

## **Nottinghamshire Network of U3As Report on the D H Lawrence In-depth study group**

### **Origins**

An article by Len Street, in the final issue of 'U3A News' in January 2012, calling for more learning in U3As to be at a deeper level, suggested the idea of this group. The Nottinghamshire Network of U3As agreed that a group learning about D H Lawrence would be appropriate in the County and that members from all 22 U3As would be welcome to join. It was agreed that Jean Hogg should be the organiser. The intention was that the group would have several elements: firstly to read and discuss selected works by Lawrence; secondly to have 'add-on' activities such as visits; and thirdly that each member would select an area of personal interest to study

### **Participation**

More people were initially interested in the group than managed to stay the course. This was not through any lack of interest. In fact the reverse – they left through an inability to commit to the level of work they knew they would want to do. Those of us who continued found that our enthusiasm grew through the year.

### **Reading**

We began with 'Sons and Lovers'. Most of us had read it before but found that our increased maturity brought greater understanding and enjoyment. After this 'Sea and Sardinia', an account of a brief trip the Lawrence's made to the island of Sardinia in the early 1920s, provided a big contrast. For most of us this was the first time we really appreciated Lawrence's sense of humour. A selection of short stories, including 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' and "Strike Pay' brought the mining communities of Nottinghamshire to life, whilst later in the year Lawrence's later novel 'The Lost Girl' illustrated how his horizons expanded. A session on poetry was enjoyed in a garden on a hot day when the heat made it easier to understand the powerful feelings in the well-known poem 'Snake'.

### **'Add-on' activities**

The Regional structure in the East Midlands meant that Nottinghamshire's plans became known in Leicestershire and gained us the involvement of Malcolm Gray, Chair of the D H Lawrence Society. His expertise and knowledge benefited us enormously and he also arranged various sessions which deepened and extended our work. He arranged a fascinating day with Professor Christopher Miles, Director of both the film 'The Virgin and the Gypsy' and a biographical film about Lawrence called 'Priest of Love'. About eighty people attended the day, at the Phoenix Film Theatre in Leicester, from various U3As in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and the D H Lawrence Society.

Malcolm Gray also arranged a lecture from Dr Hilary Hillier, an expert on Lawrence's use of dialect, and for this we read several short stories, particularly 'Strike pay'.

### **Individual Studies**

Throughout this time we were beginning to work on our own studies, which grew out of our personal interests and sometimes out of a direct connection, such as an ancestor who worked at the Surgical appliance factory where 'Bert' Lawrence worked as a young boy. At the start of November 2013 we met to share the results of our work. The D H Lawrence Society has offered to print and bind it for us. Some of the work is not quite finished but we hope that a booklet will be produced in 2014.

The topics studied were:

1. Lawrence and the Chambers family
2. Lawrence and connections with the 'surgical appliance' factory
3. Lawrence's work as a pupil teacher
4. Lawrence's use of imagery in 'Sons and Lovers'
5. Lawrence – how is he viewed and studied today?

Sadly one of our members was not able to finish her project. She had not read any D H Lawrence when the group began but soon became very enthusiastic. However she became ill and died at the start of December and will be remembered by everyone in the group with great respect and affection.

### **Practical issues and lessons for the future**

The group ran very smoothly, with no organisational difficulties, essentially in the same way as a conventional group in a single U3A. By the end our members were from just three U3As. We met in both a member's home and a room in a pub, where we only had to buy coffee, not pay rent. Members were reliant on using their cars, but that is not unusual in rural areas. The same process would be effective for another in depth study group or a minority interest group. In addition, the following points are important:

- A tutor is not essential
- The leader is a 'convener' or 'facilitator'
- Members value meeting others with a shared interest from other U3As
- Commitment to the 'theme' of the group is essential
- Working in different ways enhanced the experience for everyone

All members of the group agree that we all gained knowledge, enjoyment and satisfaction from our involvement and hope that others will feel enabled to instigate something similar.

Jean Hogg  
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