A deeper understanding: Professor Jon Cohen outlines the ground-breaking work of BSMS research groups

A passion for education: Lord Attenborough shares his views on Sussex and looks back on some career highlights

Courting controversy: Andrew Morton discusses the feverish reactions to his recent biography of Tom Cruise.
Vice-Chancellor’s welcome

I am delighted to write my first introduction for Falmer magazine. I have been at Sussex now for coming up to ten months, and I have found them some of the most exciting, challenging and rewarding months of my career so far.

I have now happily settled into life here – and my children, both relatively recent graduates themselves from other UK institutions – are enjoying making full opportunity of weekends in the glorious East Sussex countryside.

One of the very first events I attended at Sussex was the 40th anniversary alumni reunion. That was a marvellous occasion, and I was delighted to have been in post to host the event. And, as I write this, I have just returned from an academic visit to the US, which allowed me to meet some of our American alumni.

Meeting alumni, some of whom were at Sussex in its earliest days, and hearing about their lives then and since, has provided a unique insight for me. Indeed, I have to say that some of the sharpest insights and most passionate commitment have come from our alumni. And it’s not just our graduates, but former Sussex staff too, including one of my distinguished predecessors, Vice-Chancellor Asa, now Lord Briggs, who was present at the reunion.

These discussions have been invaluable grounding as we look towards crafting a new strategy for the University, with all my new colleagues, staff and students at Sussex, to take us forward into the 21st Century. We are mapping out an exciting vision for the growth and development of Sussex, growing curriculum areas that build on Sussex strengths; building some outward looking research themes, which tackle big world issues; and finding new ways to enhance the student experience. I will be sharing that with you in the next issue.

During this year, I have also been privileged to have benefited from the wisdom of Lord Attenborough, who has been connected with Sussex for nearly 40 years. He is now standing down as Chancellor after ten years in the role.

He has offered wise counsel to me; he has given me as deep an understanding as anyone could of what Sussex stands for; and, above all, he has made me enormously proud that I have come to be part of this University.

I know from my discussion with my former Vice-Chancellors, and with staff and students past and present, what a place Lord Attenborough holds in the heart of the Sussex community. He has through all that time and in many ways served the University with great distinction. And he has done so with tremendous energy and passion.

To our students and their parents, families and friends, he is the absolute star of our graduation ceremonies. A star who makes everyone he meets feel that they themselves are, rightly, the special ones on that very special day.

But behind the scenes – at meetings and at events, private and public, in personal engagement, in advice to Sussex staff – Lord Attenborough is unstinting in his efforts on behalf of the University. I am delighted that he will continue to play a role at Sussex. On behalf of all alumni, colleagues and friends at Sussex, I say a heartfelt thank you.

Michael Farthing

Vice-Chancellor’s welcome
University honours former VC with Honorary Degree

Sussex launches Second Life campus

You can now be on the Sussex campus even if you’re sitting in Australia, by visiting the virtual version in the online world Second Life. Sign up and you can study, share information and socialise in a 3D world that looks just like the real thing.

Everyone who visits creates an avatar, a virtual version of themselves that they can transport to different locations like the virtual Sussex campus. Once they have arrived, they can fly around to visit the Library, attend online seminars, or call into the Students’ Union or the Meeting House.

Tom Shaw, a graduate intern with the University’s in-house Web Team, developed the virtual campus with colleague Beth Granter.

“We really wanted to make it look like Sussex, so instead of going for some fantasy look, we’ve recreated the centre of campus, including its distinctive Basil Spence architecture,” Tom explains. Developers see the campus as a new platform for developing teaching, learning and communication tools that encourage interaction and collaboration between users.

The virtual campus, which is open to exploration even though it’s still in its developmental stages, offers many potential uses, including:

• providing students and distance learners with interactive teaching resources such as seminars and lectures
• offering a chance for potential students, particularly those who live abroad, to visit and explore the University to get a feel for the place.

The School of Science and Technology is already thinking of staging a virtual open day

• offering a more dynamic and engaging web presence that makes use of developments for the internet generation of students

Physics experiment ranked in UK’s top three

A small experiment led by a team of University of Sussex scientists has been ranked amongst the UK’s most important particle-physics projects.

Following a recent government reorganisation of the funding of the UK’s science, the University’s neutron electric dipole moment (nEDM) experiment, which looks to explain why the Big Bang created more matter than anti-matter in the Universe, is one of only three projects to have been rated ‘high priority’ by the government.

“The review found that every single one of the UK’s particle-physics projects was carrying out first-rate science, and all were worthy of funding,” explained Professor Philip Harris, who heads the Sussex group.

“The project’s top rating, which puts it alongside Atlas and CMS, the two large UK-led experiments at CERN’s Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland, guarantees funding by the Science and Technology Facilities Council, which carried out the review.

The team at Sussex, together with scientists from the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Oxford University, Kure University (Japan), and the Institut Laue Langevin in Grenoble, have been investigating the asymmetry between matter and anti-matter – in other words, how all the material in the Universe emerged from the Big Bang.

“By creating a corresponding asymmetry in subatomic particles, we have been able to test if the universe is left handed or right handed,” says Professor Harris.

“The project’s top rating is a major coup, and an honour, as well as an acknowledgement of the important contribution that these small but beautiful precise experiments can make to our understanding."

The overall ISB scores of Sussex in 2007 improved on 2006, and improved in almost all categories. Sussex in 2007 improved on 2006, and improved in almost all categories. Overall, 88 per cent of international students would encourage other students to apply to Sussex, a better rating than most other institutions in the survey.

The University uses the findings to strengthen services to students. After putting specific effort, for example, into airport welcome and induction events for international students, the 2007 results suggest improvements are being noticed.

As one Polish student said: “Everything was superb. There was no way someone could possibly get lost. Lots of students in their ‘I can help!’ t-shirts were walking around. They were always very nice and helpful.”

The overall ISB scores for Sussex in 2007 improved on 2006, and improved in almost all categories. They also showed greater improvement than the average for other universities taking part.

At Sussex, 98 per cent rated teaching staff as expert lecturers, 96 per cent rated the environment as safe, 93 per cent praised the research and 91 per cent praised the multicultural environment. The University also got top-10 ratings in many other areas including learning support, social facilities, making friends and good transport links. Overall, 88 per cent of international students would encourage other students to apply to Sussex, a better rating than most other institutions in the survey.

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Sussex and Kew cultivate new research partnership

Recent international league tables have placed Sussex fifth in the UK for the impact of its research.

The THES-QS World University Rankings 2007, published in the Times Higher Education Supplement on 9 November, also lists Sussex among the top 150 universities in the world and in the top 50 institutions in Europe.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, said: ‘I am delighted that the strength of the University continues to be recognised in these international tables. I am determined that we should continue to strengthen our position further, and to establish ourselves firmly in the top 100 in future years.

The University is placed joint fifth in the UK alongside Bristol for the impact of its research, surpassed only by Cambridge, Oxford, UCL and Imperial. The ranking is based on the number of times published research papers are cited by academic colleagues around the world.

The University also scored highly for attracting international students and staff to Sussex (equal 34th and 56th in the world respectively).

The THES-QS placing follows on the work of Sussex scientists in Plant Conservation. The University was placed seventh in a top ten table published in the Guardian on 30 October, ranking UK institutions according to the impact and influence of their research over the period 2002 to 2006.

Research at Sussex has an impact well ahead of its size, as the science department itself, a new University of the Year award and the overall SET Student of the Year award.

Star gazers find familiar patterns in molecules

Sussex scientists are using the techniques for mapping entire galaxies to map single molecules in microscopic images.

Chemists Dr Mark Osborne and Steven Lee are applying astronomical concepts to try to shed some light on the properties of single molecules.

Dr Osborne came up with the idea when he noticed significant similarities between the sky maps on show in the Astronomy Centre and the images his team were trying to decipher.

‘I was wondering how astronomers decided whether a really faint star was real, an aberration or noise – and figured they must have some well-established algorithms for sorting the wheat from the chaff,’ he said.

‘I think you can apply astronomical concepts to try to shed some light on the properties of single molecules. This research will ultimately provide the tools for a more powerful analysis of complex processes at the molecular level, such as the immune response, DNA repair and protein misfolding.

‘I guess it was the extreme scales that appealed, from mapping galaxies across the Universe to single molecules under a microscope,’ explained Dr Osborne. The team is conducting initial tests and hopes to deliver bespoke algorithms within the next few months.

Helping to save the world’s endangered plant species and finding new medicinal uses for plants are among the ideas being considered for an exciting new research collaboration between the University and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

The partnership is the latest development in a growing relationship; already, Sussex postgraduate students in Plant Conservation are taught by Sussex staff and by staff at Kew’s Millennium Seed Bank in Wakehurst Place near Haywards Heath.

Both institutions now want to extend this partnership into new areas of scientific research to the benefit of academics, students, the wider community and the regional economy.

‘This collaboration provides ample opportunity to explore the possibilities not just of plant science and conservation, but wider areas of Kew’s heritage and archival material,’ commented Professor Bob Allison, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research).

Academics at Sussex have also identified research areas they would like to collaborate on with scientists at Kew, including:

• conservation of plant species at risk of local or global extinction, both in situ and ex situ
• the ecology and practice of restoration of plant populations and plant communities
• analysis and meta-analysis of large databases, for example on the seed biology and germination behaviour of plant species, and on physiological and biochemical properties (eg salt tolerance)
• metabolomics: global study of all small molecules), and its application to studies of seed changes during germination, and root recognition behaviour
• exploration of the medicinal and pharmaceutical potential, and allergenic properties, of plant species.

Other ideas outside scientific research would involve Kew’s rich archival resources and academics with interests in art history, heritage and education.

Sussex graduate named Physics Student of the Year in national science competition

The Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) awards are organised by the World Leadership Forum to reward and highlight excellent achievement by science students. This year saw record numbers of entries from every major university in the UK and Ireland.

Paul Skrzypczyk (PHYSICS & ASTRONOMY 2003) received the National Physical Laboratory Award for the Best Physics Student at a special dinner at London’s Alexandra Palace on 20 September. After the ceremony, he said: ‘I’m very honoured and also very surprised to have won this award. It was great to make it to the final and to be invited to attend the evening ceremony.

‘I would like to thank all the colleagues who have supported me and my work over the past two years – from my family to the lecturers, from the Physics department to the SET awards committee. Without their help and support I would not have been able to achieve such a high level of success.’

Paul, who last year earned a first class MPhys in Theoretical Physics at Sussex, added: ‘I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Sussex. The Physics department is great, and all of the lecturers are friendly, approachable and supportive.

‘I need to say a big thank you to Dr Claudia Eberlein, for all of her advice and encouragement over the past few years. I would also like to thank my project supervisor, Professor Gabriel Barton, who guided me along the way.

‘I was selected for the competition because he impressed both Dr Eberlein and Professor Barton with his outstanding research and exceptionally high marks throughout his four year degree programme.

‘I was shortlisted for the prize with fellow Sussex physics undergraduate Robert Zietal. ‘Getting not just one but two students recognised as the best in the country is an outstanding achievement for the department,’ added Dr Eberlein.

‘It is not the first time that the Sussex Physics department has seen success at these awards. In 2000, Emma King made history by winning both the Physics Student of the Year award and the overall SET Student of the Year award.

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A deeper understanding – The growth of research at BSMS

The Dean of the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS), Professor Jon Cohen, here outlines the ground-breaking work of the School’s research groups, and describes his vision of building a globally respected medical research facility in the years to come.

BSMS was established in 2001 as a joint venture of the Universities of Sussex and Brighton. From the outset, the School made a clear commitment to research as an integral component of its structure and function.

One of the benefits in placing a medical school in Brighton has been the very strong existing biomedical science research environment at the two parent universities. Within the University of Sussex, this is predominantly located within the School of Life Sciences, which has large and internationally renowned groups in biochemistry, neuroscience and cancer-related genetics – the MRC Genome and Damage Stability Centre in particular. At the University of Brighton, the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences provides valuable complementary expertise in pharmacochemistry and therapeutics as well as microbiology and bioengineering. Bringing this expertise together into one institution means we can develop a strong and vibrant research programme built on collaboration.

Infrastructure – laying the groundwork

BSMS has worked together with its partners – the universities and the NHS – to build a state-of-the-art research facility that has been critical to the rapid development of research capacity.

The Medical Research Building (MRB) on the University of Sussex campus provides 750m² of prime research space with room for over 40 scientists. This is a ‘wet lab’ facility, with cutting-edge provision for cell and molecular biology, histochemistry and tissue culture. Among the research groups working in the MRB are the immunologists, led by Professor Florian Kern, cell biologists (Professor Laurence-Watt, Professor Evans and Dr Newbury), and the infection group (Dr Nessport and Dr Llewelyn).

From the outset, BSMS has worked closely with our NHS colleagues. For example, we were able to secure funds to build a Clinical Investigation and Research Unit (CIRU) at the Royal Sussex County Hospital. The ten-bed unit provides facilities for detailed physiological investigation, as well as some laboratory facilities and opportunities for qualitative interview-based research.

Surprisingly, this type of facility is unusual, even in university teaching hospitals. We were delighted when Professor Sally Davis, the Director of Research and Development for the NHS, came to officially open the building. She complimented us on the opportunity that it offered to drive forward so-called ‘translational’ research – transforming basic science research into changes that can be delivered to patients. One of the principal early users of the CIRU has been Raj Rajkumar, Professor of Elderly Care and Stroke Medicine, whose interests focus on cardiovascular disease in the elderly.

Imaging has become a key element of the Medical School research strategy. Significant fundraising, supplemented by University resources, has enabled us to build a state of the art Clinical Imaging Sciences Centre (CISC) on the University of Sussex campus. The Centre houses an integrated Positron Emission Tomography-Computer Tomography imaging system and a 1.5T magnetic resonance imager. These instruments provide the most modern and technologically advanced imaging facilities, allowing researchers such as Ken Miles, Professor of Imaging, Paul Tofts, Professor of Medical Physics, and Professor Hugo Critchley, Chair of Psychiatry, to carry out ground-breaking research in patients with conditions as diverse as cancer, multiple sclerosis and depression.

Research strategy – our guiding principles

The development of the research strategy within BSMS was based on a number of key principles – that is, that we should:

• identify a relatively small number of research areas and ensure that we develop strength in depth
• build upon existing strengths present within the two universities and the local NHS, in order to foster strong, collaborative links
• seek to recruit non-clinical and clinical academics with expertise ranging from basic science to clinical practice, with a strong emphasis on translational medicine
• build a balance between senior and experienced colleagues, but at the same time provide a platform for earlier career clinical scientists to develop their own research programmes
• recognise that the development of a new Medical School within a local health economy has important implications for the provision of health care to the community and that we should be sensitive to the local epidemiology and the positive impact that our research programmes could bring to the community.

Based on these considerations, we identified three major research themes: infection and inflammation, neuroscience and neuromuscular disease, and oncology. These three are underpinned by research groups in primary care and epidemiology and medical imaging, in such a way that their interactions link and strengthen the research output across the School.

Research groups – an overview

Infection and inflammation

Cutting across the disciplines of HIV and sexual health, immunology, and infectious and inflammatory diseases in both children and adults, the primary focus of this programme is the epidemiology, diagnosis, pathogenesis and treatment of
infections and inflammatory diseases. The work of the group seeks to understand why some patients seem more susceptible than others to complications, and how high-risk patients can be identified in advance in order to improve their prognosis. My colleague Dr Martin Llewelyn and I are interested in severe bacterial infections – especially those, such as the infamous MRSA, that occur in hospitals. We are exploring why these bacteria sometimes cause devastating diseases, and we are also involved in very large international clinical trials of innovative treatment strategies. Florian Kern, Professor of Applied Physiology, has developed extremely sophisticated measures of the genetic susceptibility to infection, using sophisticated brain scanning methods to explore how feelings and emotions are reflected in brain function, and uses other laboratory-based techniques to address symptom expression in neurological and psychiatric patients. His research examining how emotions arise and control behaviour has generated considerable interest among the general public too.

One of the most exciting areas of research in recent years has been the so-called stem-cell therapy. Professor Dr Lawrence-Hall, Professor Darrrell Evans and Dr Sarah Newbury are investigating some of the basic processes that determine how primitive cells develop into cells with specialised functions – in their case, muscle cells. This kind of work may help us understand how to treat children with severe muscle wasting diseases, such as muscular dystrophy.

Neuroscience and neuromuscular disease
Neuroscience at BSMS encompasses several different groups, many of which have established collaborative links since their arrival at the Medical School. Professor Rajkumar’s research in Elderly Care focuses on stroke and vascular compliance. The overall research strategy of the section falls into two main fields: modifications of vascular compliance, and assessment of biological age prevention and acute management of stroke. Several further areas of research have been identified as part of a £1.5m award from the Department of Health. The research of Professor Hugo Critchley, Chair of Psychiary, combines clinical investigations with sophisticated brain scanning methods to explore how feelings and emotions are reflected in brain function, and uses other laboratory-based techniques to address symptom expression in neurological and psychiatric patients. His research examining how emotions arise and control behaviour has generated considerable interest among the general public too.

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Oncology
A successful partnership has developed between BSMS, Sussex Cancer Research Network, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust, and the Universities of Brighton and Sussex. The partnership’s aim is to integrate scientific and clinical research programmes, so that advances in the scientific understanding of cancer improve actual cancer treatments. A number of research pathways are being developed, such as identification of molecular targets and biomarkers, drug development, and clinical testing of novel agents. Using functional imaging technology helps the identification and evaluation of tumour biomarkers, enhancing diagnosis and screening, and evaluating how tumours respond to different therapeutic modalities.

BSMS also has a strong psychosocial oncology group, led by Professor Fallowfield. The interests of this group analyse cancer-patient relationships in the context of cancer, along with cancer epidemiology and ethics.

Looking forward – the future of research at BSMS
The School is not yet five years old, and inevitably and appropriately much of our effort has gone into developing and delivering the new undergraduate curriculum. Our first cohort of students is graduating this summer – a very significant milestone. However, we have also been keen to develop the research capacity of the School, because we believe that medicine is best taught in a research-rich environment. We have concentrated on growing our research interests in a select number of areas, and as the School moves to the next stage of its development, research activity will grow even more. With the combination of outstanding faculty and a strong research infrastructure, we are optimistic that the next five years will see BSMS mature into a significant player in the national and international arena.
A passion for education

Since Lord Attenborough first became associated with the University of Sussex in the late 60s, his contribution has been immense. He has chosen to step down as Chancellor at the end of this academic year, at the age of 85, and the energy and enthusiasm he has brought to the role will be greatly missed. Here, he shares his passion for Sussex and for education, and looks back on some outstanding career highlights.

Barely five minutes into the interview, it is clear how much Lord Attenborough loves everything about Sussex, and that he is going to miss his close association with the University very much.

It is an association that goes back to 1960, when Lord Attenborough was producing and directing the award-winning film, Oh! What a Lovely War, in Brighton. ‘Oh! What a Lovely War’ is an extraordinary anti-war musical set in World War I. The troops were cannon fodder and the vital thing in telling this story was that they should look like the boys they were: 17 and 18 year-olds. I didn’t want normal film extras; I wanted young men who looked like … well … undergraduates. So I discovered an extraordinary man, who I am now devoted to, called Asa Briggs, who was Vice-Chancellor, and I wrote to him asking for his approval to put up a notice in the University asking if my volunteers to come and act in the movie. Well, of course we didn’t get 10 or 20, we got God knows how many! However, there being no such thing as a free lunch, Asa said that if he allowed this, he would be appointed Patron of the Gardner Centre, a new arts centre which was still being completed. Of course, I said yes and that’s how I became involved with the University.

Over the next 40 years, his participation in university life deepened. He was made Pro-Chancellor in 1970, and then became Chancellor ten years ago, bringing a measure of cheerful informality to graduation ceremonies.

‘I couldn’t really conform to the total solemnity of the event. It seemed to me that if you have been working hard for three years, and this is acknowledged with the reward of a degree, it should be an event of celebration, of joy, of recognition, of achievement to be shared with all the family. Sometimes there is unexpected fun. On one memorable occasion, a boy came up, behaved absolutely correctly – except that by the time he walked off the stage, he opened his gown and was totally naked! Of course the place broke up with laughter.’

‘I love graduation and I have a stack of beautiful letters, not so often from the graduates but from their families, saying that it was an occasion they would never forget. And, of course, I have had the great joy of bestowing honorary degrees on so many extraordinary people, including, Amnara Sen, Jonathan Miller, Thabo Mbeki and Albie Sachs. At one particular ceremony I bestowed a graduate degree on my son, Michael, and an honorary degree on his godfather, and one of my dearest friends, Noel Coward. Noel was gay and no university at that time would give him an honorary degree, but Sussex did.’

Lord Attenborough was still visibly moved when he recalled receiving an honorary degree at Mamphele Ramphel on the, the mistress of Street Biko. She was the Vice-Chancellor of Cape Town University and Lord Attenborough had got to know her when he was filming Cry Freedom. ‘We invited her over and she made a speech of such passion, of such humility, of such understanding of the problems that face people from the African continent, or any group of people different from your own, that when she sat down the entire place stood up and applauded and applauded. I never heard an ovation like it in my life. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful.’

Although from an academic family (his father was Principal of University College, Leicester), Lord Attenborough says he was not intuitively academic like his brother (the naturalist Sir David Attenborough). ‘Always wanted to be an actor and all my spare time was spent with the local drama group or the school drama society. So I went on a Leverhulme Scholarship to RADA in 1941, where I met Sheila (his wife, the actress Shakila Smit). I was in a film (my first) in 1941 called To Which We Serve, which was Noel Coward’s first film, and from that I did a couple of plays, including the stage production of Brighton Rock in 1943. But later that year, having volunteered for the air force, I was called up.

Despite not going to university, the importance of education – of every conceivable kind – is one of Lord Attenborough’s greatest passions. ‘My parents were the most extraordinary people and very socially conscious. So there was always this feeling that in order to understand and be aware of the world, you had to know, you had to learn, you had to experience it in some form or another. And how did you come to learn? There was no television; there were a few newscasts, but mostly you learnt through reading and through experience. Sometimes when I talk at the University I try to say that yes, of course academia is absolutely vital because it broadens you, but at university a group of people live as a community, and in my terms that is an education which extends fundamental academia into an experience of life – and the knowledge that we are all each responsible for the others.’

Principally an actor, director and producer of films, for over 60 years Lord Attenborough has also been concerned with a wide range of other interests, which include a large number of charities in which he is actively involved. It is possible to highlight some of the career achievements of which he is most proud.

‘My parents were very aware of minorities – and minorities included all forms of disability, and one of the things that pleases me most is that I founded, in my home town of Leicester, a centre for Disability in the Arts which bears my name and for which we raised all the money. It is a building specifically designed for those with physical and mental disabilities and it was opened by the Princess of Wales. I was very proud of Oh! What a Lovely War and I was very proud of Gandhi. Gandhi was not the greatest film ever made but it was a film with a statement – and the fact that it was acknowledged by my peers, and shown so widely, was very important. I’m very proud and very
What I found at Sussex was the antithesis of an ivory tower. The doors were open. The campus was beautiful. And I found the community, the atmosphere and the endeavour so exciting."

thilled that I’ve been married for 65 years. I’m very fond of art and one of the things Sheila and I have collected is Picasso ceramics. We had decided to gift the 160 pieces to the University both as a principal officer of the School of Humanities. So he has seen the University both as a principal officer and as a parent. What did he think was so special about Sussex?

‘I remember Asa saying, “the important thing, Dick, is that we are either an international university for all peoples or we are nothing”. And I always felt that Asa’s statement “a new map of learning” embodied that ethos. What I found at Sussex was the antithesis of an ivory tower. The doors were open. The campus was beautiful. And I found the community, the atmosphere and the endeavour so exciting and the commitment of the undergraduates so warm and open. People walk by me on the campus and they say good morning or good afternoon to me – or hello, how nice to see you. I just love it. I shall miss it very much.’

But Lord Attenborough’s relationship with Sussex is not ending; in a way it has come full circle. It began with his becoming involved in the Gardner Centre and, following his retirement in July, he will once again become involved in the Centre. ‘The new Vice-Chancellor, Michael Farthing, has asked me if I will re-interest myself in the Centre and take an active part in its re-conception. It’s something I will adore to do.’

Written by Jane Jacomb-Hood

Author Andrew Morton (MA in History, 1972) chronicles the modern phenomenon of celebrity in his best-selling biographies of subjects like Diana, Princess of Wales, Monica Lewinsky, and most recently, Tom Cruise.

Courting controversy
Andrew Morton is probably best known in Britain as the biographer of Diana, Princess of Wales. However, over the past year his Diana: the Biography of Tom Cruise has been the subject of feverish discussion in the US and on the internet because it examines the Scientology beliefs.

‘While my book on Diana is probably the world’s best-known unauthorised, unofficially authorised biography, my book on Tom Cruise was deliberately unauthorised – because any authorised book about Scientology and Tom Cruise would not be worth the paper it was written on. However, such is the litigious outrage from Scientology leaders and such are the extraordinary libel laws in Britain that the book cannot be published here.’

This is a great disappointment both for Andrew and his publishers. He had researched Scientology extensively because, as Cruise himself had said, ‘you can only understand me by understanding Scientology.’ What the author was trying to find out was why Cruise had decided to involve; what had drawn him to the religion? He tried to focus on Cruise’s journey through life rather than write a pure history of Scientology. Yet Andrew is frustrated that what he has written about the religion means that the book cannot be published in Britain. ‘The book has been published everywhere in the world – in China, in Vietnam – countries not known for their support of freedom of expression. Is this not how, whether you agree with Scientology or not, whether you agree with its rules or not, it should be a subject that can be discussed and debated in this country. Here is a book about a well-known Hollywood figure, and a controversial religion that wants to expand in Britain, which cannot get published in this country because of our repressive laws. It is a coincidence that an episode of the comedy show ‘South Park’ which poked fun at Scientology was not shown in Britain. We have become the world capital for what is known as libel tourism.’

Publishing litigation is not a new experience for Andrew. His book about the Beckhams had been challenged in the courts by the celebrity couple, using human rights laws introduced in 2000 to stop its publication. ‘We had to fight that one, otherwise it would have set a legal precedent that could have affected freedom of expression in this country. The case generated a lot of publicity and we won – then, lo and behold, the Beckhams brought out their own book within a few months.’

As well as his books about Tom Cruise, and the Beckhams (and non-fiction book on an American mining disaster), Andrew has written biographies of Monica Lewinsky, Madonna, and Daniel arap Moi, the Kenyan leader. He acknowledges these are all controversial figures, but he feels he does not. ‘When I plan a biography I try to be measured and even-handed about it, and when I’ve finished I hope I have reached an understanding of my subject.’

And what attracts him to his subjects? His answer is immediate. ‘It’s the exploration of your own subjects? His answer is immediate. ‘It’s the exploration of your own interests.’ He calls his approach to research ‘pointillist’, as he tries to build up a picture of his subject with lots of little dots, or scraps of information, ‘because often the story that people tell you is not the story that you want to know – but there might be one small fragment for you in it.’

‘Whether or not these stories are the stories he would like to hear, he must have heard hundreds of fascinating rumours and truths during his many interviews. Has he ever been tempted to investigate any of them more deeply? ‘He gives a truthful sigh, and tells of the time, during his writing of the Cruise book, when a Washington lobbyist disclosed that a man had just flown out from Baghdad with six billion dollars in the back of a transport plane to fund the reconstruction in Iraq. ‘It was a great story. I thought immediately ‘Six Billion Dollar Man!’ But it would have involved a lot of messing about and I was deep into the Cruise book. However, 18 months later the story emerged. I really did wish I had followed that one up.’

For a short time, Andrew was the royal correspondent for a national newspaper. One of his specialist topics at Sussex had been Aristocracies and their Elites so he felt he knew something about the subject. But when he took on the Diana project he had absolutely no idea of the storm it would cause. ‘The archive includes all the tapes of her chatting away and so on. It’s oral history. But one of the interesting things about Diana is that she wrote a lot, too, I only have her manuscripts but having said that, all the faxes have faded (we didn’t know about photoshopping then at the time).’

For several years Andrew has chronicled how modern celebrity has gradually eclipsed the Royal Family, and he believes Diana had a pivotal role in this transformation. ‘Tom Cruise and wider Scientological family who didn’t make headlines around the world. Then in the Diana age they became of global interest and she and her, and his, death. He made his will after the Diana book came out but at a time when no one knew that she was behind it. ‘Obviously I never expected her to predecease me. Once she had died, there seemed no point in keeping her cooperation a secret. The archive includes all the tapes of her chatting away and so on. It’s oral history. But one of the interesting things about Diana is that she wrote a lot, too, I only have her manuscripts but having said that, all the faxes have faded (we didn’t know about photoshopping then at the time).’

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Memories of Sussex

As well as supporting the Sussex Fund, the University’s phone campaigns offer alumni the opportunity to connect with current students and to reminisce about those memorable years at university. Paddy Conway (né Clarke, SOC 1964) shares with Falmer the memories that a call from a Sussex student conjured up and his reasons to support the Sussex Fund.

I owe the University of Sussex a great deal. It was an exciting time; mid 1960s, the University in its fourth year, tripping over foreign camera crews in the library. My year comprised of a lot of very ordinary kids from school, one who felt like that and that everybody else was the ‘Sussex student’ they read about in the Sunday papers. I wore the University scarf (red on one side, blue on the other) with pride (it was said that Hardy Amies had covered any extras I might have needed).”

Where there’s a will

Have you ever considered leaving a gift in your Will to Sussex? At the Development and Alumni Relations Office we often receive enquiries from alumni and current and former members of staff considering doing just that. Such far-sighted gifts, whether large or small, are always very much appreciated.

To help with some common questions about Wills and legacy gifts, local solicitor Julian Potter, of DMM Stallard in Brighton, will be answering your queries in a new regular column for Falmer.

Q. I am confused about the new laws around Inheritance Tax. Can you explain what they mean for me and my wife?

I hope to dispel your confusion. Firstly, the threshold for Inheritance Tax usually reses each year with the budget. From April 2008, the threshold for Inheritance Tax increased to £312,000. In broad terms, if a person dies with assets in excess of this figure, then the balance over £312,000 is taxable at the rate of 40 per cent.

Regardless of this, rather than open the cafeteria or run the gauntlet of the contractors, there was a set of lectures to attend, and punctually. Not that most of us needed any encouragement to listen to these fascinating and beautifully crafted lectures. The problem was that the entrance to the Chemistry lecture theatre was inside an area that the buildings had roped off. So we had either to bear the wrath of Asa Briggs or run the gauntlet of the contractors.

And then there were other treats; the Professor of Economics arguing that rather than open the cafeteria during the vacation, it would be cheaper to employ someone to stand at the entrance and give everybody who came ten shillings with which they could get the bus into Brighton, west end and get the bus back.

I also remember the day the Queen came to open the Library. The University newspaper described graphically how the campus was populated by secret servicemen trying to look like secret servicemen! I was in Falmer House when an official of the Students’ Union came through and pleaded with people: ‘please, could you just stand up when she goes past?’ The tenor of his plea was that even the most hardened republicans duly stood up. Later they were rewarded when someone threw his cloak over a puddle the Queen was about to step in and she discovered a window in the Library that didn’t quite fit.

A few years ago I decided to give my dress suit, which I hadn’t worn since Sussex, to the local drama group. Inside I found my ticket for the summer ball (top of the bill – the Dave Clark Five) and a pristine ten shilling note which would have covered any extras I might have had.

But, most importantly, Sussex taught me how to think. In particular, Aaron Sloman, who taught me logic and skills which I’ve relied on all through my working life. And I still remember and benefit from Josephine Klein talking also about groups work and explaining the all important distinction between an empty silence and a thinking silence. One of my current activities is chairing adjudication panels at the General Medical Council and I use daily things I learnt from these two lectures at Sussex over 40 years ago.

Some people go to university for specific skills related to an intended career. Others – like me – were looking for knowledge and skills that would help with whatever one did in life. Sussex was good at identifying and nurturing what each individual had to offer. It was delightful to talk to Kate, one of the student secretaries, when she rang a few months ago. She provided me with a chance to reminisce about the Sussex of 1964 and hear something of its life now. I was delighted too to hear something about the Sussex of 1964 and hear something of its life now. I was delighted too to hear something about the Sussex of 1964 and hear something of its life now.

If a person dies with assets in excess of this figure, then the balance over £312,000 is taxable at a rate of 40 per cent. However, if the whole estate is left to a surviving spouse, the estate will not have to pay any inheritance tax (Spouse Exemption). For example, Mr Smith dies on 9 October 2007, in circumstances where the whole OR a portion of the estate of the first spouse to die passes to the surviving spouse, then on the death of the second spouse, there will now be a double taxable event. Whether or not any gains tax as the amount the University will reclaim (currently 28p for every £1 given).

I would like the University of Sussex to reclaim tax on this donation. I pay at least as much in income tax or capital gains tax as the amount the University will reclaim (currently 28p for every £1 given).

Please complete this form in BLOCK CAPITALS. Thank you.

Name
Address
Postcode

I wish to make a donation of (please tick):
£25 £50 £100 £250 £500 Other amount £

GIFT AID DECLARATION (UK taxpayers only)
I would like the University of Sussex to reclaim tax on this donation. I pay at least as much in income tax or capital gains tax as the amount the University will reclaim (currently 28p for every £1 given).
New alumni benefits

Below are the latest benefits and services available to members of the Alumni Network. For a full list of benefits, please visit the Alumni and Friends website at www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni

Cruises with Spirit of Adventure

As a member of the Sussex Alumni Network, you and a travelling companion can now save up to £150* per person off discounted fares aboard Spirit of Adventure. Spirit of Adventure’s cruises are for those who want to explore and learn about unusual places, especially those rarely visited by other cruise ships. They are also for anyone who’s looking for a relaxed, informal cruise where it’s really up to you what you do. On most cruises you fly straight to the ship so there are no lengthy periods at sea and you get to see many more places. You will also have ample time in each port, allowing you to get closer to the local history and culture. An excursion or expedition is included at almost every stop and expert guest speakers will enhance your cruise with a full programme of fascinating on-board lectures.

To find out more and take advantage of these special discounts, please visit the Alumni and Friends website at www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni

* Terms and conditions apply.

One Alfred Place members’ club

If you live and work outside Central London, but often travel there for business and miss having a place to hold meetings, make calls, keep up with emails and receive office support, then One Alfred Place (founded by Sussex alumnus Rob Shreeve, SOC 1968) may be the right venue for you. Designed for business, One Alfred Place offers a welcoming ambience, stunning space flooded with natural light, original contemporary art – and all the office services and communication resources you could need.

Rob Shreeve, Chief Executive of the club, is donating five percent of the money alumni who become members spend using the club’s facilities to the Sussex Fund, which mainly supports scholarships and hardship bursaries at the University.

To find out more about the club, please visit www.onealfredplace.com

If you would like to arrange a visit, or request an application, please contact Rob on 020 7000 1999 or by email at rob.shreeve@onealfredplace.com. Please remember to quote the ‘University of Sussex’ as your sponsor when filing in your application.

International success for former sports bursary recipients

Two recent former students, who were beneficiaries of sports bursaries during their time at Sussex, have now become medal winners at world championship level. David Stone (SOCIAL WORK 2003) won a gold medal at the World Para-Cycling Championships in France in August last year. This was David’s second gold at the World Championships, having also won gold the previous year while he was still a student at Sussex. Also last year, British Olympic hopeful Laurence Halsted (PSYCHOLOGY 2003) won a bronze medal at the World Student Games in Bangkok. Laurence is ranked among the top five of Britain’s fencers and is seen as a strong medal hope for both the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Olympics.

While at Sussex, both David and Laurence benefited from sports bursaries partly made possible through the generosity of alumni. Sports bursaries provide invaluable support for those students who demonstrate outstanding sports talent, offering them training funds, access to sports facilities free of charge, and dedicated support from sports staff.

Commenting on their achievements, Luke Terrill, Director of Sport at Sussex said: ‘It’s a pleasure to see two of our outstanding former bursary recipients receive these accolades. This is undoubtedly a great source of inspiration to the many talented students that we currently mentor as part of the sports bursary scheme.’

You can support sport bursaries at Sussex with a gift to the Sussex Fund. Find out more on page 17.
Sussex people
Who is doing what and where?

60s

60s Tim Shaw (AFRAS 1964) was proud to launch his new Routledge monograph on the Commonwealth at MUBS in Uganda as part of CHOGM in Kampala.

60s Peter Heiløyer (AFRAS 1965) is working as Adviser to the UAE Government’s National Media Council on External Information in Abu Dhabi. He has no plans, as yet, to retire home to Jersey, not least because he and his second wife have recently adopted a little girl, born in 2004.

60s Following the release of his first book, Who’s Who In Proust, Patrick Alexander Lane (ENGG 1965) is delighted that his second book, Marcel Proust’s Search For Last Time, has also now been published and is available at Amazon.com. Information about the books is available at www.whoiswhoinproust.com

60s Matthew (Bob) Seal (ENGAM 1965) has co-written a manual on natural medicine, Hedgerow Medicine. The book gives advice on which plants to use for different ailments, the various forms they can be used in, and an insight into the background of these natural remedies.

60s Brian Easton (SOC 1966) is an independent scholar in New Zealand with connections to a number of universities. He is also a Distinguished Fellow of the New Zealand Association of Economists. His latest book, The Globalisation of Nationstates tackles interdisciplinary issues ranging widely through history and across continents.

60s Pramesh Kapoor (SCITECH 1966) has been invited by National Tsing Hua University, in Taiwan, to spend three months as Visiting Professor in the Department of Biochemical Engineering and Environmental Science.

60s Gabrielle Kelly (CCS 1967), Adjunct Professor at USC’s School of Cinematic Arts, and at UCLA Extension, was selected for a Fulbright Senior Specialists project in Taiwan, during 2007. She worked with NTHU Faculty on developing their film programme and taught ‘From Script to Screen’, a screenwriting and producing masterclass.

70s

70s Congratulations to Linda Barnett (ARTS 1974), who was awarded an MBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours 2007 for services to youth justice and child protection in Somerset.

70s After 40 years teaching in schools and universities in England and Ireland, Anthony Harrison-Barbet (ARTS 1974) is now an ‘independent scholar’. He has recently published E. A. Visscher: Writer and Mystic, a critical study of the Hose-based novelist, poet, and Milton scholar (1678-1792). He is also the author of the popular text-book Mastering Philosophy.

70s Further to senior posts at California State and Pittsburgh Universities, Reza Karkia (ENGG 1974) has been appointed a Commissioner of State-wide Health Policy and Data by the Governor of California, Mr Schwarzenegger.

40 years on

Nearly 400 alumni who were at Sussex from 1961 to 1967 returned to campus on Saturday 5 September to join in the celebrations of the University’s 40th anniversary. The evening event was hosted by Catherine Boyd (SOC 1963) and Helen Pennant-Rea (SOC 1963), better remembered as the Jay Twins, who kindly championed the event. Many former tutors were also present to mark the occasion and catch up with their old students. Former Vice-Chancellor Lord Asa Briggs and Lady Briggs were the guests of honour. Lord Briggs spoke movingly about those first few years at Sussex and about how the University, with its innovative interdisciplinary approach to teaching and research, pioneered a new ‘map of learning’. His speech was followed by a few words from the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, who welcomed everyone back to the University and outlined his vision for Sussex over the next few years.

As well as enjoying seeing old friends and tutors, alumni were able to take part in guided tours of the campus and get together for the requisite group photograph. Alumni then made their way to the newly refurbished Arts A lecture theatre to participate in a debate on climate change led by Professor Sue Hartley, and joined in the celebrations of the University’s 40th anniversary. I’ll definitely be going to the next one!’ said the party was ‘a great chance to meet up with other Sussex graduates and reminisce about good times on campus.

The University of Sussex Lecture

Professor Gordon MacHern, Director of the Sussex Energy Group in SPSR (Science and Technology Policy Research), was the keynote speaker of the 2008 University of Sussex Lecture held at One Brighton Walk, Westminster. Entitled Energy, Climate Change and Nuclear Power, the subject of the lecture could not have been more topical.

Professor MacHern argued that due to the persuasive evidence for climate change, directly connected to human behaviour in general and the burning of fossil fuels in particular, climate change policy has to be energy policy. However, energy policy has other concerns such as security of supply and this is where problems can arise. He went on to explore the consequences for energy policy-making as a central concern for the future of the climate, and examined the contemporary, often fiercely disputed, arguments about nuclear power in the context of climate policy and wider energy policy objectives.

The University of Sussex Lecture is an annual event held in London, aimed to make world-leading Sussex research accessible to a wider audience of alumni, friends and supporters of the University, as well as raising the profile of the University among policy-makers at the highest level from government departments and non-governmental organisations.

Sussex goes to Brussels

Brussels, the heart of European politics, provided the perfect venue for a lecture in October 2007 organised by the Sussex European Institute (SEI) and the Development and Alumni Relations Office, and sponsored by SJ Benin via one of its partners, Sussex graduate and former member of faculty Stephen Ken (EURO 1971).

The event brought together two Directors General of the European Commission, Philip Lowe (Director General for Competition) and Sussex alumnus Jonathan Faul (Director General for Freedom, Security and Justice, EURO 1973). The audience, made up of members of the European Commission, academia, industry and the legal profession, heard about the role that European watchdogs play in safeguarding fair competition.

Reflecting on the lecture, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, commented: ‘an event of this stature reflects extremely well on both the University of Sussex and SJ Benin. Both the level of insight into an important area of EU policy and the calibre of guests who attended did much to help raise the profile of the University and the Sussex European Institute among an important group of policy makers and opinion formers.’

Recent Graduates’ Party

On a gorgeous day in May, a group of Sussex alumni met at the Pitcher and Piano in Trafalgar Square to catch up with fellow graduates from 2002 to 2007. The event was attended by a wide mix of alumni from different schools, including SPRU, Life Sciences and Humanities.

The evening ended with a competition draw for one lucky graduate to win a bottle of Mr Schwarzenegger. Everyone had a great time catching up with friends, reliving stories of university life, sharing their experiences as graduates and enjoying one or two drinks.

The event provided a competition draw for one lucky graduate to win a bottle of champagne, with Andrew Jones (BOLDS 1999) walking away with the prize. Andrew said the party was ‘a great chance to meet up with other Sussex graduates and reminisce about good times on campus. I’ll definitely be going to the next one!’

The party is one of a series of regular events organised by the Sussex Alumni Network. To see pictures from the party, and for information about future events, please visit the Alumni and Friends website (www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni).

Events and reunions

40404
80s

80s Kate Brian (EURO 1981) has written a new book, The Complete Guide to Female Fertility, published by PIATIUS. It is aimed at women who want to know more about their fertility, especially those wondering how late they can have a baby. Kate was a member of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Expert Advisory Group that is currently deciding how to reduce multiple births after fertility treatment, and writes a blog on fertility issues (www.fertilityviews.blogspot.com).

80s Candida Lacey (EDUC 1981), who received an OBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours for Services to Healthcare.

80s Joss Hawthorn (SICITECH 1981) has been awarded the Federation Fellowship in Australia for research into astrophysics. He will move to the University of Sydney to develop a revolutionary new technology for astronomical instruments in collaboration with Australian industry. This technology will soon allow Australian cosmologists to see further into the Universe than has been possible to date.

80s Candida Lacey (ARTS 1981) has released her second book, A Stolen Child: The Story of Esther Wheelwright. The book is a biography of a relative who was taken captive as a child by Wabanaki Indians from New England to Quebec until the age of 12, later becoming an Ursuline Mother Superior at the time of the American conquest in 1759. Julie also started a new post running the UK’s first MA in Creative Writing, Non-Fiction, at City University in January 2008.

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Her new book The Food of Love is being published in November 2008.

80s Lesley Rowe (née Attree CCS 1981) has had her first anthology of poems, Butterflies and Wishes recently published. Lesley is also now halfway through writing her first novel.

80s Congratulations to Diane Waller (EDUC 1981), who received an OBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours for Services to Healthcare.

80s Calestous Juma (SPRU 1983) has been appointed Special Advisor to the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The commission members are divided as to whether commercial whaling should be resumed, and their differences of opinion have brought the commission to the brink of collapse. In this role, Calestous has an opportunity to make a significant contribution to resolving one of the world’s trickiest environmental issues.

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80s Carlos Rossi (ARTS 1989) officially presented his second book, Epilogue of GU, at a ceremony in Venezuela in October. The book deals with the forthcoming world energy supply crisis, and the ceremony was attended by the whole petroleum industry in Venezuela.

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The Alumni Newsletter - Fall 2008

First Book by Jonathan Stewart

Congratulations to Lochlinn Parker

90s - A book by Ken Goodman (EURO 1997) due to appear shortly. The publication is listed under his pen-name, Simon de Vries, and is a translation of Des Drei et des Devoirs du Citoyen, written by Abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably in 1758. Ken is currently working on a further translation of a book by the same French author on the author.

90s - Jonathan Stewart (SMS 1999) was part of a group of eight co-workers from Brighton-based company Spannerworks, a search engine optimisation company, who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in September 2007. The expedition was undertaken with the aim to raise £10k for the Amani Kids Home, for the redevelopment of the home and other related projects - visit www.amanikids.org. Other Sussex alumni involved in the climb included Tom Morphy (BIOIDS 1994), David Coats (PHYSICS & ASTRONOMY 2000) and Doug Platts (INFORMATICS 2001).

90s - Congratulations to Julia Wycherley (BIOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT 1999), who has been awarded an MBE in the New Year’s Honours List for services to amphibian and reptilian conservation.

00s - Congratulations to Raj Anand (ENGINEERING 2001), who made it into BusinessWeek’s Top 5 Young Entrepreneurs for 2007, with his customisable social-networking website, Kevin. The company’s web-based software creates online social networks tailored to the specific needs of a company’s customers or user base. Target clients include sports, media, and travel businesses.

00s - Maria Witz (SOCIOLOGY 2001) is running the Street Children and Recycling Project Afghanistan, as part of the institute for Gender and Environment. The project aims to help young children who are forced to work on the streets of Afghanistan to support their families, providing the children with a safe environment, and improving recycling as a form of income as well as an educational and creative tool.

00s - Kirsten Brosolo (RP 2002) re-elected for the Danish Parliament at the elections in November 2007. She is now serving in her second term as an MP for the Social Democrats in Denmark. Kirsten has been appointed spokesperson for science and research, which includes universities and research institutions, in the new parliamentary group.

00s - Jeremy Austin (aka Jeremy Packham, MUSIC 2002) released his debut album Trusting Again in July 2007. His website is now up to date with the latest mp3 downloads, lyrics and song descriptons. Visit www.jeremy-austin.com

00s - Greg Rose (ENGLISH 2003) completed a music video for Skill last year. It was filmed on the Sussex campus, and features many students. Skill regularly performs at major venues in Brighton, and now has a solo album, Original Visions, in various record shops around the country.

00s - Cassandra Hodges (ENGLISH 2003) has been accepted to Drama Studio London. Fellow Drama graduates and SUSUS students going to drama school this year include Adam Roberts (ENGLISH 2003) - Royal Academy of Music, Sarah Jayne Butler (ENGLISH 2004) - LAMDA, and Katherine Kotz (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 2004) - East 15 Drama School.

00s - Jorge Ollero Perán (SOCIAL THEORY 2005) completed a swim across the Strait of Gibraltar sponsored by Amnesty International to bring attention to the plight of illegal immigrants from Africa into Europe. He left the port of Tarifa at 9am and arrived at the Moroccan coastline at 2.30pm.

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00s - Lochlann Parker (RP 2000) and Rebecca Ransley (RP 2000) got married in May 2008, having met on their first day at Sussex eight years ago. Their bridesmaids and groomsmen were all Sussex graduates.

Message Board

Young Voices: British Children Remember the Second World War


During the Second World War, British children endured six years of increasing deprivation, uprootings and long separations from their families. They witnessed and endured intense air raids, both by conventional bombing and by the new terror weapons of V1s and V2s. Many were exposed to both physical and psychological human suffering and, at a very young age, were forced to cope with the loss of friends and family.

Using personal accounts from the Imperial War Museum’s Sound and Document Archives, Lyn Smith takes us beyond the home front and provides an insight into the lives of British children around the world during the Second World War. We learn what it was like to live in Nazi Germany as war was breeding. Children who lived under enemy occupation tell of their existence under the jackboot. With the spread of war after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, we hear of the brutal conditions experienced by those living under Japanese occupation and internment in the Far East.

For many, their wartime years have been the most powerful experience of their lives, and even those who suffered great hardship and loss insist they wouldn’t have missed it. Through the richly diverse voices and writings of over 100 contributors, Lyn Smith has written a powerful oral history of the war as seen from a child’s perspective.

Bookmarks

A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identity


What makes the English laugh? Why is our humour still steeped in class distinctions? And does analysing comedy really ruin its pleasure?

Comedy is crucial to how the English see themselves. A National Joke is a run through a series of case studies of popular English comedies and comedians in the 20th Century, ranging from the Carry On films to the work of Mike Leigh and contemporary sitcoms such as The Royle Family, and from George Formby to Alan Bennett and Roy ‘Chubby’ Brown.

Relating comic traditions to questions of class, gender, sexuality and geography, Andy Medhurst looks at how comedy is a cultural thermometer, taking the temperature of its times. It asks why vulgarly has always delighted English audiences, why camp is such a strong thread in English humour, why class influences what we laugh at and why comedy has been so neglected in most theoretical writing about cultural identity. Part history and part polemic, it argues that the English urgently need to reflect on who they are, who they have been and who they might become, and insists that comedy offers a particularly illuminating location for undertaking those reflections.

Andy Medhurst is a Senior Lecturer in Media, Film and Cultural Studies in the Media and Film department at Sussex.
‘Everything about the atmosphere at Sussex was ‘cool’; from the incredible range of courses, to the faculty, the location, and above all, the students. I remain amazed at how much fun the whole experience was, both educationally and socially. The University’s ethos rewarded initiative, accepted diversity and actively encouraged risk taking, and I will always be grateful for the confidence this gave me. I left with better life skills, practical knowledge and enduring friendships.’

Luke McKeever (SOC 1988)
Chief Executive Officer, Capital ID