Eric Hobsbawm memorial
More than 400 guests attended the moving memorial to Professor Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012), the late President of Birkbeck.

Leading figures from academia, left-wing politics and journalism attended the celebration of Professor Hobsbawm’s life and paid tribute to the remarkable achievements of this influential Marxist historian, one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century. They shared their memories of his inspirational teaching, wit and friendship.

At the event, held at Senate House, University of London, in April 2013, Professor Roy Foster, Fellow of Birkbeck and Carroll Professor of Irish History at the University of Oxford, said the memorial demonstrated “the extraordinary emotional and magnetic man that Eric was and the way the force field of his mind and personality endures”.

Describing him as a “great enthusiast”, Julia Hobsbawm spoke of her father’s passion for many different interests, including his love for his family, nature, sweets, gossip and his students.

The Eric Hobsbawm Scholarships for Postgraduate History Students at Birkbeck (see p2) were launched at the memorial by Professor Frank Trentmann, Professor of History at Birkbeck. The scholarships are a fitting legacy to Professor Hobsbawm’s profound belief in the importance of higher education for working people.

Birkbeck’s programme of challenging public lectures continued with a keynote speech delivered by David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, at the prestigious Triple Helix International Conference in July 2013, co-hosted by The Big Innovation Centre, Birkbeck and UCL Advances.

Willetts talked about the links between universities, industry and government, and said he recognised government’s historic strategic role in backing “key, general-purpose technologies” as well as specific technologies where the UK had the research capacity, business opportunity and comparative advantage to develop these from the research community to the market.

Law on trial
In June 2013, Birkbeck’s School of Law held a week of lectures and workshops that offered a radical re-imaging of legal education. During Law on Trial Week, novelists, journalists, political activists and academics explored the influence of legal education on the wider cultural and social landscape. Panels of experts considered whether legal academics should confront the challenges of widening participation by developing a culture of pro-bono – offering legal education freely outside their universities and colleges.

In October 2013, Birkbeck’s Annual Law Lecture drew an audience of 600-plus to hear US scholar and political activist Angela Davis on the subject ‘Freedom is a constant struggle: classes and continuities’. Davis traced a global struggle from the emancipation proclamation of 150 years ago to the civil rights movement in mid-twentieth century America, current political issues and the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Social Sciences, History and Philosophy Week
A diverse selection of readings, discussions, lectures and film screenings made up the School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy’s first-ever ‘SSHP Week’ in June 2013. The series of events, entitled ‘To seek, to find, to live’, examined the past and future of society and the environment.

Highlights included a lecture on ‘Multilingual swearing’ by Professor Jean-Marc Dewaele, Professor of Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism. Professor Minmir Zukas, Executive Dean of SSHP, said: “The week of events really demonstrated well the range of work being undertaken in the School”.

Business Week
The final event of a highly successful Business Week 2013, held in June, saw Willie Walsh, CEO of International Airlines Group, deliver the first Sir Cyril Marshall Memorial Lecture to a capacity audience.

Walshe paid tribute to the late Lord Marshall, CEO and Chairman of British Airways, and Chairman of the Board of Governors at Birkbeck from 2003 to 2010. He spoke of the challenges facing the aviation industry, citing increasing fuel costs, CO2 emissions and political ‘interference’.

Science Week
Research into climate change, the fight against pathogens such as Chlamydia, a new hypothesis on the causes of autism, and how people live with the impact of generic information were showcased during Birkbeck’s Science Week in April 2013. Professor Nicholas Keep, Executive Dean of the School of Science, said: “Colleagues gave six really fascinating lectures, demonstrating how their research at Birkbeck has an impact on matters that affect people’s health and well-being”.

Arts Week
Can anyone make a film? This was the challenging question discussed by film-maker Mark Lewis and students on Birkbeck’s MA Film, Television and Screen Media at a public screening of his work during Arts Week in May 2013. The week’s lively series of events also included an exploration of the Victorian fascination with dolls, and a roundtable discussion on the intersection between science and creative writing.