



A life-long process

WE Gladstone (1809 – 1898), the 19th century prime minister, laid the foundation stone for Nottingham's University College on 27 September 1877. Education, he told the crowd, should not cease when a person “quits school or... University” but be “be a life-long process”, done not for a particular social class, “but in the interests of the whole”.



The new college was set up to house “university extension” courses taught by lecturers from Cambridge. Extension lectures enabled the growing Victorian middle class – and not least their daughters – to get university education. But in the early 20th century working class men and women began to demand higher education. The Workers Educational Association (WEA), founded in 1903, argued workers had a right to all the best of all universities had to offer.

Photograph of a stairwell at the Adult Education Department at Shakespeare Street, c. 1960s. University of Nottingham Collection, UAD 2/4.

Illustration showing the Adult Education department on Shakespeare Street, Nottingham c. 1970s. University of Nottingham Collection, ACC 3187.

The WEA's great innovation was the Tutorial Class: working adults, many of whom had left school at 12 or younger, met once a week with a university tutor for three years, studying a subject they had chosen in a small class – not a large lecture. By 1911, the WEA had branches in Derby, Nottingham, Mansfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield. Two years later, the University College set up a joint committee with the WEA, and offered five tutorial classes across the region.

The Great War proved the game-changer. Working people gave their lives in hundreds of thousands on the Western Front. RH Tawney (1880 – 1962), social historian and WEA tutor, who was seriously injured at the Battle of the Somme, argued reconstructing education “in a generous, humane and liberal spirit” – to include adult education – “would be the noblest memorial to those who have fallen”.

Many agreed. In 1919 the Ministry of Reconstruction recommended every university should set up “a department of extra-mural adult education with an academic head”. Nottingham was first to act: the Department of Extra-mural Studies (also known as the Adult Education Department) was established, with Robert Peers (1888 – 1972) leading it, in 1920.

The department provided courses for adults across the East Midlands from the 1920s to the early 2000s. This exhibition tells its story.



Photograph from the Save Adult Education protests headed by Dr Kenneth Lawson from the Adult Education Department, c. 1979. University of Nottingham Collection, ACC 3187.



Photograph of Adult Education tutor Marjorie Arnfield teaching her class 'The Artistic Vision', c. 1980s. University of Nottingham Collection, ACC 3187.



University of
Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

University of Nottingham
Libraries, Manuscripts and
Special Collections

