

Vine Project on show

So impressive was a sewn and painted banner put together by Open Age members at the Second Half Centre that the charity was invited to exhibit it at Kensington Central Library during March and April.

The contributions were created at sewing and art classes at The Second Half Centre between 2024 and 2026 and became known as The Vine Project as a metaphor for renewal, with new shoots symbolising creativity, flowering at different stages of life.

Tina John writes:

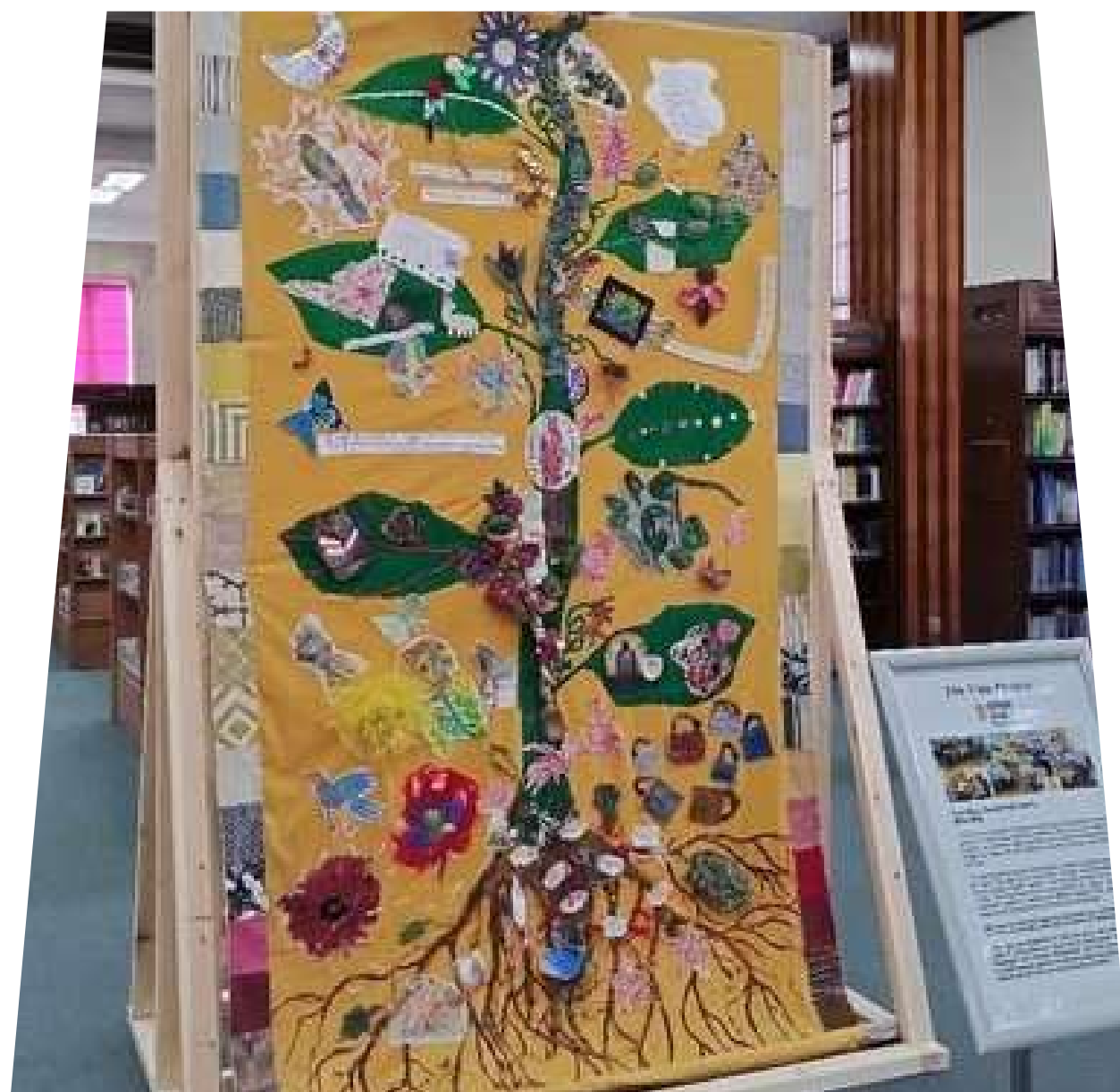
More than 25 Open Age members have been involved with The Vine multimedia project which took over two years to complete.

The project is a combined creative partnership between the sewing and painting & drawing classes and was designed to reflect on life's learning process.

Sewing class tutor Alex Goodwin and painting and drawing tutor Mary Milner were very inspirational in guiding the class.

The Vine banner depicts several stages of life, including symbols of poetry, birds, and tree roots, plus paintings, stitchwork, and beadwork.

Florence Charles, one of the participants, had this to say: "This piece was about a battered poppy in remembrance of all the fallen soldiers, but the knitting which I did represents fallen leaves."



It was an interesting project to work on because different media were being used."

The banner demonstrated how wide and varied art can be, showcasing different skills of all who participated. Another member, Kitty Molloy, also felt the project was well worthwhile. She said: "I learned many things. I learned to sew and knit, all of which helped me very much."

"Meeting people from different countries has encouraged me to learn more about their cultures, and as a result I was able to get on well with them. We helped each other."

"It reminds me of the tree of life and makes me think about what people can do. It therefore can open new horizons for the individual."

"The tapestry says something to you in a way that encourages people to learn more."

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Portraits at Pimlico

Lots of Open Age members are interested in creating art and many have attended classes, but if you want a portrait, James McQuilkin is your man.

It all started with a childhood interest in art back home in Northern Ireland, and then in Corby, Northamptonshire, to where he moved in the 1950s. This developed from dabbling to completing three or more oil paintings a year.

But it became a more regular hobby in 2006 when he retired and at the same time received a leaflet through the door from Open Age about an art class in Pimlico. He joined the class and has been an active member since then.

Former Senior Co-ordinator at St Margaret's Centre Vivienne Mitchell said: **"Through the art classes James has developed from oil painting to watercolour, which is a much quicker medium. He can now produce a fantastic painting in a couple of hours!"**

"James painted the landscape which was reproduced as one of Open Age's 2025 Christmas cards: the original is now on display at St Margaret's Centre, where he attends the weekly Art class on Thursday afternoons. He is very talented."

James, who moved to London in the 70s, mainly favours landscapes, but wanted to expand his repertoire into portraits. One of his classmates suggested he try painting one of the other members, and Tina John was keen to volunteer.

The portrait took about four hours to complete, with stage 1 being a sketch, stage 2 the actual painting and stage 3 final touches.

Tina says of her portrait (right): **"I feel James has really captured my likeness. Posing for the portrait was a challenge, because James was meticulous. I'm very happy with the finished portrait which James has kindly given to me and I will frame it and hang it in a place where I can admire it every day!"**

Promotions

Two Senior Centre Co-ordinators were promoted this spring to take charge of two Open Age centres instead of one.

Laura Taylor (New Horizons) was recently promoted to Centre Manager of both New Horizons and St Margaret's, while Andrea Carrington (Second Half Centre) has the same role at Second Half Centre and The Avenues.

Further changes are:

India Deiana is the Senior Coordinator at St Margaret's (replacing Vivienne Mitchell who retired) and Marie Smith is the Senior Coordinator at the Avenues.

Also key to the structure are the three Centre Coordinators of Emma Bugg (New Horizons), Leo Goodliffe (Second Half Centre) and Alex Lane (Avenues). Congratulations and welcome!



Recognise this?

Does this picture ring a bell? It appeared on the front page of the Members' Newsletter MN40 in December 2016 when New Horizons member Christopher MacTavish won a major photographic competition.

Sadly, Christopher died last year, but he had many friends in London and abroad who gathered in Chelsea in April to celebrate his life and scatter some of his ashes.

See page 5 for more details.



(Not so) new starter at The Avenues



Marie in Japan



At the Leaning Tower of Pisa



In Taiwan with friend

Marie Smith joined the Member Experience team staff last October following the departure of Marinne Laurent.

Although hailing from the west coast of Scotland, Marie is much travelled. She studied for a degree in Japanese and Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, and as part of her studies lived in Japan for a year.

She says: **“It was amazing. I loved being able to learn about a new culture, try new experiences and learn Japanese. Sadly, my Japanese is not as good any more, but I am still trying to improve with regular Duolingo.”**

In 2022, she went to Madrid to teach English and stayed for 3 years, loving the Spanish culture and enjoying the sunny weather - a great change from rainy Scotland.

Alongside this, she spent five summers working in summer camp management across different countries, including the UK, Poland, and Hungary, particularly enjoying the creative aspects of the role, such as designing activities and organising trips and events.

Marie explains: **“Travelling is a special interest of mine. This year I have visited Vietnam and Taiwan, which was an amazing trip. My goal is to visit 30 countries before I am 30, and as I am currently at 29, I am very close to my goal!”**

After moving to London in August 2025, she wanted to find a position that incorporated these elements, while also offering new professional challenges. As Open Age works with adults (instead of the child/teenager environment she is used to), she feels it presents an exciting opportunity for her to develop in a different direction.

Since arriving at The Avenues, she has enjoyed a friendly welcome and introduced a few fresh ideas. Trips such as The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, National Art Library and the Museum of Anaesthesia were all well attended and received excellent feedback.

At the centre, she recently started a popular songwriting workshop and other plans are in the pipeline.

Away from work, she volunteers as an event host for Girl Gone International, a non-profit organisation focusing on helping women make social connections. She started volunteering for them two years ago in Madrid and has now moved to their London branch.

Adds Marie: **“I host events once or twice a month. Each month we have lunch and try a local restaurant from a different country. It has been an amazing opportunity to try foods that I have never tried before, such as Ethiopian, Brazilian and Sri Lankan food.”**

RIP tutor Ira Levin

Open Age lost one of its brilliant tutors on Boxing Day, when Ira Levin passed away after several months of illness. He taught 'Archaeology of Ancient Greece and the Middle East', and had been an engaged and valued member of New Horizons for several years prior to that.

Ira, also known to many as "Super Dad", grew up in Boston, USA, where he met his Italian-born wife Adriana. They moved to Rome where they had two children, Tatiana and Jonathan. Ira began teaching social studies and ancient history at the American Overseas School of Rome (AOSR), and developed a deep love for the people, the food, the wine and the history.



In 2014 he moved to London where his daughter Tatiana was based, and began enrolling for classes, eventually teaching at New Horizons - initially on the subject of Italy's archaeology and later with a wider remit. He retired in spring 2025 due to health issues.

Tatiana said that teaching was her father's passion and he was very much loved by his students in Rome and London and around the world.

Centre Manager Laura Taylor said Ira would be greatly missed by students and staff.

Robert Silver, a former tutor of Ira, said Ira was a member of his Creative Writing group for several years and wrote on some fascinating subjects, including Driving a Porsche in the US in the 1950s (Life Writing), Story of a Sleigh-Dog (Fiction), Water Systems in Ancient Rome (Archaeology/History) and Warty the Warthog (Fiction - about a warthog that escaped from a zoo in Canada).

Added Robert: "I know from my conversation over cups of coffee before classes he had swum for Brown University, that he enjoyed living in London and Rome and - it always seemed to me - engaging with people around him. Certainly, I enjoyed knowing him."

Comments from his former students included:

- "Ira gave such wonderful Archaeology talks which I thoroughly enjoyed and from which I learnt so much. His sessions were enthralling, really capturing the imagination. He will be very much missed by all of us, but by me especially. Such a very sad loss to us all."
- "His presentations were brilliant - so interesting and I really learnt a lot and really enjoyed those classes. It was amazing to have a teacher so knowledgeable about the subject."
- "Ira was an inspirational teacher who adored the ancient world and was never happier than when he was imparting his vast knowledge to his appreciative students. I miss him hugely."
- "Ira was a great teacher, but also someone I liked very much as a person. I think he had a great adventurous life doing what he loved - teaching and archaeology, photography and Italy. I felt he cared for us students, never mind our age and ability."
- "I was enthralled by his descriptions of our ancient past, accompanied by so many, many brilliant photographs."
- "Such a very nice person, and we all loved Ira's 'Warty' stories in Robert Silver's class."

Many tributes appeared on the Facebook page entitled AOSR 1970's, including:

"Mr Levin was my favourite teacher. Wonderful and inspiring. Always jolly and smiling!"

"A quite unforgettable social studies teacher - engaging, warm, funny and appreciative, and a fantastic ambassador for geography."

Christopher's friends say farewell

Open Age lost a popular member in November 2025, when Christopher McTavish (pictured on page 2) passed away after a long battle for health.

Born in Canada, Christopher came to the UK to study for a film and TV degree at Napier University, Edinburgh, and later during a year spent back in Canada he acquired a further qualification in New Media Studies from Vancouver Film School.

Once settled in London he had a range of jobs, travelled widely and had friends around the world. He loved to meet people, learned to speak several languages, and enrolled for various classes.

Your editor Kay met Christopher in 1998 when they both worked for the College of North West London (CNWL), a college of further education in Dollis Hill.



Ashes group

It was while taking fitness and language courses in Kensington & Chelsea that he discovered the New Horizons centre. In 2010 he suggested that Kay might like to join, as the charity's members' newsletter needed help from someone with a journalism background.

Christopher spent some years in China and learned Mandarin. Eventually he returned to London and became New Horizons' unofficial photographer.

In 2016 one of his photographs of St Paul's Cathedral reflected in glass, entitled St Paul's in the Water, was selected for the 2017 MyLondon calendar – a special project for people who had been homeless.



The picture won first prize in the Judges' Vote and third prize in the People's Vote.

In 2020 Christopher's health began to decline. Eventually he was unable to walk and in November 2025 he died a few days after his 73rd birthday.

On the last Sunday of April 2026, 18 friends of Christopher, plus nine more people watching on Zoom via a laptop, gathered for a celebration of his life in St Luke's Park, Sydney Street, Chelsea.

There they scattered herbs of rosemary, sage and star anise and some of his ashes under bamboo, ivy and London plane, in front of a massive oak tree.

After sharing memories of Christopher, they went to eat at Phat Phuc Noodle bar, a nearby Vietnamese restaurant which was a favourite haunt of his.

Other ashes will be scattered in China, Scotland and Canada.



Vietnamese meal

Silverwork wizardry

The beauty of silver

Open Age member and multi artist Vlastimir Zeric, also known as Vlado Batic, got interested in jewellery and sculpture as a young man living in Krusevac, around 200 miles from Sarajevo, now the capital of the multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

He was always good with his hands and had an artistic temperament and began designing and making silver bracelets, necklaces and earrings, using precious metals, mainly silver, with the help of a magnifying glass and pliers.

He came to the UK in 1992 and studied art in Central London.

His silverwork wizardry was eventually recognised when a dress he made from silver thread was exhibited at the first ever Serbian talent contest, British Serbs Have Talent, in June 2018, when it was described as an “extraordinary masterpiece”.

Later the sterling silver dress was selected by artist Chris Orr of The Royal Society of British Artists to be exhibited at their Annual Exhibition at the Mall Galleries, St. James's, in February 2020.

“Jewellery is a combination of art and beauty, and silver is a beautiful metal. Making the pieces is fiddly and time-consuming work, but I love to do it and I find it relaxing,” says Vlado.

Once when he was at Portobello Market, Vlado asked someone to model a necklace designed as a top. The bodice (see below) involved 26,000 silver links, weighed 400 grams and took 200 hours to make. The raw materials cost him around £1,000.

Since he joined Open Age, Vlado’s other main interests are two Wednesday classes - arts and crafts, and singing - at New Horizons.



A selection of Vlado’s jewellery creations



Vlado Batica

He also enjoys dancing the Argentine tango at Crossharbour and travels to the Isle of Dogs to attend a class.

He once took a salsa class, and also loves the waltz, but finds lessons expensive.

“The tango is very sentimental and lets you express your feelings. You have to be emotionally involved as well as learning the steps. The teachers are very good and have been teaching there for 17 years.”



Necklace modelled by Open Age member Hazel Medlock

Lines from a poetry workshop...

New Horizons' occasional poet Christopher Haslam was featured in this newsletter in May 2023 when he described his former life as a manager to the musician Van Morrison. His poem about Armistice Day was also published here.

Last November Christopher attended a poetry workshop run by The Poetry School, which runs many courses at Somerset House. Participants were asked to write a poem called Your Own Domestic Space.

So Christopher sharpened up his images and wrote about the flat where he lives in almost human terms, as follows:

Inside Kingsley House

My kitchen weeps in self pity,
 for attention and unswept crumbs,
 singing southern country blues,
 my plug gargles with a tinkle drip,
 dried mug rings make mosaics
 on the dishes,
 lids grin cheekily,
 a glass petalled with fingerprints
 out of reach, forgets its fingers,
 my fridge snorts like a hedgehog
 through stewed rhubarb and fresh mint,
 rattling intermittently snoozing,
 the party is hungover.

The morning spills from outside in,
 fluorescing my damask curtains.
 The little room inhales the crisp dawn,
 piercing my curated collage of space
 exhaling a smoky magazine
 drama-dreams, flash-photographed.
 Waste paper bowelled across emerald green,
 self-cleaning magic carpet,
 before collapsing in a midnight blink.



Albums sing about loss,
 a beetle whistles jealously to kettle,
 their jazz blows raspberries in the
 immaculate toothpaste bathroom,
 showered with
 yesterday's horrified papers.

Memories tango for sunrise
 from pages never opened.
 Limericks keep laughing,
 reference books keep their
 wisdom and secrets to themselves,
 magnets to dust.
 Even the air hums!

by Christopher Haslam

Marathon woman

Those of you who watched the London Marathon on TV or perhaps even in person on Sunday April 26 may not have been aware that one of our very own members of staff was in the thick of it.

Appropriately enough, that person was Open Age's Head of Physical Activity Lauren Earle, but the fact that someone is sporty by nature does not guarantee them a place, as many applicants have found.

This year over 1million entered the ballot and it was second time lucky for Lauren after she failed to get accepted last year. She knows someone who has been trying for a place for 14 years without success.

"I thought my chances were really low, yet I got in at my second attempt. It was hard work, but the crowds were absolutely amazing, and unbelievably loud as they shouted encouragement," recalls Lauren, who was raising funds for Open Age.

"I'd been training for six months, but I was so pleased to cross the finishing line and to have actually done it. It was very hot, so I was drinking water and pouring water over myself all the time."

Lauren has always enjoyed playing lots of different sports, including hockey and cricket, which is why after attending school in Havering and Westcliff on Sea she opted to study for a Sports Science degree at Loughborough University.

She also enjoyed being surrounded by older adults, so while at university she became a voluntary befriender for an older adult and also worked in falls prevention for Leicestershire Council and decided to make this work her career.

Knowing falls prevention is so specialised, she researched it and discovered Open Age's Steady and Stable programme.

She joined the staff as a Clinical Exercise Specialist nearly four years ago and soon became a Senior Specialist and then Clinical Exercise Manager.



A medal winner!



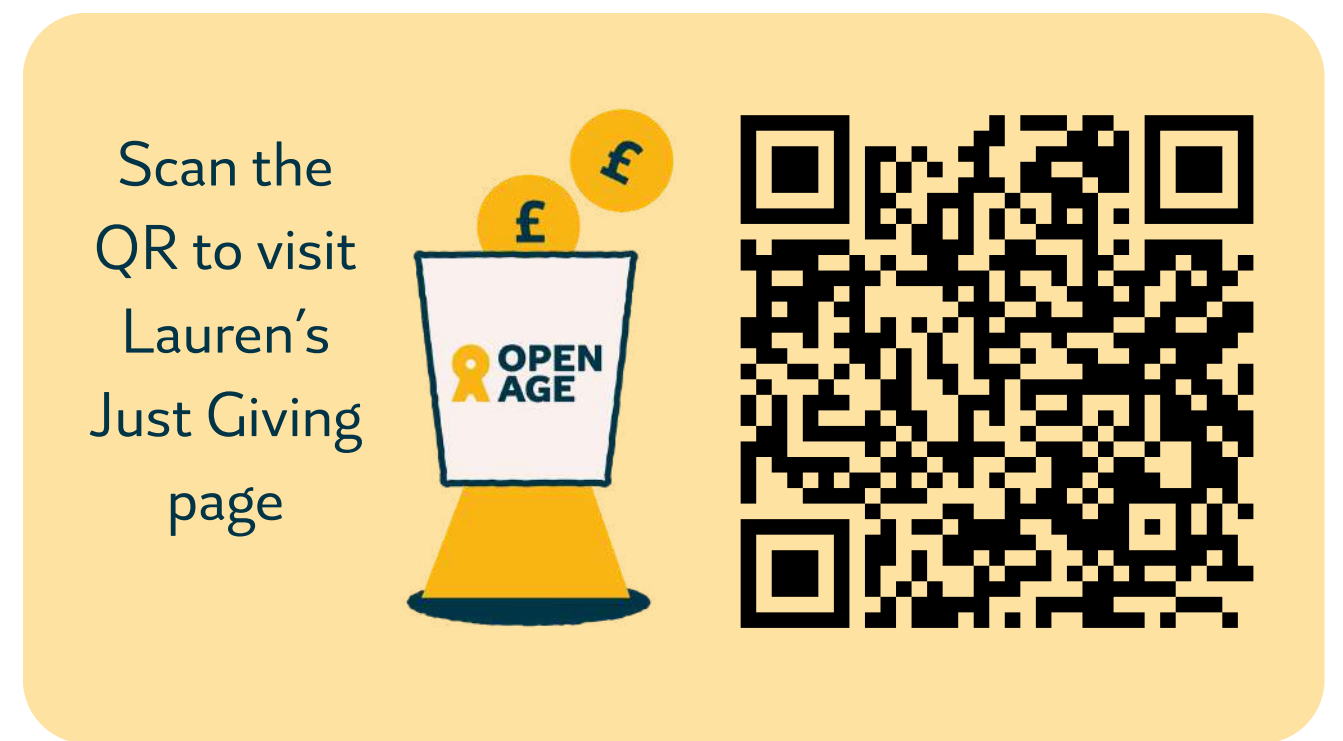
Her current role started a year ago, focussing on managing her team, expanding the offer and seeking further funding, so she tends to teach only when a class needs cover.

Steady and Stable classes are taught in four boroughs and involves 15 classes, plus three more in Brent. The physical activity team also run three Healthy Lungs classes, four Osteo Blast classes for those with Osteoporosis and Osteopenia.

It has recently started a new project working with global majority communities in Kensington and Chelsea called Breathe and Beat, which helps improve lung and heart health for those at risk.

Says Lauren: “I don’t get to see the members regularly the way I did, but it’s been a change and a challenge, because my main aim is to expand the classes and grow the services.”

Thanks to Lauren’s online page and support from colleagues, members, friends and family, she has collected just over £1500 for the charity.



But if anyone else feels generous and wants to add to the total, she would be delighted, as she knows how the money really changes the lives of older people, allowing Open Age to help members stay healthy and active.

Well done, Rudikya!

One of our members, Rudikya Mukadam, was highly commended at last year’s Mayor of London Adult Learning Awards for her inspirational progress after illness.

The Awards Ceremony took place on 13th November, and was attended by Rudikya, tutor Lena Dekair, and Open Age’s Head of Learning and Community Development Angela Sharkey.

Her story was recently mentioned on Open Age’s Facebook page on 8th March to celebrate International Woman’s Day, as follows:

Rudikya has faced significant health challenges, including breast cancer and a dementia diagnosis - experiences that understandably affected her confidence and independence -but since joining Open Age and taking part in our digital courses, her daily life has been transformed.



Rudikya at the Adult Learning Awards

She shares: “I feel more independent. I don’t need to wait for my family to fix things on the computer - I do it myself. I go to classes on my own, get the bus, and walk more, even after knee surgery.”

These classes have helped her manage her dementia more effectively, meaning her family can celebrate her growth instead of being worried.

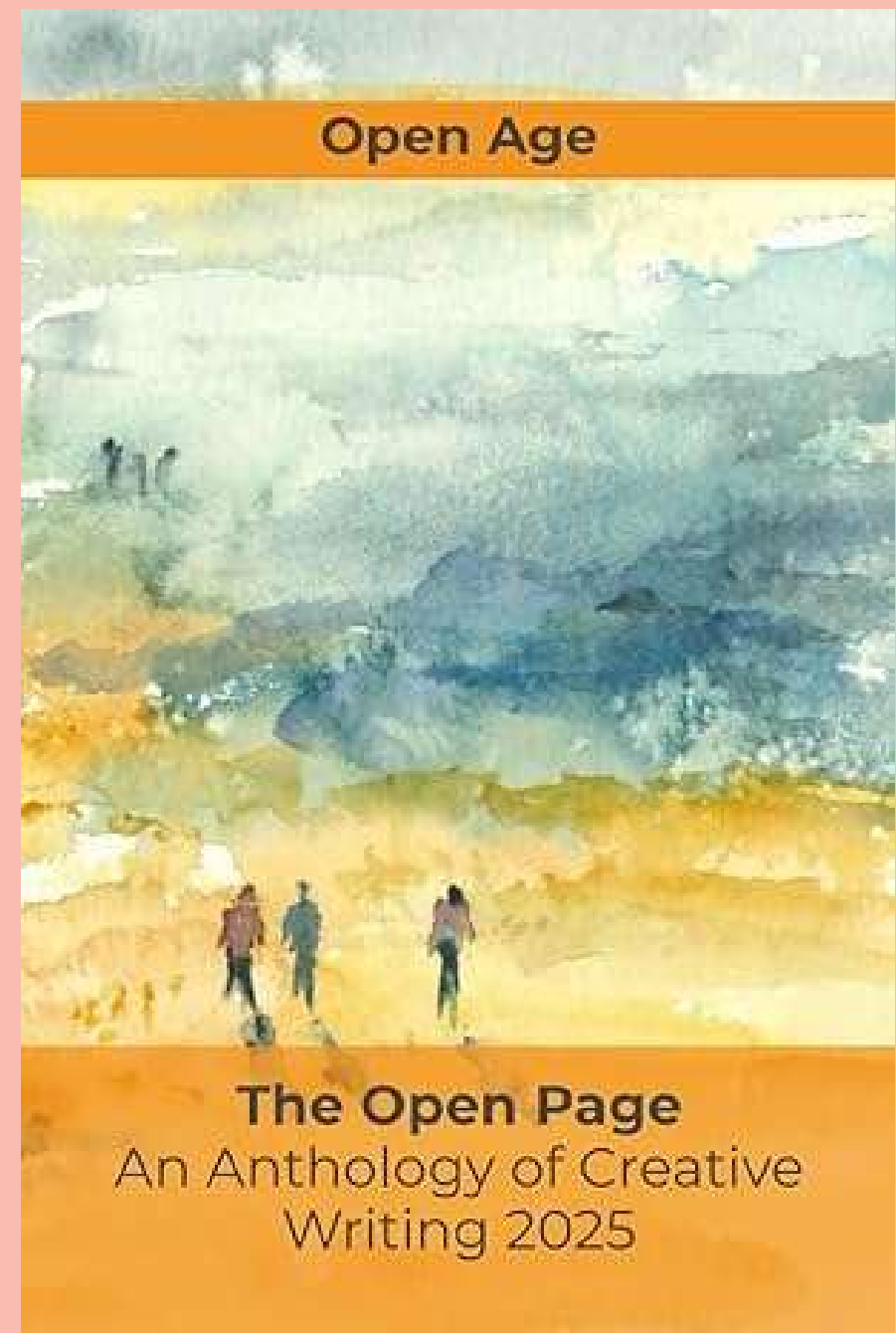
“Open Age has been a lifeline - it keeps me active, social and happy. I look forward to it every week,” she says.

Rudikya is a powerful example of the life-changing impact of adult learning. Her story shows that, with the right support, it’s possible to thrive at any age.

Buy the book!

In late 2025, Open Age released its third creative writing book – “The Open Page, An Anthology of Creative Writing 2025” – featuring the best work produced by our members.

It was available in centres to purchase, or on Amazon for £7.99. It is still available, and not only is it a wonderful read, but also of benefit to our charity, because for every book sold, Open Age receives £2.40. So don't miss out!



Anyone for bingo?

A building company is offering free bingo sessions at New Horizons in Chelsea, thanks to their Sustainability Manager: Social Value, Caroline Hudson.

Caroline, who works for the demolition company Keltbray, knows how a variety of activities can benefit older people because her mother attends a community centre. She was looking for ways to help others and was put in touch with Open Age.

She offered to run an hour-long session and act as caller in January. Due to its success, she organised more sessions in March and April and it has now become a regular monthly fixture on the New Horizons timetable. Games are free.

She is also helping out the New Horizons gardener Manuela Gouveia, who looks after flower beds, bushes and pots around the patio at the Cadogan Street centre.

“As a company, Keltbray likes to do something for the community,” says Caroline. “Although I’ve played bingo, I’ve never been a caller before, but I thought this would be a fun, sociable activity.”

To book for a future session, phone the centre, or speak to Laura or Emma at New Horizons. The Bingo sessions are set to continue on the last Thursday of every month from 1.00pm to 2.00pm.



Members playing bingo in March

Remember the 1970s?

A concert by American rock/country/blues band The Eagles was recently shown on TV's Sky Arts channel and it reminded me of a review I once read about the guys with the "high-flyin' harmonies".

According to the writer, The Eagles represented an era from 1972-1980 which was a 'MeDecade post-hippie retreat into freewheeling self-absorption', followed by 'excess, decay, implosion and rancour'.

Really? One reason The Eagles were so popular over here was not just because of their great harmonies, but also because the issues they sang about were so different from ours. Hotel California, Desperado, Take It Easy were a world away from rainy England.

So, folks - what did you do in the Seventies? All right, I'll go first.

In 1970 I left my job at the Manchester Evening News and came to London to teach juniors for a year. In 1971, I went to India on an overland coach trip.

On the same trip to India was Australia-bound Barbara Greenhalgh – the two of us have been friends ever since, and Barbara is now an Open Age member!

I then circumnavigated India by train, bus and boat - partly alone, partly with others. In Calcutta, I met Mother Teresa and was allowed a brief chat.

In Pondicherry, I stayed at the ashram of the late Sri Aurobindo, one of India's great philosophical and religious thinkers. On a side excursion to Nepal, I took a short trip to view Everest.

Back in Delhi, I finally went to Kashmir and spent a few days on a houseboat. The whole expedition was an amazing experience.

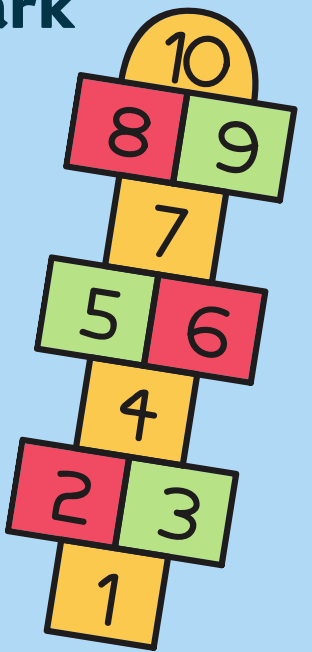


American rock band, The Eagles

1970s Games

If you were still a child, or had children, in the 1970s, you may remember the following games and activities listed in a magazine about the 50s,60s & 70s. They include:

- **Playing outside until it's dark**
- **Knowing your neighbours**
- **Penny sweets**
- **Den building**
- **Tree climbing**
- **Hide & seek**
- **Marbles**
- **Conkers**
- **Swinging on ropes in the woods**
- **Skipping**
- **Ball games**
- **Hopscotch**
- **Stamp collecting**
- **Collecting shells on the beach**



In 1972 I returned to journalism, newly divorced, and bought a house with a friend. Later came some great holidays, a varied newspaper and magazine career, plus voluntary driving work with a charity for the elderly. I'm surprised to hear that my era represents 'post-hippie self-absorption' followed by 'excess, etc'!

So, fellow Open Agers, what did you do 50 years ago? Before personal computers. Before mobile phones. Before social media. Was your life unusual? Were you into travel or music? Let us know if you would like your experiences featured in this newsletter.

In case you're wondering what happened to The Eagles guitarist and co-vocalist Glenn Frey died at the age of 67 in 2016, while Randy Meisner (bass guitar, vocals) died in 2023 aged 77. But Don Henley (co-founder, drums, vocals) and Bernie Leadon (guitar, vocals) are both alive and well aged 78. Hopefully still rocking.

Kay Shelley

Hedgehogs are go!

Everybody seems to love hedgehogs. The Avenues hosted a Paper Hedgehog Workshop for Earth Day, and the event was a great success.

Using recycled materials such as old books and ribbon, participants transformed discarded items into charming prickly animals. Folding the book pages into spiky shapes took time and patience, and selecting decorations for each hedgehog's hat allowed for plenty of personal expression.

While the process was detailed, members thoroughly enjoyed the experience and left with unique handmade creations and a renewed appreciation for reusing materials in imaginative ways.



A recycled paper hedgehog



Learning how to fold the paper



An Open Age member getting stuck in with the scissors and glue

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Designer: Open Age staff

Contributors: Tina John, James McQuilkin, Vivienne Mitchell, India Deiana, Marie Smith, Robert Silver & former students of Ira Levin, friends of Christopher McTavish, Vlado Batica, Lauren Earle, Caroline Hudson, Rudikya Mukadam, Angela Sharkey, Christopher Haslam, Kay Shelley.

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New Horizons, Chelsea, the Second Half Centre, Kensington, The Avenues, North Westminster and St Margaret's, South Westminster, are pioneering activity centres for older people delivered by Open Age (Registered Charity No. 1160125), in partnership with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and NHS Kensington and Chelsea.