



History - compiled by Brita Haycraft

Fifty Years of IH in Broad Brush Strokes

By Brita Haycraft

This article was written by Brita for the IH Journal and appeared in issue 14 which was to mark the 50th Anniversary of International House in 2003.

John and I arrived in Cordoba so that he could write and both of us could live on giving English classes. Neither of us was thinking of founding a school. But three weeks later sixty Cordobese people had passed through two patios and knocked on our door. Doctors, lawyers, clerks, waiters, olive salesmen, lace merchants, señoritas, students. We had become a school.

At once John laid the foundations: low fees ensuring small earners weren't excluded; persuading students to join classes according to level not friendship; small classes, since our rooms were small. The cold rising through the brick floor had everybody cluster round the table, with a brazier underneath, - perhaps the origin of our friendly circular classroom seating. Contradicting the reputation of the Spanish, our Andalusian students arrived punctually, regularly and wrote wonderful homework. On Sundays we'd meet for excursions. We decided to stay.

Expansion had already taken possession of John's mind. In a year we had started Spanish Easter courses for Foreigners and people from England, France, Holland descended for a packed three-week programme, also sampling Montilla wine and flamenco dancing with our delighted Cordobese students.

Once in better premises, we started a library, a little bar was fitted out, classes of German and French began and speakers from England also stopped by to give talks. We organised 'International Weeks' and had ambassadors come down and be fêted by the Town Hall. We became not just a school but a 'Casa Internacional'.

John wrote in the mornings, stimulated by the new enterprise. I was just as gripped by our projects though sometimes wished for longer spaces in between. Six years later, now with two babies, we had to settle and so returned to London.

IH London might easily not have happened.

After publication of his successful book *Babel In Spain*,

John hoped his writing would take off and we both had journalism in mind but that was precarious with minimal savings. Suddenly the chance of a flat in Covent Garden came by, we grabbed it and the school process began again.

How different from Cordoba! By Christmas only six students had found their way to our third floor premises in tatty Endell Street. We tried to cheer up the grim metal stairway and John also taught ILEA classes in West London to make ends meet. But when they closed for the summer, all John's students followed him to Endell Street and never went back to the ILEA school.

Things looked up when the BBC commissioned John to write a course for English By Radio. Just then he was asked to go to Finland to polish President Kekkonen's English before his state visit to Britain. In his palace quarters in the dark snowy North, when not tutoring the President, John wrote his BBC course.

Back in London, I manned the school, dropping our toddlers in a Greenwich day nursery. I spotted the ideal premises in Shaftesbury Avenue but was rejected, until a note in the Daily Express gossip column about John teaching Kekkonen made the agents smile. It was very cheap except that the lease had to be renewed every six months, pending reforms for Piccadilly Circus. We stayed 18 years. The eight-room flat was grotty but perfectly located at a stone's throw from the famous Eros. Students filled the school. We needed teachers fast.

This is when John thought of a course to train teachers. A tiny ad in the magazine *The New Statesman* brought our first twelve trainees for two weeks in June 1962. There was a bold new component. Each afternoon, after their theory session, the trainees had to teach real classes watched by fellow trainees and their tutor. It worked, possibly because of the group discussion afterwards. And it was the 60s. At the end, we kept on the best ones as teachers. The course was to multiply.

Against tradition, teacher trainers didn't stop teaching foreign students and so stayed in touch with classroom complexities, always upgrading the training course. The beauty of short courses was that you could see the result within months, rather than years. Swapping ideas and observing classes became the norm and I remember the excitement at the teachers' meetings. Being a new school with new teachers made new ideas possible. This was only 1963-4 -5. We never looked back and some of our intrepid trainees have become today's most popular EFL authors

The teacher-training programme launched, John set off to newly liberated Algeria; bound to need English language training we thought. Some of our newly hatched teachers soon found themselves out there, including Ben Warren and Doug Case. Beirut followed. When a Libya contract was cancelled due to the Gaddafi coup, the teachers happily flew to Khartoum which also craved English. They were valiant and dedicated and brought valuable teaching ideas back to IH London.

From Rome, Ausonio Zappa would bring summer students regularly to London and in 1966 he asked us to run a teachers' course there. In Rome's unforgettably soft September we met a promising pick of trainees, Roger Gower, Sheila Sullivan, Edward Woods, Cathy Wallace, and other EFL experts-to-be. John was keen to start an IH Rome and a year later a building was found. John just said 'OK Let's go out and start it'. It was goodbye to *Transinterpreter*, my little translation agency, and I had to suspend my Longman pronunciation book, but I couldn't resist Rome. Our children were taken from their primary school and off we drove. Four months later we were back home, as the school expanded into our lodgings.

Three years later it was off to Paris, which we knew well. The Parisians loved the lively and beautiful International House; but John's wish to create a whole 'village anglais', pub and all, hit local resistance.

By then International House had some thirty affiliates and 40 Shaftesbury Avenue was a powerhouse of teaching and training, supplying teachers, materials and services to many UK schools too. We offered classroom videos, the English Teaching Theatre, a bookshop, a teachers' monthly magazine, Salvatore's restaurant, a students' welfare bureau, an au pair agency, and the Teachers' Centre. We never advertised until 1980. What we lacked was some large rooms.

In 1976 John happened to notice that 106 Piccadilly was to let (very cheaply) and after nine months' wooing, he got us this splendid, totally unschool-like Georgian piece of el-

egance with some magnificent rooms where we still are. Doubting teachers all succumbed.

The teaching engine purred. Charles (Tim) Lowe created the DTEFLA distance course in the ex-quarters of one footman. In the garret of the other footman, the business school was shaped by Joe Wiersma. And the EFL world, I think, was pleased to have a brilliant centre where teaching ideas could shine. Abroad, the affiliated schools were no longer fledglings: you could now train in Colin McMillan's IH Lisbon or IH Rome or in Ben Warren's IH Barcelona or in IH Cairo, also founded by IH London offspring.

In 1975 John persuaded the Bell School to run their first teachers' course, as one of our teacher trainers was moving to Cambridge. In 1978 John told me the RSA wanted to model their new teachers' course on ours and he'd agreed. I wonder if it ever crossed their minds what a gift that was. John felt education was there to be shared. We seconded teacher trainers to the Institute of Education from 1985 to 1990, at our expense. Slowly the CertTEFLA spread, even to the lofty universities.

In the late 80s John told everyone he was re-launching the Modern Language Department. No sooner said than done. Teacher trainer Elaine Walker produced the business plan overnight and Marisol Gower and Ana Palley gave the first TT course for Italian, Spanish, French and German teachers a month later. Japanese followed. It prospered.

IH know-how was to bring in schools in Hungary, Poland, the Ukraine and beyond. The dedication continues in more than 120 affiliated schools worldwide.

Together, the EFL opportunity and the IH inspiration have crafted an exhilarating and valued international profession. Let me express my awe and gratitude for a fantastic first fifty years.