

## U3A Press Release.

Reading's University of the Third Age (U3A) which has celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011 have donated the results of their latest project called "Living Memories of Reading" to the town's museum.

Reading U3A exist to promote and provide learning opportunities for retired people by sharing skills and experiences in informal settings for enjoyment rather than qualifications.

The "Living Memories of Reading" project, which received funding through Reading Borough Council's Community Grants scheme, was conducted over a period of three years. Elderly Reading residents were interviewed about their experience of the changes in Reading in the post War era and in particular being moved from the town centre streets to the new estates at Whitley, Coley, Caversham and Southcote.

Reading Museum's Community Engagement Curator Brendan Carr said.

"The U3A have done a great service to Reading by producing these recordings which represent a tremendous resource for anyone interested in the post war era in Reading. The recordings give a unique glimpse of the past and there are some incredible stories of real hardship as well as recollections of happier times"

The project was coordinated by Margaret Marshall, who led a team of ten U3A members to find and interview members of the community who grew up in town centre housing before it was demolished during the 1950s and 1960s to make way for new developments such as the Civic Centre, Broad Street Mall and the IDR.

Mrs Marshall said.

"The project was urged on by David Cliffe at Reading central library who suggested that this part of Reading's history was in danger of being lost, just like the buildings which were swept away"

The housing estates in Coley, Southcote and Whitley were a big change for those who moved there after the war. For many of those interviewed the new houses seemed like palaces with gardens, running hot water and indoor bathrooms. In contrast the back streets of Reading of yesteryear had very poor facilities, often with no electricity with some residents using the Kennet to wash.

Denise Tetley, who was responsible for transcribing all the interviews; so that they are accessible within the museums catalogue system, added:

"The project has been a great deal of fun for the members of the U3A involved, as well as the participants; who were very generous in willingly sharing their life story for posterity. They all enjoyed reminiscing about

their younger days and were keen that a permanent record for future generations was made.”

The oral history collection that has resulted will be added to the museums other collections including “Routes into Reading” which consists of memories of people who settled in Reading having emigrated from other parts of the world. For a full list of the recordings available visit the museum’s website. [www.readingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk)

For more details of the U3A and the learning and education opportunities available contact Reading U3A membership secretary Kathy Oliver

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