

READERS & WRITERS

Our special page for retired Partners' news, views, memories and tips...

A very mature student...

June Card (Victoria 1991)

Since retiring from the Partnership, I had occupied myself with travelling, turning a paddock into a garden, doing some painting, acquiring the navigational skills to help crew my brother's small boat around the Hebrides, learning German and acting as secretary to a local environmental society. But, with an 80th birthday approaching, it was becoming all too easy to drift through the mornings doing the crossword and the Sudoku, and I needed a more sustained project. At a meeting of the Friends of the York Art Gallery, the Head of the History of Art Department at the University of York gave a taster session of its MA course and emphasised that for more mature students the entry qualifications were flexible. I was hooked!

I knew that my brain would be rusty and my computer skills wanting, so I applied to do the course part time, spread over two years. This was reckoned to take an average of two-and-a-half days a week, which was probably about right. I had to submit a sample of writing and dug out a piece about a George Stubbs exhibition that I had written for *the Gazette* many years ago. It must have done the trick for I was accepted for the course: it consisted of four modules of choice, each comprising a weekly seminar, related visits and an essay, and culminating in writing up a piece of original research in a dissertation of 15,000 words.

My four modules were: Theory, Historiography and Methodology; The Domestic Interior in Italy c.1400-1550; Scrolls and Serpents - The Arts of the Early Insular World c.600-900AD; and Painting on Light - Stained Glass in the Medieval Tradition. The subject of my dissertation was All Saints Church, Middlesbrough, commissioned from the famous Victorian architect George Edmund Street at the height of the iron boom. I examined how far the design and construction of the



church were influenced by the conditions prevailing in Middlesbrough at the time.

Most students are worried about funding, accommodation and whether at the end of the course they are going to get a job. As a pensioner I had none of these worries. The fees were paid in six instalments spread over two years, and I found that I actually saved money because I was so busy studying that I didn't have time to spend it on other things. My house was a four-mile bus ride, with bus pass, from the University. All I had to do was to enjoy.

And there was so much to enjoy: a beautiful campus with a library open 24 hours a day in term-time; quiet study areas and convenient catering facilities; the fascination of burrowing away in libraries and archives on my research topic and sometimes striking gold; the stimulating interaction with my fellow students and tutors during weekly seminars.

Whenever I encountered computer

problems, such as preparing a PowerPoint presentation for the first time, or meeting the formatting requirements for written work, help was readily available. My main difficulty was the physical one: elderly frames and eyes do not take kindly to long hours of sitting over books.

The twice-termly reviews of progress with the Chair of Graduate Studies, the written feedback from essays and class contributions, and the regular availability of tutors for consultation represented a huge commitment of the academic staff to the success of their students, who, regardless of gender, age and nationality, were welcomed as equals in the commonwealth of learning. I graduated with mixed feelings: relief and satisfaction that I had achieved my goal; and desolation that I was no longer part of that commonwealth. ■

Above: June on her graduation day