CALLING IN THE CLEANERS – MILLIONS OF THEM
NOT DARK YET: DYLAN AND POETRY’S SURVIVAL
GENDER VIOLENCE: SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT
Welcome from the Chairman

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I hope you enjoy reading about our University.

Bill Ray
Chairman of Convocation
alumni@bristol.ac.uk

Features

Particle power cover 6
The persistence of poetry 11
The other CO₂ problem 14
Physical attraction 18
The regeneration game 22
Taking a stand 27

Regulars

Bristol in pieces 2 & 17
Alumni in the news 3
Bristol and beyond 10
Events 25
Alumni deaths 26

In pictures

Snapshots 5
Taken 29

Contents

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Psychotherapy framework.
with the British Association for Counselling and
counsellors receive ongoing supervision in accordance
students undertaking their clinical placement. The
at different city locations. Most of them are mature
There are currently 21 volunteer counsellors working
in Bristol.
It’s one of the biggest counselling agencies
of the 90s, is a long-term project studying the health and development
ALSPAC, aka Children
11,500
Milk teeth
112,045
Toenail samples
collected
40 million
Questions answered by participants in ALSPAC studies.
470+
Academic papers
published as a result of information supplied by
families
The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) is a long-term project studying the health and development of a cohort of children in the Bristol area. The vast amount of information gathered from ALSPAC families is an ever-growing resource for research scientists all over the world. www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac

Andrew Ruhemann (BA 1985) scooped Best Short Animated Film at the Academy Awards in February for his short film The Lost Thing, which he co-directed with Shaun Tan.

Ruhemann said: ‘When I first saw The Lost Thing at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair, it stood apart from all the other books with its unique and striking visuals and the whimsy and melancholy underlying the narrative. To me the film is a kind of poem to all the lost things in this world and beyond.’

In true Oscar speech fashion, Ruhemann thanked his wife, Jennifer Nadel (LLB 1985), Ruhemann is managing director of Passion Pictures and also worked on Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. He co-stars in the film.

The plug

Book reviews

The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1822-1914 by Robert Bickers (Penguin)

Robert Bickers, Professor of History, tells the story of European impact on China from the early 19th century to the start of the First World War, reimagining the encounters between two equally arrogant and scornful civilisations. The degradation of China in this period forms an important part of Chinese nationalism and identity that is crucial to understanding China today.

Story of Sociology by Gregor McLennan (BA 1974) (Bloomsbury Academic)

Situating sociology within the wider context of social theory, Gregor McLennan, Professor of Sociology, takes readers from the intellectual tensions of Enlightenment thought through the American-dominated 20th century, to the latest debates in the discipline. This interpretative and elegant overview of the subject has been described by renowned sociological theorist Jeffrey Alexander as ‘a brilliant synthetic essay of theoretical importance’.

Bristols in pieces

In the city

The University in Bristol

Listen in is a low-cost community counselling service run by postgraduates from the University’s MSc Counselling programme. It’s one of the biggest counselling agencies in Bristol.

There are currently 21 volunteer counsellors working at different city locations. Most of them are mature students undertaking their clinical placement. The counsellors receive ongoing supervision in accordance with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy framework. We work with issues like depression, anxiety, bereavement and relationship difficulties,’ says Jo Buchmuller, the Service Manager. Most referrals come from GPs, but clients sometimes find us themselves via our website. For some people, it’s their first-ever, and perhaps only, contact with the University.

www.bristol.ac.uk/cppd/listenin.html

Alumni in the news

www.bristol.ac.uk/alumni/news

Move over, Colin: Bristol alumnus triumphs at the Oscars

Andrew Ruhemann (BA 1985) scooped Best Short Animated Film at the Academy Awards in February for his short film The Lost Thing, which he co-directed with Shaun Tan.

Making it public

Public sector

• ‘The mother of all accountants’ Caroline Mason (BSc 1975) took up Presidency of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy last year. She was interviewed in Public magazine, which reported that ‘she is not the first woman to hold the office, but the first mother, a distinction of which she is justifiably proud.’

• The press also reported on another Bristol alumnus appointed Chief Executive of Citizens Advice.

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The press also reported on another Bristol graduate making waves in the public sector. Third Sector magazine featured Gillian Guy (LLB 1978) (below right) after she was appointed Chief Executive of Citizens Advice.

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Young green guns

Business

Nicko Williamson (BA 2006) was one of seven ‘young guns’ featured in an article in The Guardian about Britain’s new entrepreneurs. Williamson is company, Climatecars, was born out of an idea he developed while at Bristol. Having come across a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) conversion centre called Green Fuels, he set about converting a fleet of people carriers to LPG and launching a green taxi service in London. Williamson said that the financial crisis had made entrepreneurship an attractive career option. ‘Lots of people have been laid off and are putting their pay-offs towards setting up a business ... they’re realising that working punish is for someone else isn’t that rewarding.’ www.climatecars.com

Puccini in the pub

Theatre

An opera produced by Ben Cooper (BA 2008), co-founder of opera company OperaUpClose, attracted critical acclaim after its debut at the Cock Tavern Theatre in Kilburn. The Guardian said: ‘Putting on La Bohème in a pub is a challenge, but OperaUpClose find that Puccini and pubs are a happy mix.’

The show went on to become the longest continuously running opera in history and received a Whatsonstage.com Award for Best Off West End Production and an Olivier Award for Best New Opera Production in 2011.

Cooper said: ‘Winning an Olivier Award, especially after just a couple of years in the business, was a huge surprise. I worked on the Bristol Shakespeare Festival when I graduated, which was very much the training ground for me as a theatre producer.’

www.coventgarden.org.uk
Rango on the move

Film

The Los Angeles Times interviewed Nikita Patel (MEng 2006) about her work on Gore Verbinski’s new animated film, Rango.

As a creature technical director (TD) for Industrial Light & Magic, Patel was responsible for simulations and skeletons of the characters. She and her department added rigging to 3-D models of the characters and objects before passing them to the animators.

She told the LA Times: “Rigging is putting a skeleton inside the model so that the animators can move it around. If we want to see more realism, the creature TDs will go in and add some simulation to the muscles and the flesh.”

Patel discovered computer programming at a summer school at Bristol, where she went on to study Computer Science and French.

www.rangomovie.co.uk

Theatre joins the spending cuts debate

Politics

Eight playwrights, including Mark Ravenhill (BA 1987), donated short plays that were performed across the country in March to highlight the potential impact of spending cuts.

Some 80 groups staged the works in theatres, pubs, libraries and private houses as part of Theatre Uncut.

In an interview with the BBC, artist director Hannah Price said: “Having Mark on board helped get other writers involved.”

In Ravenhill’s play, A Bigger Banner, students occupying their university building “summon the ghosts” of students from the 1950s. He told the BBC: “I thought it would be interesting to put together a couple of students from now with a couple of students from then, for whom future possibilities were optimistic.”

www.theatreuncut.co.uk

Screen highlights

Film

Hauling (above left, a documentary directed, written and produced by Sean Walsh (MA 2000), won Best Feature Film at the International Environment Film Festival 2010. Set in São Paulo, Brazil, it follows the day-to-day life of people who make their living out of collecting and recycling material that others have thrown out. Hauling is Walsh’s documentary directorial debut.

David Nicholls’ (BA 1988) bestselling novel, One Day, is being made into a film starring Anne Hathaway.

Deborah Moggach’s (BA 1970) novel, Tulip Fever, is to be filmed by The King’s Speech director, Tom Hooper.

In her new film, Granges and Sunshine (above right), Emily Watson (BA 1988, Hon MA 2003) plays a social worker who battles to reunite British families with children forcibly sent to Australia. The film is directed by Ken Loach’s (Hon Dlitt 1996) son, Jim Loach.

Michael Winterbottom (Certi Radio, Film & TV 1983) has started shooting his new film, Trishna, a contemporary Indian version of the Thomas Hardy classic, Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

In brief

• Non-profit firm Diagnostics for All, led by Una Ryan (BSc 1983, Hon DSc 2009), received a $3m grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK’s Department for International Development to develop diagnostic tests for agriculture.

• Stage designer, Es Devlin (BA 1993) talked to theartsdesk.com about her work on the play, Pieces of Vincent. She has also designed sets for some of the biggest artists in the music industry from Take That to Lady Gaga.

• Sailor Iain Percy (BA 2006) was one of four British Olympic champions to unveil the countdown clock in Trafalgar Square to mark 500 days until the 2012 Games.

And finally ... Charity

The Brentwood Weekly News reported on Chris Stack (BA 2009) and his “madcap caper” which will see him and 49 friends running the Paris Marathon tied together like a centipede. They hope to raise £50,000 for the Teenage Cancer Trust and the Montblanc Foundation.


In pictures

Snapshots

Life and work at Bristol

Clockwise from top left:

KNITTED NEURONS
Created from a knitting and neuroscience project.
www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2010/7350.html

DIGITAL RADIOGRAPHY
OF ROSES
Winner from this year’s Art of Science competition, www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2010/7453.html

HENRY VIII

MEGALOPS
Cleaning up pollution: big enough task for you? A new method is being piloted by members of Bristol's Interface Analysis Centre – led by a man with a fascination for uranium.
In the late 1990s, researchers started exploring the possibility of using granular or scrap metal iron to create ‘permeable reactive barriers’. But there are challenges to this approach, including the fact that it can quickly clog up and become ineffective. Furthermore, because the iron rusts as part of the process, it is only effective at shallow depths. Groundwater has a much more complex chemistry than that: it teems with salts, minerals and carbonates, in varying concentrations. Scott’s team found that the INPs didn’t work as well on samples of ‘real-world’ contaminated water. The effects didn’t last as long, and in some cases it was only a week before the nanoparticles released the contaminants back into the water. To remedy this, Scott has gone one step further. ‘We’re using thermal treatments, heating them under vacuum to refine their structure and surface chemistry,’ he says. ‘This makes them more reactive.’

Scott’s work has introduced an important refinement to the ‘standard’ INP idea. Previous lab studies had established the particles’ effectiveness by adding them to ‘synthetic’ solutions of water, contaminants and little else. But groundwater has a much more complex chemistry than that: it teems with salts, minerals and carbonates, in varying concentrations. Scott’s team found that the INPs didn’t work as well on samples of ‘real-world’ contaminated water. The effects didn’t last as long, and in some cases it was only a week before the nanoparticles released the contaminants back into the water. To remedy this, Scott has gone one step further. ‘We’re using thermal treatments, heating them under vacuum to refine their structure and surface chemistry,’ he says. ‘This makes them more reactive.’

Braving the threat

The biggest obstacle to the INP method is the fact that it must be introduced into the plume of contaminated groundwater in a single batch. ‘In many cases, we need to remove uranium completely,’ Scott says. ‘But there are limits to what we can do in a single batch. There are also limits to the amount of iron that can be used without creating other problems, such as enhanced bacterial activity.’

Other iron nanoparticles are so tiny that they stay in suspension in water for weeks or even months. Scott’s nanoparticles are much bigger, so they settle out quickly. ‘But they are still big enough to be effective,’ he says. ‘They are big enough to immobilise the uranium, but they are also small enough to be injected.’

Scott’s team has found that the nanoparticles are effective at reducing the dissolved uranium concentration in water. ‘But we need to do more research to understand how they work,’ he says. ‘We need to understand how they interact with the uranium and how they are degraded in the environment.’

Scott is confident that INPs will become a fixture in the toolkit of geochemical companies. ‘Besides the many UK nuclear facilities nearing the end of their lives, there are leaking landfill sites and other areas contaminated by industrial by-products like chlorinated solvents and heavy metals,’ he says. ‘INPs are good at clearing these as well, so that could open up a low-cost route to converting hazardous areas into safe sites that can be built on safely.’

One of the most promising applications is in the cleanup of uranium mining sites. ‘There are many uranium mining sites in the world, so these swarms of tiny do-gooders will have plenty of work to do,’ Scott says. ‘We need to develop more efficient methods of removing uranium from the environment and making it safe for people and the environment.’

The reaction

The dissolved uranium sticks to the INPs. There’s then a chemical reaction in which electrons are swapped between the uranium atoms and the iron atoms on the surface they stick to. This osmosises the uranium and immobiles the uranium by reducing it to a crystalline compound called uranium dioxide (UO₂).
From Bristol to Barbados

Eve MacFarlane interviews Diana Wilson Patrick (LLB 1986), partner at Lex Caribbean, Barbados

When I was very young I wanted to be a judge. When my parents explained that I had to be a lawyer first, I announced that I’d just skip that bit.

Law always seemed to me to be a wonderful living thing rather than just a theory. I wanted to study law because I could see its practical application in everything around me.

I grew up in Stafford, so I was never going to choose to study somewhere as small and sleepy. I came to Bristol for my interview just before Christmas 1982 and fell in love with the city. I was drawn to the fact that it wasn’t dominated by the University, it had a big, bold life of its own.

We were a very tight-knit group in the Law School. We had the run of the Wills Memorial Building. We studied, partied and lived together.

At first, we were petrified of Professor Roger Kerridge. But we soon realised that underneath the hard exterior he was a big softy. He’s a brilliant man and lecturer. He was at our reunion in 2009 and we were still in awe of him.

Bristol was one of those times when all my stars seemed to align. It gave me huge confidence. I felt that I could do anything and go anywhere. It was my passport when all my stars seemed to align. I closed my eyes and stuck a pin in a map of the Caribbean. It landed in Jamaica and I got a placement with a law firm on the island. I sold my flat and filled two trunks with my remaining possessions. If it didn’t fit in, it wasn’t going.

The Caribbean was very different from London. I didn’t miss the pace of the City – I realised my life, starting collecting art, learned to scuba dive and generally exhaled.

In 1997 I got the opportunity to work with the Caribbean Development Bank, a regional offshoot of the World Bank, based in Barbados. For ten exciting, challenging years I worked as a lawyer on development projects all over the Caribbean, from Turks and Caicos to Guyana. I realised that life wasn’t just about me.

Things got more difficult when my family came along. I tried to juggle work and home life for a while, but there was too much travelling with the job. I was missing out on my children growing up. And so I decided to go back into private practice, and became a partner with a regional firm, Lex Caribbean.

We travel to England every year, and my girls often ask to visit Bristol. I think they realise how much my time there meant to me. One of my daughters wants to study law at Bristol.

I’m very happy in Barbados. Finally I feel I’ve found my place.

BRISTOL WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES WHEN ALL MY STARS SEEMED TO ALIGN

The persistence of poetry

Poetry and song, once inseparable, have long since parted ways. Or have they?

Daniel Karlin, Winterstoke Professor of Poetry, believes that the work of one songwriter in particular amounts to a fruitful reunion.

At the base of the Albert Memorial is the Frieze of Parnassus, an assembly of sculpted figures depicting history’s great poets, musicians, sculptors and architects. The south face belongs to the poets and musicians, and at their centre is Homer, bent over a lyre. Poets no longer plucked at stringed instruments or sang their poems by the time the Memorial was created in the mid-19th century, but Homer’s pride of place indicates the enduring connection between song and poetry.

Standing at his shoulder is the philosopher Pythagoras,’ says Professor Daniel Karlin, ‘who is credited with the idea of the “music of the spheres”, a universal, cosmic harmony that all poetry—even as the age of print—aspires towards.’

Karlin uses the figure of the singer to pull together a universe of interests (including most of English and American literature since Chaucer) into his sphere of study: ‘Poets continue to refer to themselves as singers, long after poetry and song have gone their separate ways,’ he says. Examples are legion, from Petrarch’s Canzone (‘Songbook’) in the 14th century to modern classics like Ezra Pound’s The Cantos and John Berryman’s Drums Song.

The metaphor extends, says Karlin, to the act of reading: ‘When we read a poem, we perform it to ourselves—you could say that we “sing” it, but our performance is partly determined by the form of the text on the page, especially in modern poetry.’

By Nick Riddle
The Department of Music has been able to buy a suite of new instruments, thanks to a legacy from Christopher Stunt (BA 1996). Music was Christopher’s passion and he wanted to help others enjoy it.

Contact:
Ella Searle (MA 2002), Planned Giving Manager
T: +44 (0)117 331 7971
E: ella.searle@bristol.ac.uk
www.bristol.ac.uk/centenarycampaign/how/legacies

Exempt charity number: X1121

Bringing it all back home
But forget metaphorical singing for a moment. There is one modern poet who, as far as Karlin is concerned, brings poetry and song back together with resounding success: Bob Dylan.

“It was around 1971 that I started listening to Dylan – in the sense of paying proper attention,” he says. “I remember hearing “All Along the Watchtower” for the first time, and at the last line, “Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl”, thinking to myself how great it would be if the song ended there, and foolishly betting that it wouldn’t – but then it did. That taught me about Dylan’s art and joked me out of my own complacency.”

Dylan’s use of literature in his lyrics – with fragments, quotations and allusions woven together into a new design – makes him a poet in the vein of TS Eliot, says Karlin, though his special potency lies in his combination of words with melody and rhythm to drive the songs and elicit a response that can verge on the ecstatic. “That’s true not just of the great driving songs such as “Like a Rolling Stone”, but of quieter ones like “I Shall Be Released” – or “Not Dark Yet”, which is a great, late masterpiece.” Take away the musical settings, in fact, and you diminish both the pleasure and the meaning of the lyrics to the point of obscurity.

The pleasure principle
“You might not think of the poem on your birthday card and TS Eliot’s The Wasteland as part of the same phenomenon, but I think that they are,” says Karlin. “The factor that they have in common is something Wordsworth talks about in the preface to The Lyrical Ballads: “… the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being”. If a poem doesn’t give you pleasure, it can’t do anything else. That’s as true of the greetings card poem or the song lyric as it is of the poem of high art.”

Karlin often encounters students who need to be introduced to this pleasure principle. Without it, trying to get to grips with, say, Homer’s epic has resisted a complete understanding by generations of academics. But begin by reading it aloud, Karlin insists, “you get a sense of what the physical body of the poem is like, its sound, rhythm and tone. Engaging with its layers of meaning and symbolism does, however, require serious work in order to recover some very specific kinds of knowledge that the poem assumes you have. There’s no getting around that.”

Indeed, most poetry before the mid-20th century took for granted an acquaintance with biblical stories, basic Christian and Judaic doctrines and ancient mythology – the furnishings of a classical education. But few poets have been as forbidding as Ezra Pound, who, says Karlin, when asked what he should do in order to understand the bits of Homer that he was including in The Cantos, replied, “Learn Ancient Greek.”

Poetry spoken here
Poetry stands no chance of dwelling in the shadows at Bristol, thanks partly to the presence in the Arts Faculty of several practising poets – and to the forthcoming launch of the Bristol Poetry Institute, of which Karlin is to be Director.

Everyone can leave a legacy. Please think about it.

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The other CO$_2$ problem

Carbon emissions are making our oceans more acidic. But what does this mean for marine life? Bristol researchers are going back in time to look for the answers.

By Eve MacFarlane

Our oceans represent 70 per cent of the Earth’s surface and support vast biodiversity. Since the Industrial Revolution, they’ve been sucking up almost a quarter of the CO$_2$ produced by humankind’s activities. But CO$_2$, in sea-water forms carbonic acid, which increases the acidity of the oceans. We know that — acidification is easy and immediately measurable. What we don’t know is how it affects the sea creatures living there.

Scientists are particularly concerned about marine calcifiers — organisms that make shells and skeletons out of calcium carbonate. With an increase in ocean acidity, these animals may struggle to build these protective structures. It’s already apparent that some species are more affected than others. Oysters, for example, seem to deal with increased acidification much better than mussels — bad news for moules frites lovers.

Most of what we know has been gleaned from controlled experiments in laboratories, but this only tells part of the story. It doesn’t show how organisms adapt to changing conditions over time. The bigger picture lies in the historical record — in the skeletons and shells of dead marine life. And it’s thanks to the great British Antarctic explorers of the 19th and early 20th centuries that we have this record.

Seeded away in the historical collections at the Natural History Museum are hundreds of samples collected on voyages of discovery such as the Challenger and Discovery expeditions. Gathered from a pristine environment before very much CO$_2$ had bled from chimneys and exhausts into our atmosphere, they hold key information about ocean acidification and its impact on marine life over time.

Dr Laura Foster and Suzanne Jennions in the School of Earth Sciences have been given access to the collections to extract this information. They’ll examine the pre-industrial specimens, compare them with modern-day specimens and quantify the changes. Then, with the help of computer models, reconstructions of historical changes in the environmental conditions, they’ll determine the ‘fingerprint’ of ocean acidification and reveal how different organisms have adapted over the past hundred years. The result? Scientists will be able to make more accurate predictions for the future.

Foster is looking at bryozoans (invertebrates often known as ‘moss animals’), while Jennions is concentrating on bivalves (animals with two hinged shells, such as oysters or mussels). They’ll determine shell thickness, weight, density and growth patterns, and probe for geochemical clues about historical ocean chemistry using advanced analysis techniques. In particular, they’ll be looking to quantify levels of calcification.

Jennions says: ‘Some bivalves live for a hundred years. Every time they produce calcite, they capture the chemistry of the sea around them at that moment. They capture history. We’re reaching back in time and grabbing that information.’ One way of measuring calcification, for example, is by looking at the bivalve’s concentric growth rings — the thicker the ring, the higher the rate of calcification.

Most of the specimens in the Natural History Museum have remained untouched. The tools and techniques needed to analyse them properly hadn’t been developed — until now. And Bristol’s Isotope Lab and Interface Analysis Centre are two of only a handful of stand-alone research centres in the world. By Eve MacFarlane

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Feature

Behind the scenes

Foster’s Postdoctoral Fellowship is funded by Roger Holmes (BSc 1981) and his wife Kate. Jennions’ PhD is funded by Mario and Maria Freering, whose son is studying at Bristol.

Holmes and Maria Freering share a love of the sea, a commitment to protecting the environment and a desire to contribute to scientific research. So when they heard, separately, about Bristol’s ocean acidification research, they were keen to get involved. ‘Climate change has been a concern for me and my wife for a long time, and oceans are our passion,’ explains Freering. ‘Here was our opportunity to make a difference to something we really care about.’

Holmes was attracted by Bristol’s strong research credentials in this field through the work of Dr Dani Schmidt and Professor Andy Ridgwell. Both are partners in the UK Ocean Acidification Research Programme and the European Project on Ocean Acidification. Dr Schmidt is also a lead author for the Ocean Systems chapter of the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report on Climate Change.

‘I enjoy getting updates from Suzanne,’ says Freering. ‘And I’m looking forward to hearing about her upcoming Antarctic expedition.’ Holmes agrees: ‘It’s a privilege to support such important research, particularly knowing that it will go on to influence global policy.’

www.bristol.ac.uk/centenarycampaign

Antarctic explorers: left to right: Ernest Shackleton, Robert Falcon Scott and Edward Wilson; the Discovery Expedition, circa 1903.
The other CO2 problem

labs in the world where this work can be done. They offer a range of techniques that Foster and Jennions will use to analyse the samples. One technique, Electron Backscatter Diffraction, determines crystal structure. Changes here will reveal whether ocean acidification has had an impact on the very building blocks of the organism’s skeleton. Some of the analysis is destructive, which also explains why scientists have been cautious. “These samples are invaluable and we don’t have buckets of them,” explains Foster. “We have to be convinced that what we’ll find out is worthwhile.”

Foster describes what it felt like opening the samples for the first time. “Going through all these little bottles of things from the past with their original labels was like taking a step back in time. Some samples were even kept in old snuff boxes. And the names of the collectors are so evocative – great heroes of science. And their research is so important.”

Timing is critical, as the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will publish a major report in 2013. Foster and Jennions’ findings will feed into this directly. “Jennions’ findings will add up of complex interactions and you need to look from all angles.”

Foster and Jennions have no preconceptions about what they’ll find. What they do know is that their work will help establish a fundamental understanding of acidification in the Southern Ocean. The Antarctic heroes of the past took huge personal risks exploring this largely untouched continent for scientific research. Could they have imagined that one hundred years on their samples would reveal how human activity threatens the oceans in this vast area and how big the ‘other CO2 problem’ might really be?

What is ocean acidification?

Ocean acidification describes the changes in the chemistry of the world’s seas.

Since the Industrial Revolution, there has been an increase in atmospheric CO2 as a result of human activity, such as burning fossil fuels. But not all unlocked CO2 remains in the atmosphere – the oceans have absorbed up to 25 per cent of this excess CO2.

The increased CO2 in the water has caused the pH of surface oceans to fall. This reduces the availability of carbonate ions, which many creatures use to build their calcium carbonate shells and skeletons. This means that organisms such as plankton, corals and molluscs may have to work harder to build or maintain their structures.

The Southern Ocean could be the first area to see the impact of ocean acidification because its cold water naturally stores a lot of CO2, and organisms living here already face extreme conditions.

One last question

Which historical event would you like to have witnessed?

Lois Bibbings, Senior Lecturer in Law and Honorary Research Fellow in Ethics in Medicine

The early-20th-century marches and rallies in London in support of votes for women seem to have been a remarkable spectacle. Many in the processions not only carried embroidered and appliquéd banners (in the Suffragette colours of purple, white and green) but also accessorised their outfits to reflect their allegiances. Women and men came in their hundreds of thousands to participate, to support or simply to watch. It would have been amazing to have been there and, perhaps, to have taken part.
Dr Helen Heath (PhD 1986) and Professor Greg Heath are both lecturers in the School of Physics and researchers on the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) experiment at CERN. They reflect on the challenges of working with your spouse, explaining interactive forces to schoolchildren and recreating the conditions a billionth of a second after the Big Bang.
Physical attraction

Interview by Hilary Brown

Random sampling
Teaching or researching? Maths or physics?
How two careers were launched

Helen: I was encouraged to do a A-level Physics by the same teacher who took me off for talking in class. He wanted me to get on, but when you're 14, there's always something you have to say to your best friend. I got interested in particle physics when I did a project on the quark model for the school science prize. The bottom quark had been discovered a few years earlier and signified the existence of another elementary particle, the top quark, which hadn't yet been observed.

Greg: I was a drifter. I was thinking of doing maths at university, but my mother, who was a maths teacher, talked me out of it. She thought I should do something more practical.

Helen: I got turned down for teacher training, so I did a PhD instead; the thought of working at CERN was quite a draw.

Greg: I had plans to do a PhD on grand, theoretical ideas, but got an offer to do experimental work in particle physics and just carried on.

Helen: We didn’t have any great career plans then, just a fascination for the subject.

Take one length of knicker elastic
Particle physics can be fun; it’s all in the training, so I did a PhD instead; the thought of working at CERN was quite a draw.

Greg: I had plans to do a PhD on grand, theoretical ideas, but got an offer to do experimental work in particle physics and just carried on.

Helen: Any area of advanced physics is hard to understand, but it’s not difficult to explain the principal concept of particle physics, that matter is built up from smaller things.

Helen: The principal concept of particle physics, that matter is built up from smaller things.

Helen: When I talk to young people, I take things to understand, but it’s not difficult to explain the principal concept of particle physics, that matter is built up from smaller things.

Greg: Helen’s lectures are always interesting and popular, regular science to the audience. Mine... are difficult and dull.

Balancing act
Opposite attracts, and take turns babysitting

Helen: We met at a tedious meeting in Oxford...

Greg: ... which I was running. I was reporting to colleagues on some new software we were using for a collaborative project, and this attractive young post-doc turned up.

Helen: Except that you didn’t talk to me again for five years.

Greg: Well, there was a lot of courting and going: particle physicists have to travel a lot. We’ve both been in Bristol for around 20 years now.

Helen: We’ve always worked together to some extent. It was handy when the children were small, before video conferencing. We could share the childcare and go to conferences for each other.

Greg: We do talk about work at home.

Helen: And sometimes we talk about at home. ‘Your child just called...’

Greg: It’s helpful to work through a research problem together that we haven’t understood individually. Though we may just have a bitch about university politics.

Helen: We have different approaches to doing things. I’m easily distracted and try to do too many things at once. Greg gets absorbed in the detail.

Greg: I’m rather single-minded. I find it hard to juggle lots of different things. Maybe it’s just snobbery.

Small particles, big experiments
Postcards from CERN

Helen: We’ve been involved in designing CMS, one of the four detectors that measures the energy produced when particles collide inside the LHC.

Greg: LHC enables us to accelerate protons at around 40 million times a second, spraying out new particles in all directions. I work on a system that decides which single event is stored. For every half million collisions, only one can be recorded: there aren’t enough computers in the world to store them all.

Helen: The way the new particles decay tells us something about their nature. We don’t know what we’re going to discover — if anything — but we can narrow down the possibilities by eliminating the things we know about. So far the data generated has confirmed the findings of previous decades, startup with the pi, which was first discovered in the 1960s, through the charmed and bottom quarks in the 70s and 80s, and the top quark in the 90s. It’s like we’re retracing the history of particle physics.

Greg: We’re increasing the intensity of the collisions all the time so we can collect sufficient data. But you can’t operate such a complex machine at very high energy levels without running into problems.

Helen: As everyone knows from the publicity surrounding the first major power failure in 2008. Then there was the time a bird-dropped a baguette at one of the points where the electricity supply enters the collider.

Greg: And what became known at CERN as the ‘fried fouine’ incident, where a marten chewed through some of the electrical plant.

Helen: It’s a big world out there, if only you could see it.

Greg: It’s very exciting to be able to generate the amount of data in a day that previously took two weeks, but at the back of your mind you know that if it be another year or two before we detect the particles we’re looking for, to see something new. And it’s more likely to be a full mass spectrum which is hard to see, not someone like me based on a university.

Helen: The thing everyone wants to find is the Higgs, the mechanism that explains why all other particles have mass and is fundamental to a complete understanding of matter.

Greg: It could be a relatively light particle that’s easy to produce in a collision but hard to see, because it decays in similar ways to other particles. But the laser, the other hand, are rarer but decay in more obvious ways. So there’s not just one way of looking for it; there are dozens of groups working on it in different ways.

Helen: It makes the atmosphere at CERN both competitive and collaborative.

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Helen: But you can’t do particle physics on your own; it’s a team effort — a massive team of around 2,000 people, all of whom are mentioned on every paper that gets published!

Greg: One of the best things about working on an experiment as big as this is talking to journalists and non-physicists about it. People hardly know who’ve seen you in the local paper will stop you in the street and ask how the project is going.

Helen: It’s also the kind of thing that makes students want to come here. They may go into condensed state physics in the long-run, but there’s an immediate appeal to something as fundamental as particle physics and how the very small may help us understand the very big — the 95 per cent of the universe that we still haven’t seen.
The regeneration game

By Nick Riddle

The human body – as Hamlet observed – is a marvel of nature. Infinite in faculty, in form and moving express and admirable... but in disease, injury and old age, it’s often painfully fragile. In the past decade, stem cell biology has begun to yield new treatments for the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. And there’s plenty more in the pipeline.

Researchers at Bristol made headlines in 2009 when a breakthrough by Professor Anthony Hollander’s (PhD 1990) team in the School of Cellular and Molecular Medicine enabled a woman with a failing airway to receive a new, tissue-engineered trachea, prepared using her own stem cells. This inaugurated an approach to medical treatment that should keep researchers busy for some time.

Dr Wael Kafienah – a long-time member of Hollander’s team – is now leading a project that pushes even further into the field of biomaterials in the search for new therapies. The next landmark on the horizon, he believes, is a new generation of surgical implants that are likely to revolutionise the treatment of osteoarthritis, and could ultimately lead to a wealth of other applications including cancer therapy.

A fluid fix

Stem cells are already being used clinically to create cartilage implants for worn-out joints, but their effectiveness is limited: the implants are solid and inflexible, and are only a stopgap measure before total joint replacement.

Kafienah’s team, collaborating with researchers in Canada and Qatar, are hoping to develop a biologically engineered, synthetic liquid polymer that would stimulate the formation of new tissue, eliminating the need for further surgery.

‘This would be injected as a gel which can assume the form of a defected area – even an irregularly shaped one,’ says Kafienah. ‘The tissue that forms would then encourage the growth of healthy cells. We’ve only done initial testing so far, but the results are very promising indeed.’

He is cautiously excited by the world of possibilities now opening up, cautious, because ‘there’s still so much about the workings of the body that we don’t understand’.

The heart of the matter

Kafienah has been conducting his own quest for understanding since he was a child. ‘I was fascinated to learn that we have this thing called the heart that we can feel and hear, pumping in our bodies all the time,’ he says.

Then when I was 12 years old, my father had a heart attack. So I realised that this amazing organ can become dysfunctional, and I read as much as I could about it. I was deeply fascinated. But my father got better, and my interest in the heart subsided a little.’

He knew that he wanted to be a scientist. ‘I wished I could have a lab of my own and just try things out,’ he recalls. ‘I wasn’t even sure what I wanted to try, but I used to imagine myself wearing a lab coat.’

As a student he became fascinated by cancer biology and genetics – the idea of sequencing genomes was just gaining ground at the time – but when he came across a postgraduate studentship offered by Arthritis Research UK to work on osteoarthritis, he changed tack and successfully applied for it. Again, there were personal reasons. ‘My mother suffered from osteoarthritis,’ he explains. ‘I became her medical adviser, which made her very happy. I felt I’d made the right decision – for my family and for myself.’

Research at work: Dr Wael Kafienah in the stem cell labs, School of Medical Sciences
Insider healing
One more convention had yet to take place, and this one concerned the field itself. In the 1990s, osteoarthritis research was focused on understanding how enzymes degrade cartilage, and how that process could be inhibited. Eventually we concluded that you can’t stop it – cartilage will degrade,’ he says. ‘But delivering stem cells into the incredibly complex environment of the body is as much an art as it is a science. You need to account for a lot of factors and test many different combinations.’ Thus he finds himself doing more and more as a scientist and less and less as a doctor.

Audacity and humility
‘This is amazing, beautiful science,’ says Kafienah. ‘You can make an ear, or cartilage for the knee, or a trachea. You can make ribs. You can shape the tissue and make it stronger or weaker.’ There’s a godlike aspect to this, he acknowledges. ‘It’s humbling to want to create and control. That’s one of the reasons we raise children — to make our line live longer. ‘Rest assured, we’re very humble,’ he adds. ‘We know that growing little pieces of tissue is nothing compared to creating a heart or a brain. And we always, always need to act responsibly. But we also need to have a little bit of audacity.’

Meet the new breed
Pluripotent stem cells
It stands to reason that, if you’re researching stem cell medicine, you need an abundant supply of stem cells to work with. For this project, Kafienah is testing the viability of induced pluripotent stem cells — a new arrival on the cellular scene.

Until recently, there were two basic types of stem cell: embryonic (derived from embryos) and adult (derived from adult tissue). The great advantage of embryonic stem cells is that, unlike adult cells, they are pluripotent — that is, they can become almost any kind of cell in the body and can therefore be used to research a tremendous range of possible therapies. They can also multiply indefinitely, providing an unlimited source of cells for research and therapeutic purposes.

There are now a third type: induced pluripotent stem cells, or iPSCs. These were developed recently by researchers in Japan who successfully reprogrammed mature cells to behave as if they were embryonic stem cells. This new breed can be derived from mature cells collected from the patient’s own body, making any ‘new’ tissue less likely to be rejected by the recipient’s immune system.

However, pushing this far into new territory requires a much deeper understanding of the mechanisms that control the fate of these cells. This in turn requires a plentiful supply of pluripotent stem cells in order to test as many ideas as possible. Happily, that’s exactly what iPSGs provide.


Saturday 2 June
50 years on: Chemists’ reunion, Bristol
Following the success of the 2001 reunion organised by Dave Roberts (BSc 1961), Richard Carter (BSc 1951) is planning a second get-together for Chemistry alumni this summer, to be held in the University’s Alumni Weekend 2011.

Sunday 24 June
Clifton open garden day, Bristol
See three of the University’s finest gardens: Manor Hall, Clifton House and Goldney. The £10 ticket includes guided tours and tea.

Monday 25 June
Eccentric London’ walk, London
Join the London Branch of University of Bristol Alumni on an ‘Eccentric London’ walk led by an experienced Blue Badge guide.

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Annual reunion, eastern Canada
Organised by Dr Dennis Crenon (BSc 1931, MB MCh 1934, DSc 1973), this reunion for alumni based in eastern Canada will take place in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Jones Falls.

Wednesday 28 September
Welcome to London
If you graduated in 2010 or 2011 then come along to this career-focused event organised by the London Branch of University of Bristol Alumni Association. It’s a great chance to network, meet other alumni working in London and get career advice.

Tuesday 1 November
May 2011
Western Canada reunion, British Columbia, Canada
Organised by Dr John Weaver (BSc 1953) and Dr Duncan Innes (MB ChB 1957), this reunion for alumni and friends in western Canada will take place in the beautiful wine region of Kelowna.

Friday 23 – Sunday 25 September
Annual reunion, eastern Canada
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July
Friday 1 – Sunday 3 July
Alumni Weekend 2011: Back to the future, Bristol
Come back to Bristol and enjoy lectures and lunches at this annual weekend gathering of
The University extends its sincere condolences to the friends and families of those listed below for whom the University has received notification of death.

In order of degree date

Mrs Mary Baen (née Greenshields) (BA 1953, Dip 1958) died 28 June 2010, aged 93
Mrs Erin Smith (née Papeworth) (BA 1947) died 12 February 2011, aged 93
Dr Mercia Bradley (née Griffin) (MB ChB 1942) died 9 March 2011, aged 91
Dr David Sarsfield (MB ChB 1943) (née Griffiths) (Testamur 1950) died 6 October 2010, aged 81
Mr John Hutchins (BA 1944, Dip 1947) died 24 November 2010, aged 90
Dr Michael Howarth (BA 1949, PhD 1954) died 20 December 2010, aged 63
Mrs Judith Weaks (BA 1949) died 25 November 2010, aged 61
Mr Adrian Jackson (BA 1949) died 25 October 2010, aged 59
Dr Brian Grewal (PhD 2002) died 20 December 2010, aged 43
Mrs Mary Phillips (BS 1951) died 28 October 2010, aged 43
Dr Diana Wynne Jones (MedD 2001) died 30 December 2010, aged 83
Miss Kiera Tongish (BA 2008) died 2 December 2010, aged 22

Please email any notifications of death to alumni@exeter.ac.uk

2010 edition of alumni@exeter.ac.uk

Taking a stand

Since she was 17, Finn Mackay has actively campaigned against violence against women. Now in her mid-thirties, she is drawing on her experiences to study for a PhD in the School for Policy Studies’ Centre for Gender and Violence Research.

By Hillary Brown

Ask Finn Mackay whether feminism is dead, and you’ll get a resounding ‘No’. ‘The nature of women’s involvement in the liberation movement – their motivations and aspirations – may have changed, but there’s been a massive resurgence of interest in feminist activism in recent years,’ she says. ‘With over 15 years’ campaigning experience behind her, Mackay is well placed to offer an opinion. As the founder of the Feminist Coalition against the Home Office’s fence, and tapes of women’s peace songs,’ she says. ‘Growing up in rural south-west Scotland, Mackay has actively campaigned against violence against women. Now in her mid-thirties, she is drawing on her experiences to study for a PhD in the School for Policy Studies’ Centre for Gender and Violence Research.

By Hillary Brown

The death of Dr Colin Shipway (BS 1962) was announced in the summer 2010 edition of The Exonian. This was a mistake. Dr Shipway is alive and well and we apologise for any distress caused.

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Taking a stand

Finn Mackay

Mackay’s own experience tells her shaped politics and society. the extent to which women have actively in the women’s liberation movement, and investigate the role of this form of activism from 30 to more than 2,000. Her PhD will 2004, the number of participants has risen during the late 1980s and 1990s,’ she says. ‘RTN marches against rape and male violence prevention officer in London, but embarked on a professional career as a domestic violence in the women’s movement had lost its impetus. ‘There seemed to be very little feminist activity in the late 1990s outside of established women’s organisations like Women’s Aid and Rape Crisis,’ she explains. ‘LFN, now one of the largest grass-roots feminist movements in the UK, grew out of my desire to recapture the collectivism of the women’s peace camps, and provide a forum for all women to discuss and raise awareness of the issues that affect them.’

Finding a voice

The RTN marches against rape and male violence reflect the recent renewal of interest in political direct action. ‘RTN began in Britain in 1977, but took off during the late 1980s and 1990s,’ she says. ‘Since LFN rejuvenated the marches in 2004, the number of participants has risen from 30 to more than 2,000.’ Her PhD will investigate the role of this form of activism in the women’s liberation movement, and the extent to which women have actively shaped politics and society.

Mackay’s own experience tells her that such action certainly has an effect on the women involved. ‘The marches are empowering, especially for women who have been victims of male violence,’ she says. ‘They enable women to voice their anger about an issue that is often buried. Some women walk the whole way in tears, others sing or shout their heads off; they’re very emotional events. We don’t expect the conviction rate for rape to improve on the strength of a march, but it keeps the issue alive. And changes in police policy are evident in the safety awareness work we do with local councils and organisations like Transport for London.’

The demands of a PhD leave little time for active campaigning, and Mackay is adjusting to life as a researcher. ‘I find it hard to be objective about something that’s been such a big part of my day-to-day life,’ she admits. ‘But it’s a privilege to study in a unit that has pioneered research into violence against women. I never dreamed I’d have women as well regarded as Dr Melanie McCarry [PhD 2004] and Professor Marianne Hester commenting on my work. I’m proud to be part of that world.’

In pictures

Spanish and Italian student, Tommy Trenchard, was the winner in the People category of the 2009-10 Modern Languages Year Abroad Photo Competition with this image of a crying child in the aftermath of last year’s earthquake in Haiti.

Interview by Hilary Brown

I spent half my year abroad working on an English-language newspaper in the Dominican Republic. I went to neighbouring Haiti to cover the earthquake for the paper and to help out with an aid organisation. On the way there, I got caught up with the thousands of refugees streaming over the border. I’d never taken anything but holiday snaps before I got the position on the paper. I thought I’d be working as a journalist, but when I first arrived I struggled with the strong Spanish accents and the speed at which everyone spoke, and a misunderstanding with my editor resulted in my press pass reading “photographer” instead of “reporter”. These children were sitting on a bench with their mother, looking scared and bewildered; it was a spur-of-the-moment shot.

I took it in colour originally, but I think it’s more striking in black and white. The experience has helped me focus on my future career, perhaps doing something that combines photography and aid work.’

The competition received sponsorship from thirdyearabroad.com, a website for UK students, run by Bristol graduate Natacha Cullinson (BA 2008). For more information, visit www.bristol.ac.uk/emi/undergraduates/study/year3.html

Feature

The marches enable women to voice their anger about an issue that is often buried. They’re very emotional events.

Lull before the storm

After a stint of volunteering for the Feminist Archive at the University of Bradford, Mackay returned to education to study for a degree in Women’s Studies, followed by a Master’s in Gender, Culture and Modernity. She then returned to education to study for a degree in court, and gave talks to trade union organisations and universities. ‘It was an excellent grounding, even if I did have to wash in rainwater from the roof of the caravan I was living in,’ she says, recalling winter nights so cold that her hot-water bottle froze. ‘But there was such solidarity in the camp, and a feeling that women-only action was possible and effective,’ she adds.

Previous page: Finn Mackay portrait © Nick Smith // Illustration © Paddy Mills

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I spent half my year abroad working on an English-language newspaper in the Dominican Republic. I went to neighbouring Haiti to cover the earthquake for the paper and to help out with an aid organisation. On the way there, I got caught up with the thousands of refugees streaming over the border. I’d never taken anything but holiday snaps before I got the position on the paper. I thought I’d be working as a journalist, but when I first arrived I struggled with the strong Spanish accents and the speed at which everyone spoke, and a misunderstanding with my editor resulted in my press pass reading “photographer” instead of “reporter”. These children were sitting on a bench with their mother, looking scared and bewildered; it was a spur-of-the-moment shot.

I took it in colour originally, but I think it’s more striking in black and white. The experience has helped me focus on my future career, perhaps doing something that combines photography and aid work.’

The competition received sponsorship from thirdyearabroad.com, a website for UK students, run by Bristol graduate Natacha Cullinson (BA 2008). For more information, visit www.bristol.ac.uk/emi/undergraduates/study/year3.html

Feature

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Lull before the storm

After a stint of volunteering for the Feminist Archive at the University of Bradford, Mackay returned to education to study for a degree in Women’s Studies, followed by a Master’s in Gender, Culture and Modernity. She then returned to education to study for a degree in court, and gave talks to trade union organisations and universities. ‘It was an excellent grounding, even if I did have to wash in rainwater from the roof of the caravan I was living in,’ she says, recalling winter nights so cold that her hot-water bottle froze. ‘But there was such solidarity in the camp, and a feeling that women-only action was possible and effective,’ she adds.

Finding a voice

The RTN marches against rape and male violence reflect the recent renewal of interest in political direct action. ‘RTN began in Britain in 1977, but took off during the late 1980s and 1990s,’ she says. ‘Since LFN rejuvenated the marches in 2004, the number of participants has risen from 30 to more than 2,000.’ Her PhD will investigate the role of this form of activism in the women’s liberation movement, and the extent to which women have actively shaped politics and society.

Mackay’s own experience tells her that such action certainly has an effect on the women involved. ‘The marches are empowering, especially for women who have been victims of male violence,’ she says. ‘They enable women to voice their anger about an issue that is often buried. Some women walk the whole way in tears, others sing or shout their heads off; they’re very emotional events. We don’t expect the conviction rate for rape to improve on the strength of a march, but it keeps the issue alive. And changes in police policy are evident in the safety awareness work we do with local councils and organisations like Transport for London.’

The demands of a PhD leave little time for active campaigning, and Mackay is adjusting to life as a researcher. ‘I find it hard to be objective about something that’s been such a big part of my day-to-day life,’ she admits. ‘But it’s a privilege to study in a unit that has pioneered research into violence against women. I never dreamed I’d have women as well regarded as Dr Melanie McCarry [PhD 2004] and Professor Marianne Hester commenting on my work. I’m proud to be part of that world.’

In pictures

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