come from? What is it for? Who is it for? How does it relate to the central functions and values of a university at any time but particularly today?*

'Today' is an important context: since 2007¹ fundamental changes to the way in which part-time adult students in higher education are funded in England have drastically reduced the opportunities for such education. The roll call of universities that have closed their departments of continuing education since that date is a melancholy one. Even those to have survived struggle to support the traditional liberal arts and humanities curriculum: funding in an age of austerity focuses on SIVS (Strategically Important or Vulnerable Subjects) and STEM subjects: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Providing continuing professional development (CPD) at one end of the Higher Education spectrum, and up-skilling or re-skilling the workforce at the other, is the priority now. The old tensions between 'education' and 'training'; between 'professional' and 'academic'; between 'inutility' and 'utility' — to borrow terms used by Newman in his classic work, *The Idea of a University*, 1852 — are as strong and perhaps as corrosive today as they have ever been.

1 In 2007 the introduction of the ELQ [Equivalent or Lower Qualifications] policy removed funding from almost all part-time adult students studying any course accredited at a level equivalent to, or lower than, a qualification they already possessed. This drastically affected many university departments of lifelong learning with their traditional focus on liberal arts programmes.

In 1995, not long after the re-unification of Germany, I was invited to give a lecture in Magdeburg (formerly in East Germany) on British education. The Otto-von-Guericke University had only been founded in 1993, and its Education Faculty was largely concerned with retraining teachers of Russian to become teachers of English. So rapidly indeed had the Faculty grown that it had had to find new accommodation and the only available building in Magdeburg of sufficient size was the former headquarters of the Stasi, the State Secret Police. My audience was a rather sullen cohort of former card-carrying Communists. When my lecture was over, however, the first question came quickly. A middle-aged woman said, 'Professor Barlow' (flattering but inaccurate) 'you have said some startling things. If you had said in this room five years ago that the object of education is to make people think for themselves, you would probably have been arrested. Did you really mean that?' Sensing an opportunity for an expression of *perestroika*, I replied that I had certainly meant it. It seemed — and seems — self-evidently true. 'How many of you in this room believe that the job of education is to teach young people to ask questions and to challenge received wisdom?' I expected a forest of hands, but not one went up. 'Professor Barlow,' said my questioner with mordant satisfaction, 'if you had asked that question five years ago in this room you would probably have been shot.'

There was nothing remotely original about what I was saying. In 1871, James Stuart, then a very young Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, had given a lecture to the Leeds Ladies' Educational Association. This lecture, entitled *University Extension*, is usually taken to be the starting point for extramural studies in any modern sense. Stuart began with the following definition and description:

The object of all education is to teach people to think for themselves, that is the direct or specified object of what is called Higher Education. Reading and writing are one of the many means of acquiring education, they constitute what is called primary education, and supply men with better tools, so to speak, to work with. But reading and writing are not education any more than a fork and knife constitute a good dinner, and a man who is educated in the truest sense may even be unable to read or write, for an educated man is a man who is capable of thinking about what he sees.²

2 James Stuart, *University Extension* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1871) p.3

Stuart's argument was radical for its day: the idea that an illiterate person might yet be truly educated would have amused or irritated his colleagues back at Trinity. But Stuart went further:

The object of true higher education is to lead out the faculties of the mind, a process which may be done by means of any subject, and is frequently better performed when the subject by means of which the education is imparted is not of a nature which can be immediately utilized; in fact, the subject by means of which higher education may be best given depends rather on the teacher than on the taught, and a man leads out the faculties of the human mind best by means of that subject which he is best able to teach.³

Here Stuart is following directly in the footsteps of Newman who had argued twenty years earlier that 'Liberal education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence.'⁴ For Newman, the word 'liberal' (in the sense of 'free') was an important qualification. He contrasted it with work he defined as 'servile': 'bodily labour, mechanical employment and the like, in which the mind has little or no part'. He argued:

As far as this contrast may be considered as a guide into the meaning of the word, liberal education and liberal pursuits are exercises of the mind, of reason, of reflection.⁵

Newman's definition of education is, however refreshing, an exacting one. He distinguishes fiercely between education as a systematic process and study as recreation. 'I consider', he says, 'such innocent recreations as science and literature are able to furnish will be a very fit occupation of the thoughts and the leisure of young persons, and may be made the means of keeping them from bad employments and bad companions'; but he continues:

Recreations are not education; accomplishments are not education. Do not say, the people must be educated, when, after all, you only mean, amused, refreshed, soothed, put into good spirits and good

3 *ibid.*

4 J.H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green and Co.1852) p.121

5 *ibid.*, pp.106–7

humour, or kept from vicious excesses... . Education is a high word; it is the preparation for knowledge, and it is the imparting of knowledge in proportion to that preparation.⁶

How does Newman's view of education, as expressed here, help us to understand the purpose and value of lifelong learning? There is an echo perhaps of the lipping circus owner, Mr Sleary, in Dickens's *Hard Times*, who reminds Mr Gradgrind that 'People mutht be amuthed, thquire, thomehow ... they can't be alwayth a-working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a-learning'.⁷ But, more ominously, it is as if Newman sees the provision of quasi-intellectual entertainment as a strategy designed to keep the lower classes from revolting. He would, on this reading, see the idea of 'recreational learning' as having little to do with real education, and he certainly appears to see the whole process as one that requires the learner to be entirely passive — like, in fact, Gradgrind's 'little vessels' having facts poured into them. We can, however, better see the value Newman places on education by noting that he is an advocate of self-education. Self-education, he asserts, is a better form of education than one which has the absorbing of information or the passing of exams as its primary aim. People who are self-educated, he argues, are likely

to have more thought, more mind, more philosophy, more true enlargement, than those earnest but ill-used persons, who are forced to load their minds with a score of subjects against an examination.⁸

Liberal education is, for Newman, ultimately a form of self-education, for he actually suggests that a university which had no teachers and no curriculum might be preferable to one dominated by instruction, rote learning and exam cramming. In such a place, he argues, men (it is, again, only men who feature in Newman's idea of a university) are more likely to learn 'principles of thought and action'.

It is clear Newman sees examinations as belonging to schemes of training, not of education — certainly not of liberal education. My own teacher of English started my A level course by announcing to us: 'Gentlemen,' (my schooling was men only, so Newman would have approved of that) 'for

6 *ibid.*, pp.143–4

7 Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854) Bk. III Ch.viii

8 Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p.149

five terms I shall teach you, and together we will explore English Literature and why it is worth studying. In the sixth term, I shall not teach you, but I will train you to pass the examination.’ And he did.

The value that Newman attached to liberal education for *young* undergraduates has applied equally to education for adult learners of *any age* in Higher Education. But whereas Newman envisaged university experience as only possible in a place like Oxford, where students would live an enclosed collegiate life, James Stuart envisaged from the start ‘a sort of peripatetic university the professors of which would circulate among the big towns, and thus give a wider opportunity for receiving such teaching.’⁹ Stuart’s approach was more practical but no less idealistic than Newman’s. In 1867 he accepted an invitation from the newly-formed North of England Council for promoting the Higher Education of Women to give a series of eight weekly lectures on Astronomy in each of the cities — Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Leeds — that made up the Council.

Anxious to make these lectures as educational as possible, Stuart invented the lecture hand-out (though he called it a syllabus). As originally conceived, this was a very brief summary of the lecture, simply a series of headings or single sentences. It was designed both to help the students follow the lecture as it unfolded and also to write up fuller notes of their own afterwards. Later Stuart added a series of questions to each syllabus, inviting students, if they wished but without obligation, to produce written answers to be marked by the tutor before the next lecture. From this simple beginning the syllabus developed to become a prime feature first of University Extension Lectures, then of extramural, and now of continuing education courses. To satisfy the demand for discussion with the tutor and for opportunities when the tutor could respond to questions afterwards, or before the next week’s lecture, Stuart instituted the principle that tutors should be available to talk to students before the start of an evening, and that the evening itself should then be divided into two sessions: an hour-long lecture, followed by an optional class which would take the form of a discussion — firmly directed by the tutor — of the subject introduced in the lecture. This format is still recognisable in many of the remaining continuing education courses today.

9 James Stuart, *Reminiscences* (London: Chiswick Press 1911) p.155

By 1871 Stuart thought he had generated sufficient enthusiasm for his peripatetic university to justify asking Cambridge to support the scheme. He sensed that the University would soon need to demonstrate its commitment to the world outside its walls, public engagement being as much an issue then as today. He was right about the timing, and the University eventually adopted his proposal for a trial period of three years, placing the Extension Lectures programme under the aegis of the Local Examinations Syndicate, later re-named the University of Cambridge Local Examinations and Lectures Syndicate. Three lecturers were appointed to give lectures on behalf of the University in Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, travelling between the three cities each week. This idea of lecturers being appointed specifically to lecture outside Cambridge on behalf of Cambridge thus enshrined, from the start, the idea of ‘Cambridgeness’: the work of these teachers both emanated from Cambridge and was supervised by Cambridge. The Syndicate was responsible for assuring the quality of what was being taught and examined, and was responsible too for guiding the programme as it grew in size and scope.

The same principles apply today. The work of the Institute of Continuing Education is controlled by the General Board of the University, which appoints a ‘Strategic Committee’ to manage the affairs of the Institute on its behalf. The permanent academic staff (the lecturers) of the Institute are all university appointments, and it is these lecturers who are responsible for the academic quality of all the Institute’s teaching — their own, of course, and that of the tutors who are teaching on their behalf, whether in Cambridge or outside.

Stuart persuaded the University that ‘one of the advantages of the system about to be inaugurated would be that it would offer a more liberal education to those about to become teachers in elementary schools.’¹⁰ In this he was not promoting the idea of teacher training, but of teacher education. He had seen at first hand how the mechanics’ institutes and the elementary schools he visited were struggling to provide good teaching to students and pupils of all ages because the teachers themselves were not adequately educated:

The more ignorant our pupils, and the more they are necessarily engaged in the task of earning their daily bread, the more necessary it is that the one who attempts to teach them should

10 Stuart, *Reminiscences* p.172

be well versed in his subject far beyond the limits up to which he teaches it. It is only then that the process becomes truly educational, and ceases to be a simple imparting of unsuggestive and undigested facts.¹¹

From the start, therefore, Stuart's extension lectures were designed to combine the 'inutility' (Newman's word) of the liberal arts with the utility of improving the education of those who were themselves to become educators. The majority of these would be women, and it is not the least important part of Stuart's legacy that the Extension Lectures responded from the start to the demand for higher education for women: Stuart himself was one of the earliest lecturers to travel to Hitchin to lecture to women at Emily Davies's nascent Girton College, and he was instrumental in encouraging Jemima Clough (who had been Hon. Secretary of the North of England Council for promoting the Higher Education of Women) to establish what would become Newnham College, in Cambridge itself.

There was nothing élitist about Stuart's view of extramural studies: he wished to raise the level of education available from working men's and mechanics' institutes, and he was fully prepared to meet, mix with, and learn from, the people he wished to teach. This has always been an essential aspect of extramural teaching. He went, for example, to Northumberland and stayed with miners in their own homes:

I spent a very interesting week in the pit villages. I stayed with some pit men; and we all slept in an upstairs room, and washed ourselves at a tap in the back garden. There were many of the pitmen whose houses I visited who had very remarkably good though small libraries, with such books as Mill's *Logic*, Carlyle's *Hero-Worship*, Fawcett's *Political Economy*, and others of that kind.¹²

Stuart did not make the mistake of patronising his students. Through his work he quickly discovered there was often far more appetite for learning, and sometimes far more genuine erudition, among his adult students than among the young undergraduates back in Cambridge. He helped to establish the principle that adult students could work — if they wished to — for credit by submitting

11 James Stuart, *A Letter on University Extension*, 23 November 1871, Cambridge University Library [UL] mss. BEMS 1/1

12 Stuart, *Reminiscences*, pp.176–7

written assignments, and that this credit could be accumulated. He also introduced end-of-course examinations, so that students who had both performed well during the course and reached an acceptable standard in the examination should be awarded a Certificate, signed by the Vice-Chancellor of the University. He went even further (though not successfully), proposing that such a qualification could lead to admission to a full-time degree programme at Cambridge with exemption from the first year of the programme.

Stuart's concept — of extension lectures providing continuing education for previously disenfranchised adult learners in the form of recognised Higher Education level Certificates which could become a passport to part-time or full-time university study leading to a degree — was visionary. His vision has today been largely realised, with many universities now accepting and indeed welcoming such students onto first degree programmes, often with exemption from part of the course; but, ironically, not at Cambridge.

Stuart worked tirelessly for extramural education, while still holding a professorship at Trinity. His work with educationally disadvantaged communities and sections of society led eventually to his becoming an MP, first in Hackney (1884–1900) and, later, for a North-East constituency, Sunderland (1910–1914). As early as 1882 he had stood as a Liberal candidate for the University of Cambridge where, exceptionally, the system of election was by open voting, and he records in his *Reminiscences* that 'The largest number of clergymen voted against me, I suppose, than has ever voted against any individual person.'¹³ When to his Parliamentary work he successfully added membership of London County Council, it was time to sever his formal academic links and he resigned his professorship in 1890. As a gift of thanks from the University, he received a silver salver and an Address signed by most members of the Senate (but not all; there were still some who disapproved of the very idea of extramural studies):

We, the undersigned Resident Members of the Senate, having learned from your letter to the Vice-Chancellor your intention of resigning your Professorship in the University, desire to express our sense of the great public service which you have rendered in connexion with the University Extension movement.

13 Stuart, *Reminiscences* p.235

By yourself first delivering specimen courses of lectures, and afterwards strenuously advocating and ably organising their wide-spread establishment, you did for the country at large, and for our own and other Universities, work which we regard with sincere respect and admiration.

The degree in which Cambridge has, during the last twenty years, come into useful relations with sections of the community which were previously regarded as beyond the sphere of its influence is, we hold, largely attributable to your inspiring initiative and to the wise principles of administration which, mainly under your guidance, the University laid down.¹⁴

It was right that this Address should have recognised the importance of Stuart's work, both nationally and in other universities, for the influence of his project spread far beyond Cambridge. It is appropriate to note that as long ago as 1890, Cambridge acknowledged its responsibility to those who had previously been 'beyond the sphere of its influence'. Extension lectures, extramural studies, lifelong or leisure learning, continuing or even post-professional education — all of these have owed a debt to James Stuart and all of them, by whatever current label they are known, contribute a great deal more to the University's commitment to widening participation, than simply accepting more 18-year old students from state schools and colleges.

Not, it must be acknowledged, that everything Stuart did succeeded at first attempt. He himself admitted, in the Inaugural Address he delivered to the Second Summer Meeting of University Extension Students in Oxford, 1889, 'we started on too ambitious a scale and we had to suffer for it.' As early as 1891, one of the first histories of the movement, *University Extension Past, Present, Future*, an Oxford perspective written by H.J. Mackinder, Staff Lecturer to the Oxford University Extension, and M.E. Sadler, Secretary to the Oxford Delegates for University Extension, had concluded:

The promoters had in their mind three different classes of person: women, young men in the position of clerks or shop-assistants, and working people. The first idea was to have in each town a course specially adapted for each of these classes, and delivered on different days. But this proved, in almost every case, too costly.

14 Stuart, *Reminiscences* p.176

The larger towns were naturally the first to avail themselves of the new proposals. They contained a greater number of leisured or educationally-minded people; they furnished a larger area from which to draw subscriptions.... [But] the fact was that in most places no really general demand for higher education existed. It had to be created almost everywhere, and in many towns the work has still to be done. In every place a few of the leading inhabitants, the majority, perhaps, of the professional classes, a fair number of tradesman, and not a few working-men, were keenly alive to the value of the lectures which the University of Cambridge had decided to offer. There was abundant reason that their desire for higher education should be met; but the difficulty was that there were so few people who really felt the desire.¹⁵

There is plenty in this analysis of the situation in the nineteenth century which one can recognise from other sources. As early as the 1840s, novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell had noted the appetite of working men to extend their education:

In the neighbourhood of Oldham there are weavers, common hand-loom weavers, who throw the shuttle with unceasing sound, though Newton's "Principia" lies open on the loom, to be snatched at in work hours, but revelled over in meal times, or at night.¹⁶

And twenty years after Mackinder and Sadler were writing, E.M. Forster's Leonard Bast, in *Howards End*, is a classic instance of an insurance clerk anxious to improve himself by reading Ruskin and going to concerts in the Queen's Hall. Forster had met and knew people such as Leonard Bast: he himself taught for Working Men's Colleges and for the University of Cambridge Local Examinations and Lectures Syndicate. Much, indeed, that *University Extension* describes still obtains: Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*, after all, only updates both Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the archetype of a working-class woman who aspires to better herself through education — with the Open University replacing the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). But the rigid social hierarchy implied by the original scheme to segregate

15 H.J. Mackinder and M.E. Sadler, *University Extension Past, Present, Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1891) pp.26–7

16 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (1848) Ch. 5

women, clerks and working-men has largely vanished, along with Working Men's Institutes and single-sex universities; though of course Jemima Clough's Newnham College remains resolutely women-only.

It is, incidentally, ironic that Newnham should have been the setting for Virginia Woolf's celebrated polemical lectures, later transposed into *A Room of One's Own*. Not only did she complain that her father Leslie Stephen had deemed higher education inappropriate for women — or at least for his own daughter — but Stephen himself had contributed to the latest Macmillan 'English Men of Letters' series, advertised explicitly as being 'for university extension students'.

That the concept of extramural studies should have been, in spite of setbacks, so successfully developed in the twenty years since Stuart launched his first series of Lectures is a tribute to his vision and energy: it was an idea whose time had come. By the end of the First World War this momentum, accelerated as it had been by the founding of a number of university colleges, by the influence of the WEA and by organisations such as the YMCA providing lectures and classes for soldiers during the war itself, meant that the adult education movement had come of age. Cambridge recognised this fact in 1924 by approving the splitting of the combined Local Examinations and Lectures Syndicate and setting up an autonomous Board of Extramural Studies.

The headquarters of the old Syndicate were in a building at the entrance to Mill Lane in Cambridge; when the University opened the offices of the newly-established Board next door to the Syndicate, they called the building Stuart House. It was (and is) one of the most impressive buildings of the inter-war period in the city; and Cambridge's pride in it can be judged from the elaborate achievement of the University's arms dominating the pediment of its Queen Anne-style façade. Stuart House, then, at the time of its opening in 1926, was a powerful statement of the University's debt to James Stuart and an equally powerful statement of its commitment to lifelong learning.

From this date to the start of the Second World War, the fully evolved pattern of local centres, semi-independent of the parent university though sometimes managed by resident tutors who spent six months of each year 'up-country', organising, teaching and supporting students, had been established. Book boxes, supplying books for

each course from a special university-based extramural library, were transported to local centres. Of particular importance was the creation of university tutorial classes, usually of twenty-four weekly meetings running for three years and provided jointly by universities and the WEA. These classes offered a challenging level of student democracy which many universities would still find alarming today. As a post-war WEA leaflet, *The University Tutorial Class: Questions answered for Students*, explained:

A university tutorial class is much more than a group of students listening to a lecture. It is an exercise in self-government, a joint enterprise which depends for its success upon co-operation between all concerned: WEA branch, students and tutor. The WEA branch recruits students for the class and undertakes all the necessary local organisation. The students choose their own subject of study. They express preference for the tutor under whom they wish to work. They co-operate with him in the preparation of the syllabus, or master plan, of the three-year course. They appoint their own class secretary and librarian. The tutor teaches.¹⁷

The idea of a three-year programme was to allow time for students to reach a sufficient standard of proficiency in study skills for their work to be marked at university standard in the third year. What is important here is that nothing is imposed: everything is negotiated, and the teaching — as this same leaflet explains — is ‘approached through the experience and interests of the students themselves, moving at a pace set by their needs’. In many ways, this remains today the fundamental skill of tutoring a continuing education class. A WEA leaflet of the same period, *A Statement for Tutors*, spells out the crucial difference (now, as then) between lecturing to 18-year-old students who have all got three A grades (and, now, at least one A* into the bargain) and teaching adult students on an open-access course:

Although he will be expected to give much the tutor will have much to gain from the university tutorial class. He will have to reconsider the subject matter of his specialist knowledge and re-examine its assumptions constantly under the weekly scrutiny which they receive from men and women with a much wider

17 Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), *The University Tutorial Class: Questions answered for Students*, (nd.) p.1

range of experience and specialist knowledge than he is likely to meet anywhere else... The exchange of speculation with men and women who, by virtue of their character and human experience assimilated during a long life, may in some respects be his superior gives him a standard against which to measure his own conception of life and the place of his specialist knowledge in it.... If he is honest he will recognize the influence of his students upon his own formation and count this as a rich reward.¹⁸

Speaking personally, I certainly recognise this description; so, I am sure, will most teachers who have worked in adult education. Throughout the twentieth century, writers and cultural commentators from E.M. Forster and T.S. Eliot to Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart all developed their philosophy of education and of literature through such teaching, often in the first half of their careers. For me, it has been the other way around. The most significant decision of my career was taken before my career even began: in the week before my A levels, prompted by my English teacher (the same one who told us he would teach us for five terms and only train us to pass the exams in the sixth), I abandoned my initial idea of reading Law at university and determined to become a teacher myself. It was absolutely the right decision, and one I have never for a moment regretted. At different times and in different places I have taught pupils and students and teachers from the ages of 8 to 88 (and occasionally older still) but no teaching has been as challenging nor — certainly — as rewarding as the classes I have taught which are still most accurately described by the single term, extramural.

At the heart of such teaching, it seems to me, lie three principles. First, there is the awareness that you are likely to learn as much from your students as they will learn from you. Second, your own knowledge, scholarship and research must underpin every class you take: you cannot busk your way through two hours of lecture and discussion with extramural students. However, thirdly you are not there to dispense wisdom, nor necessarily the latest knowledge from the ivory tower, to grateful students who will lap up every word you utter: you are there to teach people to think in new ways through sharing your own subject with them, and giving them an insight into why that subject matters.

For me, that subject has been English Literature.

18 Workers' Educational Association (WEA), *A Statement for Teachers* (nd.) p.3