

# Subtext 5

Spring 2008



## **Plant life**

The making of  
a botanist



## **Both sides now**

A scholar tries her  
hand at soundbites



## **Meeting of minds**

Two sociologists  
walk on to a  
badminton court ...



## **Regarding Henry**

Is it a bird?  
Is it a plane?  
No, it's the second  
monarch of the  
House of Tudor!



University of  
**BRISTOL**



# Welcome

This being the fifth issue, *Subtext* has hit the magic 100 pages of insight from and about people who make Bristol University such a remarkable place. The great thing is that we feel we've hardly scratched the surface. Not a week goes by without meeting or hearing about colleagues – academic and otherwise – with fascinating histories, awesome talents, unusual jobs, provocative ideas and amazing pastimes.

*Subtext* is building into a valuable archive of words and images. Our only regret is that we didn't start sooner. How bizarre that it's easy to look back through donkey's years of committee minutes but it's hard to find much out about the people who took the decisions and did the work.

In this issue you can have a ringside seat as two intellectual heavyweights go a few rounds on multiculturalism (p10); meet a musician and technical wizard with a dodgy metronome and a passing acquaintance with Portishead (the band, not the town) (p17); and learn about a multi-talented woman who occasionally drives a car the size of Belgium (p13).

Thanks to everyone who has taken the trouble to email us about *Subtext*. Comments and ideas are always welcome.

**Barry Taylor**

barry.taylor@bristol.ac.uk



Subtext Spring 2008

*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**  
APB Colour Print. 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](http://bristol.ac.uk/university/publications/subtext). For the latest news about the University, see [bristol.ac.uk/news](http://bristol.ac.uk/news)

For an insight into research conducted at the University, see *re:search* magazine and visit [bristol.ac.uk/researchreview](http://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](mailto:news-team@bristol.ac.uk)

*Subtext* No 5, February 2008  
© University of Bristol 2008  
Extracts may only be reproduced with the permission of the Public Relations Office.



## Contents

**How I got here** 4  
Dr Sonia Bhalotra considers the laws of motion that led her from Delhi to Bristol and the competing impulses of family, protest and career.

**Tales from the field** 6  
What was a climate researcher doing collecting stalagmites in a cave thousands of metres above sea level in Papua New Guinea? Dr Erica Hendy explains herself.

**Profile: Regarding Henry** 8  
He's probably England's most famous monarch, thanks partly to Hans Holbein the Younger, says Dr Tania String.

**Feature: Meeting of minds** 10  
Family heritage, arguments and badminton – three topics close to the hearts of Professors Tariq Modood and Gregor McLennan from the Department of Sociology.

**Another string** 13  
When she isn't working with databases, Maggie Shapland tinkers with ancient machinery and gets a lot of soaked trouser legs.

**The scholar and the soundbite** 14  
Human genetics: lots of scope for media scaremongering and wild inaccuracies. But Dr Ainsley Newson tried life as a journalist – and came away impressed.

**Bristol in pieces** 16  
Paul Grant answers 20 questions; two books get plugged; and a stone mongrel on a plinth gets noticed.

**Other people's jobs** 17  
Sound words from Jonathan Scott, Studio Manager in the Department of Music.

**Why I became ... a botanist** 18  
Professor Simon Hiscock blames the bee orchid for his choice of career.

**From the archives** 19  
A piece of headgear, once worn by an esteemed dental surgeon and caving expert (no, really) emerges from the vaults.

**Next issue due out June 2008**

**100% recycled**  
This document is printed on 100% recycled paper

**recycle**  
When you have finished with this document please recycle it.





JASON INGRAM

## How I got here

# SONIA BHALOTRA

*Dr Sonia Bhalotra, Reader in Economics, might have been a physicist or philosopher. She talks to Barry Taylor about her route to Bristol and reflects on family history, tree hugging and equilibrium.*

**My father was not born into poverty, but he experienced it soon enough.** His father died young and my father was one of 11 siblings. He grew up in the part of India that became Pakistan. The Partition of India interrupted his graduate studies, and the family had to leave everything they owned and flee across the border. His experience of poverty made him determined that his own children would be well educated and become professionals.

**I was the last-born of three girls.** My parents had a baby boy, but he died when he was a few weeks old. They hoped to have a son but ended up with three daughters. My father felt that the only respectable careers for women were teaching and medicine. Because teachers were poorly paid in India, he decided that we should all be doctors. He reminded us of this every Sunday at lunch. Both my sisters are now medical doctors.

**I also had a place at medical college, but I got cold feet.** It was the thought of blood and injections. My father was very disappointed and decided that the next best thing for a career was economics. I wanted to study physics, literature or philosophy, but as we had already done battle on this issue, I gave in.

**I had a greater passion for physics than I did for economics.** But when I was working for my doctorate it occurred to me that physics had a lot in common with economics. Perhaps it's that both are concerned with equilibrium and laws of motion.

**Early on, I was drawn to the social dimensions of economics.** As an undergraduate, I worked with a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Each summer we would go to the foothills of the Himalayas and engage with other, local NGOs. One summer we visited the Chipko belt where women had clung to trees to prevent commercial cutters coming in and destroying their natural environment. Lasting community networks emerged across scattered villages as a result of the Chipko movement – look it up on Wikipedia!

**One year, we met a doctor who visited the villages every month on his motorbike.** He said the women wouldn't see him about anything to do with their reproductive health because it was too personal, so we mediated. Other things we did there included campaigning against the Tehri dam and in favour of free access for villagers to local forests.

(No, my father wasn't pleased about my 'hippie' associations and my bringing bearded, kurta-clad men home.)

**In Delhi, we went on street marches about all sorts of things** – nuclear disarmament, deforestation, the sexual harassment of women on buses and so on. When I came to Oxford as a postgraduate, I was surprised that protests were so rare. I still find it strange that people here are quite compliant and don't demand change.

**When Indira Gandhi was assassinated in 1984, I was at a lecture at university in Delhi.** Violence broke out on the streets and it was difficult to get home. Eventually I made it and watched from the roof as the city went up in flames. Thousands of Sikhs were massacred. We had no government and thought Pakistan might take over. There were rumours that the water supply had been poisoned.

**I applied to go to Oxford as a postgraduate student because it was beautiful.** A friend from a poetry group I was in went to Balliol College to study literature. She wrote to me each week, describing Oxford, and it sounded like something out of the English novels we read as children. It didn't disappoint me. I met the most amazing and diverse people, I learnt a lot about other cultures and disciplines outside economics, I discovered western classical music and I relished the freedom of being able to cycle everywhere. The city seemed peaceful and uncrowded after Delhi.

**My current research crosses economics with demography, evolutionary biology, anthropology, sociology, politics and statistics.** Now that I can choose what I study, I love my work. I just wish it were easier to find stretches of quiet time for it. I've been researching the effects of economic cycles on education, health, fertility and work. Child mortality rises during recessions in India, especially among girls, and I'm investigating whether women who can time their births choose to avert birth in recessions. In another study, I'm looking at the effects of adverse conditions (poverty, extreme weather, disease prevalence) in childhood on height at maturity. I've also researched why children work in Asia and Africa, and I've found that while child labour is compelled by poverty for boys, it isn't for girls – they work even when it's not 'necessary'. I'm currently investigating the role of natural selection (as opposed to parental choices) in determining sex ratios, using data on about four million children and one million women from 50 poor countries. If, by nature, boys are more likely to be born in high-status households, parental behaviour may be secondary.

**I almost went to the US twice.** After the MPhil in Oxford, I got a PhD scholarship at Cornell. But I liked Oxford better, so I came back after a term. And after Oxford, I got a Rockefeller postdoctoral fellowship at Yale, but I declined it to come to Bristol.

**I enjoy the seasons in England, and the flowers, and the intellectual freedom.** I like Bristol. I think many of my colleagues are seriously smart people. But sometimes I need to move. I spent two years away, working in Cambridge. At that time, I was invited frequently to visit the International Labour Organization in Geneva. Earlier, I spent a term at Berkeley and did some stints at the World Bank in Washington DC. I also spent a year each at the universities of Sussex and Edinburgh. I travel to India regularly. I miss India more deeply the longer I'm here, but I think I'm lucky to have two worlds to live in. ❀



# DOWN UNDER

*What are the two essential items for a caving expedition in Papua New Guinea? A machete and an umbrella, of course. Dr Erica Hendy, RCUK Fellow in the Departments of Earth Sciences and Biology, tells Hilary Brown about the perils of pot-holing in the name of climate research.*

It's not often that you get to hold 35,000 years of history in the palm of your hand,' says Erica Hendy. She's tracing faint lines on a section of stalagmite collected from a cave in Papua New Guinea. One shows a period of drought, another a change in the strength of the Asian-Australian monsoon.

Not only has New Zealander Hendy come half way round the world to date this and other samples (the Bristol Isotope Group, an interdepartmental collective hosted in the Department of Earth Sciences, has vast expertise in this area), she also went to considerable trouble to collect them in the first place. Why on earth would you choose a barely accessible mountain range for your fieldwork, where the most recent maps date from the mid-'70s, sodden tracks masquerade as roads, communication with the locals requires three levels of translation, and two days of hiking across alpine grassland at 3,600 metres above sea level could lead nowhere?

Hendy admits it was a risky decision. She wasn't even sure there were any caves in the areas she wanted to explore. All she had to go by were a few aerial photos of some sink holes, a collection of old newsletters published in the '70s by the mainly expat caving community based in Papua New Guinea and some 35-year-old maps produced by the Australian government before the country got its independence.

But with its dramatic topography and its location surrounded by the warmest ocean waters on Earth, Papua New Guinea is of key interest to climate researchers. In this part of the tropics, warm, moist air rises up to form bands of intense rainfall – the Asian-Australian monsoon system. Changes in the temperature or site of these air movements have catastrophic climatic effects around the world, causing severe drought or flooding.

'As the monsoon system swings seasonally between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, it runs into a barrier – the 1,600-kilometre-long mountain chain of peaks up to 5,000 metres high that forms the central spine of New Guinea. I wanted to track the behaviour of these air masses over the mountain range,' explains Hendy. 'I knew the area was limestone. The challenge was to find caves, and then it was a case of whether we would find useful stalagmites in them.'

The first hurdle was getting to the remote area inland from Kabwum in the east. Papua New Guinea is hardly on the tourist trail, and development is hampered by the rugged terrain and the high cost of putting in infrastructure. Negotiating the four-kilometre-high mountain range by plane was nothing compared with the landing – the runways are alarmingly short and slope uphill. 'The only road was barely passable by four-wheel drive,' recalls Hendy. Two descriptions of the road conditions in the local pidgin sum it up: 'road buggerup' and 'road nogut'. 'Mostly we got around by foot, like everyone else, along the muddy tracks criss-crossing the hill slopes.'

When she wasn't trying to avoid getting trench foot, she was worrying about being swept away in a raging torrent. The mountains are bisected by rivers, often swollen with rain, and the only way to cross them is on bridges made from a couple of tree trunks and a bit of

bamboo, lashed together with strips of vegetation and secured at each end by a pile of stones.

But with inadequate maps showing villages that didn't exist and the multitude of unmarked tracks, how did she know where she was going? 'We couldn't possibly have done it without the help and permission of the locals – and I mean *all* the locals,' says Hendy.

New Guineans, it seems, have a decidedly bottom-up approach to decision-making. As the evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond explains in his book, *Collapse*: 'Instead of hereditary leaders or chiefs, each village has a "bigman", who by force of personality is more influential than other individuals, even though he still lives in a hut and tills a garden like everybody else. Decisions are reached by means of everybody in the village sitting down together and talking.'

'And talking ... and talking,' adds Hendy. 'Everyone has the right to offer an opinion, and the whole extended family has to agree before you can go into a cave on their land.'

The process was even more protracted because of the language barrier. Hendy would explain her aims in English, a colleague from the Department of Environment would translate them into Tok Pisin (the official national language), and a local politician would communicate them to the bigman in the local Tok Ples, one of 800 languages spoken in Papua New Guinea. The bigman would then summarise the proposals for the benefit of the villagers, and the talks would begin. Add to that the complication that the Tok Pisin word for cave, 'hul-bilong-stone', has multiple definitions, from sink hole to tufa (a waterfall-like calcium carbonate deposit in streams), and you could be in for – literally – days of discussions.

'People were sometimes suspicious of our motives,' says Hendy. 'The only reason they could see for anyone wanting to disappear down a muddy hole in the ground was that there must be gold there.' But most were easily persuaded of the scientific aims of the expedition; climate, after all, is very much on the minds of subsistence farmers, and the local people had had first-hand experience during the 1998 El Niño event of the devastating effects of drought, bush fires and frosts on their crops.

'Even when we'd got agreement to explore a particular cave,' continues Hendy, 'it sometimes turned out, once you got there, that it had disappeared in a landslide decades ago or that a river made it inaccessible for half the year.'

At least there wasn't any danger of getting lost, as Hendy and her colleagues, three experienced cavers, were accompanied everywhere by a group of villagers, each equipped with an umbrella (because it rains a lot) and a machete (because it's an all-round useful implement for a bush walk). 'It takes a long time to set up the ropes to go down a cave, so as people got bored watching us they would start idly clearing away the shrubbery. We had to keep a very wary eye on our ropes.'

Hendy admits that having such a massive audience put quite a bit of pressure on the team, and not just while they were caving. 'Even at night, staying in a local village house, we'd easily have a dozen people sleeping in the same room. The first thing I wanted to do when I got home was go into my room, shut the door and be on my own!'

Despite the difficulties, the trip resulted in some rare finds, including a stalagmite from a cave at 3,670 metres above sea level – probably the highest such sample ever collected. Hendy's hope is that the material will help to fill some of the gaps in existing climate records. 'It's a long process, but understanding past atmospheric changes will help us predict what our future will be like, and this distant and magical place of Papua New Guinea has a lot to tell us about rainfall patterns across the world.'



**Clockwise from top:** Papua New Guinea's 'magical cloud forest' more than makes up for wet feet and leeches; one of the many precarious wood and bamboo bridges; exploring Karangingbang Cave; the process of 'talk-talk' with villagers; Hendy with Tala from Satop village, carrying the two essential items for going anywhere – a machete and an umbrella



# REGARDING HENRY

*Dr Tania String, Lecturer in the History of Art, wanted to do a thorough study of a famous portrait of Henry VIII. So – as she explains to Nick Riddle – she dismantled him.*



'I didn't have one of those childhood fascinations with Henry VIII,' says Dr Tania String. 'I've never wanted to know what made him tick.' The Henry she's interested in is the one in Renaissance portraits, especially the famously iconic rendition by Hans Holbein the Younger and the influence of this picture on English art.

Hear the name 'Henry VIII' and the chances are that it's Holbein's 1537 portrait you call to mind, even if it's a modern reiteration by actors like Charles Laughton, Keith Michell or Ray Winstone. The posture assumed by this figure – square-shouldered, legs astride, arms braced against the body – has been in the repertoire of manliness for centuries. And its point of entry, says String, was Holbein's portrait.

Her own entry into the Henrician universe occurred at Florida State University, where she was introduced to Northern Renaissance art, Holbein and portraiture, especially depictions of Henry VIII and his wives. Her PhD took her first to the University of Texas and then to the Warburg Institute in London on a prestigious Kress Fellowship ('They must have realised I couldn't do research on Henry VIII and Holbein in Austin, Texas'). Somewhere along the way, Holbein's famous depiction of Henry became a central topic for her.

The original portrait was part of a large mural that Holbein painted on one wall of the Privy Chamber in Whitehall Palace in 1537. Henry VIII stands with his father (Henry VII), his mother (Elizabeth of York) and his third wife (Jane Seymour). A fire destroyed the mural in 1698, but two other versions – Holbein's original cartoon and a 1667



copy of the mural (above) – survive and serve as the basis for all that Henrician iconography.

String chose to examine this portrait in an unorthodox way: by taking the figure of Henry apart and analysing the components. Legs, shoulders, beard, arms, elbows, codpiece – all make their own statements about the masculinity of Henry VIII. And the picture lends itself to this intensive approach because it is less a naturalistic portrait than – to use a not very Tudor phrase – a branding exercise.

'Holbein wasn't just capturing a moment when Henry was standing around like that,' says String. 'Holbein had used some of the elements in previous pictures, but he pushed those elements further to create this perfect moment that then becomes absolutely definitive.' Taking the portrait apart piece by piece highlights the fact that Holbein 'assembled' his components to make Henry look like a powerful and masculine monarch.

That strategy becomes all the more significant, argues String, because of Henry's battles with the Roman Catholic Church and his determination to

establish himself as the head of the English Church. The portrait came soon after the Act of Supremacy in 1534 – legislation that granted Henry the legal authority of the Sovereign of England. 'Until then, he didn't pay so much attention to getting the best man in town to do his portraits,' says String. 'But once he realised what portraiture could do for him, Henry chose to have himself portrayed several times by Holbein and depictions of him became very consistent.'

Today's students are accustomed to a culture saturated with images – but does that make them more visually sophisticated than previous generations? String isn't sure. 'What we do is more about leaving that non-stop passage of images,' she says. 'We freeze-frame and look at an image for a long time. Not to decode it or "solve the puzzle" – I hate all that *Da Vinci Code* stuff – but to see how it's constructed, how it reflects the conventions of the period. Students are often surprised at how much that kind of examination can yield.'

String's MA students are getting the chance to look at a selection of Renaissance portraits more closely than they've ever been looked at before, thanks to a new project in conjunction with the National Portrait Gallery (NPG). Each student is making a special study of one portrait from the NPG's collections as part of the preparation for an exhibition entitled 'On the Excellencie of Women: Tudor and Jacobean Portraits of Women'. This will be the first time in 40 years that some of the portraits have been on display. The exhibition opens in March at Montacute House, a National Trust property in Somerset.

'They've been researching each portrait – the artist, the sitter, the context – and looking at them in great detail,' says String. 'For the exhibition they'll write the captions and the information panels, and they'll have a say in the layout of the pictures and the decoration in the room. They'll handle the publicity, the handouts and the information for schools and families. They'll also give regular gallery talks during the rest of the year.'

Such close attention has led to plenty of observations about 16th-century notions of the virtuously dressed woman. But again, there are no Dan Brown-style revelations. 'We can't look into the eyes of a Renaissance portrait and say, "Ah yes, she's a bit of a minx",' says String. 'We may think we can discern a personality, but we can really only detect patterns and spot exceptions to them.'

She finds herself spotting that Henry VIII pose everywhere: just look at Superman and Batman, as well as figures of slightly lesser stature. 'David Caruso in *CSI: Miami* stands around a lot looking completely Henrician,' she says. 'He puts his feet apart and his hands on his hips and his jacket spreads out.' Not that she thinks it's in conscious imitation of the Holbein portrait, but it's an indication of how ubiquitous that masculine stance has become.

String's office is also beginning to be colonised by Henry ephemera: a few miniature monarchs are starting to appear, their tiny feet planted on her bookshelves. 'I resisted collecting them for years,' she says. But you can't keep a good man down. ✱

**Above:** A 1667 copy of Holbein's Whitehall mural by Remigius van Leemput



# MEETING OF MINDS

*Two boys, same age, one the son of working-class Scottish communists, the other an upper-middle-class Pakistani immigrant. Both are now professors in the Department of Sociology, with specialisms in Marxist theory and multiculturalism, respectively. Hilary Brown hears Gregor McLennan and Tariq Modood discuss the biographical similarities and differences that have helped shape their outlook, their work and their friendship.*

## In at the deep end

**GM:** I was 13 when I arrived in 'the big smoke'. I went from a medium-sized school on the outskirts of Glasgow to a huge London comprehensive, a great big skyscraper of a thing with 2,000 boys. The first thing my teacher said was, 'Never mind your academic subjects, get down to the football field – we need you on the team'. I thought I must be in the wrong place. I wasn't small for my age but these guys had beards and were six foot something at the age of 14. I remember some of the West Indian boys saying, 'If ah don' like 'im, ah kill 'im'. Of course, they didn't, and we became friends, but it was a dramatic introduction to multicultural London.

**TM:** I came to London from Karachi at the age of eight. I couldn't speak a word of English and failed the 11 Plus. So having attended a middle-class primary school, I moved to a working-class secondary modern, which gradually became predominantly African-Caribbean. It didn't teach any examination subjects. It gradually introduced the CSE, then the O-level. Mine was the first year to do A-levels, and I was the first person from my school to go to university.

**GM:** I did pass the 11 Plus, but at the time I thought it was just another test. When my teachers said I could then go to Allan Glen's – the posh school in Glasgow – I realised it must have been important. When I asked my mum and dad what to do, they said, not for the first time, 'Whatever you think best'. I remember thinking that that was what *I* was supposed to say. I chose the local secondary modern, because that was where all my friends were going.

**TM:** My dad was disappointed that I went to the local 'rough' school. He discovered that you could re-sit the 11 Plus at 13 and wanted to pay for me to go to a private school for two years so I could re-take the exam. I refused. I felt that I had been tested, the result was plain, and I should go along with that, even though most of my friends did go to the local grammar school.

## Family heritage

**TM:** My dad was a devout Muslim, but remarkably liberal towards everyone else. He thought he had a duty to introduce his children to God, but he didn't insist we join in his prayers. He had an unorthodox interpretation of Islam in some ways. He thought Britain was a much more Islamic country than Pakistan; for him the core values of Islam

were honesty, personal integrity and public service, which he thought existed to a greater extent here.

**GM:** My dad was working class; it was an engineering apprenticeship for him. He was clever, became a draughtsman, and could have gone further, but he sacrificed his career to his political commitment. He became leader of both the Scottish and the British Communist Party. He was a big influence on me, but in a slightly perverse way. Everybody thinks I must have been pumped full of communist and Marxist dogma, but nothing could be further from the truth. It was always whatever *I* wanted to do, whatever *I* wanted to think. Both my parents were pluralistic, liberal and open to a variety of views.

**TM:** Dad was a Bollywood film star in Pakistan. When we came to Britain, he wasn't trained for anything, so he set up his own business. He was one of the first wholesale halal butchers in London. He used to go to Devon to slaughter the animals and travel back in the lorry with the carcasses, then distribute them to the Pakistani grocers. It was remarkable – he'd been something of a dandy and came from a background where manual work was frowned upon, but he threw himself into it for the sake of his family. Although I didn't want to be a Muslim in the way he was, it made me want to live up to the heritage I got from him, and to show gratitude in my adult life for the sacrifices he made.

**GM:** It's as if we're both honouring the personalities that made us possible, even though we're not honouring the letter of what it was they believed in.

## Flirting with philosophy

**TM:** I got into philosophy because I loved arguing. My dad had a metaphysical outlook that I found difficult to handle, but I could see that it connected with some of the writings of Plato. I got a book out of the library by Bertrand Russell, which said that Plato was a philosopher because he was committed to the 'disinterested' pursuit of knowledge. I had to look 'disinterested' up, and found it meant 'without regard to self-advantage'. That was what I wanted to do: to pursue knowledge without regard to self-advantage. I was interested in politics, too, so I did Philosophy and Politics at Durham University.

**GM:** I fell for existentialism while watching a TV adaptation of Sartre's trilogy *The Roads to Freedom*. I knew a bit about Marxism, and needed to see how it stacked up against other world views. I didn't realise that all right-thinking adolescents felt the need to be gripped by a French existentialist philosopher, especially if they wanted girlfriends. History was my other interest, and I came to Bristol to study History, English and Philosophy. I dropped History when my tutor failed my first essay on the grounds that I'd knocked the medieval barons. They had been his bread and butter for 40 years. At the time I thought it was a bit harsh, but I have a certain sympathy for him now. (Laughs.)

## Sideways into sociology

**TM:** My highest qualification in sociology is an O-level. I did a PhD in political philosophy, but university jobs were hard to find when I graduated. I was a tax inspector for a year, but didn't enjoy it, and went on to equal opportunities policy work. By the mid-1980s, I had become interested in race. It was sociologists who had done the groundwork on race and racism, not philosophers or political scientists. So I began a critical debate with sociologists about these issues and, after doing some social research at the Policy Studies Institute, found myself occupying a niche in the areas of race and racism. I don't define myself in terms of a single discipline, like sociology. I'm interested in ethnicity, race and multiculturalism, which just happen to have made the running within that discipline.

**GM:** I haven't done a degree in sociology, nor even an O-level in it, but I don't think that matters too much. One of the great merits of sociology is its eclectic and encompassing remit. Even though I approach the discipline from a social philosophy point of view, I do think of myself as a sociologist. I did a Masters and a PhD in cultural studies, and the MA involved quite a lot of sociological theory, so I reckoned I could be cheeky enough to apply for jobs in sociology. I got one, and from then on I was following a certain track, one I've felt very comfortable with and learned something from.



JASON INGRAM





‘How do we stay friends? You have to keep talking and you have to stay human.’

JASON INGRAM

**TM:** We both applied for the same job at Bristol, chair of sociology, in 1997 ...

**GM:** ... a job that I got. But it was decided that Tariq was too good to let slip, so the powers-that-be decided they could kill two birds with one stone and take us both on.

#### To agree or not to agree?

**TM:** We work in different areas, but we feed off each other's ideas. We agree on some things, but regularly disagree on others. For example, class is as important a concept to Gregor as ethnicity and religious identity are to me, and this can bring us into conflict.

**GM:** But I'm not especially wedded to the notion of class. Most sociologists, and others besides, regard the working class as something to do with coming from a particular type of housing estate or manual labour background; I disagree with that. I've got a much broader notion of a working class of hand *and brain* that sustains the productive forces of society. It's true that such a broad concept contains other social divisions such as gender, ethnicity and religion. What does bring us to loggerheads is that I'm a progressivist – a fan of the western 'enlightenment' process of social development. To me, what we *can become* is more important than what we *are now*. You, on the other hand, are an exponent of the civic and political idea of multiculturalism, which focuses on current identities rather than future capabilities.

**TM:** What you've said about class I could say about issues of ethnic and religious identity. I have a similarly wide-ranging notion of religious identity. I don't want to tie such identities to traditional behaviours or doctrines. But I do place some importance on how people see themselves and what matters to them. I think there's more to the human identity than the enlightenment view of what is important in terms of social progress.

**GM:** People, whoever they are and whatever they think, require respect and dignity, absolutely. I guess I'm a liberal humanist in that sense. But that just underlines the value of a strong commitment to democratic citizenship; the multicultural bit is just a kind of contemporary historical context. It only matters if it's a big idea – if it says that the way people are powerfully formed into particular deep cultures is the most important thing about the self. But, to me at least, this is a bad big idea. Otherwise, if multiculturalism is more of a wee, small idea about social diversity, we can probably agree, but maybe it then doesn't matter all that much.

**TM:** I don't accept that multiculturalism can only be coherent if it gives primacy to deep cultures in the way you suggest. Multiculturalism isn't a comprehensive sociology or politics. Rather, it highlights how race, ethnicity and religious community interact with other points of view, some of which are intellectual and some of which are 'lived', not something you read about in books. I want to argue for plurality of identities, relationships and commitments. I'm trying to connect multiculturalism to some of the other big ideas of western intellectual life – humanism, liberalism, citizenship and so on – and give it more distinctiveness within them. To me, the enlightenment mentality tends

to marginalise, to narrow rather than widen horizons. Making progressives respectfully engage with sensibilities beyond their favoured types is a big enough idea for me.

#### Reaping the rewards

**GM:** I'm very happy to see myself as a research-driven social theorist, sociologist, (ex-)head of department, Warden of Goldney Hall, and so on. But perhaps I see myself above all as a university teacher, a professional image that, regrettably, has been somewhat devalued in recent times. The biggest buzz I get is when students, especially postgraduate students who have been firmly entrenched in one form or other of identity or belief, come up to me and say, 'I'm going to have to think about this differently now, thanks to you'. Ultimately, that's why I pick up my pay cheque.

**TM:** I enjoy teaching and research but what I am driven by is generating and disseminating ideas that will affect society. I always wanted a university job, even though I've done other things. University is a place where you can develop ideas and research on your own as well as in collaboration with colleagues such as Gregor. This way I can have more of an impact on the world than I could if I were working for government or for a think-tank. I'm pleased that the public intellectual role of universities is being increasingly recognised.

#### Friends and rivals

**GM:** How do we stay friends? Well, you have to keep talking, that's for sure. And you have to stay human. People, their characters, their personalities and their lives are never reducible to the formal ideas they have. We're all richer than that and there's much more scope for human contact and affinity than a simple set of ideas.

**TM:** I've been here ten years and I've had more engaged arguments with Gregor than with anyone else. Our friendship isn't based on agreeing; it's based on thinking that the other person hasn't got it right but that their objections are valid and need to be addressed.

#### Competitive edge

**TM:** Our badminton games are a bit like our conversations. We want to be stretched, we want to feel alive, whether physically, using our lungs and technique on court, or intellectually, exploring our ideas.

**GM:** Being competitive and having a good game is part of doing something well. So just as we'd better be on our toes for an argument, we'd better be alert on court as well. It doesn't really matter who wins, if having a robust exchange makes us feel better. Who cares who wins for now? Although whoever hasn't won will be ready for a rematch.

**TM:** We each try to win, but the real enjoyment stems from the other person trying to win as well. If I were trying to win and Gregor weren't, it wouldn't be a good game. Gregor wins the most, by the way – at badminton, anyway. (Laughs.) ❄

#### Another string

# VROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

*Whether rebuilding classic cars or restoring Clifton's lost railway, Database Consultant Maggie Shapland will always have a passion for the past. She talks to Hannah Johnson.*

Getting from A to B can be a challenge when you're at the wheel of a 1924 Lanchester 21, admits Maggie Shapland, Database Consultant and self-confessed 'petrol-head'. When you've got two tons of aged engineering at your command, it's best to plan the route first, avoid steep hills and always, *always* park on a slight slope – just in case you have trouble starting.

The Lanchester, a luxury limousine in its 1920s heyday, is just one of many cars lovingly restored by Shapland at her garage in Clifton. They include a 1925 Talbot 10/23, a 1929 Peugeot 190 and a 1986 Moss Monaco kit car, all of which came to her in various states of disrepair.

Some, she cheerfully admits, were more jigsaw puzzle than motor car: 'The Peugeot was totally in pieces – and it didn't actually have a body. It was a real challenge to see whether I could make a body from scratch and put all the bits back together. Then I discovered they weren't just bits of the Peugeot but several other kinds of cars as well, all in a huge pile.' With the help of a French spare parts manual, she identified exactly what belonged to the Peugeot and attended woodworking classes to learn how to make a body. 'It was a great triumph to get the thing started again,' she says.

That's only part of the fun, though. Hitting the road in a vintage car is never dull: 'Somebody once said that driving a Lanchester is like driving a cathedral on wheels. It's not exactly a runabout – I couldn't use it to go to work because it's too big to get in the car park.' The Talbot, on the other hand, did make regular appearances in the University precinct, and she has driven both the Talbot and the Lanchester in many competitions and rallies abroad.

Cold weather can turn driving into something of an endurance test, too. Wrapping up well is a priority, but, Shapland says pragmatically, in an 80-year-old car you have to accept a certain degree of discomfort: 'On one extremely wet trip in the Talbot, the speedometer filled up with water. And with the Lanchester, because it's got a "V" windscreen

with a gap in the middle, the water seeps through and your leg gets soaked. When you climb out, you've got one wet trouser leg and one dry.'

Despite the occasional drenching, driving a piece of history is a real privilege. Shapland has owned the Lanchester for 35 years and loves being part of what she calls its 'big, adventurous life'. It was used as a taxi in Ireland for several years, then went to Wales before ending up in pieces in the back garden of a carpet salesman in Kidderminster. 'He'd taken it to bits and couldn't get it back together again. We'd actually gone to buy the engine for a different car altogether, but we saw the pieces and offered to buy them. Everything was there, surprisingly, except the radiator cap.'

A love of bringing the past into the present also informs Shapland's other passion: the Clifton Rocks Railway, which ran inside the

cliffs of the Avon Gorge from 1893 to 1934. During World War II it housed a barrage balloon repair workshop, refuge shelters and a secret transmission base for the BBC, but it has been disused for the past 60 years. Shapland is part of a dedicated group of volunteers which is slowly restoring the site, and she clearly enjoys being down in the tunnel. 'It's got a great atmosphere because it's just like the *Marie Celeste*. The bottom station is still as it was in 1934 with all the original woodwork.'

The volunteers' ultimate aim is to open the site to the public, but there's still a lot of work to be done: 'Certain parts, like the BBC area, haven't been touched yet because we want the Archaeology Department to help us record it all accurately. Once you've taken things away, you can't work the story out properly.'

But the key is ensuring that the place doesn't lose its unique atmosphere. 'To make it look all pristine and give visitors a Jorvik-type experience would be totally stupid,' says Shapland. 'It's the same with my cars: I've kept the original upholstery and it's just beautiful. Some people complain that the horsehair sticks out of the leather, but I say it's all part of the car's history. At rallies it's always the used-looking cars that attract the attention because they haven't lost their character.'

Could her day job have influenced her attitude? 'I know it's strange when I've worked with computers all my life, but I refuse to have a car with a computer in it,' she admits eventually. 'I want to wind my windows up. I want everything to be manual because it's a lot easier to sort out than anything electronic. With vintage cars, everything comes apart, everything is easily recognisable. You can make the parts again if they break – and I love that.' ❄

**Below:** Maggie Shapland in her Clifton workshop; the Lanchester is on her right



JASON INGRAM



# BOTH SIDES NOW

*Early encounters with the media left Dr Ainsley Newson apprehensive about talking to the press. Then she spent a month working as a journalist – and started to see things differently. She talks to Nick Riddle about her view from the other side.*

**D**r Ainsley Newson describes her first encounters with the press – while she was a PhD student in Australia – with the rueful detachment of someone who knows she's wiser nowadays.

'I used to feel I had to say something genuinely new or groundbreaking to journalists,' says Newson, Lecturer in Biomedical Ethics at the Centre for Ethics in Medicine. 'Or I'd overwhelm them with information. For a piece on genetics and intelligence, rather than just giving a handy summary of my opinion, I sent the journalist entire academic papers. Not only did this confuse her, but my key messages got lost and I hardly appeared in the final article.'

It helps to be flexible, then – but, as another early sortie taught her, not *too* flexible. 'In one interview about a controversial aspect of paternity testing, the journalist pushed me hard to speculate on future changes in policy. This was a no-go area for me. But I eventually caved in and provided a few suggestions, and got myself into trouble: it looked as if I'd disclosed confidential information.' The lesson? 'Stick to your agenda, not the journalist's – and don't be afraid to say "No comment".'

Newson moved to the UK, working first at Imperial College and then at Bristol, but still had mixed feelings about talking to journalists – until an opportunity came her way to see things from the other side. For one month in 2005, thanks to a media fellowship run by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, she worked at *The Times* alongside its science correspondent, Mark Henderson (now the paper's science editor).

'I went in with all these preconceptions – "journalists are just out to get the sexy story", "they never get the facts right", "science is completely off the agenda" – and had them completely turned around,' she says. 'The science correspondents that I met really knew their stuff.'

But it's a different kind of knowledge, and therein lies the source of a lot of misunderstanding between academics and the media. 'I know a lot about a highly specialised area,' says Newson, 'but these

journalists' knowledge covers a huge domain. They read a lot of the science press; they can wade through 200 press releases every day and know what'll make a story.' They also have to pitch every piece in order to wrestle the space from the other correspondents.

During her month as a journalist, Newson had several articles published in *The Times* – some editorials, others straight reporting – and watched the often-traumatic journey that each one had to make through the newspaper machine.

'You'd write a 500-word article, then there'd be a late-breaking story. So your piece suddenly has to be 300 words, and the sub-editors decide what needs to go, or they ask you to cut 200 words just as you're packing up.' Newson's first published article – an opinion piece on paternity testing – went from 700 words to 300. 'All your nuanced arguments suddenly collapse,' she says, 'and you end up making one point.'

Sub-editors do have a reputation for wielding the scalpel in a cavalier fashion, which was one reason why Newson asked to observe their work. She came away with a new respect for them. 'In a way they're the unsung authors of a newspaper,' she says. 'They work long hours, under severe pressure to get things finished. They correct everyone else's sloppy text, but they get the blame when one mistake slips through.'

It took a while for Newson to get used to the peculiarities of the news cycle: its speed, its voraciousness and its short attention span. When that first opinion piece appeared in *The Times*, 'it was an unbelievable day – everyone wanted to get hold of me'. The article led to two TV appearances, three radio interviews and multiple quotations in other newspapers across the world. But the next day – nothing. 'That's the news media: everybody wants you, then they move on to the next story.'

Back in academia, Newson still handles media requests, although her preferred medium is radio. Television is not so comfy: 'More often than not you're sitting in the BBC's Bristol newsroom talking to someone who isn't there with you,' she says. 'It's very disconcerting to speak to camera without any

reaction from the people you're looking at. They usually give you a swivel chair, too, and you have to sit completely still on it.'

Taking up the right position is important in other senses, too, since medical ethics is such an emotive area. 'We try to stand back and, at least as a first step, weigh up the issues rationally,' she says. 'I tend to be the middle-ground person who can see both sides, which might be why I'm not used so often. Some people are more willing to go out on a limb and give a black-or-white opinion.'

Being a middle-ground person presents challenges when the media fires you one of its favourite controversy-tackling questions: Where should the line be drawn? Newson's most recent limit-marking invitation came from Radio Four's *Woman's Hour*, as part of a piece on screening in pregnancy.

'Women in pregnancy can get tested for many more conditions than ever before,' she says, 'but the results can be uncertain. Women are often given a percentage risk of harm to their foetus, and they then have to make decisions about getting other kinds of tests, or even whether they want to end the pregnancy. And here I am, an academic with no children, making pronouncements about that.' Hence the need to tread carefully, but also to draw on the objective knowledge of an academic in the field. 'My response was that it's not about drawing lines – you have to deal with the specifics of the case concerned.'

Newson brings the same practical approach to bear when she offers advice for academics new to media work.

'Speak in short sentences; pause; breathe. And get feedback on how it went, either from the journalist or from your peers. If it's a TV interview, get somebody you trust to watch it while you're hiding behind the sofa, and ask them to comment on what you said or how you said it, or whether you blinked or swivelled too much. It won't always go as well as you hope, but there's no substitute for just diving in.'

**Right:** Dr Ainsley Newson with a model of the DNA double helix, part of At-Bristol's 'Inside DNA' exhibition

**'That's the news media: everybody wants you, then they move on to the next story.'**



JASON INGRAM





NICK RIDDLE

## TWENTY QUESTIONS

**Paul Grant, a PC Systems Specialist in Information Systems and Computing, has a problem with cats (except tigers), but loves dogs (except the ones next door).**

**What is your favourite meal?** Cottage pie and peas followed by treacle pudding with custard.

**If you were offered one superpower, what would you choose?** X-ray vision – just imagine the fun you could have with it.

**Cat or dog? Or neither?** Dogs every time. Cats scare me and they can sense my fear.

**Which historical figure would you invite to dinner?** Winston Churchill.

**What do you sing in the shower?** Nothing at all, straight in and out, no messing around.

**Favourite smell?** Freshly served roast dinner.

**Your greatest character flaw?** Forgetfulness – I'm shocking. I once forgot to turn up for a rather expensive training day.

**What keeps you awake at night?** The wife snoring and the neighbour's dogs whining and occasionally fighting.

**Native Americans believe we all have a Spirit Animal. What would be yours?** A tiger – no reason in particular, but it's my favourite animal.

**Favourite spot in the world?** The Island of Baros in the Maldives – it looked like something off a postcard.

**Least favourite spot?** Memorial Stadium, Horfield – being a Bristol City fan isn't easy.

**One book, one piece of music, one film** *The Hobbit* by JRR Tolkien, *Bat Out Of Hell* by Meat Loaf, *Hot Fuzz*.

**Who would you like to banish to a desert island?** The entire Australian cricket team.

**You can make one new law. What would it be?** Ban all cars from using the road at the weekend, leaving it free for bikers.

**Your biggest life-changing experience (so far)?** Entering this year's London Marathon. I've even had to start eating fruit!

**Something you wish you'd known about life when you were 18?** How quick it seems to go after turning 18.

**'My philosophy is this...'** Try and be as happy as you possibly can, you never know what's around the corner.

**When and where were you happiest?** 15(ish) years ago at Manchester Polytechnic.

**How would you sum yourself up in one line?** What you see is what you get.

**Is there a question you'd like to be asked?** How about 'What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?' The answer: While I was out running I passed a pub, tripped over my laces, fell over and gently rolled into the road, much to the amusement of the lads in the pub garden.

## THE PLUG

**Queer as Folk** by Glyn Davis (BFI Publishing)



In the first critical study of Russell T Davies' groundbreaking drama series *Queer as Folk*, Dr Glyn Davis – Senior Lecturer in Screen Studies – examines in detail both the Channel

Four original and the US remake, from conception and production to marketing and reception. His study also considers *Queer as Folk* in different contexts, including the history of 'gay TV' and the 'mainstreaming' of homosexuality in the UK and US. As well as exploring concerns addressed in the series (queer parenting, homophobia, cruising, etc), Davis traces its aesthetic and narrative pleasures.

**A Summer in Gascony: Discovering the Other South of France** by Martin Calder



(Nicholas Brealey Publishing) An account by Dr Martin Calder, Lecturer in the Department of French, of a summer he spent in his youth working in a remote village in Gascony, South West France. Armagnac, dusty roads, village festivals, colourful characters and an idyllic romance – *A Summer in Gascony* is an *embaras de richesses* that puts Gascony on the travel-writing map.

## THINGS YOU NEVER NOTICED

### 5. NIPPER'S STATUE

Before Gromit, Bristol's most famous canine resident was Nipper, the mongrel terrier who lived in Montpellier with his master, Mark Barraud, a scenic designer at the Prince's Theatre on Park Row. Nipper was immortalised in 1911 as the gramophone-fixated dog in the 'His Master's Voice' and Victor trade-marks; 90 years later this statue was unveiled over the eastern entrance to the Merchant Venturers' Building, a spot roughly opposite the site of the Prince's Theatre, which was destroyed in the Blitz.



NICK RIDDLE

## Other people's jobs

# THE LIFE ACOUSTIC

*Jonathan Scott started his audio career in his bedroom. When he became Studio Manager at the Department of Music, he found himself working in another bedroom – but a much posher one. He talks to Nick Riddle about acoustics, going digital and the day Portishead dropped by for a tinkle.*

A small wooden pyramid sits high atop a wall-mounted screen in one of the recording studios in the Department of Music. It's an old-style metronome of the kind familiar to any musician, but its working life is over. 'It might come in handy if you need an irregular time signature,' says Jonathan Scott.

Scott has combined his strong musical background with an equally strong interest in the technical details of recording. Which is not surprising, given that his father was an audio engineer at the BBC, his mother was a piano teacher and his sister is a professional violinist and school music teacher. 'I played musical instruments from a very early age,' he says, 'and I got interested in producing music electronically rather than just capturing it.'

This was in the early years of digital recording, when the grandparents of today's PC-based audio software were making their debut. 'I'd experiment in my bedroom with a four-track cassette recorder and a tinny drum machine,' says Scott. 'And making terrible teenage bedroom music, like everyone else.'

Scott's early passion for percussion had already led him into a wide range of musical genres, from the minimalists like Steve Reich to jazz and pop. 'I played in a few bands in

Bristol and London – some truly awful ones, and one or two reasonable ones.'

Shortly after graduating in music from London's City University in 1992, he became Studio Manager at Bristol's Department of Music. The new post was designed as part of the launch of the MA course in Composition for Film and Television. 'They needed somebody to build a studio,' says Scott. 'All they had were a few microphones, a tape deck and a couple of old synthesisers in a cupboard.'

In those days the Department of Music was still based in Royal Fort House, and the task of creating a serviceable recording studio inside a listed 18th-century building was fraught with difficulty. 'It's a beautiful place, but it's an acoustic nightmare,' says Scott. 'We never did turn it into a proper studio. It was just a bunch of gear in a rather nice room with a gorgeous view.' In fact, Scott was recording in a bedroom again – the old master bedroom on the first floor.

Not that he didn't get results; as he says, 'There's a lot you can do in any space with a bit of thought and some careful miking.' That's especially true if you're not concerned with capturing the ambience of a live recording by an ensemble. Some of Scott's work with students involves recording one instrument at a

time and building up the layers – something that digital technology has made easier because you can add so many layers without losing sound quality.

'Most of the critical recording happened in the evenings, to avoid sounds leaking in from the rest of the building,' says Scott. 'And you had to pray that the wind wouldn't blow, because that used to rattle the sash windows.'

In 1996, when the department moved to the Victoria Rooms, Scott swapped his elegantly appointed room for a basement with no windows. But what he lost in panoramic splendour he gained in acoustic quality. 'It was a bare room, eight by 15 metres, that had been used as a martial arts studio,' he says. 'We turned it into a suite of spaces and brought in an acoustic designer.' Now the walls and ceilings are hung with diffusers, absorbers and bafflers – grey and silver shapes placed strategically to absorb, redirect or diffuse sound in very specific ways.

Most music students pass through the studio at some point. Undergraduates work there as part of a course on electroacoustic composition; and there's a growing community of postgraduates concentrating on studio-based composition. But the studio also generates income for the department through commercial work. The most notable clients were two members of Portishead, who came to record some piano parts in the Recital Room upstairs.

Things may have moved on from reel-to-reels and giant mixing consoles, but digital technology hasn't changed any of the basics for students, according to Scott. 'The aesthetic principles of how a composition is put together haven't really changed,' he says. 'New techniques have opened up new approaches, but what music does, how it affects human beings, and why we bother to do it in the first place – that hasn't changed. A good composer will find something musically interesting to do with whatever you give them; it doesn't matter if it's a string ensemble or a digital audio workstation.'

But the lure of old technology is strong, especially in pop culture. Vinyl refuses to die, cumbersome pre-digital keyboards like the Mellotron are back in production, and that metronome in its wooden casing has a quaintly comforting air amid the digital workstations with their sleek monitors. Scott can see the attraction; after all, he couldn't bring himself to throw that metronome out.

He points out that the digital age began with attempts to simulate those earlier devices and the sounds they produced. Digital technology is now very good at emulating analogue equipment, and the benefits – such as convenience and economy – are obvious. 'But I think it's much more interesting to go beyond simulating the real world and think more in the abstract,' says Scott. 'I like to explore digital technology to see what it can do that no other method can.'



JASON INGRAM

**'You had to pray that the wind wouldn't blow, because that used to rattle the sash windows.'**



# ... A BOTANIST

A field full of bee orchids in the grounds of a nuclear research station was Simon Hiscock's host of 'golden daffodils'. Hilary Brown meets the professor of plant sciences with an artistic soul.



**Above:** The scent of a *Zygopetalum mackayi* transports Professor Simon Hiscock from the Botanic Garden in Stoke Bishop to Brazil **Above right:** *Ophrys apifera*, the British bee orchid Hiscock first saw at Harwell

I got interested in plants at an early age. I was born in rural Berkshire; I was an only child. I amused myself by going out and about in the fields around our house, looking at butterflies, beetles and plants. Snelsmore Common was nearby. That was where I discovered mushrooms and toadstools. I used to collect them, and my mother and I would cook and eat them.

I started drawing fungi, and was encouraged by a teacher, who gave me the opportunity to exhibit at a local gallery when I was 15. I sold every painting – about 25 – at the private view. All I wanted to do was become a botanical painter. Then I saw a bee orchid.

It was at Harwell nuclear research facility. A family friend who worked there discovered a huge colony of bee orchids on a disused runway in the grounds. The runway had been covered with chalk from a local downland quarry to stop aircraft from the nearby Abingdon air base landing on it accidentally. There must have been orchid seeds in the chalk, and an array of these extraordinary flowers had sprung up in this incongruous setting. They were unlike anything I'd seen before – almost unreal, like plastic, or as if they were something you could eat. They look like bees, too. There's a poem by John Langhorne that I use in my lectures, called 'The Bee Flower', which was inspired by his first sighting of a bee orchid. They really do take you by storm.

That was what got me interested in flowering plants, and orchids in particular. I started painting

them, but I soon wanted to find out more about them. Rather than going to university to do fine art, I wanted to be a botanist.

This meant I had to take sciences at A-level. I had never done chemistry or physics before. The school I went to after failing the 11 Plus offered things like woodwork and technical drawing, and biology was the only science I had taken at O-level. I did A-level biology, chemistry and geography at the local grammar school. Chemistry was hard but I found it fascinating, particularly the atomic structure stuff. I got higher grades than predicted, and was encouraged to do the Oxbridge exams. I got into Worcester College in 1982 and spent three happy years at Oxford studying botany.

When I finished my degree, however, I decided to give my art another go. This was something of a contradiction, after spending all that time studying. But I had continued with my painting and had sold a lot of work, the early '80s being a time of relative prosperity. I was even commissioned to illustrate and co-author a book on British orchids. A career in publishing, illustration and art seemed rather glamorous.

Unfortunately, the economy took a downturn. The commission fell through, and my later exhibitions didn't sell out. It was time to do something else, so I became a biology teacher. I was excited about the subject and enjoyed teaching, but it made me want to learn more, particularly about plants.



'They were unlike anything I'd seen before – almost unreal.'

The chance of a PhD came up at Reading, on the ecology of Mediterranean plants. It was right up my street, because I'd been visiting Greece and Turkey throughout my student and teaching years, looking for orchids. When the funding didn't materialise, I started a different project, on an aspect of plant reproductive biology called self-incompatibility, a mechanism that allows flowers to recognise and 'reject' their own pollen to stop self-fertilisation. I've been working on this ever since.

One of the reasons I applied for a lectureship at Bristol was the possibility of being involved with the Botanic Garden. After being here a couple of years, I became Academic Director of the garden (now Director), with a remit to develop its role in teaching and research. I had a fair amount of artistic licence in helping to design the new Botanic Garden at The Holmes and this has been really exciting. I'm particularly proud of the Angiosperm Phylogeny display, which shows the 'family tree' of the flowering plants as a tree of paths.

I still have the opportunity to indulge my love of Mediterranean plants. I run a field course for undergraduates in Mediterranean plant ecology and biodiversity. We go to the Algarve in Portugal at Easter where the students can see all the wonderful plants. My most exciting plant find in the Mediterranean was an extremely rare bee orchid, *Ophrys candida*, which is only found in the Samaria Gorge in Crete. I also grow a lot of Mediterranean plants in pots in my courtyard garden, mainly *Euphorbias* and various types of lavender and rosemary – I love their aromatic smell.

Listening to myself makes it seem as if I've had no real direction in my career. But I tell my undergraduates that there are many different paths one can take, and advise them to try out different things while they are young. I have no regrets about the way things have turned out, although I do wish I had more time for painting. One day I'll get back to it. 🍷



## PAPER HAT – ONE CAREFUL OWNER

This caving helmet belonged to Dr Edgar Kingsley Tratman (1899-1978), a senior figure in the University's Spelaeological Society for many years. The Cromwell Protector Helmet is made from layers of laminated paper; the lamp uses calcium carbide and water which react to produce acetylene. In the 1930s it was advertised at the price of three shillings (the lamp bracket was threepence extra).

'Trat', as he was affectionately known, studied dentistry at Bristol and graduated in 1924. His career included over 20 years in Singapore

where he built up the dental school at the University of Malaya (and rebuilt it after World War II), bookended by teaching posts at Bristol's Dental School.

Dr Tratman was as active in caving and archaeology as he was in dentistry. The Society's museum and its collections (where the helmet resides) were almost completely destroyed during the War, but Dr Tratman's efforts were a major factor in its reopening in 1955.

With thanks to Graham Mullan, Society Treasurer.

**Above:** The helmet's chinstrap is an old bootlace **Right:** E K Tratman in the field





# Endnotes

**1** Dr Eugene Lloyd (left), Teaching Fellow in the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, demonstrates Stan, the Human Patient Simulator, to Professor David Eastwood, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, in November. Professor Eastwood presided over the official opening of the University's two £24 million Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Applied and Integrated Medical Sciences (AIMS) in the School of Medical Sciences; and Bristol ChemLabS in the School of Chemistry.

**2** A group of Bristol postgraduates at the Young Neuroscientists' Day in October, an event organised by Bristol Neuroscience and co-hosted by the universities of Bristol and Cardiff in the Great Hall of the Wills Memorial Building. Some 230 people attended the event, which was also supported by the British Neuroscience Association. Clockwise from right: Andreas Papadopoulos (Psychopharmacology), Hannah Taylor (Physiology and Pharmacology), Dr Anne Cooke (Bristol Neuroscience and event organiser), Rebecca Pearson (Academic Unit of Psychiatry), Alice Wilson (Experimental Psychology).

**3** The arrival of the 'clones' at the Young People's Research Ethics Committee, an event combining drama and debate at the Centre for Ethics in Medicine. Staff at the Centre worked with pupils aged 12-13 years from four local comprehensive schools to encourage constructive argument about research in medicine, including xenotransplantation, cognition-enhancing drugs and cloning. Students from the Department of Drama worked with the pupils on their presentation to a live audience. The project was funded by the Wellcome Trust.

**4** An artist's impression of the sea scorpion (eurypterid) *Jaekelopterus rhenaniae* that lived between 460 and 255 million years ago. Dr Simon Braddy from the Department of Earth Sciences was co-author of a paper in the journal *Biology Letters* describing the discovery of a giant fossilised claw – believed to have belonged to the gargantuan creature – in a German quarry. Extensive media coverage included several front pages and a mention on the BBC's *Have I Got News For You*.

**5** Nine hundred and ninety-nine red balloons released in Broadmead in December by the Bristol Students' Union Stop AIDS Society. The event marked World AIDS Day and was part of the Society's campaign for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. Also present were Oxfam and Medsin campaigners, a spokesperson for the Treatment Action Campaign, the Lord Mayor and Bristol MPs Doug Naysmith and Stephen Williams.



MARTIN CHAINEY



SAM CROSS



BIO APPROACHES SW



SIMON POWELL



BO ZHANG

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