

Subtext³

Summer 2007

✦
Roads to Rome
... and Athens, and Troy

✦
The bug squad
At war with a devious,
microscopic enemy

✦
**The scholar and
the soundbite**
Why the media makes
mincemeat of nutrition

✦
Tales from the field
One thousand metres
under the sea

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WELCOME

'Variety's the very spice of life, That gives it all its flavour.' So said the popular 18th-century poet, William Cowper, in *The Task* (1785).

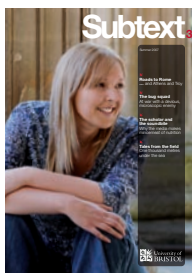
One of the aims of *Subtext* is to reveal the diversity of the University's staff and students and the breadth of their expertise and accomplishments. Our intention is to delve beneath the surface of this exceptional institution and find intriguing truths about the individuals who help make it the extraordinary place it is – an untold story, an unsung talent, an uncommon experience. We hope we have succeeded in the first three issues of the magazine's life.

This term sees another collection of articles that reflect the eclectic nature of the University and its people. There's the rabbi who played truant from Hebrew classes as a boy (p 18), the Palestinian cardiac expert who never expected to stay in Bristol (p 4) and the classicist with a modern take on the Ancients (p 9). And there are some things you never knew about the Vice-Chancellor on p 12.

Variety is indeed the spice of life.

Hilary Brown

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How I got here

Saadeh Suleiman is Professor of Cardiac Physiology and a member of the academic cardiac research group at the Bristol Heart Institute. During 35 years in a war-torn Middle East, he taught himself at home, worked in a copper factory and ran a university department on six hours of electricity every other day. He talks to Hilary Brown about a life marked by uncertainty and change.

My parents were among the many refugees who fled Palestine when the country was divided. They ended up in Damascus, Syria, where I was born. They returned to Jordan (which included the West Bank) when I was three. We lived in Amman, then Jerusalem.

I was the oldest of seven children. I shared a bedroom with my three brothers; you pulled the beds out from under the sofa at night. There would always be someone chatting, listening to the radio, reading, sleeping. I learned to block out all the distractions so I could study.

All nine of us used to pile into an ancient VW Beetle and go on a picnic every Friday during the winter. It was a bit of a squash, as you can imagine. There was about an 18-month age gap between each of us kids. We had to endure a two-hour drive to get to the picnic spot at the Dead Sea or Jericho, but we enjoyed it when we got there.

I studied one curriculum at school and taught myself another at home. Jerusalem was occupied by the Israelis after the Six-Day War in 1967. All the state schools had to adopt an Israeli curriculum instead of the old Jordanian one. This was tricky because at 14 you had to pass a national exam to continue your education, but the Israeli certificate wouldn't allow you to study at any high school with a Jordanian curriculum. So I bought all the books for the Jordanian curriculum, and studied these by myself in the evening while following the Israeli curriculum at school. I sat both exams and passed, so I could go to high school.

My father was arrested when I was 17. He was put in prison under 'administrative detention', without charge and without trial. We never knew why. He was outspoken in his opinions, though. He was pro-peace and used to write articles in the local newspaper. He had many Israeli friends who thought like him. We even once went to visit an Israeli kibbutz, which was unheard of for Palestinians.

I went to work in the furnaces of an Israeli copper factory. While my father was in prison, I was head of the family. I had to get a job to help pay the rent. It was hard, unpleasant work.

A chance meeting led to my going to university. My mother worked as a hairdresser. One of her customers ran an orphanage, which had links with a charity that awarded scholarships to Palestinian orphans to go to university. This lady knew I had come second in all Jerusalem in my high school exams. She recommended me for a scholarship, arguing that having a father in jail was like being an orphan. I didn't want to go. I thought I should stay and help my family, but my mother insisted. I ended up going to Bir Zeit College and then the American university in Beirut.

SAADEH SULEIMAN

'When you live in uncertain times, you get on with what is in front of you.'

I spent a year working in business in Jordan. My father was released from prison, but expelled from Jerusalem. He went to live in Jordan and my mother joined him with the rest of the family. I then came to the UK, to do a PhD at Essex.

My first teaching job was at Nablus University during the Israeli military occupation. We only had electricity every other day, and then for only six hours at a time. Communication was difficult. The telephone exchange hadn't changed since the '40s, and you had to go through an operator to place a call. You would ask for a number, and the operator would tell you you couldn't be connected because the person you wanted had gone out shopping.

Everything was run in an ad hoc way, even the university. I was never consulted about my promotion to dean of research and graduate studies in 1986. My wife and I had been away and when we got in the taxi at Tel Aviv airport, the driver congratulated me on the appointment. He had read about it in the paper. It was the first I'd heard of it.

We lived next door to the Samaritans. They are a unique community, with their own customs, but they are very open and friendly. Every time you went past they would rush out to ask, 'How are you?', 'How much did you pay for those tomatoes?', 'What are you making for dinner?'. Then they would give you some advice about where you could have got your tomatoes cheaper, which ingredients you should add to your dish, and so on. You could be there all day.

Life was turned upside down in 1987 by the first intifada. There was a curfew for months. The university was shut down, we couldn't leave the house, people were being shot at in the streets and there were food shortages.

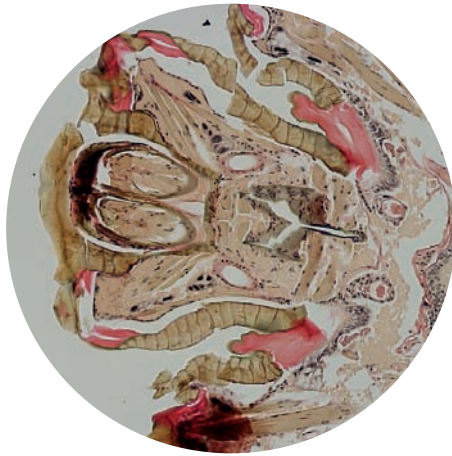
I was worried about the laboratory animals left inside the university when it was shut down. The Israeli military governor agreed to let me go and get them. I arrived at the university to be greeted by a convoy of Israeli armed cars and the governor himself. He didn't believe I was there to release the animals, he thought I was up to no good. When I picked up the cages to take them home, he flew into a rage and accused me of dragging out half the army just for some animals. It was the joke all over town.

I was offered a Fulbright Fellowship to go anywhere in the US but I turned down Harvard for a temporary position at Bristol. When people ask why, I like to say it's because I love the British weather! Really it was because I was more familiar with Britain, having been a student here, and because it was nearer to Norway (my wife is Norwegian) and the Middle East. And my mother used to say, 'America swallows people, they go and never come back'.

I never intended to stay in Britain. Political unrest continued at home. The university was closed, and the violence was escalating, so we stayed in Bristol and became British citizens in 1995. I would rather live in Britain than anywhere else in Europe. I like the feeling of inclusiveness here.

Everything that has happened to me has been by chance. I have never planned anything. It's partly because life is so unpredictable in the Middle East. When you live in uncertain times, you just get on with what is in front of you. It's also to do with the culture there, which is a bit fatalistic. I'm getting better, but I still get told off by my wife for not making plans in advance for the summer holidays. I usually get the tickets a few days before we travel. ✦

How do you wage war on an opportunistic life form that invades other life forms in ruthless pursuit of its self-serving agenda? Through teamwork. Nick Riddle meets the people behind Acarus, a project that charts the campaigns of a fiendishly cunning single-cell adversary.



MATTHEW ROBINSON

THE BUG SQUAD

DAVE PRATT

In a secure lower-floor laboratory in the School of Clinical Veterinary Science at the University's Langford site, there's a dog with fleas. The dog is artificial, but the fleas are real. Inside the fleas, microscopic organisms are at large; single-celled evil geniuses bent on spreading their offspring – and some unpleasant diseases – as widely as possible.

Acarus is the Sherlock Holmes to their Moriarty. The four-person team – plus occasional collaborators – has a three-fold mission: to detect the presence of these organisms in companion animals; to spread the word about the issues posed by infected fleas and ticks for animals, including humans; and to increase our understanding of how the miniscule invaders do their work.

'These organisms cause a number of bad diseases for dogs, cats and their owners, but they're fascinating,' says Susan Shaw, Director of the Acarus Laboratory. 'For example, the *Borrelia* organism – which causes Lyme disease – is a wonderful snaky little thing called a spirochete that may alter the tick's behaviour to make it more likely to find a host.'

It always helps to know your enemy. But more than that, Shaw and her colleagues rather admire theirs.

Ticking the boxes

Before we expend all our sympathy on the poor exploited tick, it's worth zooming out to its aforementioned 'host' – often an animal we're far

Above: From left to right, sheep tick before a meal; mouth parts, salivary glands and 'brain' of a tick; sheep ticks engorged on blood **Above right:** The Acarus team: from the left, PhD student Matthew Robinson, technicians Debbie Langton and Tim Hillman, and laboratory director Susan Shaw



more likely to feel sorry for. The Acarus team is concerned with arthropod-borne infectious diseases (an arthropod being a tick, flea or fly) that strike in companion animals – mostly dogs.

The reasons behind Acarus go back to 2000, when the UK's border controls were relaxed to allow people to present 'pet passports' instead of putting their pets into quarantine. Shaw was born and studied in Australia and has also worked in the US, so her international background gave her a degree of prescience about how things might develop. 'I foresaw that these animals were going to bring back a lot of diseases,' she says, 'and they did.'

Acarus was set up with funding from a veterinary pharmaceutical company interested in establishing a diagnostic service for vets, scientists and specialists using DNA analysis. The DNA tests are still unique in the UK for their accuracy in detecting infection. 'Other tests look for antibodies, which indicate whether the animal has been exposed to the organism,' says Tim Hillman, one of the technicians (with Debbie Langton). But the Acarus method delves deeper: using a process called polymerase chain reaction (PCR), the team goes down to the molecular level. 'We look for the presence of the organism's DNA in the blood of the animal, regardless of whether it's active.'

The diagnostic work has steadily increased, and is now complemented by research work using the same techniques. Funding from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), industry and charities has helped to support a PhD student, Matthew Robinson (see panel on page 8), the man responsible for the artificial dog, its specially bred fleas and their grisly payload.

On the teaching side, information about these diseases has found its way into the curriculum, and Acarus also attracts visiting international researchers. Shaw has travelled as widely as any of the diseases she studies, speaking to groups and associations all over the world, and at every level 'from the top tier of organisations like DEFRA to local chapters of the Kennel Club. And whenever I do, Tim and Debbie know about it soon afterwards, because we get a spike in the number of incoming samples.'

Many vets in the UK are still getting to grips with tick-borne diseases, which ensures a steady flow of calls, emails and faxes. 'They often say "I've got a dog or a cat that looks like this, does it need your test?"' says Shaw. She adds that the traffic goes in both directions: 'We send out information to practitioners, and they send us blood and tissue samples for us to test.'

The information is making an impact, but many vets are still unfamiliar with the more exotic diseases. Many of the 400,000 or so animals entering the UK since 2000 come from the rest of the European Union, but a significant number from further afield – the United States, Russia, South Africa, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and so on. 'Some are being imported – often people rescue dogs from abroad,' says Hillman. 'But a lot of animals are just going with their owners on holiday.'

'Many people take their animals to the south of France,' adds Shaw. 'But there are also many travelling with their dogs and cats for work placements – military, foreign services – to parts of the EU where these diseases are common. Then there are all the working animals: the military, search and rescue dogs.'

Guarding the frontier

Not all countries have borders as open to animals as the UK. The government of New Zealand is especially strict in this regard; it requires that every pet must have a certificate confirming that it is free of tick-borne organisms before it can enter. And because the testing offered by Acarus is one of the few recognised by the New Zealand government, the blood samples come thick and fast from all over the world.

This is an emotive area, as Shaw and Hillman acknowledge. 'We get quite a few phone calls from the owners,' says Hillman. 'For the organisms that we're looking at, the animal has to be tested within 10 days of leaving and the paperwork has to be signed, sealed and delivered before the animal is allowed onto the plane. That's a fairly narrow window.' Feelings can run high, and a spot of hand-holding is sometimes called for. 'Sometimes the dog is virtually on the runway,' says Hillman, 'and the owner calls in a panic because the certificate hasn't turned up.'

It would be nice to report that there's always a happy ending, but the organisms at issue have a habit of spoiling people's plans. Take Babesiosis – a potentially fatal disease with similarities to malaria. An animal can appear perfectly healthy, but it could still be carrying the *Babesia* organism. 'If the test comes up positive,' says Hillman, 'the New Zealand government doesn't care whether the animal's healthy or not – they won't let it in.'

A significant number of samples sent to Acarus from Hong Kong are from animals owned by British citizens who are travelling to New Zealand. And such is the prevalence of Babesiosis in Hong Kong that these owners often get a nasty shock. 'One lady was in tears on the phone because both her dogs came up positive,' says Hillman. 'And the treatment for Babesiosis is never 100 per cent effective – you very rarely manage to clear the organism completely. So the tests kept on coming up as positive, but her animals seemed perfectly healthy to her. The last we heard, she had to leave them behind.'

Bugs, blood and bacteria

Babesiosis is extremely rare in the UK (the first case of it occurring in a non-travelled dog on these shores was picked up by Acarus), and long may it remain so. But we have our own, home-grown diseases, such as Lyme disease (Borreliosis), tick-borne fever and cat-scratch disease. The Acarus team get a number of calls about these too.

All in all, there's no shortage of work to be done. Fortunately, the diagnostic service is self-funding. 'We pay overheads to the University,' says Shaw, 'and we cover the salaries and the costs of buying, maintaining and updating our equipment. Any profit is fed back into the laboratory to help fund development of new tests and to support postgraduates.'

Acarus has identified several new organisms and, thanks to the team's expertise and its growing archive of DNA samples, it has become a valuable resource for researchers all over the world. Shaw is an energetic spokesperson, and never more so than when she is describing the strategems of a minuscule adversary. Take the protozoan parasite of the genus *Leishmania*, for example, which pursues its ends via the sand-fly, a bloodsucking insect found in parts of mainland Europe.

'What this organism does when it gets inside the fly is amazing,' she says. 'It starts to produce mucous that fills up the fly's stomach. Next time the fly bites, it has problems swallowing, and it has to stay longer on the host and bite many more times in order to survive. So this half-starved sandfly jumps from dog to dog, continuously trying to feed. Every time it sucks, it delivers the organism back through the salivary glands into the host. The sandfly's saliva also suppresses the immunity of the host's skin, so when the organism is introduced it has a great advantage. The end result is a horrible disease, in both humans and dogs.'

The Acarus team can't help but admire the devious methods of all parasites (both big and small) whose exploits cause so much

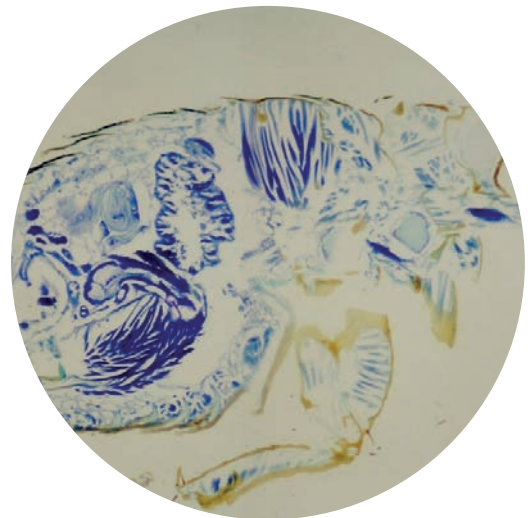
trouble. But what do they think of the view, expressed by Stephen Jay Gould and others, that these unicellular organisms – bacteria, viruses and the like – are, through sheer number and tenacity, actually the dominant life form on the planet, and that we are merely their vessels?

'That's certainly a way of looking at it,' says Shaw. 'Arthropods carry all kinds of bacteria, protozoa and viruses – the ones we look at are the tip of the iceberg. We've known that for a very long time.'

To prove it, Shaw points to a few lines by Jonathan Swift, written in 1733:

*So, naturalists observe, a flea
Has smaller fleas that on him prey;
And these have smaller still to bite 'em;
And so proceed ad infinitum. ❧*

'Arthropods carry all kinds of bacteria – the ones we look at are the tip of the iceberg.'



MATTHEW ROBINSON

Tracking the troublemakers

While the rest of the Acarus team are busy detecting pathogens (disease-causing organisms) in animal blood samples, PhD student Matthew Robinson is plotting the course of these pathogens.

Like Shaw, Robinson was drawn to this research through an admiration of the sheer ingenuity of the parasites concerned. 'These little organisms can make a vector – that is, a carrier such as a tick – behave in a way that means it's more likely to be picked up by another animal,' he says.

Robinson is tracking the pathogens as they migrate through the tick, using the Acarus lab's PCR technology to operate at the microscale. With help from colleagues at the University of Liverpool, and industrial sponsors, he is developing new techniques to tag organisms and antibodies and to 'micro-dissect' the organs of the tick (yes, a tick has ovaries and a brain and a rudimentary kidney) to come up with a working model of the process of infection.

'Ideally we'd like to be able to say, "After this amount of time, the pathogen this tick has taken up will be in this tissue, interacting with these cells". And if an animal or a person gets bitten by a tick or a flea, we want to be able to estimate how likely they are to be infected, depending on how long the flea is feeding.'

His work is partly funded by the BBSRC, and by the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer.

Above: Nervous system, gut and reproductive organs of a male cat flea



DAVE PRATT

ROADS TO ROME

Classics used to form the core of a university education. Things have changed, but the classical world still shapes modern attitudes. Dr Genevieve Liveley, Lecturer in the Department of Classics and Ancient History, talks to Nick Riddle about Latin, The Simpsons and the enduring appeal of the subversive Roman poet, Ovid.

Meeting Ovid

I was about 12, at a nice girls' school, and we were given a passage from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (*Art of Love*) to translate. Something about going to the races to pick up girls. It was so clever and funny – I loved it. I was already one of those geeky kids who was good at Latin, but I fell in love with Ovid very quickly. At the time I had no idea that the *Ars Amatoria* was an infamously racy, scandalous work – I liked it because it wasn't Cicero or Livy. And because Ovid has the same sense of humour and wit that you sometimes find in contemporary musical lyrics, I heard the *Ars Amatoria* more as a pop song than as some two-thousand-year-old poem.

Romans, sharks and Nazis

The classical world still grips people's imaginations. Romans are a perennial favourite for TV documentaries – along with sharks and Nazis. And when students explain on their UCAS forms why they want to do Classical Studies or Ancient History at Bristol, they often talk about the films they love – *Gladiator*, *Troy*, *Alexander* – or they mention reading Greek myths and the *Asterix* books.

I think the resurgence of academic interest in the classical world is now being led by the focus on reception studies, which looks in part at how our culture for the past 2,500 years has been shaped by the ancient world. Bristol has been at the forefront of that; Professor Charles Martindale's book *Redeeming the Text* in 1993 really opened

up the field of reception studies in classics and the department has now become a world leader in reception and the classical tradition.

Classical patterns

There are different models of reception studies. At the pop-culture level you can study films like *Gladiator* or Disney's *Hercules* for their classical themes and influences – though some people question how intellectually rigorous that approach is. Recently, a lot of interesting work has been done on classical models of politics, gender and sexuality, looking at the ways in which modern culture repeats a lot of those ancient patterns. One of my particular areas of research is in the parallels between ancient and modern comedy. Athenians in the fifth century BCE laughed at fart gags, and Aristotle theorised about why someone cross-dressing or wearing a big padded phallus might be funny. And according to the latest interpretations of Aristotle on comedy, *The Simpsons* would have made a fifth-century Athenian laugh just as much as an audience today. Reception studies is about keeping a conversation going between the past and the present – not just looking at the authenticity of the armour in *Gladiator*.

Lenses and barriers

Fewer and fewer A-level students arrive at Bristol with either Greek or Latin, so we do a lot more teaching of *ab initio* languages now. We also study a lot more texts in translation. That's really energising the field, and it's great for teaching, because you can get through more – and more interesting – material. If you had to read through all 15 books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Latin, you wouldn't get much else done in a course.

But I'm old-school about learning ancient languages – I think it's essential if you want to have a real feel for your subject. A lot of classical studies and ancient history students reach the end of their third year feeling disappointed that they're not more proficient in the language; they love this author or that text, and they feel it's a shame to have to read it in translation, through the lens of another writer. But then again, being able to read Ancient Greek or Latin doesn't give you straightforward or unmediated access to the ancient world – there are always cultural barriers in between.

Back to Ovid

There are little bits of Ovid that still surprise me and make me laugh. I think he really is in a class of his own. He was once accused of killing the tradition of classical love poetry stone dead because of his sense of humour and his refusal to take anything seriously; after Ovid it's supposedly impossible to write love poetry without sounding insincere. It's certainly hard to say 'I love you' with your tongue in your cheek.

Does being a classicist affect the way I look at the world? Probably not. But being an Ovidian does, I think. I'm good at seeing the less serious side of things. ✦

A FINE MESS

You'll never look at a pile of dirty dishes in the same way again. Hilary Brown talks to artist and library assistant Susan Lovatt, who is inspired by those daily chores the rest of us find so tedious.



DAVE PRATT

Never was there a truer phrase than 'A place for everything and everything in its place', according to Susan Lovatt. Lovatt is an artist whose day job as a library assistant in the Arts and Social Sciences Library dovetails neatly with the creative side of her life. 'Contrary to popular belief, many artists like order. Art doesn't just happen; it takes a lot of organisation to produce work once you've had an idea. The ordered environment of a library is comforting.'

It was when she first started shelving books in the library that she came up with the idea that was to form the basis of her MA in printmaking and is a continuing theme in her art. 'I realised I spent a huge amount of time tidying up, both at work and at home,' she says.

It got her thinking about how daily chores are dismissed because they are mundane and repetitive. Yet monotonous tasks consume so much of our time and are so necessary, are they not worthy of attention? 'I thought of generations of my family who had never achieved anything out of the ordinary,' she muses. 'The daily business of living – washing up, making the sandwiches, doing the laundry, queuing for wartime rations – had no apparent value, and it seemed a shame it was never celebrated.'

She was also struck by how clearing up leaves no trace: 'If you clear up well, there's nothing to show for it. I thought it had cultural significance – would society fail if all the little tasks were not completed?' Bristol-born land artist Richard Long was an influence here. His work includes photographs of land he has

walked over and changed in some way; others are unaltered landscapes, capturing ideas both of passing without trace and leaving a mark.

And so began the process of enshrining the evidence of hundreds of thousands of us having done the dishes. Various artworks – including a four-foot pile of ceramic laundry, enamel shopping lists and a tiled splashback depicting Lovatt and her husband washing up (main picture) – form an installation that is intended to be displayed as a whole. It has the appearance of a museum set, and indeed both the artist and the librarian in her were drawn to methods of display, classification and storage. An awareness of archaeology, geography and anthropology is also evident, particularly in works such as 'Stilled life' and 'Half life.'

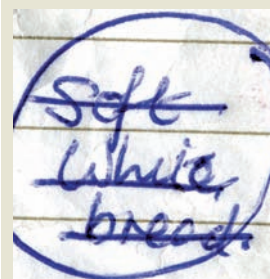
Lovatt has shown work at the Royal West of England Academy, the Business Design Centre in London and Bristol's Create Centre. The reaction is always positive: 'People smile – it's a smile of recognition.' It's not just women who like it; her work is not intended as a feminist statement. 'I have no axe to grind,' she insists. 'You could argue that women do most of the clearing up, but the chores have always been shared in my house.'

Lovatt plans to develop the theme with large, two-dimensional drawings of people performing everyday tasks. She would also like to do another wall tiling, featuring University cleaners in action: 'Our life is so much better for what they do, and we'd soon notice if they didn't do it.'

With that she dons a pair of Marigolds. There's work to be done. ✦



DAVE PRATT



'Would society fail if all the little tasks were not completed?'



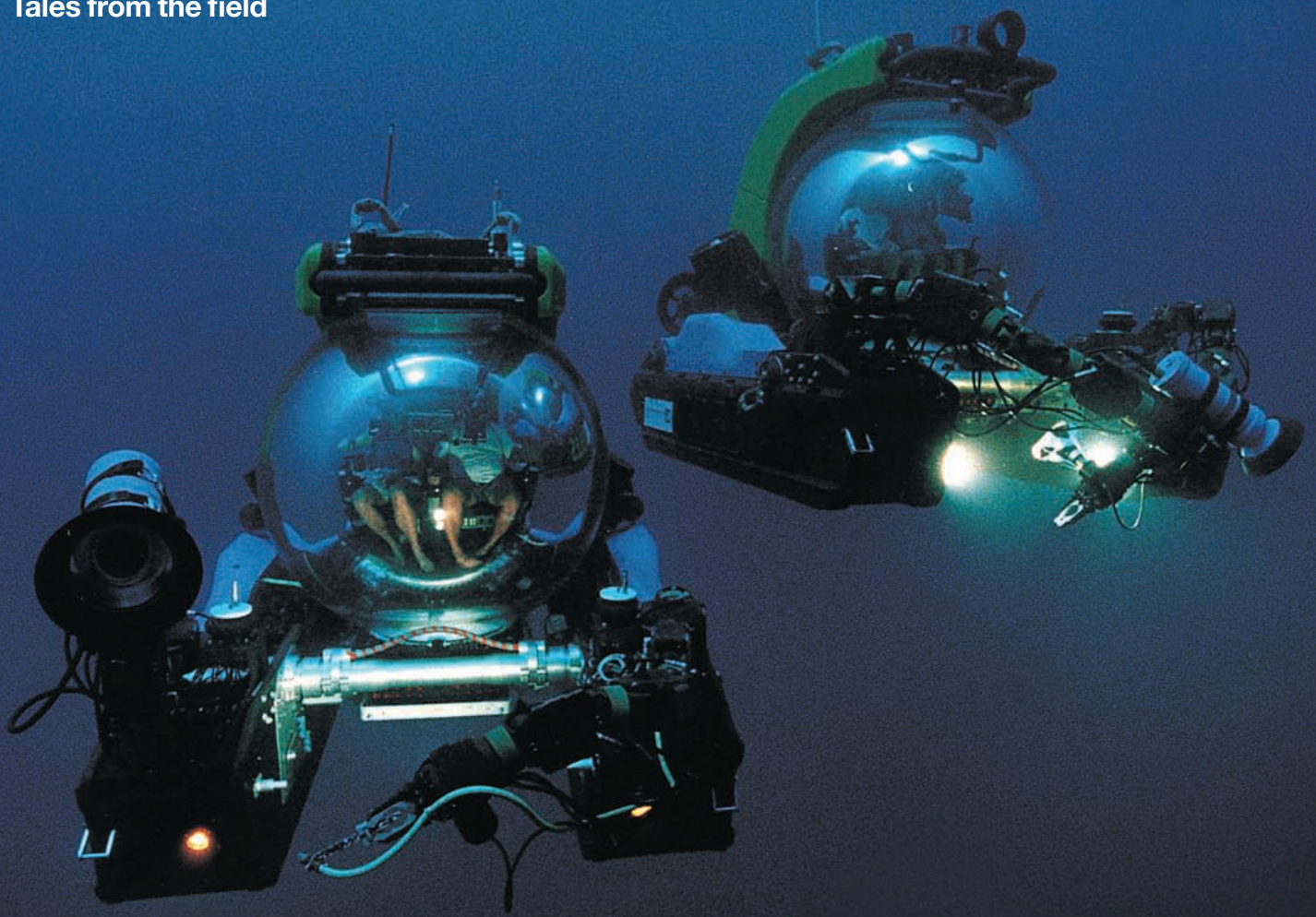
DAVE PRATT

Top: Half life 'This is one of a series of washing-up "fossils". I made these to create evidence for a task that leaves no mark. Here I put the negative space into plaster, made from where the plates had been stacked. It was hard to remove the plates, I had to pick and wash the clay out. I called it 'Half life' because we spend half our lives clearing up, it is literally cut in half and the name is reminiscent of nuclear waste. The steel case makes it seem powerful and industrial, like the water towers and gas tanks photographed by Berndt and Hilla Becher. But when you open it out, it's delicate and easily destroyed.'

Middle: Soft white bread 'This is a print of a friend's shopping list. Her mother-in-law, who likes soft white bread, was coming to stay. It wasn't one of her usual purchases so she circled it to remind herself to buy it. People's shopping lists are quite different, they can tell you something about their lives.'

Bottom: Stilled life 'I encased a stack of bowls in concrete and got a friend to cut through it vertically with his diamond-blade angle grinder. I was thinking about how core samples are taken, and how in archaeological digs you slice into the ground, reveal a bit of something and then interpret it. In cross-section, the stack is intriguing because the plates don't look quite as you'd expect.'

For more information on Lovatt's work, visit www.lovatts.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/index.html



INTO THE BLUE

If you work on animal vision, you'll probably end up doing fieldwork. When the animals concerned live deep under the sea, you're going to need more than a snorkel. Nick Riddle meets Dr Julian Partridge, Reader in Zoology in the School of Biological Sciences, to hear his tales of life beneath the bounding main.

Imagine yourself inside a motorised chamber the size of a wardrobe, one thousand metres beneath the sea. Daylight doesn't get this far. The motor and the lights are turned off. It's silent and dark, and cold.

Feeling uneasy?

Even Julian Partridge wasn't sure the first time he tried it. 'I spent most of it thinking about my children rather than about this incredible experience,' he admits. But the scientist in him eventually kicked in.

Partridge is no stranger to undersea work: he has professional diving qualifications and it was his interest in diving that helped to steer him towards his specialist field, namely the ecology of vision (the range and variation of visual systems in different species). Towards the end of his PhD, he got his first chance to work on a big research ship, a vessel operated by the Natural Environment Research Council. 'We were trawling just south of Madeira,' says Partridge. 'It was fascinating to come into contact with bizarre deep-sea animals that I had only seen in books. They

live in an extraordinary visual world: it's basically dark, with tiny flashes of blue-green light generated by other animals as bioluminescence. I realised what an interesting environment this was for looking at how visual systems evolve.'

Partridge has since collaborated with researchers at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution in the US, and got experience of working in their Johnson Sea Link submersibles. 'It's a fantastic experience; the subs have an acrylic sphere at the front, so you have an almost 360 degree view. At the back is a separate metal chamber just big enough for two people to lie down and peer out of two small windows.'

The advantages for a scientist of seeing this environment first-hand are obvious, but surprisingly few deep-sea researchers have done it. 'It's too difficult and too expensive,' says Partridge. 'There are very few submersibles worldwide that can do it.' Remotely operated vehicles are now a popular choice, but there's no substitute for

being there yourself.

Let's go back to that opening scene and look at it from the point of view of a scientist, like Partridge, researching vision in deep sea animals and their bioluminescence – the emission of light by living organisms. 'If you go down in a submersible and turn off the lights and the motors, there's almost no spontaneous bioluminescence,' he says. 'It's only when these creatures get disturbed that they start to give off light.' In the absence of humans, these disturbances mostly involve fish interacting with each other for various reasons; 'Sex and violence, as biology tends to be,' says Partridge. 'But start blundering around in a submersible and you get all sorts of light going off all the time.'

Not that the researchers go down simply to watch the light show. They're busy taking measurements and fulfilling other technical tasks. 'But I think exploration is hugely undervalued by research funders,' he says. 'It's seen as rather Victorian; that we're past that, and now we do hypothesis-driven



TIM COLBOURNE



Main image: A species of squid found at about 500 metres' depth **Top inset image:** Partridge holds a polystyrene cup that was strapped to the outside of a submersible and crushed to a fraction of its original size by the pressure at a depth of 1,000 metres **Bottom inset image:** The cover of *The Blue*, an anthology of striking images and essays to which Partridge and co-author Buzz Aldrin contributed

science. I'm not saying that most science should consist of rummaging around; clear hypotheses are essential for good science, but exploration by trained observers can lead to new hypotheses – particularly in the case of the deep sea, which is so under-explored.'

So what of the day-to-day conditions on those research ships which spend two to six weeks at sea? 'You're locked up in a small space with a small group of people,' says Partridge, 'so you have to be willing to muck in and make it work – you're all in it together. The work hours are long, and people can get quite ratty, but you have to control it.'

Going down in the submersibles – usually a three-hour dive – raises another set of issues. Even in the tropics, sea temperatures plummet once you hit one hundred metres. By one thousand metres it's two to four centigrade, so taking plenty of spare clothing is advisable. Then there are the inconveniences of human biology. 'There are no toilets in these things,' says Partridge, 'so you can't drink too much coffee in the morning.' If you *are* caught short, there's always the Piddle Pack – a plastic bag containing dry compressed sponge – 'but there's little room to use it and absolutely no privacy.'

At times, Partridge could almost be describing a space mission. He acknowledges that there are parallels, but also some striking contrasts. 'I once wrote a book chapter with the astronaut Buzz Aldrin, and one of the things we talked about was the difference between space exploration and exploring the

deep sea.' Space travel requires a huge amount of energy to escape the Earth's gravity, but very little once you're up there; and the vacuum of space means that there's no pressure on the outside of your spacecraft, so it can be as flimsy as a baked bean tin. 'But the deep sea is the reverse,' says Partridge. 'You need virtually no energy to get into it, you just let some air out and you sink. But the pressure on your vessel increases rapidly as you go down, and by one thousand metres it's about one hundred times greater than the surface pressure.' So baked bean tins are out, then.

Later this year, Partridge will take part in an expedition to the deep sea around Australia. 'We're planning to go down from the escarpment of the Great Barrier Reef – somewhere that's never been looked at before.' If this suggests that the Victorian notion of exploration for its own sake isn't quite dead, Partridge happily agrees. 'We've got a schedule of work mapped out but we're not going down with hypothesis blinkers on. I don't know what we'll find,' he says, 'but we're bound to find something unexpected. We just have to be open to it.'

After Australia, who knows what might be next? Maybe Partridge has been unduly influenced by his meeting with Aldrin, but at one point he says: 'If they asked me whether I wanted to be shot up into space, of course I'd say yes – I mean, what an opportunity!' ✎

JULIAN PARTRIDGE



NICK SMITH

Who was his first crush? What's the difference between a vice-chancellor and a Sainsbury's shopping trolley? Professor Eric Thomas answers the questions that really matter.

Q: What originally inspired you to study medicine? How do you feel about your career having moved away from this?

A: I think it was as straightforward as wanting to help people. I don't miss clinical medicine although I do miss the individual consultations, the interaction with a single human being in which you really can help them. Some of my most profound experiences have occurred in those circumstances. There was also never any doubt that it mattered – to them and to you.

Q: What do you love and hate most about your job?

A: The best bit is just revelling in the excellence of the work done by all the staff and students here. The bit I dislike the most is people who only see a glass as half empty.

Q: Have you got or ever had a mentor, role model or guru?

A: Professor Ian Cooke at the University of Sheffield who was my doctorate supervisor was a great mentor and role model. A genuine academic, a great leader, a very good doctor and great fun.

Q: Do you think we're so focused on research that teaching gets short shrift?

A: No, I don't believe that has happened here. There has been inevitable pressure on teaching as the unit of resource per student dropped over 20 years but I

Q: Do you play a musical instrument?

A: 'House of the Rising Sun' on the guitar and 'Z Cars' on the piano.

have always been impressed by how our academics take their teaching responsibilities so seriously.

Q: The Independent said you were one of the 'big beasts' of higher education. Does that mean you'll be leaving us soon?

A: A university of Bristol's quality deserves a vice-chancellor who is leading on the national and international agenda in higher education. If that is what a 'big beast' is, I'm happy to be called that. It's my opinion that I have the best job in higher education in the UK, and we have a big Centenary celebration coming up in 2009. I have no intention of going anywhere – unless the Chair of Council thinks differently!

Q: Why do you support a football team that consistently underperforms?

A: Because I was born there [Newcastle] and have supported them for as long as I can remember. This is about what defines me rather than a performance assessment.

Q: Why are so many of our students so posh?

A: The overwhelming majority of our students come from Birmingham southwards. That part of England is posher than the rest.

Q: Tell us a joke.

A: What's the difference between a vice-chancellor and a Sainsbury's

shopping trolley? It's almost impossible to fill either of them completely with food and drink, but at least one has a mind of its own (the shopping trolley).

Q: A university vice-chancellor ends up in the firing line a good deal. How well do you deal with criticism?

A: Not too badly. It hurts more if it is unjustified or simply wrong, but you do learn to grow a thick skin in this job.

Q: Complete this sentence: 'What people don't understand about being a vice-chancellor is ...'

A: '...just how complex it is.' No job has such a diversity of culture within the institution and so many different external partners. Makes for an interesting life, mind you.

Q: Who was your first crush?

A: Janice, who I worked with as a waiter at the Red Lion pub in Chester-le-Street, Co Durham in 1970. She made a serious impression on a 17-year-old boarding school boy. I wonder where she is now.

Q: Where would you like to retire?

A: London – the most exciting city on the planet. We could live in a manageable flat with no garden and really enjoy what the city has to offer.

Q: Are there any parallels between obstetrics and running a university?

A: Almost none, except that clear communications are the order of the day for both.

Q: What do you do to unwind?

A: Walk. In Bristol I love walking around Clifton and the Downs. On occasional weekends at our house in Hampshire we enjoy the river Test. I also play golf rather badly.

Q: If I find myself in the lift with you, what's a good way to break the ice?

A: Say hello and ask how my family is.

Q: If I wanted to beat you at a board or card game, which game should I choose?

A: Virtually any game you care to mention. My work life is so competitive that I just can't be bothered to compete in things like board games.

Q: What are you bad at?

A: I can't do detail. When I go to hell, I'll have an eternity of Audit Committee meetings as my punishment. ♣

Many thanks to readers who sent in questions for Professor Thomas. You will find a full CV, biography and some of his speeches and articles at www.bristol.ac.uk/university/vc



NICK RIDDLE

TWENTY QUESTIONS

Dominic Hiles is a senior technical researcher in the Institute for Learning and Research Technology, with a love of the sea and a good dinner.

What is your favourite meal?

Scallops that I've dived for in the afternoon and cooked simply the same evening.

If you were offered one superpower, what would you choose?

The ability to teleport – I'd walk out of my office at the end of the day and head into the Scottish Highlands for a spot of fresh air.

Cat or dog? Definitely dogs, not just because I have one, but because I'd never trust anything that keeps its claws hidden.

Which historical figure would you invite to dinner? Pablo Picasso, though I suspect that he'd decline.

What keeps you awake at night? My girlfriend, but I rather enjoy it.

Favourite smell? The sea – I can't help smiling as soon as I smell the sea air.

Native Americans believe we all have a Spirit Animal. What would be yours? A snow leopard, though less glamorously I had a childhood obsession with stag beetles (which have made regular appearances in history as anything from sacred symbols to a cure for gout).

Favourite spot in the world? 25 metres underwater somewhere tropical, with my torch switched off, playing with the phosphorescence and eyeing up the moray eels.

Least favourite spot? The gym – I'm just not a Lycra kinda guy.

One book, one piece of music, one film. *Down and Out in Paris and London* (George Orwell); *Wish You Were Here* (Pink Floyd); *The Italian Job* (directed by Peter Collinson).

*Nutritionist, TV presenter and author; her nutritional advice and the validity of her qualifications have been questioned by health professionals. **The Aston Martin DB5, the James Bond car.

Your biggest life-changing experience (so far)? Challenging my now-girlfriend to a chilli-eating contest, which proved to be the rather inauspicious start to our relationship.

Who would you like to banish to a desert island? 'Dr' Gillian McKeith* – I probably can't say why, but Google might provide some insight.

You can make one new law. What would it be? I'd bring back the stocks for people who wind down their car windows and fling out their rubbish. It could be ceremonially thrown back at them.

What is the University of Bristol for? Propping up the local pub scene?

Something you wish you'd known about life when you were 18? Fast cars merely attract speeding tickets more rapidly.

'My philosophy is this...' Treat people with the same respect and good will that I would hope for from them. Fulfil my part in our collective role as caretakers for the environment as diligently as I'm able to. Eat well, drink well and offer both to friends as often as possible.

Where will you be ten years from now? As far away from a computer as possible, somewhere close to a bottle of wine.

How would you sum yourself up in one line? Occasionally grumpy but easily swayed to a state of happiness by a good meal.

When and where were you happiest? Most recently, swimming with my girlfriend in crystal clear water off a tiny bay, near Achmelvich, in the North-West Highlands.

Is there a question you'd like to be asked? Would you mind taking care of the DB5** for the weekend?

THE PLUG



The absurd in literature
by Neil Cornwell

Professor Neil Cornwell of the Department of Russian has published the first study of the literary absurd since Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Unlike Esslin's study, *The absurd in literature* covers fiction as well as theatre. It presents an historical survey of absurdist literature and its forbears, covering a range of artistic movements, literary figures and selected works. This is complemented by fuller case studies of four authors: Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka and Daniil Khams. The final chapter ('Beyond the absurd?') looks at how the absurd has infiltrated literary and artistic forms into the 21st century, touching as well on popular culture, media and contemporary thought. The book should appeal to students of comparative, European and English literatures, to those concerned with theatre studies, humour theory, the avant-garde and the history of ideas, as well as to the general reader.

Manchester University Press, £17.99, paperback

THINGS YOU NEVER NOTICED

3. DANIEL THE GORILLA

This is the skeleton of Daniel, a lowland gorilla born at Bristol Zoo on 10 August 1971. He was the first gorilla to be raised successfully in captivity in Great Britain. He died on 22 August 1994 of a heart attack. At the time he weighed approximately 160 kg. The post-mortem was carried out at the Vet School in Langford and the bones were subsequently sent to the Department of Anatomy for reconstructive work. A team of technicians, including John White, Bill Wrigley and Steve Gaze, prepared the bones and articulated the skeleton, which is now on display in the lobby of the Pre-Clinical Veterinary School on Southwell Street.



NICK RIDDLE

LABOUR OF LOVE

When Dave Skelhorne took the job of contracts supervisor for Building Services, constructing a royal toilet wasn't in the job description. But, as he tells Hilary Brown, he has had to do that and much more.



DAVE PRATT

If you've ever had a blocked drain, thank your lucky stars you don't have responsibility for helping maintain the plumbing in some of the University's oldest buildings. That's part of Dave Skelhorne's job, the job he still relishes after 13 years.

Having previously worked for a contractor that had done numerous jobs for the University, he was no stranger to the vagaries of the precinct's Victorian infrastructure. But he soon found that working on the inside was very different. 'As a contractor, you're only interested in the project you've been brought in to work on. Inside it's a different story. As the liaison between Building Services, the contractor and the customer – the department where the work is being carried out – you can't walk away from things. If there's a problem, it becomes your problem; you're only ever a phone call away from disaster.'

Skelhorne has become something of an expert in identifying potential pitfalls and averting disaster. This is a particularly handy skill when many of the buildings in your remit – such as the Wills Memorial Building, the Victoria Rooms, Biological Sciences and the Physics Building – are almost a century old.

'One of the main tasks is making sure water doesn't get in,' says Skelhorne. 'Old buildings have more than one roof, and many roofs means many gutters, which easily get blocked. Chip papers and plastic coffee cups are the usual suspects in the middle of a city.'

Many gutters also means many drains; it's not just a case of stopping water getting

'You're only ever a phone call away from disaster.'

in, but also helping it get away. One of the major causes of blocked drains is tree roots – there are lots of mature trees around the precinct – and the chances are that when there's a problem it's under a road or in someone's driveway.

There are some things that can't be anticipated, such as a six-foot-wide ceiling rose crashing down in the Centre for Reproductive Medicine. 'It was several inches thick,' remembers Skelhorne, 'and it destroyed the ends of two beds, fortunately missing the patients in them.'

Then there are the things you know about, but aren't quite sure how to handle – the construction of a loo for a visit from the Queen in 1997, for example. 'That was a daunting task,' says Skelhorne, 'because you don't know what standards are expected. I carefully created a toilet for her, a conversion of two cubicles into one. To conceal an old drain cover, I installed a throne, consisting of a box with an upholstered top in University red. Unfortunately, her visit was cancelled due to Tony Blair entering Downing Street!'

Skelhorne is nearing the end of one of the biggest projects he has overseen: the restoration of the Wills Memorial Building tower. Construction work is disruptive at the best of times, but in a working building it's particularly difficult. 'Dust is unavoidable,' he says, 'and noise is another problem, not just in terms of teaching; a little bit of noise can ruin an experiment, for example.'

Managing such a project is all about keeping people in the picture. 'People sometimes see me as the prophet of doom, but I try to be fair to everyone.

As a facilitator, being seen to be fair is an important part of the job.'

It's not the people who have caused Skelhorne problems on the Wills project so much as the bird life. 'When the building was fully scaffolded, pigeons would perch on the rails on the western elevation and warm their rears in the afternoon sun. When it got dark they would come inside the scaffolding and nest among the pinnacles. We had to encase the scaffolding in horizontal netting to stop them.'

With retirement looming, it's fitting that the restoration should be one of Skelhorne's legacies. He's an avid fan of the building's architect, George Oatley, and his enthusiasm spills over into the tours he leads, the proceeds of which go to the Wallace and Gromit Grand Appeal at Bristol Children's Hospital. 'I'm always learning something new about the building,' he says, 'and the more we restore, the more we discover. I'm cataloguing the grotesques on the side of the tower and am at the point where all the mythical creatures have been used up, and ordinary people's faces are being depicted, probably people who once worked on the building.'

Never mind that the restoration has taken three hours of each of Skelhorne's working days for the past year; it's been worth it. 'If the designers could come back and see it, they'd say it looks as good as the day it was built,' he declares. 'I think we'd all agree with that. ♣'

Tours of Wills and other University buildings can be booked at www.bristol.ac.uk/cms/cpe/university-tours.html

FOODS & FADS

Pity the academic who has to deal with an outbreak of explosive flatulence from the camera crew on live television. Sue Baic, Lecturer in Nutrition and Public Health in the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, has endured this and other indignities to get her message across to a diet-weary public. She talks to Nick Riddle.

Thanks to the nation's current obsession with healthy eating, Sue Baic gets a lot more calls from the media these days. But if they want an endorsement of the latest exotically named miracle fruit or fad diet, they go away crestfallen.

Baic's field is evidence-based nutrition, which has little in common with the turf patrolled by primetime TV's 'diet doctors'. Since she became programme director of the Masters course in Physical Activity, Nutrition and Public Health in 2001, she has seen nutrition become a key area of media interest – and confusion.

Take superfoods, for example. 'Focusing on blueberries or pomegranates isn't particularly useful,' says Baic. 'The media loves to grab hold of particular foods, but you should be looking at your overall diet and pattern of eating.' At the same time, she understands why the media seize on the singular. 'I'm a big reader of newspapers,' she says, 'and if something doesn't hook me in, I don't read it.'

Nothing hooks TV viewers in quite as well as the prospect of a slanging match. On at least one occasion in her role as media expert, Baic has found herself in the ring.

'It was on a live daytime chat show,' she says, 'one of those shows where the audience can attack you.' Baic was brought on to discuss the pros and cons of obesity surgery with an audience concerned about their weight. But there was something she didn't know. 'They told the audience before I came on that I was going to tell them where they'd gone wrong. I couldn't understand the air of hostility before I'd even opened my mouth.' Wisely, she avoided the strident tones the audience had been expecting: 'I'd prepared what I wanted to say in advance, so I carried on and explained the procedure, and outlined the risks and benefits of gastric banding and stomach stapling.'

Baic's other media work has included interviews for *Diet Trials*, a BBC-commissioned study of commercial weight-loss treatments, appearances on the *Today* programme on Radio 4, and a segment on

BBC 2's *Don't Die Young*, presented by Bristol's Alice Roberts. She has also ventured where many academics would fear to tread: kids' telly. 'The programme was called *The Top Ten of Everything*, and the producers wanted me for a segment on the ten most flatulence-inducing foods. It was based on a Canadian study which a fellow academic had actually carried out, and my role was to talk the audience through the list. I said I'd do it, because I hoped kids might get the message that it can be fun to eat fruit and veg.'

But what's the dress code for children's TV? She borrowed a hooded top from her partner's teenage daughter. 'After the dry runs, the floor manager said: "OK, Sue, you can get changed – we're doing the live one now"'. Then it dawned on me that kids' TV is all about glamour; the female presenters wear boob tubes. And there I was in my casual kit, looking a bit rough with nothing to change into...'

There was one more surprise in store: 'At the end of the live programme, the camera crew rigged up this big flatulent explosion in the studio, just to see how I reacted. And I leapt out of my skin!'

A more common (and less traumatic) challenge is simply to make mainstream nutrition interesting – perhaps because so much of it is common sense. 'But it is possible,' Baic insists, and cites as an example the now standard five-a-day guideline for eating fruit and vegetables. 'From what you hear on TV, you'd think they have to be fennel and alfalfa seeds, or at least all fresh produce.' Not so, says Baic. 'It can be frozen, tinned, fresh or dried. It can even be juice or smoothies.' Frozen peas count as one, and so do tinned tomatoes, baked beans and raisins.

Another common-sense angle is that, contrary to the media's fondness for black-and-white statements about nutrition, the truth is – as always – more of a greyish colour. 'A lot of it is about relative risk,' says Baic. 'We think that having five portions of fruit or veg a day helps protect against some forms of cancer, but nobody's proven that. The most we can say is that this is our best interpretation of the knowledge as it stands at the moment.'

Last year's controversy over oily fish, says Baic, provides an object lesson in taking media coverage with a pinch of salt. A new study contradicted the conventional view that oily fish can help prevent heart disease. 'It was one trial among hundreds, and the others suggested that oily fish is beneficial. But the press jumped on it and said: "This proves that fish oil is useless after all"'. When the media approached Baic, she suggested that the trial's methodology might not have been tight enough. 'But they printed something along the lines of "Nutritionists cannot agree about oily fish".'

Thankfully, some questions have clearer answers. Baic often writes in response to health queries on newspapers' Q&A pages. 'A reader recently asked: "Does a pint of cider count as one of my five daily fruit and veg?"' I wrote in to tell him no: with clear apple juice or cider, all the pulp has been removed, and that's where most of the antioxidants are. You'd have to drink at least a litre of cider to get the equivalent of one apple.'

Appearing in the media can have some advantages, says Baic. There is some evidence that scientific research covered in the media is more likely to be cited by other academics, and it helps to inform the public about the work that universities do. 'What's more, our current and potential students say they enjoy seeing the department and the University in the news.'

Neither are university lecturers averse to seeing themselves in print. Baic has co-authored several books, including *Nutrition for Dummies*, *GL for Dummies* and the forthcoming *Living Gluten-free for Dummies* (for people with coeliac disease). 'The publishers hired escalators on the London Underground to promote *GL for Dummies*, with the cover on display all the way up both sides. We made a special trip to London just so we could go and find them!' ❁



'The media loves to grab hold of particular foods, but you should be looking at your overall diet.'

... A RABBI

From scientist to rabbi was not such a leap of faith, as Progressive Jewish chaplain Rabbi Ron Berry explains to Hilary Brown.

My father was a card-carrying member of the Communist party and would have nothing to do with religion, so I grew up knowing very little about my Jewish heritage. My mother did enrol me in religion school attached to Romford Synagogue, and for a while I went to Hebrew classes on Sunday mornings. I wasn't very good at it; we didn't speak it at home and there's a limit to what an eight-year-old boy can learn in two hours a week, so I started playing truant. I used to get off the bus half way there, spend the return bus fare on ice cream and walk home.

Later on, a teacher encouraged me to take lessons for my Bar Mitzvah. I can't say I learned much Hebrew for that either, just a few lines parrot-fashion to get by. Nevertheless, I had always had a religious inclination and took to reading the Hebrew scriptures with a torch under the bedclothes at night.

I gained a degree in Zoology from the University of London, and went off to Nigeria to work as a volunteer for the development charity VSO. I was laboratory superintendent in

the veterinary section of the Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research. Many of the Nigerians I worked with were Muslims. They had an attitude of respect towards me because I was Jewish. On the other hand, many of the ex-pat English vets there seemed anti-Semitic.

During this time, I befriended the Catholic priests who ran the mission schools in the bush. They were always asking me questions about Judaism which I couldn't answer. All this was a formative influence: it made me want to understand the reasons for anti-Semitism and to satisfy the priests' curiosity – and my own – about my Jewishness.

In 1974, after a spell in Zambia as a tsetse control officer (working on the prevention of disease spread by these flies), I went to Israel to do the 'kibbutz thing' and to find some answers to my questions. It turned out to be a secular kibbutz, so I learnt nothing about Judaism, but I did have a lot of fun! Back in Britain, I worked in Southmead Hospital in the pathology lab of the human cytogenetics unit, which led to a two-year secondment in Reykjavik.

When I returned to Bristol, I became a science teacher. While teaching at Hartcliffe School, I became a member of the Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation. I learned the main prayers of the regular service of worship and became a lay preacher.

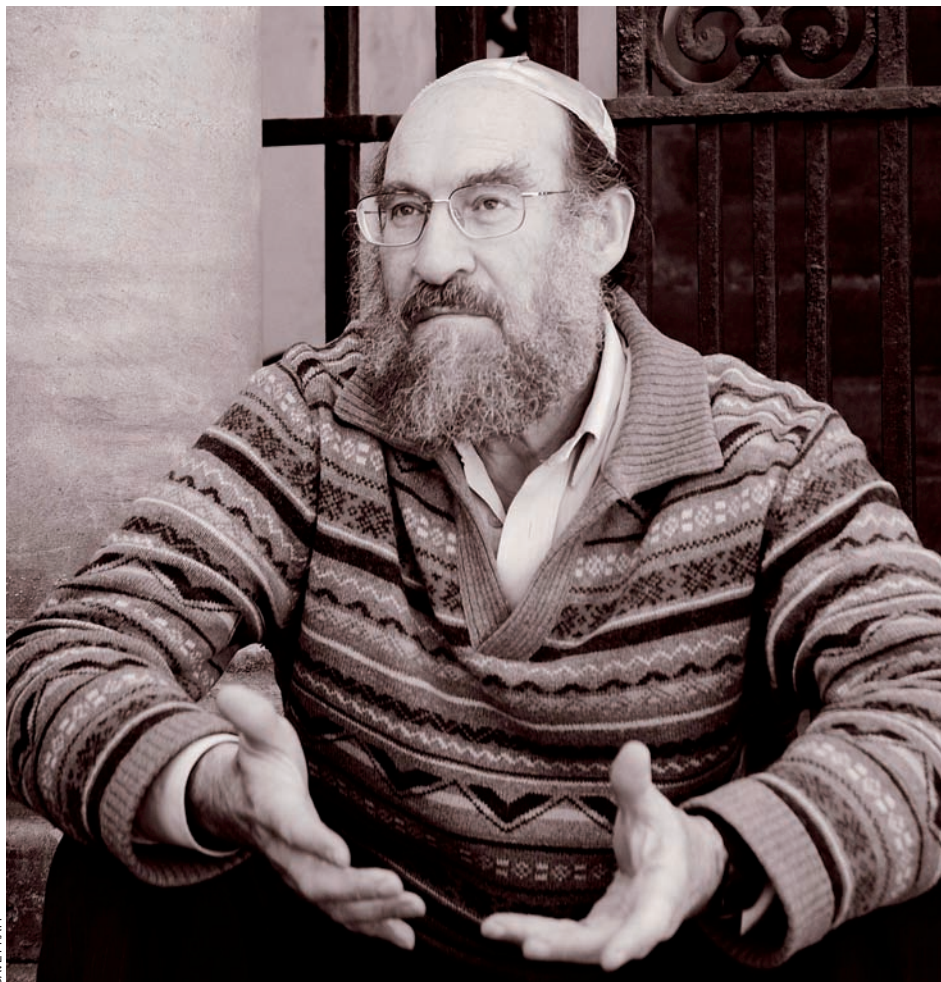
One of the rabbinic students who visited the synagogue suggested I attend a summer school at Leo Baeck College, the rabbinic training seminary in London. Here I discovered how wonderful it was to study rabbinic texts. By this time I had done a PGCE at Bristol's Graduate School of Education and got a job teaching chemistry at Lockleaze Secondary School. I enjoyed it, but the summer school made me want to study full-time to become a rabbi.

After three years as a rabbi in Newcastle and Darlington, I returned to the South West. I wanted to write a torah scroll, which contains the five books of Moses and is used in worship in synagogues. To prepare, I needed kosher parchment and quills cut from turkey feathers. My plumber directed me to West Somerset Community College, where the students raised turkeys to sell to staff and parents at Christmas. I was invited to collect the wing feathers from the slaughtered birds, which, as it happens, were slaughtered in the traditional Jewish way.

Then a strange thing happened. I had to leave the quills to dry out for a year until they were resilient enough to use. It was a year later to the day that I received a commission from the West London Synagogue to write a torah scroll. I said to my wife, "It's a sign!". It took me 15 months to write the scroll, 42 lines a day.

I now serve the Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation. I am also a teacher in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies and a member of the multi-faith chaplaincy teams at both Bristol and the University of the West of England.

The move from science, to teaching science, to teaching theology and preaching has had a kind of inevitability about it. It's as if I'm being led along a certain path. I have no regrets; I enjoy everything I do. It's all meaty, meaningful stuff. ✦





IMAGES OF CHINA, LOST AND FOUND

Clockwise from top: Panoramic views of a mountain path in western China and of the river in Shanghai, a hundred years ago; outside Hong Kong's Botanical Gardens; inside the tea tasting room of Oswald and Co in Foochow

In 2008, 'China Now', a celebration of modern Chinese culture, will be running across Britain, but in attics across the country lie unique pieces of evidence about 'China then': photographs of the pre-revolutionary era. The intimacy of Sino-British relations – not always welcome, of course – meant that tens of thousands of Britons visited or worked and lived there before the 1949 communist revolution. Many took photographs, and where they survive these private records of Chinese places and people offer unique glimpses of a country now changing irrevocably. Working with

British and French collaborators, a team in Historical Studies led by Professor Robert Bickers and Jamie Carstairs is locating and digitising such collections, and placing them online. That snapshot in your grandmother's album might be the only surviving record anywhere of a slice of the Chinese past. The project website offers a research resource, and a way of sending these images home: <http://chp.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr> ❧

Endnotes

1 'Rigoletto, Sadler's Wells Opera at the New Theatre, London', by designer Frederick Crooke, is one of the images in the University of Bristol Theatre Collection's Visualising Theatre project. More than 1,000 images from the collection have been digitised to provide a fully searchable online picture library at www.bristol.ac.uk/theatrecollection/search.html.

2 'Watching', by 16-year-old Nathan Al-Shehab, was the winner in the 16 years and over open category of a photography competition run by the Vet School in February. The competition was part of the Spring Hop event at Langford to celebrate rabbits and brighten up the winter months.

3 Image from 'Muerte, ¿Bienvenida? Images of Death in Mexico', an exhibition by Helena Hernández Tapia at last term's Semana Cultural (Cultural Week). This annual event, organised by the Department of Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, celebrates Luso-Hispanic culture.

4 Local schoolchildren construct a model building before testing it to destruction on the shaking-table at the Bristol Laboratory for Advanced Dynamics Engineering. They were competing in the sixth annual IDEERS (Introducing and Demonstrating Earthquake Engineering Research in Schools) challenge, organised by the Department of Civil Engineering and funded by Widening Participation. It is run in collaboration with At-Bristol and Bristol City Council Children and Young People's Services.

5 Local artist Phillipa Fawcett, who has repainted the heraldic shields on the Wills Memorial Building as part of the restoration of the 68-metre-high tower.

6 A cranium reconstructed from 40,000-year-old bone fragments showing both modern human and Neanderthal traits. The bones were recovered and analysed by Professor João Zilhão of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology and Professor Erik Trinkaus of Washington University and

colleagues. Their findings indicate that humans continued to evolve long after they were established in Europe, and interbred with Neanderthals as they settled across the continent.

7 One of the world's oldest and rarest plants, the Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*) is a new addition to the plant collection at the University's Botanic Garden. From the time of the dinosaurs, the species survived undiscovered in Wollemi National Park, Australia until spotted in 1994. When the plant is large enough it will be planted in the garden's Evolutionary Dell, where it will find a home in the Cretaceous section.



COURTESY OF THEATRE COLLECTION



NATHAN AL-SHEHAB



HELENA HERNANDEZ TAPIA



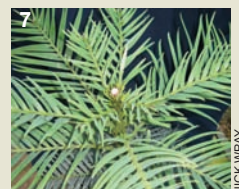
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