

Later life • Men and violence • Think while you drink • Gentlemen and players

Problems do not begin with age

We can cope, but we have not come to terms with all that the third age means

Looking for retirement

How to Handle Later Life
 by Marion Shoard; Amaranth Books; £22.99

IT WOULD be difficult to visualise a more complete and wide-ranging compendium than this on how to cope with the pressures and perils of later age.

It is definitely a reference book, indeed an encyclopaedia, weighing in at over 1,000 pages; a book to be turned to rather than read through.

Health, with more than 200 pages, housing, legal matters, finance and all other facets of later life are comprehensively and sympathetically treated, with a user-friendly structure and presentation.

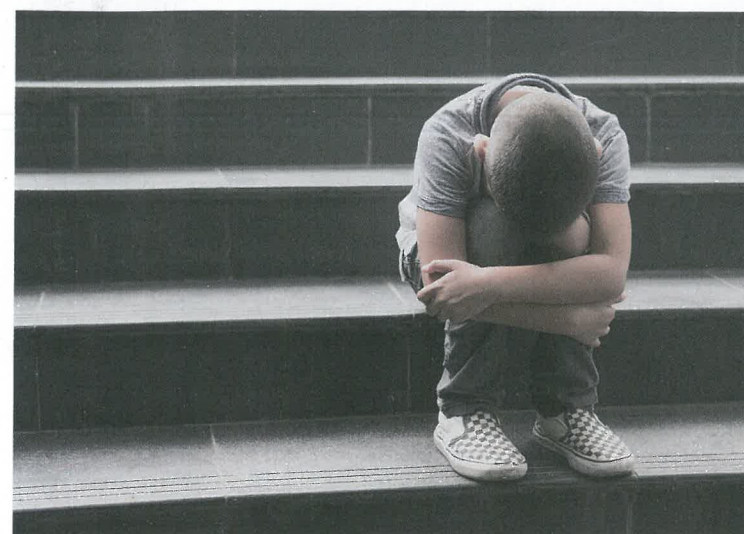
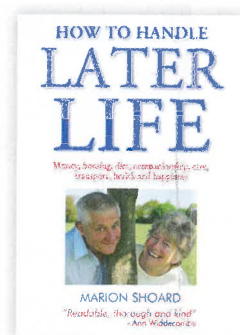
There should be a copy in every library, council office, doctor's practice, MP's surgery, Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK office, if not in every household. And the U3A has a handsome mention. That said, and it is no fault of

the book per se, it deals, like so many books on the topic, mainly, if not exclusively, with the problems. Of course older people may suffer such problems. Nevertheless, we still lack an overall concept of what older age – the third age – means as a distinct cultural entity.

It became clear to me after a lengthy involvement in ageing matters that some of the major issues were cross-generational, although often considered as “old age” troubles.

Poverty is often endemic and lifelong; very often the child of a poor family has a difficult start in life, finds only poorly paid, if any, employment, and struggles on meagre state benefits. True, 29% of pensioners are finding it hard to make ends meet – but a rising figure of 4m children, nearly a third of that echelon, are officially in poverty.

Loneliness, research suggests, is as prevalent in some younger age groups as in the older cohort; the fact that less than one in four households has only one inhabitant, as opposed to one in sixteen in 1960, is a signal pointer.



Age discrimination is rife lifelong, despite “ageism” being generally regarded as an “old age” matter. Insisting a child starts school at five is just as arbitrary and ageist as forcing someone to leave work at 65.

All such factors should be regarded as recurrent over the life cycle. What then constitutes the third age as a tertiary phase of particular character? Retirement as both a lengthy and mass experience is relatively novel, dating primarily from the mid-20th century. Peter Laslett, co-founder of the

U3A in the UK, demonstrated that British workers in the 19th century did not fail to save because they were feckless; it was because, first, they didn't earn enough money to save but, second, they had no precept of life beyond work.

For the bulk of populations until recently the recipe for adults was basically work, raise children and drop down dead. Now, with great suddenness in historical time, the majority of people have what, using that older definition, is a “post-adult” period, with many in retirement as long as they were in employment.

We have not yet come to terms with retirement qua retirement. We have no grasp or perception of what it means to have a society in which, quite abruptly, approaching a quarter are in the third age.

Margaret Mead famously said: “If a fish were an anthropologist the last thing it discovered would be water”. The same goes for gerontologists – the last thing they'll discover will be retirement.

Eric Midwinter

Butcher who became a gent ...

The Stakes Were High - The Story of John Gully, 1783 - 1863
 by Keith Baker; Pitch Publishing; £9.99

FEW LIVES are as surprising as that of John Gully, the butcher's apprentice from Bristol who became a respected member of the landed gentry and MP for Pontefract.

Sheffield U3A member Keith Baker tells how, imprisoned for debt in London's Fleet Prison, Gully was rescued by a leading bare-knuckle fighter, Henry Pearce, “The Game Chicken”. With the help of Pearce's wealthy sponsors, Gully was released and became champion of England.

He rode the tide of the Georgian and Victorian horse-racing boom, amassed huge wealth, and rose through society like a bubble through water, trading on a good head for figures, a reputation for reliability, and a willingness to settle his debts when he lost.

Gully's career is charted against detailed, well-researched backgrounds, but the real strength of Keith Baker's matter-of-fact narrative is his obvious respect for his subject. Gully does not appear to have resorted to the worst types of corruption prevalent at the time, and, above all, he was a man determined to make the best of himself in a difficult world.

His success was built on good manners, discretion and straightforward dealings. His personality tended towards generosity and loyalty, timeless virtues that might lead to success in any age.

Could a simple pugilist do so well nowadays? The only boxer so far to earn a knighthood, Sir Henry Cooper, also began in poor circumstances and gained widespread affection through his perceived honesty. The part of John Gully in the film version of *Royal Flash* is played by Cooper, casting which would surely have met with Gully's approval.

Errol Murphy

... Gents who became butchers

Playboys and Mayfair Men - Crime, Class, Masculinity and Fascism in 1930s London;
 by Angus McLaren; John Hopkins Press; £18.50

IN DECEMBER 1937 Etienne Bellenger, managing director of Cartier's, London, took a sample of rings, valued in today's prices at £500,000, to the Hyde Park Hotel. While discussing business with his prospective clients he was savagely attacked and relieved of the rings.

Within days the police had detained the suspects, who became known as the Mayfair Men. These playboys inhabited a glitzy world of holidays on the Riviera, fast cars, aeroplanes, heavy drinking, society and night club hostesses and bouncing

cheques. All the accused went to prison and two were subjected to the cat o' nine tails.

The first half of Angus McLaren's thoughtful book discusses these events in detail. Against that background he moves on to reflect on the significance of the assault and robbery to the wider themes of pain, masculinity, crime, class and fascism.

Take the latter two. The robbers, the toffs, seized what they believed was theirs for the taking and showed no remorse.

There is in the thirties a playboy link to fascism. A.J.P. Taylor once described Oswald Mosley, the most prominent advocate of that ideology in Britain, as “a highly gifted playboy.” Mosley did not believe he enjoyed an entitlement to rob. But he believed he was privileged to rule.

John Amery, one of three traitors executed by the British state after the Second World War, lived recklessly in the world of fast cars, unpaid fines, bounced cheques and prostitutes before he hitched himself to Hitler and the Nazis.

Other playboys, including John Lonsdale, soon to become one of the Mayfair robbers, had engaged in gun-running for Franco.

Playboys and Mayfair Men shifts the interest in London crime from the East End and Soho to the elite life in the capital. And there is enough in McLaren's book to pique most tastes and interests.

It is a worthy successor to his earlier works, *Sexual Blackmail*, *Impotence* and *A Prescription for Murder*.

Colin Holmes

