Subtext 9

Summer 2009

Beds, borders and Betjeman
A historian gets himself back to the gardens

Together in pain
Two neuroscientists discuss sensation, suffering and … sailing

Communism and kismet
A former Red Guard on the role of fate in his career

Hock, loan and blinkers
One researcher's fascination with money and human behaviour

University of BRISTOL
2009 CENTENARY
GREAT PAST ~ GREATER FUTURE

Welcome

Blue Peter beat us to it. Not that we're bitter.

'Dear *Blue Peter*… I can save lives' runs the headline of an article in their online magazine. The story relates how the career of Bristol's Professor Anthony Hollander – whose work on tissue engineering using human stem cells led to a surgical first that saved the life of a woman with a damaged trachea – began with a letter he wrote to *Blue Peter* as a child.

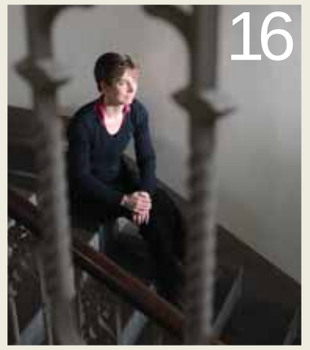
The story has everything we could hope for in a *Subtext* feature: it's funny but also inspiring, and it shows how a flourishing career sometimes has roots in unexpected places.

Luckily, the University of Bristol has plenty more stories waiting to be told, including those of a former Red Guard (p4), a researcher fascinated by the irrational interplay between human beings and money (p16) and a garden historian whose childhood passion for architecture was kindled by a famous neighbour (p6).

Take that, Biddy Baxter.

Nick Riddle
n.riddle@bristol.ac.uk

Contents



Next issue due out October 2009

14

JASON INGRAM

***Subtext* Summer 2009**

Subtext is produced termly by the Public Relations Office, which is a department of Communications and Marketing Services.

Communications and Marketing Director
Barry Taylor

Assistant Director/ Head of the Public Relations Office
Jill Cartwright

***Subtext* editors**
Hilary Brown, Nick Riddle

Design and production
www.pelotondesign.co.uk

Print and reproduction
Portishead Press. This publication is printed on Cyclus Offset, a 100% recycled paper stock using vegetable/mineral oil-based, environmentally friendly inks.

Subtext is available online at bristol.ac.uk/university/publications/subtext

For the latest news about the University, see bristol.ac.uk/news

For an insight into research conducted at the University, see *re:*search magazine and visit bristol.ac.uk/researchreview

Public Relations Office,
Senate House, Tyndall Avenue, Bristol BS8 1TH
Tel: +44 (0)117 928 8895
Email: news-team@bristol.ac.uk

Subtext No 9, June 2009

YONGJIN ZHANG

Professor Yongjin Zhang is Director of the Centre for East Asian Studies. He talks to Barry Taylor about the series of 'accidents' that brought him here.

I always regard myself as an accidental scholar. The journey that brought me to Bristol was a long and winding one. I was born in Guizhou, a mountainous province in southwest China. My father had been a member of the Communist Party since the 1930s, so I was born with impeccable proletarian credentials.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, I was one of the first youngsters to join the Red Guards. I was 12 and very idealistic: I genuinely believed that we could transform the world. I was chosen to be among the first group of Red Guards from my province to go to Beijing to be reviewed by Chairman Mao. It took us three days to get to Beijing. On 15 September 1966, we were woken up at 5:30 am and trucked to Tiananmen Square. I had a good spot, very close to the rostrum. But Mao didn't appear until 3:30 pm, so you had one million people waiting, and one of the problems was finding the loo. But it was very exciting – a time of revolutionary euphoria.

My formative years came early. Towards the end of 1966, the whole of China became very chaotic, with everyone – including different groups of Red Guards – fighting each other. The whole country almost imploded. My parents, like most of the veteran revolutionaries, became targets of persecution. I didn't understand how things had turned out that way for my family and the nation.

Schools and universities were closed down for over two years. In 1968, Mao started sending schoolkids to the countryside to be 're-educated' by peasants. I was too young to be sent. In 1970, when the high school reopened, I had a choice of going there or working in a factory. I chose the school. By the time I finished, universities had reopened but would only enrol the so-called 'worker, peasant and soldier students' – those with experience in the countryside, the factories or the army. I didn't qualify, so I became an apprentice electrician in a factory that made radios. After two-and-a-half years, I earned my qualification as a model worker and was recommended to study at Anhui University in central China.

I had no say in what I studied at university. I was given a subject – English – which was not popular at the time. I didn't mind – it was an honour to be selected. I'd worked hard to be well thought of at the factory and it had paid off.

As students we spent most of the afternoons in political meetings. We also went to the countryside and stayed with peasants, cultivating the land and familiarising ourselves with their experience. Our textbooks were all about revolution, factories and peasants and were written by our teachers. Listening to the BBC or the Voice of America was prohibited. We had no cassette recorders, just a huge, primitive reel-to-reel tape machine between 20 of us.

1978 was also an important year for me: I took the national postgraduate entrance exams, the first after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was extremely competitive. I got a place at Xiamen University on the southeast coast. Three years later, I found myself in Beijing, teaching English at the Institute of International Politics.

Britain was calling. In 1982, the Chinese Education Ministry allocated the Institute a government scholarship to study in Britain. These were the early years of China's opening and reform: government scholarships to study abroad were few and far between. I had to pass a series of exams, including a national one organised by the Education Ministry and a British Council exam, before I was awarded the scholarship.

It was purely by chance that I went to Oxford. There was little information about British and American universities available in China then. Thanks to a special relationship between Oxford University and China, I was offered a place at Queen Elizabeth House, which was affiliated to Oxford. I arrived in England in autumn 1984.

My fate has often been determined by something outside my control. I was meant to be a two-year visiting scholar at Oxford, but was encouraged to do a degree by Sir Adam Roberts, who is now the President-elect of the British Academy. I got a place at St Anthony's College to read an MPhil in International Relations, but I had no funding. Then out of the blue the British Council awarded me a Foreign and Commonwealth Office scholarship – which puzzles me to this day because I hadn't applied for one.

I made history at Oxford. I was enrolled in February 1985, but Oxford bent all its rules to backdate the start of my MPhil to October 1984 so that I could finish within the two years the Chinese government had permitted me to spend in Britain. I got my MPhil in 1986, and became the first student from the People's Republic of China to have completed a postgraduate degree in any arts and social sciences discipline at Oxford since 1949. I could claim a similar honour when I completed my DPhil in 1989.

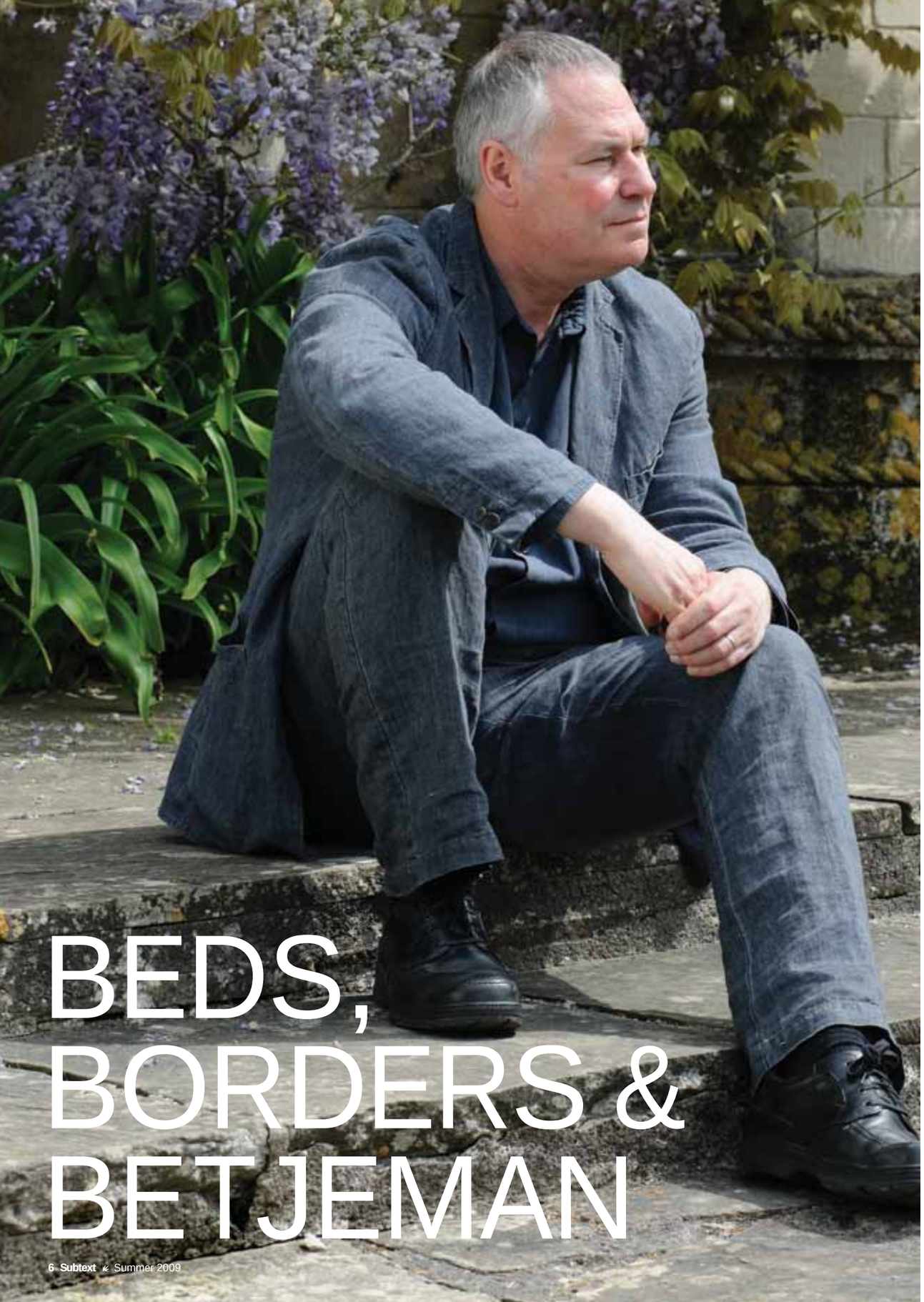
At Oxford I met dons who said to me 'Oh gosh, that Cultural Revolution business was terrible' and 'how dreadful the Red Guards were'. So I said 'Actually, I was a Red Guard'. That took them aback. Soon afterwards I was invited to give a seminar at St John's College. My title was something like 'I was a Red Guard: Personal Reflections on the Past'. The seminar room was packed!

When martial law was declared after the Tiananmen Square protests in June 1989, I had already shipped my belongings back to China. I attended my DPhil degree ceremony at the Sheldonian Theatre just one day after the declaration and decided to extend my stay at Oxford. I was lucky to have got a stipendiary research fellowship at Wolfson College. But it wasn't until I won the BISA (British International Studies Association) prize in 1991 for the best article published in *Review of International Studies* that I felt the professional calling to become an academic.

I'm lucky and happy that my journey has brought me to Bristol. There's such a lively intellectual environment and so many inspiring colleagues. And the city is, I think, even nicer to live in than Oxford – it's more of a real city with its own character and identity.

'I was born with impeccable proletarian credentials.'

DAVE PRATT



JASON INGRAM

BEDS, BORDERS & BETJEMAN

The historic gardens of England are famous the world over for their formal elegance and imaginative flair. Timothy Mowl has made it his mission to chronicle every one of them – along with their creators, many of whom are far from garden-variety. He talks to Hannah Johnson.

Dusty archives and green wellies: the two essential components of the garden historian's life, according to Timothy Mowl, Professor of History of Architecture and Designed Landscapes in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology. And he should know. His ambitious 36-part series of books on the Historic Gardens of England (that's one for each of the old counties) aims to be the horticultural equivalent of Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's epoch-making *Buildings of England*.

Ten books have already been published so there's a mere 26 to go. At 70,000 words and well over a hundred gardens per book, it's a lot of work for one man and Mowl is necessarily sanguine about his chances of finishing the series himself. 'I'm too old, really,' he sighs, 'and I started too late.' Luckily, thanks to a £300,000 grant from the Leverhume Trust, students on the University's MA in Garden History now co-author the books, undertaking much of the research in those dusty archives before donning the green wellies for site visits with Mowl.

'The Leverhume Trust grant-aided Pevsner when he was going round the country doing his architectural guides, so I said to them: "Give me some money and I'll do the gardens",' Mowl explains. Along with information from English Heritage, the National Trust and the County Gardens Trusts, Pevsner's guides act as one of Mowl's starting points for researching each book. The curmudgeonly German, however, doesn't always prove helpful. 'Although all the major houses are in Pevsner, he never talks about the grounds,' Mowl laments, 'so he might describe a great 18th-century house but, when we get there, we find nothing has survived of the garden.'

But that's all part of the fun. The real excitement for Mowl is the detective work, comparing the existing site with old maps, photographs and articles to work out how the garden might once have looked.

Pevsner and the poet

The Historic Gardens of England series is the latest venture in an academic career that can only be described as eclectic. Mowl's work crosses centuries and disciplines: his life at Bristol began in the Department of History of Art but he now comes under the auspices of Archaeology and Anthropology. His first love was architectural history, a passion inspired not by Pevsner but the poet Sir John Betjeman.

'I lived in Wantage as a child,' he says, 'and Betjeman was effectively my next-door neighbour. His wife took me through my first communion: I used to go up to their house, The Mead, for classes. They were both very exotic figures: she drove a pony and trap everywhere, he always wore a battered gabardine mac and a panama hat. Ever since then I've felt a real connection with Betjeman.'

Mowl initially trained as a teacher, but his interest in architectural history won out, and he pursued an MA in the subject at Birmingham University, then a doctorate at St John's College, Oxford. Academic posts proved elusive in the dark decade of the 1980s when 'architectural history was hardly taught in universities', so he became an inspector for English Heritage, travelling up and down the country listing historic buildings. The turning point came in 1992, when Michael Liversidge, then head of Bristol's Department of History of Art, invited Mowl to deliver the Perry Art Lectures. He subsequently joined the Department, and combined lecturing with writing a number of books on subjects including park gate lodges, Freemasonic influences on Georgian Bath and 20th-century architectural experiment in Cheltenham.

He also returned to his earliest influence with a controversial polemic entitled *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman versus Pevsner*, which caused quite a stir. 'We should all be Betjemanians,' Mowl argues. 'Pevsner's work is dry and scholarly whereas Betjeman's engages with human beings. I'm interested in architecture because of the architects who designed the buildings, the patrons who commissioned them and the men and women who have enjoyed them. Pevsner was a great scholar but he didn't talk at all about the people who made the architecture he wrote about. It's the people that interest me.'

Colourful specimens

This interest informs the writing of the Historic Gardens of England series. Rather than being simply collections of facts with a gazetteer entry for each garden, the books are set out chronologically, each chapter driven by strong narratives about the men and women who created the gardens.

As a result, they teem with colourful characters such as Sir Samuel Hellier, an 18th-century Wolverhampton man whose garden included a mechanical hermit, 'Father Francis', posed as a monk at prayer, which would jerk into life when unsuspecting visitors approached. Hellier also hoped to build several stone temples and other follies but lacked the money to realise his plans. 'He ended up having to construct them from canvas instead,' Mowl says. 'He was waiting for his inheritance but it never came; his rich grandmother lived to be 92.'

Then there's Admiral Richard Whitworth, who staged mock naval battles in his ornamental lake, complete with a full-size frigate, cannons, miniature forts and local boys dressed as ratings. An oil painting in his Staffordshire house depicts the Admiral in full nautical regalia watching the 'battle' through a telescope.

Such English eccentrics don't just reside in the past. One of the joys of writing the series has been the encounters – some friendly, some rather less so – that Mowl has had with current owners. 'One of the gardens in the Wiltshire book was created by naturists,' he says. 'Extraordinary people. I got very worried about them pruning the roses.'

TIMOTHY MOWL

Top left: Geometric form entwined with flowers at Barbara Hepworth's Trewyn Sculpture at St Ives, Cornwall **Bottom left:** 1920s topiary designed by a Buddhist monk for the Tudor hunting lodge at Beckley Park, Oxfordshire **Right:** A Michelangelo design realised in Northamptonshire? One of the two 17th-century garden pavilions at Stoke Bruerne

Aristocrats, however, can prove difficult: 'They don't like you questioning things their ancestors might have done,' he says. One county proved particularly trying: 'It's effectively run by about nine families; they all know each other and they're all intermarried and incredibly proprietorial. They weren't too happy about someone coming into the county and criticising their gardens; but my books are scholarly analyses so I have to make judgments about good and bad design.'

Mowl is also fascinated by how gardens reflect their owner's character: 'You only have to go round Highgrove to know that,' he says. 'You can see exactly what kind of man Prince Charles is and what his interests are.' Likewise, when visiting a garden designed by the potter Clarice Cliff, he found it full of peonies, tulips and crocuses, 'all the things she painted on her pottery'.

New growth

So, what would Mowl's garden say about him? He quickly confesses to not being a gardener at all, leaving the creation of his own back garden to his wife and mother-in-law. 'It's very mixed,' he says, 'quite traditional in its planting, with a herb garden and a "fairy garden" for our nine-year-old daughter. The one concession to modernism is our collection of contemporary figurative sculpture by local artists.'

He has recently been instrumental in creating a brand-new garden, though, as part of the University's centenary celebrations. Choosing the site was crucial: 'I wanted something that was really public,' he says, 'because I think it's very important for the University to reach out to the city. Our most public space is the green by the Wills Memorial Building, so that's where we decided the garden should be.'

The garden, designed by Anne de Verteuil, a former student on Mowl's MA in Garden History, is strongly architectural, with a row of gum trees running parallel to Park Street providing a sense of enclosure and privacy. The garden was constructed by Gardens and Grounds Services and co-ordinated by Alan Stealey of the University's Estates Office. Nicholas Wray, Curator of the University's Botanic Garden, advised on planting. It opened in May this year and has given Mowl a taste for more: 'What I'm also hoping is that the centenary garden makes people aware of what we can achieve, what we own as a university and how we ought to preserve, restore and engage with it – and with the city.'

For example, he'd love to see the 'fabulous, decayed' garden at Clifton Hill House restored to its former glory and occasionally opened to the public, its paths and terraces put back, the summerhouses rebuilt and the planting recreated. An astonishing record of what this garden used to look like is drawn on a 1746 map belonging to the Merchant Venturers, who owned the entire manor of Clifton at that time. The superbly detailed map, kept at Merchant Venturers' Hall, shows the gardens of every house in Clifton right down to the little summer houses, labelled 'turrets', which all faced the Gorge so that the residents of Clifton could see the ships coming back to Bristol.

It's this human interest that stimulates Mowl most. One day he hopes to return to his first love: biography. In the past, his subjects have included the 18th-century aesthetes Horace Walpole and William Beckford, and the architect William Kent, but his sights are now set on a modern subject: Germaine Greer. 'She's a really iconic figure, one of the most important influences on late 20th- and early 21st-century culture. I'd love to meet her,' he says with a grin. 'And she's a passionate gardener …'

WOMEN IN PAIN

Professors Sally Lawson and Bridget Lumb in the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology have almost 70 years' combined experience of studying the mechanisms of pain. Hilary Brown listens to a conversation between two neuroscientists at the sharp end of their research.

JASON INGRAM

'… pain can't really be studied in a petri dish.'

Growing pains

BL: My mother was a biologist, and she sparked my interest in science and how things work. I remember examining earthworm anatomy on the kitchen table as a child.
SL: I was nowhere near as focused! I wanted to be a doctor but was put off by an acquaintance who said that training women was a waste of the country's money because 'women get married and have babies'! I started reading Zoology, but switched to Physiology. It seems to be a subject some people come into indirectly.
BL: Mainly because they don't know what it is.
SL: People confuse it with physiotherapy or psychology because it's another 'ology'. They don't have the same problem with anatomy or neuroscience.
BL: I used to run workshops for sixth-formers who wanted to do a biological science at university. At the introductory sessions there'd only be two or three students out of, say, 120 who'd ever heard of physiology.
SL: And medical teaching is now systems-based rather than subject-based, so students tend not to distinguish between the different fields of preclinical medical sciences. They study the cardiovascular system, but aren't clear which aspects are pharmacology, physiology or biochemistry. This has good and bad consequences. On the one hand, it's good to have an integrated understanding of a whole system because nothing about the body works in isolation; on the other hand, you develop a particular mindset when you come through the discipline of a single subject, which helps with problem-solving, especially in research.

Clinical versus research

BL: I always liked animals and thought about a clinical career in veterinary science, but there's a difference between being fond of animals and being a vet. Then in the third year of my undergraduate degree, I decided I really wanted a research career. It's so exciting designing experiments and testing hypotheses, knowing you're the only person working on a particular question.
SL: I still remember what was probably the defining moment of my research direction, when I was doing my PhD. I had cultured some sensory nerve cells in a dish, and one day I started wondering about the different types of nerve cell, and what they did – and whether they all survived in culture or whether certain types died. I went to the library to try to find out and there was so little information that I've spent my research life trying to answer these fundamental questions.
BL: A research career is such an interesting one because it uses different skills at different times. It may look like I've been in the same job for 30 years, but I haven't, because it's constantly evolving. And *how* it evolves is largely up to you.
SL: I'm glad now that I didn't do medicine; research has been so fulfilling intellectually. And it meant that I could spend the money I'd been saving up for a medical degree on a sailing boat. That was a very good move.
BL: It was good for me, too, because I got to go sailing with Sally. Especially as I did most of the drinking.
SL: While I drank hardly anything but got the hangovers.

Pricking versus burning pain

BL: Our work comes from two different directions and meets at the spinal cord.
SL: There are two different types of pain: fast or pricking pain – the initial pain you get from, say, pricking your finger – and slow or burning pain, the kind you feel with burns or chronic conditions like arthritis. The pain messages are carried to the brain at different speeds by different types of sensory nerve cell – the ones I was growing in petri dishes all those years ago. I now know a lot more about them.
BL: If you follow the pain signal from the source of the pain – say, your pricked fingertip – the first point of information transfer is the spinal cord, which then sends messages to the brain. The brain interprets those messages and sends a response back down the spinal cord – this is called 'descending control', which can control the level of pain you feel. How the quality of the pain signal changes is my main area of research. The interesting thing is that the nervous system deals with the two types of pain signal very differently; the brain can control the amount of pain you feel, especially the burning pain. For example, the pricking (fast) pain drives protective reflexes; it's the sort of pain that makes you take your finger away from a sharp object pretty quickly.
SL: But you can't escape burning pain, or long-term, ongoing (chronic) pain, in the same way; this type of pain makes your life a misery if you suffer from something like arthritis.

Pass the aspirin

BL: Until now, most studies on pain have concentrated on the peripheral nervous system. People have steered clear of the central nervous system because it's too damned complicated.
SL: There's a major problem: we don't have good enough drug treatments for chronic pain, partly because we don't understand the pain pathways well enough.
BL: For example, the complex two-way interactions between the peripheral nervous system and the brain.
SL: And the contribution to pain of different types of sensory nerve cell in the periphery are still not fully understood. For example, the longer you suffer from burning-type pain, the more sensitive the nerve cells become. Some of them can even start sending pain messages without there being any obvious painful stimulus. We've discovered that these spontaneous messages cause spontaneous or ongoing (often burning-type) pain.
BL: One of the problems for researchers and drug companies is that pain can't really be studied in a petri dish. Once you isolate the cells, they don't behave in the same way because they have fewer things to talk to. Then there's the interaction between different systems – the central nervous system and the cardiovascular system, for example …
SL: … and the immune system.
BL: You can't study that in a dish either.
SL: This is a strong argument for studying whole systems.

On the receiving end

BL: I'm not sure if being a pain specialist helps when you're on the receiving end – it can be a double-edged sword. I remember writing an article about counter-irritation – a phenomenon where, if you're feeling pain in more than one place, the pain in one part of your body seems to ease the pain in the other part. I had raging toothache and period pains at the time, and all I could think about was that it wasn't working!
SL: On the other hand, if you're really in danger, it can help to intellectualise what's going on – it takes you away from the emotional. I once hurt my knee badly when I was skiing. There was no one else around and I knew I couldn't lie in the snow for long without risking my life. From past memories of hurting myself, I expected the pain to be excruciating if I put any weight on my injured leg. But I managed to get up and thinking about the pain mechanisms helped me to feel less pain while I was waiting for help.
BL: When you're stressed, you don't feel pain in the same way as you do when you're relaxed – the brain blocks it out, at least in the short term.
SL: When people really hurt themselves, they can often still get to where they can be looked after. Feeling less pain in dangerous situations is an important survival mechanism.

The great debate

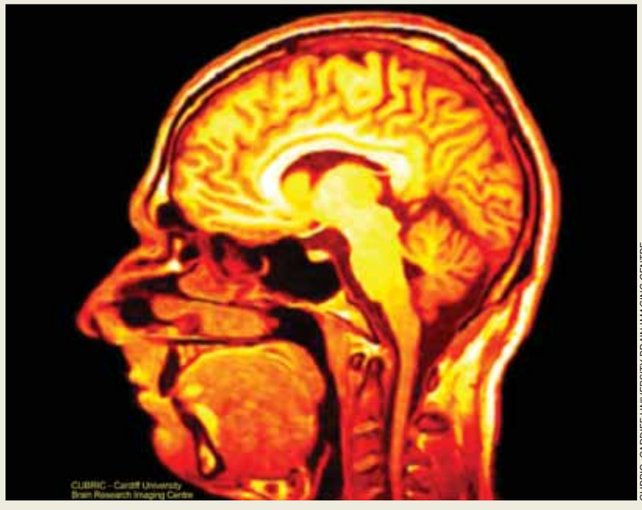
BL: It's hard to talk about any aspect of biomedical research without touching on the thorny issue of animal testing. I do a lot of outreach work in schools, talking about the ethics of using animals for research purposes. It's interesting because when you first go into a classroom you probably get more than half the kids saying they're against animal testing, but when you talk about how such research can advance medical science, many will change their minds.
SL: And, of course, animal testing isn't just for humans – it's for domestic and veterinary animals too. But public opinion is definitely beginning to change. Just look at Pro-Test, the group that supports animal testing in medical research, which was founded by a 16-year-old.
BL: I was recently asked to appear on the *Richard and Judy Show*, to put the case for animal testing. In the end there was no need for someone to traipse up to London from Bristol to do the interview because scientists there were queuing up to do it. It's a sign of the times – five years ago, TV editors would have been scratching around for someone who would be prepared to go on national television to talk about these issues, but now people are beating a path to their door.

Keeping it real

BL: There's current debate about whether researchers should teach. I think they should. Teaching is one of the best ways of keeping your subject fresh. When you're trying to explain your science to someone else, it reminds you how wonderful it is.
SL: Especially when you're trying to explain it to children. That's why outreach work is so good – it reawakens your sense of excitement about the subject. And talking to general audiences is really helpful for teaching. When I did my inaugural lecture, it took a lot of effort to work out how to present my work to members of the public, but once I had done it I could use that material in my undergraduate teaching; it helped me connect with the students on a more intuitive level.

A generation thing

SL: Undergraduate students are much better taught nowadays than we were.
BL: Their postgraduate experience is very different, too. These days they go to major international conferences every year to meet colleagues and see where their science fits. As a postgrad I had high hopes of attending a European pain meeting in Florence, but the one time I got to go it was held in Brighton. I was very put out.
SL: When I was culturing those sensory nerve cells in the dish all those years ago, I was probably the only person in the UK doing so. I did my experiments in a little room with polystyrene stuck on the walls as insulation, and a fan heater to control the temperature; it was really basic. There was no possibility of visiting the group in the USA that was doing similar work at the time. It's so much easier to make and maintain contacts now, and sensory nerve cell culture is being done in labs all over the world.
BL: And career progression is much more structured now – for example, students have to write reports and make presentations to the department once a year. Sally and I are definitely of the sealing-wax-and-string generation; we muddled through somehow. It's only taken me 30 years to get to be Head of Department. [Laughs.]



CUBRIC, CARDIFF UNIVERSITY BRAIN IMAGING CENTRE

THE FABULOUS BRAIN

SL: The way the brain works is endlessly fascinating. I can teach my students how information about pain gets to the brain, but then what happens? How do we become conscious of it?
BL: What never ceases to amaze me is the fact that we ignore most of the sensations we have most of the time because otherwise we'd be overwhelmed with information.
SL: For example, you're sitting there, but you don't notice the pressure between you and the chair, and aren't aware of the feeling of clothes on your body.
BL: There's all the visual input, too – you're looking at me while I'm talking and that's what you're taking in, ignoring most of the rest. You may be able to recreate some of the details – you'd recognise this room if you came back here tomorrow, for example – but for now your brain is focused on taking in the unexpected and discarding all the rest.
SL: Yes, the human brain focuses on the important things, particularly things that change, have some meaning or are unfamiliar or unexpected. Pain cannot be ignored; it dominates your awareness to the extent that it can keep you awake and make your life a misery. That's why understanding pain is so important.

THE ART OF ADMIN

JASON INGRAM

Lesley Dinsdale talks to Nick Riddle about her dread of the blank sheet of paper and the marathon slog known to the world – well, parts of it – as the Research Assessment Exercise.

A librarian, a prosecution lawyer, a bailiff, a senior civil servant: Lesley Dinsdale has been none of these, but there have been times in her career when she's felt like all of them. University administration can be like that.

'I've yet to meet anyone who at their mother's knee said "I want to be a university administrator",' she says. 'People get into it by chance, but once they're in, they really enjoy it.'

Dinsdale is well and truly in. She heads the University's Research and Enterprise Policy Team in Research and Enterprise Development (RED), which stokes the engines of the University's research strategy and ensures that its policies are supported.

'Every university has a research strategy,' she says. 'We have to have one – increasingly, all universities need to be able to articulate their strategic priorities, to be aware of government agendas and of what the research funding bodies think the UK should be doing.'

A chemical reaction

Dinsdale herself had been heading for an academic career, but wasn't at all sure that research was what *she* should be doing. She began a research Masters in Chemical Spectroscopy, but began to feel that she 'didn't really have the capacity for original research'. Pressed to elaborate, she says: 'I hate blank sheets of paper.' Good research involves painstaking work and incremental progress but also, in her experience, requires a facility for 'making intuitive leaps into the unknown and making connections that nobody thought of before. I'm not particularly good at doing that.'

What she *has* always been certain about is the value of universities. 'I remember as an undergraduate being really excited by the idea that I was being taught by people who were at the forefront of their science. They would come into a lecture and talk about something that they'd just been researching, and I'd think, "Wow".'

Dinsdale quit academia and found work as an information scientist with a large chemical company. And thus began her 'librarian' phase. 'I was scanning the scientific literature for new patents and developments that might be relevant for their researchers.' After 18 months of snipping out articles and sticking them on card indexes, she left for the sake of her sanity and returned to higher education in a series of administrative roles, first at King's College London and later at Royal Holloway College.

The work had its challenges and vexations, but she became fascinated by the systems side of things. 'At Royal Holloway I went on a year's secondment to implement a new student record system. It was a huge project, from procurement through to development and testing and I worked very closely with all the groups involved. I enjoyed it so much that I didn't want the year to end.'

This was in stark contrast to the regular job she had to return to, a large part of which involved dealing with students who hadn't paid their fees or who had cheated in their exams. 'The first of those is like being a bailiff, the second is like being a lawyer. That was the only contact I really had with students – it wasn't balanced out by a few positive encounters.'

Dinsdale decided to take her freshly acquired expertise to the private sector, and worked as a consultant for the company that had supplied Royal Holloway's student record system. But when the company was taken over, 'I began to see the writing on the wall'.

Her move to the University of Bristol, to manage the information systems for the newly formed RED, coincided with the run-up to the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Most members of University staff will be familiar with the RAE; other readers will have to google it to get a full sense of its importance, but the crucial detail is that the RAE results determine the amount of research funding that every university in the country receives from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Dinsdale's involvement in the 2001 RAE was relatively light; its successor was a different matter.

An exercise in co-operation

A lot of things had changed by the time the 2008 RAE came around. Dinsdale was now Senior Research Policy Manager, reporting directly to the University Research Committee. Moreover, the RAE process, always complicated and arcane, hit a new peak of complexity. A total of 48 academic departments were selected to make submissions that would represent Bristol's research output, each one requiring a daunting amount of supporting data about the department's income, student numbers and plenty more besides. On top of that, HEFCE issued new criteria for transparency to ensure a level playing field. And Dinsdale's task was to co-ordinate it all.

'It took us about three years from start to finish,' she says, 'and the four people in my team worked on it full-time for the year leading up to the submission in November 2007.' Each of the 48 departments involved had its own selection committee, and hundreds of people across the University were involved in the process to varying degrees.

'We visited every single department and talked to them about how their submission was going,' she says. 'We had fantastic co-operation from departments, because everybody understands that the RAE means money and reputation.' That didn't stop Dinsdale from worrying about the barrage of emails she was often responsible for. She recalls getting ready to send out yet another message filled with

'Great George went *bong!* Then all hell broke loose.'

action points, and hesitating 'with my finger hovering over the button, thinking "Dare I actually send this? Are they all going to say *God, it's that woman again*?"'

But Dinsdale and her team were on hand every step of the way, answering around 6,000 emails in the 18 months before the submission, never mind the meetings and telephone calls. 'A lot of it was great fun,' says Dinsdale. 'But some of it wasn't,' she adds. 'The best part was when we went to talk to the academics about their submissions. Hearing about their research is so interesting – the scope of it is just amazing.'

And that's how Dinsdale has come to reconcile her fierce belief in academic research with what she feels is her own lack of aptitude for original work: by taking other people's ideas, organising them, and making them work better. 'Some people are great at coming up with ideas but not at making them work – they lose interest. HEFCE presented us with a framework, and we had to move things around within it to make things work best for us. There are intellectual challenges to doing that, but it's a different sort of intellectual challenge from being the ideas person.'

The bottom line

If the RAE submission was a marathon, processing the results was a sprint, albeit with a lot of pre-race training and a dry run or two. Universities were told to log on to the HEFCE website at precisely nine o'clock one morning in December 2008 to get their results. Dinsdale and her team set up a 'command centre' in RED with three PCs, ready for some serious number-crunching. 'We logged on just before nine and waited,' she recalls. 'Lo and behold, Great George went *bong*! – and up they came. Then all hell broke loose.'

Her team had 90 minutes to process Bristol's results before they were released to the press, with only sketchy information about how other institutions had done. 'We fed everything into spreadsheets to produce potential league table positions,' says Dinsdale. 'We used a lot of educated guesswork about how the league table providers would interpret the information.' Meanwhile the Director of Communications and Marketing, Barry Taylor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Professor Malcolm Anderson and the Director of RED, Dr David Langley, were in the room next door with the Vice-Chancellor, drafting a press release and 'trying to figure out whether we really were top in the areas we seemed likely to be top in.'

The departments were also desperate to hear the news, so co-ordinating the release of their results was another complex task that had to be done concurrently, along with preparing a presentation for the Vice-Chancellor to deliver at a big reception that afternoon.

No wonder Dinsdale's nights in the run-up were filled with RAE-themed dreams ('I can guarantee that not a single head of department would have slept well the night before the results,' she says).

There was one last leg to go: the announcement of the funding, released in mid-March 2009. And the projections Dinsdale's team produced of the amount involved turned out to be very accurate. 'We predicted a £5.5 million increase from last time,' she says, 'and we got it.'

Dinsdale is at pains to point out that the RAE success 'wasn't down to me, but to the academics', and acknowledges the work of her deputy, Dr Sophie Pearn, and the rest of her team in RED, along with Dave Spencer and the Applications Development Team in Information Services, who built a special database for the data collection and the development of submissions.

To concentrate on the RAE is to overlook a vast portion of the work in RED, which provides support for the academic community across the full spectrum of research, knowledge exchange and enterprise activity, within an integrated division. And Dinsdale is not alone in her academic origins: many members of RED are highly academically qualified.

In the end, Dinsdale maintains, you earn your credibility 'through how you behave towards people and how you do your job'. That said, she places a high value on understanding the academic perspective. The RAE was a tremendous opportunity 'to break down some of those barriers between academics and administrators', and to prove that, while only a polyanna would deny that such obstacles exist, they're far from insurmountable.

Business as usual

With the RAE behind her (until next time), Dinsdale's work has settled down somewhat. Of her role as adviser to the University Research Committee she says: 'I feel a little like a senior civil servant, briefing ministers who often have very strong opinions of their own.' She believes very strongly in the highly prized block grants that follow from the RAE (there is, inevitably, talk of cuts), and declares that she will defend 'to my grave' the right of universities to do pure research of the kind that such grants make possible. 'In my role you do need somebody who has opinions,' she adds.

Dinsdale has found the ideal position from which to defend and encourage the research that she has always valued so highly. She describes a common scene during the RAE: 'I would meet academics in their office, and I'd spot a weird-looking model on the shelf. I'd ask them about it and they'd say "Oh, that? Well, let me show you this work we're doing…" I love being around that.'

How fitting that Professor Leon Tikly of the Graduate School of Education should work for an institution whose motto is 'Learning promotes one's innate power'. He talks to Hilary Brown about his mission to improve the quality of education in low-income countries and equip the world's poorest people with the skills to fight poverty and gender inequality.

WIND OF CHANGE

NICK SMITH

Professor Leon Tikly's preferred adage is 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. Borrowed from the Italian activist and social theorist, Antonio Gramsci, it has served him well throughout 30 years of teaching children from disadvantaged backgrounds and researching education in low-income countries. But what does it mean to him? 'Many people face huge barriers in getting access to a decent education, but those obstacles can be overcome,' he explains.

Tikly's positive outlook is crucial to his work as director of a research programme on Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries (EdQual). EdQual is a research consortium of six universities in the UK and Africa whose purpose is to generate information that will improve the standard of education for the poorest people in Sub-Saharan Africa and other low-income countries.

Where to start with such a broad remit? Gloom-inducing problems abound in the schools of the EdQual African partner countries – South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana and Rwanda – from inadequate school buildings and lack of resources to underqualified teachers, large class sizes and pupil absenteeism. Such difficulties are also often played out against a background of political instability, high unemployment and crime rates and soaring levels of HIV/AIDS.

Formative years

Tikly is unfazed by the enormity of the task. He's always had faith in the importance of education. Both his parents were teachers and his father, a South African of Indian descent, was a member of the exiled African National Congress (ANC) who came to the UK in 1959. 'When I was growing up I was very aware of what was going on in Africa,' he says. 'I was inspired by my parents' belief that education could help bring about change in countries like South Africa.'

A science teacher by training, Tikly cut his teeth in inner-city London comprehensives and went on to teach in Tanzania in a school set up by the ANC for children of refugees who had fled South Africa in the 1976 Soweto uprisings – riots that grew out of protests against the policies of the National Party government and its apartheid regime. Teaching there opened his eyes to some of the glaring shortfalls in the educational system. 'For example, many children had never been taught science under apartheid, or if they had, the curriculum was irrelevant,' says Tikly. 'So when apartheid ended, you had a generation of children who couldn't enter the labour market that had just opened up because they didn't have the right skills.'

'The common thread that unites the world's poorest communities is an incredible passion for learning.'

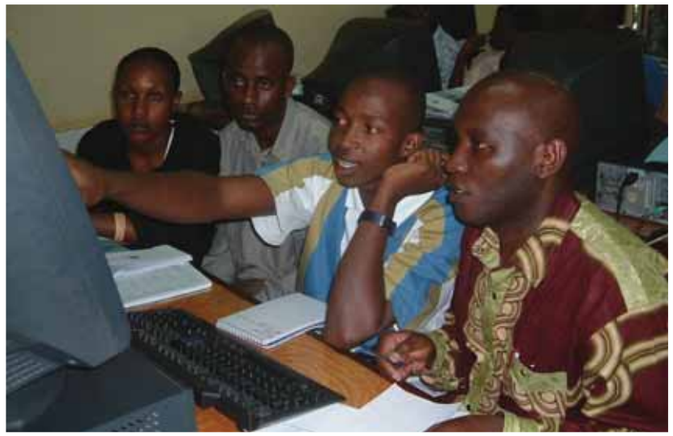
His experience in Tanzania made him determined to apply his 'optimism of the will' to the problem. After doing his PhD on education policy in South Africa, he landed a job as a policy researcher for the new post-apartheid government – another eye-opener. 'One minute I was a radical young thing, supporting student and teacher protests against the apartheid government and gaily criticising its education policy, and the next I was being asked to do something about it,' he recalls. 'It was pretty daunting.'

People power

Back in the UK, three years of teaching International Comparative Education at the University of Birmingham allowed Tikly to look beyond Africa at education in other low-income countries. 'But the common thread that unites the world's poorest communities is an incredible passion for learning,' he says. 'They've often built their school with their bare hands and it means everything to them. That makes it a potent force for change.'

Tikly tries to harness that potential in projects such as EdQual by working with policy makers, education leaders and headteachers to decide which areas they need to tackle, whether it be devising a more relevant science curriculum, introducing information and communication technologies, or improving language and literacy skills. 'The teachers do their own research in their own classrooms, work out what needs to change and implement those changes,' he says. 'I try to facilitate what they do, but they're the ones who own the project.'

This method of empowering people does work, says Tikly, and he has seen it win people over. 'Headteachers I met with in Ghana a year ago were very unsure about this type of action research, which is totally new to them. Traditionally, the African education system is hierarchical and bureaucratic – teachers don't have much control over what they do. But at *this* year's workshop, the difference in their behaviour was amazing: they'd started to tackle the problems in their schools and were seeing results.'



EDQUAL RPC

Going south

EdQual is moving away from the old, paternalistic models that have the northern partner leading and the south following. 'It's much more relevant for the southern continents to share experiences and learn from each other,' says Tikly. 'We encourage the African partners to forge links with countries, like Pakistan and Chile, that face the same kinds of quality issues in education.' He came across an inspiring example of the progress possible during a recent visit to a school in Tamil Nadu, India, organised by EdQual's funder, the Department for International Development.

'In India, you used to find the same kind of teacher-centred, rote learning that you get in African classrooms – the teacher with a cane over the knee at the front of the classroom, children sitting in rows reciting from irrelevant textbooks,' he says. 'But here the teacher was more of a facilitator and the children were taking part in group activities with work cards and their own blackboards to write on. You could see how happy and engaged they were.'

Where there's a will, there's … optimism

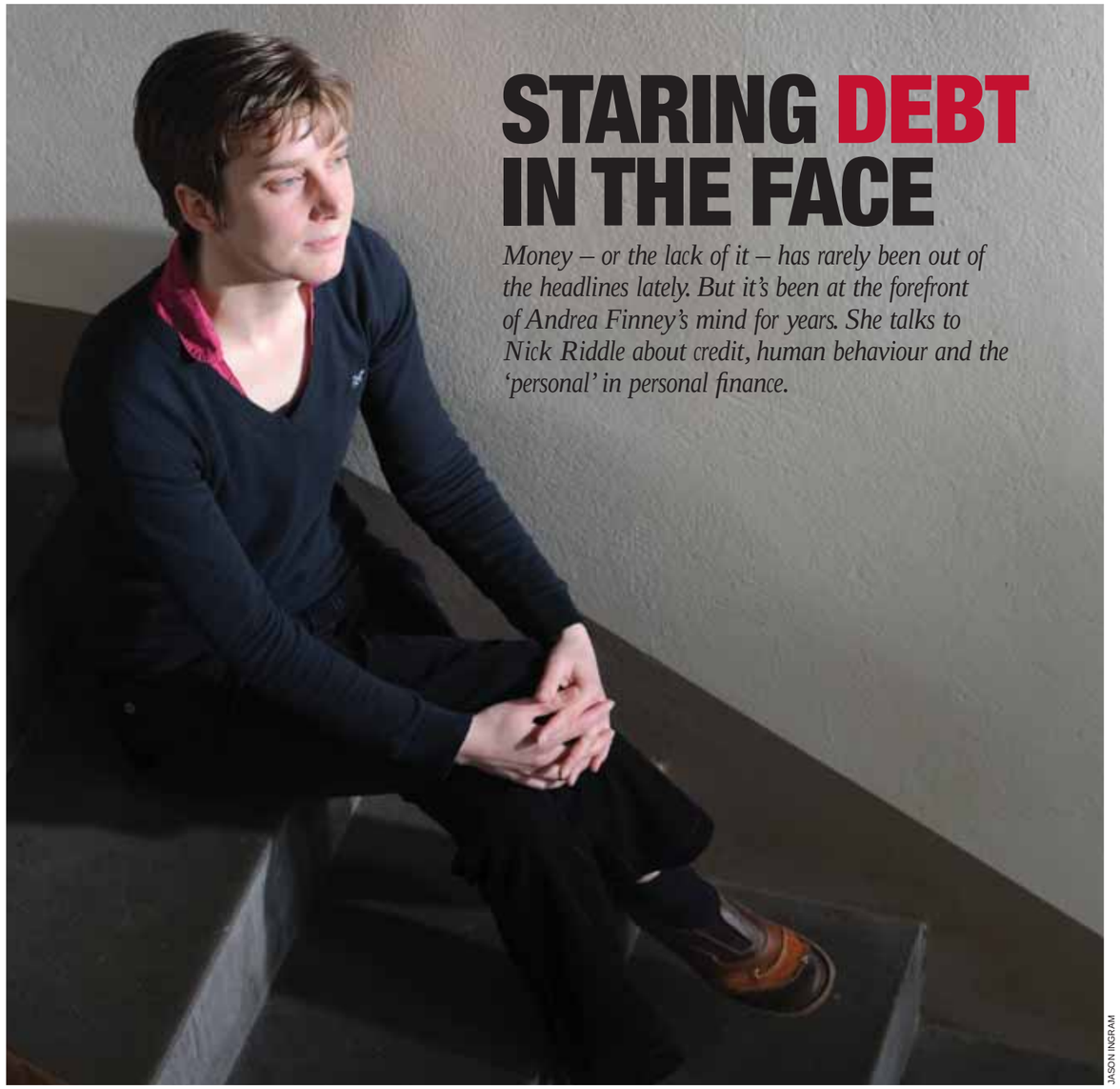
Africa still has a long way to go, entrenched as it is in the 'stand in line, be on time, kiss the rod and trust in God' mode of teaching. Any moves towards a more learner-centred approach, like the one in Tamil Nadu, require better teacher training and continuing professional development. Other barriers to learning that are specific to Africa need to be part of the debate, for example, the pressure on schools to teach in English even though educators agree that children learn best in their mother tongue in their early years.

But Tikly is convinced that change is possible, especially when the impetus comes from the communities themselves. Taking a step back to let the indigenous researchers take responsibility for their own projects is an important part of the process, even if Tikly does worry about what will happen if the electricity goes off for three months in Tanzania and people can't use their computers: 'How will they get their work done then? The research still has to be delivered, and ultimately the buck stops with me,' he says. Thankfully, some of those sleepless nights are eased by the knowledge that he has strong support from the EdQual teams in Bristol and Bath, as well as those in the African partner universities.

But if all else fails, including the power supply in Tanzania, Tikly has another saying that he keeps just for the EdQual project – 'We'll get there in the end'.

For more information, please visit www.edqual.org.

Top: EdQual teachers' workshop in Rwanda
Bottom: A primary school class in Ghana



JASON INGRAM

STARING DEBT IN THE FACE

Money – or the lack of it – has rarely been out of the headlines lately. But it's been at the forefront of Andrea Finney's mind for years. She talks to Nick Riddle about credit, human behaviour and the 'personal' in personal finance.

We are an irrational species; never more so than in matters of money, as recent events have confirmed. And the current crisis has seen an emerging field come of age, according to Andrea Finney, Research Fellow at the Personal Finance Research Centre.

Interest in how people manage their money and use financial services has only really gained pace in recent years. It was during the recession of the early 1990s that the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in London undertook the first comprehensive study of credit and debt from the consumer's perspective. The University's Personal Finance Research Centre (PFRC) owes its existence to Professor Elaine Kempson, a prime mover at the PSI who brought her research to Bristol in 1998. The PFRC remains the only social research centre in the UK to be dedicated exclusively to researching the full gamut of personal finance issues.

The Centre's work is mostly commissioned by government departments, banks and insurance companies, consumer groups and charities like the Money Advice Trust. The scope of their interest nowadays reaches far beyond statistics and into the realms of psychology. 'We're increasingly interested in the relationship between what people say and what they do and how best to help change that behaviour,' says Finney. 'That's the basis of a related field known as behavioural economics, which looks at how and why our behaviour deviates from the "rational" when it comes to finance.' Behavioural economics can help us to understand why people delay taking important decisions or don't always choose the options with the highest rewards, and it can also account for some of the dizzier attitudes to credit. Finney finds this side of personal finance compelling: 'I've always considered myself to be a psychologist at heart,' she says.

From crime to credit

It was psychology that drew Finney to personal finance in the first place. She studied psychology and criminology as an undergraduate, but rather than pursue the prison-and-probation route, she found herself drawn to 'the responses to crime and the victim's side of things. I was always interested in social injustice, suffering and human rights'.

After getting her Masters in Forensic Psychology at the University of Surrey, she lost no time in applying to one of the largest employers of social scientists in the country: the Home Office. Much to the despair of a Surrey colleague.

'He said: "Don't go into government, it'll destroy you – you'll just become a drone". But I only planned to stay for two years.' And was her colleague proved right? 'There's no doubt that the Civil Service is extremely hierarchical; everything has a system. That kind of environment can stifle creativity. But on the whole I found it a rewarding place to be. The Civil Service has many different faces and the area I was in was quite lively, with a very supportive environment. My two years became six.'

Those years brought her stints of work on alcohol-related crime and the British Crime Survey – which often confirmed the impressions she'd got from her postgraduate work about 'how troubled human nature can be' – before she moved to the Office for National Statistics in Newport to work on the Wealth and Assets Survey, a new, large-scale survey of household assets and debts. 'That was my entry into the world of personal finance,' she says. And when the PFRC advertised a post in 2007, she leapt at the chance. 'It's much more hands-on here,' she says. 'You work on a project through from the design and methodological development of the study, to the fieldwork, through to the analysis and publication.'

'Traditionally there's been a kind of taboo about discussing money.'

From 'easy come' to 'hard going'

One such project is striking for the way it captures a precipitous moment in our history – not that anyone knew it at the time. Standard Life commissioned the PFRC to carry out a study of borrowing and the resulting report, *Easy come, easy go: borrowing over the life cycle*, co-authored by Finney and published in 2007, already seems like something from another era, with its references to 'the current strong economic climate' and 'widely available credit'.

The study concentrated on qualitative rather than quantitative enquiry – underlying attitudes rather than figures and graphs, in other words. 'With quantitative research you don't get the depth of understanding or the nuances,' Finney explains. 'So we held a series of focus groups, composed of people with varying levels of income, to get a sense of how they thought about borrowing.'

What emerged was clear evidence of a shift in attitudes since the 1970s and '80s. 'We were struck by how dominant positive attitudes were towards borrowing quite large amounts, even among the 30-55 age group, many of whom had witnessed the previous recessions. It's almost as if the rules of old don't really apply any more, or didn't until the current crisis.'

Another observation is that, in the words of the report, 'the line between needs and wants was virtually indistinguishable'. How does one account for that in a way that doesn't paint us all as grasping materialists? Part of the answer, Finney suggests, lies in the changing nature of what it means to participate in society. 'Poverty is being seen more and more as relative rather than absolute,' she says. 'If people can't afford the things that most others take for granted, or the things that bring people together – culture, a hobby or a holiday – you can define that as poverty. It's understandable that people don't want to be "left behind".'

If Finney remains largely unfazed by economic behaviour, that doesn't mean she is immune to astonishment. Take the question of pensions. 'I heard a comment recently about parents in their 50s and 60s who were supporting their adult children in these difficult times, taking £10-20,000 out of their pension pot to help tide them over or help them put a deposit on a house. But £10,000 now could become £60,000 if they kept it in their retirement fund.' Alarming. But it bears out a finding that comes up time and again, says Finney: 'People generally emphasise the value of a sum of money now over its future value, for all sorts of reasons.'

The 2007 Standard Life fieldwork preceded the Northern Rock crisis by a matter of weeks. Did Finney get any ominous vibes from hearing so many people talk positively about their borrowing? 'I'm an incredibly risk-averse person, so I was very conscious of the dangers. But I don't think anyone could have imagined what the end to that era would look like.'

The Centre's links with commerce and government mean that its work is highly valued, discussed and sometimes acted upon by policy makers. A recent study by the Centre highlighted how dramatically the credit market is withdrawing from many lower-income households. It concluded that growing numbers of people don't have any realistic recourse to affordable credit. This informed the decision, in the recent Budget, to give a boost to the government's Social Fund over the next few years, to provide short-term loans to those on low income who need help to cover the basics.

The Centre also helped evaluate a successful trial scheme, now going national, equipping specialist teams to investigate loan sharks and help their victims. So far, several million pounds' worth of illegal lending activities have been closed down. That's another instance of the recession 'acting as a catalyst to bring into focus things that were already going on,' says Finney. 'There's more interest in galvanising people to save and to protect themselves.'

So how *are* people protecting themselves in the new and uncertain climate? Finney and her colleagues are following up the Standard Life study, 'to see how people are adapting, especially the borrowers'. The new study is commissioned by the Money Advice Trust, an umbrella organisation for the debt advice agencies, and Provident Financial, who deal mostly in home credit. Both are interested in understanding what kind of advice and support people facing debt might need.

Getting personal

'For a long time, people assumed it wouldn't be possible to conduct a detailed survey of people's finances, because traditionally there's been a kind of taboo about discussing money,' says Finney. 'But when the Wealth and Assets Survey was trialled in 2001, response rates were very high.' It turns out that people are fairly happy to talk about their finances in the right environment, and with the right approach. 'I take my hat off to the interviewers – they're at the coalface, and they strike a rapport with people after only a few minutes.'

Occasionally, the 'personal' in personal finance applies to Finney herself, who confesses to having a little of the social campaigner in her. Those adverts promising to solve your debt problems, for example, make her very uncomfortable. 'The Standard Life study confirmed that many people see "debt solution" options like bankruptcy as an easy way out,' she says. 'What the adverts don't tell you is that bankruptcy is often a difficult and expensive process, and it'll appear on your credit record for up to six years,' she says.

If the recent calamities have taught us anything, it's that even the most informed consumers can come a cropper. Finney herself had some savings caught up in the Iceland banking debacle. 'I felt pretty ashamed about it for a while, since I thought I should have known better,' she says. 'But when you're talking about the bankruptcy of whole countries – well, that's where I let myself off the hook.'

But personal misfortune is often a necessary part of personal development, and Finney is philosophical about the experience. She thinks more about the gains she's made at the Centre. 'We're a bridge between policy-making and academia,' she says. 'I feel very lucky to have the best of both those worlds.'

Bristol in pieces

NICK RIDDLE

TWENTY QUESTIONS

Jeni Milsom, PA to the leader of the Bristol Research Initiative for the Dynamic Global Environment (BRIDGE) in the School of Geographical Sciences, professes an affinity with a sub-species of lizard and a weakness for Toblerone.

What is your favourite meal? Homemade super-chunky vegetable soup made with whatever's in the fridge. It has to include roasted fennel seeds; they're the magic.

If you were offered one superpower, what would you choose? To be able to match my actual pool-playing ability with how good I *think* I am.

Cat or dog? Or neither? It's got to be cat. Cats are so much cooler than dogs and there's almost no risk of them shaking their drool on you.

Favourite smell? Small hardware shops.

Your greatest character flaw? Spilling my life story to people I've only just met.

Which historical period would you like to have lived in? Any period when I would have been required to wear a large and impractical dress and an extremely complicated hairdo.

What keeps you awake at night? Too much sugar, a child with nightmares, partying seagulls and a snoring cat.

Native Americans believe we all have a Spirit Animal. What would yours be? Blue-tongued skink. Distinctive and gets to bask in the sun.

Favourite spot(s) in the world? Sennen in Cornwall, Myrtos Beach in Kefalonia and my sofa with a child either side of me watching *Doctor Who*.

Least favourite spot? My kitchen after a dinner party when everyone's gone home.

What winds you up? Predictive text or any technology that tries to second-guess you.

One book, one piece of music, one film. *The Times Atlas of the World*, 'Ize Of The World' by The Strokes, *The Longest Day* (1962).

If someone met you for the first time, what could they say to break the ice? 'You look like a girl who plays poker!'

Your biggest life-changing experience (so far)? The aftermath of realising I was right when I had long suspected my husband was having an affair. Being wrenched out of my cosy married existence and becoming a single mother has improved me as a person in so many ways, it's hard to be bitter.

Something you wish you'd known about life when you were 18? Enjoy only having yourself to worry about.

'My philosophy is this…' Don't be too hard on yourself. When those around you are entering half-marathons and 10k runs, it's OK to speed-eat Toblerone while watching all the *Godfather* films. That's good for you too, but in a different way.

When and where were you happiest? Whenever I've been camping and cooking outside with friends and family.

Where will you be ten years from now? Hopefully doing some proper travelling – my children will be 18 and 21 by then.

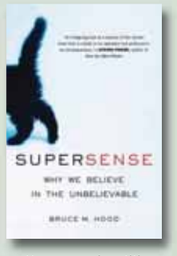
How would you sum yourself up in one line? Easily pleased.

Is there a question you'd like to be asked? 'Even though you've beaten me at pool every time we've played, do you want a rematch?'

THE PLUG

Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales 1300-1800 **by Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift** (Oxford University Press)

In this groundbreaking study of an essential and easily overlooked part of modern life, Dr Paul Glennie and Emeritus Professor Nigel Thrift from the School of Geographical Sciences draw on historical sources, ranging from personal diaries to housekeeping manuals, to chronicle how the practice, indeed the very notion, of 'telling the time' developed through centuries of technical and intellectual endeavour. Throughout its pages, famous figures such as Edmund Halley and Samuel Pepys rub shoulders with sailors, gamblers and burglars.



Supersense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable **by Bruce Hood** (Constable)

A whole subset of human behaviour is governed by a belief that there are energies, patterns and entities operating in the world that are categorically denied by science, according to Bruce Hood, Professor of Developmental Psychology, who calls this belief 'supersense'. Professor Hood presents his investigations into superstition and belief, and examines how many supernatural beliefs have their origins in the way that children spontaneously think about the world.

COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL THEATRE COLLECTION

Above: Vivien Leigh, studio portrait, 10 November 1943 **Far left:** James Mason and Ann Todd, studio portrait for *The Seventh Veil*, 17 March 1945 **Centre:** Michael Redgrave, *Hamlet*, Old Vic, 1949 **Right:** Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier, *Arms and the Man*, Old Vic, 1944

A GOLDEN AGE IN BLACK-AND-WHITE

The holdings of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection grow ever more impressive. A recent arrival is the John Vickers photographic archive, the collected work of a prominent theatre photographer whose career included a long association with the Old Vic.

John Vickers began his career in the 1930s as assistant to the legendary Angus McBean, and ran his own studio from 1939 until his death in 1976. He worked for many London theatres, photographing many hundreds of productions. His portraits of actors, writers and musicians gained him a high reputation.

The archive, donated by his daughter, Sarah Vickers, includes some 20,000 glass plate negatives and 1,500 black-and-white prints, along with 14 boxes of correspondence and ephemera.

ALAN STEALEY

Endnotes

COURTESY OF ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

D RODRIGUES/UNEP/STILL PICTURES

1 Above 'Oiled bird, Brazil' from the Hard Rain exhibition held in Royal Fort Gardens as part of a 100-day energy campaign launched by Sustainability (the University's Energy and Environmental Management Unit) in March. The touring exhibition is the brainchild of photographer Mark Edwards and highlights the defining issues of the 21st century: climate change, poverty, habitat loss and human rights. www.hardrainproject.com

2 Left A five-ton nodule of sandstone, one of a pair excavated by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, has been reunited with its even heavier twin on the University precinct after 21 years apart. The two nodules, dating from the Late Carboniferous period, were unearthed in 1837 during the excavation of the Great Western Railway Tunnel near St Anne's, Bristol. In 1970, Sir Alfred Pugsley, then Emeritus Professor of Engineering, secured one of them for the University. Thanks to Bob Hughes, a former member of staff at the University's Long Ashton Research Station, discussions with Network Rail have led to the arrival of the second stone. The pair have been installed on the raised bed at the entrance to Cantock's Close.

3 Above Gregory Doran, Chief Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, delivered the 2009 Wickham Lecture in the Department of Drama. Doran was a student of Drama and English at Bristol in the late 1970s. He subsequently studied at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. His recent RSC productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* were performed in The Courtyard Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon before transferring for an acclaimed run at the Novello theatre in London's West End, where *Hamlet* won the Whatsonstage award for Theatrical Event of the Year.

4 Below A hand-coloured engraving from Samuel Rush Meyrick's 'A critical inquiry into antient armour, as it existed in Europe, but particularly in England, from the Norman Conquest to the reign of Charles II', published in 1824. The image, said by Meyrick to represent Henry VIII, was copied from a manuscript which includes an account of the actions of the King and his army in France. It is one of 100 items drawn from the University Library's Special Collections to be displayed online as part of the 2009 centenary celebrations. www.bristol.ac.uk/centenary

COURTESY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

If you need all or part of this publication in an alternative format, such as in Braille, in larger print or on tape, please telephone +44 (0)117 928 8895