

Adult Education

Night School

Education of those older than the school leaving age has always been important and was perhaps more important when children left school at 11: most adults could not write, and a quarter could not read. Soon after its opening [in the 1850s], Hook Norton National School started a night school. The hours were from 6-8pm (and those who arrived late were made to compensate by finishing later). It was partly for children who were falling behind at day school and partly for those who had started work. In 1868, most of the pupils were aged 12-21, but a few were over 21. Teaching was provided 54 times in the year, probably twice a week during term-time. In contrast to the day school, religious instruction did not have priority. At the end of the year more than half of the 38 pupils passed at least one examination in Reading (18), Writing (11) or Arithmetic (13).

Workers' Educational Association

An Oxford conference of 1903 led to the creation of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). It drew together the Co-operative movement, trade unions, churches and the University Extension Movement (particularly Oxford) to improve learning opportunities for the working class. In most parts of the country, there developed educational opportunities for workers who had left school early. Chipping Norton and Banbury had Adult Education Centres. "Night School" became a standard way to gain technical and professional qualifications.

In 1927 Rewley House opened in Oxford, affiliated with the University, and developing into the present-day Oxford Department of Continuing Education.

After the Second World War adult education expanded beyond its initial working-class aspirations, to one that provided further education, for students of all standards, on a wide range of subjects. There were still vocational classes and formal teaching of academic subjects, but there was a large increase in hobbies and

leisure-based interests. Local centres advertise courses in Calligraphy, Making stitched cards, Roman mythology, Hedgerow medicinal plants, and Art appreciation.

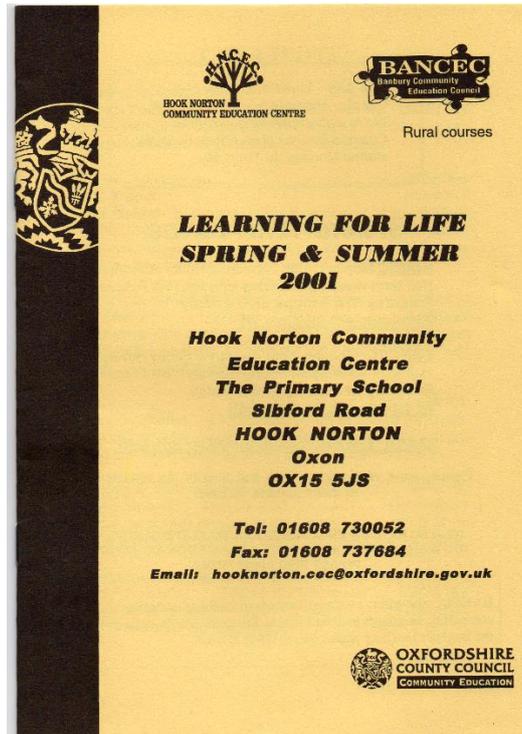
The WEA continues, subsidised by the National Skills Agency working in partnership with the Government Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Oxfordshire is in the Southern Region which concentrates limited resources to areas of deprivation, especially the South Coast towns. Nevertheless, there is a centre in Banbury.

Community Education in Hook Norton

Throughout the country the period from 1970 to 2000 was a boom time for community education. There were educated adults who had an appetite for further learning, mothers needing respite from child care, and people seeking society, a new skill, a slimmer figure, interest and fun. In the early years there was little internet competition. For the student, costs were low. Although direct funding from LEAs was small, indirectly it was considerable, including school facilities, heating, cleaning and caretaker.

In Hook Norton, Alan Sibson foresaw the opportunities to develop classes, not only for those needing further education in traditional subjects, but for the increasing numbers who wanted classes in crafts, hobbies and leisure pursuits. With the cooperation of the School Head, Andrew Bowen, a wide-ranging programme developed, utilising the WEA, affiliated societies and the Oxford Department of Continuing Education. The classes took place in the school premises on The Bourne. Linda Buchanan, who for seventeen years continued the development, initially had her office-headquarters in the broom cupboard compartment of the Art Room. The Art Room had been commandeered for community education mainly because in the early days it was the only classroom with adult size furniture. Accommodation for staff and students became more elegant after the move in 1993 to the new school on the Sibford Road.

Housing developments of the 1980s added considerably to the local clientele, but the reputation of Hook Norton's programme drew students from a 25 mile radius. The programme became self-sufficient and able to create new courses according to



Booklet advertising 38 courses available in Hook Norton between January and June 2001.

Published by Hook Norton Community Education Centre, 2000

local need. There were classes four days a week, sometimes both morning and afternoon; evening classes on three days, and some Saturday day schools. Each year about eighty courses were advertised, attracting 1,000 enrolments a year; some people enrolled in more than one class. The annual programme issued in late summer was awaited eagerly, caused much discussion, and some competition for places on the more popular courses. The autumn enrolment evening was a major event “like the January sales”; there were queues stretching from the school to the pavement by the road.

Most of the courses were non-vocational: arts, crafts, upholstery, dance, keep-fit, hobbies, literature, languages, history, current affairs. In later years government- subsidised computer skills courses were popular. Most of the courses were for adults. There was no age limit: one lady in her eighties attended both tap-dancing and yoga. There were some courses for children: gymnastics, art, and French, with Saturday day-schools. A video was made showing some of the classes

in 1984; see “Film, Television and Radio”, in the [Views of Hook Norton](#) section of this website.

Local government reorganisation in 1998-1999 placed Hook Norton within the Cherwell (Banbury and Bicester) sector of the county, and no longer with the villages of West Oxfordshire. Hook Norton’s community education became an outpost of the East Street centre in the Grimsbury district of Banbury. Aims, priorities and practices changed. The village programme diminished gradually and finished in 2003.

Nationally, funding and society’s needs changed. Good inexpensive on-line education courses became available. People worked long hours and more women were in paid employment; parents spent more time transporting children to, and supporting them in, out-of-school activities; and older people were healthier and retired earlier. Those who had benefited from community education had been shown the way that others might follow without LEA funding or management.

Local initiatives replaced many of the former courses – a sort of privatisation, as popular teachers organised fee-paying classes, and groups of class-mates formed village societies. Hook Norton Literary Group, the Local History Group, Art Appreciation and other societies originated in Community Education classes. An interesting current example is the monthly 50-minute session “Carry On Learning” for those who cannot travel far or sit too long. It was developed in 2003 by Janet and Paul Warwick, aided by a grant from Age Concern. The number and variety of societies and clubs in Hook Norton are a legacy of, and testimony to, the strong tradition of community education in the village.

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