

THE SUSS-EX CLUB

NEWSLETTER No. 27, September 2013

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♪♪ Brighton Early Music Festival (Bremf) ♪♪

A visit to a concert in this lively, varied and popular festival is proposed. The title of the concert is 'Profane Deliriums' (a quotation from an 18th century observer on the effects of the style of Portuguese and Brazilian music to be performed!)—described in the programme as 'a unique vocal genre characterised by captivating melodies, unusual rhythms, and colourful instrumental effects'. It will be performed by candlelight in St George's church in Kemp Town, with seating around tables at which the suggested picnics may be eaten in the interval. A Portuguese picnic would clearly be appropriate, and it is hoped to organise a shared one with those interested; some Portuguese recipes have been collected!

The concert is at **7.30 pm on Saturday 9th November**; bookings need to be made early, or seats may sell out, so you are asked to reply as soon as possible to make this work, please. For those under 60 tickets are £18.50, for 60 and over, £16.50; if we have 10 people or more, there is also a 10% group reduction. For this concert we shall organise the visit if there are six people or more, without regard to the group reduction threshold; once the demand is known, you will be notified of the resulting price of your tickets. If you are buying a Bremf multi-concert ticket independently, you will still be welcome to arrange to join the Suss-Ex group table and picnic in the interval.

We would like to make a provisional booking by 11th September. It may be possible to add some places after that, but that will depend on the general progress of bookings by other people. **If you would like to come, please let Jennifer Platt know at once.** (j.platt@sussex.ac.uk, home phone 01273 555025, campus office Friston 233, home address 98 Beaconsfield Villas, Brighton BN1 6HE; she will be away 28th August – 5th September. Be sure to give your own full contact information too.)

There are two possible responses: would like to come with tickets bought by Suss-Ex (and are/are not 60 or over), or would like to join a Suss-Ex table but with own tickets. With either response, of course we need to know the number of tickets/seats required. Hope to hear from you soon!



Christmas party

Watch this spot for details of our usual Christmas party. Arrangements cannot yet be finalised, but you might like to pencil in Tuesday 17th December in your diary as a possible candidate. Full details will be in our next mailing in early October.

Reviews of Activities

American Express community stadium

The unmissable bulk of the new stadium across the road from the University compels attention, even from those who have little or no interest in the football which is its *raison d'être*. Yes, the bulk is unmissable, but the stadium is partly set into the ground, in an acknowledgement of the planning sensitivities of the site: 138,000 cubic metres of chalk were excavated to reduce the visual impact of the stadium. Yes, football is the *raison d'être*, but other sports can use the stadium, and a large scale music event has shown that it can also host activities other than sport. (The University of Brighton has teaching space somewhere within the structure.)

A Suss-Ex party of nearly 40 curious souls enjoyed a guided tour of the £100 million facility on 11th June, inspecting all manner of features, from hospitality suites to changing rooms, from a trophy room to the directors' room. We admired the various ways in which heroes of Brighton & Hove Albion FC are honoured by mural and other decorations. We sampled the (padded) seating, uniform throughout the stadium, with all seats having uninterrupted views of the playing area—the roof is supported from above, not by any pillars beneath it—but for those not particularly concerned with the football the more memorable views were probably those of the woods of Stanmer Great Park and Moulsecoomb Wild Park, seen when approaching or leaving the seating areas. Towards the end of the tour we emerged through the players' tunnel towards the pitch, but no, we could not tread the turf, as the pitch had been resown to take advantage of football's close season, and the new grass was not yet fully grown.

The Suss-Ex group could not take everyone who wanted to go on the June tour. Those who were disappointed can make independent arrangements to do so by visiting the stadium website, www.amexstadium.co.uk, and following the appropriate link; tours are regularly offered (for a charge) on Mondays, Thursdays, and Sundays.

Adrian Peasgood

The Pitmen Painters, Brighton Theatre Royal, 27th June

Seeing *The Pitmen Painters* took us on a celebratory journey to a now bygone era before and after the war, when class distinctions determined life chances and where class solidarity was crucial to survival as a member of the mass working class. Long hours, limited education and poverty also imposed heavy constraints on their opportunities to explore worlds beyond the narrow confines of local communities. Yet it was also an era when workingmen's organisations played a key role, sometimes expanding opportunities by creating contexts for collective activities, sometimes constraining them by limiting the ability to follow individual trajectories that threatened their links to their social networks. The play, like *Billy Elliott* (also by Lee Hall), explores the tensions between working class identities, artistic aspirations and the opportunities for personal development when formerly constrained individuals are suddenly presented with opportunities to enter worlds previously closed to them.

The Pitmen Painters were a group of Northumberland coalminers in a WEA group who fortuitously signed up to a class on art appreciation, taught by a visiting lecturer who quickly realised that they had little interest in the abstruse debates that sustained his trade, and encouraged them to do the real thing instead. A number of them had real talent, produced powerful 'primitive' pieces, and in the second half of the 1930s received a good deal of recognition from patrons and the art establishment. Their work fell into obscurity during the war, but they continued painting and were rediscovered in the 1970s, have been widely exhibited—notably in China—and now have a museum devoted to their work in Ashington, their home village.

The play's great success stems from its ability to understand and portray the tensions involved in the complex interactions between the individuals within the group, their middle class teacher and their upper class patron, and to celebrate not only the strength of the solidarity and discipline shown by the group able to produce great art after 12 hour shifts down the mine, but also the wider social solidarity that

made it possible for teacher and patron to maintain these relationships despite the class barriers that inevitably divided them. Yet it also exposes the constraints that ensured that this group's early success did not propel its members into the mainstream, and limited the ability of the most talented of them to take their work to a higher level.

They are able to exhibit; they meet an established painter interested in their work, their female patron offers the most talented of them the money to become a full-time artist (and it would seem the opportunity for a much closer personal relationship). However, the cultural distance between their world and the established art-world is far too great—they are not interested in moving out of their milieu; their teacher moves away to a better job, the possibility of personal advancement is turned down. The group continues to operate in obscurity until their works are accidentally re-discovered gathering dust in the 'shed' (not studio) where they had met and actively discussed each other's work.

The play was superbly acted, mounted and presented, but attracted an undeservedly thin house—maybe this is why the Theatre Royal puts on so little serious work. At the end of the evening I was left with mixed feelings—a powerful affirmation of the role of solidarity, organisation, education and progressive patronage to liberate and empower, and of the unrealised talents generally suppressed by poverty and isolation, but also of the limits that class-based systems and the loyalties that they engender also impose upon both the elites that give most of the orders and the workers expected to obey them.

We have now moved decisively into an individualised era that supposedly offers our new under-class the opportunity to escape these constraints and achieve their own destinies. Visiting *The Pitmen Painters*, as with Ken Loach's *The Spirit of '45*, raises some very important questions about the validity of this claim and about what we have now lost by privileging individualism over solidarity.

Teddy Brett

The Suss-Ex Croquet Experience, 1st July

A sunny July afternoon in Sussex, not far from the sea, but tucked away behind hedges, at least ten green croquet lawns stretched away to an old wooden clubhouse. A couple of the croquet courts were in use, occupied by white-clad figures apparently left over from a different era. What looked like fine loam and sand was being carefully spread across another court. Inside the clubhouse eighteen people were sitting round a table, drinking tea and contemplating the plates of cucumber sandwiches and homemade cake. Next to the large teapot on the counter were plates of strawberries and a jug of cream ... could there be a more quintessential English scene?

Sixteen members of Suss-Ex turned up for the afternoon of croquet, organised by Richard and Pat Jackson, at the county club. Most seemed to have wielded a croquet mallet on the odd occasion, decades earlier, either as a student or at a garden party, but all really were novices. Richard and his colleague quickly demonstrated the essentials, split us into pairs, and set up eight games of "golf croquet"—to be completed before the splendid tea break. After tea there was time for another two rounds, again punctuated by muffled cries of dismay and glee, as a stroke misfired whilst another caused the ball to wriggle through a hoop against all logic. Some tactics were learnt and a little skill probably developed, but we were at the stage when luck dominated. More important, however, was the most enjoyable afternoon entertainment the event produced. Everyone present was very grateful to Richard and Pat for organising such a successful visit to the famous club.

Ken Wheeler

There was a good turnout of about twenty members for the afternoon of croquet arranged by Richard and Pat Jackson at the Sussex County Croquet Club in Southwick. It was a perfect July day, sunny, but with a refreshing breeze coming from the coast. We played golf croquet, which is less complicated than Association croquet and eminently suitable for groups of people. Most of us were novices, but after a short introduction from Richard and some practice at swinging the mallet and "running the hoop" we were soon divided into teams and set free on the courts. We quickly learned to think tactically and to try to spoil our

opponents' chances of getting their ball through the hoop. It was great fun—competitive but good-natured and convivial. At half time we had a sumptuous tea, including smoked salmon and cucumber sandwiches very much in the Edwardian tradition, before playing a final match and counting the hoops won. The overall winners were Colin and Judith Finn. Our thanks are due to the club for allowing the invasion and to Richard and Pat for organising the afternoon so smoothly.

Valerie Betts

Obituaries

Dr Mihaly (Misi) Ertl, 19th July 1936 – 31st July 1999



Misi Ertl was Reader in Materials Science 1965–1986 and returned part-time 1993–1998. His death does not seem to have been noted in the University at the time, so we publish below the recollections of his widow Paula, followed by a pair of obituaries from the *Roedean School Magazine 1999*. The latter are re-published by kind permission of the authors, editor and Roedean School.

Misi did his PhD in Low Temperature Physics at Imperial College as an external student while working at the GEC Hirst Research Centre. On the evening that I met him at a University of London Union 'ball' held in the Chelsea Town Hall (with invitations to the student midwives at Queen Charlotte's where I happened to be studying at the time), he informed me that as soon as a suitable job became available in Brighton he intended applying for it. He and his older brother had been boarders at the Brighton Grammar School. They had abandoned Budapest and their beautiful home with their recently widowed mother in 1947 to live in Knightsbridge with their Jewish grandfather who had wisely sold his stately home (as did his son who resembled him remarkably) and settled in London before the war broke out. Widowed for many years, he had been married to a Christian; the children brought up in her faith. So although grandfather had tried to persuade Misi's wealthy father to bring his daughter and the two boys to England also, Misi's father felt that he had too much to lose by so doing and was certain that he was able to protect his family adequately whatever happened and so they remained in Budapest throughout the war.

Misi's love affair with Brighton and Sussex in general was well and truly cemented and the decision to spend the rest of his life in or around Brighton was formed. On our second date, he proposed marriage but matron had warned us about what the young men from London University were after and advised us against embarking on 'Part 3' of our midwifery courses before we had even completed the first. However, Misi's wonderful personality, vitality and *joie de vivre* was totally irresistible and we were married in less than a year of our first encounter. Misi completed his research at the Hirst Research Centre and got a job as Senior Lecturer at Twickenham College of Technology while writing up his PhD (which I typed out laboriously on my portable Olivetti with carbon paper between the sheets (those were the days!). In 1965, two years after our marriage the Materials Science department was formed and Misi was immediately successful in applying for a Readership within it.

Misi had a vast number of hobbies external to his academic work; notably classic cars, alternative sources of energy, and electronics. He found the idea of a PC in every home exciting and had been adapting existing devices as a hobby at home since the early 70s. Our front Living room was totally occupied with enormous 'computers' and electronic gadgets for many years.

As a result of their known interest in Electronics both Tony Simpson, the other Reader in Materials, and Misi were invited to move across to the Electronics Department after the abandonment of Materials Science. Misi had always had a reputation for being an outstanding lecturer and felt competent to keep ahead of the undergraduate students, but was reluctant to supervise postgraduates in a subject that had after all simply been his hobby. He therefore decided to apply for early retirement and offered his services to Roedean School as a teacher of A-level Maths and Physics. He was immediately 'snapped up' and spent several happy years amongst the beautiful girls there, several of whom wrote to inform me that they had read science-based and engineering subjects as a result of his inspiring tuition and imaginative post curricular projects (creating a very realistic half size Jaguar, using fine chicken netting and fibreglass; transforming a Reliant Rebel into an Electric car; making holograms and many other exciting things not normally available to engage in at school). Many of these successful projects appeared in the national press; the Electric car featured on *Blue Peter* with Misi and his bevy of beautiful young women. "Girls will be Boys" one of the headlines said of one of the first of his car projects.

Two or three years after Misi started working at Roedean, Chris White who had been a member of the Engineering technical staff at Sussex and was another classic car enthusiast, decided also to take early retirement and joined Misi at Roedean. The School had by now attracted a great deal of free publicity over Misi's car projects and it now gave Chris whatever he asked for to make the car projects ever more adventurous and eye-catching ... a large purpose-built garage with built-in hole in the floor to allow easy access to the base of the cars ... professional tools, etc etc. and the car projects took off in a big way.

But not long after Misi and Chris were working on the car projects together, Misi was invited back to Sussex University to run some Project Groups in the Engineering department and also (I believe) to give the occasional lecture in Materials Science to students who were thought to have been disadvantaged by not having this component in their course. He enjoyed the projects enormously. He stayed at Sussex until diagnosed with terminal (pancreatic) cancer in December 1998.

Misi's mother, wife, three sons and seven grandchildren survived him (three of the seven were born after his death). We had been very happily married for 36½ years. His only brother had died of cancer in 1996, his mother in February 2009 aged 100½.

Paula Ertl

Those who knew him will be saddened by the news that Dr Misi Ertl has died of cancer, shortly after retiring. The first time I met Misi was at the start of his first morning at Roedean in 1986. We sat together in Chapel while a Roedean gale blew outside. He was tremendously enthusiastic even about that: on the edge of his seat and chuckling at the prospect of setting up some wild new experiment. Like everyone else, I took to him at once. He was very much everyone's idea of the eccentric boffin, who found Physics and all its possible practical applications totally absorbing and entertaining. He was himself very entertaining and he had some funny stories to tell, often at his own expense.

Misi Ertl was Hungarian by birth, and came to the UK in 1947 after he and his parents were forced to leave Hungary. His father died in what may have been a road accident or something more sinister, while trying to drive the family's wealth, in gold, to Switzerland; certainly the gold vanished. In England, Misi went first to a prep school in Seaford to learn English, then to Brighton and Hove Grammar School. He already showed signs of academic ability and was offered a place at St Paul's, but his mother, unfamiliar with English education, did not want her son to go to anything so common as a public school. Misi went on via London University to acquire a BSc in Physics, an MSc in crystallography and a PhD in low temperature physics. He taught in the Materials Science Department at Sussex University from 1965 to 1986, then at Roedean until 1993. He thought he had retired then, but soon found himself back at the University teaching part-time.

Misi will be remembered for his boundless enthusiasm for science, life and fun—and for him they were all the same thing. His hobbies included building and rebuilding old vehicles—those who saw his converted hearse are unlikely ever to forget it—and helping with other people's 'mad boffin' projects, like his students' wind power projects or my electrical resistivity meter. He laughed as our prototype meter gave wildly wrong readings; "The machine's turning itself into a battery!" "I don't want it to do that, Misi," I said, through gritted teeth. But to him exploring the problem and learning something new from it was the important thing, not the solution. He was one of the friendliest and most likeable people I have ever known.

Rodney Castleden

My first encounter with Misi (Hungarian for Mike) was at Sussex University where I came across a strange-looking car left in a no-parking bay and blocking the entrance to the Engineering Department. Although he wasn't working at the University at the time it was his custom to visit on a regular basis to raid the skips of any unwanted goodies. In talking to colleagues I soon became aware that this was someone held in very high esteem and awe by those that came into contact with him. There were many stories, some hilarious, of his many exploits.

Three years on I arrived at Roedean and to my surprise found Misi teaching in the Physics Department. Soon I found myself more and more involved with his projects; I had never met anyone with so much energy and enthusiasm not to mention imagination and a sense of fun. In the following years we became firm friends enjoying many a car boot sale on a Sunday morning followed by coffee in his delightful garden at Ravenscroft.

He was recognised all over Brighton especially when driving his converted Austin Princess hearse and was known by some tradespeople as the Prof. Misi will probably be best remembered by many people for instigating the Car Engineering Projects which have become so successful over the years.

Few people are lucky enough to have such a friend, someone who touches their lives and makes a difference. I am sure many of the girls Misi taught will have fond memories of his exciting Physics lessons and will be saddened by this news, but knowing Misi he won't be idle in the next world; he's probably turning out glassfibre wings for the Angels and welding bits onto the pearly gates. As long as they have a scrapyards it will be just fine.

Chris White

Norman MacKenzie 18th August 1921 – 18th June 2013

Norman MacKenzie, who died on 18th June 2013, played an important part in the history of the University. He joined it in its second year as a lecturer in political sociology and retired in 1983 after serving as Professor of Education for the previous six years. His interest in its affairs remained strong in the thirty years that followed. As the first of England's new universities Sussex was encouraged by the University Grants Committee to be innovatory, and almost immediately after Norman became a member of faculty he set up a committee on new methods of teaching and learning. In 1966 he secured funds from the Rank Foundation for the foundation of a new Centre for Educational Technology. He was already deeply involved in the foundation of the Open University and served on a planning committee set up by Jennie Lee. When it was created he was a member of its first Council and did his best to ensure that it would have the full support.

Norman's life and mine have been remarkably intertwined. I was born a month before him and took my BSc (Econ) degree at the London School of Economics, evacuated to Cambridge during the War. After the War I was a regular reviewer for the *New Statesman* at which he had become Assistant Editor in 1943 after being invalided out of the forces. Both he and I spent time, unfortunately not together, at Sarah Lawrence College in New York and in 1980 we were both working in Australia. Our meeting there in 1962 led to my inviting him to come to my new university, where I was hoping to redraw the map of learning. I wanted to bring into the university people from outside who had not been 'academics', but like Norman would draw on outside experience. In the case of Norman, however, I also wanted to talk to

him about the books he was co-authoring with his first wife Jeanne Sampson whom he had married in 1945. The one book of theirs to which I had most to contribute was their biography, *H G Wells: Time Traveller*, a description which appealed to me since I regarded myself as a time traveller not tied to one period of history. It was for a different book, however, *The First Fabians*, that they won the Heinemann Prize of the Royal Society of Literature in 1978. In 1962 I had written an introduction to the new edition of *Fabian Essay*, first published 1889. I was not a member of the Fabian Society. Nor do I think was Norman.

I was very sad when Jeanne died of cancer in 1986 as alas did his first daughter in 1999. I saw a lot of him in Lewes where he unremittingly followed the fortunes of the University. He offered me a huge number of obituaries. When he married his second wife, very different from Jeanne, in 1988 there was no break in our long relationship. Gillian, Deputy Chief Medical Officer in the Department of Health, which I knew well, and subsequently Medical Director of Marie Curie Cancer Care, became a close friend. We loved visiting each other in our Lewes houses, talking about the widest possible range of subjects almost to the end of his life. I shall miss him more than I can say. I regret that because of my own physical immobility I could not take part in the service of thanksgiving and celebration for his life held in St Anne's Church, Lewes on 1st July 2013. I was glad that his surviving daughter Juli gave a reading.

Asa Briggs

Other obituaries: [Bulletin 26 June 2013](#); [New Statesman 28 June 2013](#); [Guardian 24 June](#) (print version 3 July) and [22 July 2013](#); [Herald Scotland 16 July 2013](#); [Daily Telegraph 5 July 2013](#) (print version 6 July).

Miscellaneous

The University's *e-Bulletin*

The print *Bulletin* of 19th July 2013 was the last. The *e-Bulletin* is published weekly online and sent as an e-newsletter to all current staff. The stories in each e-newsletter link through to the online version of the *Bulletin*, at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/internal/bulletin/>. Any former staff who would like to be added to the distribution list for the e-newsletter just need to email internalcomms@sussex.ac.uk.

Suss-Ex and its website

More information about Suss-Ex is available on its webpage at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/suss-ex/>. 'Suss-Ex Club' in Google will get you there, as will <http://tiny.cc/sussex>, or you can find us in the A-Z on the University's homepage. The website has copies of past Newsletters, and also has a link to <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/suss-ex/Obituaries.html>, a list of obituaries of deceased colleagues.

Suss-Ex activities are organised by a steering committee, which currently comprises:

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We are always seeking ideas for social occasions when we can meet former colleagues. Please let us have your suggestions, or volunteer to join the committee. We meet once a term, when practicable immediately before a Suss-Ex event.