OLDER PEOPLE

SOCIAL NETWORKS

AND INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR

Susan Elizabeth Capel

MPhil

2009

OLDER PEOPLE

SOCIAL NETWORKS

AND INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR

Susan Elizabeth Capel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Northumbria University for the degree of Master of Philosophy

School of Health, Community and Education Studies

August 2009

Abstract

The study aim was to explore the information behaviour of older people living in a rural location in order to understand how they exchanged information through their social networks and social activities. The study provides a unique contribution to research with its emphasis on information exchange in a remote rural context based on the perspectives of older people. The approach was interpretative, using a phenomenological, interactionist methodological framework, taking account of social constructionist and critical realist philosophical perspectives and grounded in information behaviour theories and models. The ethnographic methodology, combining qualitative data collection methods, emphasized the lifestyle, the participants, the information and the contexts. Data were summarized thematically within the four global headings, 'Lifestyle', 'People', 'Information' and 'Place' and further themes and sub-themes reflected both the common and individual viewpoints of the participants. The key findings were that older people relied on family and close friends (strong ties) for support, advice and personal information. They preferred to exchange practical, local information about regular activities and local services interpersonally within their close social network groups and during social activity. This information was often available through more casual contacts (weak ties) facilitating information flow through social networks and social activities in both formal and informal information grounds. Informal information grounds, such as the Age Concern coffee morning, proved to be the most successful, where all the positive elements, including an informal atmosphere, the presence of close friends, casual contacts and a variety of information resources were present in one place. The 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting', highlights the contextual and social influences affecting information behaviour, the means by which information is exchanged, the types of information exchanged, and the way in which social information grounds are successful for older people.

List of Contents

6.   Stage Two data collection

7.   Lifestyle

8.   People

List of Figures

Appendices

Acknowledgements

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Chapter 1: Older people, social networks, information behaviour

1.1 Introduction

The following quote about older people 'nattering', taken from an article in The Guardian of December 22nd 2007, relates to the stated objective of this research to 'explore the activity of people over sixty-five and their information behaviour within their social networks and social activities in a rural community'.

> Having a natter is the equivalent of a meeting for people who don't work in an office. There's usually an agenda to get through, some problem-solving brainstorming and appraisals of people who aren't at the meeting. Coffee and biscuits are often provided. A good natter can take up to an hour and busy natterers can have back-to-back natters all day …
>   Nattering sounds innocuous enough, but its how information spreads through a community. If you have something important to communicate across a wide area, just have a quick natter with the head natterer in the area …
>   Nattering is a form of exercise for the elderly: it gets them out, gives them fresh air and provides an endorphin rush when they hear some juicy gossip …

The anthropologist Rapport (2002) suggests that gossiping (a form of nattering) is a key part of the identity of any community. Social 'nattering' is key to the way that individuals in their social networks within a community pursue, encounter and exchange information and build their individual and communal information and knowledge store. Rapport stated that "The gossip of a community is an inherent part of its identity, a confirmation indeed of its very existence, in which all members portray and simultaneously are portrayed" (p.314). In addition, the sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999) suggested that 'third places' or 'great good places' are the public places where people in a community gather away from the first and second places (home and work) for social interaction and to engage in lively conversation. These places are considered important for the social vitality of communities and exist on neutral ground "where conversation is a primary activity in an informal atmosphere and where there is social equality amongst a regular clientele" (p.42). The study of the information behaviour of any particular population focuses on the context, the actors, the process, the means and the content. In the case of this study these are the social networks, and the social activities and places where the exchange of information occurs.

1.2 Thesis overview

> Information behaviour focuses on people's information needs; on how they seek, manage, give, and use information, both purposefully and passively, in the varied roles that comprise their everyday lives. (Fisher, KE and Julien, H., 2009, p.317)

The study aim was to examine the information behaviour of older people living in a rural location in order to understand how they share information through their social networks and social activities. The study provides a unique contribution to existing research with its emphasis on information behaviour in a remote rural context based on the perspectives of older people resulting in a 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting'. It was grounded in information behaviour theory whilst taking into account ageing theory and social network theory. The ethnographic methodology combined qualitative data collection methods and took an approach to the data collection and analysis that emphasized the lifestyle, the participants, the information and the contexts.

Statutory and voluntary providers, such as the Department of Health (DOH) and Age Concern England have found that older people increasingly identify a need for better access to information (Department of Health, 2004a; Age Concern England, 2004b). Older people maintain a positive attitude to the way they are supported and informed (Reed et al., 2003) and believe that they are healthier and happier if they are members of strong social networks (Manthorpe, Malin and Stubbs, 2004; Wenger, 2001; Wenger and Tucker, 2002). Lowe and Speakman (2006) have suggested that the gradual increase in the population of older people residing in the United Kingdom (UK) "has become a powerful factor in shaping rural areas" and that "rural areas are thus at the cutting edge of a major social transition" (p.9). Wenger (2001), however, has noted that, despite there being increased numbers of older people in rural populations in the UK, there has been very little research about this group. Asla, Williamson and Mills (2006) pointed to "gaps in research regarding the role of information in successful aging …" (p.49). The few studies researching the information behaviour of older people in the UK have generally been undertaken by service or information providers with a view to improving their own information services.

In this study I have sought to contribute to bridging the gap in existing research in a unique way through a focus on information behaviour within the social networks of older people in a rural location in East Cumbria at a time when the older population in rural areas has been increasing through in-migration. I have used an interpretative philosophical approach to the research, taking into account the means by which information is communicated, together with the contexts in which exchange or encountering occurs within the existing structures, opportunities and constraints of the real worlds of older people in the community under study. My research uses a phenomenological, interactionist methodological framework, taking account of social constructionist and critical realist philosophical perspectives and information behaviour theories and models. My ethnographic data collection methods in the field included focus groups, interviews, observation, and participant journals, together with social network interviews. The approach to the field and to the participants, and the process of data collection, was rigorously, ethically and reflectively managed and was exploratory and inductive, with ongoing analysis. Data were summarized thematically within the four global headings, 'Lifestyle', 'People', 'Information' and 'Place' and further themes and sub-themes were identified through an analysis that creatively reflected both the common and the individual viewpoints of the participants resulting in a rich description of the findings.

The key findings (discussed in Chapter 11) were, in summary, that older people who contributed as participants to the study relied on family and close friends for support, advice and personal information and that these social contacts were strong ties within their social networks. The participants had a preference for exchanging or accessing both personal and more general information face-to-face within their close social networks and during social activities. In addition, they needed practical day-to-day local information and updates about regular activities and local services and, significantly, this sort of information was often available to them through more casual contacts that were weak social ties for them in their community. It was observed that some weak ties were able to facilitate information flow within and between social networks and social activities through the information grounds where social activities took place. Although information was exchanged in both informal and formal grounds, those activities that were predominantly

informal, such as the Age Concern coffee morning, proved to be the most successful information grounds. These information grounds where all the positive elements, including an informal, friendly atmosphere, the presence of strong and weak ties, and a variety of information types and formats, were present in one place were usually those where the main purpose was to gather socially rather than to provide information. In Chapter 12, ways in which information behaviour in this type of context might be utilised for the benefit of older people and service providers, together with recommendations for ways in which further research could build on the findings of this study are presented. The simple, empirically grounded 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting' (Figure 12.1) provides a contribution to the field of information behaviour research and seeks to show the elements that impact on the process of information behaviour amongst older people in this particular rural community. The model and findings illustrate the contextual and social influences affecting information behaviour, the means by which information was exchanged, the types of information exchanged, and the ways in which social information grounds provided places in which information exchange could take place. Further research is needed in order to explore the implications of the study and the applicability of the model in this and other rural communities of older people living in the United Kingdom (UK).

1.3 Research aim

The aim of this study was 'to explore the information worlds of older people living in rural East Cumbria in order to understand how they share information through their social networks and social activities'.

1.4 Research objectives

A set of objectives covered aspects of the research that required exploration. The objectives were modified during Stage One in order to respond to the emergent requirements of data collection, using a reflective and exploratory approach to take into account the needs of participants. The final research objectives were as follows:

1. To identify existing theories and models in the fields of information behaviour, ageing and sociology in which to embed the research.
2. To explore the activity of people over sixty-five and their information behaviour within their social networks and social activities in a rural community.
3. To identify the particular information issues emerging from the research that effect older people living in rural areas.
4. To assess the potential of the results for the development of new knowledge in this field and feed back to local information providers.

1.5 Background and rationale

In the last few years UK Government policy has focused on enabling individual choice and involving people, including older people, in the policy decision-making process, particularly in the fields of health and social care provision (Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection, 2006; House of Commons Health Committee, 2007). The older rural population in the UK has grown steadily and many of these older people are determined to remain independent and actively involved in their communities. Dunning (2005) has stressed the importance of information, advice and advocacy services in encouraging involvement with community activities and supporting continued independence.

> Information, advice and advocacy can help to support an older person in making choices, taking decisions, securing rights, acting in his or her own interests as well as contributing to the life of the community and being fully engaged in society. (p.1)

The culture of community may be different in rural areas from community culture in urban areas, and, according to Thorson and Powell (1992) it is important that the information worlds of rural communities and their individual social contexts are studied in order to explore how information can support active lifestyles. A study conducted by Manthorpe, Malin and Stubbs (2004), surveying older people's views on rural life, indicated that many had a positive approach to their rural lifestyle. However, other research, looking at the needs of older people, including information needs, both national (Yates-Mercer and Wotherspoon, 1998), and local to Cumbria (Northern Fells Project, 2002), identified some of the lifestyle problems that older people had in rural areas, including access to information, transport, and housing. Nevertheless, it has been shown that when older people are more active and interdependent, and less isolated and vulnerable, they take a positive,

self-help and proactive view about their health and social problems and share information within their social networks (Quinn, Snowling and Denicolo, 2003; Chatman, 1991). Research undertaken in rural East Cumbria by Kolek and Age Concern Eden (Kolek, 1993) confirmed that contacts in social networks were a common source of help for older people.

Lievrouw and Farb (2003) have suggested that research and information policy initiatives should identify what kinds of information are essential to various communities so that opportunities can be created to make that information more widely available and to show "how people navigate among contexts, how contexts affect each other, and any common elements of this movement" (p.528). Some of the theoretical developments in information behaviour research that are also pertinent to this study, having emerged from research undertaken with older people and others in the USA, Canada and Australia in recent years (Williamson 1997, 1998, 2005 and Pettigrew, 1999, 2000, Fisher et al., 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007) and these are discussed further in the following chapters. Williamson (1997, 1998) developed a model of information behaviour showing the information use of older people in urban and rural areas in a community context in Australia. These researchers have identified that there are gaps in information research addressing the information behaviour of different groups within their own locations, and through my review of the literature I have also identified the lack of this type of research in the United Kingdom. Fisher and Julien (2009) have stressed that although it may not be possible to generalize from research focusing on specific contexts, it is still important to carry out local research studies because "results of such studies often have local relevance and practical outcomes for improving information delivery systems" (p.319). Courtright (2007) suggests that previous studies have shown that focusing on actors' actual activities and material practices in context can provide a richer view and can be explored successfully through ethnographic, iterative studies using multiple methods.

Research I have undertaken within local communities in Cumbria over a number of years with older people has led to a strong desire to know more about how information sharing has impacted on their lives. This doctoral study was therefore focused on the social contexts, activities and interactions through which the sharing of information occurred

(Tuominen and Savolainen, 1997; Pettigrew, Fidel and Bruce, 2001). The study was aimed at making a contribution to research on the information behaviour of older people within their social activities in a rural area of the United Kingdom, through a new model, in order to contribute to this gap in the information behaviour research base, identify the implications for older people and for service and information providers in this location, and identify areas for further research. East Cumbria was chosen because the area was rural, with a high percentage of resident older people and because of my familiarity with the area and my existing contacts with local statutory and voluntary organizations. The study was focused on the eastern side of Cumbria, outside of the Lake District as all of the Eden District of Cumbria, including Alston, is considered to be in the Rural-80 category defined as "districts with at least 80% of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns" (Eden District Council, Profile of Alston, 2006b, p.12).

1.6 Sensitizing concepts

The following sensitizing concepts taken from the research question and explored in the initial literature review provided the outline for the conceptual framework for the study and are summarised below:

- Active ageing
- Information
- Social networks

1.6.1 Active ageing

It is mainly informal activity that is associated with life satisfaction and therefore, according to Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra (2006), there is a connection between activity and wellbeing in older people and the responsibility for wellbeing lies with "the quality of the social relationships that accompany activity, particularly informal activities" (p.227). The Theory of Successful Ageing emphasizes the positive attitudes of older people who refuse to accept "the physical consequences of growing older as being inevitably life limiting, or to see growing older as a process of decline that cannot be halted" (Reed, Stanley and Clarke, 2004, p.20). These older people include "social activities, interests and goals" in their definitions of successful ageing (Bowling, 2005, p.7). However, more recently, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Older People's Steering Group (2004), in comparing the

traditional old age 'loss' model with the physically active 'heroic' model, concluded that "neither model leaves any space for older people who experience the onset of limitations but nevertheless do not see these as defining their lives" (p.30). They found that, rather than being overly concerned about physical ageing, older people feel more concerned with the ordinary everyday business of living their lives and remaining as independent as possible.

1.6.2 Information

In 1981 Wilson suggested that information seeking resulted from "the recognition of some need, perceived by the user" (p.4). He later broadened the concept of information seeking to define information behaviour as the "totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking, and information use" (Wilson, 1999, pp. 262-263). Chen and Hernon (1982) identified information as "all knowledge, ideas, facts, data, and imaginative works of mind which are communicated" (p.5) and Buckland (1991) suggested that it is difficult to define what information is and what it is not, "We are unable to say confidently of anything that it could not be information" (p.356). Information is an intrinsic part of the culture of communities, and how information is exchanged in day-to-day life within the context of 'small worlds' as 'information worlds' (Chatman, 1991, 1992, 1999) can be explored through research. As Sandstrom (2004) is quoted as saying "I think many of us can agree that information is part of an ongoing, organic cultural system, not a commodity that can easily be divorced from its meaningful context or content" (p.3).

1.6.3 Social networks

Information contained within the social relations between people, and knowledge that members of a social network have and share in their interactions, is a crucial form of social capital according to Coleman (1988), impacting on people's health and wellbeing according to Field (2003). The term 'social capital' describes how the combined resources of social networks impact on behaviour and the outcomes of that behaviour for the individuals involved, dependant upon the trustworthiness of the social environment, and the extent of social obligation within that environment (Coleman, 1988, p.S102). The strength of tie between the individual and others in their social network is important in "assessing the

overall connectedness of actors in an environment and the likelihood that information will flow from one actor to another" (Haythornthwaite, 1996, p.327). Lievrouw and Farb (2003) see social network members, "family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers, fellow church or club members" as credible information sources for individuals, and suggest that when people consult paper sources or the internet, they still check the information they find with other people (p.520).

1.7 Uniqueness of the study

This study explores the information behaviour of older people within their social networks in a rural context and provides a unique perspective by

- providing a study of the information behaviour of older people in a northern UK rural context
- grounding the study in a information behaviour theoretical background that takes into account ageing theory and social network theory
- using an ethnographic approach in this context that combines a number of qualitative data collection methods
- taking an approach to the data collection and analysis that emphasizes the lifestyle, the participants, the information and the contexts
- presenting a model of information behaviour amongst older people in a rural setting
- recommending ways in which information behaviour in this context may be utilised for the benefit of older people and service providers

1.8 Description of content

The thesis begins in Chapter 2 with a review of the research literature that includes a brief look at older people, their lifestyle, active ageing and wellbeing, rural issues, social networks and research on older people and information behaviour. Chapter 3 covers the underpinning philosophies of social constructionism and critical realism, social information network theory and information behaviour theories. The methodological framework is outlined in Chapter 4, and includes a discussion of the phenomenological, interactionist, ethnographic and qualitative approaches to data collection, and the criteria for trustworthiness and ethical standards guiding the research. The two stages of the data collection and analysis process are described in Chapters 5 and 6, including the methods used; interviews, focus groups, observation and participant journals, and this is followed by

a description of the findings under the four headings; Lifestyle, People, Information and Place, in Chapters 7 to 10. The eight key findings of the study are outlined in Chapter 11 and, in Chapter 12, the theoretical and methodological processes are critiqued with reference to the research objectives, and limitations of the research process are discussed. Chapter 12 concludes with a 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting', the implications of the key findings for information behaviour for older people and the improvement of information practice, and recommendations for more research within the academic community

Chapter 2: Review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

In the early stages of the study I undertook a review of the research literature for inclusion in the submission of my initial project approval document for the University. The idea for the study had arisen from my previous interest in information behaviour and in research with older people. I was interested in the communication of information by older people within their social groupings and within the information worlds of their social networks, and I wanted to focus on understanding how information exchange happened, and the contexts in which it took place. Lievrouw and Farb (2003) had identified that more information research was needed to "investigate the interests, orientations, practices, and complex social relations among individuals and social groups to gain a deeper appreciation of how people obtain, understand, and use information" (p.529) and I had not been able to identify any in-depth studies of the information behaviour of older people in rural areas of the UK.

I therefore decided that the aim of the study would be to explore the information worlds of older people living in rural East Cumbria in order to understand how they shared information through their social networks and social activities. In order to achieve this aim and to build on the initial literature review and conceptual framework I needed to undertake a more far reaching search of the literature produced by several academic disciplines. I searched a broad range of resources for relevant items in the fields of information, sociology, gerontology and in some health and psychology sources. The following exploration of the existing literature on research about older people, and their social networks and information behaviour, shows how information exchange fits into the wider context of social networks and the places where people gather to exchange information. According to Godfrey, Townsend and Denby (2004), healthy ageing and independence in local communities can exist for older people where there are opportunities for them to have social relationships and join in with social activities, and where there are "environments that are safe, secure, easily negotiated and which fully integrate older people" (p.80).

In this chapter I outline the context for the research through focusing my literature search in response to the sensitizing concepts arising from the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. Section 2.2 covers some of the political and theoretical background impacting on older people, and this is followed by Section 2.3 in which I discuss some of the theory and research behind active ageing and the wellbeing of older people. Section 2.4 deals with the implications for older people of living in rural locations, and in Section 2.5 the importance of social capital and social networks for information behaviour is discussed. Section 2.6 explores the research base on contexts, sources and channels of information behaviour in general, and section 2.7 focuses in on research on older people and their information behaviour.

2.2 Older people

> Older people want the same things from life as everyone else, and social care has to move away from the assumption that the need to take part in society and to live an active and fulfilling life ends at the age of 65. (Gordon Lishman, Director Age Concern England, 2004, in Age Concern England 2004, p.9)

In order to build inclusive communities and tackle the social exclusion of older people, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Social Exclusion Unit (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006a) proposed a 'Sure Start to Later Life' programme that would provide a "single, accessible gateway to wide ranging services in the community" and to "comprehensive services that can empower older people and improve quality of life" (pp. 8-9). Government agencies believed that, through these policies, older people would be empowered and encouraged to lead healthy, independent and actively engaged lives. The population of older people living in the UK has increased in proportion to other age groups over the last few years, and research on aspects of policy affecting the care, treatment, housing, wellbeing and economic situation of older people has also increased. However, despite this emphasis on older people as service users, the evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Older People's Programme of research (JRF, 2004) shows that there is still a mismatch between how older people want to live their lives and what policy and practice are delivering and planning to deliver to support them in their choices.

The term 'older people' is used in this study to avoid stereotyping terms such as 'elderly' or 'geriatric' which give a passive, inactive impression of a group of people who just happen to be older than others. Reed et al. (2003) point to the danger of categorizing older people and thinking of them as a separate group because, in reality, "older people are us, just a bit further on in development and experience. We will become old; we will become them" (p.17). The older age group is diverse in wealth, in health, in attitude, in education, in skills and in many other ways and Bowling (2005) suggests that categorization by age "obscures the diversity of older people, physiologically, psychologically and socially" (p.3). Many studies of older people, including those of Chatman (1991, 1992), a key theorist in the information behaviour field, identify their samples of older people using a lower age limit, of 50, 60, or 65, but with no upper limits, and the voluntary organization, Age Concern, provides services to anyone over the age of 50. Williamson (1997, 1998), however, differentiated between older age groups in the research she undertook about older people and their information use, by identifying those aged 60-74 as the young-aged, those aged 75-84 as the old-old, and those aged over 85 as the very old. Many older people in the United Kingdom, both male and female, will live at least two decades after they reach the age of 60 and "… as life expectancy increases … interests and priorities are likely to include greater activity – socially and economically – alongside limited finances, changing family networks and health and social care needs" (Age Concern, 2004b, p.4). The older age group could also be divided into just two main sections, the 'younger old' and the 'older old' and Laslett (1996) has called these two older age groups the third and fourth ages, although he does not divide them into specific year brackets. He describes the third age as "an era of personal fulfilment", a very productive age, and the fourth age as "final dependence, decrepitude and death" (p.4). This stark contrast between the two groups arises from his perspective that the third age is in fact the culmination of the "life career" (p.4) rather than a completely new era. Andrews (1999) has argued that older people inevitably learn to accept the later consequences of ageing and do not feel pressured to "retain our youthful spirit" (p.301) if this means trying to stay young, but accept ageing as an inevitable and acceptable process. For this doctoral study I considered it necessary to identify the population from which the sample of older people would be taken and decided

to include all those who had reached the age of 65, the official pensionable retirement age for men that remains the definition of 'old' for most official purposes.

2.3 Active ageing and wellbeing

It is considered important for older people to be able to use their abilities to the full and keep as active and involved as possible (Reed et al., 2003; Godfrey, Townsend and Denby, 2004). Although they may start to have problems with health and mobility at some stage, as Bowling (2005) has stated, in their sixties and seventies older people "are independent, engage in everyday activities without major restrictions, and most report that they are happy and satisfied with their lives" (p.3). Having more leisure time after retirement means that older people are able to participate in social and community activities and, in so doing, engage in and contribute to their own community. Social health is as important as physical health to older people and, according to Bowling, "social relationships and activities are among the most important areas of life nominated by the public" (p.92). Townsend, Godfrey and Denby (2006) recognize that active older people make a distinction between 'being old' and 'feeling old'. "Older people have more nuanced views that encompass aspects of the negative stereotypes and emphasise active agency." (p.885) Godfrey and Denby found, using life-story interviews and focus groups with older people, that active respondents' descriptions of the ageing process showed that they were aware of potential or actual decline in their abilities but used coping strategies in their daily lives to help keep themselves going. Whilst wanting to remain independent themselves, they also wanted to stay involved with helping and caring for others. Older people generally want to live healthy and independent lives, and these two areas of concern are inextricably linked.

In the research field of social gerontology, Continuity Theory, Activity Theory and the Theory of Successful Ageing are those most relevant to this literature review. The first, Continuity Theory, infers that maintaining the continuity between past and present helps to preserve the psychological wellbeing of older people, and their stable involvement in their social networks across the life course. As such, it is a good indicator of successful ageing and proposes that it is the responsibility of the individual to preserve their lifestyle through a process of evolutionary responses to the society in which they live in order to maintain

equilibrium (Atchley, 1977, Victor, 2005). It is certainly true that there are gradual changes in the process of ageing for an individual but, as Andrews (1999) points out, people still remain themselves. "Time and again old people say they experience the ageing process as a continuation of being themselves: their lives are ongoing" (p.316). Havighurst (1961, 1963) popularized the concept of successful ageing fifty years ago, believing that it was important to explore positive aspects of the process of ageing in research, particularly with older people who were actively controlling their lives within their own communities. Asla, Williamson and Mills (2006) report Havighurst as having postulated in his Activity Theory that "the majority of normal older people will maintain fairly constant levels of activity; that disengagement is not some inevitable process" (p.52). Although this theory challenges the stereotype of the inevitability of older people becoming less able to cope physically and socially as they age, it has also been pointed out that there is a lack of evidence for the rationale that activity in itself increases self-esteem and life satisfaction. An emphasis on healthy living and, in particular, physical activity to improve healthy living, may lead to an assumption that gradual physical deterioration or change in lifestyle with ageing is not actually inevitable. Ageing should be accepted as a process that will eventually lead to physical and sometimes mental deterioration, especially now that more people are living to a much older age. Successful ageing should be understood through each individual's perspective of their own lifestyle, taking into account the possibility that older people may vary in whether they feel satisfied with different levels of engagement or dependency. Clarke and Warren (2007), in discussing Clarke's in-depth, biographical doctoral study of the experiences of a sample of older people living in northern England, argue the need for gaining an understanding of activities within social networks in research that can "go beyond emphasizing structural factors and physical functioning" (p.483).

Health in old age is defined by older people as a mixture of good physical and good mental health, independence and mobility, and an associated ability to keep actively involved with friends and relatives (Reed et al., 2003). The influence of social relationships on wellbeing has been studied widely "Relationships can impact upon older people's wellbeing in several ways, by their number, diversity, frequency and intensity …" (Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra, 2006, pp.227-228). In their theory of 'life span development' Baltes and Baltes (1990) state

that individuals require higher levels of culturally-based resources, such as those provided through social networks and organizations, to support them through the ageing process. The degree to which older people can remain independent and active, and make their own life choices, is vital in supporting their health and wellbeing (Reed et al., 2003; Le Mesurier, 2003). A review of the results of interviews with older people for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) 'Growing Older' Research Programme (Dean, 2003), showed that "For some, a key element of their quality of life was still a physically active life … family, friends and social support was still providing a good quality of life" (p.6). In a large study randomly sampling, surveying and interviewing 999 people over the age of sixty-five, it was emphasized that old age could be a positive period of life, and most of the older participants rated their quality of life as good (Bowling, 2005). Elements of wellbeing that older people identify as important themselves reflect their spiritual, mental, physical, social and emotional needs (Chiva and Stears, 2001).

2.4 Older people in rural areas

In 2004 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2007) published a definition of rural areas covering England and Wales, using settlement size as the base, launched at the same time as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Rural Strategy (DEFRA, 2004). Under the new definition, all of the eastern side of Cumbria (the research area in this study), apart from the city of Carlisle, was classified as rural. The proportion of the population of older people who live in rural as opposed to urban areas is higher and growing rapidly, partially through in-migration from urban areas (Commission for Rural Communities, 2007). Between 1993 and 2003 there was a significant increase of 20% in those in the 75+ age group living in rural areas, one in twelve of the population being over 75 (Champion and Shepherd, 2006; Lowe and Speakman, 2006). Over the 20 years following 2005 the number of older people in rural districts is predicted to continue to rise, with those in the 60-74 age group increasing by 40% and those over 75 by 60% as people increasingly live longer, healthier lives (Age Concern England, 2005). The needs and wants of older people are therefore beginning to have a much stronger impact on rural services as the older population grows (Wenger, 2001; Lowe and Speakman, 2006).

Wenger (2001) points out that people growing older in rural areas consist of a mix of those who have lived there for many years, those who have retired there, those who are in the 'third age', and those in the 'fourth age' who may be in poorer health and more isolated. Older people in rural areas tend to live in the larger villages or small towns, moving in from the countryside as they get older in order to be nearer to friends and family, shops and other services. Manthorpe, Malin and Stubbs (2004), in their survey of older people's views of life in a rural English village, found that location was very important to their respondents, and that they appreciated factors such as the peace and quiet of the environment. They also appreciated the community spirit and neighbourliness in evidence in the village. There were some difficulties experienced, including lack of public transport, a fear that they might be isolated once they could not drive a car, poor health, and lack of police services. However, the survey showed that older villagers were determined to minimize these difficulties and organize their lives to make the most of the advantages of rural living. The respondents to Wenger's 2004 survey mostly had family living nearby, and Wenger and Tucker (2002) showed that rural communities had strong and longstanding social and family networks, with older people viewing themselves as being healthier and happier if they were part of these social networks. The community support structures displayed by the older generation in rural areas are strong, particularly in the age group that has experienced the second world war, and it's aftermath, as this is a group "that strongly believes in society and the common good" (JRF, 2004, p.45). However, Wenger (2001) also identified a myth amongst urban dwellers that the countryside was some kind of rural idyll. In reality, older people in rural Britain often have fewer facilities and services, higher costs, and difficulties with transport although it is assumed that there is less need for these services in rural areas. In fact, although life satisfaction is better and health problems are the same as in urban areas, access to services is worse.

Despite the disadvantages, many of the older people who live in rural areas, particularly those who have retired to the area, become involved in local voluntary activities and groups and support community activities. Older people are engaged in their local communities through involvement in voluntary groups, taking part in church activities, having a wider social network of friends, and being supported by this network of friends and voluntary

groups (Wenger, 2001; Reed et al., 2003). It is also clear that, even when socially engaged, rural older people need support for themselves, they are not stopped from being supporters in other ways to other people (JRF, 2004). Le Mesurier (2006) suggests that the contribution older people make to their rural communities is rarely acknowledged. Neal and Walters (2008), in their study of two rural organizations, the Young Farmers and the Women's Institute (WI), aimed to unpick the reality of the picturesque English countryside as a place of neighbourly community and safety. They found that respondents emphasized geographical location and the sense of a local place where attachment was "actively promoted in the process of face-to-face interaction and friendship making" (p.284). The, mainly older, WI members in this study placed an emphasis on "the everyday efforts required in the ongoing construction and maintenance of structures of community feeling" (p.287). Neal and Walters observed a link with the concept of the mixed 'landscape' as described by Putnam (2000) where social organizations pull the community together, and they observed the way members spoke about the influence of the WI on community involvement.

2.5 Social networks

Physical capital is observable and has a material form, human capital is present in the skills and knowledge acquired by individuals, and social capital exists in the social relationships between people; all three facilitating productive activity within and between social groups. It is believed by many that social capital, in the form of membership of formal and informal social networks, has a positive impact on people's physical and mental wellbeing (Ginman, 2003; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) argued that the ties developed between individuals within social activities help to increase social capital in the whole community. Social capital has been defined as "the wealth (or benefit) that exists because of an individual's social relationships" (Lesser, 2000, p.4), and this benefit includes the resources (both physical and social) that are made available through a network of relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 2000). The term social capital describes how the combined resources of social networks impact on the behaviour of individuals, and on the outcomes of that behaviour for the individuals involved, dependant upon the trustworthiness of the social environment, and the extent of social obligation within that environment (Coleman, 1988, p.S102). However,

it has also been noted by Portes (1998) that the conformity and social control that is often present in small, close-knit communities may lead to restrictions in individual freedoms and must be taken into account when considering the benefits of social capital (p.16).

Putnam (2000) draws a distinction between social capital of the 'bonding' type and that of the 'bridging' type. He sees bonding capital as consisting of those social ties that are generally formed amongst individuals who are socially close, the 'strong ties' identified by Granovetter (1973), and originally considered by him to be more valuable than 'weak ties'. Dolan (2007) suggests that bonding networks mobilise community spirit and "help to engender trust, and to communicate and enforce norms of behaviour among group members" (p.477). He sees bridging as essential to the success of civil society, providing "opportunities for participation and exchange" (p.477). Nussbaum, Thompson and Robinson (1989), discussing studies on the communication of elderly people undertaken by Nussbaum in 1983, report the finding that closeness in network contacts was the most important factor in promoting life satisfaction in elderly people, and concluded that "those elderly individuals high in life satisfaction remained outwardly active through their conversations" (p.246). Gray (2009) used British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data to examine how "social networks influence the practical and emotional support available to people aged over 60 years in Great Britain" (p.5). She found that there were class and gender differences in older peoples' membership of social networks and women had stronger social networks and social support than men. Ginman (2003) claims that an individual's identity is created by the internal and external information and communication they have with their social groups and the outside world:

> …everyday life discourses become one of the decisive factors in the formation of different social identities and common values as well as for the group members' behaviour. Discourses, stories and communication construct the reality in which the individual lives and works. (pp.59-60)

Coleman (1988) states that acquisition and exchange of information is an important form of social capital to facilitate action within social relationships (pp.S104, S109). Although individuals who serve as sources of information for others on a particular topic have usually initially acquired that information for their own benefit and not for the benefit of others,

there will be some who purposefully acquire information not just for themselves, but "to maintain their position as opinion leaders" (Coleman, 1988, p.S117). These individuals are examples of those people referred to by Granovetter (1973, 1982) as 'weak ties', in his rooting of the network theory of social capital in the concepts of social network theory and analysis. According to Granovetter (1982), any individual's network consists of weak ties (acquaintances and distant friends) and strong ties (family and close friends). As far as information is concerned, according to Field (2003), people prefer to go to informal sources within their social networks of friends and family because it is "much less stressful than dealing with bureaucracies and it usually seems to work faster and often produces a better outcome" (p.2) and this is true of many older people in rural areas. Boyd (2004) describes information seeking within social networks as 'fuzzy' because it "stems from the unpredictable nature of network interaction", and is affected by socio-economic and demographic circumstances (p.82). It should be noted that older people, in common with other age groups, may not always recognize their social interaction as a means of information exchange, see themselves as an information resource or provider, or be able to identify that they have an information need. Ginman (2003) states that social groups create a special information culture that may either encourage or block the sharing of information. Therefore the closeness of the group and the familiarity and comfort of the environment are vital for the group's ability to process information and influence its members. Lin et al. (2001) and Johnson (2004) claim that successful access to resources, including information resources, requires contact with weak ties outside an individual's close tie social network, some of whom may be higher in the social hierarchy of the community. Johnson (2003) found in her study that people will "use their weak ties to access people with better resources than theirs … in terms of age (middle-aged) and level of education (university-educated)" (p.13).

2.6 Information behaviour

> People tend to seek information that is easily accessible, preferably from interpersonal sources such as friends, relatives or co-workers rather than from institutions or organizations, unless there is a particular reason for avoiding interpersonal sources. (Harris and Dewdney, 1994, p.21)

Harris and Dewdney (1994) set out several principles of information seeking, and one of the key principles is that information needs are situation based and context specific, so that individuals and social groups living in particular rural contexts will have their own particular information needs. In order to understand information seeking and use in rural areas, there is a need to explore the informal networks that exist for social support (Wathen and Harris, 2007). Dervin (1992, 1999) suggests that human beings have a need to make sense of situations and to bridge gaps in their knowledge by seeking information or help through any means at their disposal within their own information and social worlds. Wilson (2000) has referred to these processes as information behaviour although McKenzie (2003) has warned against seeing individual information behaviours as separate from culturally accepted information practice within a context.

Chatman (1992) introduced the concept of the 'information world' in her research on how an individual's information needs, information seeking behaviours and use of sources were related to the everyday context of the small world in which they lived. In her study of the 'information world' community of retired women in the USA (Chatman, 1991, 1992, 1999), Chatman asked the women about what they believed was the information they required and how they went about obtaining it, as well as about the resources they used, both formal and informal, in their everyday lives. The informal sources they mentioned consisted mainly of family and friends who were part of the small world contexts in which they displayed their everyday life information behaviour. Chen and Hernon (1982) found that when respondents in their study were describing how they had discussed particular problems with friends or relatives they had often "sought spur-of-the-moment assistance with the situation described to the interviewer" (p.63). This matches Wilson's (1977) statement that information is found "where it is not specifically sought, as an accidental concomitant of routine activities with other purposes or as pure accident" (p.37). Williamson (1998) and Pettigrew (1999) and Savolainen (1995) have found that most information is accessed incidentally and serendipitously, not only through deliberate purposive searching, "but also through the passive monitoring of everyday life by which we are oriented to our environments" (Savolainen, 1995). Although people may be more readily available as information sources (Case, 2002; Chen and Hernon, 1982), the choice

of people is not necessarily an option of least effort. In their study of low income African American communities in Dallas, Texas, Spink and Cole (2001) found that the use of formal channels (like print media) versus informal channels of information access (e.g., family and friends) varied according to the type of information being sought. Also, low-income residents used family and friends in contrast to middle class residents who also accessed information via so-called formal channels (print and the media). 'Information grounds' is a descriptive phrase introduced by the information behaviour researcher Karen Pettigrew (later Fisher). Information grounds are those places or locations where the delivery and encountering of different kinds of information by specific social types takes place. They can be found in a variety of places but Fisher and Naumer (2005) report that when, in a telephone survey of over 600 residents of East King County, USA, respondents were asked to think of a place where they went for another purpose but ended up sharing information with other people, they most commonly identified "places of worship, the workplace and activity areas, that is, clubs, teams, play groups and places associated with hobbies which accounted for over 50% of the responses" (p.10). Only 1.9% of the whole sample identified the one traditional information resource mentioned, the library, as a place where they shared information. The theories of information behaviour are discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, Section 4.1.

2.7 The information behaviour of older people

Quinn, Snowling and Denicolo (2003) reported on a research project designed to involve older people in setting up an information and advocacy service in Slough, UK. They gathered the views of service providers and older people through interviews and focus groups; the older people being both users and non-users of the existing information service. For the older people, "information was seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself", (p.3) and the researchers found that they had very diverse approaches to obtaining information and advice, some being self-sufficient seekers of information, and others more reliant on other people to provide information to them. Information from formal sources was only sought on a needs basis as part of gaining access to a service or resource, and only if the seeker perceived the source to be trustworthy. Although some were self-sufficient seekers of information, others wanted to ask people they knew already, including family

friends and some professionals, rather than going to more formal information services. Barriers to accessing information from more formal sources included lack of knowledge about some of the sources, providers not sharing or co-ordinating information sources, and older people not being able to access the services identified because of lack of transport (p.4). These findings are matched by similar findings in the USA undertaken by Wicks (2001, 2004) when he interviewed fourteen older adults, seven male and seven female, retired or over 65, and living independently in Ohio. He reported that these older people relied on interpersonal sources together with printed materials to support their needs for information about participation in clubs and organisations or volunteering in the community. For practical information they went to printed resources but for more sensitive, personal information on issues around their health or welfare they tended to go to interpersonal, face-to-face sources such as their physician, family members or friends. Wicks also reports that participants read newspapers to keep up with the news rather than watching television, an interesting finding, reflecting the predominantly ex-professional sample in his survey.

Wicks (2001, 2004) also reported that participants were asked about their use of computers for everyday information searching. Twelve of the fourteen respondents owned a computer but three of these chose not to use them, and of those that did, the majority had been senior professionals. It has been assumed that the ability to use information and communications technologies (ICTs) is an essential part of living in the 'information age' and this has led to many initiatives to enable people to have access to the technologies and training in how to use them. Governments believe that e-initiatives, such as health web portals, will provide equitable access to information for people who are disadvantaged, such as those living in remote rural areas. However, these initiatives have also been criticized for failing to take account of the way in which users search for and use information (Wathen and Harris, 2007; Henwood et al., 2003). It is recognized that there is an 'information divide' in society caused, it is assumed, because certain groups are unable to get access to the technology or the training to use it. Training providers often highlight the groups of older people who succeed, the 'silver surfers', supporting the belief that everyone can benefit from ICTs if they have access and training. There has been very little research about what older people

who are users look for when they use the Internet. Henwood et al. (2003) found, in their research about the health information activity of a group of women with an average age of 55, that none of the women used the Internet to find information as a first choice; GPs were consulted first and female family members second (p.596). An Age Concern (2004a) survey of computer use by the over 50s revealed that a quarter used a computer in their spare time, and of this 25%, just over half (59%) were emailing friends and families and 48% were surfing the Internet. Anderson and Tracey (2002) undertook people-focused rather than ICT-focused research, the Digital Living study, using a range of methods to build up a rich picture of participants' use of ICTs in their everyday lives. They suggest that although the means of communication may be changing, the goal of "interpersonal social communication" has not changed. Whereas at one time people could only contact their remote relatives by letter and now have email available, there is no evidence that, unlike younger people, those adults who have Internet access in their household are spending any less time than they did before engaged in their usual interpersonal social activities and communication (pp.139-163).

Godfrey, Townsend and Denby (2004) have found that it can be difficult in a culture of self reliance, particularly in rural areas, for older people to recognize where they might be able to access formal information and advice. A review of three studies undertaken in the UK (Todd, 1984), showed that the leaflets produced by service organizations for the benefit of older people were badly designed and inaccessible. When respondents needed information, they went to family first, and then neighbours and friends, or the GP for health problems. Elfreda Chatman (1991, 1992) has shown that information sharing is important to older women who are adjusting to the life events in old age happening within their own small information worlds. Williamson (1998) discovered, in her study of the information seeking behaviour of older adults, that in addition to the use of other people to provide information, "sometimes the mass media were used purposefully" but "more commonly, respondents listened to the radio, watched television, read magazines, newspapers or other printed materials without the intention of locating specific information" (p.25). She also confirmed that most of the respondents had frequent interaction with their family and friends and this meant that they could exchange information useful for everyday living (p.31). Pettigrew

(1999, 2000), in her information grounds research, provided evidence of older people sharing their information with other older people and with nurses in addition to the nurses answering their specific questions. As also discussed in Chapters 1 and 3 of the thesis, the research and theories of Williamson and Pettigrew have influenced the development and the methodological approach for this study.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter I have provided a review of the research literature relating to the research question under investigation, including that on older people, lifestyle and wellbeing, older people living in rural areas, social networks, information behaviour, and research on the information behaviour of older people. The older people who took part in this study were predominantly those who were actively involved in social groups, some of which were physical and some sedentary, and their involvement and access to information from a variety of sources, whether interpersonal, print-based or technology-based, had an important impact on their active lifestyle (Discussed in more depth in Chapters 7-10). Further references to the literature relating to specific concepts and topics will be found in the relevant chapters that relate to data collection and analysis, the description of the analyzed data, and the description of the findings. In the following chapter I have undertaken a review of the literature on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the research, including social constructionism and critical realism and theories of information behaviour.

Chapter 3: Philosophical and theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

> … although philosophy is concerned to know what kinds of things exist in the world and what is our warrant for knowing them, research focuses on their knowable properties. (Williams and May, 1996, p.135)

The philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this research informed the conceptual and methodological frameworks, and the research design developed in response to the question, aims and objectives, and provides a fit with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher (Cresswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998). The field of information research is interdisciplinary, encompassing a wide range of ontological and epistemological perspectives. In the case of this study the ontological perspective arose from an overarching interpretivist philosophy that the knowledge, activities, experiences, interactions and multiple realities of older people in their rural location could provide the social reality that the research question was designed to explore. Epistemologically, I believed that the ethnographic approach to data collection in the field would serve my need to view participants as knowledgeable and interpretive individuals who, according to Rock (2007), construct their lives "purposefully and practically out of the meanings they bestow on what is around them and within an environment constituted by the meanings and purposes of others (p.31). In section 3.2 of this chapter, social constructionism and critical realism are introduced as the key philosophies underpinning this research. These philosophies recognise that there can be multiple realities of socially constructed worlds within local communities, facilitated or constrained by the hidden social structures and processes that exist independently of these socially constructed worlds and events. In Section 3.3 I look at how social network theories can show the patterns of the relationships and the availability and exchange of information in social networks, and in Section 3.4 I outline how information behaviour theories identify the relationship of behaviour to sources and channels of information and show the importance of context and human interaction in everyday information environments. I conclude the chapter in Section 3.5. Figure 3.1 illustrates the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the study with reference to the sections of this chapter where they are discussed.
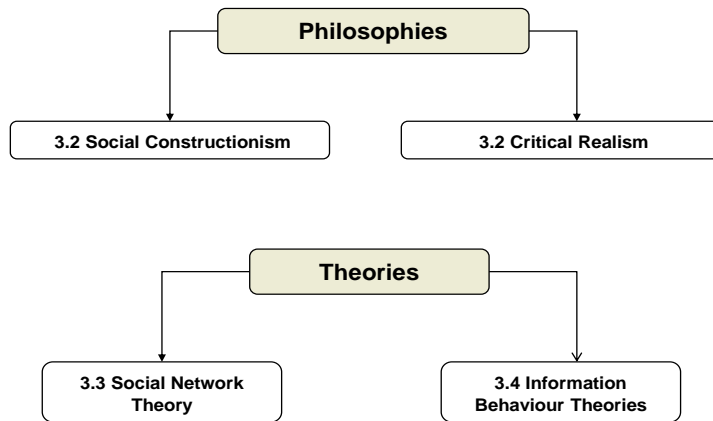
Figure 3.1: Philosophical and theoretical framework

3.2 Social constructionism and critical realism

Williamson (2006), an information researcher, believes that "the central tenet of interpretivism is that people are constantly involved in interpreting their ever-changing world" (p.84) and that a major constructivist approach, the social constructionism proposed by Berger and Luckman (1967), places "emphasis on people developing meanings for their activities together" (p.85). Within social groupings, considered by Berger and Luckmann (1967) to represent co-constructed, multiple realities "social structure is an essential element of the reality of everyday life" (p.48). According to Burr (2003), it is the dialectical relationship between the individual and society that allows us to see individuals as agents who construct their own social worlds whilst at the same time being constrained by pre-existing societal frameworks. Schwandt (1994) explains that "the focus here is … on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes (p.127). The multiple realities of social and information worlds overlap, and are socially constructed within communities that consist of individuals and groups living within their own social life-worlds (Goffman, 1990, Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). Berger and Luckmans' (1967) analysis of society as subjective reality included the recognition of a need to understand and describe the process by which an individual's conception of reality is produced by his or her interaction with the knowledge base and social structures in

28

everyday life. Social constructionism has increasingly been accepted by the information research community as an established metatheory, a theoretical and philosophical outlook, and a suitable approach to information behaviour research because it focuses on the social and communication aspects of the creation of knowledge through information exchange (Bates, 2005; Budd, 2005; Tuominen, Talja and Savolainen, 2002). Dervin's (1992, 1997, 2005) sense-making methodology has also been linked strongly to social constructionism (Vakkari, 1997). In this theory, Dervin (1997) identified common themes that take into account context and cross theoretical boundaries. A model produced by Williamson (1997, 1998, 2005) for her Ecological Theory of Human Information Behavior, is an example of a theoretical information behaviour model based on social constructionism and used as the basis for a number of her research projects.

Critical realists support a need for awareness not only of empirical events, and the social actors through whom they are constructed, but also the hidden social structures and processes, the biological, psychological, social and cultural elements that exist independently of these events, but are instrumental in driving them. In other words, the possibilities or constraints that are already in existence in the material world inform and shape the social constructions of individuals and groups; in actively seeking to find out we create knowledge because "knowledge and social action go together" (Burr, 1995). Dobson (2002), an information researcher, points out that the philosopher Bhaskar (2008) sees philosophical considerations as being an integral part of the research process. Archer (1995) supports Bhaskar in his ontological realism and in his development of "the framework of a social theory which seems set fair to navigate a passage between individualism and holism" (p.136). Davies (2008) is clear that Bhaskar has provided a sound philosophical basis for conducting ethnographic research (discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4) through the recognition of the separateness, but also interdependence, of "social structure and individual action" encouraging explanation that "builds on the creative tension between theoretical abstraction and descriptive detail" (p.26). As realists, Miles and Huberman (1994) support this philosophy, and aim to "look for an individual or a social process, a mechanism, a structure at the core of events that can be captured to provide a

causal description" (p.4), but also believe that a subjective, phenomenological research approach is important to meaning-making (discussed in Chapter 4, Section 3).

According to Wikgren (2004) information need, seeking and use are complex social phenomena and "cannot be explained in terms of mechanisms or processes working at just one level, be it personal, cognitive, discursive, or socio-cultural" (p.12). It is important not just to focus on interpreting the information worlds of particular groups through the sense-making of individuals, but also to take into account their social and cultural position, access to existing systems and sources, and the underlying causes and relationships that affect their uptake of information resources. Hjörland (2004) suggests that the subjective study of information behaviour must be connected with the objective resources and potentialities available to users. In essence, critical realism's impact on information research is to question the use of an interpretivism that focuses entirely on sense-making and human communication through dialogue, whilst ignoring structural constraints.

3.3 Social network theories

> Since information is an important resource, and one that often depends on making and maintaining contact with the right people, a social network approach offers a rich variety of concepts and techniques to describe and explain information access. (Haythornthwaite, 1996, p.325)

Social network theory has been utilized in the study of aspects of human information behaviour (Scott, 1991, Pettigrew, 2000; Haythornthwaite and Hagar, 2004). The strength of tie between the individual and the members of their social network is important in "assessing the overall connectedness of actors in an environment and the likelihood that information will flow from one actor to another" (Haythornthwaite, 1996, p.327). Strong and intimate ties are conducive to the exchange of existing information, and weak ties provide access to focused, formal, and practical information. "Strong ties connote willingness to share information, but those to whom we are weakly tied may have access to more and different information due to their connections in different networks" (p.328). In his original 'Theory of the strength of weak ties', Granovetter (1973) suggested that weak ties are more valuable than strong ties within personal social networks, pointing out that

"those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive" (p.1371). However, in his later work (1983) he conceded that only those weak ties that perform a bridging function between network segments are important for information flow, and these may be few in number amongst an individual's social contacts (p.228). There is also value in strong ties as information resources "strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available (p.209). The strength of a social tie is indicated by assessing in some way a combination of the length of time a contact has been known, the emotional intensity of the relationship, the intimacy of the relationship and the "reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973, p.1361). These reciprocal services may include the exchange of information between actors, as described in the research of Pettigrew (1999, 2000), Haythornthwaite (1996) and Chatman (2000).

Chatman (1996) built her 'Theory of Information Poverty' from a study of ageing women in a retirement community in which she applied the principles of social network theory because previous studies had suggested that "a social support system must exist before persons will engage in an interpersonal process of sharing information" (p.193). She believed that the social networks of older people would naturally lead to information exchange and emotional support, but found that some of the older women were "not engaging in information-seeking or sharing behaviors because they wanted to give an appearance of normalcy" (Chatman, 2000, p.4). Fulton (2005) suggests that Chatman's theories provide a useful framework for studying and working with groups or communities and can "offer a helpful approach to our understanding of information behavior, shifting the emphasis in exploring that behavior from a focus on information needs to social context" (p.82). According to Lai and Wong (2002), the association between social ties and routine information flow between networks, as in active information seeking or passive information receiving, is seldom examined in research. Johnson (2004) used social network theory when studying the information seeking behaviour of Mongolian residents, and based her conceptual framework on Lin's (2001) network theory of social capital, to show how the quality of the social resources within an individual's social network and means of access to those resources, impacts on individual success in achieving desired goals or outcomes. As

Johnson (2005) suggests, social network analysis can be used to find out more about the social relationships of information seekers and information sources because finding out how social structure affects information seeking "may help to explain why people in certain social groups are less able than others to acquire the information they need" (p.324).

3.4 Information theories

According to Chatman (1996) information scientists have generally used inductive reasoning to generate conceptual frameworks or models rather than to develop theories of information, and these frameworks or models have provided a base for other researchers to explore new areas using existing theoretical approaches. "It is the process of immersion, the testing of previous assumptions and the modification of those assumptions that are significant activities which ultimately lead to theory building." (p.193) In addition, theories from several other disciplines, including sociology, communication and psychology, have been applied to information need, seeking and behaviour research. In this section I specifically focus on information behaviour theories of relevance to his study. Social frameworks for describing information behaviour have been developed by a number of information researchers and are referred to in Tuominen and Savolainen (1997) and Sonnenwald (1998). Information behaviour has been defined by Tuominen and Savolainen as "a communicative construct that is produced in a social context" (p.89). 'Human Information Behaviour' (HIB) is a concept used to represent the "totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information" (Wilson, 2000, p.49). Models and theories of information seeking, needs and use initially arose from research that took a cognitive approach, focusing on the attributes of the individual, without relating them to the social context (McKenzie, 2003; Pettigrew, Fidel and Bruce, 2001; Dervin and Nilan, 1986; Kulthau, 1991; Ellis, 1989). A paradigm shift from information seeking research to information user and information behaviour research, started in the 1970s (Dervin and Nilan, 1986) and redefined information as "a subjective phenomenon, constructed at least to some extent by the user, and not an objective phenomenon" (Cole, 1994, p.465). Wilson is a key figure in the development of information needs, use, and behaviour models and his early model of information need and seeking (1981, p.8) showed how a combination of a personal needs, work (or social) role, and environment (social, work, political and physical)

gives rise to a need for information, and leads to information seeking behaviour that may also be affected by personal, interpersonal and environmental barriers. The concept of information need may be considered to be problematic, because information need is usually an aspect of a more general need (e.g. for a service or a product). Dervin's (1992) holistic sense-making approach to examining information seeking and use focuses on the connections between the provider, the means of delivery (channel and format), the message (information) and the context.

Dervin (2005) devised a sense-making methodology in order to build a bridge between substantive theories and metatheories in information research and to move towards a general methodological theory. According to Vakkari (1997) "sense-making represents social constructionism" (p.457), whereas for Tidline (2005) sensemaking is a conceptual tool for "understanding the relationship of communication, information, and meaning" and is "associated with a shift in research emphasis from information sources to information users" (p.113). A sense-making methodology can be applied using qualitative, interpretive methods, and can be combined with other theories to gain an understanding of the processes by which people become informed and the many contexts in which those processes occur (Tidline 2005). Dervin (1997) identified common themes that take into account contexts crossing theoretical boundaries, and assume that "knowledge is partial and temporary" and dependant on context, that "reality is discontinuous" and "gap-filled, changeable across time-space" only in context, that "the knower-and-the-known are inextricably bound", that "context is not usefully conceptualized as independent entity", and that "context requires a focus on process" (p.17-18). Kulthau (1991) has described the information search process as "the user's constructive activity of finding meaning from information in order to extend his or her state of knowledge on a particular problem or topic" (p.361). She states that the process of sense-making as defined by Dervin shows that an individual is actively involved in finding new meanings that fit with his/her existing knowledge, and associates feelings and thoughts with actions in the information process. In the model she derived from a phenomenological perspective, Kulthau identifies a series of stages in the process, from initiation through to presentation. Dervin's theory has been developed further to encompass the construction and co-construction of ideas,

understandings, and emergent patterns of information behaviour expressed through action and language (Dervin, 1999, Bates, 2005, Talja, Tuominen and Savolainen, 2005).

The focus on social context in information research emerged during the 1990s when the phenomenon of context was being considered within a wide range of social research perspectives. In researching information behaviour "researchers look into various types of information-seeking, use and searching within certain situations and contexts" (Macevičiūtė and Wilson, 2005, p.43). Pendleton and Chatman (1998) pointed out that information seeking is a response to an information need that is easy to identify and to respond to, whereas information behaviour emphasizes the discovery, construction and exchange of information, and represents how people interact with information and information sources regardless of whether they seek it, use it or avoid it. In her later work, (1999, 2000), Chatman took the concept of the small world, originally defined by Schutz and Luckmann (1974), and re-defined it as "… a world in which everyday happenings occur with some degree of predictability", a world that is populated by "legitimized others" who are "… people who share physical and/or conceptual space within a common landscape of cultural meaning" (2000, p.1). In her 'Theory of Life in the Round' Chatman (1999, p.214) suggests that, in these small worlds, people set boundaries on their behaviour, including their information behaviour, and the established behaviour creates a 'worldview' which is played out as their 'life in the round'. Individuals may ignore information if they feel that their small world is working well enough without it and, because of the comfort and predictability of their situation, they do not need to seek it (Pettigrew, Fidel and Bruce, 2001, p.55). The insider/outsider perspective is shown in the identification of small world scenarios where insiders believe that outsiders cannot understand or take part of their world and thus are likely to "shield themselves from needed resources" (Chatman, 1996, p.194; Pendleton and Chatman, 1998). Wilson (1999) highlights the concept of uncertainty, where individuals are faced with problematic situations in their everyday life-world that do not fit with their current accepted knowledge and experience. He suggests that there are a number of stages in problem resolution, from identification through to solution, and that "each stage sees the successive resolution of more and more uncertainty" (p.266). Marcella and Baxter's Information Interchange Theory (1999, 2000, 2001, 2005) is based on the premise

that the roles and objectives of actors taking part in an information interaction between at least two parties have a significant impact on the decisions they make about providing, accessing, withholding, and using information (Marcella and Baxter, 2005, p.206). Later, Abrahamson (2007) reviewed the research literature on people who are gatekeepers of information (called 'lay information mediaries') who pass information on to others in their own information communities. He created a conceptual information model detailing the participants, stages, contexts and characteristics of lay information mediary behaviour. Some information behaviour researchers have identified that information is mainly accessed incidentally and this is in contrast to a belief still accepted by some theorists in information science research that information behaviour is about actively pursuing information resources.

Case (2002) provides evidence that supports least effort, informal approaches to information access as being rational and successful and concludes that "it is wrong to interpret least effort information seeking as 'irrational' suggesting that such behavior can be "both satisfying and successful" (p.289). Bates (2002) emphasizes that information seeking is both active and passive "… we absorb perhaps 80 percent of all our knowledge through simply being aware, being conscious and sentient in our social context and physical environment" (p.4). Erdelez (1999) suggests that a common way in which people gather information is by "bumping into the environment" and finding information through "serendipitous information encountering" (p.26). Some 'encounterers', she asserts, have a tendency to be looking out for information, and, consequently, collect more of it when they are undertaking a routine activity in an everyday environment, or looking for other kinds of information (pp.27-28). The importance of context has been recognized by information researchers for many years but the concept of place (or grounds) as an essential factor in the exploration of information encountering and exchange amongst individuals in their own communities has only been emphasized in more recent research. In library and information science research, context has often been marginalized within a description of background information, whereas it perhaps should be considered as a vital element in the exploration of socio-cultural, context-specific processes (Lloyd and Williamson, 2008, p.9). Lloyd (2006) has described information literacy in terms of 'landscapes' and refers to 'mapping

the terrain' as a process of working within the framework of a landscape to describe the information sources that are valuable to that landscape, the constructs that underpin it, and the opportunities available within it for interaction with information, focusing on "the textual, social and embodied practices and process" (p.581). Both Lloyd and Williamson were influenced by Bronfenbrenner who proposed an 'Ecological Theory' (1979) that stressed the progressive embeddedness of active human beings developing within their settings and "relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which these settings are embedded" (p.21). Johnson et al. (2006) identified that a realist-pragmatic viewpoint allowed for the recognition of constraining spatial factors, such as physical distance from an information source, at the same time recognizing that, as individuals become focused in their information seeking, they change the nature of their information field, seeking information related to particular purposes (p.571). Lievrouw (2001) developed a conceptual model that showed that the boundaries of contexts changed according to the practices of information actors, both through institutional practices of organising and distributing information and social practices of individual information seeking and sharing. Therefore the information actor can take part in overlapping environments and activities (Lievrouw and Farb, 2003).

Courtright (2007) concludes that "An information ground is thus not only a physical setting but also is overlaid with certain social configurations, including specified actors and norms" (p.279). Pettigrew developed her Information Grounds framework whilst undertaking a series of research projects exploring the information grounds of different population groups, particularly clinics run by nurses and attended by older people but held in a variety of locations (Pettigrew, 1999; 2000). The development and use of the framework led Fisher (formerly Pettigrew) to conclude that a set of propositions could be applied in information behaviour research through the use of the framework in many different locations (Fisher, Durrance and Hinton, 2004; Fisher et al., 2004; Fisher and Naumer, 2005; Fisher, Landry and Naumer, 2007).

The propositions, outlining ways in which information grounds evolve over time, are as follows:

36

- People gather at 'information grounds' for a primary, instrumental purpose other than information sharing.
- Information grounds are attended by different social types, most if not all of whom play expected and important, albeit different roles in information flow.
- Social interaction is a primary activity at 'information grounds' such that information flow is a by-product.
- People engage in formal and informal information sharing, and information flow occurs in many directions.
- Information grounds can occur anywhere, in any type of temporal setting and are predicated on the presence of individuals.
- People use information obtained at 'information grounds' in alternative ways, and benefit along physical, social, affective and cognitive dimensions.
- Many sub-contexts exist within an 'information ground' and are based on people's perspectives and physical factors; together these sub-contexts form a grand context."

(Fisher, Durrance and Hinton, 2004, p.756)

Pettigrew was influenced by Tuominen and Savolainen's (1997) application of social constructionism and she defined information grounds as

> "environment[s] temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behavior emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information" (Pettigrew, 1999, p.811)

This definition fits well with Williamson's 'Ecological Theory of Human Information Behavior' in which she stresses that, in addition to purposeful information seeking, people find or encounter information unexpectedly as they take part in their everyday activities and she termed this process "incidental information acquisition" (Williamson, 2005, p.128). Both Pettigrew and Williamson stress the serendipitous and accidental quality of information encountering in everyday life situations.

3.5 Summary

I have shown in this chapter that social constructionist and critical realist philosophical standpoints fit with theoretical developments in information and social research that seek to explain information and knowledge exchange within social interaction in the real world (Potter, 1996). I have chosen to respond to these philosophies by taking a critical, reflective

and holistic approach to my research (Burr, 2003). The theoretical background to information research is influenced by theories in other disciplines, including sociological theories that "seek to describe the changes that happen to people as they get older, at a physical, social, and psychological level …" (Reed, Stanley and Clarke 2004, p.18). The aim of information theorists has been to "seek a better understanding of the seekers themselves … as well as the intricate variability of human social contexts and information-seeking behaviour" (Lievrouw and Farb, 2003, p.515). By focusing my conceptual framework on information behaviour theories, and the work of researchers such as Fisher and colleagues (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007) and Williamson (1997, 1998, 2005), I felt encouraged to undertake research that takes account of the different social contexts and social activities of research participants to identify serendipitous 'bumping into' information, barriers and gaps in information flow and examples of successful exchange, all of which adds empirical and analytical strength to a study of information in a particular community. In Chapter 4, I describe the methodological framework and the research design based on decisions about how to approach the field and the collection of the data, including the sample, data collection methods, strategies for data analysis and ways of ensuring rigor in the research process.

Chapter 4: Methodological framework

4.1 Introduction

Taking account of social constructionist and critical realist philosophical perspectives and information behaviour theories and models, I developed a phenomenological, interactionist methodological approach to the research framework. The research design, illustrated in Figure 4.1 shows the process of development through a review of the literature informing the research question, aim and objectives and the conceptual, philosophical and theoretical frameworks. The figure is numbered to show the corresponding chapters and sections where these are discussed in the thesis. I discuss the literature search process in Section 4.2 of this chapter, and follow this with a brief discussion of the elements of the methodology and the methods used in the field discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. The methodological approach to data collection, including a discussion of phenomenological and symbolic interactionist approaches is discussed in Section 4.3, the ethnographic and qualitative approach to data collection in Section 4.4, and there is an overview of the qualitative data collection and analysis in Section 4.5. Measures to ensure the validity, credibility and trustworthiness of the data collection process are discussed in Section 4.6 and ethical considerations underpinning all aspects of the research in Section 4.7.

4.2 Literature search

A comprehensive search of the literature was undertaken and the results obtained were combined thematically to ensure that this study was grounded in existing knowledge (Booth and Haines, 1998; Beverley, Booth and Bath, 2003). Initially, as part of the project approval process within the University, I had conducted a brief search of the literature around the proposed topic title which at first included the phrase 'health and healthy living information', later replaced by the broader, more general term, 'information behaviour'. Because the approach I intended to adopt for data collection required me to be reflexive and responsive to the needs of the field and to participants, I intended not to be led in any particular direction because of my prior knowledge of the subject or pre-conceived ideas gained from the literature.
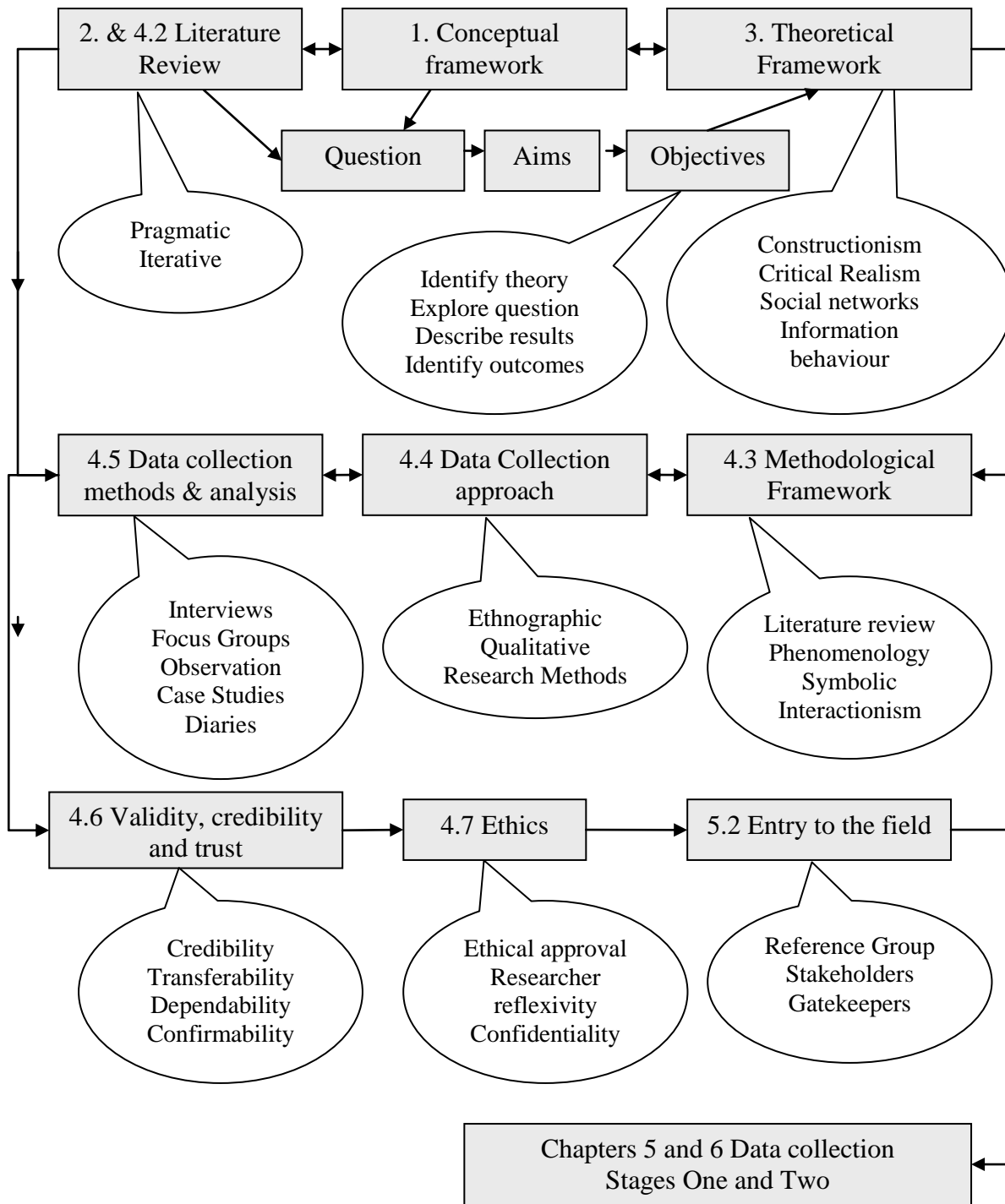
Figure 4.1: Research framework

In terms of the process of researching the literature, it has been recognized by qualitative researchers (Walsh and Downe, 2005) that both online and traditional approaches to search strategies are advisable. Bates (1989) conceived the idea for information research of 'berrypicking' in which she suggested that most searches begin with one aspect of a broader topic or one relevant reference as a start, rather than having a fully formed strategy, and then move through a variety of sources with each new item of information they find, giving "new ideas and directions to follow and, consequently, a new conception of the query" (p.3). I considered it essential to use a number of pragmatic approaches for my search, both systematic and serendipitous, in order to identify research papers related to the research question and to respond to topics identified by respondents throughout the two data collection periods. It was necessary to continually revisit the literature for more references and guidance on the methodological approach to the research as decisions were made in response to the needs of the field leading to changes in methods or in approaches to respondents and to take into account the variations in search terms needed to cover all possibilities in the databases of different research disciplines. Cook et al. (2004) have pointed out that the process of selecting items for review "involves processes of translation and interpretation backed up by an understanding of the way in which information becomes available, and ways in which it can be accessed" (p.14). I had some previous knowledge of both the subject area and the literature search process before starting my doctoral research. The resources I accessed included those from traditional paper searches and those from searches of electronic databases using a variety of search strategies and terms. I also used 'grey literature', and websites of organizations in the field, internet search engines, and citation lists of the key authors and papers previously identified (Beverley, Booth and Bath, 2003). The literature review references appear predominantly in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 but also throughout the thesis.

4.3 Methodological framework

> To state one's methodological position is to describe one's view of the nature of reality … for the phenomenologist, the world (or at least the world s/he chooses to explore) is one of intersubjectively constructed meanings. (Wilson, 2002b, p.9)

Budd (2005, p.46) supports Husserl (2001) in his belief that information is transformed into knowledge, but that the human condition is so complex that the reality of any individual's knowledge situation can only be understood at particular points in time, in particular psychological states and physical and social contexts. Schütz's (1970) principal task was to use the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl as a basis for developing a philosophy for the social sciences. His phenomenology of the social world highlighted the importance of the everyday experience of social 'actors' and, as Budd (2005) puts it, the need to "understand intentional acts when we have access only to what is said and what is done by the other" (p.49). The relationship between society, the individual and knowledge is central to the sociological theory that Berger and Luckmann (1967) based on society viewed as both objective and subjective reality. They contend that "the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality" in order "to understand the reality for a particular social context" (p.15). Husserl's Lebenswelt (life world) emanates from the idea that people exist in a day-to-day world that is filled with complex meanings affecting everyday actions and interactions. A common theme across the differing standpoints of a number of phenomenological thinkers is the "recognition that experience is richer than what our physical senses can apprehend" (Budd, 2005, p.45).

In this study I take a phenomenological, interactionist approach to the methodological framework. Taking the phenomenological approach enables a researcher to understand "... the perception of reality through the minds of the respondents" (Sarantakos, 1998, p.48). The researcher has the task of helping participants to describe their world as clearly as possible and then explaining the elements of these descriptions in order to reveal the life world of participants to the wider public. According to Douglas (1980) phenomenological researchers observe and experience everyday life interactions within natural situations in which they occur in order to try to discover 'meanings' from the standpoint of members in social groups, in terms of "feelings, perceptions, emotions, moods, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values, and morals of the members of society" (p.2). The phenomenological attitude taken within information studies has been based mostly on discourse, generally between information provider and user, and, according to Cornelius (1996), enhances information theory construction by "binding practice and theory into a closer and more complex

relationship." (p.2). According to Budd (2005) the writings of the information scientists Dervin (1977, 1989) and Kuhlthau (1991) recognize "that meaning cannot be imposed on an individual, but that the individual mind engages in a complicated assessment and interpretation" of the information sought (p.55). However, Erdelez's (1999) theory of information encountering, and Foster and Ford's (2003) ideas on serendipity in information seeking suggest that people's active intentional consciousness allows them to access information serendipitously by 'bumping' into it. The symbolic interactionist "sees ageing as a dynamic process that is responsive to both structural and normative contexts and individual capacities and perceptions" (Victor, 2005, p.35). According to Burr (2003, p.193) social constructionism links with symbolic interactionism which originated in the work of George Mead and is espoused in his book 'Mind, self and society' published in 1934, the idea being further developed by Herbert Blumer (1969). Burr (2003, 193) states that Mead saw the mind and consciousness of the individual as being key to that individual's relationship to society, and social interaction as being crucial to the development of the self. Blumer (1969) believed that the symbolic interactionist could only understand the world of the people being studied by getting to the meanings behind the social actions they took. It is a perspective that Patton (2002) feels emphasizes "the importance of meaning and interpretation as essential human processes" (p.112). The focus on symbolic interactionism in research is on close contact and interaction with participants using a flexible, naturalistic approach, and Patton (2002) follows Blumer (1969), in suggesting that a researcher must try to see the world through the eyes of her informants using qualitative methods and inductive analysis. In the field this can be achieved, according to Davies (2008) by talking and observing and developing "in-depth descriptive accounts of their interactions, seen as on-going creative processes that construct social realities through the meanings they develop" (p.50). The first step is familiarization with the topic under investigation and then data collection and description through "immersion in the setting, focusing on the relevant data, and determining the relations between people" and, secondly, "intensive scrutiny of the findings through induction, leading to theory; the inspection phase" (Adler and Adler, 1980, pp.41-42).

It has been suggested by Gubrium and Holstein (1997) that ethnography occupies the middle ground between naturalism and constructionism in that it tries, as in naturalism, to "get close to its subjects in order to capitalize upon their familiarity with the topic of study" (p.42), but at the same time does not assume that it will find "an underlying, shared, cognitive order" (p.53). The ethnographic approach to data collection in the field was appropriate for this study because, as LeCompte and Schensul (1999) stress, ethnography assumes that it is important to discover what people do and why they do it "before we can assign to their actions interpretations drawn from our own personal experience or from our professional or academic disciplines" (p.1). Ethnographic research requires the researcher to be open to the possibility of some lack of control over events, according to Lofland and Lofland (1995), who suggest that, in the serendipitous process of looking for a direction to emerge, the researcher will be at times in a state of controlled chaos. Sandstrom (2004) feels that the way to control the chaos might be to adopt a systematic approach to observation in the field based on "significant prior knowledge of the context" (p.3). Davies (2008) suggests that the critical realism of Bhaskar (2008) can make an important contribution to a reflexive, realist ethnographic approach, providing better and fuller understandings of societies and cultures. As Davies (2008) points out, ethnography provides "a much more subtle and complex view of society in which human agents are neither passive products of social structures nor entirely their creators but are placed in an iterative and naturally reflexive feedback relationship to them" (p.19). Charmaz (2006) describes the approach as a means for a researcher to be open to a setting and to the people that exist within it. "Ethnographers have the opportunity to work from the ground up and to pursue whatever they find to be of the greatest interest." (p.21)

The interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) and others have suggested that culture should be interpreted and described through a process of 'thick description', 'culture' being a semiotic communication system which Sandstrom (2004) describes as "part of the shared patterns of meaning that lie outside an individual's knowledge system" (p.3). Ethnography may be seen as a general strategy for research in the field that enables an understanding of human behaviour in particular contexts requiring face-to-face interaction within a community, or communities, and sometimes direct involvement in the

44

activities of the participants in the study. It can be distinguished from other approaches to data collection by its focus on context and on a process of discovery that enables the researcher to identify and make sense of important elements in everyday life through the use of qualitative methods over a period of time. According to Rock (2007), the practice of ethnography, because it comes from an interactionist epistemology, presumes that "useful social and sociological learning is not a state but a matter of practical exchange, a *process*", and research is interactive, creative, selective and interpretive, leading to the pursuit of further directions of inquiry (p.30).

4.4 Data collection

> The ethnographer chooses informants from segments of a social system that are meaningful in terms of the ethnographer's explicitly stated theories, hypotheses, or hunches as to the workings of society, culture, or phenomenon under study. (Johnson, 1990, p.27)

An ethnographer takes a phenomenological, 'emic', or insider's, perspective to data collection in the field by accessing multiple perceptions of reality in order to understand and describe situations and behaviours, and combines this approach with an 'etic', or outsider's, approach to rigor in data collection and interpretation (Fetterman, 1989, Patton, 2002). Bogdan and Taylor (1975) believe that "the emic perspective – the insider's or native's perspective of reality – is at the heart of most ethnographic research" (p.30), and that the documenting of multiple realities is crucial to understanding why people think and act in different ways (p.31). My approach has thus followed both the emic and etic perspectives through the use of several methods to collect data and to describe situations and behaviours whilst ensuring that the approach to the field and participants, and the process of data collection was rigorously, ethically and reflectively managed. The researcher records information about the behaviour of people under investigation from their own perspective with the aim of providing an analysis of the findings that is meaningful to the researched (Sandstrom, 2004). The holistic, ethnographic approach to data collection demands that a researcher spends "a great deal of time in the field to gather the many kinds of data that together create a picture of the social whole" (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, p.29), using multiple methods to collect the data from different individuals. Maso (2007) believes

that phenomenological ethnographers "assume that there are individual differences as well as different ways of looking between each other and within a group" and that ethnographers take for granted that "these differences lead to, as well as being the result of, different constructions of reality" (p.144). Although a researcher should remain open to multiple realities emerging from the data, it is important that the approach is 'not synonymous just with "going to have a look around", but has a purpose or an "ethnographic intent", because "purpose rather than method lies at the heart of all research" (Wolcott, 2001, p.40). Johnson (1990) believes, as do Agar (1996) and Van Maanen (1988), that the ethnographer should have the ultimate aim of producing "a written account or representation of the total aspect of a society, culture, or social scene" (p.10). The ethnographic approach can lead to a more robust interpretation and analysis of the data because an ethical approach is taken, and a researcher is committed to differentiating between their own viewpoint and the viewpoints of the participants. In an example from the field of sociology, Christensen, Hockey and James (1997) studied rural farming families in the North of England in their ethnographic study consisting of twelve months of fieldwork using participant observation, ethnographic interviews, life-story interviews and network mapping, and focused on women in rural agricultural communities. In the field of information research, Chatman (1992) used an ethnographic approach in her study of women living in a retirement community because she felt that "ethnographic studies make known contextual meanings, cultural norms, and social interactions that are not possible with other methods" (p.3). I had the ethnographic goal in this study of participating in and understanding the local culture by observing older people's activities, including those of case study participants, and recording data reflecting the viewpoint of the people engaged in the behaviours under investigation.

4.5 Data collection methods and analysis

A flexible and reflexive approach to data collection and analysis was appropriate for this study, taking into account ethical issues relating to sensitivity, privacy and confidentiality, and maximizing the collection of rich data through the use of multiple methods (Mason, 1996). According to the critical realists Bhasker and Danermark (2001), social events operate in open systems of interacting mechanisms that require the use of an interpretive methodological approach to research using appropriate multiple data collection methods.

Data collection and analysis in this study is exploratory and inductive, and therefore predominantly qualitative (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the qualitative approach allowing for "unanticipated aspects and links to emerge" (Foster and Ford, 2003, p.326). Ely (1991) stated that qualitative research cannot be easily defined but can be understood through looking at the approach to the field and the characteristics of the methods that are used. Shenton and Dixon (2004) suggest that the approach implies that a study should be fairly lengthy, involve a relatively small number of participants, and gather subjective data, leading to understanding gained from the "patterns and episodes within the data itself, rather than from the frequency with which the data falls into categories imposed by the investigator" (p.2). I used qualitative methods for the ongoing collection of data and analysis in Stage One, leading to the identification of themes for further exploration in Stage Two, with the emphasis on 'discovery' not 'proof' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). The emphasis in Stage One was on finding ways of identifying the key information issues of concern for rural older people, in terms of health, wellbeing and lifestyle. I wanted to investigate this from the perspective of providers of services to older people, but also from the perspective of the older people themselves, in order to inform the design of the second stage of data collection, focusing in more depth on the process of information exchange taking place within older peoples' social networks. In order to achieve this aim, different data collection methods were needed for the two stages, partially to suit the requirements of access to the samples of providers and older people, but also to gain different perspectives on the data. Rice and Ezzy (1999) argue that combining research methods can help to provide a range of perspectives, making the findings more robust and at the same time responsive to the needs of the geographical location and population, developing "a complex picture of the phenomenon being studied." (p38). Patton (2002) believes that researchers have a mandate to use whatever research methods are most suitable for their purpose. In this study there was significant overlap and flexibility in the use of methods, and the balance between data collection and analysis was also flexible with "constant interaction between problem formulation, data collection and data analysis" (Seale, 2004, p.221). The use of multiple data collection methods maximized the potential for the collection of rich data (Rice and Ezzy, 1999) and the process of decision making about which methods were most appropriate for particular situations arising in the fieldwork was iterative, the

methodological approach being revised at the end of Stage One and during Stage Two of the data collection. The methods used in the study are illustrated in Figure 4.2
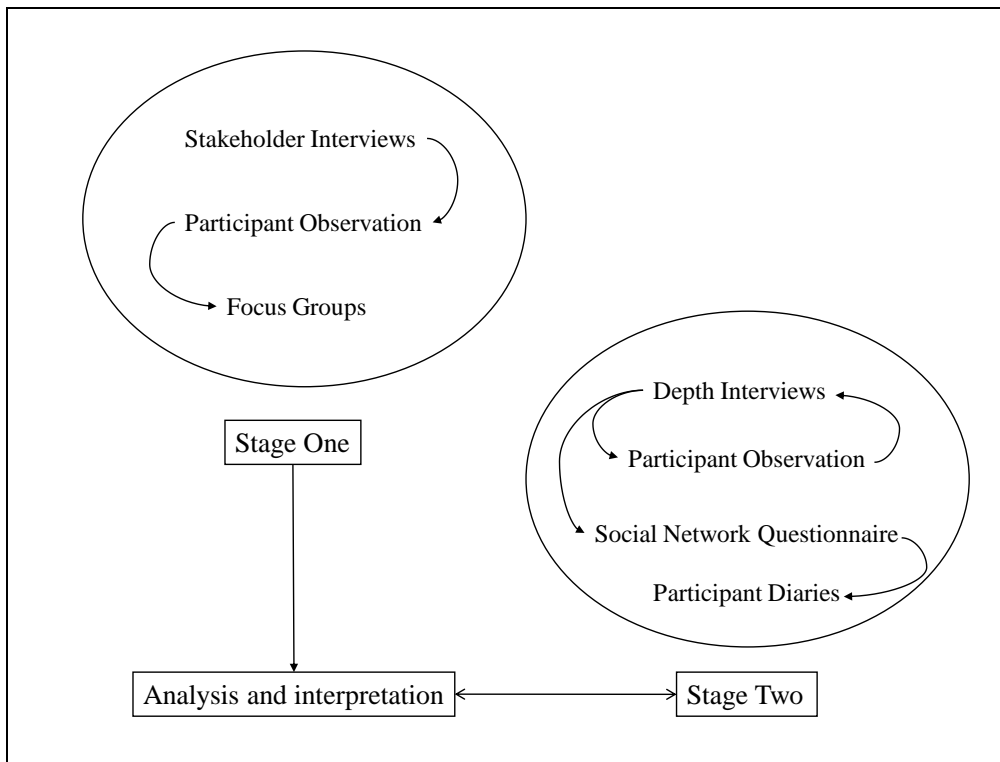
Figure 4.2: Methods

In Stage One, semi-structured interviews were undertaken using an interview guide, with key service provider informants, and focused discussions with representatives of older peoples' groups were planned once contact had been made with local group leaders. Short term participant observation within older peoples' activities provided a means of familiarization with the groups of older people. In Stage Two, observation in social activity groups involved participation for longer periods of time in order to learn about activities and observe the social interaction of individuals in addition to getting to know them better. Depth interviews were arranged with individual older people accessed through the snowball technique and people were selected according to a set of inclusion criteria. Social network interviews were conducted with most of the older people who had been interviewed in depth. Finally, five case study participants were identified from the interviewees and these five agreed to write participant journals over two weeks before being interviewed again

about the journal content. The methods I used are described in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6 in combination with the description of the process of data collection and analysis for Stage One and Stage Two in the field.

According to Patton (2002), data reduction and content analysis involves "identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labelling …" (p.463) in order to manage the data and pave the way for interpreting the results. Burke (2007), however, describes the goal of this process as being to keep in mind the whole story and "its internal coherence, to see how the pieces fit together, in contrast to 'breaking down the data' as in grounded theory-inspired coding" (p.186). Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three components of qualitative data analysis; data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. They define data reduction as the "process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (p.10). Data reduction begins at the start of data collection in the field, whilst outputs are still being produced, because of restrictions that have to be implemented, for example on sample size, interview length and observation time. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) the analytic process is informed by "theoretical ideas, common sense expectations and stereotypes which allow the analyst to pick out surprising, interesting, and important features" (p.213). Preliminary data analysis, according to Grbich (2007), "involves a simple process of checking and tracking the data to see what is coming out of them, identifying areas which require follow-up and actively questioning where the information collected is leading or should lead the researcher" (p.25). Data interpretation and analysis in both Stages One and Two of this study ran concurrently with data collection, one process informing the other (Ely et al, 1997; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The qualitative interview data was analyzed reflexively, inductively and iteratively using an exploratory, sense-making approach (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Miles and Huberman 1994) and combined with the data collected using different data collection methods in order to construct the rich description using quotes seen in Chapters 7 to 10. The analysis was guided by the initial sensitizing concepts identified from the research question and outlined in Chapter 1.6. Blumer (1969) suggests that sensitizing concepts provide the researcher with "directions along which to look" (p.148) and Patton (2002) that they are used to examine "meaning in a

particular setting or among a particular group of people" (p.456). This might also be described as directed thematic analysis where "existing theory or research can help focus the research question" (Hsiu-Fang and Shannon, 2005, p.1277). The interpretation of the analysed data is discussed in Chapter 6, Section 7, and the 'Thematic Diagram' illustrated in Figure 6.5.

4.6 Validity, credibility and trust

Chatman (1992) has identified three components of the concept of validity: face, criterion, and construct. She states that face validity exists when observations fit a sense of everyday reality; criterion validity "occurs when the research establishes the accuracy of findings by employing an additional method of inquiry" (p.13); and construct validity refers to a phenomenon having meaning in relation to the conceptual framework of the study (pp.12-14). Rather than use the term 'validity', Patton (2002) prefers the terms 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity' when referring to the production of qualitative data that are "credible, trustworthy, authentic, balanced about the phenomenon under study, and fair to the people studied."(p.51). Burke (2007) also feels that validity in ethnographic research is mainly about providing a 'compelling' and persuasive account of what the researcher has found out about the topic (p.179). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have argued that ensuring credibility is essential to creating trustworthiness in a research project. They suggest that this can be achieved through prolonged engagement in the field, an ability to focus in on the elements in a situation that are most relevant to the question, an ability to recognise researcher bias, also recognising the affect that taking part in research may have on participants, and the need to build trust with participants without "going native" (pp.301-331). Guba and Lincoln (1981) have suggested that researchers conducting naturalistic inquiries might use the following set of criteria in pursuing trustworthy studies:

Credibility	(in preference to internal validity)
Transferability	(in preference to external validity / generalisability)
Dependability	(in preference to reliability)
Confirmability	(in preference to objectivity)

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), an important way of establishing credibility in qualitative research is through the use of different forms of member checks throughout the

course of the data collection, achieved by asking participants for verification of what they have said in interviews or asking a group of participants to discuss the researcher's emerging theories (pp.314-315). Participants in this study were asked individually whether they agreed with my record of what they had said in interviews. The triangulation of data methods and sources are also considered to be important for credibility. According to Patton (2002) the purpose of triangulation for constructionists is to gather multiple perspectives via different means, and to identify the elements in the situation that are most relevant, rather than to find a common perspective, or to make generalisations (p.248). In this study I used several different data collection methods; four with case study participants to gather as broad a range of data from them as possible.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have also addressed the subject of the extent of transferability of data collected in naturalistic studies and have suggested that a researcher cannot "specify the external validity of a study" (p.316). Shenton (2004) states "Since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations" (p.69) Stake (1995) suggests, however, that naturalistic generalizations can safely be made in ethnographic research and that "naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding" (p.442). Lincoln and Guba (1985) are clear that the use of thick description allows the reader to reach conclusions about potential transferability (p.316), and Patton (2002) believes that this approach to writing can open up the world of the researched to the reader "in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meaning and significance" (p.438). The collection of qualitative data in various ways from the case study participants in particular, grounded in the detailed data from informal interviews and observations, allowed me to present a rich description of the results from which the reader can draw their own conclusions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the dependability and confirmability of research can be shown through a clear audit trail of the process, and Shenton (2004) feels that, in addition, a theoretical audit trail could clarify "the manner in which the concepts inherent in the research question gave rise to the work to follow" (p.72).

A qualitative researcher may look to ways of confirming the findings of research by avoiding researcher bias, checking with participants throughout the process, and acknowledging reasons for decisions made about methods and approaches. Chatman (1992) sought reliability in her research by consistently taking notes immediately after leaving the field, participating in or observing multiple situations to deepen her insight into the phenomenon and constantly re-visiting the literature "examination of other research in which the same or similar phenomena have been explored increases one's confidence that the data being reported are reliable" (p.12). The process of writing, whether in producing researcher notes, or writing the thesis, should be reflexive according to Jasper (2005). She suggests that the reflexivity of writing can be examined using the three criteria of trustworthiness identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

> Trustworthiness is enhanced when researchers describe and interpret their experiences, and identify the events, influences, and actions influencing their research – thus acknowledging their own centrality to the research process. (Jasper, 2005, p.256)

I recognized that I should acknowledge and record my involvement in the research process and be explicit about how my involvement might affect the resulting data through reflection and recording of my thoughts in a research diary.

4.7 Ethics

Chatman (1992) believed that ethical concerns are particularly important in ethnographic research because "there is an element of violation associated with observing people within their natural settings and of recording this activity" (p.17). Hewitt (2007) highlights the difficulties encountered by researchers in defining how they should behave ethically in advance of data collection "as moral questions can arise at any time during the research process" (p.1151). According to Goodwin et al. (2003), ethical issues must be taken into account from the very start of a research project, not only because they may need to be addressed to gain formal ethical approval, but also because a researcher must be prepared for ethical dilemmas to arise at any time during the field research, sometimes "in situations where the researcher has little control over events" (p.567).

> Ethics is an ever-present concern for all researchers; it pervades every aspect of the research process from conception and design, through to research practice, and continues to require consideration during dissemination of results. (Goodwin et al, 2003, p.567)

Ethical frameworks can help to protect researchers from being put at risk from incidents in the field (Coffey, 1999, p.75), and, according to Hallowell, Lawton and Gregory (2005), developing a robust ethical framework can give the research a certain amount of credibility. The National Research Ethics Service (NRES) (2007) provides guidance for those seeking ethics approval from the NHS, and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2005) have provided useful guidance for researchers who work on projects funded by them. The ESRC has six key principles of ethical research that I considered to be sensible and practical, outlining the need for integrity and quality, informed participants, confidentiality, voluntary participation, avoidance of harm and impartiality as follows:

- Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality
- Research staff and subjects must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved.
- The confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected
- Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from any coercion
- Harm to research participants must be avoided
- The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit

Ferdinand et al. (2007) assert, however, that research can be too tightly regulated through a rigid, traditional approach to requiring ethical approval (p.520). They suggest that researchers might take a radical position by rejecting established codes of ethics on the basis that they are able to regulate themselves through self-reflection (p.520). Although research guidelines can help in developing an ethical protocol for approaching data collection in the field, they are only guidelines, and cannot provide answers to every dilemma or situation that a researcher will encounter. According to Goodwin (2003) this is

especially the case in ethnographic fieldwork, because "ethical issues must be resolved individually, taking account of the specific research context" (p.568). The ethnographer "has a responsibility to shape the data in line with ethical and moral considerations" (p.569). I encountered minor situations requiring the consideration of ethical implications, both during the process of gaining NHS ethical approval, and during the collection of data in Stage One and Stage Two, and I employed a considered and common sense approach to resolving these. Ethical issues are addressed within the research protocol I produced for the NHS ethics approval process (Appendix 2) and the process of gaining this approval is outlined in Appendix 3. The research protocol includes an explanation of control procedures, including those for the use of multiple methods, procedures for accessing participants, gaining consent, collecting, recording and analysing data, maintaining confidentiality and safety for participants and reporting back to the reference group and supervisors. The production of a research protocol document is helpful for researchers and participants as it provides an outline of why, how, when, and what is in the planned research, an adapted summary of which can be produced as an information sheet to be handed out to participants. As Shenton and Dixon (2004) suggest, gatekeepers may want to know in a fair amount of detail what the researcher is planning to do if they are going to help with access to participants (p.7). However, a researcher conducting an ethnographic, qualitative inquiry has more difficulty establishing the particular set of methods they will be using in advance of the field work because they must also be open and responsive to the emerging requirements of the research as it progresses (Sutton, 1993). The final version of the protocol for this study does not include reference to the use of a social network questionnaire or participant diaries, as I included these methods later in data collection.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter I have described the methodological framework for the research, including my approach to reviewing the literature, the methodological underpinning of the research, the ethnographic, qualitative approach to data collection and the methods chosen, and I have explored issues of validity, credibility, trustworthiness and ethics. In Chapter 5, I describe and discuss the data collection process for Stage One of the research.

Chapter 5: Stage One data collection

5.1 Introduction

In Stage One I was able to identify the issues of concern for service providers and for older people, in order to inform the planning of the data collection within older people's organizations and activities in more depth in Stage Two. In this chapter I discuss and reflect on the use of each research method used in Stage One and include a description of the findings from the analysed results. Figure 5.1 illustrates gatekeepers enabling entry to the field, research locations, activity groups I observed and data collection methods.
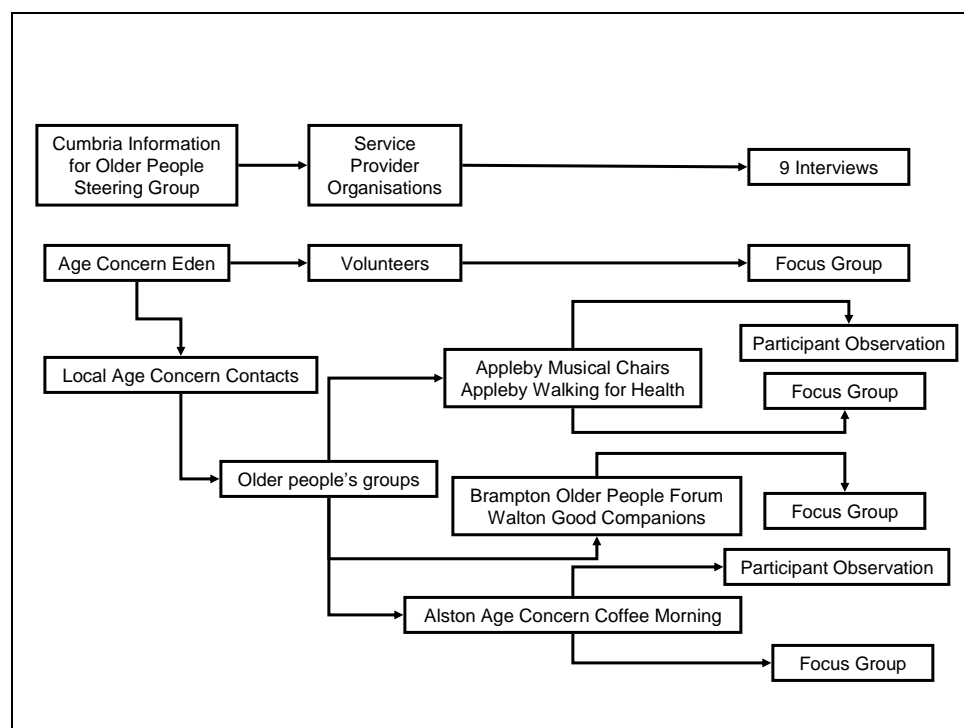
Figure 5.1: Stage One data collection

I begin this chapter, in Section 5.2, with a discussion of the fieldwork including gaining access to participants. Descriptions of data collection methods, the data collection process and the findings are discussed in the following sections: Interviews in Section 5.3; Focus Groups in Section 5.4 and 5.5.3; Participant observations in Section 5.5. Finally, the overall findings of Stage One are discussed in Section 5.6 and the chapter concluded in 5.7.

5.2 Fieldwork

Successful access to individuals and groups for the purpose of conducting qualitative research is the key to the quality of the data that can be collected and the trustworthiness of research findings, as discussed in Chapter 4. If a researcher can show that they have some personal or professional experience in the field of research, they may be accepted more easily. Most organizations or groups can be approached via a key gatekeeper, often, but not always, the leader or manager of a group. However, these individuals (or teams) may not always welcome a researcher into their group, and thus may compromise the success of the research. Access to the field for Stage One of this study was achieved through contact with key stakeholders from within an existing multi-agency partnership of service organization representatives, the Cumbria Information for Older People steering group (CIOP), and through voluntary agencies such as Age Concern Eden. My prior membership of CIOP also provided me with reference group support in the early stages of the research. The research protocol (Appendix 2) was presented to the group and to Age Concern Eden for approval and feedback on the practical and ethical implications of the fieldwork. I also asked the group to help me identify group members, and others, who would be suitable to take part in semi-structured interviews. I interviewed service providers who were involved in the provision of advocacy, support and information to older people in the area. After the interviews were completed and analyzed, I discussed the proposed design of the focus groups with the CIOP facilitating a short brainstorming session in order to generate discussion on ideas for the approach and questions to be used in the interview schedule (Appendix 4). I piloted the focus group approach with Age Concern Eden volunteers to discuss issues raised in provider interviews and identify gaps from their perspective, and with Walton Good Companions, older people living in a rural community. Age Concern Eden provided access to gatekeepers in three rural locations, Appleby, Brampton and Alston, and these contacts helped me to identify leaders of local activities for older people. The group leaders facilitated contact with potential focus group participants and arranged for me to observe activity groups. I discussed information issues with older people at the Alston Coffee Morning and then, finally, held a focus group with some of the older people in Appleby accessed through activity groups, in order to clarify the main areas of information need and use that the older people identified (Morgan, 1988).

5.3 Interviews

In this study I have used two different approaches to interviewing in order to fit the requirements of the general data collection approach, the type of data required, and the needs of interviewees. In Stage Two of the data collection it was appropriate that I use an informal, conversational approach with older people (see 6.4). For Stage One, however, a semi-structured interview schedule was devised for interviews with service provider representatives in order to undertake "conversations with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984, p.102) (See Appendix 4 for the initial schedule). Unlike the approach to interviews with participants in Stage Two, interviews with service providers were a one-off occurrence, and there was "no presumption of a continuing relationship between interviewer and interviewee" (Davies, 2008, p.105). An interview schedule lists the issues to be explored and is designed on the premise that "topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form" (Patton, 2002, p.349), "though the exact order in which questions are asked and the wording of the questions can vary" (Seale, 2004, p.165). According to Patton (2002) the interviewer is free to interview a number of people in a fairly systematic way by limiting the topic areas, but allowing for the opportunity to "build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined" (p.343). However, there should be room for other topics that an interviewee considers important to emerge and these may be explored further with others if appropriate.

5.3.1 Service provider interviews

Service provider representatives from agencies who worked with and had knowledge of older people were interviewed to provide background information, identify topics and to inform the development of the fieldwork. A list of those suitable for interview was drawn up following discussion with the reference group and from my own knowledge of local providers. Interview participants came from a variety of public and voluntary organizations. Data collected from these interviews was used to inform the field research and contribute to decisions on areas to be included in focus groups and in later interviews with older people. Nine interviews were undertaken in total and respondents represented a variety of local

providers. I considered that the nine who had agreed to take part provided acceptable coverage of the main types of statutory and voluntary organizations available to older people who were providing a service in East Cumbria. Those who agreed to be interviewed were as follows:

S1. Cumbria Social Services Information Officer
S2. NHS Older People's Champion in North Cumbria
S3. North West Welfare Benefits Agency Officer
S4. Age Concern Eden Older People's Forum representative
S5. North Cumbria Older People National Service Framework Team Manager
S6. Eden Carers' Association Officer
S7. Eden Valley Primary Care Trust Community Nursing Team leader
S8. Age Concern Eden Information Officer
S9. Eden Housing Association Officer

An iterative, ongoing analysis of the data during the data collection period showed that after the first seven interviews had been completed there were no new topics arising from the data and therefore it was considered unnecessary to identify any more participants for interview. Interviews varied from about thirty to sixty minutes in length and were conducted at a location and a time chosen by the respondent, usually their own office during work hours. Interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondent following an explanation of the purpose of the research and confidentiality and data protection arrangements. I explained the research objectives and outlined the data collection methods I planned to use with older people. These included six focused discussions with volunteers from activity groups, interviews with up to thirty individual older people, and case study interviews and diaries undertaken over three months with three to six of these individuals (The objectives and plans were later adapted to suit the requirements of the data collection process for Stage Two). The questions included in the Interview Schedule (Appendix 4) provided the basic structure, but elements were varied, excluded or adjusted if considered appropriate. Providers identified a much broader range of information available to, or needed by, older people than might generally be encompassed by the phrase 'health and healthy living information', then included in the objectives, and therefore this finding informed a decision to include other topics about day-to-day living, including those relating to physical, social and emotional activities and information needs in the schedule.

5.3.2 Service provider interview findings

When talking about the information, advice and support needs of older people, S1 said that very few questions came directly to him from older people themselves, and that most questions, 80-90%, came from other providers such as General Practitioners (GPs) and community nurses. Older people often thought that their GP could answer all their questions but S6 felt that GPs had limited information available to them about benefits, housing, or care services. S6 and her staff acted as information advocates. "If people have been down lots and lots of places already the last thing they want is somebody else signposting them, so we'll get the information and pass it on to them". Questions that older people asked were often masking real issues of concern and S4 thought that although, initially, older people would contact Age Concern because they were finding it difficult to manage financially they were reluctant to ask about money directly. The subject of claiming benefit was a very sensitive one.

It was important to take into account that requests for information, advice and support came from a variety of sources including carers, family, friends, neighbours and health, social care or voluntary agencies on behalf of older people. Information, advice and support providers needed to be aware of situations where older people required help in making social contacts as this impacted on their ability to ask for support and information. S8 was in favour of a holistic approach to assessing the needs of an older person in their own home as a means of getting to the root of the information, advice or support need. She described how a pilot project, Living Choices, undertaken by Age Concern in Eden, had used a questionnaire survey to assess the healthy lifestyle of older people. Results of the survey showed that transport was a major issue for older people without a car, if they needed to get to a hospital appointment or to go to the local town or city for social contact or shopping. Housing was mentioned, together with the need for adaptations and equipment in the home to help with continuing independence. S9 highlighted the need for coordinated information provision for older people that would include an integrated database of useful information from provider agencies, although S6 felt that joint working of voluntary, as opposed to statutory providers, was already generally good in the Eden area.

If there was one central place that somebody could ring and say "this is what I want" that could access that information from all the agencies, that's got to be the best way forward really. Because you know yourself, you ring up and you get passed from pillar to post. (S9)

Age Concern Eden provides information through word-of-mouth, leaflets, fact sheets and flyers from their main offices or in outreach sessions in particular locations. Signposting people to other sources of information was considered important although people often didn't want to be signposted on, they want to be helped to find the information themselves or through their first contact. S2 pointed out that people new to an area found it difficult to know where to go for information but that villages with old-established stable families were more likely to have good social networks of people who would help out. There were strong networks revolving around the churches that often provided a parish newsletter, delivered by hand to every house, with a broad range of local information, not just to do with the church. S1 referred to some work his organization had undertaken (unpublished) to find out about how people used their information. One finding was that information networks were often based around, and dependent on, powerful local individuals such as clergy or a local worthy who provided word-of-mouth networks. Men and women often had different social and information networks and they tended to communicate in different ways and in different places. It was mainly women who came for help and information for themselves and there was a difference between men and women when it came to providing information. Women could be accessed through a wider variety of means "… they tend to read local papers, they tend to talk more to their neighbours, to their friends, they meet up in the supermarket and general kind of chat passes on information …" (S5). Key issues were identified from these interviews that needed to be taken into account in the design of the focus group schedule in Stage One and interviews in Stage Two as follows:

- Questions asked by older people might not always identify the real issue, or issues, of concern to them.
- Service information, advice and support could best be provided through joint working initiatives and a holistic approach.
- It would be useful for information to be available through jointly held centralised resources in a one-stop shop arrangement.

- Older people needed information, advice and support provided in their own communities.
- Older people needed information on personal health, transport, housing, isolation, benefits and finance.
- The more isolated older people were within society, the less able they were to access the information, advice and support they might need.
- People who were new to an area might find it difficult to know where to go for information or might be excluded from networks.
- Information should be provided face-to-face and backed up with printed information in the form of fact sheets, newsletters, leaflets or information downloaded from some of the better Internet sites.
- Older people sometimes made contact with service provider agencies through third parties such as relatives, friends, neighbours or other providers.
- Some older people believed that a GP was a first port of call for information.
- Women, their female family, friends and neighbours, were more involved in networking information than men who tended to be less inclined to ask.
- Older people networked information amongst themselves, families and neighbours, especially in close-knit well-established communities and families
- There were strong networks built around the local churches and local 'worthies'.

It has to be borne in mind that these interviewees, as service providers, were naturally more inclined to take a needs-based view of the information requirements of older people which might differ from the views of older people themselves. Decisions about topics to be included in Stage Two of the research, and discussion of how the findings from these interviews related to the analyzed results from the focus groups conducted with volunteers and older people, can be found in Section 5.6.

5.4 Focus Groups

The focus group is a form of interview undertaken with a group of people, usually between six and twelve, moderated and focused by the interviewer, where "the object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (Patton, 2002, p.386). Morgan (1997) has stated that "The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group". (p.2). Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest that focused discussions have the advantage of allowing participants more time than conventional interviews to reflect on topics and recall and relate particular experiences in response to the related experiences of others (p.21). The

focus groups in Stage One were held with older people in order to gain "… information in a short period of time about the breadth (and) variation of opinions" (Sarantakos, 1998, p.181). It had been proposed by the CIOP that Nominal Group Technique (NGT) could be used as a structured approach to the focus groups. NGT is a formal consensus method used in focus groups in order to gather information from participants about a given issue and to aggregate the results (Jones and Hunter 1999). Participants can "attempt collectively to tease out previously taken-for-granted assumptions" (Bloor, 2001, p.6) about what information they use and how they share information within their social networks. It was proposed that the interaction between participants in the focus groups in this study would draw on their attitudes, feelings and experiences in order to access a broad range of views and to identify the main issues for discussion in more depth in individual interviews with older participants at a later stage.

5.4.1 Focus groups with older people and volunteers

I initially decided that two focus group discussions would be held in each of the three rural locations identified (total six) to explore the issues identified through provider interviews. In reality it proved unrealistic and unnecessary to organize six focus groups, partly because of the differences in the three locations in terms of gaining access to older people in their activity groups, and partly because decisions needed to be made about the feasibility of using all three locations in terms of timescale. In the end one focused discussion was held in each location with older people, in addition to one held with volunteers at Age Concern Eden. I used an adapted version of NGT in order to collect and manage data and clarify lifestyle information use as identified by the older people. (See Appendix 5 for further information on the NGT approach). I used a focus group schedule to structure each discussion and this was adjusted and refined for each group to suit the circumstances. It had been decided that volunteer sampling, following on from participant observation in two activity groups in each location, would allow for the identification of up to six focus group participants chosen according to criteria designed to achieve a balanced group. Numbers in groups should be kept low and participants should be seated close enough to each other to see and hear each other adequately. In the event, the Appleby focus group was the only group in which participants were accessed through contact made during participation in

activities. The other three focused discussion groups were held within the context of an existing meeting of older people. The protocol included the following procedures:

- Each group discussion would last for approximately 1.5 hours, 1 hour of questions and discussion, a summary, and final comments from the participants.
- A simplified version of the NGT procedure would be used to identify issues and rank them into an order of importance to participants.
- A flipchart would allow the recording of responses from participants.
- Key points from the discussion would be noted as the focus group progressed.
- A tape recorder would be used to record the conversation.
- The permission of all participants would be sought for the use of the tape recorder before recording began.

It was intended that focus groups would provide clarification of the main issues of concern for participants so that the comparative importance of the issues could be identified for the particular groups concerned, and any issues that had not previously been identified by other means could be included. The initial protocol for the focus groups is shown in Figure 5.2.

Step One: As an introduction to the group, and for the benefit of the researcher, each person will be asked to answer the following question and given a name badge: "Can you tell me your name (what you like to be called) and then one thing you enjoy doing to relax?"
Step Two: Introductory discussion: "Can you tell me what you think I mean when I talk about health information? What does healthy living information mean to you?"
Step Three: Ideas provided individually, each person to contribute up to three (most important first). Ideas to be recorded on a flipchart: "Can you give me some examples of information you have needed or used that is connected with your health or healthy lifestyle? (It doesn't matter if you can't think of anything)"
Step Four: Clarification of ideas, bringing together similar ideas and numbering the resulting list of ideas.
Step Five: Asking the group to discuss and rank the ideas in order of importance: "What do you think are the most important health and healthy living information needs on the list? What are the least important? Let us discuss this briefly, rank them in order of importance and agree a final list."
Step Six: Having an open discussion about where participants go for information: "Where do you get health and healthy living information from? Who do you / would you ask?"
Step Seven: Finding out if participants share information with others: "Do you talk about health or healthy living information with other people?"
Step Eight: Summarising the discussion outcomes: "Are you happy with my summary of what we have discussed? Is there anything you want to add?"
Participants would then be thanked for their contribution to the research and reminded about confidentiality issues. They would also be offered a summary of the findings on completion of the research.

Figure 5.2: Focus group protocol

At this point interviews with service providers were not quite complete, and an evaluation of the use of the words 'health and healthy living information' in the questions asked had not taken place, therefore the protocol still contained these phrases. Members of the COIP had suggested groups they considered suitable for piloting the protocol. I contacted the leaders of the two groups, one consisting of older people who met regularly in a rural village in the north of the area and the other consisting of older volunteers working for Age Concern Eden. I discussed arrangements with the leaders of the groups and, once agreement had been obtained, it was decided that it was most appropriate for the leaders themselves to pass information about the research on to the potential participants and to gain their initial consent, rather than for me to contact individuals before the meetings.

5.4.2 Walton Good Companions: data collection and findings

The first focus group was held with Walton Good Companions, older people who met on a regular basis in a rural community within the Brampton district. When planning this first group session it was recognized that the approach should respond to the fact that the group of women attending in Walton were an older old group, mostly over the age of seventy-five, some in their nineties. Account also had to be taken of the fact that they were used to attending this regular social gathering which had a set of normal procedures including announcements, a speaker, a raffle, and finally tea and biscuits and a good 'natter'; a very similar arrangement to a Women's Institute meeting. I arranged to meet with the leader of the group well in advance in order to introduce myself, find out more about the makeup and activities of the group, and agree a procedure for the session. I left consent forms and Participant Information Sheets (PIS) (Appendix 6) with the leader and she went through them with members and gained consents at the meeting prior to the focus group. On the day of the focus group the group leader took me to the hall and introduced me to the members. At the beginning of the session I gave a brief introduction to those present (all women) about my own background, the purpose of the research, and the expected outcomes. I reminded them about the contents of the information sheet and the importance of confidentiality and respect regarding information that was exchanged within the group and I gained permission to tape record the proceedings. Finally, participants were asked again if

they were happy to take part and were reminded that they could withdraw at any time. I had decided that it was not appropriate to use name badges with this group or to ask the participants to introduce themselves individually, as this might be considered too formal for a fairly informal group of people who already knew each other well. Because of time limits I decided to simplify the protocol, get people talking, and focus in on topics, and I moved straight into Step Three of the schedule (see Figure 5.2 above). Participants were asked to think of, and talk about, the things that were most important to them in relation to their health, lifestyle and activities. They were also asked about how they received or asked for information they needed about these aspects of their life. As people spoke, I noted the main points on a flip chart and used prompts and further questions where appropriate in order to keep the group focused on the task.

This discussion lasted for approximately forty-five minutes, and when we had reached a point where no new ideas were arising, I asked participants to confirm the topics on the list by running through them again and asking for confirmation of each. This led to additional comments being made and some additions to the list. At this point participants broke into groups of three and chose the three most important topics on the list from the point of view of each group. Participants enjoyed this opportunity to work in small groups and some of the quieter women were heard to be contributing more to the discussion. Once decisions had been made, each group fed the results back to the whole group and the number of votes for each item was recorded on the flip chart. Finally participants came together again and agreed to a final ranking of the ideas in order of importance, the findings being as follows:

First: The telephone
Second: Neighbours
Third: Pets and wildlife
Fourth: The GP
Fifth: TV, the radio and the papers
Sixth: Security and safety
Seventh: Living a healthy lifestyle

The telephone was ranked first and considered to be by far the most important means of accessing information as it was useful for contacting all the organizations that might be needed such as the General Practice, Social Services, the police or Neighbourhood Watch.

It was also the easiest way to contact neighbours, even if they were just down the road. Neighbours were ranked second, and mentioned several times in discussion, whereas relatives were considered less important as they usually lived too far away to ask for help or information. Some participants considered pets to be important as companions and also great stress relievers. A couple of people also mentioned that they watched the local wildlife in their gardens and that this helped them to relax. Although pets are not usually regarded as sources of information, the older people considered that they provided a warning of visitors approaching and ranked pets and wildlife third in their list. Several people said that they would go to their General Practitioner (GP) first in an emergency or for health information but didn't think it was the actual GP who provided the information but was more likely to be a practice nurse. There was some confusion about how to access the out-of-hours doctor's service through the phone number provided as some didn't know the number and others felt that it was difficult in an emergency to have to write down the number from the local surgery answer phone. Despite all these difficulties, the GP was ranked fourth in the listing of information sources. TV, the radio and the papers were included in the rankings at number five but were not discussed in much detail. Security and safety were ranked sixth in the list and those who lived on the outskirts of the village with no street lights considered it important to have security lighting on their homes. Neighbourhood Watch and Farm Watch were also mentioned as important security factors in the village. The social care support line was considered to provide a very useful service, especially for people living on their own, but very few people had access to a line as they didn't feel they could afford it. Living a healthy lifestyle was ranked seventh in importance. Comment was made about local healthy living campaigns, including a healthy walks programme, weight loss diets and an anti-smoking campaign. Some people knew that there had been healthy walks but had not taken part as they had been concerned that they might not be fit enough to keep up. This probably reflects the fact that most were fairly elderly and therefore some had problems with their health. Some of these older people thought that they were bombarded with too many healthy living messages about diet by the media. This first pilot focus group discussion had been extremely lively and successful in terms of the involvement of participants in the discussion, but I questioned, on reflection, whether the kind of tight structure imposed by the protocol had been flexible enough. I also recognized

that the approach would need to be flexible in its use with different groups according to the make-up of each group and in order to fit in with each group's normal activities. However, I considered that the approach had been, in general, successful for Focus Group One. Contacting an existing group through the group leader and allowing the leader to explain the research to group members prior to the day of the meeting was a key factor in its success and a similar approach was used in arranging the two focus groups that followed. The pilot had shown that an adapted version of NGT could be used in group sessions where considered appropriate but in formats adapted to suit the particular group.

5.4.3 Eden Voice and Choice Group: data collection and findings

The second focus group was organized through the leader of the Eden Voice and Choice Group who arranged for eight participants to be present, seven women and one man. These were all older people, some of whom had received help from Age Concern in the past, and all of whom were volunteers who met at Age Concern Eden on a regular basis. At a previous meeting, when discussing participation in the research, the group had decided that it would be best for participants to give individual consents on the day of the focus group. I decided that it would be appropriate to use badges and introductions as it was a more formal but smaller group, so participants were given name badges and asked to introduce themselves briefly. At the beginning of the session they were each given a Participant Information Sheet, and the importance of confidentiality and respect was explained. Permission was requested for tape recording of the proceedings and participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time. At this point there was general agreement about the tape recorder. However, at the end of the session, consent forms were not received back from two of the participants who had decided that they did not want their contributions used for quotes. In addition, the tape quality was poor, and some of the comments were difficult to distinguish so, taking these two factors into account, I decided not to transcribe any direct quotes from the tape, and the flipchart results were combined with the taped information in a description of the findings without using individual quotes. I started the session by asking what the group considered to be the major issues and information gaps for older people in their area. Participants seemed to feel uncertain about starting a discussion about gaps in information so we moved on to the more general

discussion about major information issues. They were naturally concerned to express their ideas and frustrations about existing services from the perspective of voluntary providers and the findings reflect this. Ideas were noted on a flip chart under three headings: areas of concern; gaps in information; solutions for information provision. The results are summarized in Figure 5.3.

Participants identified the need for information about financial help where care was needed, for families of older people, and for older people themselves, so that they could make difficult financial and personal decisions. Another area of concern was the cost of public transport together with increasing scarcity of transport provision in the rural areas. There were voluntary car schemes, but the many different providers and variations in provision made it difficult for older people to identify the best solution to suit them. Health services in some rural areas were threatened through cost cutting and some essential services for older people, such as NHS chiropodists and dentists, were difficult to access. There were problems of loneliness and isolation for some older people in the more remote rural areas where it was difficult for them to get to group activities or to access services. This was particularly true for older people who were less inclined to make the effort to socialize or who found it more difficult to cope after the death of a partner. More isolated older people might also find it difficult to maintain their physical fitness by taking advantage of opportunities such as swimming facilities or healthy walking programmes.

When considering gaps in information participants suggested that better information was required for older people to find and access services or group activities. They were concerned that some delays in accessing information were caused by a lack of co-ordination of service information and said it was necessary to empower older people themselves to identify the source and ask for the information they needed. It was considered more natural in rural areas for people to ask other people in their own community for information and advice. Older people did not always recognize that they had an information need, or what that need was. In these cases advocacy was required and time was needed to identify the real problem and consequent information need.

Ranked Information Needs

1. Money for housing, care at home and for residential care
2. Pensions and benefits, illness and disability benefit
3. Transport to hospital appointments
4. Social and leisure activities
5. NHS dental and chiropody services
6. Residential homes/nursing homes/aids for living at home

Ranked Information Providers

1. CAB
2. Age Concern outreach
3. Other voluntary organisations
4. Health professionals
5. Shelter & Eden Housing
6. Carers organisations
7. Social activity groups
8. Radio Cumbria

Areas of concern: Money problems, Health services, Exercise, Accessing information, Care provision, Transport, Loneliness

Gaps in Information provision: Identifying the need, Lack of training, No access to Internet, Complex information, Lack of co-ordination, Inaccurate information

Solutions for Provision: One-to-one communication, Outreach workers, Trained providers, Older people themselves, Libraries and CABs, Drop-in sessions

Figure 5.3: Voice and Choice focus group findings

Understandably, when considering potential solutions for providing appropriate and comprehensive information for older people, the Age Concern volunteers suggested that their own outreach services provided the right kind of coordinated service in combination with others such as the Alzheimer's Society. However, they conceded that they did not have the resources to comprehensively cover all rural areas, particularly the more remote areas, and that there could be potential to broaden the types of information made available. Participants considered that the key to success was to provide information on a one-to-one basis and opportunities to talk to people and explore issues face-to-face. They saw potential to broaden access to local information through regular visits from properly trained information providers through services such as libraries and the Citizen's Advice Bureau who should be supported to coordinate services. They considered that information provision could be linked with older people's activities where discussion could create potential opportunities for information exchange and thought that it was important to find

out how people in their communities supported each other and how this potential could be utilized to improve communication, information, and access. Achieving the NGT rankings proved time consuming, as participants found it difficult to agree, and it had been decided earlier in the session that there would not be time to break into smaller groups to discuss this. In these circumstances, and with these participants, it is doubtful whether the use of NGT was required. It was much less successful than with the previous group of older people, in Focus Group One, despite the fact that they were unused to group discussion and the subject of information. However, this group was able to provide results that were rich in detail and generated valuable ideas.

5.4.4 Alston Coffee Morning: data collection and findings

Following the pilot focus groups, I arranged to attend an Age Concern coffee morning session in Alston for the purpose of observing the proceedings and devising a plan for group discussions at the following meeting. I needed to respond to the conditions and avoid compromising the importance of the coffee morning as a general social session by organising something too formal. During this planning visit I observed that people arrived for their coffee and biscuits at about 10am and sat at a series of six tables in groups of between three and six. I decided that I would not be able to use a tape recorder in these circumstances, or use a structured approach such as NGT, and that it would be more appropriate to make brief notes during the discussions, followed by more detailed notes immediately afterwards.

On the day of the actual focus group, a fortnight later, I moved from table to table, staying approximately fifteen to thirty minutes with each group, partly to avoid compromising the general routine of getting together for chats with friends for too long, and partly so that I could talk to as many of the group as possible in the limited time available before they left. People were asked for their verbal consent and most were happy to take part. People were guided towards discussing the things they had needed to find out about recently to support their healthy lifestyle, and asked whether they had been able to find the information, how it had been provided and where they had found it. Words and phrases, taken from topics that had arisen in the previous focus groups and stakeholder interviews, were used as prompts to

get the conversation going. I had time to visit four tables in total and spoke with approximately twelve people. Most of the participants were very positive about their lifestyle and the impression given was that there was a very close and supportive older community in Alston, with many of the younger old people being involved in helping each other and helping the older old. They were aware that increasing numbers of people in the community were living into older age, some well into their nineties. About 50% of those I spoke to were incomers, people who had moved into the area, although several of these had lived in the Alston area for a few years. Several interesting general points were made:

- Alston had good NHS services available considering the small population size, its geographical location high in the Pennines and the distance from services located in Penrith and Carlisle
- It was easy to make a same day appointment with a GP
- People appreciated the new paramedic service
- Transport for attending hospital appointments elsewhere was good
- Public transport to Penrith and Carlisle was quite good but the one bus a day there and back meant a long day out and restricted activities
- There were no trains nearby
- There were many 'independent-minded' older people in the area and this could be a problem if they lived outside the town or in isolated locations
- People outside the town had difficulties with transport if they no longer drove and had to rely on neighbours and friends

Findings about information behaviour are listed below:
- Neighbours and local statutory, voluntary and church organizations provided good support and information when needed
- The community was small and information about people was passed around
- The upside of this was that many offers of help were made if people had practical or health problems
- The downside was that everyone knew your business
- Information provided was predominantly word of mouth backed up by print
- There were good sources of information provided by Age Concern, the Information Centre in the Town Hall and at the coffee morning
- There were information, advice and therapy sessions held on a regular drop-in basis at the hospital
- Many older people needed to ask for the transport to get to the hospital or were given lifts by neighbours
- The Town Hall could provide information about local services but it was more difficult to get the District Council to take an interest in improving services
- There was a public library branch for books

- Two or three of the respondents mentioned that they had a computer provided by the Cybermoor project and that they found it useful for contacting relatives abroad or online shopping

This session proved very useful in confirming issues of importance for supporting older peoples' lifestyle and identifying sources of information they were most likely to use, and were similar to those raised in previous focus groups. The main differences were that many of the older people were actively involved in their community and able to be more specific about local sources of information. The next stage involved me taking part in some of the activities in Appleby and identifying suitable participants for focus groups there.

5.5 Participant observation

Participant observation requires that a researcher should find a role in the setting studied so that the usual activities taking place there are not disrupted in any significant way and it is possible to join in activities over a period of time in order to relate to participants as part of the group. I supported this approach by keeping a research diary throughout the period of data collection. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) state that it is very important to keep a diary from the start in order to include reference to the way that access is gained to research situations. They suggest a model of diary recording that divides the material into three categories; 'observational notes', 'theoretical notes' and 'methodological notes'. Observational notes are those that represent the "Who, What, When, Where and How of human activity" (p.100), theoretical notes are "attempts to derive meaning from any one or several observation notes" (p.101) and methodological notes are observations on "the methodological process itself" (p.101). As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest, "There is a constant interplay between the personal and emotional on the one hand and the intellectual on the other" (p.151). I adapted and simplified this approach to structuring my brief notes, particularly those written during and after observations (example in Appendix 7) and for my reflections on participation in Stage Two (Section 6.4). I focused on observations of activities and on reflections on the methodology. The function of participant observation in Stage One was to allow me to familiarize myself with the locations and activity settings and make contact with some of the participants whilst providing the opportunity for participants to find out about the research and get to know

me. In order to achieve this, my role was more as an observer than a participant during early sessions, and I retained this role until I considered that activity participants were comfortable enough with my presence to allow more interaction. Baker (2006) suggests that "Going into a new environment may require the researcher to adopt the role of complete observer, whereas studying a group in which she/he is already a member allows the researcher to adopt the complete participant role" (p.174). Participant observation is also discussed in my description of Stage Two of the data collection (6.4) where I was involved in more participation as well as observation. The three locations chosen for observations, Alston, Appleby and Brampton, had demographic similarities, although they were different in their degree of isolation, Alston being the most isolated geographically. Access to activity groups and participants within these locations was achieved through links with key informants from Age Concern Eden. It was considered necessary to find groups that met on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Two groups were attended in Appleby, an exercise group and a healthy walking group, and the Age Concern coffee morning was attended in Alston, all of these over a six-week period. In the event it proved impossible to attend activities in Brampton due to difficulties in making contacts with gatekeepers and group leaders and because of time constraints. Written consents enabling me to attend group activities were obtained from each group leader and from the group members after the leader had explained the research purpose and confidentiality guidelines to them and gained their agreement at a meeting prior to researcher involvement. The leaders also handed out the Participant Information Sheets and explained that data would not be collected about individual behaviour or comments made by individuals, but observation would be of social interaction and information behaviour in a generalized way.

5.5.1 Appleby Musical Chairs Group

My involvement in activities taking place in Appleby was arranged through a contact I was given by a member of the CIOP. This contact was the Eden organizer of the Walking for Health initiative and he was able to put me in touch with local walk leaders in Appleby. I met one of the leaders, who was an information and advice worker for Age Concern Eden, and explained briefly what I planned to do in Appleby and how I wanted to approach the

research within activity groups generally. I asked her about suitable groups I could attend and she made a number of suggestions including:

- A healthy walks group
- A musical chairs exercise group
- An Evergreen club
- A bowling club
- An arts and craft club

I was given the contact details for the leaders of the groups and chose to attend the Appleby Musical Chairs Group because, apart from a Healthy Walks group, all the other groups that had been suggested to me were not suitable for one reason or another. It was the wrong season for the outdoor bowling club and the arts and crafts group consisted of older people who were unable to take part in a focus group. There were two exercise classes in the same morning each fortnight in Appleby where participants exercised in their chairs, and the class was very popular with the more active older people. Between the two sessions there was a coffee break of half an hour which provided the potential to make contact with people on their way in and out of the classes. The leader of this group seemed happy for me to attend as many classes as I needed, on condition that she retained control and I did not explain the research until she felt I had got to know participants well enough over the first couple of sessions. The exercise class itself was very well run, carefully thought out, effective and very much enjoyed by the members of the group who made me very welcome. However, it proved impossible to identify a suitable group of participants for a focus group for various reasons I noted in my research diary, discussed here.

At the first session I stayed for twenty minutes of the coffee break after the exercise was completed and spoke to a lady who also attended the healthy walking sessions. Others sitting close by introduced themselves to me and wanted to know who I was, where I came from and where I lived. It was difficult to avoid referring to the research in my explanation of why I was there. We talked about the classes, the weather and its effects, and what was happening in Appleby. I felt that that this could be a valuable group of people to get to know as they were of varying ages but all over sixty. The hall was full for the following session two weeks later as everyone was so committed to the activity that they had all

arrived early. I felt it helped that I was taking part and doing the exercises and that everyone there was getting used to me. However, I wanted to make sure they understood what the research was about and I did not think that many would want to read the full Participant Information Sheet. I therefore decided to prepare a summary sheet and arrange to hand the information and consent forms out in the next session.

I arrived early enough at the next session to speak to the activity leader about when I should speak to the group and when I could hand out the information sheet summaries and consent forms. We agreed that it would be best for me to talk very briefly about the research after the warm-up and then hand out the information at the end of the exercises and before coffee. Again there was a large crowd at the class, several people welcomed me, we did the warm-up and I gave my introduction. However, I felt that it was difficult to explain the research in an interesting and understandable way to this sort of rather formal group and it would have been easier to do this with smaller groups or face-to-face with individuals. At the end of the session I went round handing out the full Participant Information Sheet with the summary and the consent form. I had varying reactions and hoped that they had read the summary and were not also put off by having to fill in a consent form. I decided that at the next session I would ask to say a few more words about what the focus group would involve and when and where it would take place, to put people more at their ease.

For my final attendance I arrived well in time and spoke briefly to the leader who agreed that I could have a word about the focus group. I did speak, but felt that I did not get a very positive response. I said that I would collect consents at the end of the class. I enjoyed the actual class but, as I suspected, I received a lot of refusals and excuses and, in the end only four verbal agreements. After the group finished I went into the local coffee shop to console myself with a cup of coffee, and was writing up my notes, when one of the women who had verbally agreed to take part in the focus group came in with a friend. We started to talk about the research again and, with the opportunity to relax and talk it through, they were happy about the idea to the extent that they both said they would take part. However, I did not receive any more written consents from this class and, on reflection, I considered that people had definitely been put off by the amount of paperwork they had seen. I also felt that

the leader had not been very encouraging but I understood that this might have been because she was a paid activity leader with no affiliations to any service provider or voluntary organization. Consequently I decided to avoid these more formal groups in other locations. There were several key points to take away from this first experience of joining activity groups as follows:

- The activities I joined needed to be either completely informal, such as coffee mornings, possibly walks, or perhaps art and craft clubs or informal arrangements such as lunch or coffee before or after more formal groups.
- In order to gain access to people it was very important that the leader was supportive and actively helpful.
- It would also be helpful if the activity had some connection with an organization such as Age Concern or a local church etc.
- People needed plenty of verbal information about what the research involved and what they were required to do before they were given printed information.

5.5.2 Appleby Walking for Health Group

I was able to meet up again with the local leader of the healthy walks sessions and discuss my potential participation on the walks. She had a better understanding of my objectives for the research and an understanding of my requirements. I met up with the Eden Healthy Walks coordinator and walkers for the first time just before Christmas. The group that day consisted of just two of the regular older ladies and another two guided walk leaders as this was the special Christmas walk. There was discussion about the value of getting together for walking and how it gave people the opportunity to have a 'natter'. We walked and chatted about the weather, preparing for Christmas and the parking problems in Appleby. I was told that the route taken was the same every time, one and a half miles taken at a slow pace, and I wondered whether using different routes might encourage more interest. When we reached an icy section of the path it was decided to adjourn to the coffee shop where we discussed travel, shopping and the merits of all the different local shops.

The second walk took place two days after the river had flooded part of the town and some of the footpath. Three regular ladies arrived but other regulars had considered that the footpath condition would not be safe enough and did not participate. During the walk this flood was compared with others experienced over the years and, as we walked by the

swimming pool, there were some reminiscences about what it had been like when they were children and it had been an open air pool. I felt that it would be useful, as part of the focus group, to ask participants to relate actual stories of information need and use in order to help them put instances into a context. On the third walk we were joined by two other couples who were regulars. Both the men were using walking sticks and the walk was part of their rehabilitation after illness, their wives being there to support them. One of the women was very talkative and knew a lot about other groups in Appleby as she was active in several of them. I decided to ask this group of four to take part in the focus group when I joined them the following week. Some of the regulars arrived for the fourth walk with two new walkers, one of whom had heard about the walks on local radio. I tried to speak to as many people as possible about the research as we were walking along and felt that I got positive responses from those who had already got to know me previously. When we returned I handed out the information sheets and consent forms to those present.

I hoped to collect as many positive responses as possible the following week, and on my arrival for the fifth walk one of the couples had their consent forms ready for me and another agreed to give me their consent. There were different walkers joining in each week but never more than about eight altogether. It was difficult to give new people information each time and I did not have enough time to speak to everyone. On reflection I considered that it was difficult to build up the right kind of relationship when people were focused on the activity rather than just meeting together to talk as they did in the coffee mornings at Alston. Unfortunately there were no regular coffee mornings in Appleby. The day of the last walk was also the day of the focus group and three regulars were there together with a new lady. I invited her to join the discussion and she agreed to take part. In the end I had only recruited five participants for the discussion because the walking group was really too small and too fluid to make up a reasonable group in size and mix. In a way I had to persuade people to take part which is far from an ideal approach. I also felt that there was one dominant member of the group, and although this didn't matter in the context of the walk, and could be entertaining for participants, it might prove to be difficult in the focus group situation.

5.5.3 Appleby Walking for Health Focus Group

It had been planned that the two focus groups in Appleby should take place around six weeks after my first attendance at the group activities. In the case of the Walking for Health group, meeting weekly, the number of people attending regularly had been fairly small, from three to seven during the weeks I attended. There were more registered as potential attendees but, apart from a core of four, others only came occasionally, so this made it difficult to get to know enough people over the period and to invite them to take part. The focus group was held at a sports hall situated half way around the normal walk so that people did not have to give up their walk entirely and did not have to commit too much extra time. I had considered that the NGT approach might be useful with this group in focusing the discussion and keeping it within the time limit of one hour. At the start of the session I explained that previous groups had raised certain key issues they considered to be of importance to older people in connection with healthy lifestyle information and that these included health and illness information and healthy living and activity information. This group added that they needed information for diet, finance, security, housing and health services. Participants were asked to think of three examples each of instances where they had obtained information to support their lifestyle and of how they had obtained this information. They then discussed some of these issues and were asked as individuals to rank them according to their perceived importance in terms of source and content. Some participants were unable to choose one source as more important than another and so they discussed this and agreed rankings as a whole group. Person to person information exchange received the highest ranking, followed by the telephone as second highest and television and radio, newspapers and notice boards ranked together third. Participants then ranked the content they had discussed which, in this case, related strongly to health issues. They ranked the need for health and illness-related information highest, followed by information about healthy activities second and then diet third. The fourth area to be ranked was information to support financial questions, security issues were fifth in the rankings, followed by housing in sixth place.

An evaluation of the focus group discussions showed that those held with mixed groups of older people, within their existing meetings, such as those in Walton and Alston, were more

successful than this separate focus group held with a small number of participants in Appleby after involvement in their healthy walking activity group. This was partly because the NGT approach did not seem to suit this particular group, and partly because the group was focused on particular issues related to the activity in which they were involved, in this case healthy walking. The Voice and Choice group discussion was also less successful because participants, although volunteers, were more concerned with their role as information providers than as users. The focus group approach provided a suitable means of exploring peoples' views on the main issues of concern and the sources of information they used, focusing the discussion on a set of issues and encouraging people to introduce ideas to each other and make decisions as a group. I did not consider formal focus groups to be appropriate for Stage Two because the emphasis was on individuals and their social interactions with others within their normal social settings. Gomm (2004) argues that focus groups do not mimic 'real life' and may inhibit people from being open and honest with one another (pp.172-173).

5.6 Findings summary

Although participants' healthy lifestyles were still important in terms of impact on individuals and their involvement in social activity in everyday life, Stage Two was focused more on the processes of information behaviour as part of the lifestyle of participants in one small community rather than on the information topics of concern. Other lifestyle information issues of concern to older people emerging from Stage One were issues of isolation, transport, safety, finance and access to services. Participants identified their main information resources including family, friends and neighbours, service and information providers, printed information, voluntary organisations, the media and, for some, Internet-based resources. The information gaps identified related to lack of co-ordination of service information, gaps in local information, complex or inaccurate information and lack of access to the Internet. I identified that face-to-face communication within people networks and in the places where people gathered for social activity were particularly important for the exchange of information, advice and support. I have summarised the key findings from Stage One and presented them in Figure 5.4.
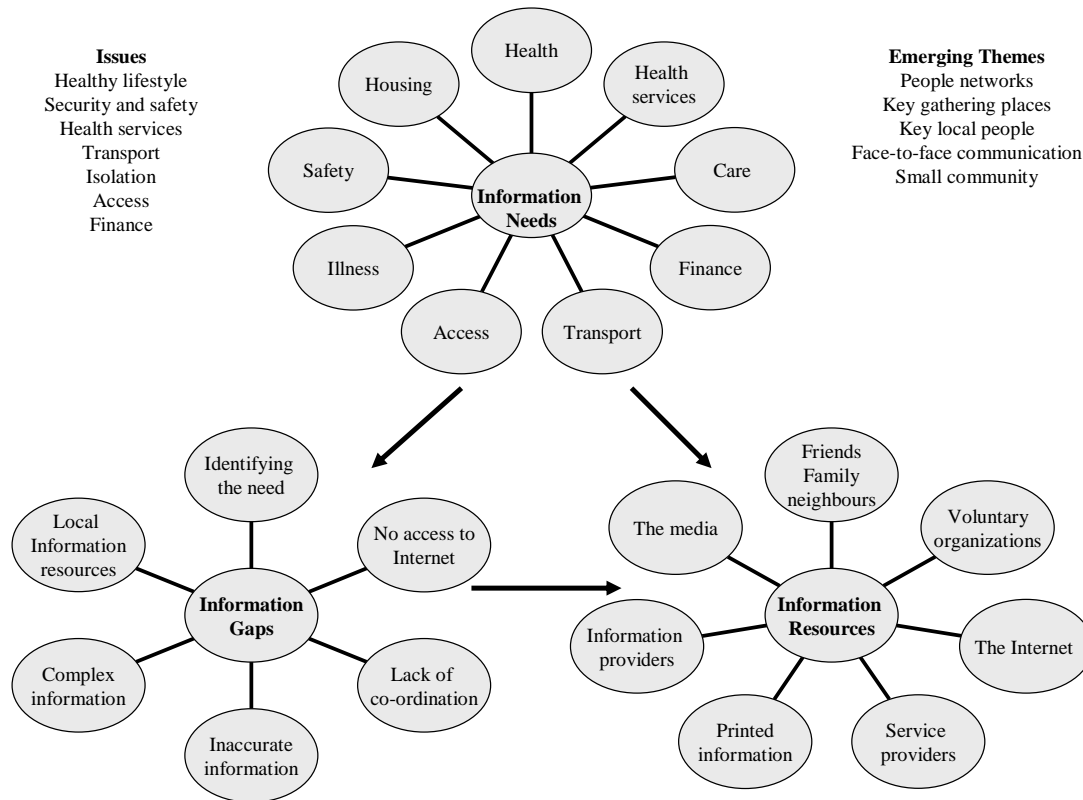
Figure 5.4: Stage One findings

5.7 Conclusions

The interviews and the focus group findings identified information issues and sources from the perspective of information providers and older people, and the participant observation enabled me to reflect on the interview findings whilst gaining some knowledge of the activities and locations involved. The original focus on health imposed unnecessary restrictions on participants' thinking and the results show a broader range of information topics considered of importance to older people. Health and healthy living were just two of the information topics amongst several others raised in the data collection in Stage Two of the research (Chapters 7 to 10). Although the findings confirmed my expectations as an information professional, the data collection and preliminary analysis for Stage One had enabled me to identify issues of concern for service providers and groups of older people about information and support, and informed the planning of more in-depth data collection within older peoples' organizations and activities in one location in Stage Two.

Chapter 6: Stage Two data collection

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, I discussed the major themes, issues and information resources identified by service providers and groups of older people during data collection in Stage One. The second stage of the fieldwork involved the exploration of information behaviour, resources and context in more depth with some of the older residents of Alston. As each context was unique, and generalization between contexts problematic, it was not considered appropriate to continue data collection in all three of the original locations visited in Stage One. A major theme emerging from Stage One data was that older people had a positive approach to accessing and sharing information with friends and family through social activities. I decided that the emphasis in Stage Two should be on individuals and their social interactions and their use of information sources in their social activity settings. I considered it possible and preferable to immerse myself in the community for a period of several months, with the help and support of local gatekeepers, in order to conduct data collection in far more depth (Patton, 2002, p.81, Atkinson, 1990), to explore participants' underlying experiences and identify differences as well as similarities in these experiences. I therefore increased the ethnographic participatory approach and length of time spent in the field in order to provide a "direct view of information behaviour" (Cooper, Lewis and Urquhart, 2004, pp.1-2). In this chapter I discuss issues of access to the field in Section 6.2, the approach to the data collection and analysis in Section 6.3, participant observation in 6.4, informal interviews in 6.5, participant journals in 6.5.1, social network interviews in 6.6, and interpretation and analysis in 6.7.

6.2 Access to the field

If a researcher can obtain support for entry to the field of research in advance of data collection through a known contact in an existing and well-respected body (such as Age Concern) then they may be at a distinct advantage in approaching the field, particularly if the organization or group is keen to receive feedback on the results. The danger, however, is that the researcher may find it more difficult to escape being thought of by participants as

some kind of 'provider' or 'expert' (Seale, 2004, Flick, 2006). However, the support of a gatekeeper can be vital for a researcher in gaining access to, and empathy with, potential research participants, particularly when it is possible to rely on this support on first meeting members of the group and explaining the purpose of the research. In ethnographic research in particular, this process must not be rushed, and it is wise to spend some time with potential participants in their natural surroundings and everyday activities in order to gain their trust and develop a rapport before any data collection begins. It is helpful if personal connections can be made in terms of shared experiences or background so that the researcher can empathize with the interests and expressed beliefs of potential participants, at the same time being aware of the need not to become too involved and to maintain a separateness that is not too obvious. As Pitts and Miller-Day (2007) suggest, the way in which a researcher approaches the field is key to success in accessing participants and building relationships and, according to Bogdewic (1991), researchers should be unobtrusive, honest, unassuming, self-revealing, and reflective listeners.

Reed and Proctor (1995) have raised the issue of the importance of the researcher's relationship with a location chosen for research and the impact that the research might have on research participants. They have identified three potential positions for a researcher on a continuum from 'outsider' through 'hybrid' to 'insider'. According to Chatman (1996) the 'insider' is someone who shares cultural, social, religious or other perspectives with participants leading to an acceptance of norms of behaviour and ways of looking at the world. The insider can "define those things that are important to pay attention to and those things that are not" (p.194). Carey, McKechnie and McKenzie (2001), writing from their perspective as information researchers, describe the experiences they had of undertaking ethnographic research as moving "from insider to outsider and back" (p.331). They emphasized the importance of allowing this ebb and flow in helping their participants to lead them into new discoveries and to the possibility of "deep engagement" (p.331). In my involvement in the field I considered myself to be in a position somewhere between an outsider and a hybrid along the continuum identified by Reed and Proctor (1995). I did not live in the location, but did live in a rural district of Cumbria, and I was nearly sixty at the time, so felt that participants would be able to accept me more easily, whilst accepting that I

was not a member of their local community, but there as a researcher on a temporary basis. My previous background in undertaking research with users of health services, including older people, and in setting up means of access to local and national information about health services and healthy living, had provided me with key contacts who could introduce me to the gatekeepers of groups of older people in the community. I had some success with this approach through the Age Concern coffee morning contact in Stage One and this contact was particularly helpful in Stage Two due to her enthusiasm for the research and eagerness to facilitate my approach to the older people. Attendance at the fortnightly coffee mornings, and the discussions I had with some of those who attended, were very successful in terms of the quality of data collected and contacts that were made. I decided that snowball sampling with activity group members would overcome the risks of non-participation and facilitate the identification of participants for interview through personal contacts and introductions. Whilst it is important to avoid bias in the inclusion of inter-related individuals who are part of the same social networks when using the snowball technique to gain access to participants, it can be a very useful, informal way of gaining entry in exploratory and descriptive research (Atkinson and Flint, 2001) through gatekeepers in order to make initial contact with potential respondents in the required population (Grogan, Mayberry and Straker, 1999). Discussion with local activity leaders informed this process of access to participants, and an attempt was made to achieve a balance of participants according to a basic purposive sampling framework that took into account gender and included some individuals who did not attend social activities on a regular basis and were socially or geographically more isolated. This approach follows Patton (2002) who has described various approaches to purposive sampling, including snowball or chain sampling that, according to Foster and Ford (2003) "entails using the knowledge and contacts of existing interviewees to suggest other potentially information-rich cases" (p.327). Purposive sampling sets the criteria for evaluating the suitability of interviewees for inclusion in the sample and snowballing enables the generation of candidates for consideration. However, as Fetterman (1989) points out, a researcher needs to rely to a certain extent on their own judgment in the selection of the most appropriate individuals because "natural opportunities, convenience, and luck also play a part in the process if the ethnographer is savvy enough to make good use of them" (p.43).

6.3 Data collection and analysis

It was planned in Stage Two data collection to explore some of the issues and themes that had been raised in Stage One in more depth, to focus on the individual experience, and to "follow up interesting leads ... (so that)... different respondents could discuss different topics" (Seale 2004, p.205). The naturalistic approach to research, according to Erlandson et al. (1993), demands that the design "emerges as data are collected, preliminary analysis is conducted, and the context becomes more fully described" (p.66). It is suggested that action only makes sense in context, each context is unique and that generalization between contexts is problematic (Silverman, 1985, p.21, Erlandson et al., 1993, p.17). Fetterman (1989) recognizes that an ethnographic researcher may be subject to constraints such as lack of time in the field. I had decided that, in the limited time available to me, there would be more value in conducting the research in one location, recognizing in the process that "the focus of the investigation shifts to match the site under study" (p.42).

Gomm (2004) states that many researchers combine naturalistic observation with qualitative interviews in order to seek explanation through understanding of how the people being studied see the world. Hobbs and May (1993) think that, in an ethnographic study,

> interviews might, for example, offer the background to the direct observation provided by fieldwork which acts as foreground; or more informal fieldwork observations might be used to flesh out a study which rests largely on detailed interviews, in the way of 'incidents' or 'excerpts' from daily life (p.ix).

Indeed, Lofland and Lofland (1995) are keen to "emphasize the mutuality of participant observation and intensive interviewing as the central techniques of naturalistic investigation" (p.19). For Stage Two of this study the major focus of actual data collection was on data collected from interviews and journals, but the participation in and observation of activities was vital to the rich contextualization and confirmation of the interview data. The major themes for further exploration in Stage Two were taken from the issues identified by older people in Stage One, from the research objectives and issues from the literature and these were used to inform the design of the Interview Schedule (Appendix 8).

Collection of data took place over a nine month period through observation, interviews, social network interviews and participant journals and the data collection process is shown in Figure 6.1. Initial contact had been made in Stage One through Age Concern Eden and the leader of the Age Concern Coffee morning and a focus group discussion had been held with some of the older people who attended (see 5.4.4). These initial contacts had paved the way for attendance in Stage Two, leading to participants being identified for interview through snowballing and the identification of other suitable activity groups to attend for the purpose of observation. I observed some of the activities attended by older people on a regular basis, including the Age Concern coffee morning, a Tai Chi in the water class, and an Arts and Crafts club.
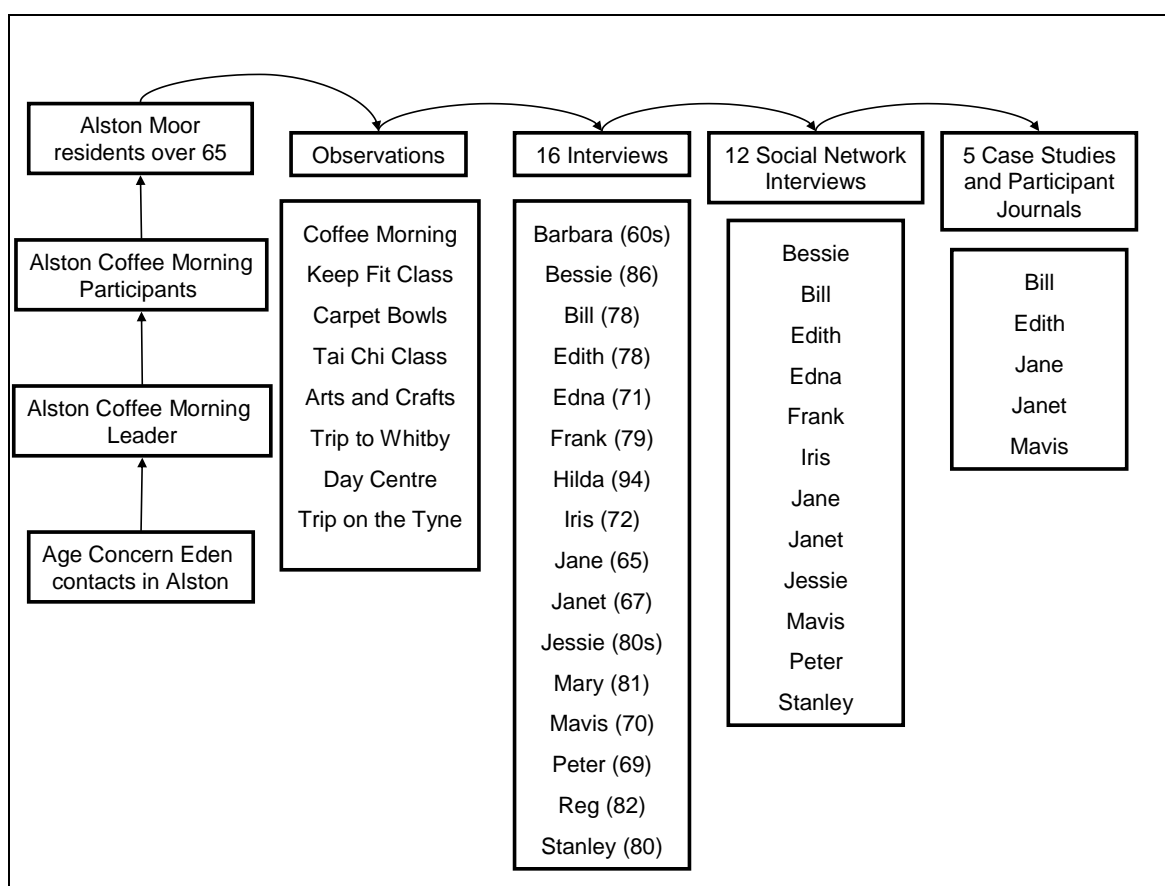
Figure 6.1: Stage Two data collection

Other activity groups were suggested by the older people and attended once or twice but were considered unsuitable for regular attendance for a number of methodological or practical reasons including the time of year in which observation took place, the variety of locations and the inconvenience of the time of day or day of the week. One-off activities and events organized by and for older people, such as day coach trips, were also observed where possible. Informal interviews were undertaken with sixteen older people, eleven women and five men, identified through attendance at the Age Concern coffee morning, participation in other activities and through personal contacts initiated with the snowballing technique. Twelve of the sixteen interviewees took part in interviews designed to identify the strength of their social network ties. Five participants were chosen from those who had been interviewed, as embedded case studies, their range of backgrounds and ability and willingness to take part having been taken into account, and these people completed participant journals over a period of two weeks and were interviewed again to discuss and explore what they had written in their journals. Data collection in the field produced several outputs as follows:

- Field observation notebooks with records of background information, observation of group activities and reflections on methodological issues
- Sixteen informal interview transcripts
- Thirteen social network interview transcripts and additional notes
- Five case study journals produced by participants
- Five case study interview transcripts
- Five case study summaries including text and quotations

A number of themes for further exploration had emerged from Stage One of the research and these were incorporated into the iterative data analysis in Stage Two. The three initial sensitizing concepts taken from the research question and described in Chapter 1.6 informed the initial thematic analysis and themes and sub-themes were identified from all of the interviews and observations and the five embedded case studies that represented different examples and variations on themes. However, the process was also exploratory and inductive and during data collection preliminary analysis was ongoing in order to highlight emerging themes and provide direction for further data collection. Data was summarized thematically after interviews and observations had taken place and further

themes and sub-themes were identified through analysis that creatively reflected both the common and individual viewpoints of the participants. According to Attride-Stirling (2001) "thematic analyses seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes" (p.387) I decided to follow this approach and organize the themes and sub-themes I identified into a network where the themes emanated from four 'global' themes. A thematic network of themes and sub-themes was constructed around the global theme headings that emerged from the data, related to the original sensitizing themes and to those identified by Fisher et al. (2007), used for their People-Place-Information Trichotomy. The final pattern of global themes, themes and sub-themes that emerged throughout the data collection is illustrated in Figure 6.5, page 108.

6.4 Participant Observation

> The researcher gains a more comprehensive and accurate picture of what is happening simply by observing, but also by developing relationships with different people. These relationships, typically based on mutual interests, open up the setting for further participant observation. (Jorgensen, 1989, p.51)

The use of the phrase 'participant observation' is designed to capture "the ambivalence of distance and familiarity" (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998, p.127). The necessity of detachment has been defined by Geertz as a combination of "two fundamental orientations toward reality – the engaged and the analytic – into a single attitude" (Geertz cited in Burke, 2007, p.182). Observation "combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance" (Fetterman, 1989, p.45) but, as Jorgensen (1989) suggests, it can be difficult to remain uninvolved, even as an outsider, as people "have a tendency to involve you" and "involvements with people indicate that you are being accepted to some extent as part of the setting" (p.58). The less publicly accessible the setting and the more restricted the membership of the group, the more participation in group activity is required. As referenced earlier, I considered a flexible position somewhere between outsider and insider to be the most effective way of becoming familiar with activities and of gaining the confidence of individuals within their social contexts whilst

remaining in my role of researcher. The approach was flexible so that I could respond to the requirements of the location, the activity and the needs of participants. When attending the fortnightly Age Concern coffee morning in Stage One of the research I had been able, initially through the leader of that group, and then through key contacts made within the group, to identify some regular activities in which I could potentially take part. Early in Stage Two I attended some activities identified by key contacts in addition to the regular Age Concern coffee mornings. I took part in a Keep Fit class for older women and an Indoor Bowls club that had a predominantly older membership but also included some younger people. I approached older people and they approached me when I attended activities, and some of these people became regular, key contacts. As Davies (2008) points out, key informants are not always selected by a researcher as it is not a one-way process. A researcher evaluates a potential informant against the requirements of the research. Once a decision has been made that an informant should be interviewed or observed it is important to consider that "in order for ethnographers sensitively to interpret this interaction, they must develop a reflexive understanding of their relationship with their informants" (p.89). The relationships that I developed with contacts I made in those first sessions were important to my success in identifying other activities to attend where I was then able to meet potential participants for interview over the following weeks and months and keep informed about other community events. My relationships with people existed on different levels, some very casual and others more involved. As Davies (2008) says

> In participant observation, the ethnographer will normally interact with many different individuals. Like most human interactions some of these will be very brief, superficial or highly focused on a particular type of relationship or activity. Others will be much more diffuse, covering a broad range of interests and activities. (p.89)

After the first four months I had identified activities in which I considered participation could take place over two or three days each week and I attended these activities during the summer and early autumn. During the observation period I also took advantage of one-off activities, such as coach trips, in order to get as full an impression of the lifestyle of the older people as possible. As part of my observation strategy I visited information provider

locations such as the Library and the Information Centre, spoke to staff, and collected examples of the information provided. In this Section I describe my participation in the field through observation of human activity, connections made with older people I met and reflections on the methodological processes involved. The chronology of observations from June to August is shown in Figure 6.2. I begin with a description of observations made between January and March 2005 in Section 6.4.1, followed by a discussion of methodological decision-making recorded in my research notes between June and August 2005 in Sections 6.4.2 to 6.4.4. Observations of the Tai Chi class are discussed in Section 6.4.2, of the Arts and Crafts club in 6.4.3, and of the Age Concern activities in 6.4.4.

JUNE

| 15th June Coffee Morning | 15th June Tai Chi | 21st June Arts and Crafts | 23rd June Tai Chi | 29th June Coach trip To Whitby | 30th June Tai Chi |

JULY

| 2nd July Day Centre | 5th July Arts and Crafts | 7th July Tai Chi | 13th July Coffee Morning | 19th July Arts and Crafts | 21st July Trip on the Tyne | 27th July Coffee Morning |

AUGUST

| 2nd August Arts and Crafts | 10th August Coffee Morning | 10th August Day Centre | 24th August Coffee Morning |

Figure 6.2: Observations from June to August

6.4.1 Observation from January to March

At the end of January I attended my first session of the Age Concern coffee morning in order to collect data through observation. I had previously attended sessions in Stage One to collect data through a focused discussion with some of the older people attending (see

5.4.4). I was welcomed by the Group Leader who I had considered to be very important to the success of my entry into the field. I was soon able to join in with the discussion at one of the tables, and after a short while to broach the subject of my research and my need to identify activities in which older people in Alston took part. I was provided with some good suggestions for activities and decided to continue attending the coffee morning and, in addition, to try the carpet bowls and a keep fit class as both took place on the same day of the week. I also decided to join in with an Information Technology (IT) class for older people due to be run later in the year as there had been some discussion about computers provided free by a local project, the Cybermoor Project. However, when I later contacted the IT trainer, I discovered that the proposed training session was unlikely to run that year, so I then decided to facilitate a short discussion with some of the older people at the following coffee morning in order to discuss some of their issues with IT. I attended and observed a session of the Keep Fit class in the afternoon and a session of the Indoor Bowls club in the evening of the same day. The Keep Fit class consisted of a small group of older women and was run by one of the contacts I made at the coffee morning. There was little time to talk or observe whilst exercising and only a short tea break. I decided that I would attend again if possible but was not sure that the group would be suitable for my purpose of observing social information interaction. The Indoor Bowls group was very lively but age groups were more mixed and everyone was very intent on playing the games. There were only quick breaks between games, not much opportunity to talk and members played until well after 9.30pm. There were practical problems for me in attending some activities because I lived thirty miles away, and there were few places that I could go whilst waiting for evening activities. I did not want individuals to feel that they should invite me into their homes, as this might compromise the necessary distance that I should maintain as researcher with my participants. So I decided that I would not be able to attend evening activities in general and that I would concentrate on attending the coffee morning every fortnight and another two or three groups that I could identify with these practical issues in mind. However, I was aware that in being unable to attend some of these groups because of the time of year, or because they were held in the evening, I was also unable to participate in the mixed gender groups that mainly took place at those times, and therefore would not have access to so many older men in my observations.

By the time I attended the next coffee morning at the beginning of March I had decided to structure my field notes under two of the headings suggested by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), 'observational' notes and 'methodological' notes. However, for my purposes here, I have incorporated both into the discussion. I noted in my observations of the second coffee morning that I was welcomed by the group leader and several of those attending and felt relaxed and able to mix. Someone arrived at my table asking who was going on the day trip to Whitby and later I was invited by the group leader to accompany the group on the trip. I had spoken to the group leader during the previous week and explained that I would like to recruit people to take part in a discussion group about computer use at the end of the session. In the event people said they were unable to remain behind so I organized an impromptu informal discussion during the session with those who had said they would take part. The results of this discussion are incorporated into the description of findings in Chapter 9.6. In the following three sections I discuss observations and methodological decisions made and recorded in my research notes for each activity attended between June and July 2005.

6.4.2 Tai Chi in the water

This class had arisen from an idea initiated by Iris (interview pseudonym) to use Tai Chi as exercise in water in order to make it easier for older people with health problems to exercise without damage. The Tai Chi approach is more relaxing and psychologically more calming than aqua aerobics for older people. What was interesting about the situation was that Iris's determination to improve her own fitness had led her to enthusiastically provide others with the opportunity to improve theirs. On this first visit I observed the session from the poolside, but was invited to join in the next time in the water. I was told that between four and six women usually took part and was introduced to the exercise leader, a woman in her fifties who had been a Tai Chi teacher for some time. I felt that joining in with these sessions would be useful for observing communication in a relaxed setting and relating to the women in a way that would allow me to identify some people for interview at a later point.

After the second session I noted that the exercise had been very relaxing for participants and that there was a lot of laughter and a strong feeling of spiritual wellbeing and togetherness developed towards the end of the session. I felt that I could potentially ask all of these participants for interview and noted that they had varying backgrounds and interests. I therefore decided to prepare the interview information sheet and consent form ready for the following week and to ask a couple of questions at coffee time as an introduction when handing out the information summary. It was interesting that Jane (case study pseudonym) said "this doesn't tell us anything about you". This brought into question whether it was best to allow information about the research to emerge more naturally over the first weeks or to introduce myself and the research more formally at the first session. Before the third session I went to collect one member of the group (case study pseudonym Mavis) from her house as her normal lift was not available. I felt that it made a difference to my contact with her that I could go and meet her in her own space. She started to volunteer information about her history in response to me admiring her grandchild in a photograph, and this led to her providing intimate detail about family tragedies that I would not consider including in the data. However, I thought that my sympathetic reaction made her more relaxed with me and that she would respond more positively to a request for an interview. I felt as if I was becoming part of this small group that day and was encouraged about handing out interview packs at the end of the session. I had a good chat with a lady who attended the Hospital Day Centre on a regular basis and she told me about what they did there. I resolved to make contact with the leader of that group and to arrange to attend.

The following week was, unexpectedly, the last session of the Tai Chi group as the leader had fallen and aggravated a pre-existing condition and was no longer able to teach after this session. During the tea break that followed Iris gave me her interview consent and it was a great feeling to have the first consent returned. Mavis said she had signed hers and had left it at home but, if I could give her a lift back, she would go in and get it for me. I gave an interview pack to Jane and said that I had taken on board her remark about not finding out much about me and that I would consider providing some information about my background. I felt that I had been with this group long enough to be well accepted and felt more positive about making contacts through my involvement in other groups.

After the Tai Chi class had come to an end Iris organized the annual summer coach trip and this was based around a river boat trip from Newcastle down the Tyne. It was well attended even though it was a repeat of a previous year's trip. We arrived at Newcastle Quayside for coffee, then the boat trip on the Tyne for three hours, back to the Quayside for an hour, and on to the Metro Centre for two hours shopping. I was a little apprehensive about the day, not really knowing whether it would be worthwhile for data collection and whether I would be accepted as one of this group. The day started for me with a decision about where to sit on the coach knowing that people would have planned their seating arrangements beforehand. I sat at the back next to the coach driver's wife and we talked about a previous trip to Whitby we both had attended (discussed in Section 6.4.4). It was a full coach and some of the older people had been on the previous trip but there was more of a mix in age groups this time. There were many people on this trip whose original roots were in Newcastle or the Tyne Valley who still had a very strong pull to the Tyne. Now that I had some contacts that I knew quite well, I was being introduced to others and was able to identify another three people for potential interviews and to provide them with information.

6.4.3 Arts and Crafts Group

I attended this fortnightly group at the suggestion of one of the contacts I had made at the coffee morning. She told me that this was a bigger, more stable group than the Tai Chi group (averaging twelve to fifteen women attending each session). It was said to be a good place to have a 'natter' and catch up with all the local news. The leader of the group was not an older person herself but she was happy for me to attend as long as I took full responsibility for explaining my purpose to participants. She introduced me at the first session and I briefly explained the research objectives and handed out information summaries. It was clear from the start that this group might be more difficult to use for observation because of the formal seating arrangements and lack of free space. Informal discussions were ongoing so I started moving nearer to people I had already met and talking to them so that I might be introduced to others. I heard some discussion about activities, housing and land disputes and health and ailments. However, people were intent on their craftwork and it was clear that I would be expected to play my part in producing

things, but because each person worked individually, it was going to be difficult to do this at the same time as observing. I was told that the sessions were a mix of taught workshops and sessions where everyone brought their own work. I decided to join in with the activity at the next session, make a mental note of topics discussed and introduce key information topics if the opportunity arose.

When I arrived at the second session it was clear that the tutor of this particular class was unaware that I was doing research and she welcomed me in as if I were a regular member. At the tea break I was able to explain to her who I was and that I needed to hand out interview packs at some stage. She was quite happy about it but I was concerned about being intrusive in the session. I had to speak to each of the fifteen individuals briefly again before handing out interview requests and this was difficult as I was interrupting their practical exercise in putting together a scrapbook page. I then continued to work with the others on the task until it was time for us to leave. I was uncomfortable with my presence in the group because I was doing this for my own convenience and because I was feeling pressured to get some interview consents. I did not feel very confident about the possibility of getting positive responses. At the next meeting of the group I decided to sit next to Mavis whom I had met at the Tai Chi group. I had brought some old knitting patterns of my mother's and a scrapbook about her life to use as a contribution to the group. The people on either side of me took an interest but, in general, people were focused on their own work and it seemed to be a quiet and rather subdued gathering. The group seemed very formal and I had identified tensions between personalities within the group. I noted that I had not been comfortable enough to "find ways of asking for interviews".

I felt that my approach to the group was wrong and I had started giving people interview packs and asking for interview responses too early so that people felt pressured. I had only had one positive response but I thought that this poor response was also affected by the general culture of the group. I felt that if I had encountered some people in different locations as individuals I might have had more positive responses. I had interviewed Mavis before the next session took place and, without prompting, she had informed me that the tension in the group was because of an ongoing disagreement between two individuals. One

of these individuals was not at the next meeting and the atmosphere appeared to be more relaxed. I had taken my sheep puppet knitting pattern, wool and needles and proceeded to knit. This was a very good idea as it seemed to make all the difference to my acceptance in the group. I asked the group if I could take photographs of them and they didn't mind at all. This was the last meeting before the summer break and it was unfortunate that it took until this last session for me to start to be accepted in the group as I think it would have been very successful for longer term observation and in different circumstances. I regretted allowing myself to feel too pressured to try to get agreements for interviews and therefore missing my opportunity for success.

6.4.4 Age Concern activities

I had attended the coffee morning in Stage One and continued to do so in Stage Two. When I arrived for the first Age Concern coffee morning in June, the room was packed with people busy in conversation so I quietly collected my drink and found a place to sit and observe. As the Age Concern local worker was present I took the opportunity of speaking to her about local groups and she gave me a contact for the Hospital Day Centre. I decided to ask if I could observe a session there to see if it would be suitable for regular attendance. It was at this session of the coffee morning that I was also told about the Tai Chi class and invited to join in. I moved to another table and joined a conversation about the difficulties people were having with the free computers they had been given. I moved again and listened to a very elderly lady talking about her experiences of living on a farm. I decided I could raise particular information topics in discussions at the tables in the next session where appropriate. I also decided that I could start feeling my way into inviting people to take part in interviews quite quickly.

The annual Age Concern coach trip was to Whitby on the North Yorkshire coast and replaced the next fortnightly coffee morning as the activity for that Wednesday. I had considered that travelling with some of the older people on a coach trip might be a good way of observing social interaction and information behaviour so I accepted an invitation from the coffee morning leader to attend this summer outing. The trip was useful and enjoyable in some ways but, although I managed little chats to a few people on the journey

and made some observations, the result did not seem to justify the time expended. In this situation I think that some people who didn't know me saw me as one of the helper group and most did not appear to need any help. Some of those who knew I was a researcher were still unsure as to why I would be attending the trip for my research, the prevailing view being that research was usually something to do with either 'facts and figures' or historical documentation. I considered that this observation had not been a great success because everyone was seated in twos on the coach and went off in groups on arrival at Whitby and I had not been able to join in. However, I had noticed that one lady (case study pseudonym Edith), was sitting by herself during the coach journey out and I decided to ask if I could sit with her for a little while on the way back. I explained why I was there as briefly as possible but she had no difficulty in understanding. She had only recently started joining in with this sort of activity since her husband died and she was obviously a very independent-minded lady. She seemed reluctant to be too socially involved with the others and had gone off on her own when we got to Whitby. I decided to find a way of asking her for interview at a later stage but was feeling concerned about the prospect of asking people for interviews when I had no idea how they were going to react. It was clear that the process was going to be slower than I had imagined at first.

At the next session of the coffee morning I had interview packs with me but there were fewer people there than normal as some had gone on a few days holiday to Wales. I was approached by Iris with an interview consent form and I spent some time chatting to her husband, a shy farmer. I hoped that he would join in with Iris at her interview or agree to be interviewed separately. I also spoke to another man that I had seen there before (interview pseudonym Frank) and this time I had an opener because I was able to ask if he had enjoyed the Whitby trip. He was also involved in the Bowling Club and the re-building of the clubhouse and suggested that I should come up to see the work. I gave him an invitation to be interviewed. I decided I would produce a poster to use with my brief verbal introduction and handouts for coffee mornings and other groups. I thought this would be a better lead-in for me and enable me to provide a more constructive basis for attending groups and asking for interviews. I gave interview packs to Edith whom I had met on the Whitby trip and another lady I had met before (interview pseudonym Edna) and both seem

likely to respond positively. I had decided to target a few individuals during the coffee morning and delay handing out interview packs more generally. I also met the secretary of the WI and was invited to attend the monthly meetings in the autumn. In some ways it made it easier for me that there were fewer people present that day as I had only three tables to visit. At the following session of the coffee morning I spoke to some of the people who had been on the recent boat trip on the Tyne and everyone seemed to have thoroughly enjoyed it. I took some photographs of people at their tables with their permission so that I could use them for any posters I produced. I had been concerned about achieving enough contacts for interviews before the end of the first three months but did not want this aim to drive all contacts I made at the coffee morning. I felt happy that the first four interviews were to take place in the next two days and that I had organized two more that morning. I also spoke to Frank again and he seemed more confident about the idea of being interviewed. This was a positive outcome as the older men seem generally more reluctant to get involved. At this point I decided that it might be a good idea to map people's group membership in some way using a short questionnaire and I decided to discuss this with my research supervisors. Later in the day I attended the Day Centre run by Age Concern and based at the hospital. This was a small group of older people who needed some extra support and mental and physical stimulation together with light exercise. I was welcomed into the session and asked to join in with the activities of the six ladies present. I had a great time joining in with the skittles, word puzzles and memory games although I found that I was not as good at these as they were. This group was very different to the other activities I had attended in that it was very structured and those attending were more compliant and very much less active physically and/or mentally. Although the group was of interest, I was not sure how relevant it was going to be for this research which was based on socially active older people. However, I decided to attend one more session two weeks later.

It was not such a good day for observation at the next coffee morning as one of the tables was already filling up to overflowing when I arrived so that there was no room for me, and the other tables were practically empty. I was pleased that I had already managed to complete eight interviews by this time and that consequently my focus was beginning to move from observation to mainly interviews at this stage. I was given another interview

consent form by one of my other contacts and promised another. I now had thirteen consents for interviews, including three men and decided that it would be good to achieve fifteen before the end of August. Later that day I went to the Day Centre again and received a good welcome because I had got to know a few of them on the last visit and some people were now remembering me from the coffee mornings. I joined in with the activities, including one about favourite childhood memories that was stimulating for those who were quieter and perhaps more isolated. However, I reluctantly decided that it was not appropriate to continue with this group and did not visit again. My last visit to the coffee morning, apart from visits in November to catch up with my contacts and the news, was on the 24th August when I had completed twelve interviews of the final sixteen. I had found the coffee morning the most useful means of observing social interaction and information behaviour and of accessing potential interviewees because of the informal atmosphere and the wide mix of older people attending and at this stage of the data collection I was planning changes to the methodology that would increase the data collected from some of the individuals I had interviewed.

6.5 Informal Interviews

Fetterman (1989) suggests that an informal interview is a mixture of natural conversation and "embedded questions" that "typically emerge from the conversation" (p.49), together with prepared questions asked at the appropriate time during the conversation. The informal interview is useful "in discovering what people think and how one person's perceptions compare with another's" (p.48). According to Bates (2004) an informal or unstructured interview is relevant to research that aims to understand information behaviour from the perspective of the participant because it can involve a conversation between the researcher and participant where the participant can relate stories about whatever they consider to be relevant whilst the researcher steers the interview through the research topics (pp.16-17). According to Burgess (1984) these "conversations with a purpose" (p.102), accounts of lifestyle, social networks and information behaviour, are influenced by narrative techniques, and participants can reflect on their everyday lives and how they access information to add to their existing knowledge. However, according to Nunkoosing (2005), when interviewing in this way one should take into account that the interviewee "chooses

the aspects of his or her life that he or she is most interested in telling" and allow time to "build an enabling relationship" (p.701). As has already been discussed in the previous section on observations, informal interviews took place after individuals had been encountered through observation in activities from the end of July until the last interview in mid-December. Some key contacts were interviewed, others were approached through introductions from informants, some were identified through interview participants and others I identified myself. The timetable and type of contacts made with each individual participant are shown in Figure 6.3.

Informal Interviews

27th July Jane	27th July Iris	28th July Edith	28th July Mavis	2nd August Jessie	2nd August Frank	3rd August Edna	9th August Bessie
10th August Barbara	22nd August Mary	22nd August Peter	24th August Reg	22nd Sept. Janet	30th Sept. Bill	24th Nov. Stanley	**12th Dec.** Hilda

SNA Interviews

26th October Jane	26th October Iris	26th October Barbara	27th October Edith	27th October Frank	27th October Mavis
2nd November Edna	2nd November Jessie	2nd November Bill	2nd November Janet	2nd November Peter	**24th November** Stanley

Case Study Journals

10th November Bill starts Journal	10th November Mavis starts Journal	18th November Edith starts Journal	24th November Jane starts Journal	28th November Janet starts Journal
2nd December Bill's Interview	28th November Mavis's Interview	2nd December Edith's Interview	8th December Jane's Interview	**12th December** Janet's Interview

Figure 6.3: Data collection timetable and individual contacts

Interview participants consisted of a mix of active older people, some of whom had lived in the area all their lives and some who had chosen to move to the area on retirement, their ages ranging between sixty-five and ninety-four. Written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the start of data collection, after the research purpose, procedure, confidentiality and anonymity had been explained verbally, and by providing a Participant

Information Sheet (See Appendix 6). Interviews were held in locations requested by the interviewees, mostly in their own homes, so that privacy and security issues could be taken into account and interviewees could feel more comfortable. Interviews in people's homes can be more appropriate for interviewees as they can be affected by the social context in which interviews are conducted and can feel more confident and relaxed in their own surroundings (Manderson, Bennett and Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006) "The choice of the interviewee's home … invites the interviewer into his or her private life, shifting the balance of power" (p.1318). Interviews were tape-recorded in most cases and participants were interviewed for between one and two hours in order to understand how they shared information through their social networks and social activities and to explore issues that had been identified in Stage One. In interviews, participants were asked about what it was like to live in the locality, the advantages and disadvantages of their lifestyle, social and family connections, their lifestyle activities and their information needs and activity (See Interview Schedule in Appendix 8). It was important to be aware of the need to listen carefully to the interviewee's use of language and general approach to communication as the "language one uses can either encourage or discourage the flow of conversation" (Bates, 2004, p.17). Although the information topics identified by participants were interesting and informative about the types of information used, the main concern was to identify the sources through which information was accessed, and the processes underlying information exchange. The simple interview schedule was used only as a reminder of the subject coverage and any new topics identified by participants were considered for inclusion in further interviews.

In order to remain close to the data, I transcribed and carried out an initial analysis of the data as soon as possible after each interview, identifying emerging themes and reflecting on the interview process using the following steps adapted from Moustakas (1994):-

1. Identify each relevant statement in the transcript
2. Group the statements into themes and sub-themes, relating the themes to each other
3. Check and validate themes with the original transcript
4. Check themes and sub-themes with matrix and update
5. Reflect on the themes and produce a textual description with quotes

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984) themes are derived from patterns in the data evident from "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (p.131) and to Aronson (1994) "themes that emerge from informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience" (p.1). The analyzed data from these sixteen informal interviews forms the basis of the description in Chapters 7 to 10 and is enhanced by data collected after a decision had been made to focus on five of these interviewees as case study participants and to collect more detailed data through participant journals followed by a second interview. The process of data analysis and interpretation is described more fully in Section 6.7.

6.5.1 Case study participant journals

The five case study participants had originally been identified through snowball sampling during the observation and interview process, and were then chosen, after interviews, for their broad-ranging backgrounds, their potential to provide a rich source of data, and according to their willingness and ability to take part over a longer period. As Stake (1995) suggests, cases can be chosen on the basis of how easy they are to get to and how "hospitable to our enquiry" they are (p.4) so that it is possible to access information rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). It was also important that I had built up a good relationship with these participants prior to their agreement to further participation and this had been achieved in the process of getting to know each one through participant observation and previous interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.152). Case study research looks at how the relationships and processes of information use interrelate and does this by focusing on individuals within their social settings over a period of time and using more than one data collection method (Denscombe, 2003, pp.30-39).

The extra data collection from the case studies ran concurrently with other data collection methods and each participant was asked to keep a journal of information and communication activities. Case study participants agreed to undertake the writing of their daily journals for a period of two weeks and this was followed by a further interview. Corti (1993) has highlighted the advantages of journals in helping respondents to recall events that are easily forgotten and in supplementing interview data by providing "a rich source of

information on respondents' behaviour and experiences on a daily basis" (p.1). Jacelon and Imperio (2005) suggest that a combination of participant diaries and face-to-face interviews can be used successfully to "approximate participant observation … when extended periods of participant observation are not possible" (p.991) in research with older people. Alaszewski (2006) points out that using diaries (or journals) requires the researcher to build a close relationship so that they may guide participants in the direction of recording information that will be of interest to the research. They can "make the diary itself user-friendly, provide face-to-face explanations and informal written guidance, and use diaries alongside interviews as part of a diary-interview method" (p.73). The purpose of the journal in this case was to explore "intra-individual information behaviour in daily life contexts" in each individual's information encounters (Julien and Michels, 2004). Participants were provided with a ring-bound, hardback booklet with plain, lined pages so that they could structure their diary to suit themselves. I inserted a sheet of journal guidelines with open-ended questions designed to focus their thinking about the links between activities and information encounters (See Appendix 9). The writing of the daily journal was designed to help them remember who they had talked to and what they had discussed over the two weeks, focusing on their information behaviour to stimulate discussion during follow-up interviews. A broad range of situations were accepted as "sufficiently non-trivial for analysis" (Julien and Michels, 2004, p.550). I met with each participant to brief them on the purpose of the journal and to introduce them to the guidance sheet. I arranged to telephone them after two or three days to see how they were progressing and again after the first week, and then arranged a final interview to discuss the journal contents at the end of the two weeks.

The results from different participants were very varied in terms of the amount of activity they had undertaken and the amount of material recorded; understanding of and commitment to the task also varied from a journal containing detailed written material, together with examples of paper information, to one with just a few lines of written material for each day. Each journal was scanned to identify the information 'incidents' contained in entries and a list compiled of these to stimulate further discussion in the interview that followed. When case study participants were interviewed again they were able to provide
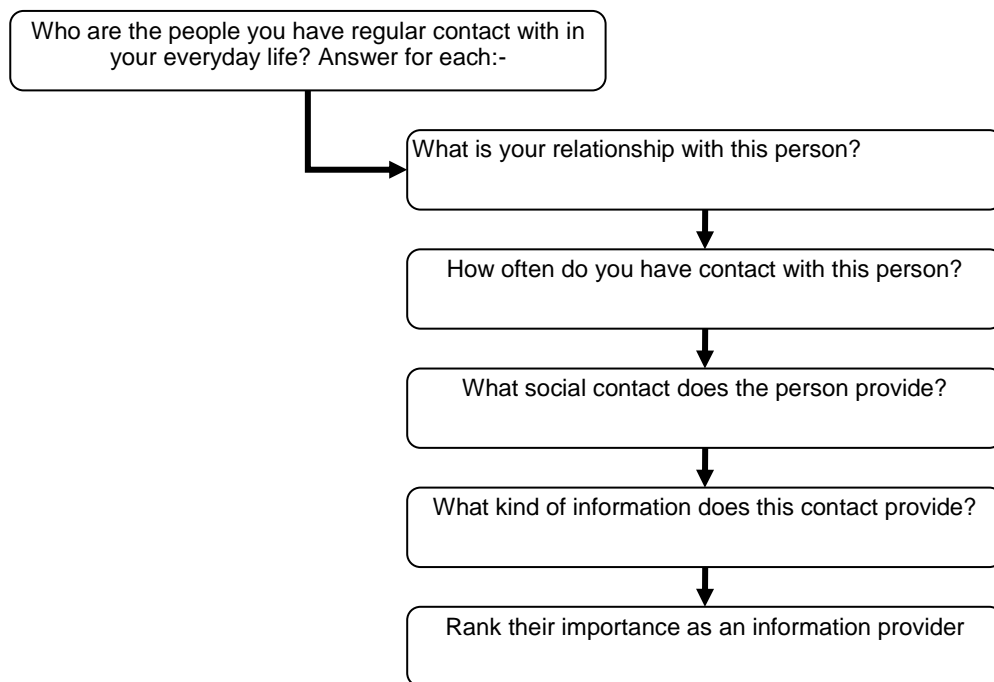
more detail based on their journal entries in addition to their first informal interviews. The journals were used in these interviews to focus discussion on information behaviours and situations but interviews were also sufficiently flexible to allow the participant to relate these situations in their own way and with their own emphasis. I treated the interviews as conversations between myself and the participant in order to allow him or her to focus on those situations that were most important to them. The results from interviews were transcribed and those from journals transformed into descriptions with quotes and both were analyzed and combined with the results obtained from case study participants through other data collection methods. Within-case analysis provided a rich description of individual case studies and cross-case analysis identified themes of commonality and difference between them (Miles and Hubermann, 1994). Finally, case descriptions of all five case study participants were compiled and these formed the major content of the description of the results in Chapters 8 to 10.

6.6 Social network interviews

I had noted during the progress of my observations at the Age Concern coffee morning that, in addition to other methods of data collection, some kind of mapping process of individuals and their social networks and activities would be useful. This led me to investigate the use of social network analysis (Granovetter, 1973) and how it had been used in the field of information research (Haythornthwaite, 1996). Social network analysis looks at the patterns of the relationships between actors in social networks and the availability and exchange of information between these actors (Haythornthwaite, 1996; Scott, 1991). It can be used in a qualitative context "to collect richly contextualised research material about the nature of the participants' information relationships" (Olsson, 1998, p.5). Haythornthwaite (1996) states that the key focus of social network analysis for information research should be to show the patterns of relationships between individuals within their social networks, their information behaviour, how often they exchange information, and what kinds of information are exchanged (p.324). Chatman (1992) decided to apply social network theory to her study of the information worlds of older women who lived in a retirement home in the United States. Chatman's earlier research had shown that a social support system was an essential prerequisite to the interpersonal process of sharing

information (p.1), and she applied social network analysis because she was observing information exchange taking place between small groups of women in the home (p.16).

I decided to develop a simple questionnaire to collect data from interview participants about their immediate social networks (See Appendix 10). I used the questionnaire with as many of the interviewees as possible either as an addition to their informal interviews or on a separate occasion. The resulting data, collected from twelve of the interview participants, provided valuable additional data to that collected by other means. Participants were asked to think of five or six people with whom they had social contact on a regular basis and then asked a series of questions to assess the strength and importance of each contact in order to identify the strength of their social network ties (Granovetter, 1973, Haythornthwaite, 1996). Three interviewees were unable to take part for a variety of reasons, and another was not available at the time of the interview. Of the twelve who did take part, eight were women and four were men. Figure 6.4 shows the questioning process.

Who are the people you have regular contact with in your everyday life? Answer for each:-

What is your relationship with this person?

How often do you have contact with this person?

What social contact does the person provide?

What kind of information does this contact provide?

Rank their importance as an information provider

Figure 6.4: Social network questions

It was clear that the small sample and the limited application of the social network analysis approach could only give a basic indicator of the egocentric tie strengths of the individuals. However, when these findings were combined with those from interviews and observations there were strong indications of the kinds of information exchanged between participants and their strong and weak social ties, and observations about the identity of some strong and weak ties who were key information providers were confirmed. An important methodological outcome has been that intuitive notions about the tie strength of participants and non-participants in this research were backed up by results obtained using the social network questionnaire.

I discuss here the problems with the design of the questionnaire. The appropriateness of the use of a structured method with participants whom I had previously interviewed in depth, at least once, is also discussed here. The structured approach to questioning was of some concern to several of the case study participants and this revealed itself in different ways. Two participants were happy to voice their concerns about it, whereas, as I had recorded in my research diary, a third seemed to 'become a little confused about what was being asked of her' and yet another was 'impatient to finish the questionnaire'. One of the two participants who voiced their concerns found it difficult to be limited to naming just six people and expressed discomfort about having to do so for the purposes of data collection. She also found it difficult to answer the second question about how often she was in contact with the six people she chose. She pointed out that this could vary at different times of the year and in different personal circumstances. The other participant was uncomfortable with responding to the structured approach to questioning and was much more comfortable and forthcoming when being interviewed in a relaxed and unstructured way. She didn't want to think about the concept of information in terms of her interaction with other people socially, and was happier to think about people in terms of friendship, advice and support. The responses of these participants illustrate the difficulties of asking structured, closed, pre-determined questions about relationships between people. I therefore considered it important for the discussion of the findings described in Chapter 8 to be combined with data from the case study participants obtained using the qualitative data collection methods.

6.7 Data analysis and interpretation

Wolcott (2001) identifies a tension between description and analysis as different ways of transforming data and Davies (2008) sees both as performing different levels of analysis. I analyzed the data reflexively, inductively and iteratively using an exploratory, sense-making approach (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Miles and Huberman 1994) to the identification of themes. In this study a thematic network of the themes and sub-themes was constructed under the four global themes that naturally emerged during the data collection period and which enabled me to build the themes within those areas and transform the data into a rich description that I felt was truly reflective of what had been said by participants and what I had observed. I therefore saw my approach as closer to analytic description than analysis with the possibility of identifying and selecting findings through "a theoretically determined format" (Davies, 2008, p.232).

The three major global themes that emerged from the data analysed from Stage Two of data collection were as follows: 'Social Networking', representing themes about people involved in the social networking of information, as discussed in Chapter 8: People; 'Information', representing themes about the information that is exchanged in terms of communication format and type, as discussed in Chapter 9: Information; and 'Information grounds' representing the places where people exchange information, for example in group activities, as discussed in Chapter 10: Place. The fourth global theme, Lifestyle, was introduced to provide a focus for a contextualizing description in Chapter 7. Attride-Stirling (2001) suggests that "Once a thematic network has been constructed, it will then serve as an organizing principle and an illustrative tool in the interpretation of the text, facilitating disclosure for the researcher and understanding for the reader" (pp.389-390). The aim here was to provide a foundation for the interpretation and description of the data that was true to the community under investigation whilst responding to the requirements of the research aims and objectives. In a discussion about how to write about cultures, Geertz (1973, p.27) distinguishes between 'inscription' ('thick description') and 'specification' ('diagnosis') as being the difference "between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge this attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found, and, beyond

that, about social life as such" (1973, p.28). Therefore my aim was to achieve both description and diagnosis within the constraints imposed by the location, methods, and participant base. Figure 6.5 shows the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from Stage Two of the data collection relating to the four global themes of Lifestyle, People, Information and Place that are interpreted and described in the next four Chapters, 7 to 10.

6.8 Summary

In this chapter I have described and discussed the data collection in the field including entry to the field and data collection methods used, including observation, informal interviews, social network analysis, case studies and participant journals. I have also outlined the analytical approach to data reduction and the development of a thematic analysis. In the following four Chapters, 7 to 10, I describe and discuss the findings in terms of the 'Lifestyle' of the 'People' and their social and information networks, 'Information' types, formats, and channels, and 'Place' in terms of information grounds. In Chapter 7, the first of the descriptive chapters, I describe the implications of living in the context of the particular rural location of Alston and its surrounding villages for the participants in this research under the heading of the global theme 'Lifestyle'. The remote rural location of Alston and its surrounding villages and the particular issues of importance to older people living there led to the identification of themes that were relevant to the underpinning structural context and included the thematic areas of location, community, work, safety, and access. All these themes represented internal and external structural influences impacting on the day-to-day lives of the older people and are included in this description of the lifestyle context, illustrated with quotes taken from individual interviews, to show their importance and impact on the information worlds of the participants.
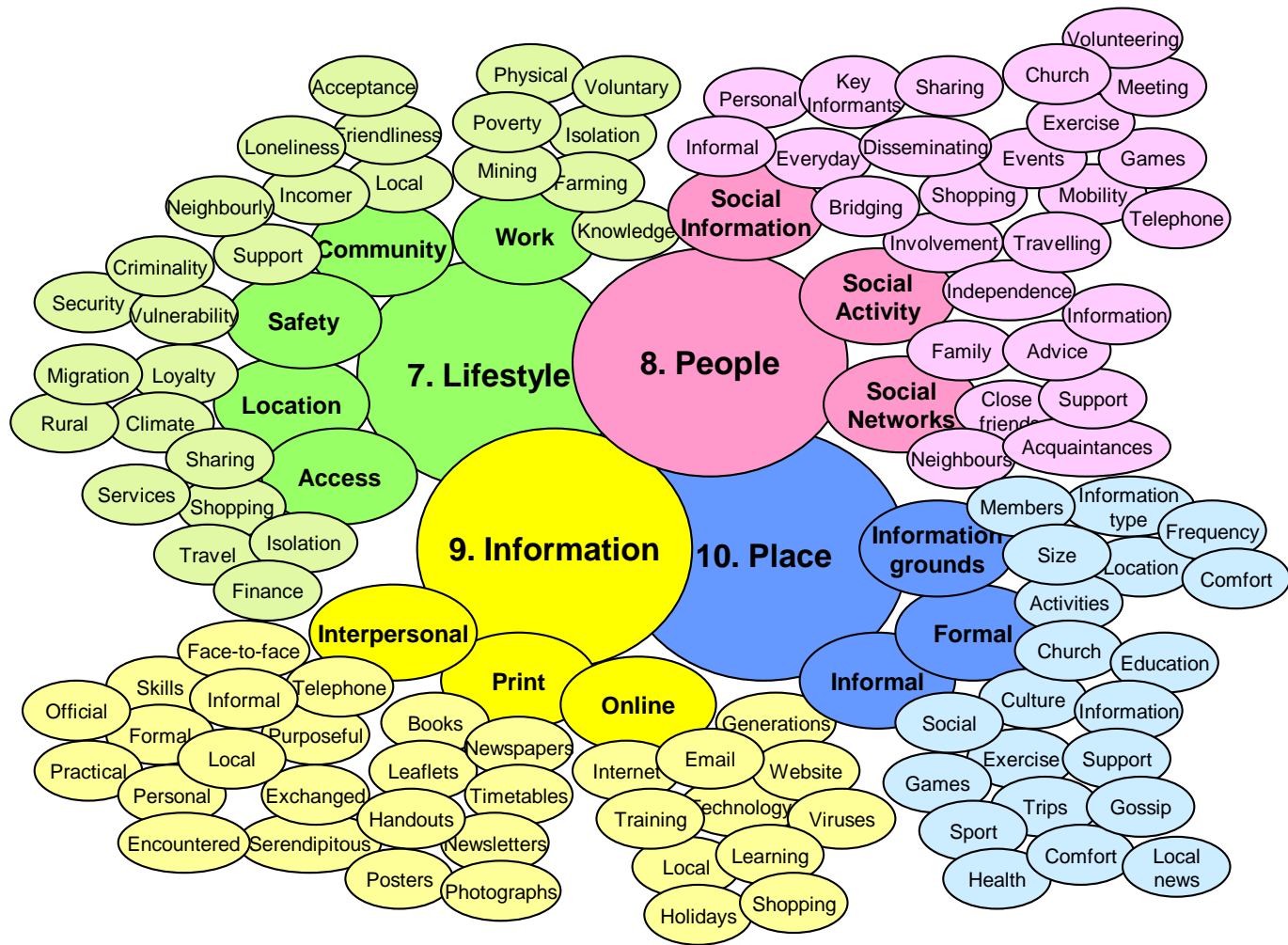
Figure 6.5: Thematic Diagram

Chapter 7: Lifestyle

7.1 Introduction

It was evident from the outcomes of Stage One of this study, described in Chapter 5, that certain key underpinning themes were emerging from the analysis that related to the global theme of Lifestyle. These themes, together with those emerging from Stage Two of the data collection, and the findings taken from the data pertaining to these themes, has been used both to place the research in context and to act as an introduction to some of the older people who were interviewed. The global theme of 'Lifestyle' and its themes and sub-themes were illustrated in Figure 6.5, page 108. Issues relating to the Location are discussed in Section 7.2, those relating to Community in Section 7.3, Work in Section 7.4, Safety in Section 7.5, and Access in Section 7.6. I conclude, in Section 7.7 with a summary of the key points raised in the chapter.

7.2 Location

> Fresh air and contentment, it's something that money canna buy. (Hilda, 94)

In 2007 the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2007) defined all populations of less than 10,000 as rural. Alston Moor was considered to be 'rural sparse', the lowest population category (Eden District Council, 2006b, p.10). The ward profile shows that Alston Moor had just 2156 residents in 2001 of whom 498 were over sixty. The distribution of the population of Alston Moor across other age groups was fairly even with the largest group being the under twenty-fives. It had a very small ethnic minority population, 98.4% of the population was 'White British' and the ward was predominantly Christian with several different Christian churches represented, including Methodists and Quakers (Eden District Council, 2006b, p.1). Nearly 3% of the older population of Alston Moor, sixteen people over the age of sixty-five, were interviewed for this research, and many more observed within their activity groups. The older community in this rural area is tight-knit and traditionally self supporting, but has faced cuts and changes in the provision of services over recent years.

These changes, because of the relative geographic isolation of the community, have threatened the integrated formal and informal support system built up over many years. The North Pennines has a dramatic landscape of moors and dales, and the industries of lead mining and farming have largely influenced its history and landscape. Alston has a very close, loyal, community, many of whom have a long family history of connection with the town and its surrounding villages. In rural areas, the locality in which older people live is very important and those who have lived in the same place all their lives have a strong attachment to their history, their "identity is rooted in the physical and social landscape around them" (Age Concern, no date, p.12). In addition to community loyalty, it has been shown that people living within the Eden Valley Primary Care Trust area have generally expressed a high degree of attraction to the area in which they live (89%) (Eden District Council, 2006c, p.3). Management of land for sheep farming and grouse shooting has moulded the landscape, whilst the remains of lead mines are an intrinsic part of its heritage.

Several of the research participants commented in interviews on the beauty of the landscape and the peace and quiet they experienced in the surrounding environment. "The quietness and peace, I do appreciate that" (Jessie, 80s). Hilda was, at 94, the oldest person who took part in interviews, and she had lived in the area all her life. She summed up her lifestyle in the outlying village of Garrigill as being the life that she wanted to live, despite the fact that she didn't have much money to spend. Iris (72) had lived in the area for many years, and she stressed the need to make the most of the surrounding countryside, especially when the weather was at its best, as it could sometimes be harsh in the North Pennines. "You've got the countryside. You make the most of it". Stanley (80), who had moved up to the area from the south of England, said that although he didn't mind the cold to begin with, he suffered from it more as he got older. However, Frank (79), who had lived and worked in Alston for many years, felt that the occasional good weather was ample compensation for the bad weather that came with living so high up in the hills. He recognized, however, that the climate was beginning to change and that there was not the same amount of snow as there used to be in the winters.

110

Most of the sixteen interview participants said that they would not want to leave the area, including Bill (78) who said that he and his wife would never leave. "We'll be to carry out in a box". Frank (79) was very active in the town and he had no plans to leave the area either. "Oh I like living in Alston, I don't think I would like to move". This determination of older people to stay in their community and remain independent for as long as possible was also displayed by Hilda (94). "As long as I can look after myself, or get somebody to look after me, I am going to stay here …" People who had been farming locally had a tendency to move into the town from the surrounding countryside when they decided to retire, predominantly for the convenience of shops and services rather than out of choice of location. Wenger (2001) points to the fact that older people in rural areas are more likely to be living in larger villages or small towns. "As they get older, they tend to move in from the countryside to be closer to the shops, services and other amenities" (p.119) Mary (81) remembered telling her mother that she wouldn't ever want to move in from the countryside and live in the town. However, she had changed her mind since she had finally moved in and was closer to the facilities; she was very content with her bungalow at the top of the town because it was easier for her to manage now that she was on her own.

> Well things have changed; I wouldn't like to live out of the town now. At one time I remember saying to mother once, 'Oh I wouldn't like to live in the town'. She'd come from a farming background, and she said 'You wait, you might' and that's true. I'm quite happy here, you know, I'm on me own I know but I'm quite happy where I am.

Some of the participants, with family connections outside of Alston Moor, in Northumberland and the North East, would have preferred to move back to those areas. Two of the farmer's wives who were interviewed expressed this preference, but accepted that they would, however, probably stay in the area because their husbands would not move. Janet (67), who still lived in a fairly isolated farmhouse with her husband, was concerned about how they would cope as they got older and less fit. She would have preferred to be in Hexham where there were more facilities. Both Janet (67) and Iris (72) felt that there would be more to do in the populated areas further east. Iris had family and friends in the North East and would have liked to be more actively involved with her family than she could be in Alston. Both women knew that their husbands, who were from a

farming background, would not want to move. "I would go down the Tyne, you know, me family's all down the Tyne … and there's so much going on down there, you know, you can join in to all sorts of things" (Iris, 72). However, in general, participants were keen to stay in the area. Chapman and Peace (2008) noted from their research with older people in rural Wales that even if there have been several moves in people's lives, at this stage in their lives "staying put and remaining integrated within the community was more important than seeking a previous homeland" (p.29). Edith (78) is one of those who chose to move to the area with her husband from the south of England when they retired. She now lived on her own in an old farmhouse that she had shared with her husband up until he died. The property, accessed down a rough track, was surrounded by a working farm, high up on the hills overlooking Alston. Edith wanted to continue living in her isolated old farmhouse for as long as she could. She liked the fact that the house was not in the town of Alston, but that she was close enough to make regular use of the facilities in the town. She considered that she had plenty of help from a niece and nephew who lived nearby, if and when she needed it, and that she preferred to be living out on her own as both she and her husband had when he was alive.

> Well the situation of the house to start with, it was kind of part of the town but not part of the town and we liked the isolation, we wanted the isolation, we wanted to get away from, as my husband always used to say, houses both sides of the street …I shall continue to live here as long as I can … I can get into town for any little things that I might need, but all the hassle and bustle of a town you haven't got.

Jane (65) had also come to the town from another area and had only lived in Alston for six years. She liked living where she did at the top of the town and did not think that she would ever want to move outside. Jane had taken on the responsibility of the upkeep of the house and garden when her husband had died but felt a little inadequate to the task now and had to get some outside help. She loved the garden and worried about a time coming when she might not be able to manage it at all. "I've no plans to move, I like it here, I like the people, I've enjoyed it, the only way I would have to move is if I was unable to do my garden and things like that but I don't think I would move out of Alston". Peter (69) and his wife used to travel up to the area for holidays and they bought a property before moving up from the

112

south of England when he took early retirement. They found that their regular visits for holidays allowed them to start to get to know people before they moved up for good. The main reason for coming to Alston was financial according to Peter. "When we thought about taking retirement … I couldn't really afford to live down there but we could buy cheaply up here". Peter and his wife were churchgoers and he felt that their integration was helped by being part of the church community.

> I think we felt we belonged, because we put our big toe in the water when we bought the place, you know, coming up here … we belong to the church you see. I think it might be true of any big organization but the very fact that you speak the same language and its familiar, you know, the door's open.

Stanley (79) and his wife Marjorie lived in a village a few miles from the town. They also came up from the south and had lived in the area for fifteen years, having bought their house ten years before their final move. They were not quite so committed to staying in the area permanently, as their family lived a long way away and they thought that they might need to be nearer to them at some stage. "Well we might (move away) eventually, it depends on age and things … our family are in Italy and London, you see, they're such a long way away".

7.3 Community

I think after fifty years I'm bound to be local … (Iris, 72)

There was recognition from some of the older people that changes had occurred in the community over many years due to the periodical in and out migrations of people seeking employment. Over the last fifty years there have been more 'incomers' arriving to take up vacant property, such as the groups of 'hippies' who came to the area in the 1960s, and, more recently, second home owners and retirees. There has been a corresponding out-migration of younger people who could not find suitable work locally. In recent years in-migration has consisted mainly of older people before or on retirement from more heavily populated areas further south, and also of local older people from outlying areas into the town so that they could be nearer to facilities and services as they got much older.

Examples of in and out migration provided by interviewees in this study are also reflected in national demographic changes.

> The exodus of people aged 75+ from the deep countryside has been increasing … however, the increased popularity of rural England for middle-aged and middle-class people, already with a 40-year history behind it, shows no sign of abating. (Champion, T. & Shepherd, J., 2006, p.48)

Stanley (79) recognized that he was one of the many retired people moving into his village who were gradually displacing the younger people who used to live there.

> You see, the people that are moving here are retired people really and consequently there are not many children, so the social mix has changed as well and that almost once again causes that cut-off between the odd one or two families with children, and the rest are all sort of retired people, more and more retired people.

In general, the older people accepted this situation and did not find it a problem because the community was still close and friendly due to the existence of close family and social networks. Bill stressed that the friendliness of the people was a major reason why he and his wife really liked living in the Alston community. Their explanation of the friendliness was put down to the fact that many of the people had lived in the area for some years and that Alston was a close-knit community of locals with everyone knowing one another. "Its a very close-knit community is Alston, I mean, if someone came up to me and asked me who lived at so-and-so I could tell them if he's within fifteen miles, you know" (Bill, 78). Bill admitted, however, that there were now more incomers in the community, and that he knew fewer people than he used to. However, he did think that people moving in could be good for the community, and that in-migration was not necessarily a bad thing. He referred to what had happened after a large influx of hippies in the 1960s. "We had the hippy incoming you know … but you know, folk went on about them, but there was a lot of derelict farm holdings … and they're really nice plots you know and they've improved them, I mean it's unbelievable what they've done …" The tendency for people to see themselves as either a local or an incomer had led to difficulty for some in settling into the community. In terms of how an incomer was defined, older locals whose family had been

114

in the area for generations still thought of someone who had been there for fifty years as being an incomer, according to Iris (72). "The funny part about it is, he's a local (her husband), my three kids are locals and I was an incomer". Although Jane (65) was relatively new to the area, she was Cumbrian born, but she still considered herself to be an incomer. She had found that it could be a disadvantage socially because so many of the local people had close family living in the town and were socially involved with one another. This meant that, although they were generally friendly, it was quite hard to make really close friends.

> I don't think I'll ever be anything but an incomer and I think in Alston they're so closely related to each other … they're very friendly and you have lots and lots of acquaintances … but it is quite difficult to have a special friend … I mean they all come to welcome you and things like that but they have such extended families, all their spare time is spent with their families, their extended families.

Stanley (79) thought that he was accepted, even though he was an incomer, but he also recognized that it might be because he lived in an outlying village where there had been more change in the population and more in-migration of retired people than in the town.

> I think we're accepted as locals … at one time people used to pass one or two remarks about us, 'Oh you're not from these parts' … but you never hear that, wherever we go the locals greet us the same way as the locals greet each other, so I think we've been accepted, but in a way, just in the village here, that's partly due to the change of life I think …

Mary (81), a local, thought that locals knew fewer people in the town than they used to. "Well there are a lot of people I don't know, I mean, at one time I should think I knew most people …" Iris (72) agreed with this view. "I mean, at one time you knew everybody, you could go from here right round the town and say more or less who was living there … now and you don't know anybody hardly". Hilda (94), also a local, lived in an outlying village and was quite happy about the incomers because they were friendly when she met them. She did point out, however, that people did not call in to see her in her house as much as in the past, and she did not think they were as neighbourly as they used to be.

People that are coming here now you see we've got a lot of holiday homes but they're all friendly people, you know what I mean. Mind, people doesn't visit like they used to do … they're not like they used to be, neighbours, you know what I mean, how they used to be coming in and they had a cup of tea and a chat and what have you …

However, Barbara (late 60s) and Jessie (late 80s), both incomers who were living on the edge of the town, thought that the town was very friendly and that people were very neighbourly. For Barbara this had helped her to overcome a depression that developed when she first moved in. "They're exceptionally friendly here and I think this helped me to settle in quicker because I think I got a bit depressed actually". As an incomer, Jessie pointed out that it was not a good idea to be too pushy too soon in such a small place because "… they'll turn and say 'but you've just come here', you know, if you're doing something that they don't agree with, so you've got to be very careful in that respect". Iris (72) conceded that there were local cliques "There's always cliques, it used to be horrendous at one time, but its not so bad now, but there still are the little pockets of cliques". Edith (79), also an incomer, was not inclined to be too involved in community activities because she preferred her own company and she felt that members of the local community accepted her choice. Jane (65), however, felt the need for company, and had sometimes been lonely since her husband died. However, she made an effort to overcome this and go out, as she would always meet someone to talk to. "I think if you're on your own you do get lonely sometimes … if I don't see anyone for two days I'm out and doing anything … I don't let it get me down that way". Since her husband had died, Mavis (70), a local, had been supported and encouraged by friends and family who had lived in the town for many years. She was well known and felt that there were many advantages to being a local as she got older because the support system around her was strong and reliable. She found that many of the local people she had known for years rallied round to support her when her husband died and she felt strongly that she wanted to stay in the area.

I think the thing is, is because you've always known these people and they've always known you … you know, from longstanding. It isn't just somebody that, you know, you've met up with, no, these are longstanding people that you've known well practically all your life. This is why it's so good really to be here, that you wouldn't really want to move anywhere where you had to start afresh.

116

7.4 Work

Well there's a lot of disadvantages farming here … (Janet, 67)

In the 1830's and 40's this area of the North Pennines became the most important lead mining area in the world. About 12,000 people live in the area today, less than half the number who lived there 140 years ago in the heyday of the lead mining industry. Alston and other villages in the Parish of Alston Moor, such as Nenthead and Garrigill, remain largely untouched by economic development and are still quite isolated. However, although the area is isolated, there is a strong focus on the development of community projects and in addition to the existence of the farming community, there is now a tourism industry and many newly emerging small businesses (North Pennines AONB, 2003). Much of the employment in the area is on a self-employed basis and there is a tendency for older people to carry on working part-time, well after retirement age, out of financial necessity. This is reflected in national research that shows that there are "… a greater mix of distinct 'routes' from employment to retirement, including a higher proportion of self-employment, in rural areas" (Green, 2006, p.105).

There is still a strong tradition of upland farming in the Alston and the surrounding areas. Several of the participants had been farming themselves, or were married to farmers, and some were still farming. It was usually the tradition for a son to take on the responsibility of running the family farm from his father, and many of these farms had originally been rented and were then bought by the tenants at a later date. It had become increasingly difficult to manage economically and many farmers now needed an income from an extra job to make ends meet. Farming in the Alston area is hampered by limitations imposed by the location, the climate, the poor quality of the land, and also by poor government subsidies. Janet (67) said that a disadvantage of living and farming where they did had been the weather which had been very bad at times with frequent snow and rain. "Well there's a lot of disadvantages farming here … there's a lot of wet, you know, rather than snow, the rain makes the ground saturated". The combination of weather conditions and marginal land meant that farmers struggled to make a living. Everyone in a farming family needed to work on the farm and it could be a tough life. However, the physical work helped to keep

people fit. Mary's husband was a farmer and she described how everyone helped on the farm when they were needed. Mary (81) was still very physically active when she was interviewed.

> When you get to nearly 82, I don't want to boast about it … I suppose people that were on farms had to, I mean when we were younger, everybody round the Nenthall area, the women went outside to help, that was a priority when the weather was fine. I mean, of course we didn't have the silage like it is now and not the bales at first, it was the women forking the hay as well and the children helping. It depends on people's health doesn't it?

Bill (78), and his wife Phyllis, had always been in farming and were both brought up in farming families. Bill's father worked on a farm in Hexham and then had a farm of his own in Alston, and Phyllis' father farmed in Alston after working in the mines. Phyllis was able to make good use of her previous experience of farming when she met Bill and they took over his father's farm. They worked the farm for fifty years until they retired. They found the work hard at times, as the weather was often bad in the winter, especially in the 1960's and 1970's. When Bill and Phyllis retired from farming, their son and his wife took over, but their son now had to be in paid employment in addition to running the farm in order to make ends meet, as did many upland farmers. "Now me son's on the farm that we had … it's not as good as it was before and he's had to take up employment … and it's paying it's way now with him working. He's got an excellent wife … she's been on a farm all her life". When Janet (67) and her husband reached retirement age they had decided to downsize the farm, but had not given up farming completely. They had finally bought the farm so that they had something to pass on to their sons, having been tenants for many years. They had been living on their rented farm since they were married forty-three years previously but had been unable to afford to move to a farm with better land.

> We've tried to find other farms, you know in better areas, since we were married but the rents were phenomenal. We couldn't afford to buy and the rents were too great so we stayed here all this time and now we've actually purchased it after all these years …

It was common for older people who had always lived in the local community to have worked at more than one job part-time in order to boost their low incomes from farming,

mining or other work. Frank (79) came to Alston in 1943 to work for the War Agricultural Committee because he had previous experience of farming on a small scale and he was good with the new tractors that were just being introduced. "There was only one tractor in Alston Moor when I came, and we used to plough it and stitch up for turnips and potatoes … tractors started to appear after the war in 1947 …" Frank also worked at a local garage and was still working there occasionally, as well as helping to run the local museum. In addition, he was a retained fireman for some years and then sub-officer in charge of the Alston Fire Station responsible for a large geographical area. Mary (81) ran a bed and breakfast business when she lived on the farm to bring in a bit more income and because she wanted a paid job. "I started bed and breakfast on the farm and also did a day or two down at Nenthall Hotel. I was interested in having a job because I'd never had a job except work on the farm …" Janet (67) qualified as a teacher but gave up teaching full-time when she married. She went back to teaching at the Alston School when her children were growing up and continued to teach the piano to pupils in their own homes. Mavis (70) and her husband used to run a shop in the town which they closed after twenty-five years the year before Mavis' husband died.

7.5 Safety

> I don't like the door locked through the day … (Hilda, 94)

In Stage One, focus group participants had identified safety and security as one of their key concerns, and therefore Alston interview participants, in Stage Two, were asked to talk about how safe they felt and how supported and informed they were. Crime was not a major problem in Alston, and, in 2005, crime statistics for the whole of the county showed that the Eden District of Cumbria accounted for only 7.6% of the total crime in the county as a whole, 50% of this was either 'causing criminal damage' or 'theft of property' (Eden District Council, 2006c, p.2). Respondents to the 'Building Pride in Cumbria' Survey described why they felt safe in the county, saying that it was because they were living in a quiet area, had good window and door locks, and that people were around during the day. The reasons given for not feeling safe were lack of police presence, large groups of young people on the streets and poor street lights (Cumbria County Council, 2006, p.7). Some

participants in this study felt that there had been a slight rise in some areas of crime over the past few years, mainly connected with increasing numbers of people being able to access Alston by car from urban areas in the North-East. However, Cumbria Constabulary statistics for Alston from October 2004 to September 2006 showed that, overall, crime had gradually fallen (Cumbria Constabulary, Alston Moor Ward Crime and Disorder Profile, 2006). Older people found out about local criminal activity through friends and neighbours. Iris (72) had many local contacts and usually heard about crimes that had been committed. "Last week was two of the pubs been broken into, farms have been broken into, different things stolen". Stanley (79) thought, however, that things had improved slightly in his outlying village over the past couple of years.

> Perhaps five years ago and the five years previous to that there was a spate of burglary, petty crimes, throughout, along the main road here, but that was mainly from Carlisle I think, people say, and I think the farmers suffered some losses as well, machinery and even livestock but it doesn't seem quite so prevalent this last couple of years.

Bill (78) had personal experience of criminal activity in the past, and recognized that local people were sometimes involved in the crime and this made him feel a little uneasy. He felt a bit more vulnerable now that he was older but didn't see it as a major worry. "We were burgled one year just before we came here in 1991, on the farm. Then we were just about quarter of a mile off the road and of course it was local youths, we knew them, you know. They didn't do it but they were behind it". Jane (65) felt that crime levels were lower in Alston than elsewhere because people were so closely related to one another in the town and this prevented local people getting involved in crime if it was likely to affect someone they knew. People locally tended to know what other people were planning. "I think because, as I said before, the extended families, if somebody is naughty, you're doing it to your auntie, your uncle or your cousin and they know right away who it is". Mavis (70) felt that a lot of the criminal activity was caused by drunkenness, and although it could be intimidating for older women, much of the activity was harmless. "We don't have enough policemen, but that applies everywhere … it's more inclined to be locals, drinking, you know … throwing their weight around …"

Most of those interviewed had been persuaded by concerned relatives, carers, or service providers to take some precautions for security and safety in their homes. Jane (67) had special lights that came on when it got dark and an alarm she set to protect the house, and Edith and others had personal alarms. However, several reported that they still kept their doors unlocked in the daytime so that family and friends would be able to just walk in, mainly those who lived in outlying areas. They did not have any worries about their own safety and security in the daytime. "I don't worry about anything … I don't like the door locked through the day but I don't keep it locked 'till four o'clock" (Hilda, 94). Barbara (late 60s) was more cautious because she lived in the town. "Sometimes we leave the door unlocked in the day but if its more than just an hour or two I think well you just don't know at all, so lock it". Iris (72) also lived in the town and was certainly more cautious than she used to be when she lived in a village. There was also more concern from participants about the risks of going out in the evening into the town because there were few police patrols. Iris bemoaned the fact that people didn't know where the police were at night and that the police had to come from a long way away if they were called out. "You don't know who they are or what's going on … we've got no police after a certain time of night …" Edna (71), Jessie (80s) and Mary (81) all expressed some concern about going through the town on foot at night because of the youngsters who tended to gather outside the bank or around the market cross area, and who could seem intimidating.

> I don't really like to go past the Market Cross, you know, when its half past eight, nine, I go up in the car but not to walk up and down. The groups that sit in the Market Cross and there's a group that hang around the Barclays Bank at the hole in the wall, they sit there because there's a wall to sit on, but I would hate to have to go and get money out from there, I think people might be intimidated with that … (Edna, 71)

Mary (81) thought it was usually alright if you ignored them "I just ignore them because if you once look out or say something … you're really pestered, but I'm not …" Jessie (80s) always got a lift as she didn't want to take any risks. Overall, however, participants taking part in the study were not unduly worried by crime and were not concerned for their own safety in their local community.

7.6 Access

> I hardly think they'll know how we live up here, they haven't a clue. (Mavis, 70)

Problems with access to health services, transport, and shops were raised as of major concern by those who were interviewed. However, participants were also keen to emphasise how they were able to overcome these problems through taking advantage of their social connections and by being flexible and practical.

7.6.1 Statutory and voluntary services

Several participants raised issues about access to services, health services in particular, and about lack of consultation about proposed changes to services. Some, in contrast, praised local health and voluntary providers for their good service and information and support practice. Lowe and Speakman (2006) point out that the centralisation of essential statutory services and "personal mobility, or lack of it, is a major concern for dispersed rural communities." (p.22).The accessibility of health and social care provision is key to the uptake of information by individuals and their access to services. During the period of data collection for this study, local people had been particularly upset by the lack of consultation over proposed hospital closures, particularly the proposed closure of the Alston Cottage Hospital. Edith (71), Mavis (70) and Bill (78) were involved, with many other local residents, in supporting a campaign against the closure. Edith (71) went to a crowded meeting in the town to hear the case being put forward for cuts or closure and was pleased that some of the local residents had managed to get their points across to the speakers despite the fact that there was such a crowd. Janet (67) also attended the meeting, and noted that people were updated on the current situation from the perspective of health service providers and were given handouts by the local campaigning team. "We were given advice about what we should and should not do to help the cause". Soon after, Mavis (70) attended a meeting of the local Health Services management group in Carlisle along with many others from the town. Her account of the meeting, expressed with some emphasis, shows the concern of the campaigners, many of them older people, about poor consultation and a lack of understanding about the needs of an isolated rural community.

122

He was over the top of our heads, put it that way, and basically saying we'd all have to wait till this white paper or whatever it was coming out … well it's something that we'll all get to know eventually, basically, but it wasn't, he didn't say anything definite, you know, he wouldn't say yes it is or no it isn't … Iris went "Excuse me", she said "Do any of these people know where Alston is?" Anyway, well she says "I would like to invite all of them up to Alston just to see where we are and how we exist". And this woman says "Oh well" she says "Yes" she says "There is nothing to stop us always providing we can get a cup of tea". Iris says "That's not a problem, you come to the Topp and you'll get a cup of tea". I says "We'll give you a three course dinner if you like" (laughs). So yes, oh yes. We could plan it (for the snow) (laughs) … because I hardly think they'll know how we live up here, they haven't a clue. (Mavis, 71)

In contrast to these experiences, Janet (67) had found that it was easier to communicate with health professionals face-to-face in her role representing local carers. She became involved, along with her husband, in health, social, and voluntary organizations as a carer representative, and attended organized activities across Cumbria. When attending meetings, she felt able, in these smaller groups, to ask the professionals questions in order to obtain the information she needed. "Well I'm not frightened, I'm quite good at asking questions, that's something I don't worry about …" (Janet, 67). Jessie (80s) had been very impressed by the approach of the nurses who ran the 'Falls Group' at the Alston Cottage Hospital. These nurses went to the coffee morning on a regular basis to tell people about the group and what it could do for people with mobility difficulties, and Jessie was encouraged to join to see if they could help her to be more mobile and confident about getting around. She found that the group gave her more confidence to cope when a real crisis situation occurred. She told how she had put her knowledge to good use.

I loved every minute of it, and we had different speakers, a dietician, a chiropodist, you know, different speakers, we had exercises to do, it was a lot of fun and we were all in need of some kind of help … we had just finished and I was walking across the road when I fell flat on me face, oh, I was in a terrible state. I had the police and the ambulance and they took me to the hospital … the nurse came in and she said "Me first failure, you're coming back" she says and laughed. When I was lying (on the road) I heard somebody say "How are we going to get her up?" and I said "You wait, I'll show you" and I just rolled over and I thought yes, I know what to do. (Jessie, 80s)

Sometimes older people helped out the statutory and voluntary services using their local knowledge and contacts when in a volunteering role. Bill (78) and Phyllis were volunteers for a charity which provided alarm systems that allowed older people who were alone in their own homes to contact support workers if they were in difficulties. They visited some of these housebound older people with mobility difficulties to check that everything was in order with the alarms, but also to have a chat and spend some time with them. Bill thought that it could sometimes be useful for older people to find things out this way, especially if they were vulnerable for some reason, or needed more help or information.

7.6.2 Shopping and transport

Where, when and how to get food supplies took up a great deal of people's time and required careful planning and family and community support. The percentage of households in Alston that did not have a car was much higher, at 28%, than in the wider Eden community (Eden District Council, 2006b, p.4). Therefore, those who did not have cars needed to be flexible and creative in the ways they found to get to the shops outside Alston. Several of the local respondents had purposely moved into the town from outlying areas in order to be closer to shops and services. Mary (81) had a shopping routine combined with socializing and volunteering that was fairly typical of older people that lived in the town.

> Fridays, well I'll get me pension and pick up things, and I like to have coffee with me friend in the bungalow on the roadside and we'll walk down … I go to the Post Office, we get down to the fruit shop, she'll maybe want to go to the chemist and I'll pop back for some cooked ham, and she gets her greens and maybe I've got mine on a Thursday. I carry them to the Angel for her and we have coffee and she gets a taxi home and I go and get my hair done and into the shop (Age Concern). (Mary, 81)

However, even though Mavis (70) accepted that she could get most foods in Alston, she found that they were slightly more expensive, and so she chose to go to other towns such as Hexham, where there was far more choice, if she got the opportunity to have a lift with friends. "You can buy basically what you want here (in Alston). Well you don't have to starve and you just pay, I mean you can't make an issue out of prices here, living here, you pay for the pleasure". National research has emphasized the higher levels of mobility of

124

rural residents in connection with access to retail outlets. The Countryside Agency (2004b) has pointed out that, although market town residents use their own shops as much as possible, village residents are more likely to travel greater distances to larger urban settlements. Those participants in this study that did have cars took advantage of the supermarkets in Penrith, Hexham or Carlisle because the food was cheaper. They often took friends or neighbours with them if they didn't have transport. Bill (78) always travelled by car and did not use public transport very often unless he was going on holiday. Although he and his wife, Phyllis, used to do their shopping when they went to the farm auctions in Hexham, they now tried to do most of their shopping when they were on trips to Penrith where they found it cheaper than the Co-op in Alston. Stanley (79) and his wife, Marjorie, drove into Alston from a nearby village and did most of their shopping in the town if they could and then they stocked up once a month in Carlisle. Janet (67) said that people who lived near bigger towns didn't realize how easy it made life for them having the shops nearby. She understood why older people in the Alston area felt that they had to make the most of any trip away from the town as shopping facilities were so limited and expensive. On the other hand, special trips just for food shopping were expensive in travel costs so the older people in the town often also made use of the coach trips that were available, or got lifts with other people. There were those in the younger old group who planned to use online shopping facilities in the future for the bulk of their shopping.

> In the winter, if I couldn't get out by car or I was no longer driving I'd use Tesco's and stock up with a bigger list that would take me through almost a month and then I'd walk down for all the local stuff here, 'cause I do shop locally as well, in the Co-op, the greengrocers and the health shop because you can't buy too many fresh vegetables all at once. (Barbara, late 60s)

Although Bill (78) and Phyllis mostly preferred to do their shopping in the traditional way, their daughter-in-law bought a lot of her shopping through the Tesco online service and had it delivered to their house. "Our daughter-in-law does that (Internet shopping) but they won't deliver to the farm, they bring it all here and then she comes to collect it". Phyllis thought it was quite convenient as they would bring quite a small delivery and you could book your delivery time ahead on the computer.

Internet food shopping may well increase amongst the younger old as they age and transport issues become more difficult to resolve. The lack of public transport services is a much debated issue in rural areas and rural transport was identified as a key priority in reports produced by the Countryside Agency every year until their last report in 2005 (Countryside Agency, 2004b). As Wenger (2001) points out, a sparse population is associated with "longer travel distances to necessary services; higher fares on public transport and less likelihood of concessionary fares" (p.120). Some research participants were recognizing that there would be a time when they might not be able to drive any longer and would need to use local shops more. Edna (71) was becoming more uncertain about driving into Penrith or Carlisle and sometimes took the bus out of choice to avoid the stress of driving. Hilda (94) still used the local bus service to get into Alston to do her shopping. Others were contemplating using the local public transport system, although it was very limited as there had been several cuts in services over the last few years. Jane (65) was happy to be living in Alston whilst she still had her car and could get to visit friends and family but was concerned about when she might have to use public transport. "I'm ok at the moment, I've got a car, I can go anywhere but the isolation for people who don't have transport, it's not good". Frank (79) felt that having to use public transport was very limiting but that owning a car might become expensive "… well you've got to have a car in Alston but it's getting very expensive now. I think when you get older and you've got to rely on a bus service you're tied up, if you've got your own transport and you still use it … it makes all the difference."

7.7 Summary

Most of the older people who participated in this research wanted to stay in the area, both locals and incomers. In-migration from the surrounding countryside into the town occurred as people needed to be nearer to facilities. Both locals and incomers appreciated the friendliness of the community but also recognized the possible effects of in-migration. The upland farming tradition was still strong and farms were passed on through the family where possible, but farmers usually needed some other income and work was scarce and limited. The participants felt slightly more vulnerable as they got older and frailer and some believed that crime had increased a little. Although some still left their doors unlocked in

126

the daytime, they felt most vulnerable if they were out at night, especially if there were groups of young people about. Older people were sometimes frustrated by the difficulty of accessing services but appreciative of local health services connected to the cottage hospital to the extent that they campaigned vigorously to avoid its closure. Some of the older people who were still relatively active did not drive, but others were reluctant to give up their cars and to use the limited bus service. Many went on organized coach trips or got lifts with friends in order to get to the larger supermarkets where food was cheaper. Online shopping for home delivery was a helpful additional change in services provided by supermarkets.

Clearly there are both advantages and disadvantages for older people who live in a very remote rural community location such as Alston Moor, and these may vary according to where people live in that community, how active they can be, and how much access they have to resources, facilities and services. In this chapter I have discussed issues participants raised that were of concern to them in their everyday lives and described some of the underpinning contexts and structures which support their lives in the round (Chatman, 1999). In the next three chapters the findings are described and discussed within the global themes of People, Information and Place. Firstly, in Chapter 8, I describe and discuss the findings in terms of the social networks of the older people who took part. Secondly, I look at what sources of information people access and what kinds of information they exchange in Chapter 9. Lastly, I describe and discuss the locations or grounds in which information is exchanged in Chapter 10.

Chapter 8: People

## 8.1 Introduction

It has been shown that it is important for older people to have social contact with their family, friends and neighbours and to be involved in local community activities in order that they can remain independent, active and healthy (Le Mesurier, 2006, Lowe and Speakman, 2006, Wenger, 1992). As Wenger and Keating (2008) have pointed out, rural areas are generally considered good places for people to grow old as long as they are "surrounded by family members, friends and relatives who will support or care for them as they age" (p.34). In findings taken from a qualitative study in rural Canada, Fast and de Jong Gierveld (2008) showed that "social network size is an important predictor of respondent's feelings of connectedness to their communities" (pp.71-72).

The findings in Chapter 8 have been taken from the results of the social network interviews, related to the data collected through other methods and represented within the global theme 'People', and its themes and sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 6.5, page 108. A discussion of the method and how it was implemented can be found in Chapter 6, Section 6. This chapter begins with a summary of the social network interview results in Section 8.2 followed by a description of each individual case study in relation to social networks, social activities and social network information behaviour in Sections 8.3 to 8.7. According to Stake (1995) individual cases are important both for their uniqueness and for their commonality. It is important to explore each case in order to identify experiences that are exclusive to an individual from those that are relevant to all cases (Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafl, 2003, p.871). Within-case analysis of the social networks of case study participants shows the type of social network within which each individual was situated, the relationship and tie strength they had with their main contacts, their involvement in social activities and information behaviour within their networks. Each case is discussed by combining data taken from interviews, participant journals, social network interviews, and in some cases, from researcher observation. A cross-case analysis follows in Section 8.8 in which commonalities between the cases and the uniqueness of each case are discussed. The findings are summarized in Section 8.9.

8.2 Social networks

In the social network interviews (See Appendix 10) participants were asked to name the first six contacts they could think of and then to identify how close they were to each of them, how often they had contact with them, whether each contact provided friendship, advice, support and information, how highly they ranked each contact as an information provider and the kinds of information the contact provided. Firstly, each participant was asked to name the first six people they thought of as regular contacts. It quickly became clear that family members were important close contacts and they were included, in some cases as a group contact, to reflect the wishes of participants. In total, fourteen family members or groups and fifty-three friends were listed, and of the friends, forty-one were women and twelve were men. The eight female participants listed predominantly female contacts and some males, three of the male participants listed a mix of male and female contacts and one male participant listed predominantly male contacts.
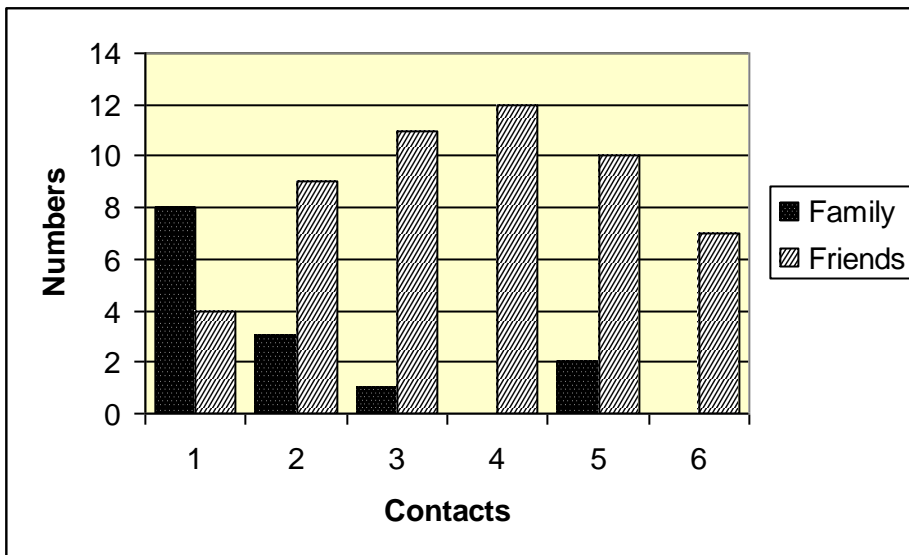
Figure 8.1: Family and friends as regular contacts

Taking the results from all the participants as a whole, most of the family members were named as first and second contacts, and friends named from second to sixth contacts. Figure 8.1 shows the ratio of family members as contacts listed by participants against the numbers of friends as contacts. Figures for Contact Six were incomplete because some

interviewees did not want to list a sixth contact or could not think of someone to list. Some participants thought of family members first and others thought of friends or neighbours before family but this is not considered significant as all family members were close contacts anyway. When asked about the strength of their friendship with each contact, the twelve participants said that they were close or friendly with the first two contacts they listed, many of whom were family members, and half said that their third to sixth contacts were close friends. A category of family has been included in Figure 8.2 to differentiate between family members and other contacts who were friends. Numbers of contacts are shown within the four friendship categories of close friend, friend, casual friend, and family, from contacts one to six.
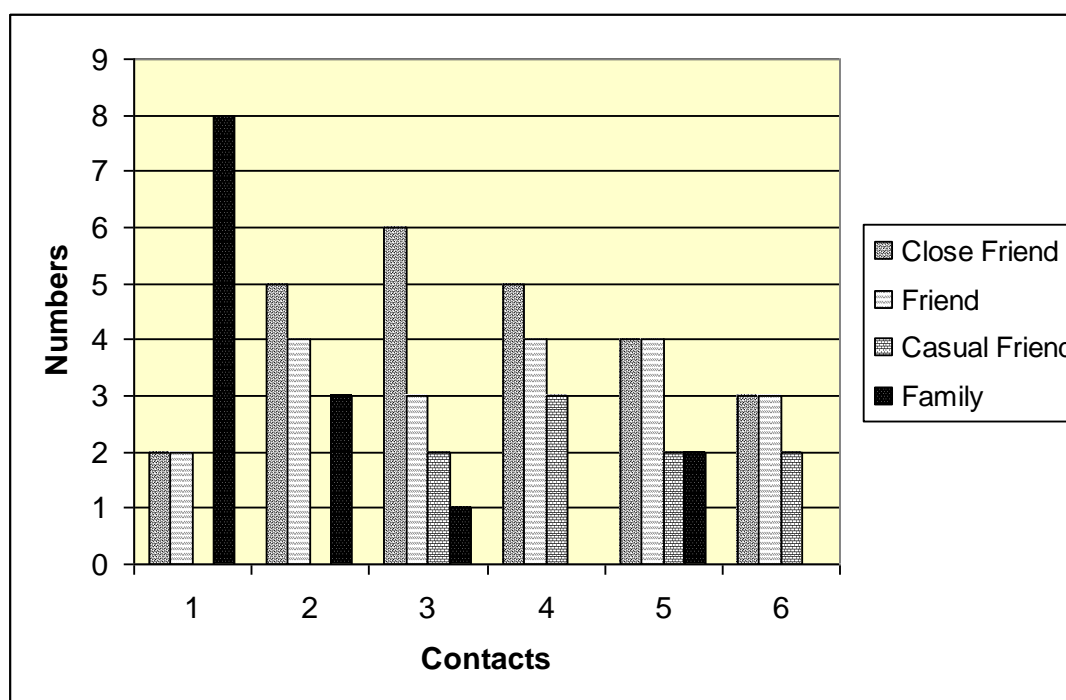
Figure 8.2: Strength of friendship with each contact

It can be seen that most of the family contacts were considered to be close. The questionnaire included a category 'acquaintance' that none of the participants chose to use, and so this category has been omitted from the chart. Participants were asked how frequently they were in touch with their contacts in Question Two. Five of the participants either saw or spoke to the first-named contact every day, most of these being family

members, either living close by or in regular touch by telephone. All of the first three contacts mentioned, bar one, were seen or spoken to at least weekly, two thirds of these several times a week. Most of those named as contacts four to six were also in touch several times a week or weekly with only four being in touch only monthly. Frequency of contact was one of the variables considered by Granovetter (1973) as appropriate for assessing the strength of a tie, although this has been questioned by other researchers who suggest that the use of frequency of contact as a measurement overestimates the strength of tie of family and neighbours (Marsden and Campbell, 1984, p.499). As the telephone was included as a means of contact, the use of frequency as a variable becomes more complex and perhaps less meaningful. If the strength of tie was decided just in terms of frequency, most of the contacts mentioned would be strong ties, but answers to the other questions, additional comments added by participants, and data from informal interviews and participant journals does not necessarily back this assumption.

Marsden and Campbell (1984) have concluded that measuring the closeness or emotional intensity of a relationship is the best indicator of tie strength (p.498). Therefore, in Question Three, participants were asked to indicate the kind of social exchange and intimacy that their contacts provided through friendship, advice, support, and information, in order to gain more understanding of the closeness and function of the relationships involved. Half of contacts three to five were considered weak ties, but some of these were important information providers as can be seen at contact three in Figure 8.3. Qualitative data from interviews and observations suggests that some participants had at least one slightly weaker contact in terms of friendship, and this person made themselves available to provide support, whether emotional or practical, at times when needed. Examples of this weak tie support and information role are identified in the case study descriptions that follow and discussed at the end of the chapter. Figure 8.3 shows that almost all of the contacts listed from one to three provided friendship and support, and that two thirds also provided advice; so these contacts could be considered to be emotionally close. Around half of contacts four to six also provided advice and support, in fact all those listed at first and fifth position in the contact lists provided support. In terms of strength of tie based on support and advice,

contacts one to three were shown again to be strong ties and several contacts at position five should also be considered to be strong in that they provided advice and support.
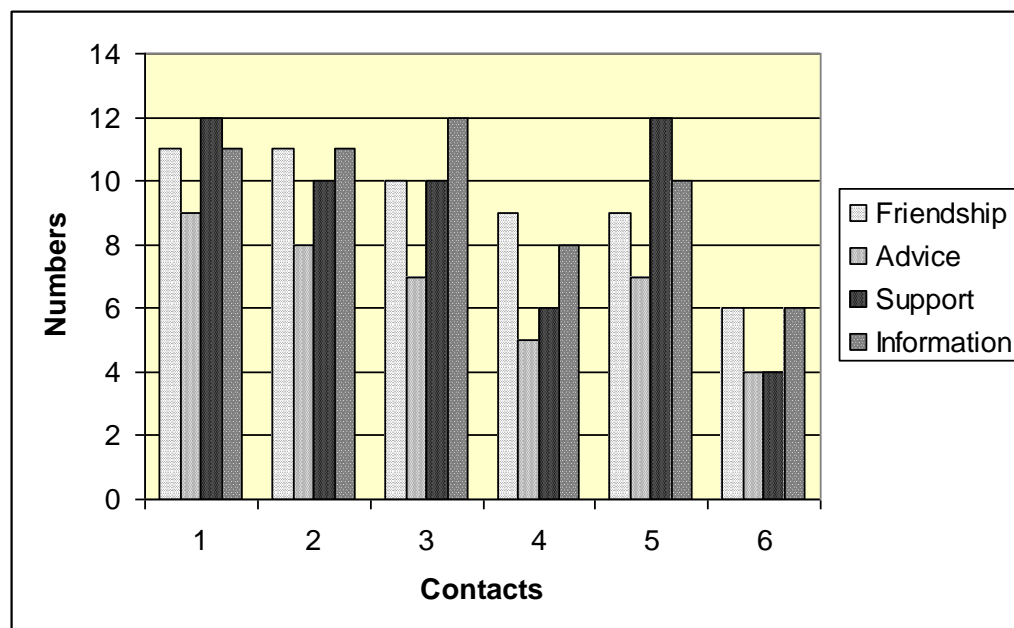
Figure 8.3: Friendship, advice, support and information from key contacts

Participants were then asked what kinds of information members of their social network provided and how important each individual was to them as an information provider. In general, contacts one to three were ranked most highly by the participants as information providers. However, some of the third to sixth contacts were not ranked highly, and this is surprising, as some of these contacts were said, shown in the results from Question Four, to have provided useful, practical information to participants. It may be that, when thinking about the term 'information' in the context of weak ties, participants were not identifying what they were told by these weak links as being information as such, or they may have considered information to be linked with advice provided by strong ties. The results of the social network interviews in respect of information provided by contacts to case study participants are included in the individual case study descriptions. Specific examples of information accessed or exchanged are discussed in more detail in Chapters 9 and 10. It may be hypothesized that participants rank their closer contacts more highly, as these people also provide them with friendship and support. Participants were not specifically

asked whether information was exchanged reciprocally between themselves and their contacts, and I consider this a fault in the questionnaire design. These general findings are discussed in conjunction with case study findings at the end of this chapter.

8.3 Case Study: Edith

Edith (78) lived on her own in an old farmhouse surrounded by a working farm, high up in the hills overlooking Alston. She described herself as very independent-minded and did not feel the need to be very socially active or to make any particular contribution to the community. Edith saw her relative geographical isolation as a positive in her determination to be self-sufficient and to carry on her life in much the same way as she had done before her husband had died. As Sims-Gould and Martin-Matthews (2008) state "For most older people, a good place to grow old is one that enables them to age in place, maintaining their own home and living independently for as long as is possible" (p.50). Edith identified the need to be alone for some of the time, describing this as a trait that she shared with her family. "I wouldn't want to be completely surrounded by other people all the time … it is a family trait, within my family, we do need to be alone; we like to have our time". The social network interview findings, summarized in Figure 8.4, show that Edith's strong ties were with members of her own family, and her social activity and information exchange took place mainly with her family.


```
                          ┌──────────┐
                          │  EDITH   │
                          └────┬─────┘
     ┌──────┬──────┬──────┼──────┬──────┐
```

| Contact 1	Contact 2	Contact 3	Contact 4	Contact 5	Contact 6
Niece/nephew	Grandaughters	Son	F Friend	M Contact	F Contact
Strong ties	Strong Ties	Strong Tie	Strong Tie	Weak Tie	Weak Tie
Friendship	Friendship	Friendship	Friendship	Support	Casual
Advice	Advice	Advice		Information	Friendship
Support	Support	Support			Information
Information	Information	Information			

Figure 8.4: Edith's social network

Edith was in regular daily contact with members of her family, and the three other contacts she named in her social network interview were a female friend who she saw socially and two other casual contacts, one of whom was the local farmer. She listed a niece and nephew who lived nearby as her most important contacts, followed by two granddaughters who were students in Newcastle, and a son who lived further away. Edith said that she had contact with her niece and nephew every day, she spoke to her granddaughters and her farmer neighbour at least weekly and her other contacts at least monthly. She saw her son rarely but spoke regularly on the phone to him. "We're on the phone, he talks to me probably about three or four times a week, we're in contact". Edith's family provided her with friendship, advice, support and information although she said that she didn't always want to take advice from her nephew. "Not always the advice that I want". She particularly enjoyed the company of her granddaughters and was willing to listen to their advice. "They provide me with friendship and help, they come here and they cook and they clean and we play games together". Edith's family had remained very supportive, and helped her through difficult times when her husband was ill and until he died. Her daughter and her husband had lived with her and her husband whilst he was ill, her granddaughters came from Newcastle regularly, and her son visited frequently.

She recognized that family members were worried about her living on her own, and that they felt that she would benefit from being more involved with the community. "My daughter said I must start going, I must go out more". Concerns about isolation that may come with increasing age are supported by evidence in research by Manthorpe, Malin and Stubbs (2004) who state "The small number of people without family nearby, with no access to transport and increasing levels of disability may be relatively isolated: these were most likely to be very old widows, living alone …" (p.102). Edith only joined in with group activities occasionally when there was something in particular she wanted to see at the theatre or film club, a talk she wanted to hear or a visit she wanted to make. She would also call in at the coffee morning if she was in the town for shopping and she enjoyed her regular visits to the hairdresser as a treat. Edith ranked her family as quite important information providers, although she was clear that she provided as much information to them as they provided to her, information exchange was reciprocal. "We probably each

give each other information, an exchange situation I would say, they tell me things and I'll tell them". Figure 8.5 shows some of Edith's activity over two weeks in November 2005 and also shows a list of activities that were mentioned by her in interviews.
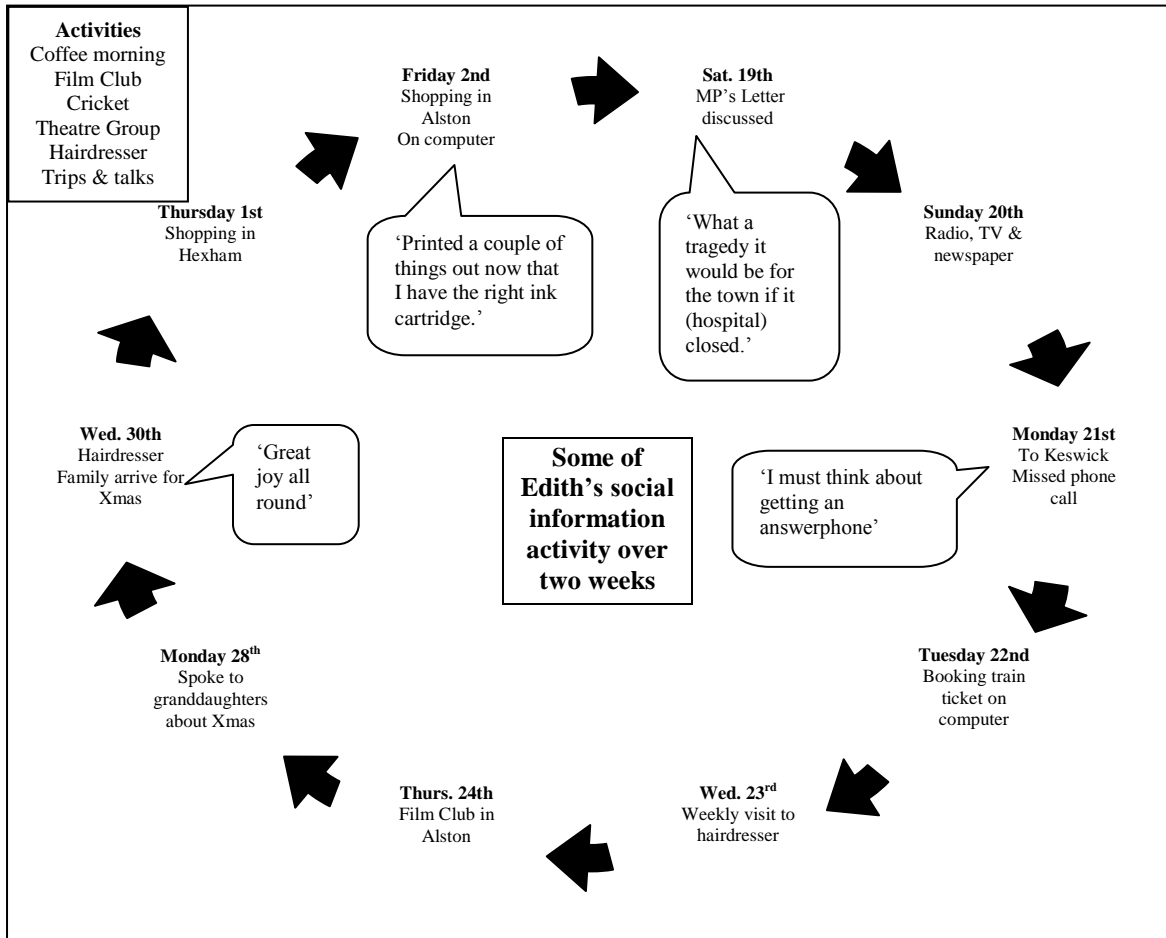
Figure 8.5: Edith and her social information activity

Edith's participant journal showed that she was very actively involved in finding and using information from the Internet, newspapers, television and radio and enjoyed discussing issues raised with members of her family. She spent time using the computer to write letters, book tickets and shop online. Edith exchanged information with family, neighbours and friends and it was noted that a weak tie, described by Edith as a casual friend, was a person also named in two other case studies but, as in the other cases, was not ranked highly as an information provider.

8.4 Case Study: Jane

Jane was sixty-five years old at the time of data collection, and had lived in Alston for six years. She said that she found Alston a friendly place and, although she was relatively new to the area, and members of her family mainly lived in Carlisle and Glasgow, she had lots of contacts in the town. She had sometimes been lonely after her husband died, but had made an effort to overcome this loneliness and to go out as much as she could. She found that there was always someone to talk to if she needed support or just a chat. "I think if you're on your own you do get lonely sometimes … if I don't see anyone for two days I'm out and doing anything … I go somewhere, do something, make an effort, I don't let it get me down that way". Isolation can be a problem for older people in rural areas for a number of reasons. Bevan and Croucher (2006) suggest that "for older people social isolation may come about from feeling an outsider, from being distant from friends and family, from their own declining mobility or from the loss of a partner or close neighbour" (pg.151). Jane's social network contacts are shown in Figure 8.6.
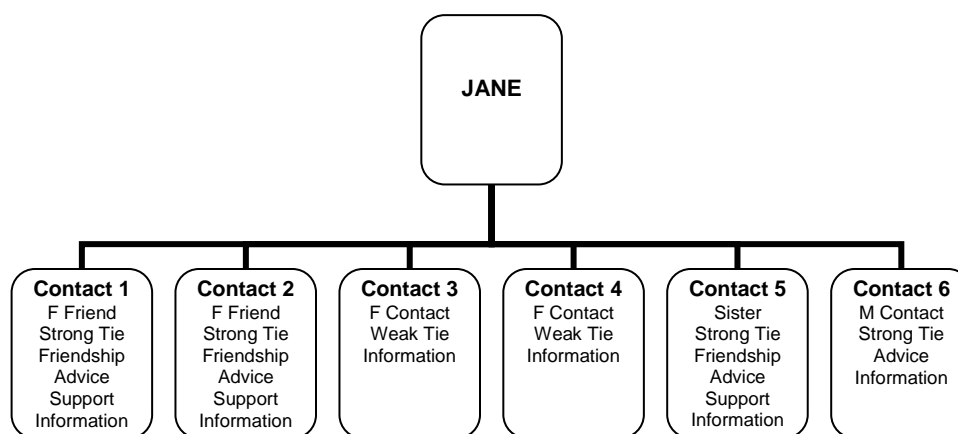
Figure 8.6: Jane's social network

When she was asked to name her first six social contacts, five of Jane's six choices were shown to be friends and one was a sister who lived in Carlisle. Jane was uncomfortable about having to make a choice of contacts and felt that her choices would vary over time, giving the example of her neighbours who she saw more often during the summer because they were out and about. She felt that she was unable to say whether she would think of these neighbours as friends. "You know you could think of one person one day and another

one the next". When asked how close each of the contacts were, Jane identified two as being close friends, including her sister in Carlisle, two quite close friends, and two casual friends. Although Jane was close to her family, most of them were too far away to see very often face-to-face. She saw her sister from Carlisle more often and would have been inclined to see her sister every day if she had lived in Alston. She spoke to her several times a week on the telephone but usually only saw her face-to-face monthly. "Well, sometimes I'll go twice (a month) you know, like last week I was there …"

Although her sister was at number five in her contact list, they had a close relationship and she provided Jane with support and advice. Jane saw two of her contacts, a married couple, quite often, although she said her relationship was closer with the female half of the couple than with the husband, and she placed him at sixth contact as a friend. Jane's female friend, and another good friend, together with her sister, provided her with friendship, advice and support. Her first named friend tried to give her advice even though "sometimes I don't listen to her but I suppose she tries". She kept Jane in touch with what was happening in the town from the perspective of her own teenage children. Of the two more casual contacts, Jane saw the third named, Iris, more often face-to-face, and was more inclined to have a chat with her. "I see her quite often, I know her quite well … I know her problems and her ailments …" Iris and her friend Mavis were neighbourly towards Jane, coming to call at the house and inviting her to call in to visit them. "Iris and Mavis, they don't pop in every day, every week, but they've started popping in occasionally if they're out for a stroll, which is nice …if you go down town and Mavis says 'Don't pass the door, you can pop in any time'". Jane saw or phoned her two closest local friends several times a week and three of the other contacts approximately weekly, these three being her weaker ties, one of whom she only saw on the Theatre Group trips.

Jane's social information activity over two weeks in December is shown in Figure 8.7. These two weeks were not representative of her general activity as she was ill for a few days and was not attending some of her normal groups. She helped out in the Age Concern charity shop and found that this was a good way to keep up-to-date with local news about what was going on in the town and, as she was relatively new to the community, to get to

know a wider spectrum of people. She tried to restrict the number of activities she attended, however, as she had other personal commitments in her life, such as visiting her family in Carlisle and Glasgow.
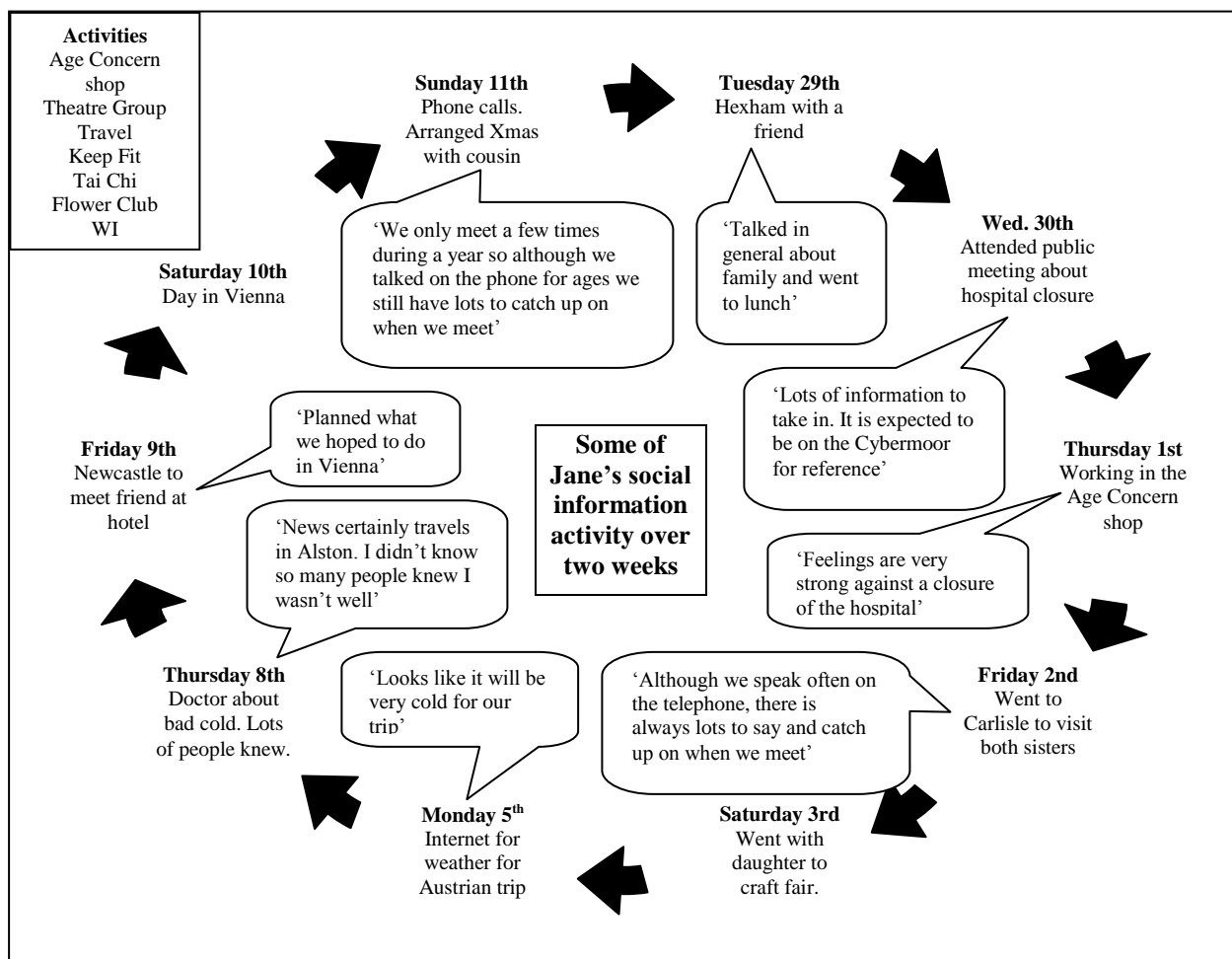
Figure 8.7: Jane's social information activity

Jane attended particular activities, such as the Keep Fit class and the Theatre Group, but not the Age Concern coffee mornings, so her role as an information provider and receiver was mainly restricted to her close friends and family. As far as information exchange was concerned, five of the six contacts she listed provided her with information about local activities, issues and news or supported her with practical information. Her ranking of the importance of these contacts as information providers was surprising, however, as she ranked the two weak ties who provided her with information as low in importance. It was

more important to her that information exchange was part of a supportive, friendly relationship. One of the two weak tie contacts who she ranked lower was the same person named by Edith as an information provider. Jane mainly needed information to help her with practical tasks around the house and garden and with her car and to keep her up to date with what was going on locally. She used her friends and family as information providers but also used the Internet and the local Cybermoor website.

8.5 Case Study: Janet

Janet was sixty-seven years old at the time of data collection and lived on a farm with her husband near a village just outside the town. Janet had suffered from some personal problems in the previous few years and, although she was independent-minded, she had needed the support of friends in the community. She had kept herself very busy serving her community, particularly the church community, in a number of roles. Janet's ties with her family were strong, and much of her time was spent supporting her own family, entertaining others with her music, and teaching others music. In these ways she had strong ties to the local community and was well known by many. Janet's conviction that she had a duty towards the community was a major motivation that led her to contribute, using her skills, and she also found ways of providing support to people much older than herself who were living on their own. "I wouldn't say that I'm a very sociable, I mean I'm quite happy on my own, but I've been brought up to think if you have some sort of talent you're supposed to help the community so that's the way my mother brought me up …"

Janet named six people as contacts, shown in Figure 8.8; two family members and four female friends. She considered that she had a close friendship with five out of the six people she had named and the other person counted as a casual friend. Janet's husband came at the top of her list of close contacts and she commented "We're in each other's pockets all the time", but that this was in a positive way. Janet's second contact was her brother, and her third was a lady of ninety-four who she visited and helped out on a regular basis. Contact four was another older lady with whom she had become close when she visited her during lunchtimes whilst working at the local primary school. "She used to enjoy talking, she was a great talker, she's been very sympathetic and good for me …"

Janet described the fifth contact as a close friend, although she claimed that there were only certain things that she would tell her. She was more intimate with her sixth contact. "She tends to get things out of you with the questions she asks you if you're in conversation … she's had her own problems so she's got quite a vast experience".
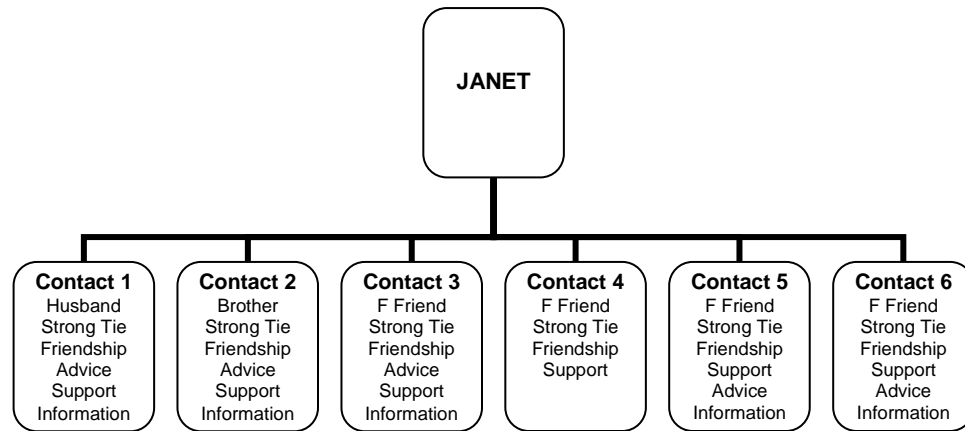
Figure 8.8: Janet's social network

In terms of frequency of contact, Janet was with her husband on a daily basis; she saw or spoke to her brother on the phone several times a week and she saw the other contacts approximately weekly. All six of her contacts provided friendship and support and five of the six provided information and were ranked fairly highly. Only four contacts, the family members and two friends provided her with advice. Janet said that her brother liked to give her advice, "Oh well he's very willing, more than willing to give advice". Janet saw the old lady in the local village quite frequently to help out at her home or take her to church, and she saw the relationship with her as mutually supportive. She spent time just talking with her, visiting the local shop, or finding out what she needed and arranging for jobs to be done for her. When she first retired, Janet had joined several of the local activity groups to try them out thinking that she should make the most of the opportunities available. Figure 8.9 shows some of Janet's activities over two weeks from the end of November to the beginning of December. She stopped going to some of these groups once she had decided which ones suited her best but she had always been very involved in the local choir and usually played the piano for any local musical events.
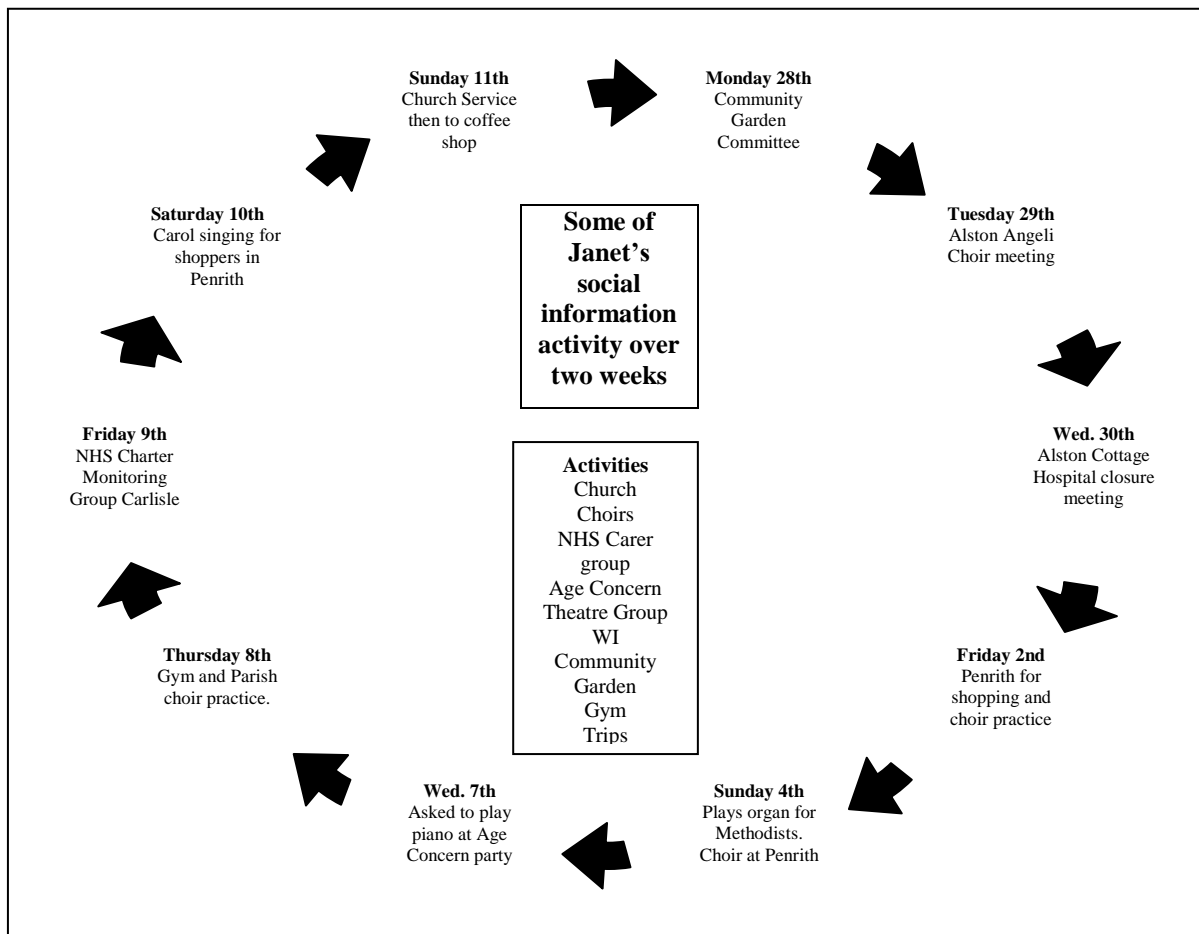
Figure 8.9: Janet's social information activity

Janet was both an information gatherer and information provider and she had needed to find information to help with her personal and family problems over recent years. She was a great collector of printed information such as fliers, newsletters and leaflets and she provided examples in her participant journal. She was also a great reader of books on subjects of current interest such as health issues.

8.6 Case Study: Bill

Bill was seventy-seven years old and his wife, Phyllis, seventy-four at the time of data collection. Bill was born in Hexham and Phyllis was born locally in Alston. They had a large family who were all married and lived fairly locally "Five girls first, then we had a boy …they can all get (here) within an hour". It was very clear from the interview data and from Bill's self-completed participant journal, that family, particularly their own children

and grandchildren, was important to Bill and Phyllis. They were both proud of their children for doing well and pleased that they all lived quite close at hand so that they could see them or speak to them frequently on the telephone, and, in addition, could always have some of their family with them for the Sunday midday meal each week. Bill and Phyllis also looked after several of their grandchildren to help out, and had them to stay over for the night if their parents were going out for the evening. Bill described how at least some of his family came to visit every Sunday and how they had a big family meal at Christmas. "We always have fourteen or fifteen on a Sunday … on Boxing Day it can be about twenty-seven".

Bill had strong ties with many members of the local community, he played important roles in the voluntary and social activities in which he took part, and his ties with his own family and extended family were very close. When answering social network interview questions he wanted to count members of his family as contacts but not rank them individually so it was decided that his whole family should be counted as one, a group contact. Bill could only decide on another four contacts to list, and firstly chose a couple who lived in the same road. He described the friendliness of the neighbours. "Well the streets just one happy family". The final three contacts he listed all had a connection with him through their interest in playing bowls, in addition to being his friends, and one of them had previously been a next door neighbour when they were both farming. Bill's social network is shown in Figure 8.10.
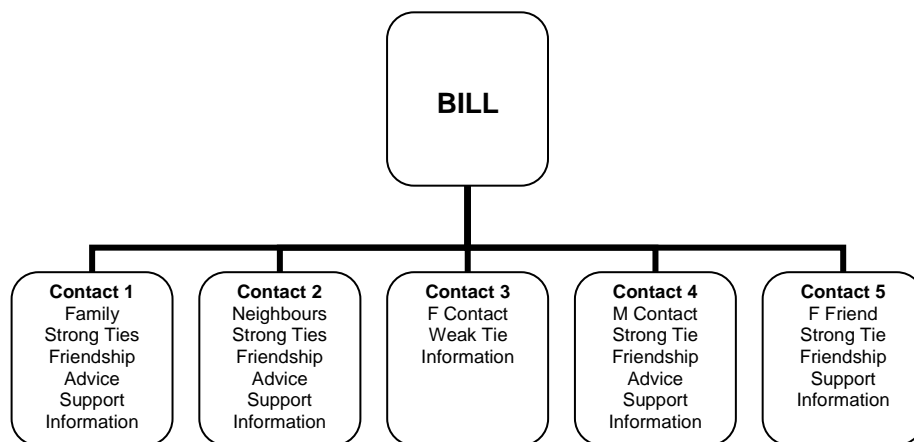

Figure 8.10: Bill's social network

Bill had a close friendship with Mavis, another case study participant, but had only got to know her well after her husband died, when she started joining in with activities and he started giving her lifts to dominoes matches. He described all his contacts, except one, as being very close, this was particularly the case with his own family. He saw his close neighbours practically every day and family and friends once or twice a week. Bill felt that it was important to keep himself active and involved within his extended family and within the community, to take a positive attitude to getting older, and to help out in voluntary roles where he could. He worked for 'Eden Community Alarms' and 'Meals on Wheels' together with his wife, and both of these roles involved him calling on older, frailer people in their own homes. He was able to give them time, listen to their concerns, answer their questions and provide them with new information, and he found that volunteering prevented him thinking about getting older himself. "Well we dunna bother about getting older, we just do what we have to do, if the day comes when you couldn't do it well you'd have to pack it in …". Davidson, Daly and Arber (2003) point out that retired married men are more likely than single or widowed men to make a regular commitment to volunteering because they "were being useful and enjoyed the self-esteem that accompanied doing 'good works'" (pp.175-176). In addition to volunteering, Bill was involved with the bowls group, played whist and dominoes and attended the Age Concern coffee morning amongst other activities.

Bill said that all his contacts, bar one, provided advice, support and information in addition to friendship. Members of his family gave him advice even if he didn't want it, and they also helped in practical ways. "Advice, yes, we don't always take it. If we get forms we canna fill in you know they'll come and look after us in that respect". His former neighbour and his bowls friend were both happy to give advice and support. The third contact mentioned, a weak tie, was not ranked highly by Bill as an information provider. She was more of a casual acquaintance with whom Bill mainly had contact to get information about bowls matches and competition arrangements, usually on a weekly basis. This was the same weak tie mentioned by Edith and Jane who provided information about activities but was not ranked highly as an information provider by any of them. Bill ranked his family and his close neighbours as very important for providing him with information, and the

other three friends as slightly less important. He spent a lot of time on the phone to members of his family providing them with practical advice and information. Figure 8.11 shows some of Bill's social information activity.
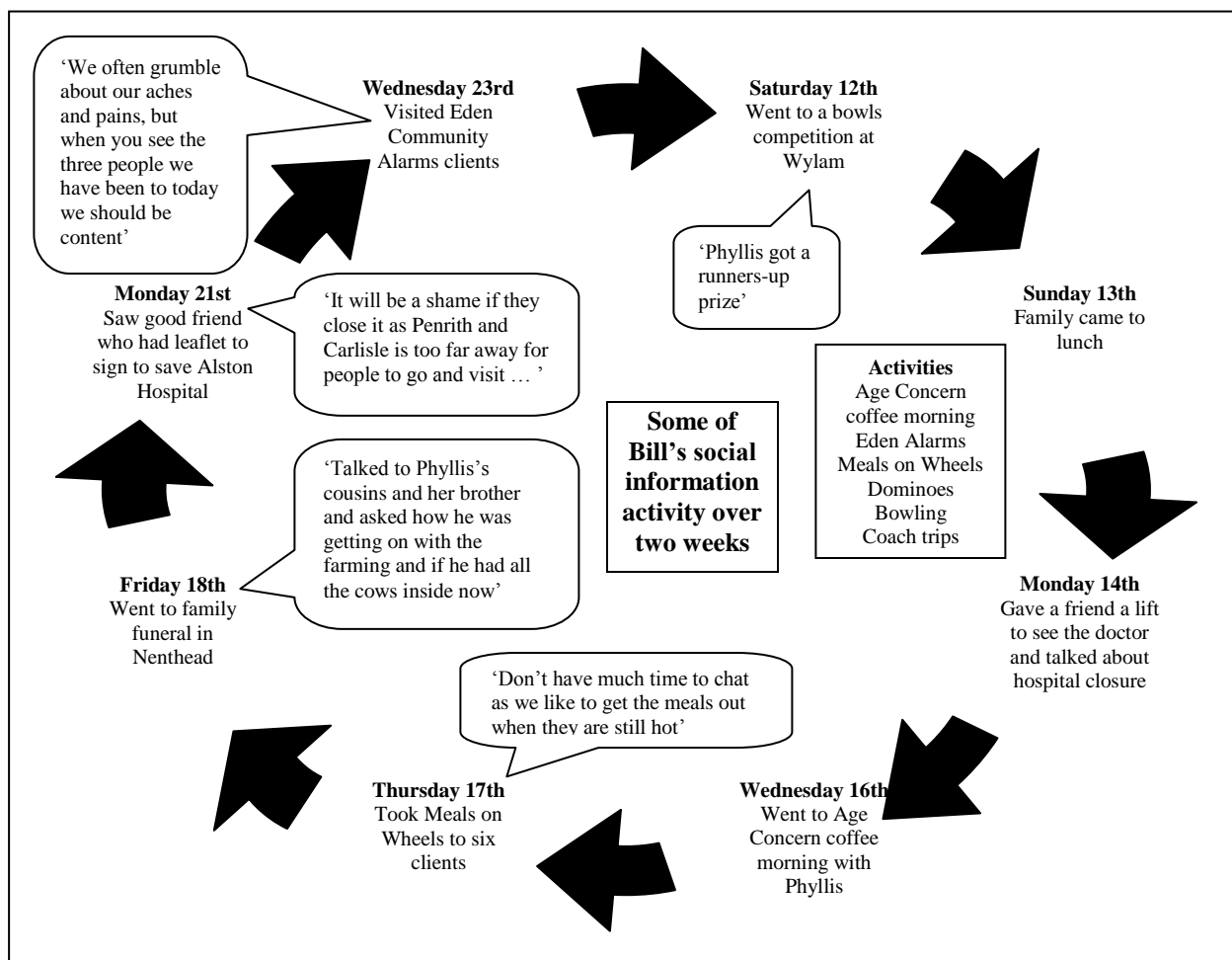
Figure 8.11: Bill's social information activity

8.7 Case Study: Mavis

Mavis, aged seventy at the time of data collection, was a widow whose husband had died seven years previous to this study, a year after they had closed the shop they ran at the top of the town. Since her husband died she had been supported by friends and family, most of whom were locals and had lived in the town for many years. She had close family living nearby, visited other members of the family elsewhere, and was very involved in helping to look after her grandchildren who lived locally. Mavis felt that the friends she had known

for a long time knew her the best and were her most reliable friends, supporting her through her bereavement. "… they're friends that are friends all the time, you know, they don't come and go … well they're proper friends … but then this is what you need". Mavis had decided to start living a new kind of life after her husband died, joining in with many new activities, learning new skills and developing new friendships, and had a very positive attitude to life. She had strong ties with her many friends and she had a particularly good friend in Iris, with whom she spent much of her time. As she took part in so many activities, she also had many weak ties with whom she shared information. People liked to be with her, as she was always amusing and good fun.

When asked to answer social network questions Mavis was uncomfortable about the concept of 'information' and about the more formal, structured approach to the questioning. She was quite happy to answer questions about several of her close friends and about their friendship and support but was less happy about answering specific questions about her friends as information providers and was unable to rank some of them as such or to provide many examples of the information they provided. Mavis's social network is shown in Figure 8.12.
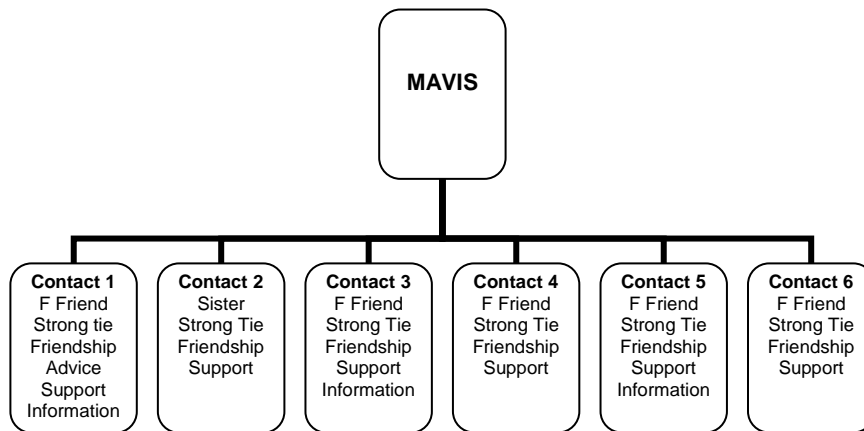
Figure 8.12: Mavis's social network

Mavis named the first six people, all women, with whom she had contact, five of whom were friends, and one her sister. The first person Mavis named was a close friend, Iris, with whom she attended many social activities; the second was her sister who lived nearby; the

146

other four were friends who she saw or spoke to regularly. She described all but one of her friends as being close, and she said that she saw Iris and her sister almost on a daily basis and the others several times a week. All her contacts provided her with friendship and support, but only Iris gave her advice. Mavis felt that she was able to talk about most things to Iris but that she would draw the line at very personal information about herself and her family.

> I mean if I disagree with her I tell her, you know … I say what I've got to say and then she says what she says and if I don't agree well I tell her … If it was anything personal or to do with family or anything, no, but anything else if I needed to know I would just ask her …
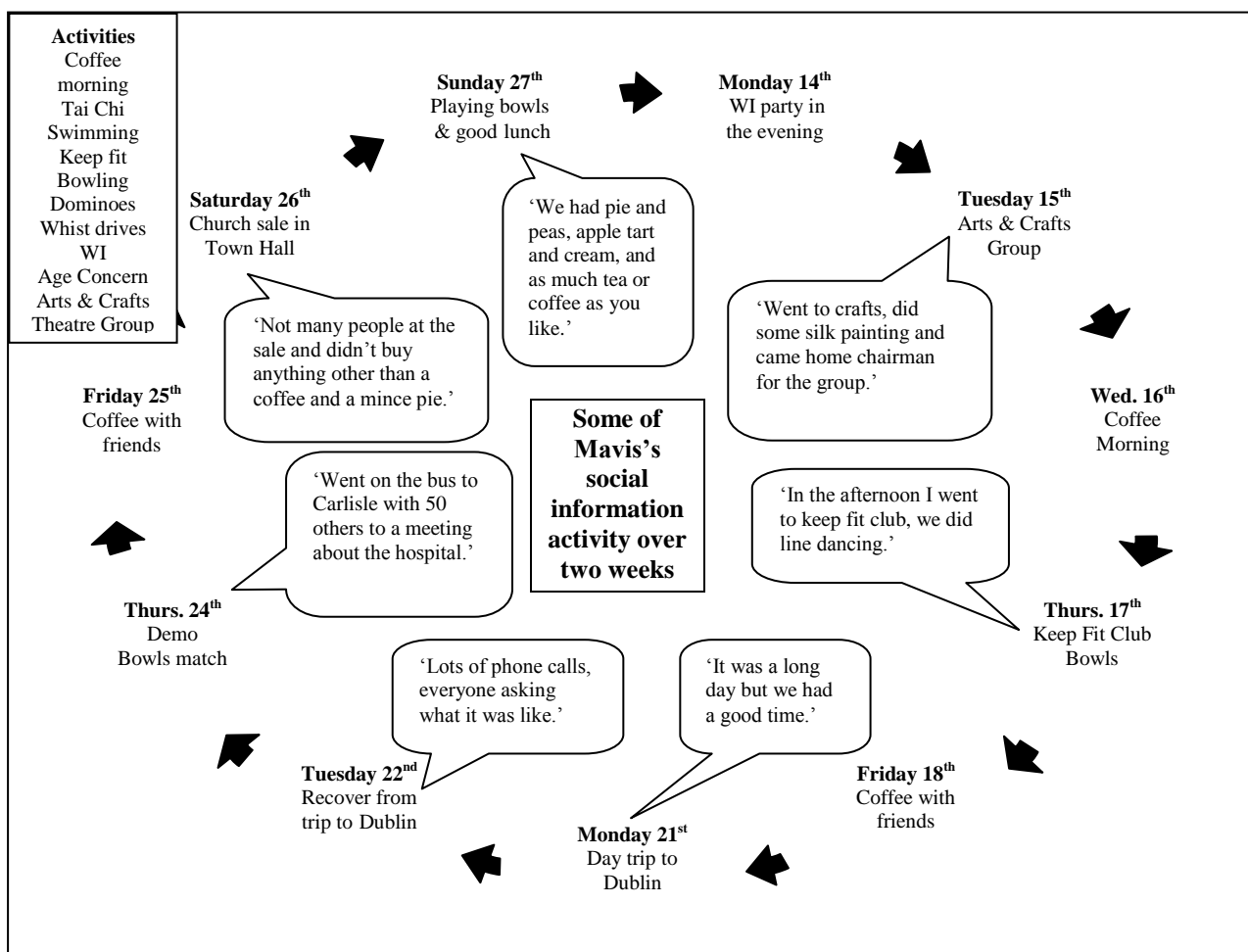
Figure 8.13: Mavis's social information activity

Figure 8.13 shows the activities in which Mavis took part. Mavis's activity in local groups is described in more detail here as she was the only case study participant who was present at all the activities that I observed for this study and she was a very active person and liked to keep busy and involved, joining in with new activities when they started up just to give them a try. "I'm in the WI, I'm in the indoor bowls and keep fit, I'm in the crafts, I work in the charity shop once a fortnight unless I'm called upon to do more …well you put yourself about and I think that's probably about it". Bill had only developed a friendship with Mavis after her husband died, even though they both had lived in the area all their lives. "We've known Mavis a long time, she's in the Bowling Club … at one time we couldn't get her to go anywhere and you can hardly stop her now that she got onto the competition with us, she really enjoys her day" (Bill). Most of the activities had the strong social element which was important to Mavis, and I observed her to play important roles within these groups. However, these roles varied according to the make-up and style of the group, from an important but fairly passive role in the Women's Institute, to a secondary but lively role when she was in the company of her friend Iris at the Coffee Morning and the Tai Chi class, and a quietly confident leader role in the Arts and Crafts group.

Whichever role Mavis played it was always undertaken with humour and laughter. Her active social life was evidenced by the social activities she described in interviews, and the content of her participant journal which she said represented a typical two weeks in her life. After her husband died Mavis had achieved one of her main ambitions, learning to swim for the first time in her life. This had been one of her greatest achievements as she never learnt as a child, and was frightened of the water. Mavis had been going to the pool in Penrith with a group of older people from Alston for about four years. She had been gradually gaining confidence in the water and could now swim a little. "Oh it is (an achievement), that is from somebody who was absolutely petrified at water over me knees". As a result of confidence gained through learning to be in the water in the large swimming pool, Mavis had been able to join in with the Tai Chi exercises in a small private pool in a nearby village. She hoped that the swimming, Tai Chi and Keep Fit classes would help her to keep fit and stay healthy. Observations I made at Tai Chi classes show that she had been able to overcome her nervousness about the water.

> <u>Thursday 16th June</u>
> Mavis was quite cautious about the water at first and didn't want to be in too deep but she soon joined in enthusiastically with the Tai Chi; at this point I did not know that she had only learned to swim recently and I found out more about this in her interviews.

Mavis had been going to the Arts and Crafts Group in Alston for some time and enjoyed both the creative activities and the chat with longstanding friends. Just previous to my involvement there had been a serious personal difference between two members of the group, and this had caused an atmosphere to develop. Mavis explained the problem to me when she was interviewed because she had been aware that I would have observed the tension when attending the group. At a later meeting of the group, not observed by myself, Mavis was voted in as the new chairman in the hope that she would be able to resolve the difficulties and 'keep control'. This episode shows the importance the group placed on Mavis as a group member, leader, and communicator. However, she seemed to be a fairly reluctant member of the local Women's Institute (WI). Her mother had been in the WI, and Mavis didn't really want to join because it all seemed so formal to her, and she was afraid that she would be drawn in and given responsibilities. She resisted joining until her husband died, making the excuse that she was not old enough. However, she was finally drawn in, and now had an officer role, welcoming the speakers to the group. She also took part in several other group activities including bowls, whist and dominoes. She played in the teams in Alston and in a number of other villages in the area, and was appreciated for her support.

Although she didn't recognize her role as an information provider, Mavis had an important role in distributing information through her social activities because of her friendly and outgoing personality and her longstanding role as a key member of the local community. When asked about what kinds of information her contacts provided she said that they provided information about activities and that her closest friend was the most informative. Her closest friend and two others provided her with information about what was going on in and around the town in terms of events, activities and general gossip. This friend, Iris, although a strong tie for Mavis, was a participant also named by Jane and observed by

myself to act as a weak tie for others, providing local information about health issues and local activity. Another strong tie contact that Mavis described as a friend who provided information had also been named by both Jane and Edith as a weak tie providing information, and was someone whose name came up in several of the conversations I had observed. This person had not been asked for an interview as she was in a slightly younger age group.

8.8 Case Study Participants' social networks

The cross case analysis that follows includes a short discussion of participant views of older peoples' involvement in activities and allows for the identification of any common themes that have arisen across some or all of the cases in terms of case study participants' social networks and involvement in activities "in search of patterns and themes that cut across individual experience" (Patton, 2002, p.57). As Ayres et al. (2003) state "The qualitative researcher must develop an interpretation of these data that reflects each individual's experience and applies equally well across all of the accounts that constitute the data set" (p.871) because there are themes that occur both in individual accounts and across the cases that may apply beyond this research (p.872).

Family members provided practical and emotional support to participants, and that support was reciprocal, although some participants said that they were not so good at taking advice from their families. All the first and second named contacts in social network interviews, and half of the third to sixth named contacts, were considered to be close, or fairly close, friends. The female case study participants had at least one female friend who provided support, and close female friends had helped case study participants through bereavements. Supportive, close family and friends shared information within their social networks, and first and second named contacts were ranked highly as information providers. It may be that participants ranked their close contacts highly because they provided friendship and support in addition to information, and most of the information they provided related to the everyday life activities of these participants. Family members at, or near, the top of most of the contact lists, were mostly geographically close and provided practical and emotional support in most cases. All the case study participants gave priority to the needs of their

families whilst remaining as independent of help for as long as possible. Women tended to become more involved within their social networks and activities in general. All four of the women had at least one female friend they could confide in to a greater or lesser extent, and they said that their close female friends had provided them with support, particularly after bereavement.

All the case study participants were involved in some way with social activities but there were variations in how much, with whom, and where they were socially active. Four of the five case study participants mentioned at least one of the two contacts who were key informants about local activities and news, and who were usually referred to as casual contacts, and therefore were weak ties. In the case of Mavis, one of these informants was her close friend, and therefore a strong tie, but she performed the same information function for Mavis as she did for others, in addition to being her close friend socially. The other contact listed as fulfilling this role was named by three of the five case study participants but was not interviewed as she was in a slightly younger age group. However, I observed both these contacts and other individuals undertaking information dissemination and bridging activities in order to encourage support for social activities and to provide practical information to support the needs of older people. Johnson (2004) found that when people want new information they will seek out people they do not know so well (weak ties) but who they know have better information sources. The role of these contacts was important and will be referred to again in the following chapters. Other contacts provided different kinds of information and played different roles according to the differences in their relationships with participants.

8.9 Summary

Social networks:

- Case study participants were involved with their family living locally.
- Family members provided practical and emotional support to participants.
- Female case study participants had at least one female friend who provided support.
- Family and close friends (strong ties) shared information within their networks.
- Family and friends provided different kinds of information and played different roles according to the differences in their relationships with participants.

- Four of the five case study participants identified at least two casual contacts (weak ties) who were key informants about local activities and news.
- The day-to-day activities of the case study participants showed a spectrum of levels of involvement in social networks.

Those who are less socially involved may have, or need, the skills to access certain kinds of information in ways other than through face-to-face interpersonal contact, using technological means like the telephone or the computer or printed materials. It is important to identify the means by which people exchange information, from interpersonal 'gossip' or 'nattering' through which some people may encounter crucial elements of information incidentally, or through purposive information searching using other means. The next chapter focuses on the information sources accessed or encountered by case study participants and others through different channels, as individuals at home, and within their wider information worlds.

Chapter 9: Information

9.1 Introduction

In her 'Theory of life in the round', Chatman (1999) suggests that the established behaviour of social groups creates a 'worldview' played out as their 'life in the round'. Solomon (2002, 2005) says that 'rounding' encapsulates the ways in which people come into contact with information in their own contexts, and takes place "as people interact with the people, information and technology that they find situationally relevant" (2005, p.309). They access the information they think they need whilst ignoring the information they do not want. Information may be constructed and communicated in many different ways, through face-to-face interaction, individually, or in groups, but also in printed format, by telephone, through television, radio, newspapers, the Internet and other means. Fisher et al. (2007) suggest that the different means of communicating information should be assessed for their positive or negative affect on the user and for whether they are "conducive to information flow and social interaction" (p.10). The global theme of 'Information' and its themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Figure 6.5, page 108, and are described and discussed in this chapter.

It should be noted that very few participants in this study mentioned television and radio as sources of information access, although two case study participants, Janet and Edith, provided some examples in their participant journals and the interviews that followed. Janet said that she listened to programmes on the radio about health issues and Edith listened to the radio and watched television along with reading the newspapers to keep informed of current affairs. Williamson (1998) found that "although respondents usually spent longer periods of time watching television than reading newspapers, the latter were more highly regarded as a source of information" (p.32). The focus of the description here is therefore on interpersonal, printed and online means of communicating information. Sections 9.2 and 9.3 cover interpersonal information exchange, both face-to-face and over the telephone, purposeful or serendipitous; the use of printed information is discussed in Section 9.4, and online information in Section 9.5. The findings are summarized in Section 9.6.

9.2 Interpersonal information exchange

Interpersonal information exchange, either face-to-face or over the telephone, is described in this section with reference to data taken from interviews, participant diaries and social network interviews. The twelve research participants who took part in social network interviews were asked about information that their main contacts provided face-to-face or by telephone. The subject areas included cannot be considered to show a fully comprehensive picture. However, it can be seen from Figure 9.1 that most of the information mentioned related to the everyday life activities of participants in the locality, although some official information was also mentioned.
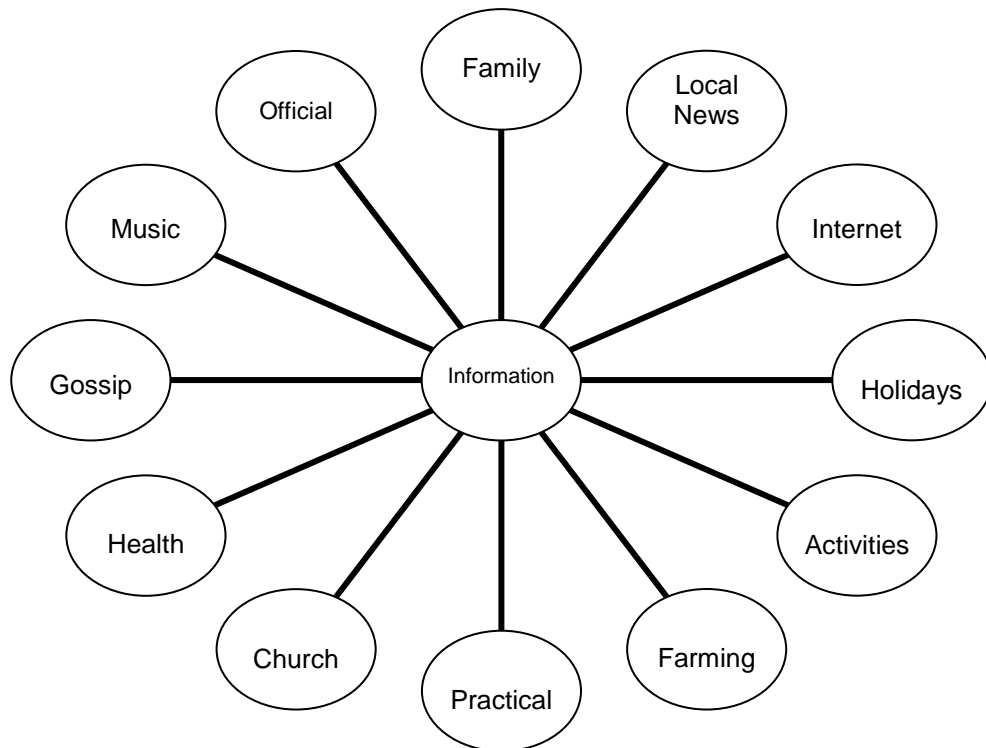
Figure 9.1: Types of information exchanged

These findings fit with some of the findings in research undertaken by Williamson (1998) when she questioned two hundred people over the age of sixty and found that their requirements were for health and financial information and recreational, leisure and

volunteering information. Most of the participants in this study said that they would prefer to communicate with other people directly where possible, and share information either face-to-face or by telephone. Well over 50% of respondents in Chen and Hernon's (1982) study of the information needs and uses of American citizens also said that they preferred to receive information face-to-face. Most participants were intensely involved in exchanging both personal and practical information with their families and close friends and the descriptions of the case study participant's information use, show the variety of different ways in which they acted as information providers and receivers. The fact that personal knowledge, or information, cannot easily be identified, named or categorized does not mean that it is not relevant or important as source material. It has been suggested that much of the information that is exchanged interpersonally is unexpected and not sought. The interpersonal information exchange of case study participants is seen in Figure 9.2.
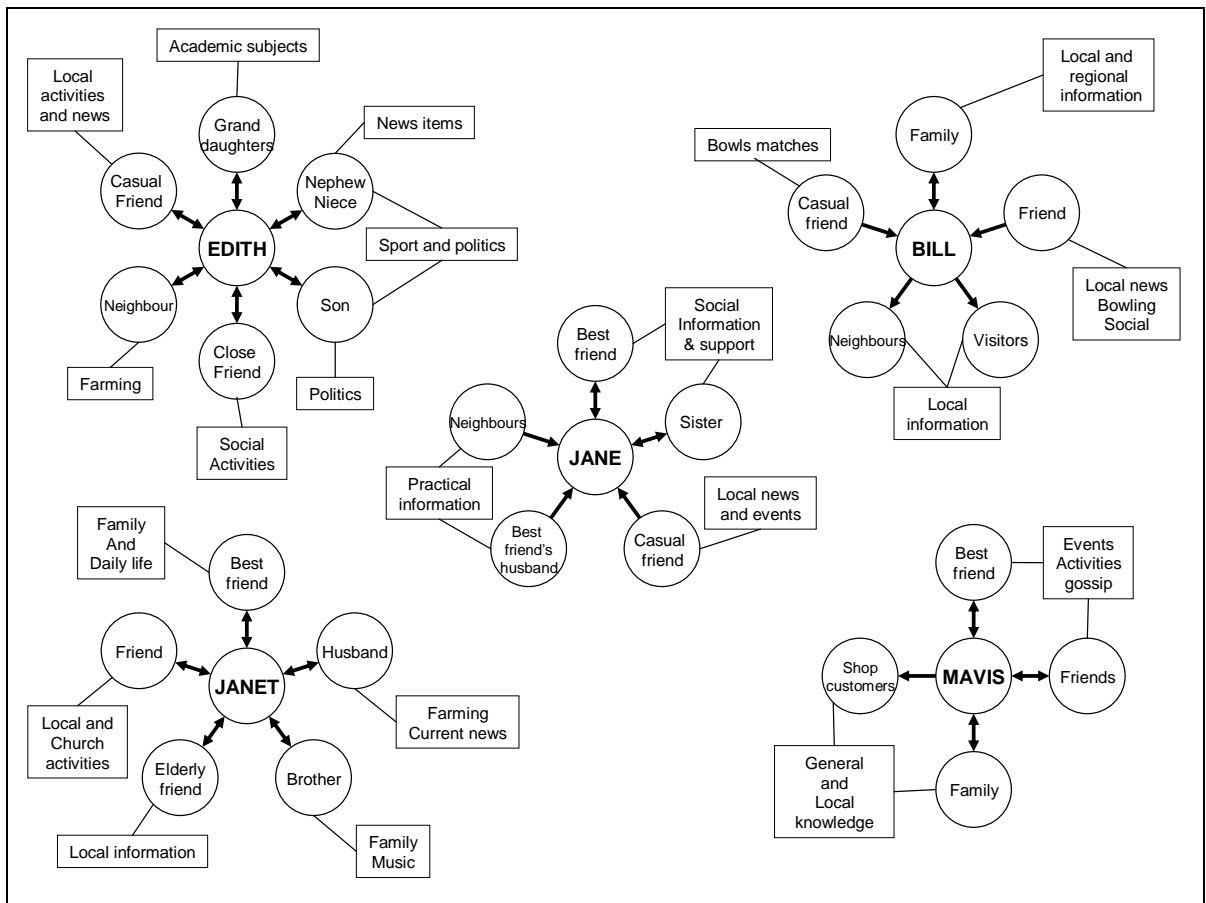
9.2 Interpersonal information exchange: case studies

Erdelez (2005) describes the process of information encountering as "a memorable experience of unexpected discovery of useful or interesting information" (p.179). Williamson (1997, 1998) believes that people are constantly monitoring their world for relevant information, but that this process is largely unconscious. The case study participants showed that a wide variety of information was accessed and exchanged and that information exchange was often reciprocal. Edith was an ex-teacher, and she identified that she was also an information provider and gave as much information to her family as they gave to her. "We probably each give each other information, an exchange situation I would say, they tell me things and I'll tell them". She discussed with her granddaughters the academic subjects they were studying, and talked about sport and politics with her nephew and son. Edith discussed issues that were in the news with her niece and nephew. "It's mainly discussing the affairs of the world if you like, because they're close and I see them most days we discuss various matters, always have done". With Edith's son information exchange included advice. "We exchange quite a lot of information, we talk about all kinds of things, we talk politics, we talk sport, he advises me, I advise him about some of the things that he does". Edith mainly liked to chat with her closest friend. "Well I don't see her very often but when we do we might talk about things we've been doing". She talked to her farming neighbour mainly about farming matters. "We exchange information about the farm and about the animals, things like that". She also had a casual friend who provided her with information about activities. "She gives me information about things, about the Theatre Group, what's going to be coming up and what isn't".

Bill's family had helped Bill and his wife with information and advice in many ways although journal evidence showed that Bill was also a provider of information to his family and friends, and also to visitors to the area. Bill had friends who provided information about what was going on locally and about local news, bowling activities, and social gatherings. One close friend would provide information about bowling activities. "Well … he brings us that information, you know, social gatherings and suchlike". There was also a casual friend with whom Bill mainly had contact for information about bowls matches and competition arrangements on a weekly basis. Bill and Phyllis had a lot of local knowledge, having lived in the area most of their lives and having been very involved with the local

156

community. Bill gave an example of how he was able to provide information to a friend and former neighbour about a buried drain on his land that was not visible on the surface, and for which no written records could be found. Extracts from Bill's participant journal in Figure 9.3 show some examples of different kinds of information he provided over a period of ten days, including directions he gave to his daughter about how to get to a race course.

Friday 11th November

Bill advises his niece about her dog, he suggests taking him to the vet. Bill's eldest daughter phoned to get directions to Wetherby. 'I told her the number of the road and where the race course is as we had been with the caravan.'

Saturday 12th November

Bill's youngest daughter phoned wanting to know the best way to get to a particular farm in Garrigill.

Saturday 19th November

Bill's fourth daughter asked where the best place would be to go to a car boot sale and Bill advised her. Bill phoned one of his grandsons to ask for the answer to one of the questions on the quiz sheet about nursery rhymes.

Monday 21st November

Bill and Phyllis went to the town and asked his niece if her dog was better and she said he was.

Figure 9.3: Bill's information exchange

Jane felt that her two closest friends, her strong ties, provided her with general information about what was going on within the community. Weak ties provided information about social activities and about health-based issues. "It's just really what's going on and 'Would you like to do this?' or 'Would you like to go there?'". The husband of a close friend was very helpful in giving advice and information to her about the work she needed doing in her house. Since her husband had died, Jane had been reliant on friends and neighbours for recommendations of reliable workmen for the jobs she wanted done. She thought it was important to find out about how the jobs should be done properly. "You know, if I'm looking for a good workman … I'll ask them … it takes a long time to get a good plumber … and it's quite hard to start and get somebody who I really like here … I try to get all the information to hand". Although she had very regular chats with another friend, Iris, about local news and events, Iris did not provide her with support or advice, and she was not rated highly as an information provider by Jane, and so was considered to be a weak tie. Jane

used local people as information sources for general local information and local activity information, but for more specific and broader information she would go to the Internet or a book. "I mean it's quite difficult isn't it actually because you pick up information from so many different sources. Because I suppose most of the information I glean is local information, as opposed to any other type".

Janet was very much an information provider to other people in addition to being a user of information. Her most important contact was a friend who she spoke to fairly regularly and with whom she shared information about family matters and experiences in daily life. Members of her family were also important to her as information providers, particularly her husband and brother. Her husband was knowledgeable on matters connected with the farm and mostly dealt with the paperwork at home. He spent more time at home than she did so was able to keep her up to date with current news from the media. "He'll tell me things he's seen in the paper or heard on the radio". Janet's brother telephoned her regularly and kept her informed about family matters and about what was going on in Hexham where he and his family lived. "I'm not a phoning person so he keeps me up to date with family and we talk about musical things and events". A friend was a major provider of information about local activities, and particularly church activities and another elderly friend told Janet all about her life and about the locality, and kept her informed in more detail about what was in the local paper. "She passes on information and tells you what's been in the paper. She loves to tell you all the things that have happened".

Mavis was very much a people person so that most of her information was gathered from others, either through her general conversation, or by asking specific questions, and these exchanges usually occurred within her social situations. She provided her family with advice and information and they also advised her; she gave the example of them advising her not to learn to drive. She was also a provider of information to individual friends and family, using her own knowledge and experience. Mavis did not see the need to ask for help, or to check information she was giving to people when she was asked questions whilst on duty at the Age Concern shop. She felt that most of the time she could inform people without asking for help as she had plenty of local knowledge. "You don't need to go

and ask anybody in the back office 'cause they don't know as much as you know. We don't do anything like that you see (advice on benefits etc.). If anybody wants to know anything, well, you tell em what you know …" Mavis's closest friend, Iris, and two other friends provided her with information about what was going on in and around the town in terms of events, activities and general gossip, but Iris was rather more informative about activities. **"**I'm talking information about outings … information if there was anything on and I didn't know about it that she would tell me … I wouldn't need to ask, she would just tell us". Case study participants accessed and exchanged a wide range of information in their interpersonal interactions, although most of the information related to local activities and news with strong and weak ties and to personal issues with strong ties only. Wicks (2001, 2004) research with older adults also showed that interpersonal sources were used for information about participation in local clubs and organizations and Williamson (1998) that older people wanted information about leisure and recreation activities. Much of this information exchange was reciprocal and some unexpected, what Williamson (1997) considered to be a process of "incidental information acquisition" or "accidental information discovery" (p.339).

9.3 Telephone communication

As part of her 1997 study, Williamson (1998) asked her 202 respondents to record the purpose and topic of all their incoming and outgoing telephone calls over a two-week period, and to describe in a diary what each call was about. Respondents made or received, on average, about thirty calls each week; 65% of these were to family and friends and were personal calls, but, in many calls, broader topics of interest came up in the conversation. Access to a telephone was considered vital to most of the participants in this study, although some people were more comfortable using the telephone than others. Participants thought that it was important to have the telephone available because they could not always speak to friends and family face to face. Several participants highlighted the importance of the telephone for keeping account of the activities of their family. Edith was quite happy telephoning people locally, or family who lived further away, and she used the telephone frequently. She knew that she could rely on her family to call her at home. Figure 9.4 gives some examples of telephone use taken from Edith's participant journal.

> Sunday 20th November
>
> *Edith phoned her niece to find out what time she would be coming to pick her up in the car. She phoned her son about his job interview.* 'He said he will phone me on Wednesday or Thursday to let me know.'
>
> Monday 21st November
>
> *Edith's youngest son phoned and they talked about important matters, he said he had phoned the day before and she wasn't there to answer.* 'I must think about getting an answer phone.'
>
> Tuesday 22nd November
>
> *Edith received two phone calls in the morning, one about her house repairs and one from her youngest son saying he didn't get the job he was interviewed for.*
>
> Wednesday 23rd November
>
> *Edith phoned her niece to let her know she would collect the papers as she was going to the hairdressers in the town.*
>
> Saturday 26th November
>
> *Edith spoke to her son on the phone* 'but apart from that had no other human contact.'

Figure 9.4: Edith's telephone use

> Sunday 13th November
>
> *Bill's fourth daughter phoned to say that she and their granddaughter would be coming for dinner. Bill's son phoned to see how they were.*
>
> Monday 14th November
>
> *Bill's son phoned to ask if they could look after their granddaughter who was off school not feeling well as he and his wife needed to go to Carlisle. Bill's oldest daughter phoned to say that she had a good weekend away. His youngest daughter phoned because she was arranging a cousin's funeral.*
>
> Tuesday 15th November
>
> *Bill spoke to his youngest daughter on the phone and his third daughter rang to find out how they were.*
>
> Wednesday 16th November
>
> *Bill's youngest daughter phoned to remind them about her visit on Friday.*
>
> Saturday 19th November
>
> *Bill's fourth daughter phoned to say that she would not be able to come to dinner the next day.*
>
> Tuesday 22nd November
>
> *Three of Bill's daughters phoned.* 'Nothing exciting to report.'
>
> Wednesday 23rd November
>
> *Bill's youngest daughter phoned and told them that another friend had died and their fourth daughter phoned just to see how they were.*

Figure 9.5: Bill's telephone use

Bill was also comfortable with the telephone and used it frequently to speak to his family and friends. It was particularly striking to note from his participant journal how many times different members of his family phoned him to check how he and his wife were getting on, or to find things out from him. Figure 9.5 shows his telephone activity with his family over a period of ten days taken from his participant journal.

Janet felt that she was fairly well informed and that she knew how to access the information she wanted, or if not, who to ask for information. "I use the phone, such as today, for something definite. If there's a query I will ring up, I'm not one to talk on the phone to friends, I only use the phone for definite queries or information that needs to be passed on". Janet was not as comfortable and relaxed using the telephone as she was talking to people face-to-face and she was more likely to use the telephone to find the answer to a particular query for herself, or to pass information on to others, rather than to just have a chat.

9.4 Printed information

As Yates-Mercer and Wotherspoon (1998) point out, public buildings, post offices and shops in rural areas often carry a stock of useful leaflets, and newsletters are usually produced by churches and some other local organizations and groups (p.23). Although most participants in this study had a preference for information exchanged face-to-face, most of them also used printed information extensively, especially in connection with social activities. Printed information in the form of books, newspapers and leaflets was an important resource to enable Edith to keep up-to-date with current affairs and local information. Unusually, she did not generally use other people to get her local information, but went purposefully to the Library or the Information Centre, where she picked up the leaflets and timetables she needed. Bill was aware of the various places where he could find printed leaflets but he was most likely to come across them serendipitously, or accidentally, picking them up at the Age Concern coffee morning or being given them by friends. He was aware that he missed things and didn't always see posters advertising activities, but he already led such a busy life that he did not have a lot of time to do much else anyway. "Aye, there is a newsletter, just sometimes we get a one if we're at the coffee morning,

sometimes they're on the table but we don't really get a one sent to us or anything like that". I observed that a great variety of printed information was made available at Age Concern Coffee mornings and this might include the newsletters from the various churches, the local community newsletter, the handouts about events and activities produced by individuals or groups using the Information Centre facilities, and leaflets and handouts provided by various service provider organizations that had sent representatives on the day or were providing a service locally. Individuals also brought in newspaper cuttings or photographs that might be of interest to others. Examples from my research diary are included in the extract below.

> There were photos of someone's wedding being passed around the table and also handouts about the church choir performance. People had also brought electric blankets for safety checking and there were leaflets available about safety in the home. I changed table in order to speak to a different group. They were discussing a newspaper article about people being affected by bad weather abroad where another friend was staying on holiday.

Peter and Stanley both pointed out that the Parish Newsletters produced by the Anglican Church were a very useful information resource for older people, but not for young people, and that there were also newsletters produced by the other churches.

> The Signpost…for the Methodist church which is a three-monthly thing, we need to also think ahead for that. The younger generation won't be interested in a lot of these things that go on there. We announce it too, all the church services, and we have a leaflet in the Methodist church every weekend. (Peter, 69)

Janet was very comfortable using printed information, whether books, reports or leaflets. She was involved in activities as a carer, helping to run the farm, involved with the church, playing and teaching music and supporting and informing other people, and this meant that she was constantly in need of purposefully seeking information to support these activities. In order to keep the printed information she had collected accessible, Janet kept a special file. "Well now I'm trying to get them organized, I'm keeping them in a file, a special information file … I'm separating things into categories now".

Several of the participants used the library to borrow books for leisure reading, and Edna went to the library to look at some of the local papers that she did not buy on a regular basis for herself. Most participants did not see the library as an information resource, however. Janet bought some of the books she needed to inform herself about subjects that concerned her at the meetings she attended and she was more likely to buy books that were informative than to borrow them from the library. "I'm always buying books about different subject areas that maybe are bothering me you know, things to do with health". Edith was informed mainly by what she read in the newspapers, heard on the radio and saw on television and then discussed with members of her family when she telephoned them or saw them in person. She thought that she occupied herself well by keeping her brain active and, although she had some physical health problems, she felt that an active mind was more important to her. "I read a tremendous amount, I probably read two or three books a week, and my newspaper, and my crossword puzzle, and I'm quite happy with that". She liked tackling the crossword in the Guardian newspaper and found she was always learning new things from it. She talked about the clues when she spoke to her son on the phone and they worked out the answers together. The local newspaper, the Cumberland and Westmorland Herald, has a traditional approach to its production, and has local reporters in each community who report on all the activities in their area. There is always some Alston news, and the older people locally like to catch up with these reports together with the news from further afield. Mary bought certain papers each week but was beginning to have some difficulty with her eyesight so couldn't manage anything in smaller print than newspapers. "I get the Herald and TV What's on and People's Friend, that's all I get really, although there's not so much Alston news in the Herald, but still I like to get it". Hilda (94) loved to read her local papers from cover to cover and then discuss the news with neighbours such as Janet. "I read the paper, the Herald, through and through, and I read the Cumberland News and I like to read all those letters in the Cumberland News because you can read somebody else's opinion ..." Figure 9.6 illustrates some of the formats in which some participants accessed printed and other information and examples of content. Janet and Edith were both avid readers of books and users of printed information in different formats for a variety of purposes.
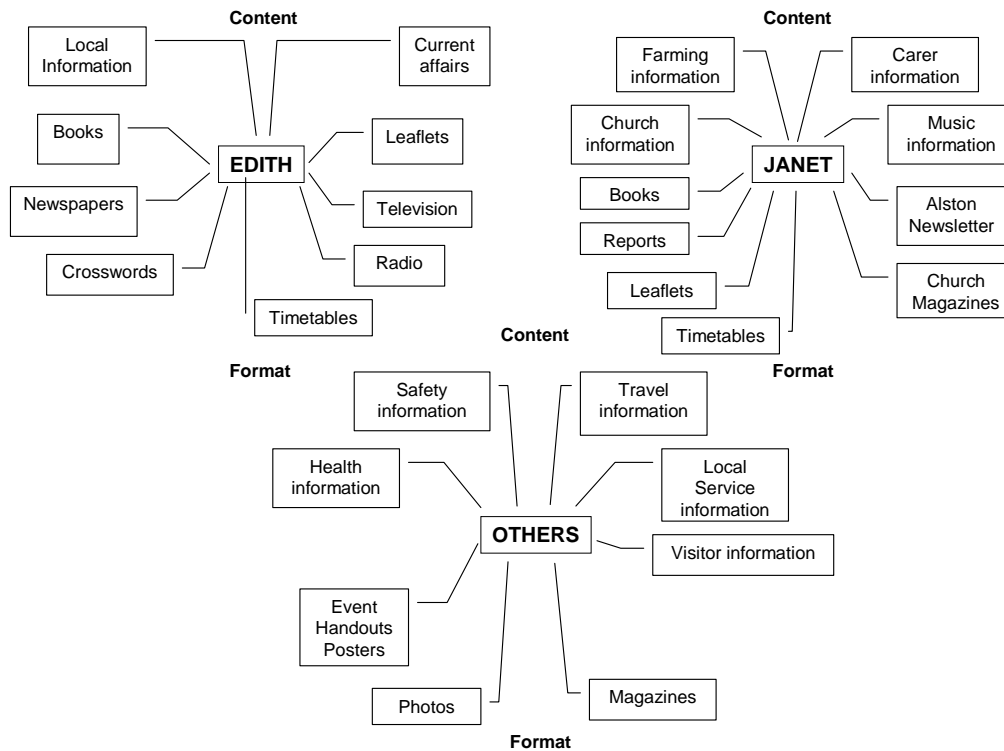
Figure 9.6: Participants' use of printed information

9.5 Online Information

It was shown in the Oxford Internet Survey (2005) that numbers of computer literate older people were increasing, particularly those within the younger old age grouping of 65 to 74. The survey showed that of those who were retired, 31% of 65 to 74 year olds compared with 20% of those over 75+ used the Internet. This suggests that although numbers of computer literate older people are increasing, the overall percentages accessing or exchanging information in this way are still low. The majority of the older people in this study did not identify Internet-based information as of high importance in their daily lives, and only four of the sixteen interviewees used a computer on a regular basis. However, I considered their views on the subject important to discuss in the context of this study. The 'older old' participants, such as Mary (81), generally showed less interest than the younger old. "I haven't got into computers and that sort of thing … I don't really want to know …I'm quite happy with the telephone as it is and the television, it's amazing how you can find out". There were notable exceptions, however, such as Edith (79), who used the

164

Internet almost every day, and Jessie (late 80s) who was keen to use her computer but had been struggling with training. It is accepted that Internet and digital technologies will increasingly provide ways in which older people can access information in the future but at present the Internet does not form a major component of older people's information seeking behaviour. However, I considered that it was important for this study to include what participants had to say about this form of communication and their use or non-use of computers and the Internet are discussed in the following two sections.

9.5.1 Use of computers

The Cybermoor Project focused initially on the rollout of broadband technology to residents' homes in Alston Moor and the provision of over seven hundred free personal computers that were delivered to about 60% of households and therefore had a significant impact on the community. Before the project started, the people of Alston Moor had the disadvantage of living with limited telecommunications services because of their rural geographical location. When the project began, some local people were trained to install computers for the rest of the community and to provide technical support, and a local community portal was set up as the core of the project. An evaluation of the Cybermoor Project undertaken by Devins (2002) stated that residents had been encouraged to undertake Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills development but that "the relatively low ICT capability of many in the community and the resource intensiveness of delivering effective support in the home, remain a challenge for the project". The project was successful in providing a community website and Internet access for the younger population, but less successful in sustaining the interest of the older population.

Janet and her husband, who were in the younger old age range, were given a free computer through the Alston Cybermoor Project but, although they felt they should support the scheme, they were put off by the technical problems they encountered at first. They had fully intended to use the computer to keep the farm financial records, but Janet had too much difficulty trying to remember how to create the documents they needed, even when she had the help of their son. "We've had intentions to use it … we thought we'd do the VAT using the computer so we tried it …our second son came and tried to help us but I

found it was taking me longer ...". Janet didn't feel that she had enough time to spare to learn how to use it properly and did not find the screen easy to look at. She did not have confidence in her ability to learn even though she had lots of books and her son was keen to encourage her to experiment. "I don't know the language very well, computer language. I've got a box full of books, how to use it, and our son said 'Oh you don't refer to the books, you learn through trial and error'". Bill and Phyllis didn't like technology much either and, although they had one of the free computers, and were aware that training was available, they didn't use the computer for accessing the Internet because they thought it had a virus. "No we've never considered on the Internet at all 'cause we don't know plenty about the Internet, it's not worth it and it's got a virus …" (Phyllis).

A short discussion was held with some of the older people attending one of the Age Concern Coffee mornings in order to find out how they were using their computers. Two women who were sitting together spoke about their Cybermoor computers. One had been having problems with logging on and had gone to the Cybermoor office to get help. The people there had given her some verbal instructions about what to do and she had gone home and tried to follow them but she still could not get the computer to work and was so frustrated that she was thinking of handing it back. She felt that it would be better if someone could have come out to her house, and helped her to understand what to do and really see what was wrong with the computer. The computers did not have virus protection installed and most of the older people did not realize that protection was needed when they accessed the Internet. Some mentioned that their computers had a virus or bug, "I had a bug you know. They had to strip it down to get rid of it. It wouldn't answer to anything", or things just went wrong, "I mean I did start with it … but then it went wrong and I probably wasn't interested enough to get it repaired". Another participant had persevered and had the computer fixed and virus protection installed, "It got a virus in … I had to take it down to the station and he had to strip it right down to get it to go, so I've got a virus protector in now". Participants thought that some people had been put off computers by the cost of accessing the Internet through the Cybermoor hub because they did not have a reduction for being retired, although those on benefits didn't have to pay the full cost.

166

Participants who had attended the training classes in Alston said that they could not remember what they had learned when they tried to practice at home, or that they hadn't managed to set up the computer properly at home, and so the confidence they were building in the class soon disappeared. "I went to two classes but because I hadn't got it fixed up at home, I couldn't practice when I got home … couldn't remember how I got to a certain place …" (Jessie, late 80s). Jessie found that she could quite easily buy items from the Internet but she was not so sure what to do with the camera she ordered when it arrived. "I do these silly things like buying a camera and I don't know how to work it you know … and you get a little thirteen-year-old who says 'Oh look you just do that'". Jessie had not been able to quite understand emailing, even though she had been to classes, but she wanted to use it more to keep in touch with her family.

> I would like to keep in touch with people and I'm not very clever at emailing, I would really like to use that more … I don't understand a lot, my daughter was here and she was looking at her email on my computer and I can't even look at any on me own you know and she said "You must get it you know".

Two participants talked about the computer training they had undertaken in another town. They had decided to go there because they found the training at Alston too limited. Jessie was unusual in that she was in her eighties when she took her City and Guilds qualification in word processing and use of the Internet. However she was not too happy about her progress. "Word processing and the Internet, I'm not that good on the Internet, quite frankly, I'm thinking of going back to the class … I think there's one in Alston but they only do six weeks and then leave it you see …" Marjorie (late 70s) was embarrassed about the fact that she had been pictured on the front of a local newspaper receiving her City and Guilds certificate when, in fact, she had only played one game of Solitaire on the computer since she had completed her training. "We did go to the class, in fact I was on the front page of the Courant showing them my certificate … I found when we went to the classes the teachers were very good but they were so quick we couldn't take it all in".

As part of the background research in Alston I interviewed one of the trainers who had run classes for older people in computer skills. She pointed out that there had not been funding for sufficient classes to be run but that the classes in which older people took part had

tended to develop into social occasions, and people were going back again to the same class because they were enjoying working together so much. This is significant, because it emphasizes the importance of identifying a convenient location where older people can go to learn together on a regular basis to fit in with their social activity. The trainer said that those who attended the classes wanted to learn how to access the Internet, how to word process properly, use e-mail, book a holiday, look for train times and download pictures. These comments suggest that the problems older people in Alston had with their computers were more to do with lack of suitable training and technical support rather than real lack of interest.

9.5.2 Internet information

The five case study participants in this study were split in their responses between those who were not interested in using their computers to find information; Bill, Janet and Mavis, and those who found them useful; Edith and Jane. Jane used the Internet on a regular basis, often accessing it via the local Cybermoor home page for local news, but mostly using a search engine for more specific information. She kept in touch with family by email. "Well I do if I go onto the local Cybermoor you know … maybe once a month or something, it's really just to go in and see what's on and what's happening, it's just a sort of nosiness really". Edith was very competent on her computer, and used it for a variety of purposes, from word processing to booking travel arrangements and shopping online. Edith used her computer and the Internet frequently and had her own computer room in the house. She had attended the History Group a couple of times when there had been a talk she was interested in and followed up the classes up by finding some useful and informative history sites on the Internet. "I have been (to the History Group) a couple of times. I'm interested in that and also interested in getting onto some of the history websites on the computer". Edith loved browsing the Internet for good sites but found that it took a long time to get what she wanted and then she would get frustrated with some of the technical aspects. "It always takes longer than you think it will and then you fiddle about with the printer 'cause it's not printing out". She was determined to make the most of the Internet for extracting useful information. One of her recent activities was to book a train ticket for her son for his trip to see her at Christmas and she had also been doing some of her Christmas shopping online. "I

bought some books and things and one or two things on the Internet, yes … they arrive in two or three days generally". She also did some food shopping online. "I shop from the Tesco, heavy shopping, that I wouldn't want to get in town". Edith was aware of the existence of the Cybermoor website but did not use it very often, and when she did it was usually to get factual information. "Once or twice I've gone on when I've wanted to find out at what time certain places are open, like the Vet …" Figure 9.7 shows tasks that Edith undertook on her computer in extracts taken from her participant journal.

Tuesday 22nd November
Edith had a long session on her computer booking her son's train ticket for coming up to visit her at Christmas and some other things.
Friday 25th November
Edith spent a couple of hours on the computer and in her office dealing with bills and accounts. 'Ordered some wine from Adnams, my wine merchants, and did some Internet Christmas shopping.'
Saturday 26th November
Edith did some more ordering of Christmas presents on the Internet.
Monday November 28th
Edith spent some time on the Internet.
Wednesday 30th November
Edith spent some time on the computer.
Friday 2nd December
Edith spent some of the morning and early afternoon on the computer. 'Printed a couple of things out as I now have the right ink cartridge for my new printer.

Figure 9.7: Edith's computer use

There was a broad range of information about local activities on the Cybermoor website, some of which was regularly updated. However, the reliability and comprehensiveness of the information found on the site was reliant on whether there was someone willing to make it available in that format. Consequently, some areas were covered well, such as church activities. Peter, one of the interview participants, was very interested in providing information in all formats. He was in the younger old age bracket, at sixty-nine, and had just started to use computers before he retired. However, although he saw the community website as a useful tool for distributing information himself, he didn't think that many other over-sixties in Alston saw its usefulness.

I keep abreast with Cybermoor … when I get on to the Internet broadband, and I get the page, and I feed information also into the diary, 'What's On', and I look to see what's on even though there are things I'm not going to attend, you know. I don't go to the Leek Club but I know if it's going to have a function. I also see if there's something not on there I put it in, you know. I think things are missed out you see. A case in point was the Flower Festival … I said 'I think it should be put on there as an important event in the life of Alston' … it's an interesting vehicle but I'm not sure whether many people over sixty use it. (Peter, 69)

Some of the older old were lacking in technical skills and interest, and may have had a fear of trying, or difficulty accessing training. This is a major barrier to increasing Internet usage for this age group, and is exacerbated by lack of facilities and opportunities in rural areas. It is clear that even though broadband access and a community website may be available in a community, it may not be used by older people because they lack confidence or access to training and support.

9.6 Summary

Interpersonal information
- Participants generally preferred to exchange information face-to-face.
- Most information exchanged with social network contacts was everyday life information, both personal and practical.
- Information exchange between participants and families was frequent and reciprocal.
- Family and close friends (strong ties) exchanged information with participants about family and community, and casual friends (weak ties) provided practical information about local activities, health issues, local services and more.

Telephone communication
- Access to a telephone was considered vital by most participants to allow them to keep in touch with family, whether they were nearby or further away.
- Some participants were more comfortable using the telephone than others and some still had a preference for face-to-face communication.
- The telephone was sometimes used specifically to access or pass on information and at other times just to have a 'chat' when information might be exchanged 'incidentally'.

Printed information
- Printed information was often accessed serendipitously in various locations such as the Age Concern Coffee Morning.

- Most of the participants used printed information extensively, especially in connection with social activity and practical needs.
- Printed information was in the form of books, newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters, local newsletters, reports, quiz sheets and timetables etc.
- Printed information was often used in conjunction with face-to-face information exchange to create a permanent reminder of activities or practical information.

Online information
- The majority of the older people interviewed did not identify Internet-based information as of high importance in their daily lives, and only four of the sixteen interviewees used a computer on a regular basis.
- Lack of confidence in understanding the technology, and some initial technical set-up problems with the free computers, led some older people to return them.
- Some older people were able to benefit from computer skills training, and those that did enjoyed the classes, but found it difficult to put what they learned into practice.
- Classes in which older people took part had tended to develop into social occasions and people were coming back again to the same class because they were enjoying working together so much.
- Those who did use their computers used them primarily for practical reasons, such as shopping online for food orders and presents, planning holidays, emailing and word processing.

As also described in Chapter 8, the findings showed that participants had a preference for exchanging information either face-to-face or by telephone and most of this information was everyday life information, both personal and practical. Information was exchanged mainly with family and close friends, but also through other friends and acquaintances that were part of their extended social networks. Printed information in a variety of media proved useful as either a permanent, more formal, reminder of verbal information or as a first or purposive choice of format. Use of the Internet to access or share information was less common as some older people did not use computers. However, those that accessed Internet information did so for a variety of purposes such as for holiday bookings, train times, online shopping, and they used email to contact friends and family. Information exchanged and accessed might be personal, local gossip or practical and useful information supportive of lifestyle needs including those around issues such as health, finance, activities, local services, holidays, church and farming. The location in which people are socially active is a crucial element in the people-place-information conundrum, and it is evident that some places may be more effective information grounds than others for socially active people, whereas others may access more of their information from home. In

information grounds, an information need may or may not be expressed, and information may or may not be exchanged, provided or encountered either passively or actively but may be encountered serendipitously. In the next chapter, I describe the extent to which the case study participants were involved in their social activities, the locations where social information activities took place, and the elements which made some of these places successful as information grounds.

Chapter 10: Place

10.1 Introduction

The knowledge base of socially involved people contains information that is relevant and exchangeable, and that adds to the shared body of knowledge available within social networks and information grounds. This chapter focuses more directly on the interaction of the case study participants, and other interviewees, with the information resources they encountered as individuals in their wider information worlds and information grounds. I discuss some of the information grounds that were relevant to older people in Alston and describe how people functioned within these grounds and the information behaviour and encountering that took place. Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) have suggested that "group participation can be seen both to fill information gaps and to fulfil participants' need to socialise, form a caring community, and participate …" (p.90).

Fisher et al. (2007) describe the characteristics of information grounds in terms of activity, atmosphere, environment, location, privacy, and noise (pp.8-10). They apply these characteristics to their analysis of "places people go for a particular reason, such as to eat, get a haircut, get exercise … but end up sharing information just because other people are there and you start talking" (p.3). These characteristics, developed by Fisher et al. for their people-place-information trichotomy, have informed my description of the activities of the case study participants within their information grounds. The global theme of 'Place' and its themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Figure 6.5, page 108, and described here. Firstly, in Section 10.2, I briefly address issues of age and gender as they relate to involvement in activities. In sections 10.3 to 10.5, the various information grounds, those who frequent them, and the information behaviour taking place within them is described. Different examples of formal and informal information grounds were identified from the activities described by participants or observed during the course of the data collection, and the key factors of each ground are highlighted. Described in section 10.6, the Age Concern Coffee Morning provides a good example of a key informal social information ground that has proved to be successful for facilitating the exchange of information and support for older people in Alston, and the important elements in terms of people, place and

information are highlighted. The findings about the social information roles played by participants within the grounds, the types of social information grounds available to older people in Alston, and the kinds of information and how it was exchanged within those social information grounds are summarized in Section 10.7.

10.2 Age and gender

Mavis noted that most of the groups and activities in the town were quite well supported but that it tended to be the same individuals that took part in many of these activities and the age groups and genders did not mix. She was aware that some older people did not want to join in with group activities, but she didn't see that this was necessarily a problem for them. Jane thought that quite a large proportion of older people got involved socially, but that the younger people didn't join in with their activities so much because they thought that most of the organized activities were there exclusively for the older people. Both Mavis and Frank pointed to the fact that it was difficult to get younger people involved with the game of bowling. Frank said that two young lads had started playing but had been bullied about it at school afterwards and Mavis had been trying to think of ways of encouraging young people to join in by combating the attitude amongst younger people that bowls was an old people's game. She tried to discuss it with her granddaughter.

> I said "Oh, would you like to play bowls?" She said "Grandma, that's an old woman's game". I thought "Oh right, I'm not going to ask you any more". But I'm saying that, but we had two young boys about the same age as her, eleven, and they came and they were very good at it but they got bullied at school so we no longer have these two young lads.

However, most of the participants in this study had some kind of regular interaction with younger people, mostly within their own families, but sometimes in their social activities.

Jane thought that local older men only involved themselves in certain of the more formal activities, such as the bowling or the historical society, and she said that fewer went to the coffee morning because a major part of the activity was chat. It has been shown that older men don't take as much part in social activities as do older women, especially if they have been living on their own for some time (Davidson, Daly and Arber, 2003, De Jong

174

Gierveld, 2003) and this is also reflected in the smaller numbers of men recruited for this study. However, Bill, the only man represented as a case study, is a good example of how older men may be socially involved in mixed-gender activities, although his role was more as a provider to others and he worked as a volunteer in at least two organisations. Other males interviewed for this study limited themselves to male only or predominantly male activities such as the men's bowling team or the men's choir. Mavis had observed that although some of the older men went on the coach trips with their wives, single men and widowers tended not to go, and they were less likely to go with groups of male friends. She thought that the older men had also been spending less time in the pubs playing darts and dominoes in recent times because the younger men who frequented the pubs liked to have loud music and just wanted to drink. As Wenger (2001) points out "Village pubs … which formerly provided a social focus for many older men and couples … seek to attract a wider, more affluent and younger clientele" (p.123). Gray (2009) showed that about 45 percent of men and 55 percent of women over 60 were active in one or more organizations in both 1991 and 2003 but they were involved in different organizations; men in social and sports clubs and women in religious, community and voluntary groups (p.19).

10.3 Places as information grounds

Fisher (formally Pettigrew) and Naumer (2006) have asked "Do you go to a place for a particular reason but wind up sharing information just because other people are there and you start talking?" (p.93); they suggest that the answer is often 'yes' and that these places may be termed information grounds. As illustrated in the description of Mavis's social activity information grounds that follows in 10.3.1, the relationships that participants had within their grounds are displayed in the different levels of involvement dependent on an individual's role and familiarity with that particular group and the strength of the tie with other members (Granovetter, 1973, 1982). Homogenous groups display strong ties between members and strengthen existing bonds, whereas more diverse groups, comprising of a mix of people who know each other well, and others who are unknown, show a spectrum of ties from strong to weak. Fisher and Naumer (2005) list the most commonly identified information grounds in their telephone survey of the citizens of King's County in the USA as "places of worship, the workplace and *activity areas,* that is, clubs, teams, play groups

and places associated with hobbies" (p.10). Their list of information grounds includes the types of grounds identified and observed in this study. Figure 10.1 shows the variety of information grounds in which the participants in this study exchanged information.
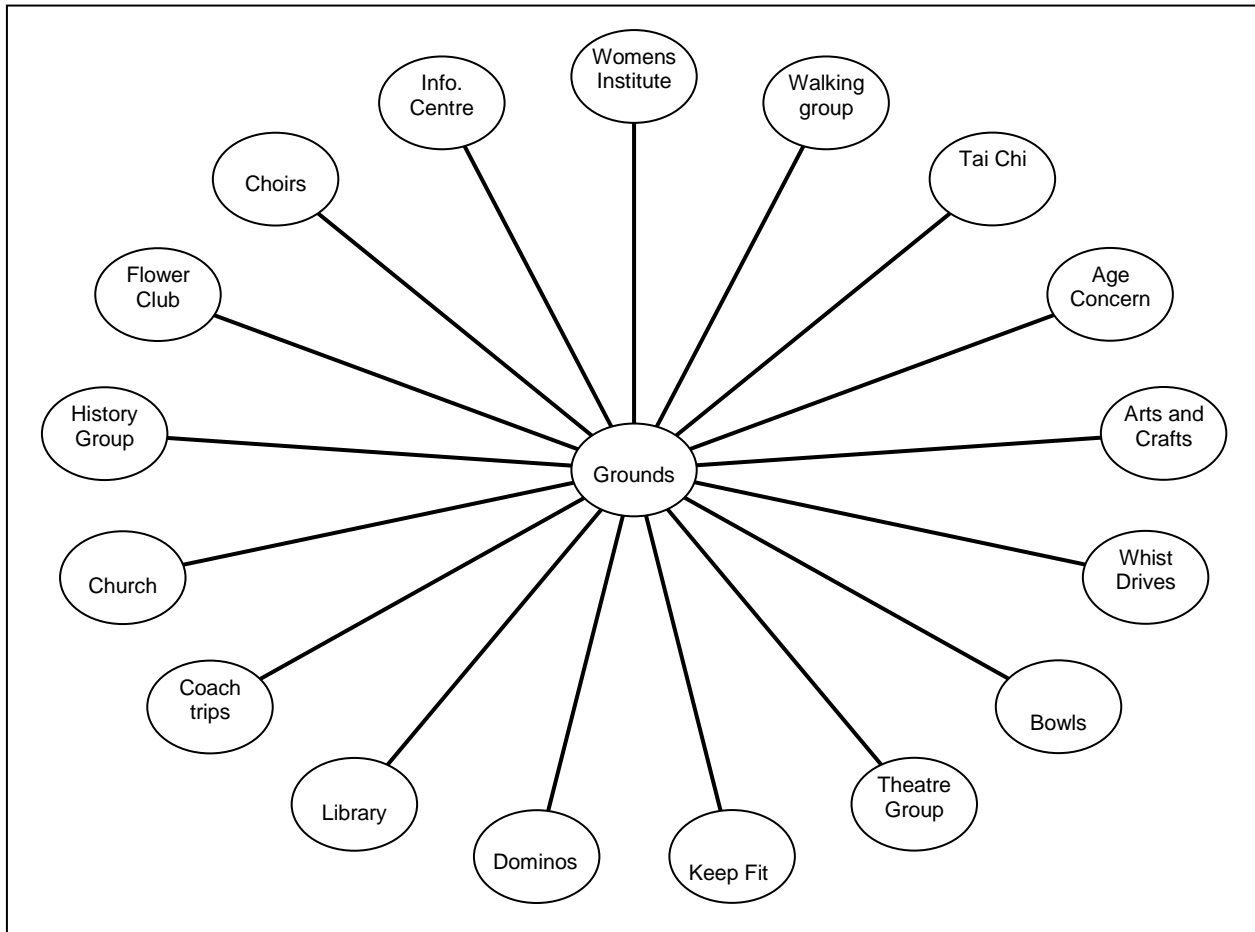
Figure 10.1: Information grounds

Information ground locations in Alston, representing the variety of places available and actively used by older people, included those used for clubs and groups and for church activities such as the various church and community halls, and places such as coffee shops or the hairdresser's. I consider information grounds to be not only the physical places where people can purposefully go to get information, although these locations can influence the way people interact within them, but also the groups of people who take part in a particular activity in places, as I believe that the type of activity has a strong influence on

the information behaviour. The activities are described in this chapter in terms of the type of location, a description of activities that take place there, the frequency of the activities within the information grounds and the comfort of the places in question. The people involved in activities are described in terms of the size of the group membership, the type of members involved, how well they know each other and why they go there. The type of information exchanged within the grounds is discussed in terms of how it is transmitted and shared, and how much or little information is available and exchanged within grounds.

10.4 Formal information grounds

Formal activities were more strongly linked with purposive information seeking, where people were attending activities that were educational, such as talks on history, gardening or other topics. This purposive information seeking took place at information grounds such as the History Society, the Women's Institute or the Flower Club. In addition, participants purposefully sought specific information at meetings they attended, for example, Janet seeking information in her role as a lay member of committees, Mavis and Iris when campaigning for the 'save-our-hospital' campaign, or Bill and Phyllis as volunteers receiving training as home visitors for Eden Community Alarms. Figure 10.2 shows some of the formal information grounds attended by participants.
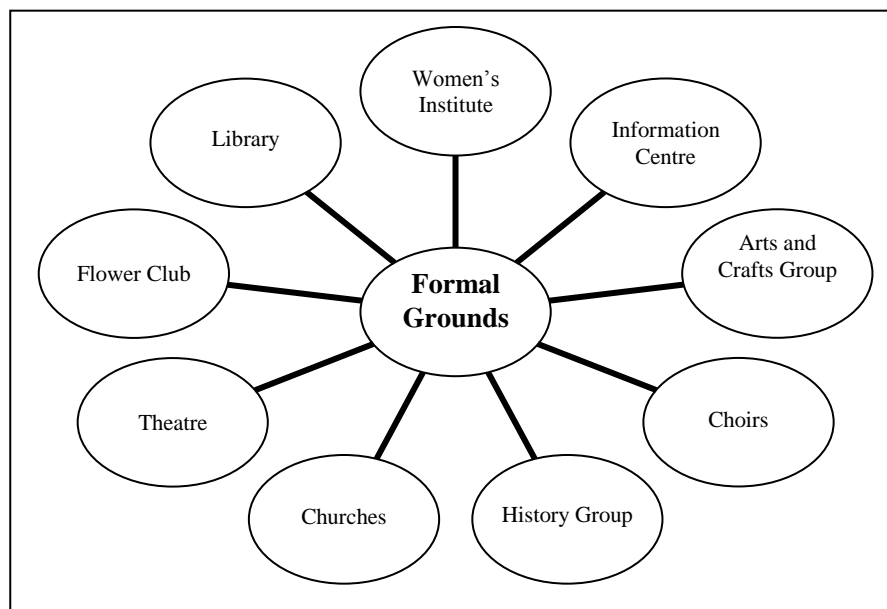
Figure 10.2: Formal information grounds

Information seeking and encountering also occurred indirectly or serendipitously in the context of these more formal gatherings. Some of these gatherings had a spiritual or ritual dimension, such as activities connected with the church, or they might have a cultural dimension, such as theatre visits or music performances. In formal information grounds, information might be encountered or 'bumped into' (Erdelez, 1999) during intervals or coffee breaks outside performance or service times. Participants referred to some of the information ground activities during interviews and they were also identified through announcements made at the coffee morning, or in leaflets at other events or locations.

10.4.1 Information Centre

The Information Centre is discussed in this category as a formal information ground because the location itself, the Town Hall, was also the venue for various meetings of groups and activities. Therefore when older people used the Information Centre for accessing or providing information, they were often with small groups meeting for another purpose or preparing for such meetings. The Information Centre was a friendly, lively location where a wealth of local information was available in printed form. Several participants mentioned that they used the Centre when they were producing leaflets, posters or flyers for distribution in the area, or they went there to get information about local services. An Information Centre worker confirmed that local older people frequently used the centre and added that it tended to be people who were organizing events or campaigns that came to photocopy or word process, and to put posters and leaflets out for others to pick up. She said that some people wanted to know about bus or train times and fares or needed other information provided by the County or District Councils in leaflet form. They might sometimes want her to help them to resolve a problem with the council, i.e. about tipping or rubbish collection, or to have help in filling in official forms. She felt that a flexible approach was needed in community information centres and she wanted to help older people to get answers to their problems. The Centre ran open days in conjunction with the Pensions Service and open mornings to offer help to older people with the use of the centre computers.

Janet regularly picked up or was given printed information such as leaflets or newsletters at the Information Centre. "I do always buy the newsletter which is in the Tourist Information and I get the Church magazine from the church …" Barbara tended to pick up leaflets to give to her visitors when she was at the Centre. "I always have a look round and see what's going on and you know, if you've got any visitors, I keep some leaflets and update them so if they want to do anything they've got them …" Bill went occasionally to ask the staff questions about Council services or to take in Eden Alarms leaflets. If Jane wanted information about places to visit she went to the Centre and picked leaflets up, either on purpose or serendipitously. Edna used the photocopier at the Centre for posters, and Jessie for quiz sheets which she sold for the benefit of church funds. "I do a quiz here once a month and they run it off for me; the proceeds are for the church … I sell some in the Tuesday Group, Coffee Morning if I'm there …"

Summary of Information Centre Ground:

Type of location: Official area in Town Hall
Description of activities: Information provision and computer training
Frequency: Permanent location, open daily
Comfort: Friendly and relaxed service
Size of group: From individual to group use
Member type: Variety of users for different purposes
Type of information: Local, tourist and service information

10.4.2 Women's Institute

The Women's Institute (WI) in Alston had quite a small group of regular members, about twenty, and it met on a monthly basis in the Masonic Hall. There was some concern that the average age of some groups, including the WI, was increasing and that membership numbers were dwindling. The Over Sixties Club had already ceased meeting due to low attendances. Edna saw that this problem for the Over Sixties Club could also be quite a problem for Alston WI because people thought it was only for older women. "Talking to the lady in the library I said 'Why don't you come some time and put up posters?' She says 'Oh well, I'm not over 60' I said 'You don't have to be over 60 to join the WI'". The WI evenings began with a business meeting and then had invited speakers from both inside and outside Alston talking on a wide variety of topics. After the formal part of the meeting

those attending had a light supper prepared by the members and there was usually a competition judged by the speaker and a raffle. Research participants recognized the continued existence of the organization but some displayed a reluctance to get involved, or to attend every meeting. Although Mavis had been drawn in and now had an officer role she had been unable to persuade her friend Iris to go along; Iris was reported to have said to Mavis that she was not a WI sort of person. Edna joined the WI so that she could just go to a few of the meetings, but she had also been persuaded to sit on the committee. Some questioned whether the WI was welcoming to visitors who were not intending to become full members and it was thought that this might be counter productive to the recruitment of permanent members. Edna could not persuade one of her friends to go.

> It depends who's in charge of each organization how much they welcome and encourage … possibly the WI doesn't … I've got a very great friend who I keep trying to persuade to come but she won't, she refuses … a person is not supposed to come more than twice without joining.

I attended only one of these meetings, during the early winter months, taking a poster about my research with me, and I observed that the group was fairly small and the atmosphere seemed quiet and formal in comparison to other groups I had attended. The Research Diary records that 'I found the situation there very formal … nobody at the WI seemed very comfortable or to be enjoying themselves much until it came to refreshment time'. Information was exchanged in both the formal and informal parts of the meeting, although the way this happened differed markedly between the two. It was observed that the formal meeting required that the members be seated in rows facing the president and secretary, who sat behind a large table covered in official-looking papers. Interaction between the secretary, who did most of the talking, and the members, was very limited, and very few questions were asked. The meeting was quite long, and it appeared hard for some of the members to concentrate after they had been sitting for a while. Information exchange at the meeting was purposive and most of the information was about the WI nationally and its current campaigns. As this information was mainly provided verbally it is questionable whether much of it could be retained without printed information to back it up, and how much was of local interest. In contrast, there was a good deal more interest shown by members in the local information provided by the speaker, a hairdresser, who talked

amusingly about her life and career in the North East and in Alston, and much more interaction was observed between the members and the speaker when they were able to add their own anecdotes to the discussion afterwards. The light supper that followed provided another opportunity for members to talk informally about future and past events in the town and to recruit more people to fill the coaches for the Christmas outings.

Summary of WI Information Ground:

Type of location: Community hall
Description of activities: Formal meeting and talk, informal refreshments
Frequency: Monthly and ongoing
Comfort: Formal lines of hard chairs for meeting, sitting around tables for refreshments
Size of group: Varied – 10 to 20
Member type: Women, mostly older
Type of information: Meeting–mostly national/regional WI, speaker–mostly local interest

10.4.3 Arts and Crafts Group

The Arts and Crafts Group took place in a pleasant room in the Town Hall, next door to the Information Centre. The room was relatively small but allowed fifteen people to be comfortably seated at tables and to be close enough to chat with the whole group whilst they were working. The people who attended were all women and predominantly those who had lived in the area for some years and knew each other well. In this semi-formal setting people attended a mix of taught workshops where someone came to demonstrate a craft and everyone had an attempt at doing it, and sessions where people just brought their own work or tried out something new. The informal discussions that took place whilst people were working on their craft items were also a major reason for getting together in this group, and people exchanged ideas about techniques and materials but also had a bit of a gossip. The discussion, therefore, was a mixture of purposive information seeking and incidental information acquisition. During my first visit to observe the group there was some discussion about a meal that some people were attending that night, problems that local people were having with land disputes, and health and ailments that friends and family had or that the older people themselves were suffering. I attended four of these sessions to observe the interaction of the group and the following entry from my research notes describes my first impressions.

> A wide variety of craft activities were evident, from card making, which seems a popular activity, to tapestries, cross stitch and crochet. People make things for themselves, friends or family or to sell them to raise money to donate to charities. The ladies informed me that they had made all the kneelers in the church in Alston and that I should go and have a look. They also had produced a series of stitched pictures for the millennium, of Alston scenes, that are displayed around the walls.

In my Observation Notes I recorded that there was general discussion about recent trips, the pros and cons of various locations, and the shopping possibilities. The imminent visit to the Bowes Museum and Barnard Castle was seen to be an opportunity to visit particular shops. The WI programme of activities was discussed and a visit to Brampton WI to hear the original Calendar Girls speaking had been very popular. Someone passed around a picture of a flower arrangement that had been at the flower festival in the church. Individuals were getting help and advice about designs and methods, wool for a tapestry kneeler, cut-outs for scrap books, and covered coat hangers, for example. The information exchanged was a mix of craft-related information, general gossip, and local activity information raised by key group members who were also members of other local groups.

Summary of Arts and Crafts Group Information Ground:

Type of location: Smallish room in Town Hall
Description of activities: Semi-formal talks and workshops, informal refreshments
Frequency: Fortnightly and ongoing
Comfort: Fairly comfortable although slightly cramped
Size of group: Approximately 15
Member type: Women, mostly older
Type of information: Information about craft activities, local news and gossip

10.4.4 Church information grounds

> The inclusiveness of church communities means that they often comprise members who otherwise would be vulnerable or isolated, as well as those who are better connected. Of note, in this context, is that the rural church has a disproportionate number of older people within its congregations. (Le Mesurier, 2003, p.136)

Le Mesurier (2003) has undertaken research on behalf of Age Concern England looking at the contribution that older people can make to their communities. He points out that the churches, their members, and the activities they organize are so widespread throughout the community that they may be able to draw in older people who would otherwise be more isolated. This may well also be the case in Alston because church-related activities and events, organized by a small but hardworking group of dedicated people, are extensive within the town and in surrounding villages. There is a strong tradition amongst the older members of the community to be involved with their particular church community, and a desire to support it. Several of the activities identified by participants had some connection with one or other of the churches, either directly, or indirectly, and there were several church communities still active, although they were struggling for members. There was an Anglican Church, a Catholic Church in a building now also used by the Methodists, and a Quaker Meeting House.

Peter had moved up to Alston from the south on retirement and was a Methodist lay preacher in the town but also involved with the Anglican Church. He pointed out that the churches were struggling to keep their congregations, those people that did come were getting older, and it was hard to find the funds to keep the buildings going. Peter believed that the church communities needed to work together to think of ways of gaining new members, and to keep existing members. A Christian Council had been set up to try to encourage this. "People are getting older you see, there aren't so many young people and what we're having to do is just think of new ways of doing things …" Buildings have to be appropriate for their function, and some people in Alston regretted the closure of the Methodist Chapel and the substitution of the Catholic Church as a place of worship for Methodists. Mary was part of a family who had all been Methodist. She went to the services now held in the Catholic Church but also went to the Nenthead Methodist Chapel with some of her family on a Sunday afternoon.

> Well I'm involved with our church, I'm a Methodist, you know, and we worship in the Catholic Church, so Sundays I like to go to the service in the morning … I like to go to Nenthead on a Sunday afternoon, they have afternoon services now …

Several of the participants highlighted the activities of the different choirs as being important for the community and several sung in them. There was a mixed male and female Church choir, the Angeli Choir for women, and the Alston Men's Fellowship Choir. Stanley belonged to two, the Church Choir and the Fellowship Choir. "Then there's the Alston Men's Fellowship Choir which is strictly for men … wherever we go with the concerts, both choirs, we always get good audiences so there's quite a good general interest". Janet was a key member of the Anglican Church community and her major contribution was to play the organ and piano for the choirs, but also to sing on occasion. In these roles she helped to distribute church and choir information by attending the activities and exchanging information with other members of the congregation, other choir members and with audiences to whom she performed. In terms of the church building as an information ground, it may well be the case that these formal, ritualistic, and sometimes very physically uncomfortable places are not conducive to human social interaction and information exchange. Other activities connected with the church, however, such as choir concerts and coffee mornings, provided a better opportunity for information exchange because they were held in varied locations where the atmosphere was more relaxed.

Summary of Church Information Grounds:

Types of location: Varied – churches, church halls, community halls
Description of activities: Formal services and concerts, fundraising events
Frequency: Very regular, at least weekly
Comfort: Varying from comfortable to uncomfortable
Size of group: Some small congregations, some larger, fundraising activities well-attended
Member type: A mix of men and women, generally older
Type of information: Formal church information, informal local information

10.5 Informal information grounds

The sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999) has written about the importance of place for communities, and has defined places as being locations that fall into three different categories for different purposes; home, work, and the third place; "the core settings of informal public life" (p.16). The informal information grounds are the most effective third place grounds; places where people "… end up sharing information just because other people are there and you start talking" (Fisher et al., 2007, p.3). Pettigrew (1999) describes

how information is socially constructed within these community settings when people come together "for a singular purpose but from whose behaviour emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information" (p.811). Figure 10.3 shows some of the informal information grounds used by older people in Alston.
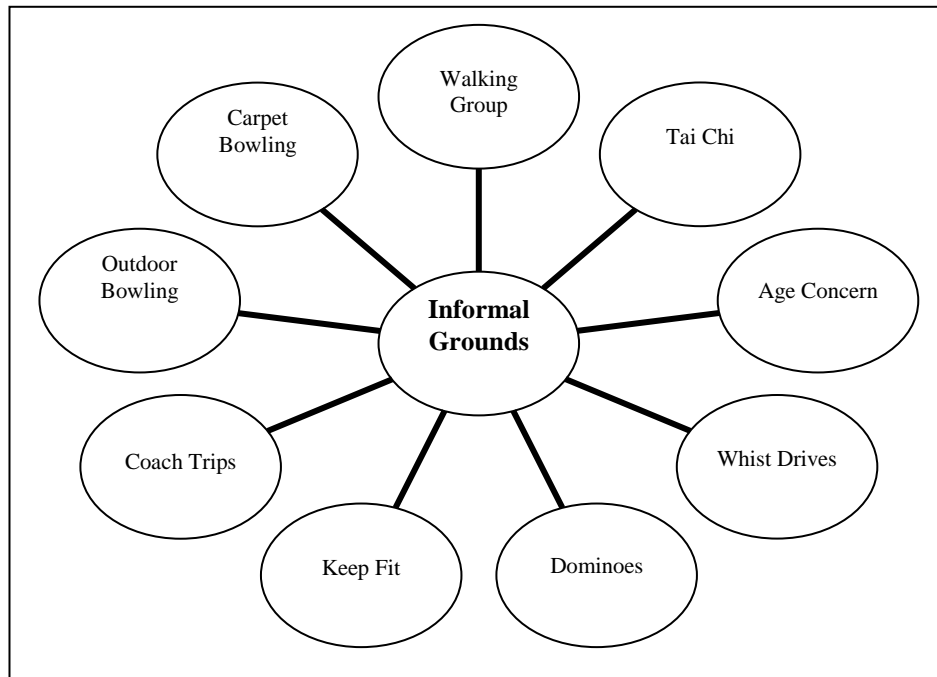
Figure 10.3 Informal information grounds

Several participants talked about visiting the town on a particular day, usually for shopping, and allowing themselves some treats, such as meeting up with friends in the coffee shop and going to the hairdresser to be pampered. Jessie (80s) always met up with friends at the coffee shop. "We have this arrangement that we'll always look into Mrs. Miggins Coffee House … and if there's anybody coming we'll be there … and we'll have a good old chatter". The coffee shop was a comfortable place to go and relax, and the comfort, warmth and pleasure provided the perfect atmosphere for conversation and the purposeful or serendipitous exchange of information. The conversation was usually about the week's experiences, activities, news and gossip. Mavis liked to go into town on a Friday to spoil herself and catch the gossip with her friend Iris.

Well that's me Friday morning treat (hairdressers) … Friday afternoon (visiting different cafes for a gossip) … she'll either come down or she goes to the bank and I meet her and we go into (coffee shop) and we have a coffee and we come back and we call in the charity … that's regular Friday, yes … I mean I might not get it the first day like (the gossip) but I do get it. (laughs)

Edith visited the town from her house in the rural outskirts at least once a week and one of her favourite activities once there was to visit the hairdresser. "I like having my hair washed … I mean I probably don't need it from that point of view any more but I've just got into the habit of going". Whilst she was in the town she would also visit the Information Centre to pick up leaflets, or the library to borrow a book, and maybe would do a little shopping. In terms of information grounds, the coffee shop was a comfortable third ground where groups of individuals met up with people they knew well on a regular basis, discussed things they had in common and caught up with local news. The hairdresser's was a place where anyone could feel comfortable and could hear about the latest news and what was happening in the town.

10.5.1 Healthy lifestyle information grounds

Many of the informal activities identified by the research participants could quite comfortably fall under the heading of healthy lifestyle activities in that they involved physical activities which were often quite strenuous. Some of these activities were undertaken by older people who were over ninety, and in information grounds ranging from the outdoor bowling green and the surrounding countryside to village halls and school buildings. Mention has already been made of Mavis's concern that she should try to keep fit, and her experiences of learning to swim. Other participants had mentioned the importance to them of keeping active, seeing the connections between physical activity and health, keeping healthy in body and mind, avoiding the need for outside help and staying in their own homes as long as possible. People took the attitude that they must do as much as they could, even if they became frailer as they aged.

10.5.2 Walking

The walking group met every Wednesday regardless of the weather but the walks were designed to take the weather and the abilities of the walkers into account. The weather

could be uncomfortable and harsh at times but the sense of achievement, and the interest in the surrounding countryside made up for this. Jane was impressed with the people much older than herself who went out walking with the group on a regular basis.

> Well I mean Mary is 81, Iris is 79 … Mary is walking everywhere, she's wonderful, every Wednesday. The old lady last year, she's just stopped, she was 92, and she went walking every Wednesday. Hilda is fabulous, she walks all the way from Garrigill and she comes to do the flowers too.

Mary described several different long distance walks that she had attended with the group and was particularly pleased that she had managed to get to the top of Cross Fell three years previously, when she was 78.

> Three years ago, I'd never walked up Cross Fell in me life … so we walked from Hartside Café to Cross Fell and had our lunch and walked to Garrigill, about thirteen or fourteen miles. I wouldn't do it again you know now but I was pleased I did it … it was a perfect day; you could see Ullswater in the distance.

Jessie sometimes went when the group did their shorter walks and she thought that it was wonderful because there were such a wide mix of ages and her grandchildren would join in when they were staying with her. People came with their families and several brought their dogs. "It's always well organized but they sometimes end up at a café you know if there's one in the area and they don't rush along … it's good for anybody who likes a bit of gentle exercise …" Members usually had prior knowledge of where they would be walking and were usually given other information about the area they were walking in. They also usually ended up in a café with the opportunity for more relaxed talk over refreshments. These walks were rather more ambitious than those organized by the local NHS Healthy Walking programme I had observed in Stage One. It could be that there are larger numbers of older people who are fit enough to undertake these walks because locals from a farming background have kept physically active all their lives, and others have retired to the area to take advantage of the landscape for walking. I observed from my own personal experience that it was not really possible even to walk from the bottom to the top of the town up the steep main street without being quite fit. Although the walks were not happening in one place or ground, the landscapes in which they took place were conducive to providing

pleasure and interest, although not always comfort. People taking part had the same purpose and interest in sharing information about local historic features or natural history and, as they were usually a mix of locals and incomers, information sharing would be both purposive and incidental.

Summary of Walking Information Grounds:

Type of location: Varied outdoor countryside
Description of activities: Organized walk routes
Frequency: Weekly, weather permitting
Comfort: Varying from comfortable to uncomfortable
Size of group: Varied from 5 to 20 or more
Member type: A mix of men, women, and children
Type of information: Formal and informal local information

10.5.3 Bowling, dominoes and whist

The Outdoor Bowling Club was very popular in Alston and had both male and female members, although it was most popular with men. There were about twenty-five members, and matches were quite competitive, but there was also time for refreshments in the clubhouse after the match, provided by some of the wives of members. After the old outdoor bowls building was set on fire, the new hut had been built by some of the male players all of whom were over seventy and some retired from the building trades. Frank was very proud of their handiwork. "We've just self-built our bowling hut, its worth seeing, well we've self-built that, we're known as the over-70 club … oh it was marvellous to self-build it". The core members were very involved, but the commitment required did not suit everyone, and Barbara, having tried it, had decided that although she enjoyed playing she could not be committed to playing matches several nights a week over the summer.

"I tried it a few times and I wasn't bad at it, it wasn't that that I stopped or didn't take it any further, it was just that I didn't want to be committed, because once it starts in the summer from about May, they practically bowl every evening …".

The summer season for outdoor bowls ran from May to September, and then many of the players turned to the indoor version, known as carpet bowls. Bill and Phyllis had been playing both indoor and outdoor bowls for many years and were some of the first to get

involved when the indoor bowls began in the town. Phyllis picked the teams and Bill had been both vice-chairman and chairman. Bill, although starting to have some difficulty with physical activity, could still go to matches all over East Cumbria and parts of Northumberland and Durham and attend all the social functions. He and his wife were out with the team at least once a week over the winter. Figure 10.4 illustrates a typical week of Bill's bowling activity from his journal.

Friday 11th November
Bill phoned a friend to find out what time he was picking them up to go to the bowls competition at Wylam. Another friend phoned to get Bill's opinion about entering two bowls teams to play at Otterburn.
Saturday 12th November
Bill and Phyllis were given a lift by a friend to the bowls competition at Wylam. During the journey they discussed the order of play. They lost two games and won the last. Later they went to the outdoor bowls dinner for a buffet and presentation of trophies. 'Phyllis got a runners-up prize.'
Sunday 13th November
A friend from across the road came to get his bowls trophy that Bill had collected for him at the dinner last night.
Thursday 17th November
Bill and Phyllis went to play bowls and told the organizer about the competition in Wylam which they lost. 'There was nineteen of us so got all the gossip'

Figure 10.4: Bill's bowling activities

Summary of Bowling Information Grounds:

Types of location: Outdoor bowling green, indoor carpet bowls in school hall
Description of activities: Competitive physical game
Frequency: At least weekly
Comfort: Bowling green location designed for the game, therefore comfortable for players
Size of group: Varied from 5 to 20 or more
Member type: More men than women for outdoor bowls, more mixed indoors, mostly older
Type of information: Information mainly focused on the game

There were many people in the Alston area who took part in whist drives and domino drives. There was a longstanding tradition to raise funds for charity through the games and so there were several teams. The team games proved particularly popular with older people over the long winter months. Iris was the organizer of the domino drives and she said that

plenty of people would come once a month from outlying areas for a game. "The majority come from away … they come a long way to have a game of dominos …" Stanley said that the older men were very keen on playing and had leagues in the pubs. "They have domino matches and so forth down at the pub there, they're very skilful at dominoes but it's easier to play dominoes than it is to play whist. Whist of course, that's an old-fashioned game, it's all from 40, 50 upwards (age) isn't it whist, don't matter where you go". Both the dominoes and the whist drives provided useful ways to raise funds for local causes or groups and they were held in many of the villages in the area. Older people went to the different locations for the games and thoroughly enjoyed meeting up with people they knew on a regular basis. All the teams were very well attended across the whole area and, although most of the focus would have been on the games, there were plenty of opportunities for serendipitous information exchange.

Summary of Dominoes and Whist Information Grounds:

Type of location: Various community halls in different locations
Description of activities: Competitive games with prizes
Frequency: Frequent and irregular
Comfort: Varied but a friendly comfortable atmosphere
Size of group: Usually 15 or more
Member type: Good mix of men and women, usually older
Type of information: Local information and gossip

10.5.4 Exercise

Some of the other physical activities mentioned by participants included Tai Chi in water, swimming, line dancing, circle dancing and keep fit. I attended the Tai Chi in water class as an observer and found it a very interesting experience. The small swimming pool was situated in the grounds of a private house in a village near Alston and hired out to the group for the session. Tai Chi relies on the power of sight rather than sound and involves slow movements that can easily be followed. Several of the older people were encouraged to go to sessions at the community gym in the town where they were charged lower rates than others. The gym was run by Alston Moor Fitness Club and managed by local people, with membership open to anyone living or working on Alston Moor. Janet tried to keep herself fit by attending sessions at the gym. "I go twice a week … and that has helped my blood

pressure I'm sure". Janet said that it was a place where she could get useful information about diet and exercise. As Jane pointed out, it was one of the few places where there was a mix of age groups. "Quite a few of the older people go to the gym, now that's one place where you get all the ages going".

Mary recalled the barn dances held in the seventies and was sad that these events were no longer available. "My husband and I used to go to the Barn Dances you know, we used to travel as far as Hayden Bridge sometimes … everybody was very keen for years and then somehow it just started to fall away". One of the problems for Alston was that they did not have a large community hall for big events like the one in Nenthead some miles away where line dancing sessions were still held. However, the keep fit club had a mix of line dancing and exercise for its small group of members, and circle dancing classes were available at the school sometimes. "There's the Circle Dancing … if you have danced a lot, which I do, you think this is strange … but it's nice and you get some very interesting music". Bowling (2005), in findings from a study of older people's views about quality of life, showed that having good health came high on their list of their priorities because they were aware that their health was important to them if they were to keep themselves involved socially. As Bowling states "Inequalities in health in older age lead to inequalities in functioning, social participation, activity and independence" (p.225). Much of the information people acquire serendipitously about health issues is accessed through contacts with other people, often when they are taking part in physical activities, along with what they see on television, hear on the radio or read in magazines and newspapers. Purposive information seeking about health or illness more commonly takes place through contact with the GP or close friends.

Summary of Exercise Information Grounds:

Types of location: Various-swimming pool, gym, community halls
Description of activities: Physical activity to improve health or for leisure
Frequency: Frequent and irregular
Comfort: Tai Chi comfortable and relaxing, gym satisfying, dancing social and fun
Size of group: Varied
Member type: Tai Chi-older women, gym-mixed gender and age, dancing-mixed
Type of information: Health information, local information and gossip

10.5.5 Coach trips

Most of the organizers of local activity groups also provided coach trips somewhere away from Alston at least once a year and usually more frequently. The trips out were hugely popular with the older people in the town even though rather too many of them occurred at the same time, especially in the summer or near to Christmas. Although the trips attracted mostly older people, there was a mix of different age groups because activity group leaders tended to extend their invitation to others outside their own group. There were also trips to take in theatre or concert performances in the cities. Jane often went on the monthly trips to theatre performances, either in the small community bus, or in a larger coach if the numbers were high. They went to the theatre in Newcastle or Darlington and saw a wide variety of performances from plays to shows to concerts.

The Theatre Group was the first group that Edith tried after her husband died, she thought she would make the effort to go because she had enjoyed going to the theatre with her husband. Peter also went occasionally but he felt that perhaps the cost put some people off going more frequently. Both Edith and Jane said that it could all be rather tiring, however, especially if they were going all the way to Darlington. "We went to Darlington, it was a long trip, it was two hours there, and two hours the show, and two hours back, I felt I was numb, I wasn't too happy" (Edith). The day trips could be tiring and long because they sometimes went for shopping or sightseeing. Stanley had enjoyed the scenery on the way to Darlington and had paid a visit to the football ground once when he and his wife went on the trip. "I personally enjoy the scenic side of the trip, there and back, but I also quite like Darlington". Jessie wished that the driver would just take a more direct route home!

> I find a whole day (trip) is too much for me, it's not that I don't want to go, and I found as well, when they're deciding to go back, the driver says "We'll go the long way back" and I think 'oh no'. We went to Barnard Castle and I really enjoyed it and I walked round and I had to keep sitting down, I can't walk all that far and it was great and coming back and he said "We'll go the long way back" and I thought 'I just want to go home'.

During the data collection period, I was invited by the Age Concern coffee morning leader to attend and observe one of their trips. The trip they were making was to Whitby in North

Yorkshire, a distance of nearly one hundred miles across country, in a large coach from a local company. Later in the summer I travelled with a group of people who wanted to take the boat trip on the Tyne from Newcastle. There were many people on this trip whose original roots were in Newcastle or the Tyne Valley, and who still had a very strong pull to the Tyne. The Observation Notes record that 'The coach driver's wife told me that there had been an influx of Tynesiders to Alston after industries had failed on Tyneside. These people worked in small industries around Alston and Allendale and some people on the trip would have been related to these Alston settlers or have been settlers themselves'. The trips provided many opportunities for informal and formal, serendipitous and purposive information exchange as people were excited about seeing and learning about new places or re-visiting past histories.

Summary of Coach Trip Information Grounds:

Types of location: Various-sometimes quite some distance away
Description of activities: sight seeing, shopping, theatre, tours
Frequency: Quite frequent but irregular
Comfort: Journeys comfortable but sometimes too long
Size of group: Varied between 10 and 50
Member type: Mixed gender – mainly older but some younger
Type of information: A mix of trip specific and local news

10.6 The Age Concern Coffee Morning: a key information ground

Age Concern in Alston coordinates services and activities for older people in the town and provides a formal support and information service through its local office, located behind the Age Concern charity shop, and managed by the parent organization based in Penrith, Age Concern Eden. Age Concern also contributes to the running of the fortnightly coffee morning in Alston, an informal gathering of older people attended by representatives from local provider organizations, both statutory and voluntary. Several of the older women interviewed for this research worked shifts in the shop and found it a good place to catch up with what was going on in town. Jane (65) worked in the shop on a casual basis as she felt that it was a way to get to know people from a variety of different age groups. "I work in the shop, not on a regular basis, just when they need anyone and that's been very good for meeting people … you meet the people who are your own age group more or less because

they're all doing it for the same reason …" The coffee morning is a major hub for the exchange of information both purposeful and serendipitous and a centrally important information ground attended by approximately fifty older people between 9.30 and 11am in the morning on alternate Wednesdays, although they don't all come in at the same time. When I visited, the room was arranged with six tables with varying numbers of sitters at each, and a long table at one end where tea, coffee, cakes, and information in the form of leaflets and handouts were provided. The idea for the coffee morning came from small beginnings and initially was run by Bessie (86) at the top of the town in the Methodist Chapel. At the time of this study it was led by her daughter-in-law and held in the Masonic Hall.

> Age Concern wanted someone in the office, over in the Chapel in those days, so I said to my brother, "I think I'll volunteer" … I sat over there every Wednesday but I didn't meet many people … Mary, she was the head caretaker there, I said to her one day "Why don't we have a carol service that would get more people in and mince pies". It was very worthwhile, so after that we just carried on with outings and parties, it was very well attended and it became very popular, they used to call it (Bessie's) coffee morning. (Bessie)

The following extract from the observation notes I made whilst attending one of these coffee morning sessions illustrates well the wide variety of information exchanged amongst participants whilst they sat at their regular tables over coffee and cakes or moved from group to group.

> The coffee morning was buzzing this morning and the conversation was animated. There was a lot to discuss, as arrangements were being made for various different activities starting up in the autumn. Also people were catching up with each other about holidays and trips they had been on. Someone from the County Council was there to ask people to bring their electric blankets to the hall or Age Concern shop on a certain day for Trading Standards to take away, to check for safety and replace those that were faulty. A representative of Eden Carers was there to talk to people about the organization, and to hand out leaflets. Everyone sang Happy Birthday to the Day Centre leader from the hospital. I sat at four different tables today and seemed to get different information from each one.
> **Table One**: This is a full to overflowing table of 'locals'. I spoke to Bill and asked him why he thought so many people sat at this table; he said that it was all the people who had known each other for years. He told me how he visited

people in Alston and the surrounding areas to check the community alarms that they have installed, and he saw many people who were isolated in their own homes.

Table Two: Mavis and Iris came in and I had a chat to Mavis about how she was keeping generally, and she said she was 'in fine fettle'. Iris gave me some information about activities that were happening now, including dominoes, whist, line dancing at Nenthead and swimming at Penrith. She also asked if I could help her to find a Tai Chi teacher to replace the one they had who was leaving, as there was not another one in Alston. I said I would try to help as I had seen mention of a couple in the paper. Iris had a fall recently and she passed out; she was worried about her health again and keen to start working on her fitness to improve it.

Table Three: Frank told me that the bowls season had finished and the carpet bowls started. The AGM for bowls is in November.

Table Four: I spoke to Edna about the WI meetings and I will be taking a poster and handouts to the next meeting. She was telling me about all the church choirs practicing together for a performance before Christmas. The Coffee Morning leader told me about a shopping trip to Darlington that will take place at the end of November/beginning December.

The older people who attended the coffee morning were not generally going there specifically to get information, but as somewhere where there would be people they knew who they could have a gossip with, and find out what was going on in the town. Bill and Phyllis regularly went to the coffee morning. They thought that it was important for them to attend in order to find out what was going on locally and to get information that was useful to them as older people. In his interview, Bill was keen to describe the value of these sessions to older people. He said that he had been going there for five years, since he retired, and recognized its importance.

> The coffee morning is very important in Alston … it's been a great thing for us. I mean when we were farming, we didn't know much about the coffee morning, it was a Friday was shopping day and that was it, but since we've come here we've got to know how the community lives and what they do and how they cope with it, you know … its somewhere for those people to go to get to know something …

Bill listed the kinds of organizations that sent representatives with information to the coffee morning, including social services, health visitors, NHS services, the police and charities working to support older people. He said that most people would have been unaware that they should have their electric blankets checked for safety if they had not attended or

spoken to someone from the Council who had been at that particular coffee morning. He knew that anyone who was there would have passed the information on to others.

> Well who would have known then to change the electric blankets if they weren't, if they hadn't have come to the coffee morning to tell people … they'll go home and say "If you want an electric blanket testing you can take it to the Age Concern shop".

There had also been visits from the organization for which Bill volunteered, Eden Community Alarms, and from a fire officer from the Fire Service offering free smoke alarms. Bill recognized that people tended to sit at particular tables on a regular basis and that a large group of longstanding locals, including himself, tended to sit regularly at the same table. He would have preferred more mixing of groups and more men to be attending either on their own or with their wives. He observed that there were a lot of widows there. "I don't think they'll be so many men, is there, more women. We were sitting there and what did you say Phyllis? 'There's seventeen widows sitting here'". The following extract, taken from Bill's journal, shows how he had exchanged information at one of the coffee mornings.

- Spoke to a friend who had been very ill who said that she had been put onto different pills as the side effects from the others had made her ill.
- Arranged to pick up Phyllis' cousin to take her to the funeral of another cousin.
- Invited to go to a Christmas 'Turkey and Tinsel' event in another village where they have a competition to play bowls, darts and dominoes.
- Spoke to another friend and handed in a quiz sheet

Some people were there to provide official information and some to pass on local information either verbally or in the form of printed handouts. Others were there to sell quiz sheets in aid of local groups or charities and others to catch up with the latest news from their friends. There were groups of close friends (strong ties) and groups of casual friends (weak ties) and there were weak ties moving from group to group passing around local information. As I noted in my research diary "The coffee morning was buzzing this morning and the conversation was animated".

Summary of Age Concern Coffee Morning Information Ground:

Type of location: Community Hall
Description of activities: Informal discussion
Frequency: Fortnightly
Comfort: Comfortable
Size of group: Varied between 10 and 50
Member type: Mixed gender – mainly older but some younger visitors
Type of information: A mix of formal and informal, interpersonal and print

10.7 Summary

Formal information grounds
- Formal activities were more strongly linked with purposive information seeking at groups such as the History Society or meetings about hospital closure.
- Information seeking or encountering also occurred indirectly in the context of other formal gatherings such as activities connected with the church or with a cultural dimension such as theatre visits or music performances.
- Formal groups often had an informal element, such as a coffee break, and this was when most of the information was exchanged.
- The church-related choirs provided a popular activity for several of the research participants, their concerts were well attended and these and other events provided many opportunities for information exchange.
- Information exchanged was mainly formal and purposive with some informal serendipitous encountering.

Informal information grounds
- Some of the older women met regularly every week in a coffee shop, after they had done their shopping or been to the hairdressers, to catch up with the week's news.
- Most of the participants were involved in some kind of physical activity.
- The walking group was popular as there was a mix of age groups and usually a visit to a café at the end of the walk.
- Both outdoor and indoor bowls were very popular, particularly with the men, as it allowed them to get together for a chat during the breaks and journeys to matches.
- The Gym was another information ground where the age groups mixed and older people could get information about exercise, diet and health issues.
- Both men and women enjoyed going to the dominoes matches and whist drives to raise money and to meet up with people in other villages.
- The trips to the theatres gave participants the chance to enjoy the cultural opportunities of the cities and to socialize on the coach and
- Trips to other locations provided people with opportunities to learn about new places or re-visit past histories.
- Generally, informal activities provided the opportunity for informal and formal, serendipitous and purposive information exchange.

The Age Concern Coffee Morning

- Most people went for coffee, scones and cake and a good social chat rather than for the specific purpose of seeking information.
- Because they felt comfortable and relaxed at the coffee morning, there was more opportunity for information to flow.
- The size of groups that sat around each table (from 2 to 10) allowed for the most relaxed and efficient exchange of information.
- Because the groups sitting at each table were well know to each other, and sometimes knew each other's information requirements, they provided each other with the most appropriate information, but could also have the privacy to impart personal information if they wanted to.
- The regular fortnightly meetings in the same location allowed participants to plan to be there on a fairly regular basis and keep up with local information
- Most of the people who attended knew each other well enough to strike up a conversation, and so weak ties could move from table to table and pass on information they knew to be of interest to individuals or groups.

The findings show that formal activities and grounds were more strongly linked with purposive information seeking about specific topics, and informal activities and grounds provided the opportunity for older people to share more general and local information both purposively and serendipitously. The coffee morning in particular provided a vehicle for purposive information seeking, because people knew that certain information providers would be there, and for incidental information encountering, because people met up with close friends (strong ties) and more casual contacts (weak ties) and could pick up printed information. In Chapter 11 the key findings of this study are discussed in relation to the research objectives and to the four global thematic areas of 'Lifestyle', 'People', 'Information' and 'Place'.

Chapter 11: Key Findings

11.1 Introduction

The aim of this study has been 'to explore the information worlds of older people living in rural East Cumbria in order to understand how they share information through their social networks and social activities'. The findings were evidenced from multiple accounts provided by focus group and interview participants and corroborated through observation of individuals in their social activities and information grounds. A picture of older people in a remote rural community, and their social networks, information behaviour and information grounds has emerged from Stages One and Two of the study showing some of the variety and complexity of the social information relationships that existed.

Findings described in Chapters 5 and 7 to 10, are discussed in response to Objectives 2 and 3 in this chapter and nine key findings have been identified. The three sensitizing concepts, 'active ageing', 'information', and 'social networks' informed the data collection described in Chapters 5 and 6, and led to the construction of a thematic network during data analysis (Chapter 6, Figure 6.5). Themes and sub-themes arising from the data provided the structure of the description of findings under four global theme headings: 'Lifestyle', 'People', 'Information' and 'Place'. The key findings of the study are discussed in this chapter in Sections 11.2 to 11.6 with reference to Chapters 5 for Stage One and Chapters 7 to 10 for Stage Two. They are arranged under the four global headings; Lifestyle, People, Information and Place. A summary of the findings from Stage One of the data collection are presented in Section 11.2, those on the Lifestyle context in Section 11.3, key findings on the People theme are covered in Section 11.4, the Information theme in Section 11.5, and the Place theme in Section 11.6. The chapter is summarised in Section 11.7

11.2 Stage One

The findings from Stage One of the study were summarised in Chapter 5, Section 6 and in Figure 5.4 (Figure 11.1). Lifestyle information issues of concern to older people emerging from Stage One of the data collection were those of isolation, transport, safety, health, finance and access to services. Participants identified their main information resources which included family, friends and neighbours, service and information providers, printed information, voluntary organisations, the media and, for some, Internet resources. The information gaps identified related to lack of co-ordination of service information, gaps in local information, complex or inaccurate information and lack of access to the Internet. It became clear that face-to-face communication within people networks and in the places where people gathered for social activity were particularly important for the exchange of information, advice and support.
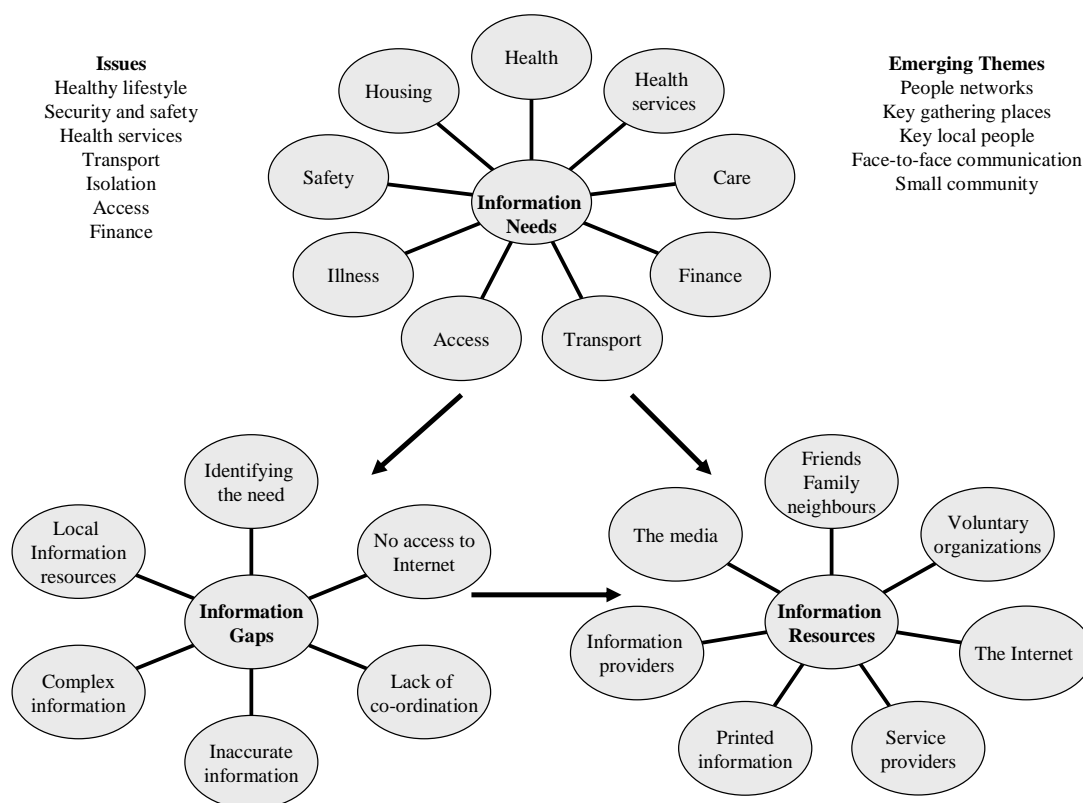
Figure 11.1: Stage One findings

11.3 Stages One and Two: Lifestyle

There were key underpinning themes emerging from the analyses in Stages One and Two of the data collection (identified in Chapters 5 and 6) that were related to the global theme of Lifestyle, and the sub-themes location, community, work, safety and access, as described in Chapter 7. These themes do not contribute directly to the findings about social networks, information behaviour and information grounds but they provide a rich picture of the underpinning structure of the location and lifestyle in which the older people in this community lived out their daily lives, as well as an introduction to some of the older people who were participants in the research. The thematic areas represented internal and external structural influences impacting on the day-to-day lives of the older people and were included in a description of the lifestyle context, illustrated with quotes taken from individual interviews. Age Concern has recognized the importance of the place where people live to the construction of their lifestyle realities.

> Place – in the sense of the locality in which people live – assumes enormous importance in the lives of older people wherever they live … People who have spent most of their lives in the same area have a strong sense of attachment to home and place that reflects their memories, knowledge and history. (Age Concern, 2004b, p.12)

The findings suggested that older people were very committed to their community, particularly if they were longstanding locals. Those who had been in the farming industry usually wanted to stay in the area but to move into the town from their more remote farms when they finally retired. People who had moved into the area from further away were appreciative of the location because their move had usually been a conscious choice. Although the climate was hard and it was more difficult to access shops and services in this remote location, there appeared to be a real sense of community and attachment that mirrors the statement from a profile of older rural residents by Age Concern shown above. Although there were some divisions and differences between the local and incomer social and information cultures, the local community appeared to be generally very friendly and welcoming to incomers (these were people who were generally considered to be those who were not born in the area and particularly those who had retired there).

Local older people had needed to be flexible and hard working in order to earn an income in this largely agricultural economy, and this had meant supporting each other in difficult times, taking on extra part-time work to boost incomes. This strong sense of duty and commitment to the community was evident in statements from those interviewed who were influenced by a long family history in the locality, by a spiritual dimension, or by the small, rural community culture. The sense of loyalty led to a strong response to any threats of loss of services and to the use and support of local transport and local shops, although some participants were regularly travelling to supermarkets and shops in the larger towns with friends or family. Baker and Speakman (2006) drew on data from the Age Concern LifeForce Survey (ACRS, 2005) and discussed the older consumer and their access to services. They stated that a large proportion of older people used local shops on a regular basis, particularly those who did not have access to a car.

> The mobility of modern rural living and the high level of car ownership mean that it is not surprising that, like the rest of the population, most older rural consumers have fairly peripatetic consumption patterns. However, a significant share of household spending is undertaken with local retailers, with older people, especially the retired, having a much higher propensity to shop locally than younger people. (Baker & Speakman, 2006, p.128)

These general findings about lifestyle are true of many situations where older people live in close communities. I would suggest that a difference in this more remote rural community was shown in the high levels of support and sharing of information evidenced as occurring between older people about the means of access to facilities and services, local news and activities.

11.4 Stage Two: People

The description of the findings of Stage Two of the research relating to the global theme of People can be found in Chapter 8 and the key findings are illustrated in Figure 11.2 and discussed in this section.
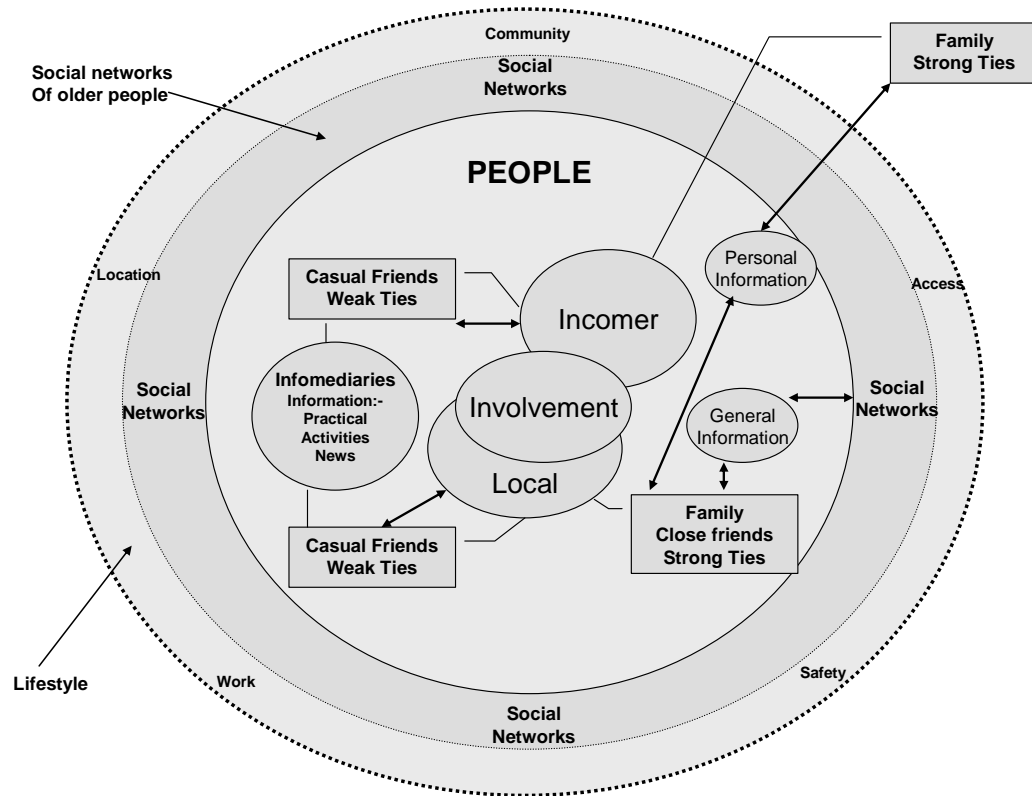
Figure 11.2: People – key findings

Examples of family and friendship links featured strongly in quotes from participants and these links appeared to provide an inclusive approach to support and information exchange within older peoples' social networks. However, there were some differences apparent in how the longstanding local older participants approached information access and exchange to that of incomers who did not have the same kind of local extended networks. Local older people, both men and women, appeared to rely more on close family and local friends (strong ties) for their support and information, whereas those who had moved to the locality more recently identified that it was harder to build up close relationships locally and most did not have family living close at hand. Those who were not socially involved appeared more likely to rely on more casual contacts (weak ties) to keep them informed about local

news and activities. The amount of social involvement and the balance of family and friends as strong ties varied strikingly between case study participants. As an example, Edith, an incomer to the area, was very close to her family but mainly through telephone contact. She was not very socially involved locally and did not identify many friends. In contrast, Mavis, a local, had a wide social network of friends, was very socially active and had family living nearby. In terms of information exchange, Edith accessed much of her information by means other than face-to-face, such as by telephone, in print, and through the broadcast media. In contrast, Mavis accessed most of her information by talking to friends and family and didn't identify with the term 'information' as, for her the process of finding out was about interpersonal communication and talking to friends and family. These differences are important because, as Wenger and Tucker (2002) have shown, when older people in rural communities have strong and longstanding social and family networks they view themselves as being healthier and happier. Wenger and Tucker (2002) and Reed et al. (2003) also suggest that wellbeing is increased when older people are involved in voluntary groups and have a wider social network of friends and family for support.

Finding One:

> It is suggested that levels of social involvement of older people in a close rural community may be linked to whether an older person is local or has moved into the area and is considered to be an incomer, whilst recognizing that each individual's circumstances are different and other factors such as gender and marital status may come into play. Levels of involvement in social networks can also affect access to information.

Many different social networks were apparent in this rural community of older people, interlinking and multi-layered, often consisting of people coming together for specific purposes, and belonging to few, several or many networks and groups. Haythornthwaite (1996) stresses the importance of recognizing that membership of networks is multi-layered, and that people do not belong to just one social network, but their networks are based on types of relationships and the roles they play in different contexts (p.325). The strength of tie between the individual and the members of their social network shows "overall connectedness of actors in an environment and the likelihood that information will flow from one actor to another" (Haythornthwaite, 1996, p.327). Chatman (1999), in her

Theory of Life in the Round' (See Chapter 3.4), suggested that people limited their behaviour (including information behaviour) to their own social networks and only crossed the boundaries of their small worlds if there was an expectation that the information outside their world (or network) would be of use to them. This links with Granovetter's (1973, 1982) theory suggesting that 'strong ties' (family and close friends) support each other within their social networks and once strong ties have obtained information, they are more likely to share it with their own network before acting upon it themselves. Information about people and their varying levels of involvement in social activity have important implications for potential access to and take-up of information resources because they suggest that serendipitous 'bumping' into information may happen rarely in some cases but may be more likely in others based on levels of involvement. However, although some of the general information exchanged between strong ties may be useful or interesting to other people, it may not include the sort of new information that is provided by weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, Pettigrew, 2000).

Finding Two:

> The social network interviews showed that close family and friends (strong ties) provided support, advice and information. These strong ties provided personal information, support and advice that might not be shared outside the network. However, some information exchanged between these strong ties was more general, and of interest or use to others. This suggests that, because of informal opportunities to serendipitously 'bump into' information, much of this general information was likely to become available more widely.

Four of the five case study participants, in their responses to the social network interview, listed at least one of two contacts who were key informants about local activities and news, and who were usually referred to as casual contacts, and therefore could be considered to be weak ties. In the case of Mavis, one of these informants was her close friend, and a strong tie for her, but this friend performed the same information function for Mavis as she did for others, in addition to being her close friend socially. The other casual contact fulfilling this role was named by three of the five case study participants but had not been interviewed for this study as she was in a slightly younger age group. Analysis of the data indicated, and observation confirmed, that weak ties named by more than one participant had provided

information about social activities and were involved in actively canvassing support for a wide range of social functions in the town such as church and group activities. These infomediaries could be seen as equivalent to Granovetter's (1973) weak ties who act effectively as communicators between social networks. Haythornthwaite (1996), having reviewed the literature on the significance of tie strength, concluded that a smaller number of people are reached with information through social networks that consist of the strongest ties, but more information is generated through weaker ties (p.1369). Johnson (2004) found that when people want new information they will seek out others they do not know so well but who they know have better information sources. I was aware from my observations that there were other casual contacts playing similar roles but who had not been named by interview participants. Granovetter (1973, 1982) suggested that weak ties were more likely to build bridges to facilitate information flow through social networks because of their interaction with different groups of individuals. Abrahamson (2007), in a review of the research literature on people he referred to as 'lay information mediaries' (or gatekeepers), found that these people passed on information both within and between social networks and sought information on behalf of friends and family "without necessarily being asked to do so" (p.2). The mediation role is also evident in the work of Williamson (1998), Pettigrew (1999) and Foster and Ford (2003).

Finding Three:

> It was evident that there were some members of the local community, some older people, some younger, some with specific roles in community organizations and groups, who were weak links or casual contacts but who played vital roles in transmitting information of use to older people that was not generally available to them through their close friends and family (strong ties). These weak ties sometimes had better access to information sources and an awareness of the need to pass information on to others.

11.5 Stage Two: Information

The description of the findings of Stage Two of the research relating to the global theme of Information can be found in Chapter 9 and the key findings are illustrated in Figure 11.3 and discussed in this section.
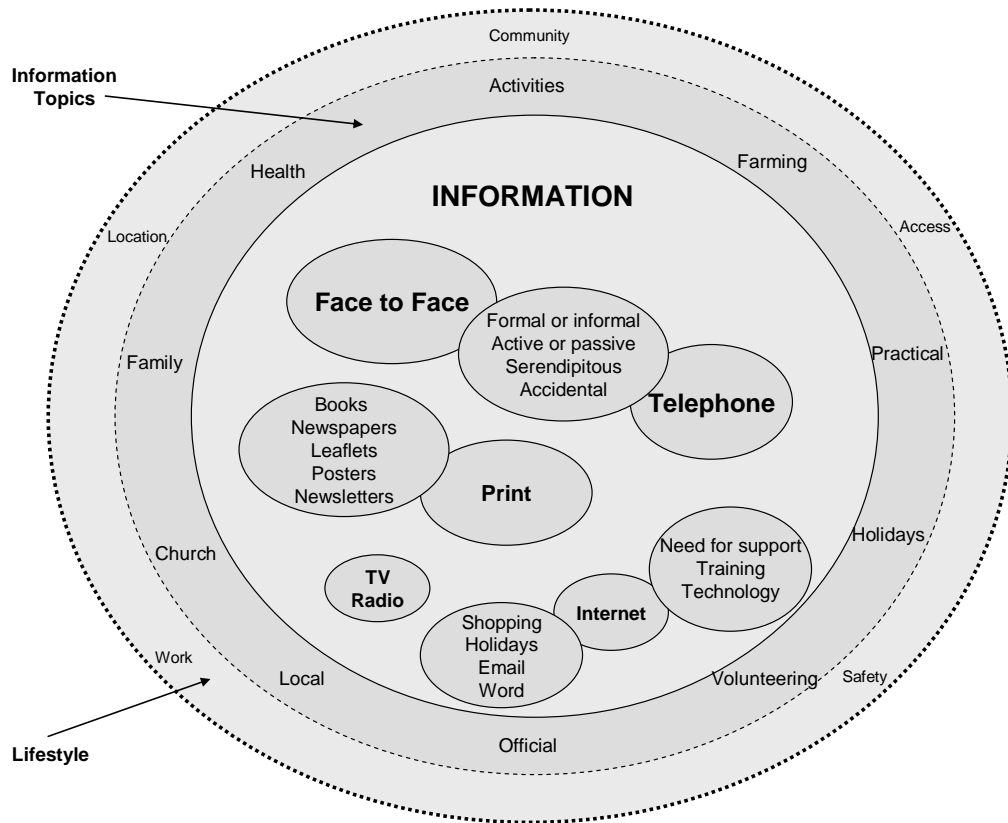
Figure 11.3: Information – key findings

Participants exchanged a wide range of information in their interpersonal interactions, although most of this related to everyday life activities in the locality, with some official information also exchanged. The difficulties that some participants had in communicating with providers about policy and services are well illustrated in Chapter 7.6. The examples show the importance to older people of being informed, and being enabled to inform, in appropriate ways. Writing about health communication, Ginman et al. (2003) suggested that information providers and recipients both have a part to play and information from service providers must be "comprehensible, meaningful and manageable for all members in the community …" (pg. 311). Participants identified that they needed information on a

broad range of topics including farming, health, holidays and the church, and some of the participants used this information in their volunteering roles. Wicks' (2001, 2004) research with older adults showed that interpersonal sources were used for information about participation in local clubs and organizations, and Williamson (1998) demonstrated that older people want information about health and finance issues, leisure and recreation activities and about volunteering and helping others. She thought that this reflected the fact that "many of the older people … were making a very significant contribution to the community through voluntary and church organizations" (p.30). The identification of the concept of 'information encountering' by Erdelez (1999) coincided with other emerging ideas about incidental, serendipitous and spontaneous information behaviour from research conducted by Williamson (1997, 1998), Pettigrew (1999, 2000), Bates (2002) and Foster and Ford (2003). Williamson (1998) has distinguished between 'incidental' or accidental information acquisition and 'purposeful' information seeking. She has suggested that coming across useful information without purposefully seeking it is the most common means by which everyday life information is accessed interpersonally agreeing with Erdelez (1999) that it happens through "bumping into the environment" (p.26).

Finding Four:

> Participants exchanged a wide range of information that was closely related to their everyday lives, both formal and informal, on a broad range of topics. The process of accessing or encountering information can be either active (purposive) or passive and, if passive, may mean that information is accessed serendipitously or accidentally.

Most of the participants preferred to exchange everyday life information with family and friends either face-to-face or by telephone, and information was exchanged reciprocally. Access to a telephone was considered vital as a means of enabling participants to keep in touch with family, whether they lived nearby or lived further away, and was used specifically to pass on information or just to have a 'chat'. Participants also used printed information extensively, especially in connection with face-to-face information exchange within their social activities. The information exchanged was in the form of books, newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters, local newsletters, quiz sheets and timetables. Quinn et al. (2003) have found that older people want diverse information resources to be

available to them when they need them. Williamson (1998) identified that older people in her study mostly used family members as sources, followed by newspapers, friends, television, printed information and the radio (p.31) and Wicks (2001) found that the small sample of retired professional older adults he interviewed used other professionals, family members and friends as priority information sources (p.156).

Finding Five:

> Most of information was exchanged by participants face to face or by telephone and was reciprocal. Sometimes interpersonal information was backed up with printed information in the form of newsletters, leaflets and newspapers, from radio and television, and occasionally via information from the Internet.

Very few participants, four out of sixteen interviewees, used the free computers provided by the Cybermoor Project (see Chapter 9.5) and some had given up using them because of the lack of technical and training support. Those participants who were confident about computers used them primarily for practical reasons, such as shopping online for food and presents, planning holidays, emailing and word processing. A local IT trainer who had run classes for older people in IT skills said that the classes had developed into social occasions because people were enjoying working together. This is significant because it emphasizes the importance of identifying a location where older people can go to share facilities and learn together within their existing social activity networks. Selwyn's (2004) research with adult users and non-users of ICTs found that those older people used computers for specific purposes such as word processing or emailing, and asked members of their family for help if they needed it. However, his most interesting finding was that many of the older adults held an ambivalent attitude towards the technologies; they could recognize the potential usefulness on a 'macro' level "whilst at the same time experiencing a fairly limited utility and usefulness of the same technologies on a 'micro' everyday life perspective" (p.381).

Finding Six:

> The majority of participants did not identify Internet-based information as of high importance in their daily lives, and only a quarter of interviewees used a computer on a regular basis. However, the two major reasons preventing more use appeared to be linked strongly to lack of technical support and lack of appropriate opportunities for practice and training.

11.6 Stage Two: Place

The description of the findings in Stage Two of the research relating to the global theme of Place can be found in Chapter 10 and key findings are illustrated in Figure 11.4 and discussed in this section.
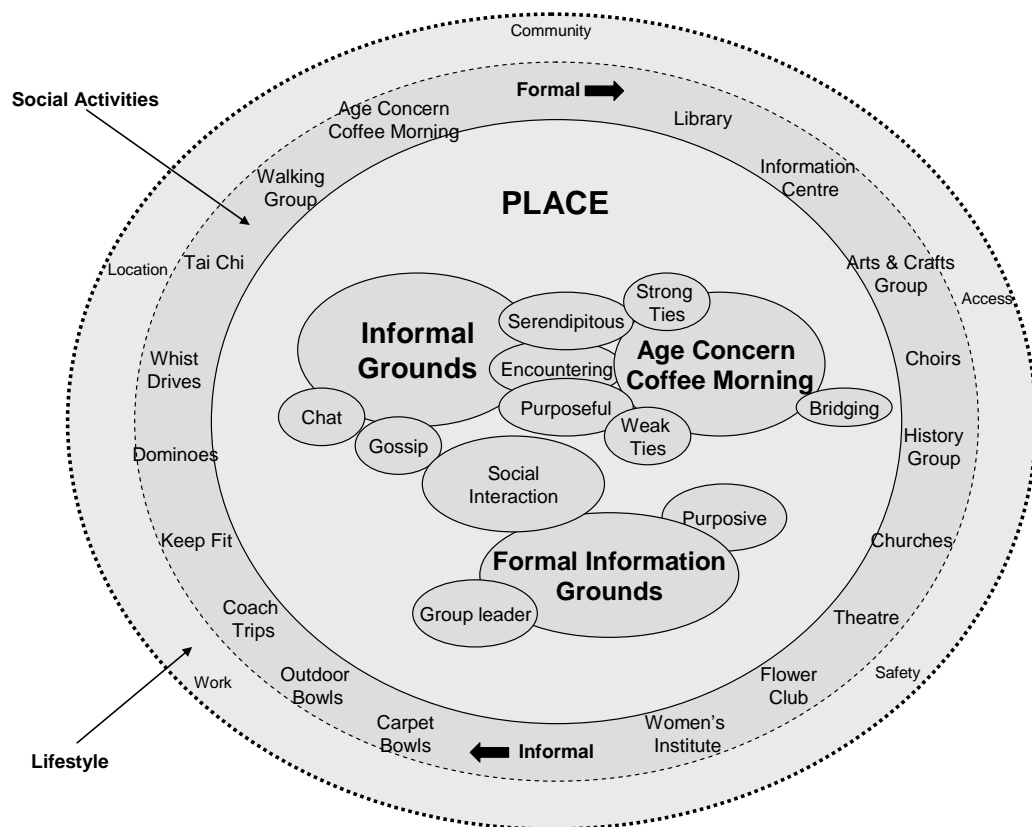
Figure 11.4: Place – key findings

Lack of gender and age mixing in social activities was an issue that was not explored as part of this study but raised by some of the participants and discussed in Chapter 10.2. Participants' comments about gender and age issues mirror recent social research about older people and their social interaction. Fairhurst (2003) suggested that there is a danger that older people may find themselves in an 'age ghetto' where it is more difficult for them to interact with younger people in a meaningful way if they live with other older people and are only oriented towards their own activities (p.41). Arber et al. (2003) found that older men did not tend to join clubs specifically organized for older people, such as a coffee morning, as they saw these as passive pursuits attended mainly by older women. They did,

however, belong to other organizations, such as sports clubs or voluntary groups. In this study, the outdoor bowling, and the domino and whist drives, gave older men the opportunity to get together socially and exchange information during the breaks and during their journeys to matches in other villages.

Activities in formal information grounds, such as those connected with the church, or the WI, were more strongly linked with purposive information seeking but information was also exchanged informally during tea and coffee breaks. Information was also provided at formal meetings attended by participants, such as the campaign meetings against hospital closure. The information available in formal group activities was mainly channelled through a group leader. In more informal information grounds, such as the coffee morning or the walking group, people were more likely to access information both purposefully and serendipitously from a number of sources. Some participants met up informally at the coffee shops in the town to have a chat or a gossip and catch up with local news. Informal social group activities for older people provided numerous opportunities for them to exchange information serendipitously through social interaction in small, relaxed groups without necessarily being aware that exchange was taking place. People were more able to share information when they could relax together, and when the purpose of the interaction was for some other reason than information gathering. It has been suggested by Pettigrew (1999) and Fisher and Naumer (2005) that people create information grounds when they come together socially. Pettigrew (1999) has described how information is socially constructed within these community settings leading to an atmosphere "that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information" (p.811).

Finding Seven:

> It is suggested that, in addition to the qualities of information grounds themselves, the activities and the people taking part strongly influenced the information exchange taking place. Activities in formal information grounds mostly involved purposive information seeking. Activities in informal grounds often involved serendipitous information encountering, and information exchange was not usually the main reason for the activity. Since participants were primarily interested in exchanging information informally face to face, informal grounds were the most successful.

The social construction of an information resource is influenced by the type of information ground in which social actors perform. The Age Concern Coffee morning provided all the elements that were conducive to information seeking and encountering through formal, semi-formal and informal information provision and exchange. Information was provided by invited experts, verbally and in printed format, key local people and group leaders, moving from table to table informally, and the relaxed chat amongst people who knew each other well, and were aware of each other's interests. Those who attended were free to seek, take or reject the information available according to their own particular needs. Weak ties were observed to be key social information contacts performing a bridging function for the purpose of organizing activities, or moving information between different social groups. As Pettigrew states, "Bridgingness … is the degree to which a network member connects the focal person with other people who are not members of the network" (Pettigrew, 2000, p.50). These people distributed information, talking to older people on an individual and group basis. They represented a particular social type playing an important role in information grounds to provide information and coordinate activities. Fisher (2007) has suggested that social types play particular roles in the "information food chain" and can "enable unique access to everyday information because they represent a weak tie or provide support and legitimacy as a strong tie in social networking terms" (p.7). As Fisher et al. (2007) point out "the social nature of information exchange transcends the sense of satisfaction engendered by the fulfilment of an information need" (p.6). The reason that people go to an information ground "does not primarily involve information sharing … activities are important for their abilities to bring people together in a social setting" (p.8).

Finding Eight:

The coffee morning stood out as a key informal information ground for a wide spectrum of older people from different social backgrounds coming together for a social purpose that enabled very effective information exchange which took place over a relatively short space of time. This information ground allowed for both purposive information seeking, because people knew that certain information providers would be there, and incidental information encountering, because people met up with close friends (strong ties) and more casual contacts (weak ties).

11.7 Summary

The key findings outlined in this chapter suggest that active older people in this rural community were receiving much of their personal information and support from close friends and family who were strong ties. General information about activities, services and other interests was accessed through friends and family but also through other formal and informal sources. Some weak ties provided information within their own social networks, and in key information grounds where information flow was intensified amongst and between social network groups. Formal and informal social group activities for older people provided numerous opportunities for them to exchange information through social interaction both in their small groups and individually. They were more able to share information when they could relax together in their social groups and information grounds, and often where the purpose of the interaction was for some reason other than information exchange. The Age Concern Coffee morning in particular provided an example of an information ground where elements conducive to purposive information seeking, in addition to serendipitous information encountering through formal and informal information sources, were seen to be present.

In Chapter 12, I reflect on influential information theories and the methodological approach of the study in response to Objectives 1 and 2, consider the limiting factors, and outline the implications of the research and my recommendations for further action in response to Objective 4. The outcomes of the research are illustrated through a 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting' in Chapter 12.5.

214

Chapter 12: Conclusions

12.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the research outcomes as they relate to the four study objectives:

1. Identify existing theories and models in the fields of information, ageing and sociology in which to embed the research.
2. Explore the activity of people over sixty-five and their information behaviour within their social networks and social activities in a rural community.
3. Identify the particular information issues emerging from the research that effect older people living in rural areas.
4. Assess the potential of the results for the development of new knowledge in this field and feed back to local information providers.

Firstly I show how Objective 1 was achieved through the philosophical and theoretical approach to the research design, with reference to the underpinning philosophies and theories, covered in Chapters 2 and 3 and reviewed here in Section 12.2. This is followed by a review in Section 12.3 of how Objective 2 was achieved through the implementation of the methodological framework in the field as covered in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The limitations of the research are discussed in Section 12.4. The achievement of Objective 3 is shown in the findings in Chapters 7 to 10 and 11, and in the contribution to knowledge illustrated in the 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting' in Section 12.5. The achievement of Objective 4 is shown through the implications of the study for older people in Section 12.6, recommendations for service providers in 12.7 and for further research in Section 12.8. Final conclusions are reached in Section 12.9.

12.2 Philosophy and theory

The research background, and the philosophy, theories and models that informed and provided the basis for the study, were explored in Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis. According to Williams and May (1996), "philosophical assumptions are the explicit, or implicit, starting point of research" (p.135). Social constructionism and critical realism (see Chapter 3.2) provided the important underpinning philosophy. Social constructionism, based on analyzing a society in terms of the subjective realities of its individual members (Berger

and Luckman, 1967), was of particular relevance. Critical realism (Bhaskar 2001) was appropriate as a joint underpinning philosophy because of its fit with social constructionism and emphasis on the need to take into account structural, social, and individual "levels of information creation, seeking, use and processing" (Wikgren, 2004, p.11).

I applied the principles of social constructionism and critical realism to the study in the following ways:

- I recognized the importance of the interaction of individuals within their social networks and groups, the contexts in which this took place, and the different requirements and perspectives of those individuals in relation to the existing structures.

- The study was based in a rural community of older people who were involved in various social groupings and social activities. The focus was therefore on how these older people co-constructed their information realities within their social groupings, social activities and social contexts.

- I was successful in explaining and interpreting the data and describing "the conditions or the context for the production of meaningful experiences", taking into account "that knowledge is communicatively constructed" (Wikgren, 2004, p.14).

Key theories guided the development of my methodological framework and the choice of research methods considered appropriate for the collection of data from participants in the following ways:

- In the field of social gerontology (see Chapter 2.3), I found that Continuity Theory (Atchley, 1977), Activity Theory, the Theory of Successful Ageing (Havighurst, 1961, 1963), and the Theory of Life Span Development (Baltes and Baltes, 1990) provided support to the emphasis I placed on older people who were involved to different degrees in the social activity of the community. The theories propose that an individual older person is better able to support their own wellbeing throughout the ageing process by accessing cultural resources and by being involved in social activities and networks. I identified how this worked for older people in this community in terms of information behaviour.

- I found that Social Network Theory (Chapter 2.5, Chapter 3.3), although it is principally applied in research through a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis, was also appropriate to this qualitative study. I was influenced by its application in previous ethnographic information research, such as Chatman's research with older women (1991, 1992), and research into information grounds conducted by Pettigrew (1999, 2000) with elderly people in a chiropody clinic. I implemented the theory through the use of a structured interview part way through the data collection in Stage Two after I had considered its potential usefulness for recording the social and information roles of members of participants' social networks.

- Granovetter's Theory of the Strength of Weak Ties (1973) was important in interpreting the social network interview results from this study because it discusses the respective roles of strong and weak ties within personal social networks and, in particular, the importance of strong ties in providing supporting and informing roles within social networks and the role of weak ties in performing bridging information functions between individuals, social networks and social groups.

Information behaviour theories were very relevant to this study (see Chapter 2.6, 2.7, Chapter 3.4) and those that have impacted directly on the conceptual and methodological frameworks of the study are outlined here. There has been a preference in information behaviour research for an inductive approach to the development of conceptual frameworks or models in addition to the generation of theories of information. It is considered that information researchers can explore new areas of information behaviour based on these frameworks or expand on or develop existing models (Chatman, 1996). Some of the information theories and models that were particularly applicable are presented here:

- Wilson developed a framework integrating the results of a number of theories from different fields of research and in 1996 created his 'general model of information-seeking behaviour' (1999, p.257). Wilson's model was very much an information needs/seeking/processing model, but at the same time it took into account intervening variables such as psychology, demography, roles, environment and source characteristics.

- Williamson (1997, 1998) was focused on the information use of older people in urban and rural areas in a community context and she produced a model of information seeking and use that she then developed further into her 'Ecological Theory of Human Information Behavior' (1997, 1998, 2005). Her model differs from previous models in that it focuses on everyday life information seeking and acquisition by older people and recognises that physical environment, personal characteristics and personal networks are highly influential. It is represented by an expanding series of circles showing the variables included within an everyday life context.

- Pettigrew's Information Grounds framework (1999), also presented within circles, is "a construct that results from the dynamic interaction of four groups of contextual factors" (p.813) that represent the physical environment, the activity taking place there, the information provider and the information user.

- More recently, Abrahamson (2007) created a conceptual information model detailing the participants, stages, contexts and characteristics of participants' behaviour, and incorporating the four contextual factors (cognitive, affective, physical, and social) that impacted on the information process.

In following the lead of these and other researchers, and in order to take into account contextual and other factors, I observed participants in their different social activities and in different locations, places, or grounds as identified by Pettigrew (later Fisher) in her Information Grounds Framework (Pettigrew, 1999; 2000). I have responded to the foregoing models and frameworks and to Wilson's (1999) definition of models applied to information behaviour as "statements, often in the form of diagrams that attempt to describe an information-seeking activity, the causes and consequences of that activity, or the relationships among stages in information-seeking behaviour" (p.250). As a result of my own research for this study, and influenced by these other information theories and models, I have developed my own 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting' (See Section 12.5, Figure 12.1) using a similar approach, and in order to contribute to the research base in this field.

12.3 Methodological framework

The methodological framework for the study was described in full in Chapter 4. Taking the phenomenological, interactionist stance, I immersed myself in the community for a sustained period of time in order to understand how knowledge was "developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.15) through the methodological framework that arose from the requirements of the conceptual framework. Davies (2008) argues that, in order for ethnographic research to be philosophically and methodologically sound, it requires "both an ontology that asserts that there is a social world independent of our knowledge of it and an epistemology that argues that it is knowable" (p.18). Sandstrom (2004) considers that ethnographic research requires some prior knowledge of the context so that the researcher may engage with the participant community face-to-face for prolonged periods of time, sometimes with "direct involvement by the researcher in the activities of the people under study" (p.3).

- Ontologically I think that I was correct in believing that an exploration of the lives of active older people within their rural community through participant observation could provide the social reality of their situation.
- Epistemologically I was able to collect rich data using a mix of qualitative methods including participant observation, focus groups, depth interviews and participant journals through my participation in real-life, interactive settings and was in the best position to be "... an interpreter or 'knower' of such data as well as an experiencer, observer, or a participant observer …" (Mason, 1996, p.61-62).
- I observed the activities of the research participants whilst taking into account the multiple realities of their lives and the structural, physical and organizational elements impacting upon them, in order to reflect on their information behaviour.
- I identified the differences between individual participants, particularly the case study participants, in addition to the similarities between all the participants' stories, in order to show individual constructions of information behaviour.
- I followed both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975) by using several methods to collect data and by describing situations and

behaviours whilst ensuring that the approach to the field and participants, and the process of data collection was rigorously, ethically and reflectively managed.

- In order to ensure validity, credibility and trust I followed the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who have argued that trustworthiness is essential in a qualitative research project.

- The social constructionist approach to the research allowed me the flexibility to provide breadth and avoid bias in the data and, as data was collected from individuals over a period of time, to use different methods, allowing for rapport, empathy and depth of understanding to develop.

- I recognized that I was a subjective actor rather than an impersonal observer in the data collection process and was always aware of the influence I might be having on the process and on the potential outcomes.

- I was aware that ethical issues might arise during the process of data collection and that these might occasionally be in conflict with the need to control the data, the means of gaining access to the participants, and the requirement to ensure confidentiality for participants. In general, however, only minor ethical dilemmas had occurred and, as I was aware of issues that might arise with older people, most were avoided or dealt with at the time.

12.4 Limitations in the research process

Firstly, in this section, before attending to some more specific limiting factors impacting on the outcomes in more detail, I emphasise that the study as a whole was necessarily limited in several ways. It was limited to one rural geographical location, East Cumbria in northern England; data collection took place during a particular time period, 2004 to 2005; the limited time available and the ethnographic, qualitative approach meant that the number of participants involved was necessarily small, sixteen interviewees, five developed into case studies; it was therefore only possible to generalise to a limited degree.

Thesis title and aim: The original provisional title (and aim) for this study was as follows; 'Older people (and health and healthy living) information exchange and networking in a rural community: an in-depth qualitative inquiry investigating information and

communication behaviours'. The words 'health and healthy living' were included in the original title and aim because I pre-supposed that the subject of health or ill-health might be identified by older people as a major topic on which they might want information and because I had been influenced by my recent research activity with older people in the health service. However, it became clear to me during the early stages that the topic of health (and its converse, illness) was only one of several topics that were of interest to older people in the context of their wider lifestyle and information behaviour. Therefore, the title of the study was reviewed and the subject coverage for interviews simplified and expanded for Stage Two of the data collection.

Geographical and timescale constraints: In Stage One it had proved more difficult than anticipated to identify group leader contacts necessary for the Brampton location and, in addition, I realized that there would be insufficient time available for participation in all three of the communities originally identified. Attendance and observation at the coffee mornings in Alston had proved to be the most successful connection in terms of the quality of data collected through observation leading to successful discussions with older people. It was decided therefore to build on this success and to embark on a more in-depth ethnographic participatory approach to data collection in this one location in Stage Two. Because of geographical and time constraints in Stage Two, I had to make compromises and choices throughout the field work in order to manage a practicable timetable. This meant I missed out on some opportunities of attending activities for observation and the identification of interview participants. I feel that this disadvantage was outweighed, however, by the advantages of committing to fewer activities over a longer period of time and of becoming familiar with, and accepted by, the older people who became participants.

Sample: In terms of the participant samples, particularly for interviews in Stage Two, although the issue of gender balance was taken into account, it was not possible within the snowballing approach to accessing the sample to achieve balanced numbers of female and male participants. However, when the balance of males and females in the mixed activities I observed is taken into account, the sample of interviewees and case study participants reflects the reality in the location of numbers of older men and women taking part. Also, on

reflection, I felt that it would have been useful if I had been able to include some of the quieter, more isolated, older people in the community for interviews but I recognised that I would have needed a more structured approach to accessing the sample and a larger group of people for interview. I did not feel there would be time or the opportunity to develop the sample in this way. In addition, as the focus was on older people who were active in social groups, it was more appropriate to interview active older people in the main.

Observation: In Stage One, it had proved difficult for me to take part in and observe activities at the same time as writing researcher notes, because the notes had to be written after the session and it was only possible to comment on interactions in a very general way. Therefore, although observation in activities was vitally important for making and maintaining contact with participants, it was more limited in its usefulness for collecting data. The aim therefore became to use observation to 'get to know' the older people participating in the groups and for them to accept me as a temporary group member in order to gain contacts for focus groups. Observation in Stage Two proved more positive in terms of the data collected, partly because of the amount of time spent meeting people at the Age Concern coffee morning prior to joining in with and observing other activity groups, partly because of the social function of groups, but mostly because I had developed relationships with some participants and they were happier for me to attend as an observer.

Social network analysis: It was clear that the small sample for the social network analysis limited its application and could only give a basic indicator of the egocentric tie strengths of the individuals. However, when these results were combined with those from interviews and observations, there were strong indications of participants' strong and weak social ties, and observations about the identity of some weak ties, who were key information providers, were confirmed. An important methodological outcome has been that intuitive notions about the tie strength of participants and non-participants were backed by the results obtained in the social network interviews. The social network interview questionnaire was of some concern to several of the case study participants, however, and this revealed itself in different ways. Two case study participants were unhappy about the structured responses required by the questionnaire, a third seemed to 'become a little confused about what was

being asked of her' and yet another was 'impatient to finish the questionnaire'. The response of participants, discussed in Chapter 6.6, illustrates the difficulties of asking structured, pre-determined questions about relationships between people in the context of ethnographic research using qualitative methods.

 The term 'information': As identified in Chapter 1.6.2, the sensitising concept 'information' is very hard to define and most definitions are very broad. Chen and Hernon (1982) identified information as "all knowledge, ideas, facts, data, and imaginative works of mind which are communicated" (p.5) and Buckland (1991) suggested that it is difficult to define what information is and what it is not, "We are unable to say confidently of anything that it could not be information" (p.356). It was therefore difficult in this study to use the term in interviews, and more productive to avoid using it directly. However, the structured social network questionnaire did include questions that referred directly to 'information' and this proved problematic for some participants to the extent that one participant rejected the term as not meaningful to her in any way. The fluid and broad nature of the term in this context necessarily limited the way in which it could be used in a structured interview.

12.5 Contribution of the study

Key elements of the information worlds of older people in this rural community relating to their information behaviour, information grounds and information resources have been identified and discussed as key findings in Chapter 11. I have outlined here what I consider to be the contribution this study can make to the field of knowledge and illustrated this through a simple, empirically grounded 'Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting' (Figure 12.1). As summarised in Chapter 1, Section 7, this study provides a unique contribution to knowledge through its focus on older people in a particular rural community in northern England using an ethnographic approach grounded in information behaviour theories and combining several qualitative data collection methods. The study cannot represent all the information behaviour elements of all such rural communities and therefore the findings and the model cannot be generalised to other locations. However, several key aspects of the model might be pertinent to information

behaviour activities in other rural communities in a number of ways. In this section the key elements of the model are described. In Sections 12.6 to 12.8 I have identified a number of implications from the findings that could potentially impact on older people and I have made recommendations as to how taking these findings into account might improve information exchange for older people, inform and improve the practice of information provision and lead to more research within the academic community.
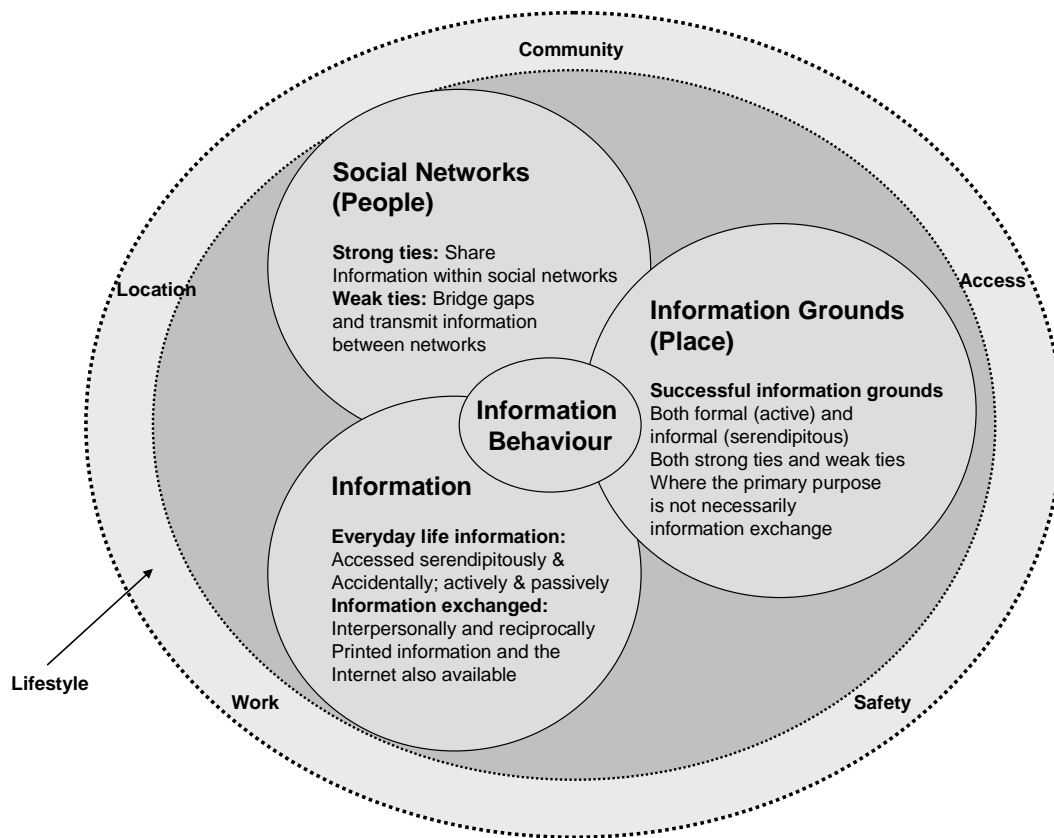
Figure 12.1:

Model of Information Behaviour amongst Older People in a Rural Setting

In discussing the key findings it is recognised that the social involvement of older people in a rural community may vary according to each individual's circumstances, factors such as gender and marital status whether they are living on their own, how long they have been resident and whether they have family living locally. It is also recognised that levels of involvement with family and in social networks can affect access to information. The

model in Figure 12.1 makes a contribution to the study of information behaviour and seeks to show the key elements that were found to impact on the process of information exchange of older people in this particular rural community. The model is divided into three main sections within the overall contextual circle of themes representing the key lifestyle elements identified by participants; community, location, work, safety and access (described in Chapter 7).

Social Networks:

Close family and friends (strong ties) provided support, advice and personal information that might not be shared outside the network. However, strong ties also provided information that was more general, and of interest or use to others within social networks and much of this general information was likely to become available more widely through informal channels and exchanged serendipitously. There were some members of the local community who played a vital role in transmitting information that was of use to older people but was not generally available to them through their close friends and family. These more casual contacts (weak ties) sometimes had better access to information sources and an awareness of the need to bridge the information gaps and pass information on to others.

Information:

A wide range of everyday life information was exchanged, both formal and informal, on a broad range of topics. Information was accessed actively (purposively) and passively, serendipitously or accidentally and mostly interpersonally and reciprocally, either face to face or by telephone. Interpersonal information was often supported by printed information in the form of newsletters, leaflets and newspapers, radio and television, and occasionally the Internet.

Information Grounds:

The places where activities took place and the people taking part in activities influenced the kind of information behaviour taking place. Activities in formal information grounds mostly involved purposeful information seeking and activities in informal grounds often involved serendipitous information encountering. Importantly, information gathering was not necessarily the main reason for the activity taking place and since participants were

primarily comfortable with exchanging information informally face to face, informal grounds were the most successful. The Age Concern coffee morning stood out as a key informal information ground for a wide spectrum of older people from different social backgrounds who came together for a social purpose enabling effective information exchange to take place over a relatively short space of time. This information ground allowed for both purposive information seeking, because people knew that certain information providers would be there, and incidental information encountering, because people met up with close friends (strong ties) and more casual contacts (weak ties).

12.6 Implications for older people

The older people in this study were generally keen to take charge of their own needs, including their information needs, as part of their desire to exist independently of help for as long as possible, and they did not necessarily want to be advised by others. At the same time, they were, in the main, a group of people who were very involved in social activities and contributing to the life of their community. The implications of this counter balance of independence and involvement from the perspective of the information behaviour for rural older people are as follows:

- Active older people want to have access locally to the information they need to build on their own personal knowledge stock and they want to control this information base both individually and within their social networks. In order to achieve this they need easy local access to a variety of information resources in a variety of formats in both formal and informal information grounds.
- Thriving social networks of older people in this rural community provide an efficient system of naturally occurring information exchange based predominantly on serendipitous information encountering that takes place in many different, mainly informal, information grounds. Some of these grounds, particularly informal activities such as the Age Concern coffee morning provide the hub for this exchange where information comes together in one place for a short period of time. These existing networks should be encouraged, supported and maintained.

- Moving amongst and between social networks were key informants, mostly older people, who were, importantly, part of the network and not outside it, and therefore could exchange both formal and informal information serendipitously and informally with larger numbers of the older people. These people were not usually official leaders of church or older people's groups but people who were involved in and enthusiastic about community activities and keen to inform and involve others. These individuals can be identified and are ideally placed to help to improve access to information in their own communities.

- Older people will increasingly want to access computer-based information as more of them become familiar with the potential of this format. In order to achieve equality, some need access to learning materials and help, either from trainers or preferably from others in their social networks who can pass on the skills. Facilities should be made permanently available in key information grounds so that older people can learn independently or in social groups, primarily where the expertise can be provided by their peers.

- It is important that any further research in this location and others builds on the interest and willingness shown by local older people, and that they are involved in a more active way in undertaking research themselves as part of locally-based community action, research initiatives or larger longitudinal studies undertaken.

12.7 Recommendations for service providers

The way information is communicated, and the way that it is made available to users, is vital to accessibility and understanding. In order to make sure that there is a clear understanding of service provision issues, service providers need to involve older people in decision-making processes and information exchange at an early stage. Thus older people could be informed in a variety of different ways and via different information formats, although, initially, predominantly through face to face information exchange.

- The active older people were clear that good interpersonal and communication skills were essential if service providers were to succeed in gaining their trust and providing information in a way that was appropriate for them at a time when they

needed it. I recommend that there should be greater awareness of the sensitivities and needs of older people when decisions on service changes and provision are made.

- It would be helpful for providers to meet older people in their own localities so that older people themselves could inform service providers of their needs through their own local knowledge. This already happens to a certain extent at the Age Concern coffee morning but there needs to be a permanently accessible and informal information ground where the emphasis is on the equal exchange of information rather than on information and advice being provided to older people.

- In order to achieve involvement of older people in decision-making and information provision it would be appropriate to encourage their involvement locally in the identification of information needs and the implementation of appropriate solutions through their involvement in local action.

- There is potential for the findings of this study to influence the development of community information resources for older people in this and other settings, perhaps linked to formal information grounds, such as information or community centres, where co-ordinated services could provide a combined drop-in centre, coffee shop and meeting space for older people and others to meet informally, exchange information and access information through a variety of other media, including computer-based information.

12.8 Recommendations for further research

The study has illustrated, through the constructions of individuals in their interviews and journals, and my constructions from observation and analysis of data, that, as in other research findings, the older people in this context seek, encounter and exchange information formally, informally, incidentally and serendipitously through their close family and friends and more casual acquaintances in their social activities and information grounds (Erdelez, 1996; Fisher et al., 2005; McKenzie, 2003; Williamson, 1997, 1998). Further research is needed, however, in order to explore the implications of the study and the applicability of the model in this and other rural communities of older people living in the UK. In her review of the role of context in information behaviour research, Courtright

(2007) concludes that "longitudinal and comparative research can add depth and breadth" to studies using an ethnographic approach and multiple methods, and can provide "a richer corpus of theoretical and empirical research in this field" (p.293). Fisher and Naumer (2006) have acknowledged the limitations of their own research into information grounds, and these also apply to this study. Fisher and Naumer call for further research

> "on how information needs are expressed and recognised at information grounds, and how information is socially constructed among different actors … how people's perceptions and participation in information grounds change over time, the life cycles of information grounds … and how they can be used to facilitate information flow" (p.206).

It has been shown that, in the context of this research, information exchange is part of active older people's normal, social and everyday life activity and that information is available through multiple means and in multiple locations, particularly for those who prefer to receive their information and support through social and face-to-face contact. More research is needed:

- To discover the key factors that make information grounds particularly successful for information exchange in order to produce a more detailed model of how an informal or formal ground might provide an information hub for the benefit older people and service providers.
- To identify the factors leading to the success of particular individuals as key information providers within their social networks and information grounds.
- To investigate the particular characteristics and kinds of information behaviour occurring within the information grounds that older people in rural areas inhabit.
- To undertake the proposed research as part of larger longitudinal studies using an ethnographic approach and mixed methodology and including action research to involve older people in the research process.

12.9 Final conclusions

It is recognised that there are limitations to the methodological approach and timescale of this small-scale ethnographic study and that it was not possible to produce generalisable

findings. However, the methodological approach has allowed for involvement with some members of the local community of older people engaging in social activities in this rural setting and for the identification of some factors that might be transferable to other settings. Older people contribute to the social capital of their communities in many ways through "voluntary work, informal care and active involvement in a wide range of community groups" (Le Mesurier, 2006, p.133), and by being involved in groups such as the Women's Institute (WI), Age Concern and church groups, and contributing to local campaigns and schemes. According to Godfrey, Townsend and Denby (2004), because of this commitment to involvement in the local community, older people themselves should be seen as a resource that could be helpful in supporting and sustaining their own communities.

Fisher et al. (2004) state that, as people create information grounds in the course of daily living, these grounds might be utilized by providers for "facilitating the flow of everyday information, especially by drawing upon the attributes of particular social types such as opinion leaders and gatekeepers" (p.3). People exchange information within information grounds and their wider social networks and, according to Abrahamson (2007), "persist in turning to each other for help in fulfilling information needs related to many facets of the human experience" and have "historically preferred to ask each other for guidance, answers and inspiration" (p.1-2). Lay information mediaries are defined by Abrahamson as "those who seek information in a non-professional or informal capacity on behalf (or because) of others without necessarily being asked to do so" (p.2). I suggest that some weak ties identified in this thesis, perform a similar, but more informal and serendipitous information role in this rural community, and provide a vital and invaluable bridging function in the information exchange of older people.

The communication of information between older people, within their community environments where inter-relating formal and informal social activity networks exist, is not only vital for their social and physical health and wellbeing, but also for the success of statutory and voluntary sector organisations in supporting their needs with information and advice. This information exchange arising from the knowledge base of community members is largely locally created and, as Lievrouw and Farb (2003) have pointed out,

there is only a certain amount that change to service provision can achieve towards supporting and informing users and potential users of services without closer involvement within the social activities of these communities.

> Information equity cannot be achieved by the redistribution of material resources – information services and systems – alone. Rather, equity is achieved only when people are able to participate effectively in whatever aspects of society, and to what extent, they desire. (Lievrouw and Farb, 2003, pp. 514-515)

This study has contributed towards the research base about how older people might be empowered to participate effectively in the achievement of equity for their communities through their sharing of information and their contribution to the knowledge base of their community.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Research outputs and journal articles

Conferences:

Poster presentation on 'Older people sharing healthy living information in rural communities' at the International Symposium for Health Information Management Research 2004, Sheffield University.

Poster presentation on 'Older people, information exchange and social networks' at the British Society for Gerontology Conference 2005, Keele University.

Poster presentation at ESRC PG event, Bournemouth University, September 2005.

Paper in the thematic area 'Health, mortality and the experience of aging'' for the 7th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, Poland, September, 2005. Capel, S. Older people, information exchange and social networks. ESA, 2005. Available online at http://www.ageing-in-europe.de/ (Health, mortality and the experience of ageing)

Best poster prize at the School of Computing, Engineering and Information Studies, Northumbria University Research Conference, 2006.

Paper at the 11th International Symposium on Health Information Management Research in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, July 2006.

Joint paper at the British Society for Gerontology Annual Conference held at the University of Bangor, North Wales in September 2006

Paper accepted for the Information Seeking in Context conference 2008 held in Vilnius, Lithuania, September 2008.

Journal articles:

Capel,S. & Banwell,L. Older people, information, and social networks in rural Cumbria. *Library and Information Research Journal* 2006, Spring.

Capel, S., Childs, S., Banwell, L. and Heaford, S. (2007) Access to information and support for health: some potential issues and solutions for an ageing population. Health Informatics Journal, Volume 13, No. 4, 243-253. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1460458207079824

Appendix 2: Research Protocol

Sue Capel – Northumbria University

1   Short Title:
Older people, social networks and information behaviour (revised)

2   Scope of Research:
Older people, information exchange and social networks in rural Cumbria communities: an in-depth qualitative inquiry investigating communication of information behaviour.

3   Background:
Older people are "a group who are simply people who are older than others" (Reed, 2004) but they are perceived by society to be a problem group because of age. Problems identified include access to information, transport and isolation. (Yates-Mercer, 1998, Cornish et al., 2002) The 'culture of health' may be different in rural areas. (Thorson & Powell, 1992) Rural older people tend to take a more positive, holistic and self-help view of their lifestyle and social problems. (Quinn et al., 2003). Empowerment of the population to become involved and informed and to be enabled to make choices and decisions about lifestyle, including health, housing and social care has been a major Government theme recently. The Audit Commission produced two reports in 2004, in partnership with 'Better Government for Older People' (BGOP), addressing how local authorities and the NHS can promote the independence and well-being of older people. (Audit Commission, 2004) The need for better information was one of the key issues older people raised.

In the rural Eden District of Cumbria the population is small, 24,600, but the percentage over the pension age (65 for men, 60 for women) is 21.7%, one of the highest in the North West Region. (Region in Figures: North West, Winter 2002 taken from www.statistics.gov.uk). A small study in North Cumbria found that women needed and were more aware of the information available than men and were more likely to actively use information. (Purkiss, 2002) The Older People National Service Framework (NSF) Information Group recently surveyed older people in North Cumbria about their information use. Older people said that they needed information about a variety of subjects including illness and disability, caring, finance, healthy living and housing. (Older People Information Review Group, unpublished)

4   Justification:
Social isolation may lead to information uncertainty and avoidance (Brashers et al., 2002) but social networking and information sharing is important to people, particularly women, adjusting to difficult life events in old age. (Chatman, 1992) Research is needed "to investigate the interests, orientations, practices, and complex

social relations among individuals and social groups to gain a deeper appreciation of how people obtain, understand, and use information" and to "learn about unconventional, socially based information resources (social networks, for example)" (Lievrouw & Farb, 2003) The research is a response to this need within the context of rural social networks and communities in East Cumbria.

5   **Focus:**
The focus of the research is on information exchange through social networks in rural East Cumbria. The research takes a social ethnographic approach grounded in information and communication theory and will contribute to knowledge of how older people use information to support their lifestyle in rural locations, informing the provision of information to this population group.

6   **Research Aim:**
The aim of this study was 'to explore the information worlds of older people living in rural East Cumbria in order to understand how they share information through their social networks and social activities'. (revised)

7   **Research Objectives:** (revised)

The objectives are to identify existing theories and models in information, communication, sociology of ageing, rurality and gender, explore the relevance of gender in information communication systems within social networks and explore the potential of the findings for the development of new knowledge in this field.

1. To identify existing theories and models in the fields of information behaviour, ageing and sociology in which to embed the research.
2. To explore the activity of people over sixty-five and their information behaviour within their social networks and social activities in a rural community.
3. To identify the particular information issues emerging from the research that effect older people living in rural areas.
4. To assess the potential of the results for the development of new knowledge in this field and feed back to local information providers.

8   **Distinctiveness:**

- A focus on information exchange and older people in rural East Cumbria.
- The research takes a social ethnographic approach grounded in information and communication theory.
- The research will contribute to the knowledge of how older people use information in this context on a local and national basis and inform the provision of information to this population group.

9   Research Approach:

The research will take a critical realist standpoint linking to theories in communication, information and social sciences research within both positivist and subjectivist paradigms. The research is influenced by a sense-making focus on the individual and their information use. (Dervin, 1992) Savolainen and Lievrouw & Farb suggest that context specivity is more appropriate to show differences in information access and use amongst members of social groups than an attempt to develop generic categories of use as proposed by Dervin with sense making. (Savolainen, 1993, Lievrouw & Farb, 2003) Chatman has used ethnographic research theories such as diffusion theory and social network theory to investigate the 'information worlds' of the socially and economically disadvantaged including older women. (Chatman, 1996, 2001) Frameworks and models have been developed in response to information communication and behaviour theories and these will be referred to in the analysis of fieldwork results and development of theory.

10   Methods:

An ethnographic,"...describing a group or culture" (Fetterman,1989:11) and phenomonological, "... the perception of reality through the minds of the respondents ..." (Sarantakos, 1998:48)approach to data collection will be used taking into account ethical issues relating to sensitivity, privacy and confidentiality.(Denscombe, 2003) Ongoing data collection and analysis will lead to the identification of themes and issues for further exploration, the emphasis on 'discovery' not 'proof'.(Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) Triangulation by combining research methods will provide a range of perspectives, making the findings more robust and developing "... a complex picture of the phenomenon being studied." (Rice and Ezzy, 1999:38)There will be significant overlap and flexibility in the use of methods in order to "... observe things that happen, listen to what people say and question people in the setting under investigation." (Seale 1998:221) The balance between data collection and analysis will be flexible with "... constant interaction between problem formulation, data collection and data analysis." (Seale, 1998:221)

10a   Background Research:

Consultation with key informants in the North Cumbria NSF multi-agency Information Group, particularly voluntary organisations working with older people, has informed the researcher about rural issues, existing local and national research and information issues of concern to providers. Voluntary organisation members of the group will act as gatekeepers to key informants in the 3 communities chosen for the research and will facilitate access to suitable activity groups. The 3 locations, Alston, Appleby and Brampton, were chosen for their demographic similarities although the locations are different in their degree of isolation. There will be ongoing analysis of data, reporting of findings to supervisors and feedback to research participants. The information sheet explains clearly what the participants' role will be within the research. They will be asked to contact the researcher should they have any further questions to ask. Participants may withdraw from the research at any time during data collection and that participation is entirely voluntary.

10b   Participant Observation

The researcher will be a participant observer in at least 2 activity groups in each of the 3 locations for the purpose of observing and recording activities. Activity groups may include coffee mornings, healthy walks, computer training etc. Observed data will be recorded as structured researcher notes. Participant observation is "... crucial to effective fieldwork ... (and) combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance ..." (Fetterman, 1989:45)

Access to the Sample:

The researcher will gain access to key community and social activity groups through key informants, group leaders of community activities for example, within the 3 locations. Written consent for the researcher to attend the group for the purposes of participant observation will be obtained from the group leader. The group leader will have explained the research purpose and confidentiality guidelines to group members and gained their agreement for the researcher to attend the group at a meeting of the group prior to researcher involvement. The leader will give information sheets to members of the group. It will be made clear to group members that data on the behaviour or comments of individuals will not be collected at this point, rather observation will be of social interaction and information exchange in a generalised way.

10c   Focus Groups

Two focus group discussions will take place in each location (total 6) in order to explore issues identified by the researcher through background research and observation. The focused discussion is an opportunity for participants to "attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions" (Bloor, 2001:6) about what information they use and how they share it within the social network. Nominal Group Technique methods will be used to collect and manage data from focus groups. Focus (or Discussion) Groups will be held initially in order to gain "… information in a short period of time about the breadth (and) variation of opinions" (Sarantakos, 1998: 181)

- The interaction between participants in the focus groups will draw on their attitudes, feelings and experiences of health and healthy living information in order to gain a broad range of views in a short space of time.
- The focus groups will help to identify the main issues for discussion in more depth in individual interviews.

Access to Sample:

Volunteer sampling within 2 activity groups in each location will allow for the identification of potential focus group participants. Activity group leaders will facilitate access by hosting 2 focus groups in each location. Each group will consist of up to 6 people chosen according criteria designed to achieve a balanced group.

Numbers in groups will be kept low because "...participants must be able to be seated close enough to each other to see and hear each other adequately." (Quine and Cameron, 1995:454-462) Written consent will be obtained from each volunteer participant prior to the start of data collection, after research purpose, procedure, confidentiality and anonymity has been explained verbally and by providing the information sheet.

10d   Interviews

Up to 8 interviews will be held in each location (24 in total) in order to explore issues raised in background research and focus groups in more depth, allow the freedom to focus on the individual experience and "follow up interesting leads ...(so that)... different respondents could discuss different topics." (Seale,1998:205) The first 2 interviews will be used to pilot the method. Interviews will be held in community locations agreed with interviewees and privacy and security issues will be taken into account. Data gathered will be tape-recorded where possible or taken from researcher notes.

- In-depth interviews use open-ended questions and allowing for flexibility in probing areas of particular interest and relevance to the participant will be used.
- The interviews will explore issues raised in focus groups in more depth in addition to exploring the views of the individual about their own experiences.

Access to Sample:

Volunteer and snowball sampling with activity group members overcomes the risk of potential non-participation and will facilitate the identification of up to 8 volunteers for interview in each location (24 in total) Discussion with activity leaders will inform the sampling process. Volunteers will be interviewed for up to one hour to explore issues raised in focus groups in more depth. An attempt will be made to achieve a balanced sample of interviewees taking into account gender and including some individuals who do not attend social activities on a regular basis and/or are socially or geographically more isolated. Written consent will be obtained from each volunteer participant prior to the start of data collection, after research purpose, procedure, confidentiality and anonymity has been explained verbally and by providing the information sheet.

10e   Case Studies

Case timeline studies will be undertaken with up to 6 individual volunteers identified through the interview process who are willing to take part in the research over a longer period of time. Case Study interviews will be held in community locations agreed with interviewees and privacy and security issues will be taken into account. Case study research will be used to study how the relationships and processes of information use interrelate by focusing on individuals within their social setting over a period of time and using more than one method. (Denscombe, 2003:30-39)

- Case studies will run concurrently and each participant will be asked to keep a diary of information and communication activities and be interviewed fortnightly over a period of 3 months in community settings.
- Data gathered will be in the form of participant diaries, tape-recordings and structured researcher notes.

Access to Sample:

Case timeline studies will be undertaken with up to 6 individual volunteers, identified through the interview process, who are willing to take part in the research over a longer period of time and fit inclusion criteria. Case study participants will be chosen according to their potential to provide a rich source of data over time and according to their willingness and ability to take part. Each case study participant will be asked to agree to be interviewed for up to one hour every two weeks for a three month period. Volunteers will be identified and process, commitment and confidentiality issues explained. Written consent will be obtained from each volunteer participant prior to the start of data collection, after research purpose, procedure, confidentiality and anonymity has been explained verbally and by providing the information sheet.

10f   Timescale:

(see Gantt chart)

11   Inclusion Criteria:

The principal criteria for inclusion for focus groups, interviews and case studies are as follows:

- participants are aged over 65 (Justification: appropriate for the research question, includes younger and older old people, most will be retired and more likely to be involved in socially based activities with others of a similar age group)
- participants are active in one of the activity groups chosen for observation and data collection in one of the three locations chosen for the research or are identified by key informants
- participants fit the sample requirements for gender balance (Justification: although it has generally been shown that women are more socially active, and share information more than men, the sample would be biased if men were not included)

12   Exclusion Criteria:

The principal criteria for exclusion of potential participants from focus groups, interviews and case studies are the following:

- participants are aged under 65

- participants do not fit the sample requirements for gender balance
- The only other reason for potentially excluding a participant from the field research would be where it becomes clear that the reason for their participation is for therapeutic reasons for the individual and focused on needs of the individual. It may be preferable to facilitate further action by encouraging an individual to obtain counselling or other services rather than to continue as a research participant.

13 Data Collection and Analysis:

Data collection and analysis (using QSR NUDIST software) will be cyclical and will involve the collection of rich data. Participants will be involved in decisions about data throughout the process. Data analysis will involve the identification and coding of themes and issues arising from the data. (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

13.1 Cyclical approach

In addition to the collection and transcription of the data from the four data collection methods, contact summary sheets will be kept for each. The sheets will be used to record the main issues that arise related to the questions asked of the participants. The results will be summarised periodically in order to guide the progress of the research and indicate any needs for adjustments to interview schedules or refining of analytic codes and categories.

13.2 Coding and categorising

Keywords will be used to code and categorise the transcribed texts as an integral part of the cycle of data collection and analysis as the data collection progresses. Pattern codes will be developed to identify emergent themes as part of the data reduction process. The ongoing approach to coding of emergent themes will provide a means of focusing the continuing data collection. Verification of coding and categorisation will be achieved through re-reading the transcripts to check out coding decisions made. The results will be described using the soft systems approach to mapping and the creation of 'rich pictures'.

14 Data Security:

Respondents will be given a number or code and no personal data will be held on university computers. Details that would allow individuals to be identified will not be published, or made available, to anybody not involved in the research, unless explicit written consent is given by individuals concerned or such information is already in the public domain. Participants will be asked for their permission for the researcher to observe groups and tape record interviews and focus groups, and procedures for using, storing, transcribing and destroying tapes will be explained. The mention of names will be avoided during interviews and focus groups and any names remaining removed from the transcript as soon as possible.

All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that confidential details of participants are secure. Audio discs will be kept in locked storage until the thesis is accepted and then wiped clean of data. After transcription, data will be stored in secure computer folders and any paper copies kept in locked storage. If floppy discs are used, these will be kept in locked storage. Raw data will not be used in any future study. All raw data will be destroyed on completion of the research.

15   Ethics:

Ethical considerations will underpin all aspects of the research from initial planning to dissemination of research findings. The main ethical issues in the research are those that might arise because of the flexibility of the ethnographic approach and control of the data, the means of gaining access to the samples, and the ability of the researcher to ensure confidentiality for participants. These issues are addressed within the research protocol and the control procedures explained, including those for triangulation of methods, procedures for accessing participants, gaining consent, collecting, recording and analysing data, maintaining confidentiality and safety for participants and reporting back to the reference group and supervisors.

16.   Bibliography:

Audit Commission. *Older People: a changing approach.* London: Audit Commission, 2004

Audit Commission. *Older People: building a strategic approach. Independence and well-being 2*. London: Audit Commission, 2004

Bloor, M. et.al. *Focus groups in social research.* Sage, 2001

Brashers, DE, Goldsmith, DJ & Hsieh, E. *Information seeking and avoiding in health contexts*. Human Communication Research, Vol.28, No.2, April 2002, p 258-271.

Chatman, E. (b) *The information world of retired women.* Greenwood Press,1992.

Chatman, 1996

Chatman, 2001

Cornish, S. et al. *Under the stones: hidden need in rural Cumbria.* Northern Fells Rural Project Final Report, October 2002.

Denscombe, M. *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects.* 2nd. Ed., Open University Press, 2003.

Dervin, B. From the mind's eye of the user: The Sense-Making qualitative-quantitative methodology. In **J.D. Glazier & R.R. Powell** (eds). Qualitative research in information management. Englewood, CO, Libraries Unlimited,1992.

Fetterman, David M. *Ethnography: step by step.* Applied Social Science Research Methods, Vol. 17. Sage,1989.

Lievrouw, LA & Farb, SE. *Information and equity.* In Annual Review of Information Science and Technology, Vol.37, Chap.11, 2003.

Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. *Beginning qualitative research: a philosophical and practical guide.* Falmer,1994.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. *Qualitative data analysis.* Sage,1994.

Purkiss, T. *The users' perspective on consumer health information needs in rural North Cumbria: a case study.* MA Dissertation. University of Northumbria at Newcastle, 2002.

Quine and Cameron 1995

Quinn, A., Snowling, A. & Denicolo, P. *Older people's perspectives: devising information, advice and advocacy services.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003.

Reed, J., Stanley, D. & Clarke, C. *Health, well-being and older people.* The Policy Press, 2004.

Rice, P.L. & Ezzy, D. *Qualitative research methods: a health focus.* Oxford University Press,1999.

Sarantakos, S. *Social research.* Palgrave,1998.

Savolainen, R. The sense-making theory: reviewing the interests of a user-centred approach to information seeking and use. *Information Processing and Management.* Vol.29, No.1,1993, p.13-28

Seale, C. (ed) *Researching society and culture.* Sage,1998.

Thorson, JA & Powell, FC. Rural and urban elderly construe health differently. *The Journal of Psychology,* 126, 3, 1992, p.251-260.

Yates-Mercer, P & Wotherspoon, G. *Information needs of rural users: an update.* British Library Research and Innovation Report 116, BLRIC, 1998.

Appendix 3: Process of NHS Ethics Approval

After the initial application was made, the LREC required further information to be provided to the Committee, and this was done, but there was one major obstacle still preventing a straightforward approval of the first application. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, requested that I should:

> *"set up a 'fail-safe' mechanism to inform the GP or others if any problems were to arise with whom you are interviewing".*

I considered that contacting a GP direct would neither be possible nor ethical as complying with the Data Protection Act meant that I should not be privy to confidential patient information. I therefore consulted senior University research staff and replied to the Committee as follows:

> *"In giving consent to participation in the research, informants have been guaranteed the right to complete anonymity and are protected against disclosure of information personal to themselves according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. As I am not a health professional, I do not have a duty of care for people's health but as a researcher I do have a duty of care to protect interviewee's anonymity. In circumstances where an informant is observed to be ill or distressed it may be appropriate to suggest that they might contact their GP themselves. If specifically asked, I am willing to do so on their behalf."*

After the next LREC meeting the Chair replied that the Committee was concerned to protect the researcher in addition to the participants. They therefore requested that a 'fail-safe' mechanism should be explained in the Participant Information Sheet as an exception to the guarantee of confidentiality.

> *"Our opinion is that the Data Protection Act, supported by recent published comment, does not absolve those who are not health care workers from sharing information with others if there is a possibility of risk to an individual. Consequently, we have requested that you identify a 'fail-safe' mechanism to be used in the event that you are concerned that an individual is at physical or emotional risk or is a victim of crime."*

My supervisors and I were not convinced that this was an appropriate response to the potential of risk in the case of a doctoral researcher who is not a health or social care professional and therefore the supervisors replied jointly to the Chair of the LREC as follows.

> *"... is not qualified in any way to make decisions on behalf of a member of the public and therefore can only act in the capacity of a 'good citizen'. As such she would discuss with the person concerned options for access, help or support which might indicate the need for contact with emergency services, a*

GP, social services, housing or other services and act on behalf of the person if requested to do so."

Ethics approval for the application was refused for the following reasons:
- The Committee was concerned about the safety of the researcher and exposure to legal claims without a 'fail-safe' mechanism and felt that this should be included in the **Patient** (Participant) Information Sheet
- The Committee felt that when a researcher enters an elderly person's home for reasons of **health care research** she has more responsibility to contact a GP without their consent if she feels they are at sufficient risk.

It should be noted that reference is being made in the letter from the LREC to 'patients' and 'health care research', which is not appropriate to this research and not included in the research protocol.

The option was given to either submit a new application or to appeal the decision. Therefore, with the support of my supervisors, I decided that it would be best, in the circumstances, to avoid any further delays by submitting a new application with some slight changes to the protocol and including the following statement in the Participant Information Sheet:

> *"In the case of a hazardous circumstance arising for either the researcher, or research participants who are taking part in an interview, the researcher reserves the following right. After discussion with the participant, the researcher will contact the emergency services or a participant's GP on their behalf if she considers that there may be a risk of harm to either herself or the participant."*

This second application was a compromise based on a process of negotiation between two different cultures with differing expectations and requirements, the NHS and the University. This compromise, however, was not necessarily in the best interests of the researcher or the participants.

Ethics approval was finally granted in January 2005.

Appendix 4: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviews to be approximately 30 minutes in length but flexible and conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee. Interviews to be tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Explain confidentiality and data protection arrangements.

Explain that I want to:
- explore the health and healthy living 'information worlds' of older people in rural contexts and to identify the ways in which they communicate and disseminate information for health and healthy living with family and social networks.
- define the particular health information issues that affect gender, rural areas and older people
- explore the potential of the results for the development of new knowledge in this field and feedback to local information providers to check validity
- disseminate the findings through appropriate means locally, nationally and inter-nationally

Briefly explain the methods to be used:
- 3 focus groups of volunteers from older people forums in East Cumbria
- Interviews with up to 60 individuals in total living in 3 rural locations in East Cumbria
- Case study interviews and diaries over 3 months with 3 to 5 of these individuals

Questions:
1) What is your involvement with older people? What service do you provide?
2) What do you feel are the health and healthy living needs of older people living in a rural community?
3) Is your organisation a health and/or healthy living information provider to older people? What kinds of information do you provide?
4) How do you provide information to older people? What forms does the information take?
5) What do you know about how older people in rural areas locally network with each other? Where do they meet? What do they do?
6) Do you think there are any gender specific issues for older people and their health in the rural areas?
7) What 3 locations do you feel would provide me with a representative cross section of social, economic, and geographic samples according to your definition of 'rural'?

Do you have any statistical or research information that would be useful to inform the research? Conclude interview, thank interviewee for contribution, provide a copy of the research protocol and offer a summary of research results on completion.

Appendix 5: FOCUSED DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Nominal Group Technique:

A very simple version of 'Nominal Group Technique' will be used to clarify the main issues of concern for participants when thinking about information needs and use in connection with wellbeing and healthy lifestyle. Participants will identify information content and information forms they have used and these will be recorded on a flipchart. They will then rank these as individuals within group discussion and I will record the ranked responses on a grid. Participants will talk through the results and the conclusions reached. The ranking technique will allow me to identify the comparative importance of the issues for the particular groups concerned and to include any issues that had not previously been identified by other means. Each focused group discussion will last for up to one hour. The permission of all participants will be sought for the use of a tape recorder before recording begins.

Introduction to discussion:

At the beginning of the session I will explain the purpose of the research and the expected outcomes and make clear to participants the importance of confidentiality and respect regarding information that is exchanged within the group. Permission will be asked to tape record the proceedings. Participants will be reminded that they may withdraw at any time. (5 minutes)

Procedure:

Step One: Introductory discussion about what is meant by the terms 'health', 'wellbeing' and 'lifestyle'. Generalised headings will be entered on a repertory grid (5 minutes)

Step Two: Participants will be provided with paper and pen and asked to write down three examples (and no more) of information they have found that has supported their wellbeing or healthy lifestyle and how this information was provided (i.e. face-to-face (other people), telephone, internet, television/radio, magazines, leaflets etc.) (10 minutes)

Step Three: There will be a break for coffee/tea and discussion of items raised. I will collect the papers and add the information items under the generalised headings on the grid, adding other headings where necessary. Information sources will be listed across the top of the grid. (10 minutes)

Step Four: After the break I will ask each individual to tell the group which items they chose and why and to rank them one to three for importance, with three as most important. (15 minutes)

Step Five: General discussion about what information is used and what works best in terms of how that information is accessed. (10 minutes)

Closure:

Participants will be thanked for their contribution to the research and reminded about confidentiality issues. (Clarified in the PIS). They will be offered a summary of the findings on completion of the research and the opportunity to take part in individual interviews to explore issues further. (Have consents ready) (5 minutes)

Appendix 6:
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study
I am a research student working in the Division of Information and Communication Studies at Northumbria University in Newcastle although my home is in East Cumbria. The research project that I am working on will result in a thesis for submission for a higher degree at Northumbria University.

Invitation
You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide.

What is the purpose of the study?
In this research I aim to talk to people over the age of 65 who are no longer working and who live in a rural area. I want to ask about how they, and their family and friends, find, use and share information in their community. I have chosen to speak to people over 65 who are retired because previous research has shown that people in this group have particular information needs. I will be in the area talking to people between March 2004 and August 2005.

Why have you been asked?
You have already been interviewed earlier in the research and have agreed to take part in further interviews over a period of three months. You will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen when you take part?

I will interview you in your own home every two weeks at times to suit you over a period of three months. You may have a relative or carer present at the interviews if you wish. The interviews will last about half an hour and no longer than one hour. Everything you say will be tape-recorded but you will be able to alter anything you say. The tapes will be kept in a safe place and only used by the researcher. Once the research is complete and the final report written all records of what you have said will be destroyed. You will also be asked to keep a daily diary about information you have used or what you have talked about with friends and family about health and healthy living.

Will your taking part in this study be kept confidential?
What you say in interviews will be completely confidential and your name will not be used in any reports. Anything that is said in discussion groups is completely confidential within

the group and no names will be used. Everything that you have said will be tape-recorded and kept in a safe place according to data protection regulations. Once the research is complete and the final report written all records of what you have said will be destroyed.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
When the research is complete you will be offered the opportunity of receiving a summary of the research results. Please say yes or no to this on the Consent Form at the end of this document. The full thesis will be published and kept at Northumbria University. The researcher will also publish research articles for journals and talk about the research findings at conferences and meetings. No names will ever be mentioned.

Who has reviewed the study?
The research study has been reviewed by the Northumbria University Research Committee and the North Cumbria Local Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information
If you need to ask any questions please contact: Sue Capel
Information Management Research Institute

Lipman Building

Northumbria University   **Telephone: 0191 227 3269**

Newcastle upon Tyne   **Mobile: 07970 821980**

NE1 8ST   **Email: s.capel@unn.ac.uk**

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research.

Appendix 7: Observation notes example

Arts and Crafts Group – 19.07.05

Observation

I sat down next to CD as she seemed to be the friendliest face. I had brought some old knitting patterns of my mother's, and a scrapbook about her life put together by my sister, as a contribution to the group. People on either side of me took an interest in the scrapbook. In general, however, people were interested in doing their own thing and were focused on their own work. It seemed to be a quiet and somewhat subdued gathering. I felt rather down about this group after this session. As I left I heard some immediate discussion and made an assumption that they might be talking about me but maybe that was my paranoia! The group seemed very formal and I have also identified tensions within the group. There seems to be a problem with local and off-comer cliques or maybe it is down to one or two strong personalities.

Methodological Reflection

"Next time will be a workshop and I will join in with the activity but also make more of a mental note of topics discussed. In future sessions I will also try to introduce certain topics for discussion to see what comes out if the opportunity arises. After a couple more sessions I will try to introduce the topic of what interviews are about and start to ask people for individual interviews." This is taken from reflection section written on 21.06.05. I haven't really been doing this and should do for my attendance from October to December. I need to review all these notes and write up a methodological report and plan for the next quarter.

I feel that my approach to the group was wrong and I went in too strongly and too soon giving people interview packs and asking for interview responses. Hence I got only one response from the group members. I think this was also affected by some members maybe feeling they couldn't commit because others didn't? The annoying thing is that if I had caught them in a different way or location as individuals I might have had more positive responses.

Appendix 8: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction
Introduce myself and the purpose of the research and explain the procedure of the interview and confidentiality and security issues as follows:

What is the purpose of the study?
In this research I am talking to people over the age of 65 who live in Alston. I want to ask about how you, and your family and friends, find, use and share information about your lifestyle. I have chosen to speak to people over 65 who are retired because previous research has shown that people in this group have particular information needs.

What will happen in the interview?
The interview will be informal and I will introduce a number of issues to you for discussion. I will also respond to additional issues that you may want to discuss providing that they are relevant to the research. The interview will last for approximately one hour. At the end of the interview you will be given the opportunity to re-consider what you have said and/or see the transcript when it is produced.

What will happen to the information you give me?

Everything that is said in the interview will be tape-recorded with your consent. Tapes will be kept in a safe place and only used by myself. Anything that is said is completely confidential and no names will be used in reports. Once the research is complete and the final report written all records of what people have said will be destroyed.

Topics for discussion

Location

Why do you live in Alston?

What do you feel about living in a rural area - advantages/disadvantages?

How long have you lived here?

Do you consider yourself to be local?

Do you have family here?

Will you continue living here?

Social networks

Are you involved in local groups both formal and informal?

Can you tell me which and why?

Which people do you think belong to groups?

Which people do not belong?

Do men belong to the same groups as women or do they have their own groups?

Are some people more isolated?

65 – 100+ is a large age range. Do you think that people get together in particular age range groups?

Lifestyle

How would you describe your lifestyle?

Would you say that you live a healthy and active lifestyle?

What do you do to keep healthy and active?

Are there other issues that affect your lifestyle?

Communication and Information

How do you find out about what is going on in the community?

How do you find out about services that may be available?

What other information do you need and how do you find it?

Do the groups you belong to keep you informed? How does that happen?

Do you pass information on to family and friends?

Conclusion

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Are you happy about what you have said?

Do you want to see a transcript of the interview?

I would like to remind you that what you have said will be kept in strictest confidence and your name will never be used in reports.

Thank you very much for taking part.

Appendix 9: Participant Journal

What you need to do

The purpose of the daily journal is to help you to remember who you have talked to and what kind of things you have discussed each day over a period of two weeks. Once you have completed the journal, I can meet up with you to discuss what you have written. The journal will act as a reminder of your activities and social contacts.

The journal entries can be as brief or detailed as you like but will need to include answers to all of the following questions where possible:

- Who did you talk to today?
- Where did you meet this person?
- What did you talk about? (you do not need to include personal details – just general subjects)
- Did they give you advice or information?
- Did you give them advice or information?
- If so, what kind of advice or information?
- Did you use any other kinds of information?

I will be providing you with a journal to write in and a pen to write with when I visit you at the start of the two weeks.

I will also be telephoning you during the two weeks to find out how you are getting on.

At the end of the two week period I will visit you to collect the journal and to arrange a time for an interview.

Thank you very much for your help with the research.

Sue Capel

Appendix 10: Questions about social network contacts:

To find out about social contacts ask:

Who are the people you have regular contact with in your everyday life? Who are the first people you think of? Collect up to 6.

1) Sons and daughters (5 times), Friends (4 times), husband (1), Other family (2)

2) Friends (9 times), Brothers and sisters (2 times), Granddaughters (1)

3) Friends (11 times), Son (1)

4) Friends (12 times)

5) Friends (10 times), sister (1), daughter (1)

6)   Friends (7)

Total of 12 SNA interviews   Total of 50 contacts

FOR EACH CONTACT ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

To find out if the relationship is strong or weak ask:

(1) What is your relationship with this person?

A Would you say that you have a close relationship with this person and count them as a close friend?**(Code 1)**
B Do you know this person quite well and count them as a friend? **(Code 2)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	10	8	7	5	6	3
2	2	4	3	4	4	3
3			2	3	2	2
4						

C Are they a casual friend who you meet by chance or see at social activities?**(Code 3)**
D Are they an acquaintance, someone you do not know well and do not see often? **(Code 4)**

To find out the frequency of contact ask:

(2) How often do you have contact with this person?

A Daily? **(Code 5)**
B Several times a week?**(Code 6)**
C Weekly?**(Code 7)**
D Monthly?**(Code 8)**
E Less than monthly? **(Code 9)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	5	3	1	0	0	
6	4	6	5	4	8	4
7	3	3	5	6	3	3
8				2	1	1
9			1			

To find out the importance of contacts for friendship / advice / support / information ask:

(3) What sort of social contact does this person provide? (Can use these as prompts)

A Do they provide you with friendship? **(Code 10)**
B Do they provide you with advice?**(Code 11)**
C Do they provide you with support?**(Code 12)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	11	11	10	9	9	6
11	9	8	7	5	7	4
12	12	10	10	6	12	4
13	11	11	12	8	10	6

D Do they provide you with information?**(Code 13)**

To find out what kind of information is provided by each contact ask:

(4) What kind of information does this contact provide? List for each.
1) Town events and local news, family happenings and business, activities, internet information, mutual interests, health, church, music, practical and technical help, help with paperwork, holidays
2) News and local issues, local group news, local gossip, mutual support, about older people in care, the internet and technology, social activities, about pastoral work, family information, Hexham news, practical information, church
3) Local news, health services, activities, outings, family information, politics, sport, church, age concern, other local people, farming advice, Penrith information, pastoral, local knowledge, talk about local news

4) Age Concern shop and activities, family information, exchange experiences, mutal activities and interests, local history and people, farming, music, church, internet information, official information, pastoral, social activities
5) General information, casual, family, activities, church and spiritual, health information, cultural, books, what younger people are doing, travel experiences, local activities, gossip and local news, music
6) House repairs, activities, mutual interests, food, family matters, holiday information, filling in forms, social matters
Prompts: health, activities, local news, church, family, organizations etc.

To find out how important this contact is as INFORMATION PROVIDER ask:

(5) Can you rank the importance of this person as an INFORMATION PROVIDER?
Rank **1** as the most important and 6 as least important.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
1	2	2	1	2	1	2
2	3	6	4	2	3	1
3	5	2	3		4	1
4	1	2	3	1	2	3
5			1	3	1	
6				2	1	

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation

LIST OF REFERENCES

Abrahamson, J.A. (2007) What's past is prologue: towards a general model of lay information mediary behaviour. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science: Featuring the Future. *Information Research,* 12, 4, October. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/10-4/colis/colis15.html. (Accessed: 9 November 2007)

Adler, P. and Adler, P.A. (1980) 'Symbolic interactionism', pp. 20-61 In: Douglas, J.D. (Ed.) *Introduction to the sociologies of everyday life.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Agar, M.H. (1996) *The professional stranger: an informal introduction to ethnography.* (2nd ed) London: Academic Press.

Age Concern England (no date) *Perspectives and priorities among older people in rural areas ~ the research base,* Ageing and Countryside Resource. [Online] Available at: www.ageconcern.org.uk/rural (Accessed 15 December 2005)

Age Concern England (2004a) *Older People and IT* (Microsoft Survey) [Online] No longer available at: http://www.ageconcern.org.uk (Accessed: 23 May 2006)

Age Concern England (2004b) *Understanding the priorities and perspectives of older people*. [Online] Available at: http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/Documents/profile_older_rural_residents.pdf. (Accessed 22 February 2005)

Age Concern England (2005) *Delivering for older people in rural areas: a good practice guide.* [Online] Available at: www.ageconcern.org.uk/rural (Accessed 15 December 2005)

Age Concern Research Services (2005) Analysis of Lifeforce 2004/5 Data – urban/rural split (unpublished).

Alaszewski, A. (2006) *Using diaries for social research.* London: Sage.

Anderson, B. and Tracey, K. (2002) 'The impact (or otherwise) of the Internet on everyday British life', pp.139 -163. In: Wellman, B. and Haythornthwaite, C. *The Internet in everyday life.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Andrews, M. (1999) The seductiveness of agelessness. *Ageing and Society,* 19, pp. 301-318.

Arber, S., Davidson, K. and Ginn, J. (eds.) (2003) *Gender and Ageing: changing roles and relationships.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Archer, M.S. (1995) *Realist social theory: a morphogenetic approach.* Cambridge: CUP.

Aronson, J. (1994) A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report,* 2 (1). [Online] Available at: http://www.nova.edu/sss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html. (Accessed 30 March 2005)

Asla, T., Williamson, K. and Mills, J. (2006) The role of information in successful aging: the case for a research focus on the oldest old. *Library and Information Science Research,* 28, pp. 49-63.

Atchley, R.C. (1977) *The social forces in later life: an introduction to social gerontology.* (2nd ed.) Belmont CA: Wadsworth.

Atkinson, P. (1990) *The ethnographic imagination: textual construction of reality.* London: Routledge.

Atkinson, P. Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (eds.) (2007) *Handbook of Ethnography.* London: Sage.

Atkinson, P. and Hammersley, M. (1998) 'Ethnography and participant observation', pp.110-136. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Strategies of qualitative inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Atkinson, R. and Flint, J. (2001) Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: snowball research strategies. *Social Research Update,* Issue 33, Summer 2001. [Online] Available at: http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU33.html. (Accessed: 18 April 2006).

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001) Thematic Networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research,* 1 (3), pp.385-405.

Ayres, L., Kavanaugh, K. and Knafl, K.A. (2003) Within-case and cross-case approaches to qualitative data analysis. *Qualitative Health Research,* 13 (6), pp.871-883.

Baker, L.M. (2006) Observation: a complex research method. *Library Trends,* 55, 1, pp.171-189.

Baker, R. and Speakman, L. (2006) 'The older rural consumer', pp. 119-132. In: Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England.* London: Age Concern England.

Baltes, P. and Baltes, M. (1990) 'Psychological perspectives on successful ageing: the model of selective optimization with compensation', pp.1-34. In: Baltes, P. and Baltes, M. (Eds.) *Successful ageing: perspectives from the behavioural sciences.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bates, J.A. (2004) Use of narrative interviewing in everyday information behaviour research. *Library and Information Science Research,* 26, pp.15-28.

Bates, M.J. (1989) The design of browsing and berrypicking techniques for the online search interface. [Online] Available at: http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/bates/berrypicking.html. (Accessed: 28 May 2006)

Bates, M. J. (2002) 'Toward an integrated model of information seeking and searching'. *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research,* 3, pp.1-15.

Bates, M.J. (2005) Information and knowledge: an evolutionary framework for information science, *Information Research,* 10 (4), July, pp.1-23 [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/10-4/paper239.html. (Accessed: 2 March 2006)

Berger, P. L. and Luckmann, T. (1967) *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* London: Penguin.

Bevan, M. and Croucher, K. (2006) 'Delivering services for older people in rural areas', pp.147-163. In Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England.* London: Age Concern England.

Beverley, C.A., Booth, A. and Bath, P.A. (2003) The role of the information specialist in the systematic review process: a health information case study. *Health Information and Libraries Journal,* 20, pp. 65-74.

Bhaskar, R. (2008) *A realist theory of science.* (3rd ed.) London: Verso.

Bhasker, R. and Danermark, B. (2001) *Explaining society: critical realism in the social sciences.* London: Routledge.

Bloor, M. (2001) *Focus groups in social research.* London: Sage.

Blumer, H. (1969) *Symbolic interactionism.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bogdan, R. and Taylor, S.J. (1975) *Introduction to qualitative research methods: a phenomenological approach to the social sciences.* London: Wiley Interscience.

Bogdewic, S.P. (1991) 'Participant observation', in M. Ely (ed.) *Doing qualitative research: circles within circles,* pp.45-69. London: Falmer Press.

Booth, A. and Haines, M. (1998) Room for a review? *Library Association Record,* 100, pp.411-412.

Bowling, A. (2005) *Ageing well: quality of life in old age.* Growing Older Series. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Boyd, A. (2004) Multi-channel information seeking: a fuzzy conceptual model. *Aslib Proceedings,* 56 (2) pp. 81-88.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruce, H., Fidel, R., Ingwerson, P. and Vakkari, P. (eds.) (2002) *Emerging frameworks and methods: proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science (CoLIS4), Seattle, WA, USA.* Greenwood Village, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Buckland, M.K. (1991) Information as thing. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science,* 42, (5), pp. 351-360.

Budd, J.M. (2005) Phenomenology and information studies. *Journal of Documentation,* 61, (1), pp. 44-59.

Burgess, R.G. (1984) *In the field: an introduction to field research.* London: Allen and Unwin.

Burke, T.K. (2007) Providing ethics a space on the page: social work and ethnography as a case in point. *Qualitative Social Work,* 6, pp.177-195.

Burr, V. (1995) *An introduction to social constructionism.* London: Routledge.

Burr, V. (2003) *Social Constructionism.* (2nd ed.) Hove, E.Sussex: Routledge.

Carey, R.F., McKechnie, L.E.F. and McKenzie, P.J. (2001) Gaining access to everyday life information seeking. *Library and Information Science Research,* 23, pp.319-334.

Case, D.O. (2002) *Looking for information: a survey of research on information seeking, needs and behaviour.* San Diego: Academic Press.

Champion, T. and Shepherd, J. (2006) 'Demographic change in rural England', pp. 29-50. In Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England.* London: Age Concern England.

Chapman, S.A. and Peace, S. (2008) 'Rurality and ageing well: 'a long time here'', pp.21-31. In Keating, N. (2008) (Ed.) *Rural ageing: a good place to grow old?* Bristol: Policy Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London: Sage.

Chatman, E.A. (1991) Channels to a larger social world: older women staying in contact with the Great Society. *Library and Information Science Research,* 13, pp. 281-300.

Chatman, E.A. (1992) *The information world of retired women.* Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

Chatman, E.A. (1996) The impoverished life-world of outsiders. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science,* 47, 3, 193-206.

Chatman, E.A. (1999) A theory of life in the round. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 50, (3), 207-217.

Chatman, E.A. (2000) 'Framing social life in theory and research'. Keynote address; Information Seeking in Context. In: *New Review of Information Behavior Research,* 1, December, pp. 3-17.

Chen, C. & Hernon, P. (1982) *Information seeking: assessing and anticipating user needs.* New York: Neal-Schuman.

Chiva, A. and Stears, D. (Eds.) (2001) *Promoting the health of older people: the next step in health generation.* Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Christensen, P., Hockey, J. and James, A. (1997) 'You have neither neighbours nor privacy': ambiguities in the experience of emotional well being of women in farming families. *The Sociological Review.*

Clarke, A. and Warren, L. (2007) Hopes, fears and expectations about the future: what do older people's stories tell us about active ageing? *Ageing and Society,* 27, pp. 465-488.

Coffey, A. (1999) *The ethnographic self: fieldwork and the representation of identity.* London: Sage.

Cole, C. (1994) Operationalizing the notion of information as a subjective construct. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science,* 45, (7), pp. 465-476.

Coleman, J.S. (1988) Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American Journal of Sociology,* 94, S95-S120. [Online] Available at: http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-9602%281988%2994%3CS95%3ASCITCO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P. (Accessed: 7 April 2007)

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection. (2006) *Living well in later life: a review of progress against the National Service Framework for Older People.* London: CHAI.

Commission for Rural Communities (2007) *The state of the countryside 2007.* Cheltenham: CRC.

Cook, G., Reed, J., Childs, S. and Hall, A. (2004) *Does money matter? Older people's views of their monetory resources.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Cooper, J., Lewis, R. and Urquhart, C. (2004) Using participant or non-participant observation to explain information behaviour. *Information Research,* 9, (4), July, pp. 1-18. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/9-4/paper184.html. (Accessed: 17 January 2006)

Cornelius, I. (1996) *Meaning and method in information studies.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Corti, L. (1993) Using diaries in social research. *Social Research Update,* Issue 2, March. Available at: http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU2.html. (Accessed: 18 April 2006)

Countryside Agency (2004a) *The new definition of urban and rural areas of England and Wales.* Research Note CRN 86. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

Countryside Agency (2004b) *The role of settlements as service centres.* Research Note CRN 83. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency.

Courtright, C. (2007) 'Context in information behavior research', pp.273-306. In: Cronin, B. (ed.) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.41. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Cresswell, J.W. (1998) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M (1998) *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process.* London: Sage.

Cumbria Constabulary (2006) *Alston Moor Ward Profile*. [Online] Available at: http://www.cumbria.police.uk/profiles/edenward/16UFGF.pdf (Accessed: 11 May 2007)

Cumbria County Council (2006) *Building Pride in Cumbria Survey.*[Online] Available: http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/675/1763/1773/3915415753.pdf. (Accessed: 11 May 2007)

Davidson, K., Daly, T., and Arber, S. (2003) 'Exploring the social worlds of older men', pp.168-185. In: Arber, S., Davidson, K. and Ginn, J. (eds.) *Gender and Ageing: changing roles and relationships.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Davies, C.A. (2008) *Reflexive ethnography: a guide to researching selves and others.* (2nd ed) Oxford: Routledge.

De Jong Gierveld, J. (2003) 'Social networks and social well-being of older men and women living alone', pp. 95-110. In: Arber, S., Davidson, K. and Ginn, J. (eds.) *Gender and Ageing: changing roles and relationships.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Dean, M. (2003) *Growing older in the 21st century.* York: ESRC.

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects.* (2nd ed.) Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2004) *Rural strategy 2004.* London: DEFRA.

Department of Health (2004a) *Better information, better choices, better health: putting information at the centre of health*. London: DOH.

Department of Health (2004b) *National Service Framework for older people.* London, DOH.

Dervin, B. (1977) Useful theory for librarianship: communication, not information. *Drexel Library Quarterly,* 13 (3), pp. 16-32.

Dervin, B. (1989) Users as research inventions: how research categories perpetuate inequalities. *Journal of Communication,* 39 (3), pp. 216-232.

Dervin, B. (1992) 'From the mind's eye of the user: The sense-making qualitative-quantitative methodology', pp. 61-84. In: Glazier, J.D. & Powell, R.R. (eds). *Qualitative research in information management*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Dervin, B. (1997) 'Given a context by any other name: methodological tools for taming the unruly beast', pp.13-38. In: Vakkari, P., Savolainen, R. and Dervin, B. (Eds.) *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of an International Conference in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts, 14-16 August, Tampere, Finland,* London: Taylor Graham.

Dervin, B. (1999) On studying information seeking methodologically: the implications of connecting metatheory to method. *Information Processing and Management,* 35, pp. 727-750.

Dervin, B. (2005) 'What methodology does to theory: sense-making methodology as exemplar', pp. 26-30. In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (Eds.) (2005) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Dervin, B. and Nilan, M. (1986) 'Information needs and uses', pp.19-38. In: Williams, M.E. (ed.) *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology,* 21. ARIST.

Devins, D. et al. (2002) *Connecting Communities to the Internet: evaluation of the Wired up Communities programme. Case Study Alston Moor.* Policy Research Institute. Leeds Metropolitan University.

Dobson, P.J. (2002) Critical realism and information systems research: why bother with philosophy? *Information Research,* 7(2), pp.1-13. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/7-2/paper124.html. (Accessed: 20 January 2009)

Dolan, A. (2007) 'That's just the cesspool where they dump all the trash': exploring working class men's perceptions and experiences of social capital and health. *Health,* 11 (4), pp. 475-495.

Douglas, J.D. (Ed.) (1980) *Introduction to the sociologies of everyday life.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Dunning, A. (2005) *Information, advice and advocacy for older people: defining and developing services.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Economic and Social Research Council (2005) *Research ethics framework.* [Online] Available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/research_ethics_framework/index.aspx?ComponentId=11292&SourcePageId=19165. (Accessed: 11 June 2008).

Eden District Council (2006a) *Eden in Profile.* [Online] Available at:
http://www.eden.gov.uk/PDF/lsp-eden-in-profile.pdf (Accessed: 2 May 2007)

Eden District Council (2006b) *Profile of Alston.* [Online] Available at:
http://www.eden.gov.uk/main.asp?page=2156 (Accessed: 2 May 2007)

Eden District Council (2006c) *Profile of Eden.* [Online] Available at:
http://www.eden.gov.uk/main.asp?page=214 (Accessed: 2 May 2007)

Ellis, D.A. (1989) A behavioural approach to information retrieval design. *Journal of Documentation,* 45 (3), pp. 171-212.

Ely, M. (1991) *Doing qualitative research: circles within circles.* London: Falmer Press.

Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M. and Anzul, M. (1997) *On writing qualitative research: living by words.* London: Falmer Press.

Erdelez, S. (1996) 'Information encountering: a conceptual framework for accidental information discovery', pp. 412-421. In: Vakkari, P., Savolainen, R. and Dervin, B. (eds.) (1997) *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of an International Conference in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts, 14-16 August, Tampere, Finland,* London: Taylor Graham.

Erdelez, S. (1999) Information encountering: it's more than just bumping into information. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science,* 25 (3), pp. 25-29.

Erdelez, S. (2005) 'Information Encountering', pp. 179-183. In: Fisher, K.E. et al. (Eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Erlandson, D.A., Harris, E.L., Skipper, B.L. and Allen, S.D. (1993) *Doing naturalistic inquiry.* London: Sage.

Fairhurst, E. (2003) 'New identities in ageing: perspectives on age, gender and life after work', pp. 31-46. In: Arber, S., Davidson, K. and Ginn, J. (eds.) *Gender and Ageing: changing roles and relationships.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Fast, J. and de Jong Gierveld, J. (2008) 'Ageing, disability and participation', pp. 63-73. In: Keating, N. (2008) (ed.) *Rural ageing: a good place to grow old?* Bristol: Policy Press.

Ferdinand, J., Pearson, G., Rowe, M. and Worthington, F. (2007) A different kind of ethics. *Ethnography,* 8, pp. 519-543.

Fetterman, D.M. (1989) *Ethnography: step by step.* London: Sage.

Field, J. (2003) *Social capital.* London: Routledge.

Fisher, K.E. (2005) 'Information grounds', pp. 185-190. In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Fisher, K.E., Durrance, J.C. and Hinton, M.B. (2004) Information grounds and the use of need-based services by immigrants in Queens, New York: a context-based, outcome evaluation approach. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology,* 55 (8), pp. 754-766.

Fisher, K.E. and Julien, H. (2009) Information behaviour. In: Cronin, B. (ed.) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol. 43. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Fisher, K.E., Landry, C.F. and Naumer, C. (2007) Social spaces, casual interactions, meaningful exchanges: 'information ground' characteristics based on the college student experience. *Information Research,* 12 (2), pp.1-15. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/12-2/paper291.html. (Accessed: 2 February 2007)

Fisher, K.E., Marcoux, E., Miller, L.S., Sánchez, A., and Cunningham, E.R. (2004) Information behaviour of migrant Hispanic farm workers and their families in the Pacific Northwest. *Information Research,* 10 (1), pp. 1-12. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/10-1/paper199.html. (Accessed: 9 April 2007)

Fisher, K. and Naumer, C. (2006) 'Information grounds: theoretical basis and empirical findings on information flow in social settings', pp. 93-111. In: Spink, A and Cole, C. *New Directions in Human Information Behaviour,* Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Fisher, K., Naumer, C., Durrance, J., Stromski, L. and Christianson, T. (2005) Something old, something new: preliminary findings from an exploratory study about people's information habits and information grounds. *Information Research,* 10 (2), pp. 1-15. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/10-2/paper223.html. (Accessed: 6 September 2006)

Flick, U. (2006) *An introduction to qualitative research.* London: Sage.

Foster, A. and Ford, N. (2003) Serendipity and information seeking: an empirical study. *Journal of Documentation,* 59 (3), pp. 321-340.

Fulton, C. (2005) 'Chatman's life in the round', pp. 79-82. In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Geertz, C. (1973) 'Thick description', pp. 3-30. In Geertz, C. (ed.) *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays.* London: Fontana Press.

Ginman, M. (2003) Social capital as a communicative paradigm. *Health Informatics Journal*, 9 (1), pp. 57-64.

Ginman, M., Ek, S., Ericksson-Backa, K., Mustonen, M., Torkkola, S., Tuominen, K. and Wikgren, M. (2003) Health communication and knowledge construction. *Health Informatics Journal,* 9 (4), pp. 301-313.

Ginn, J., Arber, S. and Cooper, H. (1997) *Researching older people's health needs and health promotion issues.* London: Health Education Authority.

Glazier, J.D. & Powell, R.R. (eds). (1992) *Qualitative research in information management*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Godfrey, M., Townsend, J. and Denby, T. (2004) *Building a good life for older people in local communities: the experience of ageing in time and place.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Goffman, E. (1990) *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin.

Gomm, R. (2004) *Social research methodology: a critical introduction.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goodwin, D., Pope, C., Mort, M. and Smith, A. (2003) Ethics and ethnography: an experiential account. *Qualitative Health Research,* 13, 4, pp.567-577.

Granovetter, M.S. (1973) The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology.* 6, pp. 1360-1380.

Granovetter, M.S. (1982) The strength of weak ties: a network theory revisited. *Sociological Theory,* 1, pp. 201-233.

Gray, A. (2009) The social capital of older people. *Ageing and society,* 29, pp.5-31.

Grbich, C. (2007) Qualitative data analysis: an introduction. London: Sage.

Green, Anne E. (2006) 'Employment and the older person in the countryside', pp. 94-107 In: Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England,* London: Age Concern England.

Grogan, L., Mayberry, P.S. and Straker, J.K. (1999) What we didn't learn because of who would not talk to us. *Qualitative Health Research,* 9, pp.829-835.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1981) *Effective evaluation.* Jossey-Bass.

Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A. (1997) *The new language of qualitative method.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hallowell, N., Lawton, J. and Gregory, S. (2005) *Reflections on research: the realities of doing research in the social sciences.* Milton Keynes: Open UP.

Hammersley, M and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography: principles in practice*. (2nd ed.), London: Routledge.

Hammersley, M and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: principles in practice*. (3rd ed.), London: Routledge.

Harris, R.M. and Dewdney, P. (1994) *Barriers to information: how formal help systems fail battered women.* Westport, CI: Greenwood.

Havighurst, R. (1961) Successful aging. *Gerontologist,* 1 (1), pp. 8-13.

Havighurst, R. (1963) 'Successful aging', pp. 299-320 In: Williams, R., Tibbitts, C. and Donahue, W. (eds.), *Processes of aging.* New York: Atherton.

Haythornthwaite, C. (1996) Social network analysis: an approach and technique for the study of information exchange. *Library and Information Science Research,* 18, pp. 323-342.

Haythornthwaite, C. and Hagar, C. (2004) 'The social worlds of the web', 311-346. In: Cronin, B. (ed.) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.39. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Henwood, F., Wyatt, S., Hart, A. and Smith, J. (2003) 'Ignorance is bliss sometimes': constraints on the emergence of the 'informed patient' in the changing landscapes of health information. *Sociology of Health and Illness,* 25 (6), pp. 589-607.

Hewitt, J. (2007) Ethical components of researcher researched relationships in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research,* 17, pp.1149-1159.

Hjörland, B. (2004) Arguments for philosophical realism in library and information science. *Library Trends,* 52 (3), pp. 488-506.

Hobbs, D. and May, T. (1993) *Interpreting the field: accounts of ethnography*. Oxford: OUP.

House of Commons Health Committee (2007) *Patient and public involvement in the NHS.* Third report of session 2006-07. Volume 1. Report, together with formal minutes. HC278-1. Stationery Office, 20 April 2007.

Hsiu-Fang, H. and Shannon, S.E. (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research,* 15 (9), pp.1277-1288.

Husserl, E. (2001) *Logical investigations,* translated by Findlay, J.N., Vol. 2, London: Routledge.

Jacelon, C.S. and Imperio, K. (2005) Participant diaries as a source of data in research with older adults. *Qualitative Health Research,* 15 (7), pp.991-997.

Jasper, M.A. (2005) Using reflective writing within research. *Journal of Research in Nursing,* 10 (3), pp. 247-260.

Johnson, C.A. (2004) Choosing people: the role of social capital in information seeking behaviour. *Information Research,* 10 (1), pp. 1-16. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/10-1/paper201.html. (Accessed: 9 June 2005)

Johnson, C.A. (2005) 'Nan Lin's Theory of Social Capital', pp. 323-327 In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) (2005) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Johnson, J.C. (1990) *Selecting ethnographic informants.* Qualitative Research Methods. Volume 22. London: Sage.

Johnson, J.D.E., Case, D.O., Andrews, A., Allard, S.L. and Johnson, N.E. (2006) Fields and pathways: contrasting or complementary views of information seeking. *Information Processing and Management,* 42 (2), 569-582.

Jones, J. and Hunter, D. (1999) 'Using the Delphi and nominal group technique in health services research' In: Pope, C. and Mays, N. *Qualitative research in health care.* (2nd ed.) London: BMJ. [Online] Available at: http://www.bmjpg.com/qrhc/chapter5.html. (Accessed: 30 June 2004)

Jorgensen, D.L. (1989) *Participant observation: a methodology for human studies.* Applied Social Research Methods Series. Volume 15. London: Sage.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2004) *Older people shaping policy and practice.* Older People's Steering Group. York: JRF.

Julien, H. and Michels, D. (2004) Intra-individual information behaviour in daily life. *Information Processing and Management,* 40, pp.547-562.

Kolek, C.R. (1993) *Elderly people in Eden: independence and the supportive network.* Penrith: Age Concern Eden.

Kuhlthau, C.C. (1991) Inside the research process: information seeking from the user's perspective. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science,* 42 (5), pp. 361-371.

Lai, G. and Wong, O. (2002) The tie effect on information dissemination: the spread of commercial rumor in Hong Kong. *Social Networks,* 24, pp. 49-75.

Laslett, P. (1996) *A fresh map of life: the emergence of the third age.* 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

LeCompte, M.D. and Schensul, J.J. (1999) *Designing and conducting ethnographic research.* Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Le Mesurier, N. (2003) *The hidden store: older people's contributions to rural communities.* London: Age Concern England. [Online] Available at: http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/Documents/regions_rural_affairs_report.pdf. (Accessed 28 May 2008).

Le Mesurier, N. (2006) 'The contributions of older people to rural community and citizenship', pp.133-146 In: Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England.* London: Age Concern England.

Lesser, E. (Ed.) (2000) *Knowledge and social capital.* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Lievrouw, L.A. (2001) New media and the 'pluralization of life-worlds'. *New Media & Society,* 3, pp.7-28.

Lievrouw, L.A. and Farb, S.E. (2003) 'Information and equity', pp.499-540. In: Cronin, B. (ed.) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.37. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital: a theory of social structure and action.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lin, N., Cook, E. and Burt, R.S. (2001) (eds.) *Social capital: theory and research.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic enquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Litwin, H. and Shiovitz-Ezra, S. (2006) The association between activity and wellbeing in later life: what really matters? *Ageing and Society,* 26, pp.225-242.

Lloyd, A. (2006) Information literacy landscapes: an emerging picture. *Journal of Documentation,* 62 (5), pp. 570-583.

Lloyd, A. and Williamson, K. (2008) Towards an understanding of information literacy in context: implications for research. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science,* 40, 1, pp.3-12.

Lofland, J. and Lofland, L.H. (1995) *Analyzing social settings: a guide to qualitative observation and analysis.* (3rd ed.), California: Wadsworth.

Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (2006) 'The greying countryside', pp. 9-28. In Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England.* London: Age Concern England.

Macevičiūtė, E. and Wilson, T.D. (2005) *Introducing information management: an information research reader.* London: Facet.

Manderson, L., Bennett, E. and Andajani-Sutjahjo, S. (2006) The social dynamics of the interview: age, class, and gender. *Qualitative Health Research,* 16 (10), pp.1317-1334.

Manthorpe, J., Malin, N. and Stubbs, H. (2004) Older people's views on rural life: a study of three villages. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 13 (6b), pp. 97-104.

Marcella, R. and Baxter, G. (1999) The information needs and the information seeking behaviour of a national sample of the population in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Documentation,* 55 (2), pp. 159-183.

Marcella, R. and Baxter, G. (2000) Information need, information seeking behaviour and participation, with special reference to needs related to citizenship: results of a national survey. *Journal of Documentation,* 56 (2), pp. 136-160.

Marcella, R. and Baxter, G. (2001) A random walk around Britain: a critical assessment of the random walk sample as a method of collecting data on the public's citizenship information needs. *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research,* 2, pp. 87-103.

Marcella, R. and Baxter, G. (2005) Information interchange, pp. 204-209 In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Marsden, P.V. and Campbell, K.E. (1984) Measuring tie strength, *Social Forces,* 63 (2), pp. 482-501.

Maso, I. (2007) Phenomenology and ethnography, pp. 136-144 In: Atkinson, P. Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (eds.) *Handbook of Ethnography.* London: Sage.

Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative researching.* London: Sage.

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994) *Beginning qualitative research: a philosophical and practical guide*. London: Falmer.

McKenzie, P.J. (2003) A model of information practices in accounts of everyday-life information seeking. *Journal of Documentation*, 59 (1), pp. 19-40.

Miles, M. & Hubermann, A. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. (1988) *Focus groups as qualitative research.* London: Sage.

Morgan, D. (1997) *Focus groups as qualitative research.* 2nd. ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moustakas, C.E. (1994) *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nahapiet, J. and Ghoshal, S. (2000) 'Social capital, intellectual capital and the organizational advantage', pp. 119-155 In: Lesser, E. (ed.) *Knowledge and social capital.* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

National Research Ethics Service (2007) *Guidance for applicants to NRES.* [Online] Available at: http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/rec-community/guidance/#appguide. (Accessed: 11 June 2008).

Neal, S. and Walters, S. (2008) Rural be/longing and rural social organizations: conviviality and community-making in the English countryside. *Sociology,* 42, pp.279-297.

North Pennines AONB Partnership (2003) *North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.* [Online] Available at http://www.northpennines.org.uk/. (Accessed: 2 May 2007)

Northern Fells Rural Project (2002) *Under the stones: hidden need in rural Cumbria.* Caldbeck: NFRP.

Nunkoosing, K. (2005) The problems with interviews. *Qualitative Health Research,* 15 (5), pp.698-706.

Nussbaum, J.F., Thompson, T. and Robinson, J.D. (1989) *Communication and aging.* New York: Harper and Row.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2006a) *A sure start to later life: ending inequalities for older people.* Social Exclusion Unit Final Report. London: ODPM.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2006b) The social exclusion of older people: evidence from the first wave of the English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing. London, ODPM.

Office of National Statistics (2007) *Rural and urban classification 2004*. [Online] Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp. (Accessed: 11 May 2007).

Oldenburg, R. (1999) *The great good place: cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of a community.* New York: Marlowe and Company.

Olsson, M. (1998) The discourses of contemporary information science research: an alternative approach. *Information Research,* 4(2), 1-6. [Online] Available at: http://InformationR.net/ir/4-2/isic/olsson.html (Accessed 17 January 2006)

Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS). *The Internet in Britain, 2005*. [Online] Available at: http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/oxis/oxis2005_report.pdf (Accessed: February 2007).

Patton, M.Q. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd ed). London: Sage.

Pendleton, V.E.M. and Chatman, E.A. (1998) Small world lives: implications for the public library. *Library Trends,* 46 (4), pp. 732-752.

Pettigrew, K.E. (1999) Waiting for chiropody: contextual results from an ethnographic study of the information behaviour among attendees at community clinics. *Information Processing and Management,* 35, pp. 801-817.

Pettigrew, K.E. (2000) Lay information provision in community settings: how community health nurses disseminate human services information to the elderly. *Library Quarterly,* 70 (1), pp. 47-85.

Pettigrew, K.E., Fidel, R. and Bruce, H. (2001) 'Conceptual frameworks in information behaviour', pp. 43-78 In: Williams, M.E. (ed.) *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology,* 35. Medford, N.J.: ARIS&T.

Pitts, M.J. and Miller-Day, M. (2007) Upward turning points and positive rapport-development across time in researcher-participant relationships. *Qualitative Research,* 7 (2), pp.177-201.

Portes, A. (1998) Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 22, pp.1-24.

Potter, J. (1996) *Representing reality: discourse, rhetoric and social construction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Prigoda, E. and McKenzie, P.J. (2007) Purls of wisdom: a collectivist study of human information behaviour in a public library knitting group. *Journal of Documentation,* 63 (1), pp.90-113.

Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Quinn A, Snowling A, Denicolo P. (2003) *Older People's Perspectives: Devising Information, Advice and Advocacy Services.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Rapport, N. (ed.) (2002) *British subjects: an anthropology of Britain.* Oxford: Berg.

Reed, J., Cook, G., Childs, S. and Hall, A. (2003) *Getting old is not for cowards: comfortable, healthy ageing.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Reed, J. and Proctor, S. (1995) Practitioner research in context, pp. 3-31 In: Reed, J. and Proctor, S. (eds.) *Practitioner research in health care: the inside story.* London: Chapman and Hall.

Reed, J., Stanley, D. and Clarke, C. (2004) *Health, well-being and older people*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Rice, P.L. & Ezzy, D. (1999) *Qualitative research methods: a health focus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rock, P. (2007) Symbolic interactionism and ethnography, pp. 26-38. In: Atkinson, P. Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (eds.) *Handbook of Ethnography.* London: Sage.

Sandstrom, P.E. (2004) Anthropological approaches to information systems and behavior. Abbreviated version of a talk given at the ASIS&T 2003 Annual Meeting. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science and Technology,* 30 (3).

Sarantakos, S. (1998) *Social research*. (2nd ed.) Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Savolainen, R. (1995) Everyday life information seeking: approaching information seeking in the context of "way of life". *Library and Information Science Research,* 17, pp. 259-294.

Schatzman, L. and Strauss, A. (1973) *Field research: strategies for a natural sociology.* Englewood cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Schutz, A. (1970) (ed. HR Wagner) *On phenomenology and social relations.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Schutz, A. and Luckmann, T. (1974) *The structures of the life-world*. London: Heinemann.

Schwandt, T.A. (1994) Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry, pp. 118-137 In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Scott, J. (1991) *Social network analysis: a handbook.* London: Sage.

Seale, C. (Ed.) (2004) *Researching society and culture*. London: Sage.

Selwyn, N. (2004) The information aged: a qualitative study of older adults' use of information and communications technology. *Journal of Aging Studies,* 18, pp.369-384.

Shenton, A.K. (2004) Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information,* 22, pp.63-75.

Shenton, A.K. and Dixon, P. (2004) Debates and paradoxes surrounding the use of qualitative methods. *Education for Information,* 22, pp.1-12.

Silverman, D. (1985) *Qualitative methodology and sociology*. Aldershot: Gower.

Sims-Gould, J. and Martin-Matthews, A. (2008) 'Distance, privacy and independence: rural homecare' In: Keating, N. (ed.) *Rural ageing: a good place to grow old?* Bristol: Policy Press.

Solomon, P. (2002) Discovering information in context. In: Cronin, B. (ed.) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.36. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Solomon, P. (2005) 'Rounding and dissonant grounds' In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Sonnenwald, D.H. (1998) 'Evolving perspectives of information behavior: Contexts, situations, social networks and information horizons' In: *Exploring the contexts of information behaviour: proceedings of the second international conference on research in information needs, seeking and use in different contexts.* Sheffield, UK. 13-15 August. London: Taylor Graham.

Spink, A. and Cole, C. (2001) Information and poverty: information-seeking channels used by African American low-income households. *Library and Information Science Research,* 23 (1), pp.45-65.

Stake, R.E. (1995) *The art of case study research.* London: Sage.

Sutton, B. (1993) The rationale for qualitative research: a review of principles and theoretical foundations. *Library Quarterly,* 63, pp.411-430.

Talja, S., Tuominen, K. and Savolainen, R. (2005) "Isms" in information science: constructivism, collectivism and constructionism. *Journal of Documentation,* 61 (1), pp. 79-101.

Taylor, S.J. and Bogdan, R. (1984) *Introduction to qualitative research methods: the search for meanings.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Thorson, J.A. and Powell, F.C. (1992) Rural and urban elderly construe health differently. *The Journal of Psychology*, 126 (3), pp. 251-260.

Tidline, T.J. (2005) 'Dervin's sense-making', pp. 113-117 In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (Eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Todd, H. (1984) The information needs of newly retired people. *Health Libraries Review,* 1, pp. 22-35.

Townsend, J., Godfrey, M. and Denby, T. (2006) Heroines, villains and victims: older people's perceptions of others. *Ageing and Society,* 26, 883-900.

Tuominen, K. and Savolainen, R. (1997) 'A social constructionist approach to the study of information use as a discursive action', pp. 81-96 In: Vakkari, P., Savolainen, R. and Dervin, B. (eds.), *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of an International Conference in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts, 14-16 August, Tampere, Finland,* London: Taylor Graham.

Tuominen, K., Talja, S. and Savolainen, R. (2002) 'Discourse, cognition and reality: toward a social constructionist metatheory for library and information science', pp. 271-283 In: Bruce, H., Fidel, R., Ingwerson, P. and Vakkari, P. (eds.), *Emerging frameworks and methods: proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science (CoLIS4), Seattle, WA, USA.* Greenwood Village, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

United Nations Secretariat. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division. (2006) *The Ageing of the world's population.* United Nations. [Online] Available at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/popageing.html (Accessed: March 2008).

Vakkari, P. (1997) 'Information seeking in context: a challenging metatheory', pp. 451-464 In: Vakkari, P., Savolainen, R. and Dervin, B. (eds.) *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of an International Conference in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts, 14-16 August, Tampere, Finland,* London: Taylor Graham.

Van Maanen, J. (1988) *Tales of the field: on writing ethnography.* London: University of Chicago Press.

Victor, C.R. (2005) *The social context of ageing: a textbook of gerontology.* London: Routledge.

Walsh, D. and Downe, S. (2005) Meta-analysis method for qualitative research: a literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing,* 50, 2, pp.204-211.

Wathen, C.N. and Harris, R.M. (2007) "I try to take care of myself." How rural women search for health information. *Qualitative Health Research,* 17, pp.639-651.

Wenger, G.C. (1992) *Help in old age: facing up to a change, a longitudinal network study.* The Institute of Human Ageing, Occasional Papers 5, Liverpool University Press.

Wenger, G.C. (2001) Myths and realities of ageing in rural Britain. *Ageing and Society*, 21, pp. 117-130.

Wenger, G.C. and Keating, N. (2008) 'The evolution of networks of rural older adults' pp. 33-42. In: Keating, N. (ed.) *Rural ageing: a good place to grow old?* Bristol: Policy Press.

Wenger, G.C. and Tucker, I. (2002) Using network variation in practice: identification of support network type. *Health and Social Care in the Community,* 10 (1), pp. 28-35.

Wicks, D.A. (2001) "Go with the flow": independent older adults and their information-seeking. Canadian Association for Information Science [Online] Available at: http://www.cais-assi.ca/proceedings/2001/Wicks_2001.pdf. (Accessed: 24 March 2008)

Wicks, D.A. (2004) Older adults and their information seeking. *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian,* 22, 2, pp.1-26.

Wikgren, M. (2004) Critical realism as a philosophy and social theory in information science? *Journal of Documentation,* 61 (1), pp. 11-22.

Williams, M. and May, T. (1996) *Introduction to the philosophy of social research.* London: UCL Press.

Williams, M.E. (ed.) (1986) *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology,* 21. Medford, N.J.: ARIS&T.

Williamson, K. (1997) 'The information needs and information-seeking behaviour of older adults: an Australian study', pp. 337-350 In: Vakkari, P., Savolainen, R. and Dervin, B. (eds.) *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of an International Conference in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts, 14-16 August, Tampere, Finland,* London: Taylor Graham.

Williamson, K. (1998) Discovered by chance: the role of incidental information acquisition in an ecological model of information use. *Library and Information Science Research,* 20 (1), pp. 23-40.

Williamson, K. (2005) 'Ecological theory of human information behavior', pp. 128-132. In: Fisher, K.E. Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Williamson, K. (2006) Research in constructivist frameworks using ethnographic techniques. *Library Trends,* 55(1), pp.83-101.

Wilson, P. (1977) *Public knowledge, private ignorance,* Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

Wilson, T.D. (1981) On user studies and information needs. *Journal of Documentation*, 37 (1), pp. 3-15.

Wilson, T.D. (1999) Models in information behaviour research. *Journal of Documentation*, 55, 3, pp. 249-270.

Wilson, T.D. (2000) Human information behaviour. *Informing Science*, 3 (2), pp. 49-55.

Wilson, T.D. (2002a) The nonsense of knowledge management. *Information Research,* 8 (1), paper 144. [Online] Available at: http://informationr.net/ir/8-1/paper144.html. (Accessed: 9 June 2005)

Wilson, T.D. (2002b) *Alfred Schutz, phenomenology and research methodology for information behaviour research.* Paper delivered at ISIC4, the Fourth International Conference on Information Seeking in Context, Universidade Lusiada, Lisbon, Portugal, September 11 to 13, 2002. [Online] Available at http://informationr.net/tdw/publ/papers/schutz02.html. (Accessed: 11 January 2008)

Wilson, T.D. (2005) 'Evolution in information behavior modeling: Wilson's model', pp. 31-36 In: Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Wolcott, H.F. (2001) *Writing up qualitative research.* (2nd ed.) London: Sage.

Yates-Mercer, P. and Wotherspoon, G. (1998) *Information needs of rural users: an update.* British Library Research and Innovation Report 116, BLRIC.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, J. (2008) *Older people and wellbeing.* London: IPPR.

Atkinson, P. and Housley, W. (2003) *Interactionism: an essay in sociological amnesia.* London: Sage.

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (2007) (eds.) *Handbook of ethnography.* London: Sage.

Baker, L.M. and Pettigrew, K.E. (1999) Theories for practitioners: two frameworks for studying health information-seeking behaviour. *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association,* 87 (4), pp. 444-450.

Baltes, P. and Baltes, M. (Eds.) (1990) *Successful ageing: perspectives from the behavioural sciences.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brashers, D.E., Goldsmith, D.J. & Hsieh, E. (2002) Information seeking and avoiding in health contexts. *Human Communication Research*, 28 (2), April, pp. 258-271.

British Sociological Association (2002) *Statement of ethical practice.* [Online] Available at: http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm. (Accessed 10 June 2008).

Bruce, H., Fidel, R., Ingwerson, P. and Vakkari, P. (eds.) (2002) *Emerging frameworks and methods: proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science (CoLIS4), Seattle, WA, USA.* Greenwood Village, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Budd, J.M. (2001) *Knowledge and knowing in library and information science*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press.

Button, G. (Ed.) (1991) *Ethnomethodology and the human sciences.* Cambridge: CUP.

Cawthra, L. (1999) Older peoples' health information needs. *Health Libraries Review,* 16, pp.97-105.

Chatman, E.A. (1987) The information world of low-skilled workers. *Library and Information Science Research,* 9 (4), pp. 265-283.

Coleman, J.S. (1990) *Foundations of social theory.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.

Collier, A. (1994) *Critical realism: an introduction to Roy Bhaskar's philosophy.* London: Verso.

Corbin, J.M. and Strauss, A. (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cronin, B. (ed.) (2002) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.36. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Cronin, B. (ed.) (2003) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.37. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Cronin, B. (ed.) (2005) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.39. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Cronin, B. (ed.) (2007) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.41. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Cronin, B. (ed.) (2009) *Annual Review of information Science and Technology.* Vol.43. New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (1994) *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1998) *The landscape of qualitative research: theories and issues.* London: Sage.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (1998) *Strategies of qualitative inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (2002) *The qualitative inquiry reader.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (2005) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department of Health (2006) *Our health, our care, our say: new direction for community services.* London: DOH.

Dey, I. (1993) *Qualitative data analysis: a user friendly guide for social scientists.* London: Routledge.

Elliott, J. (2005) *Using narrative in social research: qualitative and quantitative approaches.* London: Sage.

Fisher, K.E., Erdelez, S. and McKechnie, L. (eds.) (2005) *Theories of Information Behavior.* New Jersey: ASIS&T.

Geertz, C. (ed.) (1973) *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays.* London: Fontana Press.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine Publishing Co.

Glazier, J.D. and Powell, R.R. (Eds.) (1992) *Qualitative research in information management*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Goffman, E. (1963) *Behavior in public places*. Toronto: Macmillan.

Habermas, Jurgen (1984) *The theory of communicative action*. Translation by Thomas McCarthy. Volume One, Reason and the rationalisation of society. London: Heinemann.

Hammersley, M (1992) *What's wrong with ethnography?* London: Routledge.

Henwood, F., Wyatt, S., Hart, A. and Smith, J. (2002) Turned on or turned off? : accessing health information on the Internet. *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems,* 14 (2), pp.79-90.

Hjörland, B. (1997) *Information seeking and subject representation: an activity-theoretical approach to information science*. New Directions in Information Management, No. 34. Westport CT:Greenwood.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing qualitative research differently: free association, narrative and the interview method.* London: Sage.

Hughes, J. and Sharrock, W. (1990) *The philosophy of social research.* (3rd ed.) Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.

Intelligent Communities. *Wired Up Communities, Practitioner's Toolkit: The Alston Moor Project.* [Online] Available at: www.intelligentcommunities.org.uk/profiles/alston.htm (Accessed: February 2007)

Johnson, J.D. (2003) On contexts of information seeking. *Information Processing and Management,* 39, pp. 735-760.

Josselson, R. and Lieblich, A. (1999) (Eds.) *Making meaning of narratives.* Narrative study of lives; v.6, London: Sage.

Judd, C.M. (1991) *Research methods in social relations*. (6th ed.) London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Keating, N. (2008) (Ed.) *Rural ageing: a good place to grow old?* Bristol: Policy Press.

Keith, J., Fry, C., and Ikels, C. (1990) 'Community as context for successful aging', pp. 245-261 In: Sokolovsky, J. (Ed.), *The cultural context of aging: worldwide perspectives.* New York: Bergin and Garvey.

Kirk, J. and Miller, M.L. (1986) *Reliability and validity in qualitative research.* London: Sage.

Krikelas, J. (1983) Information-seeking behaviour. *Drexel Library Quarterly,* 19 (2), pp. 5-20.

Kuhlthau, C.C. (1998) 'Investigating patterns in information seeking: concepts in context', pp.10-20 In: Wilson, T.D. and Allen, D.K. (Eds.) *Exploring the contexts of information behaviour.* Proceedings of the Second International Conference on research in Information Seeking and use in different Contexts (ISIC). August 1998. Sheffield, UK.

Kuhlthau, C.C. (2003) *Seeking meaning: a process approach to library and information services.* (2nd ed.) London: Libraries Unlimited.

Layder, D. (1993) *New strategies in social research: an introduction and guide.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

LeCompte, M.D. and Preissle, J. (1993) *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* (2nd ed.) San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Li, P.P. (2007) Social tie, social capital, and social behaviour: toward an integrative model of informal exchange. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management,* 24, pp. 227-246.

Lowe, P. and Speakman, L. (eds.) (2006) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England.* London: Age Concern England.

Marcus, G.E. (1998) *Ethnography through thick and thin.* Chichester, W. Sussex: Princetown University Press.

Margiotta, P., Raynes, N., Pagidas, D., Lawson, J. and Temple, B. (2003) *Are you listening? Current practice in information, advice and advocacy services for older people.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

McNeill, P. (1990) *Research methods.* (2nd ed.) London: Routledge.

Parker, Ian (Ed.) (1998) *Social constructionism, discourse and realism.* London: Sage.

Peace, S., Holland, C. and Kellaher, L. (2006) *Environment and identity in later life.* Growing Older Series. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Pickard, A.J. (2007) Research methods in information. London: Facet Publishing.

Purkiss, T. (2002) *The users' perspective on consumer health information needs in rural North Cumbria: a case study.* Unpublished MA Dissertation. University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

Reed, J. and Proctor, S. (eds.) (1995) *Practitioner research in health care: the inside story.* London: Chapman and Hall.

Savolainen, R. (1993) The sense-making theory: reviewing the interests of a user-centred approach to information seeking and use. *Information Processing and Management,* 29 (1), pp. 13-28.

Smyth, M. and Williamson, E. (Eds.) (2004) *Researchers and their 'subjects': ethics, power, knowledge and consent.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Spink, A. and Cole, C. (2006) *New directions in human information behavior.* Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London; Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Talja, S., Keso, H. and Pietilainen, T. (1999) The production of 'context' in information seeking research: a metatheoretical view. *Information Processing and Management,* 35, pp. 751-763.

Tinker, A. (1992) *Elderly people in modern society*. (3rd ed.) London: Longman.

Tinker, A., McCreadie, C. and Salvage, A. (1993) *The information needs of elderly people: an exploratory study.* London: Age Concern Institute of Gerontology.

Travers, M. (2001) *Qualitative research through case studies*. London: Sage.

Vakkari, P., Savolainen, R. and Dervin, B. (eds.) (1997) *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of an International Conference in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts, 14-16 August, Tampere, Finland,* London: Taylor Graham.

Walker, A. (ed.) (2005) *Growing older: understanding quality of life in old age,* Growing Older Series. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Wellman, B. and Frank, K.A. (2001), pp. 233-273 In: Lin, N., Cook, E. and Burt, R.S. (Eds.) *Social capital: theory and research.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Wellman, B. and Haythornthwaite, C. (eds.) (2002) *The Internet in everyday life.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Wenger, G.C. (1997) Social networks and the prediction of elderly people at risk. *Aging and Mental Health*, 1(4), 311-320.

Wenger, G.C. (1999) Advantages gained by combining qualitative and quantitative data in a longitudinal study. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 13 (4), pp. 369-376.

Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative research interviewing: biographic narrative and semi-structured methods.* London: Sage.

Williams, M. (2003) *Making sense of social research.* London: Sage.

Williams, M.E. (ed.) (2001) *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology,* 35. Medford, N.J.: ARIS&T.

Williams, R., Tibbitts, C. and Donahue, W. (eds.) (1963) *Processes of aging.* New York: Atherton.

Wolcott, H.F. (1994) *Transforming qualitative data: description, analysis, and interpretation.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.