Breaking old ground
Civilisation in the dust: two archaeologists dig in

Tales from the icefield
Working at the bottom of the world

Telling it like it was
Priest holes? Chalkmen? How about a nice Elizabethan magician?

The cult of Stan
If you prick him, does he not bleed? Actually, no.
It’s hard to believe that Subtext, now into its sixth term, has already covered two years in the life of the University and the people who make it tick. We’ve always maintained that the University is more than the sum of its parts – more than mere inputs and outputs. We hope this is borne out by the stories we bring you and that Subtext continues to surprise and delight its readers as much as it does its writers.

In this issue, two archaeologists unearth some of the reasons behind the planned excavation of a little-studied region of pre-classical Turkey (p10); an internet development manager discovers a few home truths during a year working for non-governmental organisations in South Africa (p9); a biologist gets to grips with some extreme fieldwork in the Antarctic (not to mention some issues of personal hygiene) (p6); and a historian finds that his training as an actor comes in handy for the odd TV interview (p14).

As ever, send us your comments and ideas – or just sit back and enjoy the read.

Hilary Brown
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I was born in London. My father is a mathematician – he was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone and moved to England in the ’60s to work at Imperial College. When I was three we moved back to Sierra Leone.

My first name means ‘Nobody knows tomorrow’ in Yoruba. The descendants of freed slaves usually had European surnames so they liked to take an African name as a first name. Yoruba people called timber. ‘Liverpool’ is not a common name in Sierra Leone so anyone there called ‘Liverpool’ is probably related.

Things were quite optimistic in Sierra Leone in the ’70s. But then the economy started to decline in the late ’70s and the ’80s – we just got poorer every year. When I was nine years old we moved to Nigeria, where my father worked at Jos University and my mother taught English literature at a missionary school.

I didn’t get hothoused or anything. I did the maths that we did at school but I had an expert at home – if I asked my father questions about basic mathematics, he answered them. He had a lot of puzzle books at home and I used to mess about with them a bit.

I thought maths was easy. But the thing that inspired me most was physics, especially relativity and quantum mechanics. I read popular science books as a teenager, and using maths to explain the physical universe was something that I found exciting!

When I was 15 I went to school in England while my parents stayed in Nigeria. Things were not looking so good economically in Nigeria, so I was sent to live with my uncle in Liverpool (coincidentally), it was thought that it would be better for my education.

Cambridge University was the first place where I was told something that I didn’t understand the first time. Up until then, I never had to read anything twice before I understood it. It took me a while to figure out that some of this stuff was actually quite hard. It’s a transition from doing exercises at school to working on things that are close to the cutting edge and relatively recent...
Tales from the field

LIFE BELOW ZERO

It’s the coldest, driest, windiest continent on the planet. Soon it could be the flashpoint for international conflict. Good place for a spot of fieldwork? Absolutely, says Dr Andrew Kennedy, Lecturer in Biological Sciences and Course Director of the MSc in Ecology. He talks to Nick Riddle about working in the Antarctic.

Dingle Days are a mixed blessing in Antarctica. When the sun comes out and the temperature nudges above freezing, that’s a Dingle Day. ‘People tend to stop working and go out for a walk,’ says Dr Andrew Kennedy. ‘It’s a chance to get clean, too – stripping off and trying to wash from head to toe and get your clothes back on before you freeze.’

That’s the good bit about Dingle Days. The bad bit … we’ll come back to that.

Kennedy first went to the Antarctic after he heard of a vacancy at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) for a terrestrial ecologist. ‘They’d collected ten years of data about the ecology of Antarctica, he says. ‘They wanted someone to analyse it for unifying themes.’ As part of this he spent six months in Antarctica doing fieldwork of his own.

The BAS started in 1943 as Operation Tabarin, a secret naval operation to stop Nazi Germany taking over Antarctica. ‘They had already dropped swastikas over the continent to claim it as theirs,’ explains Kennedy, ‘so the British decided to go down there and assert themselves. After World War II, rather than letting all that investment wither on the vine they continued it as a civilian operation.’

Antarctic territory has been claimed by many different countries, but in 1959 the signing of the Antarctic Treaty put all claims on hold. But the climate of co-operation is looking volatile: the oils and minerals beneath the Antarctic ice cap will only increase in value as other stocks dry up, and some day, says Kennedy, these claims will resurface. That’s one reason why we maintain research stations in Antarctica – to protect our territorial claims.

The extreme environment seems to bring out national character with unusual force: the Americans have bases scattered across Antarctica, including the first Antarctic City at McMurdo Sound and the Amundsen-Scott base at the South Pole itself. ‘The taxiway for their aircraft landing strip goes all the way round the Pole,’ says Kennedy, ‘so every time a U.S. plane flies in it symbolically encroaches on every other territorial claim.’ The Russians, meanwhile, built their Vostok base at a spot known as the ‘Pole of Inaccessibility’ – the highest, harshest point on the continent – just to show that they can survive the worst conditions in Antarctica.

Kennedy’s research centres on global climate change; in this case, he used the ten-year BAS data set to investigate the impact that a warmer, wetter climate might have on the biological communities of Antarctica. The data came from three different types of research: carefully controlled laboratory incubation experiments, field observations and a combination of these which is known as field manipulation – ‘setting up a climate change lab in the field, in effect,’ says Kennedy.

Doing this in Antarctica can yield unexpected results: what seems at first glance barren and lifeless can, with a bit of field manipulation, show itself to be anything but.

‘Over 99% of Antarctica is covered by ice,’ says Kennedy. ‘The areas that aren’t often look like bare, glacial screes with very few plants, and almost no invertebrates. But if you put a small greenhouse on top, little communities start springing up in the warmer environment you’ve created. The same thing happens if you transplant soil to the lab and incubate it at 15-25°C, a variety of plant species develop that were not recorded in the field. The results suggest that warmer, wetter conditions in Antarctica could yield much more complex biological communities than occur today.

The species homo sapiens only began exploring the Antarctic in earnest in the early 20th century, and it’s less than 100 years since the harsh conditions famously finished off Captain Scott and his party in 1912. Expeditions nowadays may benefit from innovations such as the helicopter and radio transmission, but going to the Antarctic is still no walk in the park.

The weather is one of the more obvious hazards. A major feature of Antarctica’s weather systems is katabatic wind (from the Greek...
The culture shock of coming back always worse than that of going out.

Back in the human realm, Kennedy recalls the polar nights – or rather, the lack of them during the Austral summer: ‘You see the sun going round endlessly, just above the horizon.’ Did non-stop daylight ruin his sleep cycle? ‘Not really. What does much up your sleep is those winds. They can reach 90 miles per hour, and when they buffet the canvas it’s like having a whip cracking by your head all night.’

Bearing in mind the long periods involved – from a few months to several years – Antarctic fieldwork belongs in a special category of experience, one that also includes space exploration and working on nuclear submarines. ‘There are good reasons why NASA and the Pentagon have studied behaviour on Antarctic bases. But what happens when it’s time to return to civilisation?’

‘The culture shock of coming back is always worse than that of going out,’ says Kennedy, whose longest Antarctic stint was a relatively rare six months. ‘All sorts of things start flooding back, especially colour and smell. You don’t get the sense of smells down there that you get in temperate environments. The only real colour comes from the guano of the penguin colonies.’

Then there’s the hustle and bustle of human activity and the lack of time after living in a place with no crime or locked doors. Not to mention getting back to partners. ‘The Australians have a heeloff on how to approach that, including some quite intimate advice,’ says Kennedy. ‘That’s if the relationship has survived the long tour of duty in the first place; the polar postal system is no stranger to “Dear John” letters.’

For that very reason, Kennedy doesn’t go down there any more. ‘I loved being there, but I’m married now, with three small children,’ she says. ‘I can’t imagine kissing my wife and kids goodbye, knowing that I’m not going to see them for six months. That would be too awful.’

But for these scientists who work at the notion of work-life balance, the Antarctic still beckons.

Above: The aurora australis at right. I took this photo from Australia’s Mawson Research Station at the start of the Antarctic winter, using a long exposure. The temperature was -27ºC and I only had a few minutes outdoors before my camera packed up.

CHANGING PLACES

With several strings to her bow already, Sarah Agarwal transferred her project management skills from ILRT to non-governmental organisations fighting HIV/AIDS and gun violence in South Africa. She shares her experiences with Hilary Brown.

Having what is possibly the longest job title in the University isn’t all bad, says Sarah Agarwal, business analyst and deputy internet development manager in the Institute for Learning and Research Technology (ILRT) found when she decided to take a career break. What she calls her ‘terrid mixture of skills’ in all things web-related and some that aren’t – she’s currently working on a business plan for a new academic course at the University’s fitted the requirements of the Thembisa HIV/AIDS Organisation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Johannesburg using theatre as a tool in HIV prevention.

Agarwal had been working in ILRT for four years when she decided it was time ‘to do some meaningful work outside the University’. She had decided it was time for a huge adventure. As a Quaker, she was also motivated by the principle of ‘active witness’ – in other words, ‘getting off your arse and doing something’.

Her application for the job with Thembisa was successful and suddenly she was in Johannesburg. ‘It felt like the west coast of America, but in a bad decade,’ she says. ‘It was all highest 60’s and 70’s low-rise architecture, sprawling suburbs, modern yet down at heel.’

Not particularly auspicious start, but more meaningful than working on the re-election campaign of the people. ‘On my first day at work, my colleagues sang me a song. They gave me a wonderful card and said “welcome home” – what a bizarre, un-English concept. I thought this warmth would wear off, but it didn’t. There’s a connection between people there that you don’t find anywhere else.’

Agarwal’s remit was to set up an IT network, redesign the organisation’s administrative processes and help recruit new actors for its community theatre work. All good stuff, but the small things she did were the most useful. ‘Training people in the basics of how to use a computer, access the internet and set up an email address was hugely valuable to those individuals on a personal level,’ says Agarwal. ‘It opened up a whole new world and gave them the tools to follow interests, look for jobs and communicate with other people.’

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Laying the foundations
NM: My first degree was in Classics at the University of Pisa, but reading Classics in Italy is very different from the UK. It was more the study of the classical world in its totality – you had to have some knowledge of the languages, literature, history, philosophy and, last but not least, archaeology. During my second year, I attended an optional course on the methodology and field techniques of excavations, people who did well in the exam were allowed to excavate with the tutor. So, every summer in my second, third and final year of university, I dug an Etruscan settlement on the island of Elba and a Neolithic settlement in Apulia. I never looked back.

TH: I’d been introduced to the classical world through Greek mythology when I was a child. I lived in England for a year when I was 14 and did a Greek translation course at school. At university in the UK, you don’t specialise until the third year of a four-year course. One of the units I took before declaring my major was ‘Introduction to Archaeology’. I came out of the first lecture thinking, ‘This is it.’

NM: Wanting to know more about the distant past of Greece also led me to archaeology, after reading a fascinating book about the decipherment of Linear B, a Greek Bronze Age script. If you really want to know about the background to classical Greece, you have to be an archaeologist. Yes, you can get some fascinating information from Bronze Age texts, but to me the most interesting aspects of the Aegean in the Bronze Age are the architectural discoveries, such as those made by Schliemann at Troy and Mycenae, or by Evans at Knossos.

TH: For me, archaeology brought together the history, philosophy and literature of the Greek world. It was so tangible – it made me realise that the ancient Greeks were real people who made and used things, and it got me wondering why and how. But I didn’t see how I could really understand the material culture without knowing about the other aspects of Greek life. So I did my undergraduate degree in Classical Studies, which included Greek, Latin, ancient history, philosophy, art and archaeology. It wasn’t until I did my MA and DPhil that I concentrated on the archaeology.

A small world
NM: After I graduated, I wanted to spend a year abroad and learn more about excavations. I became a student at the Institute of Archaeology in London (now part of UCL). I really liked the intellectual atmosphere there, especially the friendly, unselfish relationship between students and teachers. So I decided to stay on to do a PhD. After almost 28 years, I’m still here …

TH: I came to the UK on a six-month work permit after my undergraduate degree and got a job at the Institute of Classical Studies (ICS), a research centre at the University of London. It was pretty lonely work. I did everything from making the tea to turning slides in lectures, in the days when there were still slides to turn. But actually it was great, because I got to attend all the lectures and be paid for it.

NM: That’s where we first met, do you remember? I was attending, or possibly even giving, my first ‘Mycenaean Seminar’.

TH: That’s right. It was inevitable, I guess. Everyone who’s anyone in the field of Classical Archaeology knew or had heard of the other one. I was working with no classical remains. Turkey is full of famous classical sites, like Ephesus and Pergamon, but it’s very difficult to get underneath the Greco-Roman remains to explore the periods that interest us most, that is, the third, second and early first millennia BC.

NM: I’ve done fieldwork in eastern Turkey, and Nico’s worked on the Turkish Aegean coast. We decided to combine our interests in a region in between – Lycaia – where very little work has been done on these periods. Yet we know the region was occupied before the classical period. You can see it in the place names that survive into the Greco-Roman period, such as Oinoussa, Calynda and Dos. Although these are famous Greco-Roman cities, parts of the names are actually earlier Hittite.

NM: And there are Egyptian and Hittite texts of the second millennium BC that refer to the people living in this region, as well as much later references to Lycaian pirates. Besides, for clues to early settlement in the area you only need to walk around the countryside and you’ll see plenty of pre-classical pottery in the fields.

TH: We know people were there but we don’t know anything about their material culture.

NM: What was the layout of the settlements? What can we tell about social organisation from the archaeological remains? Did they use some form of writing? What did they trade with?

TH: Did they make their own pottery or import it? What can we learn from it about storage, eating and drinking, ritual, status, or social and commercial interactions locally and beyond? We have no idea. It’s pretty much a blank slate, which is rare in archaeology. That’s what makes this project so exciting.

NM: Of course. Everybody has to live in some kind of house, everybody eats food, but how do these things differ, and why? Everybody has to eat, but the kind of food eaten, its preparation and consumption, and the way in which people interact and distribute food, is a matter of social organisation, culture, and consumption. Coming from Italy to Britain in the 20th century, I had to relearn all sorts of rules about food and drink, not to mention other things involving material culture. …

The art of diplomacy
TH: We’ve had to jump through hoops to get the project off the ground. It’s taken two years of negotiation so far. We’ve drunk so much tea!

Excavations in Turkey are very regulated. You can’t just go and dig in a field without permission. Turkey has a very responsible attitude towards its heritage; the authorities ensure that sites are excavated properly while

NM: Because of our research interests, we chose to investigate a site with no classical remains. Turkey is full of famous classical sites, like Ephesus and Pergamon, but it’s very difficult to get underneath the Greco-Roman remains to explore the periods that interest us most, that is, the third, second and early first millennia BC.

NM: My speciality is the Bronze Age, Tamar’s is the Iron Age; our research interests harmonise very neatly.

TH: The art of diplomacy
I was there with my husband, who’s not an archaologist, and he was disappointed because all he could see was the frame of a huge tent. But I could see that the artist was doing something very archaeological. He remained of the tent symbolised the political significance of this moment in Iranian history, which led to the Cultural Revolution.

The past in the present

Archaeology is important because it teaches us about human experience in the past, which in turn helps us understand ourselves and our society today. We’re all part of the same species, even if we have different ways of living, socialising and expressing ourselves in words or through our choice and use of objects. Study of past civilisations shows that there are different ways of doing things and this encourages multicultural consideration.

Other subjects, such as philosophy, history and literature, can all help us to understand the past, but archaeology provides the physical evidence. And it allows us to look at incredibly long and distant periods of time, and aspects of human life, for which there are no written records.

Our life is structured and influenced by the things around us. You can’t divorce people from the objects that they use and the environments they use in. Archaeology is a very holistic discipline; it integrates the insights from anthropology, history, science and the arts.

I’m also very interested in how archaeology affects our daily lives, in how the past is used in the present.

I love listening to ‘Yesterday in Parliament’ – it’s basically a dunging match between politicians, but that emphasis on rhetoric comes directly from the Greeks. Even the shape of the debating chamber has its origins in the Ancient Greek world.

There are examples of uses of the past in the present everywhere – just think of Birtwistle’s new opera, The Minotaur, which includes references to Minos and Knosos or the Minos Cretan, one of my main research interests, is marketed as the cradle of European civilisation everywhere, even in Easjet brochures.

Either by tradition or deliberate design, archaeology links the ancient and modern worlds. It’s everywhere.

It can also be very humid, and you can dehydrate in a matter of hours.

When you direct an excavation you only really stop working when you sleep. And a lot of the work can be incredibly monotonous.

It’s definitely not all Indiana Jones-style glamour. It can be stressful, especially when you have a set of goals you need to accomplish within a fixed time frame. Often, you need to dig down to a certain level of stratigraphy to achieve your aims for the season. You have to make sure you’ve recorded everything properly and yet you don’t have the time to lovingly uncover every object with a toothbrush.

You certainly have times when it seems that nothing is happening.

Then all of a sudden it’s the end of the day, or season, and you find exciting things that have to be dug out, recorded, photographed, drawn and stored very quickly because if you don’t they’re going to get ruined… or stolen.

An archaeologist’s eye view

Being an archaeologist, you can’t help stopping at every set of roadworks you come across and looking at the strat. It also makes me look at the physical environment around me in a certain way. I’m so used to excavating foundations and trying to reconstruct the building phases that when I walked into a standing building, I found myself imagining it as an excavation site – what would the foundations look like, what would survive in the ruin, and how would I interpret that? Would I come up with the same building that’s in front of me?

What do you like to do when you're not working?

If I could offer one superpower, what would you choose? The ability to teleport to another country without having to sit on a long-haul flight.

What’s your favourite meal?

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What’s your greatest fear?

If you were offered one superpower, what would you choose? The ability to teleport to another country without having to sit on a long-haul flight.

What keeps you awake at night?

Noisy drinkers from the pub opposite… who often include my own children, unfortunately.

Who would you like to banish to a desert island?

You can make one new law.

What would it be?

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What would it be?
Professor Ronald Hutton's self-professed 'vulgar tastes' as a historian have made him a regular contributor to TV and radio. Over the past 25 years he's shared his expertise on subjects ranging from the Tudors and Stuarts to ancient paganism, witchcraft and magic. He talks to Hannah Johnson.

Chalk Men and Velvet Cushions

It was freezing in Harvington Hall, but Ronald Hutton was thankful not to be one of the extras. The programme-makers had asked him to talk about the Elizabethan magician John Dee; they had other plans for the handful of actors they'd brought along.

'They gave me whisky and hot coffee to keep me from shivering,' he says. 'But in the next room they were shooting a "romantic" scene – namely, the actors taking their clothes off – without even putting the heating on.'

The location, a Worcestershire stately home, was chosen for its spooky atmosphere, but the historian in Hutton was more interested in its former role as a shrine to Catholic martyrs and the fact that it boasts 'the best priest holes in England'. Getting access to such remarkable places is, he says, one of the great pluses of working in TV.

'As a historian, I'm used to crawling up to the tradesmen's entrance to stately homes, paying my admission fee and being shown grudgingly to a freezing cold desk ... the front entrance and they offer food and hot drinks. Everything is brought to me on a velvet cushion – metaphorically.'

Some of Hutton's media work has been memorable in other ways. A call from the Discovery Channel, for example, resulted in a spectacular trip to the Orkney Islands.

'I left Bristol very early on a May morning,' he recalls. 'At Heathrow I was put on to a plane for Aberdeen, where I boarded something with very small wings ... where I could spout some ideas about prehistoric archaeology and meet some of the best archaeologists in their field.'

Getting involved with TV documentaries has allowed him to test some theories of his own, including the hypothesis that Silbury Hill near Avebury in Wiltshire, the biggest prehistoric mound in Europe, might have been a signalling platform.

'An American TV company had the cash to run an experiment in which they put a big scarlet banner up on the hill and then sent runners out,' says Hutton. 'And I was right: you can see the thing simultaneously from all parts of Avebury. Archaeologists – quite rightly – would never have given me the time of day, but TV made it possible.'

Far from 'dumbing down', then, it sounds like TV can enhance a historian's work?

'Occasionally you do get TV that breaks new ground,' Hutton agrees. 'The best thing I've contributed to was a series for Channel 4 about ancient monuments. We actually dated the Long Man of Wilmington, a chalk figure in Sussex which was thought to be prehistoric or maybe Anglo-Saxon. The production company paid for a proper analysis of the chalk using a new technique. The result: it turned out to be Tudor. So we made a quantum leap in the history of an ancient monument simply because a TV company had decided to make a programme. I'm so proud and happy to have been involved in that.'

Partly as a result of his media profile, Hutton is in great demand as a public speaker, giving talks to village societies, local museums and schools. He's also been asked to design stamps for the Royal Mail and was once approached by Disney to act as a consultant on a film project.

'They wanted to make a sequel to their film of TH White's The Sword and the Stone,' says Hutton. 'I provided lots of ideas for them. I was handsomely paid and had lots of fun. In the end they decided not to make the film, but that didn't matter because of all the profit, emotional and literal, I had on the way.'

Hutton is in demand to TV in other ways too. He has fond memories of the history and archaeology programmes of the 1960s and even claims to have passed the Cambridge entrance exam on the strength of his viewing habits.

'Knowing how broad the Cambridge papers were, I took notes as I watched, so in the exam I could answer with a fair degree of superficial fluency on stuff about medieval and modern history – quite obviously nothing that I studied for before,' he says. 'That went down well with my rather jaded examiners.'

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‘I’m lucky that my disposition and circumstances have enabled me to do this type of work,’ he concludes. ‘I was trained for the stage, that’s the critical thing. Most academics can name a career they might have had instead mine was acting, so I’m used to being directed. That makes me pupty in the hands of TV directors.’
Pete Dickens, AIMS Senior Human Patient Simulator Technician in the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, is not alone in his work. He shares a room with a life-sized manikin. Hilary Brown meets the man behind Stan.

It's half an hour before a fourth-year medical student physiology practical, and Pete Dickens is getting into character. Will it be the retired docker with a dodgy ticker, the thrusting young executive with a peanut allergy, or the motorcyclist involved in a nasty collision?

Depending on the teaching scenarios, Dickens, with the help of a computer, will give a life-sized model called Stan the characteristics and symptoms of these various personas so that medical students can study his illnesses and devise and carry out appropriate treatments.

Stan D Ardman, named after ‘standard man’, is a hi-tech manikin known as a human patient simulator. He and his minder, Dickens, are based in the Applied and Integrated Medical Sciences (AIMS) CETL, one of the University’s two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Dickens’ arrival at the University preceded that of Stan by five years. He came by way of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, where he worked as a medical laboratory assistant, and the University of the West of England, where he was a nursing skills technician, finally landing a job in Bristol’s physiology lab in 2000. ‘I was drawn to working in education, perhaps because I dropped out of a metallurgy degree – I’ve always felt as if I’ve had a debt to pay back,’ he explains.

When the University won some funding to invest in a human patient simulator in 2005, he successfully applied for the corresponding technician’s post. By this time, his father had died of a heart attack, which fuelled his interest in physiology. ‘I wanted to understand what had happened to him,’ says Dickens. He was also fascinated by the idea of the manikin, and the way in which technology and education drive each other to advance knowledge.

‘There’s no question that Stan has revolutionised teaching at Bristol. Until he came along, students had been limited in the sort of tests they could carry out. They still take each other’s pulses and monitor heart rates, but – young, healthy souls that they are – the results never vary much. Stan, on the other hand, can be programmed to be any age and have a whole range of symptoms. One day he’s fit and healthy, the next he’s at death’s door.

Stan has a respiratory and a cardiovascular system, so he breathes and has a pulse rate, which vary according to how ill or well he is,’ says Dickens. Even the pupils of his eyes react to light. He is also attached to a catheter so students can pump him full of drugs and watch the effect this has on his body.

‘What’s important is that the interventions Stan undergoes generate real data in real time,’ says Dickens. ‘If we take a litre of blood from him, his heart rate goes up and his blood pressure comes down, and you see these effects as waveforms on a monitor, as you would with a real patient in a hospital.’ Stan sometimes has to lose more than a pint of blood for his art. He may be hit by a virtual car, breaking his femur and losing another two litres of blood. Then, as he’s being lifted into the ambulance, he gets dropped and his fractured ribs puncture his spleen, causing him to lose yet more blood.

The students will see the physiological response to this haemorrhaging in a gradual lowering of his blood pressure until he finally falls unconscious.

By the time students are in their fourth year, psychology becomes as crucial as physiology and things start to resemble an episode of Casualty. Previously, Stan has been a model to which various conditions have been applied, but now he’s a person. He’s unwell and in shock and has been brought into hospital, and the students have to treat him as if he were a real patient.

This is where Dickens disappears behind a screen of one-way glass to don a pair of headphones, switch on a mic and metamorphose into one of his multiple personalities. Each character he plays has a name, an age, a job and a physiology. The students take a medical history and try to work out what’s wrong from the symptoms he describes. He may not be very coherent on occasion, but neither would you be if you were suffering from, say, acute appendicitis.

‘You do have to suspend your disbelief to some extent,’ says Dickens. ‘Stan is made of plastic and metal, after all. And his voice always has a Bristolian twang to it, however hard I try!’ But it works well enough for the students to make their diagnosis, apply the treatment and watch how the patient responds. Or not. If they make a mistake, they’re not spared the consequences, and Stan shuffles off this mortal coil on a regular basis.

Running the experiments and maintaining Stan (his face gets grubby and his joints wear out like the best of us) is a full-time job for Dickens. Data from the experiments also have to be tested – Stan has a reputation for fidelity to maintain, after all. He even has a devoted following on Facebook (interests include snorkelling – not for nothing does Stan endure frequent intubation with adjustable lengths of snorkel tubing).

Dickens’ work in helping to breathe new life into both Stan and the student learning experience won him the Medical and Veterinary Sciences Faculty Award for Teaching and Learning this year, of which he is justly proud. ‘I’m very happy being Stan’s agent,’ he says. ‘Even if he does receive more valentines than I do.’

Left: Get thee behind me, Stan; Pete Dickens and Stan D Ardman, but which is which?
Dawson has studied how these and other conceptions of lovesickness were re-imagined by 17th-century dramatists such as William Shakespeare and John Webster, and by poets like John Donne (who cultivated the popular ‘lovestruck’ look in a famous portrait which shows him in a pose signifying forlorn yearning: shirt unbuttoned, hat askew). She has also gone back to primary sources, examining personal letters and the case notes of physicians. This has yielded a more complex picture of contemporary attitudes to lovesickness than previous accounts have suggested, especially where gender is concerned.

‘The standard view is that where male lovesickness is elevated, noble and philosophical, female lovesickness is a destructive bodily ailment, along the lines of hysteria,’ Dawson explains. ‘But in the medical and literary texts of the period, this isn’t the case. There’s a spectrum of lovesickness that runs from lofty, contemplative forms to more extreme ones that eventually result in madness, and this spectrum applies to women as well as men.’

Another layer of complexity involves the interplay between mind and body. Lovesickness is a species of melancholy, which is a physiological disease, but it can also have spiritual, intellectual aspects, says Dawson.

‘The early modern period sees a close connection between emotional and physical states. And it’s a two-way process: the physical state can lead to something emotional, and vice versa.’

This is beginning to sound familiar. Are we moderns coming full circle, after a century or two of separating mind and body? ‘Look at Prozac, or recreational drugs like Ecstasy,’ says Dawson. ‘They work because emotions have physiological and chemical components. So although some of the details of Renaissance medicine seem bizarre to us now, their way of conceptualising emotions and well-being is not a million miles away from our own.’

The relationship between mind and body in 21st-century medicine is explored in a new course that Dawson helps to teach the BA in Medical Humanities, designed for medical students at Bristol. ‘They do a year of English and Philosophy courses, some of which are designed specifically for them but are also open to Arts students.’

The medics get to look at literary representations of illness – Keats and consumption, Freud and Shakespeare, AIDS in novels like Alan Hollinghurst’s The Line of Beauty – and also examine the philosophical basis of some of the assumptions behind medicine.

The BA is proving very popular with medical students, and the next couple of years should see the launch of a new MA in Medical Humanities. ‘Students seem to enjoy the new perspectives that get them thinking about lovesickness in a new light,’ says Dawson.

After devoting a decade of work to this often spectral malady, Dawson says she is ready for something more bracing: revenge, as it appears in literature and film from Ancient Greek tragedy to Clint Eastwood’s Unforgiven.

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Breaking old ground
Civilisation in the dust: two archaeologists dig in

Tales from the icefield
Working at the bottom of the world

Telling it like it was
Priest holes? Chalkmen? How about a nice Elizabethan magician?

The cult of Stan
If you prick him, does he not bleed? Actually, no.

1 ‘Conker’ by Annie Morris, one of the artworks on show at the University’s Botanic Garden over Easter. More than 25 local artists took part in the exhibition and sale of original botanical paintings and drawings. Morris, a graduate and a member of the Society of Botanical Artists, paints in watercolour and many of her paintings have been reproduced as prints and cards.

2 An artist’s impression of the head of Kryptops palaios, one of two previously unknown 110-million-year-old carnivorous dinosaurs named by Steve Brusatte, an MSc student in the Department of Earth Sciences. Fossils of the short-snouted Kryptops and its contemporary, Eocarcharia dinops, were discovered in the Sahara Desert by Brusatte’s former research adviser, renowned palaeontologist and dinosaur hunter, Dr Paul Sereno. The findings have been reported in the journal Acta Palaeontologica Polonica.

3 Harry Patch, a 105-year-old veteran of the Great War and a member of the workforce that constructed the University’s Wills Memorial Building in the 1920s, switched on the new Wills Tower floodlights at a special ceremony last term to celebrate the completion of the tower restoration project. The project, which has taken two years and cost £750,000 to complete, has restored the 65-metre-high tower of the Grade II* listed building to its original sandy colour using environmentally friendly techniques.

4 Kathy Sykes, Professor of Sciences and Society, talks to schoolchildren at Science Alive!, the University’s contribution to National Science and Engineering Week in March. Seventeen interactive displays gave the public a chance to explore aspects of science, medicine, engineering and technology and chat to scientists about their work. The event was organised by the Centre for Public Engagement in conjunction with the MGi Galleries, the University of the West of England and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

5 Students from the award-winning Language Through Theatre course, who devised, wrote and performed RODGES (a play in Spanish about personal journeys in search of answers to existential questions) at this year’s Semana Cultural Week. This annual event organised by the Department of Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin-American Studies celebrates and examines all aspects Luso-Hispanic culture.