bbk

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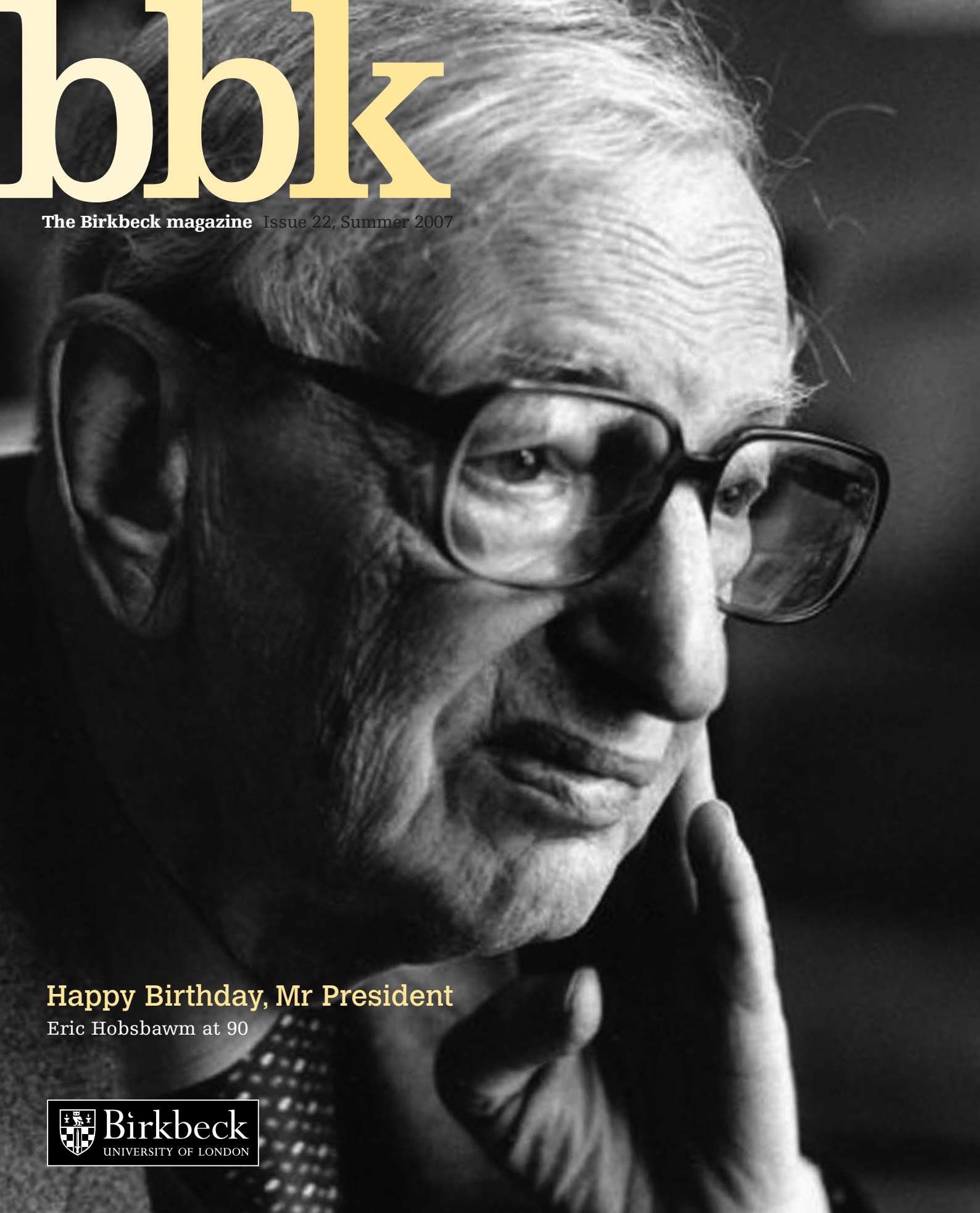

Happy Birthday, Mr President

Eric Hobsbawm at 90

Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

bbk Issue 22

Issue 22 of *BBK* is special. On the cover is a truly remarkable man – Emeritus Professor Eric Hobsbawm, who has been President of Birkbeck since 2002. On page 24, *Guardian* journalist John Crace interviews Professor Hobsbawm who, at 90, is still busy lecturing, and this month publishes his latest book *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism* (see page 29 for details). His contribution to the intellectual life of this country, as well as to the College, is immense.

This issue also describes the newly opened Centre for Film and Visual Media, a unique piece of architecture, as Professor Ian Christie of the School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media explains on page 8. Further visual interest is created on page 10, where you can judge for yourself whether there is a family resemblance between James Birkbeck IV and his ancestor George Birkbeck, our founder.

In 'Greening the College' on page 11 you will learn of the initiatives that Birkbeck is taking to become more sustainable. Conservation of a different kind in Antarctica is the subject of former student Nicola Dunn's piece on page 20.

This is my last edition of *BBK*; Catherine Stevens returns to her editorial role in the next issue.

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Cover photograph:
Professor Eric Hobsbawm, President of Birkbeck
(© Jane Bown, 2002)

Birkbeck is a world-class research and teaching institution, a vibrant centre of academic excellence and London's only specialist provider of evening higher education. Its academic reputation also attracts many traditional, full-time postgraduate and research degree students.

Birkbeck Stratford

How this exciting initiative in east London is progressing

The Stratford project is gathering momentum, as Birkbeck prepares to welcome its first students onto the east London programmes. In partnership with the University of East London (UEL), Birkbeck is providing additional opportunities for students in east London to study an exciting range of higher education programmes in the evening. Staff across the College have been working hard to ensure the success of Birkbeck's ambitious new project. The summer months are seeing the final stage of a series of initiatives designed to boost student recruitment in the autumn.

During May, the Outreach Team of three took part in a number of events during Adult Learners' Week, ranging from information days at shopping centres, hosting an advice session for the TUC, and running an information day with Newham Libraries. Birkbeck also sponsored the 'Progression to HE' category for the regional Adult Learners' Week awards, organised by NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education – England and Wales), a non-governmental organisation working to attract more adult learners.

The second phase of the marketing campaign, leading up to the June Open Evening, consisted of outdoor and local press advertising and a door drop in May of 200,000 leaflets in east London boroughs. A further 300,000 leaflets will go out in the late summer to publicise the next Birkbeck Stratford Open Evening on Thursday 20 September.

Birkbeck Stratford's first Open Evening for prospective students was held on Thursday 14 June at the Old Town Hall, Stratford, which proved to be a great success, with around 500 prospective students attending. It followed the same format as the Bloomsbury Open Evenings, with a range of subject and support stands plus, in this instance, taster sessions entitled History of Art and Philosophy. As with the Bloomsbury events, the Stratford Open Evenings are a critical part of the recruitment drive and will help encourage students to apply. The programme managers and course administrators have been working hard in preparation for the autumn start date and many of them attended the Stratford event.

At Boardman House, the Birkbeck Stratford HQ, the Office and Programme team is now three strong. The Centre for Learning and Professional Development (CLPD) team launched Drop-in and Advice Sessions in the middle of May, which are held every Monday from 4pm until 7pm in the Stratford Advice Arcade. An Advice and Learning Co-ordinator Stratford joins the CLDP group in July, who will provide pre-course and in-course advice, and offer study skills sessions and tutorial support for Birkbeck Stratford students.

The Birkbeck Stratford Library team is also busy preparing for this autumn. They expect to purchase approximately 2000 books for processing and sending out to the UEL Library at Stratford for use by the Birkbeck Stratford students. They are keeping in touch with programme managers and will purchase the required books for the students to access at the start of term.

This autumn will see the culmination of 18 months' work on the part of many academic and administrative staff at the College, to make this exciting initiative at

Above: **Prospective students gain advice at the Stratford event** (JD Moore)

For more information about studying at Birkbeck Stratford, visit www.birkbeckstratford.ac.uk

Psychology students beat London rivals

Students and School are on an upward path

Birkbeck has won both of this year's University of London psychology project prizes: the Burt Prize for projects in the field of individual differences was won by Rachel Sigrist; and the winner of the Carpenter Prize for projects not in individual differences was Stefanie Nixon.

The annual prizes are awarded in competition with all University of London Colleges. Professor Mike Oaksford, Head of the School of Psychology, said: "It is a fantastic achievement for Birkbeck to win both of these prizes and it is yet another demonstration that part-time students are able to compete with their full-time counterparts. Both Rachel and Stefanie produced insightful and high-quality work which is a testament to the broad range of topics and issues within the School."

In her project, which was supervised by Professor Jay Belsky and Dr Naz Derakhshan, Rachel Sigrist (below, right) attempted to categorise people according to their relationship attachment styles (how secure or insecure they are in their close relationships – and, if insecure, whether this is characterised by anxiety or avoidance), and also according to certain personality traits, such as overall anxiety levels and overall repression levels. Rachel, who was working as a ministerial speechwriter at the Treasury during her degree, completed her project as part of a BSc Psychology. Although already a graduate, Rachel says: "I could have done a conversion course, but psychology has always been a subject that interested me, so I decided the best way to explore it was to do a full BSc." Since graduating in July 2006, Rachel has given birth to a son and is planning to go back to studying in September. Eventually she is hoping to begin a new career in psychiatry.

Above: **Stephanie Nixon** (Birkbeck Photo Unit)

Below: **Rachel Sigrist**

Stefanie Nixon (left), who was supervised by Dr Jennifer Aydelott, shared the Carpenter Prize for projects not in individual differences with a student from University College London. Stefanie studied the effects on the listener of having to listen to two words at once, and investigated whether listeners are able to process semantic information in this situation. The prize is a fantastic achievement for Stefanie, who had no previous experience of higher education, as she left school at 17 with O-levels and in 1996 took a GCSE in Psychology from which her interest blossomed. "Studying psychology proved to be more fascinating than I ever imagined. By examining the workings of the brain, you begin to realise the complexities of human nature and learn to appreciate the vast array of tasks individuals undertake on a daily basis," she commented.

For further information about Birkbeck's Psychology courses, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/study/all_courses/psychology.html

TALENTED BIRKBECK STUDENT RECOGNISED

PhD student Abdul Martin, from the School of Biological and Chemical Sciences, was selected by the prestigious Medical Research Society from hundreds of applicants across the country to present his work on brain diseases to the Society. Abdul originally entered his application for the 'Young researchers' category, but the assessment panel was so impressed by his work that it was submitted to be judged among work by established surgeons and academics.

Abdul's research concerns Balamuthia, a parasite which causes the brain infection encephalitis. Abdul, who received funding from Birkbeck to cover his fees, says: "Birkbeck is one of the only institutions in the world with expertise in Balamuthia. I am indebted to the College for providing me with real insights into using state-of-the-art technology. When I came here I was quite a shy person. I really have been helped by Birkbeck staff and by attending the College's presentation skills courses."

Left: **Abdul Martin at work in Birkbeck**
(Birkbeck Photo Unit)

Rising star

Head of Psychology, Professor Mike Oaksford, comments on the School's latest accolade

"It is not just individuals within the School of Psychology who have been winning prizes, but the School itself has been singled out for excellence. Birkbeck was recently classified as a 'Rising Star' in psychology and psychiatry, according to Thomson Scientific Essential Science Indicators (ESI), which provides citation rankings of scientists, institutions, countries and journals.

"Birkbeck is the only UK institution to be awarded this status in the absence of an associated medical school, i.e. no psychiatry, since the Rising Stars were introduced in 2001. It is one of only a handful of pure psychology departments worldwide to achieve this status, including the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This is an impressive achievement, as specialist psychiatric units typically dominate this Rising Star category. Only four other institutions worldwide were awarded this designation for the field of psychology and psychiatry in 2006. Other institutions classified as Rising Stars in their fields at the same time as Birkbeck included the Salk Institute for Biological Studies (microbiology), the Chinese Academy of Sciences (mathematics), and the US National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Strokes (neuroscience and behaviour)."

From its database of a decade of scientific citation data, Thomson Scientific ESI uses information from bi-monthly periods to determine the rankings. Rising Stars are those institutions that achieve the highest percentage increase in total citations from one bi-monthly period to the next. This measures the departments and institutions whose publications elicit the biggest increase in citations from their peers.

For further information, visit:
www.in-cites.com/most_imp/september2006.html

Telling stories

Dr Isabelle Fremeaux (Lecturer in Media Studies) and Dr Tim Markham (Lecturer in Journalism) discuss their recent workshop for peace activists

On Monday 14 May, Birkbeck held a one-day workshop for peace activists, as part of a series of 'satellite events' around the documentary play *Fallujah*, which ran at the Old Truman Brewery in London's East End until 2 June this year. *Fallujah* is based on testimony – that has never before been heard – from people involved in the month-long siege, which saw US military forces mount an air and ground assault on the Iraqi city in 2004.

At the time of the siege, the media were given very little access to the city, so that much of what actually happened remained unclear for some time. By emphasising the silencing of one of the worst tragedies of the war in Iraq, the play asks us to reflect on how stories are (un)told in our society.

In such a context, it seemed particularly relevant to organise an educational event that would approach the notion of storytelling in an innovative way. With the support of the London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise, we decided to stage a workshop in which activists would explore the themes of storytelling and effective campaigning. Entitled *The Battle of the Story*, the workshop was based on the idea that crafting a successful campaign message requires analysing and understanding the power of narrative to structure information in a way that reaches and convinces people. It aims to determine whose stories are told, how they are framed, how widely these stories are heard, and how deeply they impact on the public arena.

Drawing from organisations such as Trident Ploughshares, Voices in the Wilderness and Jews for Justice for Palestinians, we got together with ten activists on the actual set of the Fallujah play, to develop collaboratively our own 'Battle of the Story' strategy. By exploring and analysing the ways in which media have talked about and represented the war in Iraq, we tried to understand how to elaborate alternative narratives so that campaigns can improve their impact.

Building on the personal experiences of participants, a collective analysis of coverage of the Iraq war and broader examination of the strategies and tactics available to the activist, the workshop enabled us to see the commonly recognised discourses around current events as just one of the stories that could have been told. This moves the political debate beyond a narrow discussion of bias and objectivity: even when armed with the facts, the way an event is spoken about – its imagery, metaphors, symbols and characters – radically influences its reception and the potential for action.

Above: The documentary play *Fallujah*, being performed at the Old Truman Brewery (Paul J Need)

For more information, visit www.lcace.org.uk/home.php or www.bbk.ac.uk/ce/mediastudies/

Ten years of dance

A decade of the course that goes from strength to strength

Buffy the social researcher

The first half of 2007 saw some interesting seminars from the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research (BISR), including a talk on her new book, *Making Trouble*, by Professor Lynne Segal, and the wonderfully titled *Imagining the Family: Constructions of Alternative Families in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, presented by Dr Viv Burr of the University of Huddersfield.

Speaking about the Institute, which opened in November 2006, Co-Director Professor Stephen Frosh says: "The key word of the BISR is 'interdisciplinary'. Social research encompasses work in social theory, psychosocial studies and sociology in the critical tradition for which Birkbeck is known; it connects researchers in social psychology, social policy, human geography, law, gender studies, politics and sociology, and makes links with colleagues in other areas of the humanities and social sciences."

The BISR is open to any Birkbeck academic who wishes to be a member and there are regular lectures, seminars and conferences, which are open to members of the public.

For more information about the Centre and details of forthcoming events, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/bisr or email the Institute's administrator, Julia Eisner: j.eisner@bbk.ac.uk

You might be surprised to learn that Birkbeck offers qualifications in dance, but as the course heads into its tenth year, the College's reputation in performing arts is steadily growing.

Originally started by Peter Burtt-Jones, who has been working at Birkbeck for over 25 years, the aim of the course is to offer students a chance to explore their ambitions, without having to give up their day jobs. Current course Director Maria Koripas explains: "Normally, training to be a dancer means enormous expense, so most dance students will only ever be able to attend drop-in classes, or they face having to pull their lives apart to pay for full-time courses. At Birkbeck, students can continue working, while exploring dance to discover if it is something they really want to pursue."

Like all the teachers on the course, Maria speaks from experience when talking about the life of a dancer; she originally trained in dance theatre studies at the Laban Centre, and has worked as a freelance dancer and choreographer in dance and multidisciplinary projects throughout the UK. She talks with enormous enthusiasm about the unique role that the Birkbeck dance course plays: "Our course can't compete with those offering classes every day of the week, but we don't want to turn students into machines – we show them how to explore dance as a discipline, we help them to come to understand their bodies. It is not just about muscles and technique, but about finding an artistic voice."

Dance is based in the Faculty of Continuing Education as part of the performance studies programme, which also includes opera, concert singing and acting. Each course is offered as both a Foundation and Diploma course and it is hoped that in the next couple of years the Faculty will also be able to offer a BA Hons. There is no age limit for the course and the range of experience can be very varied, so students are assessed before being accepted onto the course. At least 75% of the students continue with dance training when they leave Birkbeck.

Maria concludes: "Our students make dance a way of life and this gives us a sense of lifelong learning in the truest sense."

To find out more, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/ce/ps/courses/dance/index.shtml

Who cares for the elderly?

Gerontology student Rose Heatley writes about her project 'Volunteers in Care Homes for Older People – an Underused Opportunity?'

"For me, hitting my 50s led to a growing interest in ageing. Birkbeck's Gerontology Certificate on the social, medical and psychological aspects of ageing was perfect. Subsequent work with hospices and care homes for older people has led me to wonder why, when three-quarters of all hospices have on average 100 volunteers each, and when volunteering is strongly encouraged by the Government, there are not more volunteers in care homes. This I investigated for my 10,000-word original research diploma requirement.

"I talked to a range of people, including care home providers, care staff and activity organisers, bodies like Age Concern and organisations providing volunteers. I also read widely – surveys about the quality of life in care homes and initiatives to improve it, schemes to set up befriending, studies of why people volunteer and so on. And I identified a few homes where volunteers thrived.

"Roughly one in five of the UK population over the age of 85 lives in some form of institutional care. Boredom and depression are serious problems, but paid staff do not have time to sit and chat. Surely there must be a role for volunteers? One exceptional home had 60 in place aged from 16 to 92, and I listed 40 activities involving volunteers. But would potential volunteers be deterred by the fact that the majority of care homes are privately owned? Not if you understand the different reasons why people volunteer, in my view.

"I was delighted when the Relatives & Residents Association, whose chief executive had been my supervisor, offered to publish *Volunteers in Care Homes for Older People – an Underused Opportunity?* It has sold 150 copies in two months and a conference is planned in July. What greater reward could there be for pursuing this worthwhile and hitherto neglected topic?"

For further information about Birkbeck's Gerontology courses, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/study/all_courses/gerontology.html

Above: **Portrait of elderly women.** (Getty Images)

Who are our students?

As well as advising students like Rose Heatly (see article left), Senior Lecturer in Gerontology Anne Jamieson has been conducting her own research, which involves a three-year study focused on all the 2003 Birkbeck graduates. She talks here about her work.

"My research comprised postal questionnaires, in-depth interviews and a three-year follow-up study. The study was duplicated at the Open University, making for interesting comparisons of part-time students from the two institutions.

"Adults of all ages, ranging from 20 to 60+, are attracted to both Birkbeck and the Open University. The latter attracts more students with dependent children, for whom the distance learning mode would appear convenient. In terms of reasons for enrolling on a course of study, one of the most striking findings was the similarity between Birkbeck and Open University graduates. At both institutions the student body is heterogeneous. Some graduates enrolled mainly for reasons of personal development and intellectual stimulation, whereas others expected to improve their employment prospects. The three-year follow-up study found that most seemed to have had their expectations fulfilled.

At a confrerence at Birkbeck in March 2007, the first findings were disseminated. More material will be available shortly on a dedicated website.

Master's report: Financing our students

Ensuring that our students receive financial support can be a complex business, writes Professor David Latchman

When I became Master of Birkbeck, the Government had a target that 50% of 18–30 year olds should go to university. This ignored those over the age of 30 and begged the question of why their obtaining a university education was not something to be encouraged.

The Leitch report on skills* heralded a new target: 40% of the workforce should have a university-level qualification by 2020. Obviously, this new target is much more in tune with Birkbeck's mission of providing a university education for those who cannot study full-time.

Both the Department for Education and Skills and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) responded actively to the Leitch target by urging universities to engage more with employers. HEFCE has made it clear that it sees us as ideally positioned to do this because of our part-time mission and our high-quality, research-led education. We are in active discussions with HEFCE as to how it can best support us to do this.

Ironically, Government is encouraging part-time study by those in work, while support for part-time students and the universities which teach them remains inferior to that for full-time students. It is not sufficient to say that these costs should be picked up by employers, since in many cases, employers will be unwilling or unable to do this.

To enhance our part-time mission in the future, we need to ensure that all students receive financial support allowing them to study at Birkbeck, with such support being provided, as appropriate, by employers, government grants, the students' own resources and Birkbeck itself.

Currently, students with the lowest incomes receive government fee support up to a maximum of £1,125 per annum. Moreover, as income levels increase, the level of government support falls away, so that even students with fairly low incomes receive partial support. To enable such students to study at Birkbeck, we introduced a scheme in which the College tops up any student who received only partial government support and which ensures that their fees are fully paid.

However, we are in danger of creating a poverty trap in which students whose incomes are just above the maximum for any government support do not receive any support from the Government or from Birkbeck. In addition, no government help is available to students who have a degree, regardless of their income, even though such students may be studying work-related subjects to improve their careers.

Last year, we introduced the Student Opportunity Fund, which provided ten full-fee studentships to such students. Ideally, however, if funds were available, we would like to provide full or partial support to all students who have a significant financial need and who do not receive any government support.

Obviously, the need for student support funds will increase as we recruit students in Stratford. We have already received significant support for student bursaries at Stratford from the Sir John Cass's Foundation and the Aldgate and All Hallow's Trust.

Clearly, therefore, a significant number of students are now studying at Birkbeck who would not have been able to do so without our financial support. Much more remains to be done, however, with the help of our

Below: **Students outside Birkbeck's Torrington Square building** (JD Moore)

***Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – World Class Skills** (HMSO; December 2006)

Reel style

Professor Ian Christie, Professor of Film and Media History, describes the exciting new building

What is a research centre? In practice, it can be anything from a gleaming new skyscraper to a nameplate fixed to an office door, and almost anything in between. Indeed some of the most influential organisations have often been the least impressive visually. But when the opportunity to create a new centre for film and visual media research at Birkbeck came some four years ago, one unique feature quickly suggested itself: why not design the centre round a real cinema auditorium, which could be both a working resource and a landmark feature? Other facilities, such as seminar rooms, media storage and offices, could surely be fitted round a dramatic space that would proclaim the new centre's identity.

The winners of the competition for the project, Surface Architects, had no previous experience of cinemas, but soon became enthusiastic about getting it right. This meant planning the largest possible screen – in contrast to lecture theatre style – and adopting raked seating and side aisles, as well as providing a projection room large enough to take all the equipment we might want, ranging from traditional film projectors to the new generation of digital projectors. And, of course, full surround sound.

As a result, Birkbeck's new Centre for Film and Visual Media boasts a remarkable 70-seat cinema auditorium – already being referred to as 'The Screen on the Square' – which is as soberly dedicated to ideal screening conditions as the surrounding break-out spaces and stairway are an exuberant display of pure form and colour. In fact, Surface's extraordinary projection of intersecting cones has various filmic associations: the jagged angles recall the Expressionist set design of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, an influential German film of 1921; and the lurid colours evoke Andy Warhol's silkscreen portraits of film stars.

Original and inspiring, certainly, but how well will it serve to promote Birkbeck's aspirations in film and media research, and in teaching? The new centre hosts the London Screen Study Collection (already described in BBK21), and provides individual viewing stations for users of this resource, as well as space for seminars and researchers. Meanwhile, the cinema will run a programme of London-related screenings and special events, which should help promote the theme of researching London's screen history to a wider public – and also feed into a proposed new module, to be shared between the existing MA History of Film and Visual Media and MA London Studies.

The new centre will also support the School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media's new BA History of Film, Art and Modern Media, which launches in October 2007. This focuses on the closely related histories of many modern media, from photography to contemporary gallery installation, drawing on art history, media theory and film studies to deliver a highly innovative degree. The design of the new centre, as much as its facilities, should underline the belief that underpins much of the work of the School – that the history of art and architecture provide an ideal basis for studying other visual, plastic and, increasingly, digital media.

Photo: **Part of Birkbeck's new centre for film and visual media research** (Kilian O'Sullivan/Lightroom)

Jolly good fellows

New Birkbeck Fellows express their admiration for the College at the graduation ceremony in March

Every year, Fellowships are awarded by the governing body in recognition of exceptional service to the College or an outstanding contribution to the academic debate.

Accepting his Fellowship of Birkbeck at the graduation ceremony in March, Liberal Democrat MP for Kingston and Surbiton Ed Davey reflected the feelings of all the newly appointed Fellows: "It is a real honour; Birkbeck has helped me and thousands of others over the years. The College enables people to continue learning and to access some of the most innovative and talented thinkers in the world; few institutions come close to Birkbeck."

Ed Davey, who has an MSc Economics from Birkbeck, is a key figure in the Liberal Democrats, having been spokesman on Treasury Affairs and then Education and Skills; he is now Chief of Staff to party leader Sir Menzies Campbell. At the graduation ceremony, Ed Davey spoke of his admiration for the flexible approach to study that Birkbeck offers. He said: "Government must never again allow part-time education to be the poor relation. Higher education policies should not be based round bricks and mortar but around intellectual ideas."

Also awarded a Fellowship this year was structural biologist Professor Janet Thornton FRS, CBE. Professor Thornton has had a distinguished career in academia, and was one of the first people to classify protein structures and describe them in terms of their component parts; she was admitted to the Royal Society in 1999, holds professorial appointments at Birkbeck and University College London, and since 2001 has been the Director of the European Bioinformatics Institute in Cambridge.

Professor Thornton joined Birkbeck in 1980. "I was part-time initially, a wonderful opportunity to spend time with my two children while continuing with my research. Later I understood how lucky I had been and appreciated how much support I'd received at Birkbeck." On being made a Fellow, Professor Thornton said: "I admire Birkbeck immensely, both for its work in giving people the opportunity to study, but also for its world-class research; the words 'Birkbeck' and 'crystallography' are synonymous."

Professor Barry Ife has also had a long relationship with Birkbeck; after completing his PhD at the College, he stayed on to lecture in Spanish. "I taught at Birkbeck for 17 years – the formative part of my career. Birkbeck was my first love and I still have deep respect for it. When I left at 40 my metabolism was entirely in tune with the College."

Professor Ife joined King's College London in 1987, when he was appointed to the Cervantes Chair of Spanish. He comments: "At King's, people pulled my leg about having a day job!" He became Vice-Principal of King's in 1997, followed by his appointment as Principal of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2004. An international authority on the history and culture of Spain and Spanish America from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and a leading musicologist, Professor Ife was awarded the CBE in 2000 for his academic work in Hispanic studies.

Below: **New Birkbeck fellows (from left to right) Ed Davey MP, Barry Ife CBE and Janet Thornton FRS, CBE**

Back to his roots

A surprise visit from the great-great-great-great grandson of College founder James Birkbeck provided a crash course in genealogy

New Yorker James Birkbeck IV had always known his great-great-great-great grandfather had set up a college, and he had often wondered what it was like. In March this year, when he and his fiancée, Chrissy, were in London, James thought it would be the perfect time to find out.

James, like his ancestor, cuts an impressive figure, though the lives of the two men are considerably different – James works as a tattoo artist in Virginia Beach, whereas College founder George Birkbeck was a Yorkshire physician. James comments: "As a child, I was always told I was from this prestigious family in England, but my father and grandfather were both janitors, so it seemed incredible. My family have always rooted for the underdog and this seems to fit with my ancestor's aim when he set up Birkbeck."

When James came face to face with a portrait of his relative in Birkbeck's Council room, it was an eerie experience; the lace ruff of the early nineteenth century may have been replaced with a twenty-first-century tattoo, but the family resemblance is undeniable. "This is the first image I have ever seen of George. I have never liked my nose. Now I see where it came from," he jested.

Left: **Mirror image; James Birkbeck in front of the portrait of his ancestor, George** (Birkbeck Photo Unit)

For more information about Birkbeck's genealogy courses, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/study/ce/genealogy or call 0845 601 0174

An everyman subject

James is certainly not alone in his desire to discover more about his origins. Birkbeck runs two short courses in Genealogy Research Skills (beginner and intermediate). Mari Alderman, sessional lecturer has seen a steady increase in the subject's popularity. "Some see genealogy as a way to find out about themselves," says Maria. "They want to know how their ancestors have influenced where they are today. Others are interested in the social history."

She continues: "The subject really became popular at the end of the nineteenth century; Victorians hoped to find a coat of arms in their history. These days it is much more of an everyman subject."

So where would someone like James start? Maria says: "James is obviously in the privileged position of having a famous ancestor with an unusual name who will be recorded in the Oxford Dictionary of Natural Biography (www.oxforddnb.com) which lists addresses and family relations."

On Birkbeck's genealogy courses, students learn research techniques, using civil registration and census documents, wills and parish registers. Maria says:
"Each week we take a topic on a particular source, for example the internet or civil registration documents. We also look at how to read old handwriting and we can use documents from the London Metropolitan Archives. Family history has been described as completing a jigsaw, with no picture and some of the pieces missing."

Greening the College

Birkbeck is going green on a variety of levels, explains Jane Stephenson

When Birkbeck's College Green website was set up last year, Professor Latchman, the Master, wrote: "I encourage all staff and students to visit this website regularly, not only to watch our progress in making Birkbeck a 'greener' institution, but also to follow suggestions about making a personal contribution to this initiative. The site gives information on how, through simple measures such as recycling and energy reduction, we can all make a difference." Now the College has also begun formally working towards gaining the ISO 14001 Environmental Management Standard (EMS) – one of the major aims of Birkbeck's sustainability policy.

Above: **Health and Safety Officer Tom McCartney receives the Green Light Environmental Award from Gary Meades, Environmental Affairs Manager at British Airways**

Key drivers

The College is being advised by environmental consultant and alumnus Mark Gough, who explains: "We are working towards certification through the Acorn BS 8555 phased implementation approach, which allows us to break down the standard into manageable sections. The adoption of an EMS will enable the College to move towards an agreed level of environmental certification in a structured and phased way. An EMS is to do with understanding and implementing both a social and a business model, as well as making the College staff, students and the wider College community aware of what we are trying to achieve."

The following key drivers have been identified by the EMS Group:

- Environmental impact reduction: Birkbeck is measuring the effect of its activities on the environment and is developing practices and procedures to reduce its global environmental impact.
- Educating and influencing: Birkbeck is using its unique position of educating working people to understand the environmental impact of businesses, with the aim of spreading understanding through the wider community.
- Changing perceptions, internally and externally: increasing environmental understanding and knowledge will not only improve activities and environmental performance within Birkbeck, but also spread the message among its staff, students and alumni.
- Corporate responsibility and risk management: Birkbeck is starting from a position of a low environmental impact within the sector. Improved practices will reaffirm compliance with forthcoming legislation and best practice.

College Green wins award

Kick-starting our green credentials, Birkbeck's College Green website recently won a Green Light Environmental Award. The site was set up by Tom McCartney, Health and Safety Officer, to let staff and students air their views on sustainability and to generate ideas to improve environmental awareness.

Results to date have included the formation of several Green Teams in Birkbeck, substantially more openness about how issues like energy consumption and waste disposal are managed, and much improved dissemination of green advice and guidance to help 'green' the College.

The award for environmental practice in the public sector was judged by a panel with representatives from the Environment Agency, Barclays Bank and *Business Info* magazine. Tom McCartney collected the award at an event in Earls Court on 12 June. He commented: "This is great recognition for the site. We hope even more people will use the ideas we have there and take the initiative to recycle and save energy."

Visit the prize-winning site at: www.bbk.ac.uk/sustain

CRIME REPORT

As one of the most senior police officers in Scotland, Birkbeck graduate Chief Constable David Strang offers a first-hand insight into cutting crime

As Chief Inspector of Lothian and Borders Police, David Strang (48) is one of the most senior police officers in the country. The role, which he took over at the end of March 2007, not only covers the seat of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, but, as David points out, extends well into the surrounding countryside: "We cover a wide variety of communities with very different policing needs, varying from those in large rural areas to the specific needs of policing Scotland's capital."

Glasgow-born and raised, David originally intended to follow in his father's footsteps by studying engineering at Durham University. But on graduating he realised that a career in engineering wasn't what he was looking for. "I know it sounds like a cliché, but I really wanted to work with people and actually be able to make a difference to people's lives. Twenty-seven years on, I still believe that human relations are at the heart of the police force; 80% of our budget is spent on staffing and almost all of our calls are to do with some kind of breakdown in a human relationship."

In 1987, David decided to develop further his interest in human relations and decision-making, with an MSc Organizational Behaviour at Birkbeck. "The course was hugely relevant to my work, exploring both the organisational and the personal. As I was so interested in the topics I didn't find it difficult to put in the time, and because it was so relevant I was able to apply directly the knowledge that I was acquiring. What was most useful was the contact with the other students on the course, who came from very different backgrounds. Previously all my training had been with the police,

but at Birkbeck I had the opportunity to talk to practitioners from other branches of the public sector, as well as hearing first-hand experiences from within the private sector."

David believes that furthering education and training is important for all police officers: "Whenever colleagues ask me for my advice about training, I always say it is better to study something you enjoy rather than studying purely for your career. Birkbeck was the only time I thoroughly enjoyed academic study. For me, taking the course was not just about getting a University of London qualification, but about the course content itself. When I look at CVs these days, I am encouraged by anyone who has gone back to studying as a mature student."

Although Birkbeck's central London location may not seem the obvious choice for a policeman based in Scotland, David actually spent the bulk of his career with the Metropolitan Police, reaching the rank of Divisional Commander – the equivalent of Chief Superintendent – in Wembley. He returned north of the border in 1998 for three years as Assistant Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders, moving on to Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary in 2001. Does he notice any differences between policing in England and Scotland? "I think the public attitude towards the police is less hostile in Scotland than in other places," he comments. "We also have a closer relationship with government. Policing is one of the devolved powers and as there are only eight Chief Constables in Scotland compared with 43 in England, we are able to have a very close relationship with policy makers."

In devising police policy, David has been asked to concentrate on criminal justice reform, which involves looking at the time it takes to speed up the treatment of minor offences and also how to tackle issues at their root cause. "The police must tackle the causes of crime, rather than always dealing with the symptoms," says David. "To find long-term solutions, we must work with partners in the voluntary sector and youth groups, as well as local authorities. Community planning is vital to tackle problems like youth disorder – the police can keep chasing kids on a Friday night, but by tackling the reasons why they are behaving in a certain way, we can use police resources more profitably."

David is conscious that one of the key aspects for a modern police force is the way their work is perceived by the public. He says: "Although crime figures are one measure of success, the immeasurable targets are just as important, particularly how safe people feel. Interestingly, in Scotland, although crime figures are falling, people say they feel less safe. There are, of course, many reasons for this, not least how crime is portrayed in the media, but the police have a key role in making the public feel more secure. The police are on the side of the public, and must be seen to be so, rather than being regarded as an 'army of occupation'. It is something that we take for granted in the UK, that our police are in the main unarmed. That we can continue to have an unarmed police force is really based on trust."

In 2002, David won the Queen's Police Medal. "Whilst this was an honour, the real reward of my career has been the variety of experience I have been able to have, both on a day-to-day level and in the various roles I have had in the force, from being on the beat, to a role like the one I have now, which is about human resources and managing a £200 million budget."

Above: **David Strang, at his new role in Edinburgh**
Left: **Going Forth – a police patrol bridge under Edinburgh's famous bridge**

Having just started in his new role, David is excited about the challenges ahead, both on a local level and more widely for Scotland as a whole. "One thing that has really changed since my time as a policeman is the growing threat of terrorism. This has to be a top priority for us; without national security, our other work is undermined."

And what challenges does he see for himself on a personal level? Might there be more studying in the future? "With three teenage children to look after and a job which means I am never really off duty, it is enough to fit in the odd bit of cycling and gardening!"

For more information on Birkbeck's MSc in Organizational Psychology, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/manop/orgpsychology/msccourses.shtml

In a class of their own

Recent graduates talk about their Birkbeck experiences

"It really was an incredible experience, one of the most rewarding things I have ever done," says Jan Dalgleish about her course, MSc Career Management and Counselling. Jan, who is originally from New Zealand, says that the course was unusual because it combined the practical and the academic. "For me, it brought together all the aspects of my career so far, as a teacher and then as an HR professional working largely within professional service organisations."

Jan works for law firm Mishcon de Reya. "In my job I have been able to apply all the skills I learnt on the course. The partners in the law firm have heard of the academic rigour of Birkbeck and respect my qualification. In addition, the course taught me a lot about myself. I am definitely a more confident and empathetic person as a result."

Manjula Thimma (37) also believes that she has more self-confidence and increased academic knowledge as a result of her MSc Bioinformatics: "I really enjoyed the intensity and serious approach at Birkbeck. In India, courses tend to focus more on theoretical aspects, whereas the experience I had at Birkbeck was of a more practical nature."

The course lead to a career change for Manjula, who had worked as a computer engineer in India and Singapore, but who now works in a Medical Research Council laboratory, directly applying the skills she learnt at Birkbeck. "I was keen to find a course that used the skills I already had, but also gave me new challenges. As bioinformatics draws strengths from biology and computing, it was an ideal course for me to study and explore new career opportunities." Manjula passed her course with a distinction – a great achievement, made all the more amazing when you learn she has two daughters under seven and she only moved to the UK three years ago.

Geoff Lovett (32) also has two young children, aged nine and seven. As he and his wife, Denize, were both studying at Birkbeck, he says: "We could not have managed without the hard work of Deirdre Lazarus and her staff in the Birkbeck nursery." Geoff has just completed an MA London Studies, while Denize is studying for a four-year degree.

Managing his family's north London hotel and also being a Blue Badge guide for London, organising trips for academics and university groups, makes for a pretty full life for Geoff. "I feel I have more academic credibility and I am more confident when giving tours of historical sites such as the British Museum. I made really good friends on my course too. I particularly enjoyed the seminars, which helped me to be much more open with my ideas. Birkbeck is an excellent 'watering hole', for those with a thirst for knowledge."

For more information about Master's degrees at Birkbeck, visit www.birkbeckmatters.com

Below (from left to right): **Jan Dalgleish, Manjula Thimma and Geoff Lovett** (Birkbeck Photo Unit).

She served her cause

Professor Hobsbawm remembers Baroness Jeger, a Birkbeck alumna, who represented the determination that all graduates need to succeed

At the March graduation ceremonies, the President of Birkbeck, Professor Eric Hobsbawm, paid tribute to the students, not only for their academic success, but for what he called the 'sheer grit' that lies behind each qualification. He reminded graduates that Birkbeck was founded by people who wanted to make the world "a better and more human place", and went on to pay a moving tribute to one such person: Birkbeck graduate of 1936, Lena Jeger, Baroness Jeger of St Pancras, who sadly died on 26 February 2007, aged 92. This is part of Professor Hobsbawm's speech.

"Baroness Jeger was the daughter of a Gloucestershire postman and lived at a time when university was a dream for all but a tiny minority. Thanks to her Birkbeck degree in English and French, she became a civil servant in the wartime Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office. She was also a journalist on *The Guardian* from '51 until '54 and then from 1964 until 2003.

"As a politician, Baroness Jeger represented St Pancras, which included the area on which the present day College stands. She was first a councillor (1945–59) and then when her MP husband, Santo Jeger, died in 1953, she won the resulting by-election. Speaking about this victory she said: 'Somehow I had to live between the funeral and polling day.'

"She identified herself with a range of local interests, from tenants' rights to the anxieties of the borough's Greek Cypriot community about the denial by Harold Macmillan's government of Cyprus's right to self-determination. She campaigned energetically and successfully for the abolition of the earnings rule which cut widows' pensions. She also played an important role in the battle for equal pay between men and women, threatening to lead a backbench revolt against the government's rigid prices and incomes policy.

"Talking about the role of MP, Baroness Jeger said: 'An MP cannot win by being all things to all men and women. Constituents want more shops open on Sunday, or all shops closed on Sunday; they want more abortion or no abortion; hanging or no hanging. This is where you cannot be arithmetically answerable to your constituency. I believe, without any mandarin pretensions, that the House of Commons often has to give a lead to public opinion and not always follow it.'

"She sat as a Labour member for many years, until she moved to the Lords in 1979, handing her safe seat to Frank Dobson, who said of her: 'She pursued causes which may have become fashionable now, but were highly controversial when she espoused them. For example, she sponsored David Steel's Abortion Law Reform Act 1967, though her constituency had one of the highest Roman Catholic votes in London.' "

Summarising Baroness Jeger's life, Professor Hobsbawm told this year's graduates: "She didn't make millions or have a glittering ministerial career. But she served her cause and the people of London as well as she could. It was a good life, lived by a good person."

Above (pictured far right): **Baroness (then Lady) Jeger talking to VAT protesters in 1972.** (Getty Images)

Solid foundations

Maxine Herbert missed out on education the first time round, but grabbed her second chance

"I enjoyed school until I was about 16, but I really didn't like A-levels, so I left school and started working. I got on well, but later I began to realise that I was being held back by my lack of qualifications," says Maxine, now 37.

Maxine has had a long relationship with Birkbeck; she first came here to study for a foundation degree and she is now enrolled on a Diploma in IT Applications. Doing so well at the College, Maxine has even been asked to teach some of the course modules. "I had learnt about spreadsheets as part of my Foundation Degree, and I wanted to develop that further and also learn more about Access in order to help me in my job. From the foundation degree I learnt how to study; the IT course is more about independent study, but I feel comfortable with that," Maxine explains.

Above: **Maxine Herbert** (Birkbeck Photo Unit)

Partly as a result of her Birkbeck courses, Maxine is now a training manager for Ryman the stationer: "My job is quite diverse; I give training presentations, and write training workbooks. I am also building a training database using Access, which is why I enrolled on the IT course at Birkbeck. Because of the practical applications of my course, the company agreed to pay for it.

"Thanks to Birkbeck I am more committed in everything I do. I started the IT course thinking about a training database, but now I see the possibilities for all kinds of applications. My tutors on the course are really helpful and have loads of practical experience. We are constantly looking at real-work scenarios; for example, Ryman is about to convert to Open Office and my tutors are offering advice about how best to do this, so the course is directly integrated into my working life."

Money matters

Birkbeck has more money than ever to help students finance their course

A new student financial support package for part-time undergraduate students was created by Birkbeck in 2006 because part-time undergraduate students were not eligible for the same financial support as full-time students when the £3000 differential fee was introduced.

A generous new financial support package for part-time students was announced by the DfES in October 2005, but details of the scheme were published late in the 2006 recruitment cycle so Birkbeck needed to move quickly. The challenge in the summer of 2006 was to devise, implement and publicise a new undergraduate financial support package for students. This package used a combination of the new DfES money and donor money (Birkbeck has a growing tradition of raising money from private donors to support students). Any student who was eligible for partial government fee or course grants would have it topped up to the full amount by the College. Any student not eligible for government fee or course grants could apply to the Student Opportunity Fund. This fund, created from donor money, enabled students to apply for funding who might be caught in the 'poverty trap' (just outside government bandings) or who were otherwise ineligible for genuine reasons.

The new financial support package was launched in June 2006 and was very successful: 2372 students successfully applied for funding from the Birkbeck Student Finance Team in 2006 compared to 1732 in 2005; £900,722 was awarded to students in 2006 compared to £537,004 in 2005; undergraduate recruitment in October 2006 was buoyant; and all the Student Opportunity Bursaries were taken up.

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Birkbeck, University of London is an exempt charity under schedule 2 of the Charities Act 1993.

The Birkbeck Alumni Fund was set up to provide additional help to those students who are unable to cover the full cost of their course and to ensure Birkbeck continues to provide a vibrant learning environment for its students.

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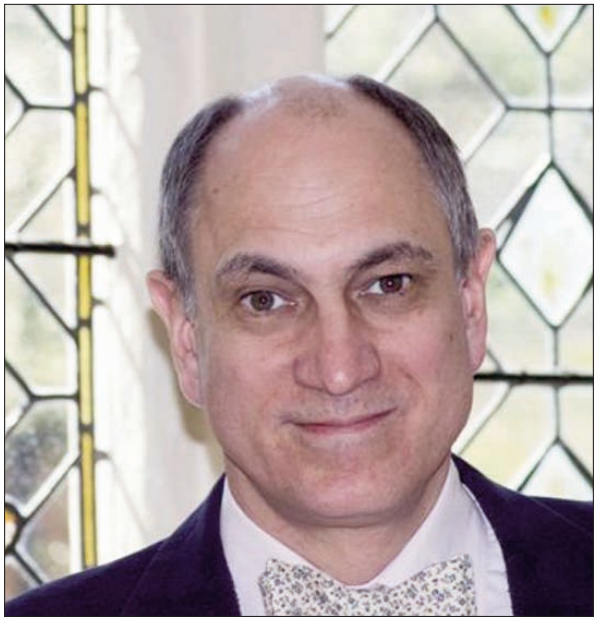
Developments in Bloomsbury

Terry Bishop, facilitator of The Bloomsbury Colleges, reports on successes to date

The Government is actively encouraging collaboration between public sector bodies, including higher education. This is particularly relevant in the provision of shared services and, while cost reduction is desirable, it is also important to aim for the improvement of the services offered. Within the University of London, Birkbeck is striving to achieve this through partnership with our neighbouring colleges in Bloomsbury.

"Members of The Bloomsbury Consortium (TBC) are collaborating together on a variety of administrative and academic matters and although these arrangements are slightly more formalized than those at Liverpool, both provide good examples of how institutions can co-operate on matters of mutual interest whilst retaining their integrity and independence." This is from a paper on Shared Services in the Higher Education Sector circulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in August 2006 and praising the efforts of TBC and our friends in the North West. Since then we have changed our name to The Bloomsbury Colleges (still TBC) and taken some significant steps forward.

The Bloomsbury Colleges consortium was set up in 2004 and consists of six colleges: Birkbeck, the Institute of Education, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Royal Veterinary College, the School of Oriental and African Studies and the School of Pharmacy. The aim is to identify areas where the six institutions can do things better collaboratively than independently. Together the six have a total income of around £270 million and are comparable in size to a large research-led, multi-faculty university.



Above: **Professor Jeff Waage, Director of the International Development Centre**

Improving student services has been a priority and Birkbeck, which does not have a hall of residence of its own, is acquiring residential places for students in September 2007. It is also seeking to expand that provision in future years through partnership with other TBC members and a quality developer. At the same time, the consortium has also been looking at ways to improve the range of student welfare services, which will help with international recruitment and student retention.

Bilateral and multilateral links between the members were flourishing before TBC was set up and the group's been building on this collaboration. An important initiative has been the establishment of TBC Research Studentships, tenable at two or more of the partners. An impressive list of joint research projects resulted in ten studentships for 2007, each with a lead supervisor in one college and a supporting supervisor in a second. Further studentships will be offered for 2008 and are additional to the awards offered by each college. Another very successful teaching and learning initiative has been the Bloomsbury Learning Environment (BLE) involving academics and administrators across the six. This has led to a shared contract with a commercial platform and the establishment of a shared post.

The major academic success so far has been the creation of the International Development Centre (IDC), drawing on the unique range and depth of expertise across the six partners. This, together with the strength of partnerships with researchers, policymakers and practitioners in Africa, Asia and other low- and middle-income regions, will see the creation of the largest and most multi-disciplinary academic grouping in the UK. This has been made possible by a major grant of £3.7m from HEFCE, which will cover set-up costs, including the Gordon Square properties, which will house the Centre. Its initial work will support the attainment of the UN's Millennium Development Goals; it will facilitate high quality, relevant, interdisciplinary research and will also develop new teaching programmes, particularly postgraduate and continuing education.

The Centre will develop technologies to support teaching and research and will facilitate

continued on page 28

Former Birkbeck archaeology student **Nicola Dunn** talks about her nine-month stay in Antarctica

EXTREME CONSERVATION

> **“The temperature was around minus 40c and my hair, face and eye lashes were beginning to freeze”**

Antarctica is a place of extremes: it is the world’s coldest, driest, windiest and most southerly continent. These challenges have made it an obvious target for exploration: though few of us will have the chance to see it for ourselves. One of the lucky few is former Birkbeck student and museum conservator Nicola Dunn, who last summer began a nine-month stay in Antarctica, as part of a New Zealand-led conservation project.

“My first sight of Antarctica was as I climbed out of the US military plane that had landed on a runway built on the sea ice,” says Nicola. “A vast, white plain stretched out to huge mountain ranges and Mount Erebus, an active volcano smoking on the horizon. There are no trees or plants to give scale to the landscape, so judging distance was difficult, and the clear air creates optical illusions which extrude the height of the glaciers and turn mountains upside down.”

Nicola was working as part of a long-term project run by Antarctic Heritage Trust, a charity which aims to preserve three wooden huts and their contents, used between 1901 and 1917 by expeditions led by Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton. Talking about the importance of the project, Nicola says: “It is vital that these huts are maintained. They are the first habitation on the continent and represent an important period of British history. Whilst we think of Scott and Shackleton as heroic explorers, their teams also included excellent scientists who gave us an understanding of the Antarctic geology, environment and weather patterns which are still relevant today.”

So how was it for the modern-day scientist? “In the first week we were trained to survive the climate, camping out on the ice, getting used to the layers of specialist clothing, scaling crevasses and discovering the enormous amounts of snow it takes to make a cup of tea,” says Nicola.

When she arrived, there was continuous daylight, but this quickly changed into 24 hours a day of darkness. How did she cope? “The constant darkness and blizzard were broken by bright moonlight and the most spectacular auroras, so we could go outside and walk and ski. There was also a large American base about a mile away, which we visited, and we organised regular social events, including Scrabble tournaments and fancy dress parties! We even had a radio link-up with the researchers at the South Pole and played them at virtual darts!”

Though the night-time entertainment may have changed since Shackleton’s time, Nicola says: “The modern base was bright and warm, but little has really changed since the expeditions: we were living in an untouched landscape and sharing many of the experiences that the explorers recorded in their journals.”

In the huts there are over 15,000 artefacts, including furniture, caribou-skin sleeping bags, cooking utensils and photographic equipment. There is also a large quantity of provisions, particularly tins of food, and it was these that Nicola was working on: “We were conserving the hundreds of tin-plated iron cans that were left behind, all of which were rusting and a number of which had burst. We used a range of conservation techniques to halt the corrosion and prevent the cans from deteriorating. The cans that were leaking were emptied and

Above: “Most of our winter was spent conserving hundreds of tin cans, containing an impressive range of foods, from Irish brawn, tripe and kippered herrings to dried spinach and gooseberries. The cans are fairly similar to those of today, only larger, and were painted (this one with red lead) to protect them from rusting.”

Above: **Mount Erebus, the active volcano that dominates Ross Island where New Zealand's scientific research Scott Base is located. It is so high that it creates its own weather such as 'lenticular clouds', which often form around it. With nothing to give scale to the landscape, Erebus looked to be in walking distance but was actually over 30km away.** (Nicola Dunn)

once we got over the revulsion of the decaying food, we became fascinated by the contents, ingredients for a 1907 Antarctic meal, which could be anything from tripe and onions to curried rabbit."

Dealing with 100-year-old rotting food may not be everyone's idea of a dream job, but Nicola is enthusiastic about the variety of her chosen career: "Working in conservation has given me some amazing experiences. I've worked in Northern Ireland and at Buckingham Palace, I've visited America and lived in one of the original buildings at Colonial Williamsburg, and worked in Tokyo and Taiwan. I never thought that I would get to live in Antarctica, especially over winter, seeing the seasons change. So few people ever experience that."

Nicola began her career as a silversmith and jeweller, but in 1992 she enrolled on an extra-mural Birkbeck course in Prehistoric, Roman and Post-Medieval Field Archaeology. She says: "I chose the course because I knew I wanted to go back to college to study conservation full-time and archaeology was relevant to that. The tutors were very knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Not only did I learn about the beginnings of British history and how objects are excavated and processed, but it got me back into studying. Most importantly, it really helped me to understand the relevance of museum artefacts, how to examine them and what they can show us about the cultures and people of the past, and alternatively what historic evidence can be lost if artefacts deteriorate and are not conserved or treated properly."

Since October 2000, Nicola has worked as a conservator for the Museum of London: "When I was studying at Birkbeck, some courses were held at the Museum of London, and I remember thinking it would be fantastic to hold the prehistoric objects in the cases. Ten years on, it is now my job to handle those same objects."

For more information about Birkbeck's archaeology courses, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/study/all_courses/archaeology.html
To find out more about the conservation project, visit www.heritage-antarctica.org

COLD COMFORT

Terra Nova hut, Cape Evans
(right, top and middle)
Terra Nova is the hut from which Scott, with Wilson, Evans, Oates and Bowers set out to the South Pole in 1911 but tragically died on their return journey. Buried in the snow around the hut are hundreds of objects from the expeditions including sleds, food supplies such as cans and bottles, nails, wire, the skeleton of a dog and two huge ships anchors left behind when the ships from a later expedition were blown out to sea during a storm.

Inside, the hut seems quite spacious, but it actually housed 25 men. Thousands of artefacts remain in the hut, including personal belongings, household items, provisions, tools and equipment all left behind by the explorers and its these that bring the hut to life and illustrates how the explorers lived, worked and survived in the hostile, isolated environment. There were ice crystals on the inside of the roof as it was minus 35c.

Survival training **(bottom left)**
Antarctica, particularly in the winter, is a deadly environment to work in. The ice that we frequently traveled over either in vehicles, on skis or walking is constantly moving, and crevasses open up that are often hidden by a layer of snow. During our survival training we practiced scaling in and out of crevasses. We descended into the spectacular and eerie 'Imax' crevasse with its shear walls of iron-hard blue ice. It was intensely cold, quiet and still, apart from the occasional cracking noise which reminded us that we were actually standing in a very slowly moving ice flow.

Nicola in Antarctica **(far right)**
In front of a spectacular red sky during the twilight of a polar winter. The image was taken very rapidly because the temperature was around minus 40c and my hair, face and eye lashes were beginning to freeze – as did the camera. I had taken my scarf off for this image and lasted for only about half a minute while the photograph was taken before pulling it back up.

All images courtesy NIcola Dunn, except 'Nicola in Antarctica', courtesy Paul Stewart

John Crace of *The Guardian* interviewed Professor Eric Hobsbawm to mark his 90th birthday and his five years as Birkbeck's President

LIVING HISTORY

Above, right: **Professor Hobsbawm, at his home in Hampstead, London.** (Eamonn McCabe)

It's a fair bet that most people who reach the age of 90 will have had their moments. But Eric Hobsbawm – despite his insistence that he's had no more excitement in his life "than a Victorian vicar" – has had more than his fair share. As one of the most respected historians of the second-half of the twentieth century, he hasn't just chronicled events, he's lived them too. He was on his way home from school in Berlin when Hitler came to power, he translated for Che Guevara in Havana, he saw Stalin's corpse and ... and these are only a few of the more notable highlights.

His globe-trotting has understandably slowed down over the past decade or so and these days you're much more likely to find Hobsbawm at his Hampstead home than on the political frontline; but his academic output remains formidable. Only this summer he published his latest collection of essays, *Globalism, Democracy and Terrorism*, and he has no plans to stop there.

"One of the benefits of being a historian is there's no limitation on age," he smiles. "In fact being old is almost an advantage as you have a lifetime of study and experience behind you. Inevitably there are some things I can't do; for instance, I don't have the energy to embark on a new area of study. But I can – and will – revisit

my old material to bring it up to date."

There's a sense in which the outside world often expects the great and the good to re-evaluate their work on landmark birthdays – as if the mere achievement of longevity confers a wisdom and insight denied to others. Yet Hobsbawm maintains that his desire to re-evaluate his work has nothing to do with being 90. "It stems from wanting to reflect what has happened in the world," he says. "There have been some enormous changes – especially in the past 30 years – and they need to be taken into account."

For many historians, the notion that events didn't pan out in quite the way they hoped or expected comes as a near-fatal, narcissistic wound. But Hobsbawm has always been something of a one-off. While most other left-wing historians had abandoned their Marxist credentials after the Soviet suppression of the 1956 Budapest uprising, Hobsbawm retained his Communist Party membership and – even now that he has disavowed much of what was done in the name of revolution – he is still identified primarily as a Marxist historian.

There's a curious dialectic at work here. For though Hobsbawm resented being trapped by other academics as the spokesman for the Marxist ghetto, the fact that he was gave him a status and recognition – not to mention book sales – it might have been otherwise hard to achieve. It's taken a while for Hobsbawm to reconcile himself to this contradiction, but he's now relatively sanguine about it.

"One of the goals of history is to explain how humanity got from the caveman to where we are now," he says, "and Marx was one of the first people to understand this and to try an build a theory around it. He was also interested in the history and thought of the unknown and the dispossessed in society – those who had been ignored by previous generations of historians.

"So it's fair to say my methods were inspired by Marx, and to that end I am still a Marxist historian. I see no need to disclaim this. A Marxist approach, with some modifications – Marx didn't pay enough attention to the importance of culture in shaping society – remains the best way of understanding history."

"Crises, such as global warming, can only be tackled at a global level and global decision making always seems to come second to state interests"

Left: **Professor Hobsbawm wears full academic gowns in his role as Birkbeck President** (Birkbeck Photo Unit)

And there's been plenty that he has revised – not least his attitude to the Soviet regime for which he has long been more of a critic than apologist – and there's still more that he plans to put right. Even his great tetralogy, *The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Capital*, *The Age of Empire* and *The Age of Extremes*, for which Hobsbawm will always be best known, does not escape self-criticism. "I think I underplayed the importance of the USA in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," he says. "I rather took it for granted and should have made it more explicit. So, if I have the time, I'll definitely go back to this."

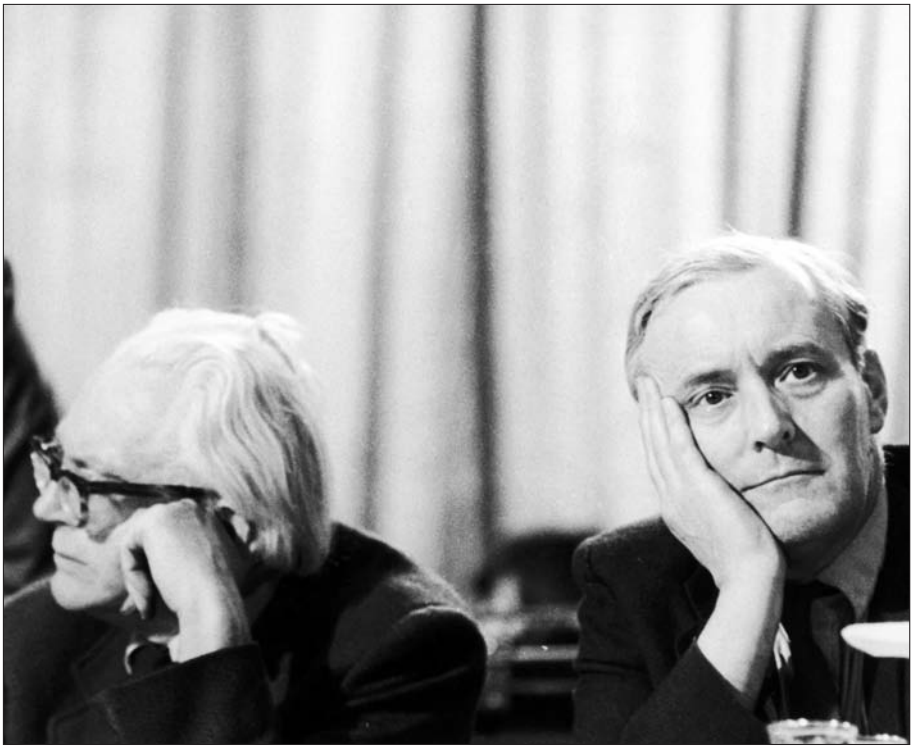
Despite this willingness to admit to his own mistakes, Hobsbawm argues passionately that these misjudgments have not affected his writing. "Yes, I got some things wrong in my personal political life," he says, "but I defy anyone to read my work and show that these errors affected my work. I would have written the same book regardless of my own opinions and beliefs." Even so, the personal and the political have always been closely interlinked in Hobsbawm's own life.

Although born in Alexandria in 1917, he grew up principally in Vienna and Berlin, where he was looked after by relatives after both his parents died by the time he was 14. "It would have been hard not to have been radicalised at the time," he points out. "It was obvious to everyone that the centre ground under the Weimar Republic was collapsing and that things were going to change.

"Joining the nationalists on the right was never an option. As a British person I was always going to be excluded and as a Jew I wasn't going to join an anti-Semitic organisation. So, I suppose it was inevitable I was attracted to the left and became a member of the Communist Party.

"In hindsight, it must have been dangerous to have opposed the Nazi party so directly in its first months of power, but at the time it just felt tremendously exciting. Change was coming and, with the optimism of youth, I believed it would be a revolution from the left."

Hobsbawm moved to England before



“It was clear that the old Labour party had become unelectable and that change was inevitable. Not that I’m necessarily pleased with the way it turned out, mind”

the war and went to King’s College, Cambridge where he also became a member of the famous Cambridge Apostles – a secret debating society of intellectuals, that had included Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt who were later exposed as KGB spies. Not that the Soviets ever made any overtures to Hobsbawm – “I guess I was too well-known as a Communist to suit their purposes,” he laughs.

His war years were almost wholly uneventful. “Having lived in Germany and also being a Communist Party member must have made me a double threat to British national security,” he shrugs, “as I wasn’t allowed to go near any interesting action. So I was kept out of the way educating soldiers.”

Life picked up – albeit slowly – once the war was over. He became a lecturer in history at Birkbeck in 1947, but his out-spoken left-wing politics made many other institutions rather nervous of him at a time when the Cold War was at its iciest. While Hobsbawm built an academic reputation by journal articles and conferences, his failure to get any books published before *Primitive Rebels*, his ground-breaking work on millenarianism in 1959, was entirely due to a covert censorship.

In many ways, then, it would have been far easier – and far more beneficial to his career – if Hobsbawm had followed the example of so many others and left the Communist Party in 1956.So why didn’t he? Hobsbawm says he was under no illusions about the Soviet regime but felt tied by an unbreakable umbilical cord to the hope of world revolution. Here the personal and the political almost certainly overlap. After all, how much harder must it have been for a Jewish person who had been present at the birth of Nazism to renounce his beliefs than for those whose politics were largely based on theory?

Hobsbawm’s gradual transformation from academic outsider to establishment grandee – among the many awards he has collected is a Companion of Honour in 1998 – began in the 1960s as his scholarship achieved recognition above his politics. But there’s also no denying that – while remaining firmly encamped on the left – his politics did become noticeably less hardline, a process he describes as being more of a realisation that things weren’t going to happen in the way he hoped, than a drift towards the centre with age.

“There comes a time when you have to accept the reality,” he says. “It was obvious by the 1960s that there wasn’t going to be a Marxist revolution from below in the West, so I never fell for the apocalyptic rhetoric coming out of Paris in 1968 nor gave any political credence to terror groups, such as the Baader-Meinhof gang. I may still have felt some kind of emotional attachment to the idea of the anti-establishment rebel, but I never thought they were going to change anything.”

As the 1970s morphed into the 1980s, all sorts of other unthinkables became thinkable. “For the first time ever, I came to believe it would be better if a Marxist revolution didn’t succeed,” he explains, “I had spent some time in South America and I thought it would be better for Peru if Shining Path didn’t gain power.”

Likewise, Hobsbawm found himself marked out as one of the architects of New Labour as he helped Neil Kinnock

Left: **Left-wing MP Tony Benn with then party leader Michael Foot at the Labour Party conference in 1980.** (Getty Images)

kick-start the transformation of the Labour party. "It was clear that the old Labour party had become unelectable and that change was inevitable," he says. "Not that I'm necessarily pleased with the way it turned out, mind. If John Smith had lived then things might have been different ... Tony Blair has been a massive disappointment. I'm more hopeful about Gordon Brown, though. At least I understand where he's coming from."

It's this desire to understand – combined with a willingness to acknowledge change – that has always been one of Hobsbawm's defining hallmarks. There's no virtue in consistency if you're consistently wrong, and the only real requirement of an academic is the ability to be receptive to new ideas and events and to try and make sense of them. And that's one of the reasons why Hobsbawm has been so intractably opposed to the Iraq war.

"I just don't understand it," he shakes his head. "I mean, I can just about see what Blair was up to, even if I don't approve. He's got a Messiah complex and wants to save the world. But I can't for the life of me see why the US went to war. It had everything it wanted and needed in terms of political and economic hegemony without doing so, and it has now put that at risk. The only explanation must be that the divisions within US society must be deeper now than at any point since the Civil War."

How will it all end up, then? "It's not a historian's job to make predictions," he says. But if he had to make a guess? "It's possible things may stabilise in the short to mid term over the next 20–30 years, but the long-term outlook is bleak. Crises, such as global warming, can only be tackled at a global level and global decision making always seems to come second to state interests."

It's a bleak outlook, but Hobsbawm has no real regrets. "I would have hoped we would have been better at saving the world," he says, "but regrets are a waste of time. I've lived longer and been more successful than I ever expected, so I suppose I should be happy with that. Besides, there's always the possibility of

ON BIRKBECK

Professor Hobsbawm with Birkbeck colleagues, family and friends, at a reception to celebrate his 90th birthday.

The appreciation speech was given by Professor David Blackbourn, Coolidge Professor of History at Harvard, and previously Professor of History at Birkbeck. In reply, the Head of the School of History, Dr Julian Swann, said: "We can't overestimate the students' pleasure at being taught by Eric and thanks to him, 1917 was a very good year for historians."

Appropriately Dr Swann then presented Professor Hobsbawm with a 1917 bottle of port.

From left, front row: **Professor Lucy Riall, School of History, Classics and Archaeology; Professor David Latchman, the Master of Birkbeck; the Austrian Ambassador HE Dr Gabriele Matzner-Holzer; Dr Julian Swann**
Front right: **Professor Hobsbawm**
(Geoff Wilson)

Obituaries

Professor Roland Levinsky, and Minnie Heath

Professor Levinsky

World-renowned immunologist and former Birkbeck student Professor Roland Levinsky, 63, was killed in January 2007 in a freak accident, when power cables came down during a storm in Devon, while he was walking his dog.

Professor Levinsky was born in 1943 in South Africa. He performed the UK's first successful bone-marrow transplants in children; he also performed the first successful gene therapy on children with serious inherited diseases who would otherwise have died. He was Dean of the Institute of Child Health in London and was Vice-Chancellor of Plymouth University from 2002.

His MA Modern History at Birkbeck in 2000 was not a subject related to his work; he studied the subject to rediscover the experience of being a student and to understand the political background to his Polish-born father's life. Professor Levinsky and his wife took up ceramics when he was a junior doctor and they continued to sell their porcelain ware at local galleries. He also sailed a 43-foot yacht, and was sufficiently proficient to undertake a transatlantic crossing.

Professor Levinsky is survived by his wife and three children.

Minnie Heath

Former staff member in the Schools of Physics and Crystallography, Mrs Minnie (Netta) Heath, died on 17 January this year. Born in Portsmouth in 1920, Mrs Heath worked for the College for many years, before retiring in 1985. She leaves behind two children, Jackie and Christopher.

Above, left: **Professor Roland Levinsky** (Image courtesy UCL)

Developments in Bloomsbury

continued from page 19

knowledge transfer, capability building and dissemination, building on the members' existing partnerships with other universities and practitioners and with international agencies such as UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank.

A search for the new Director of the Centre produced an impressive international field and TBC is delighted to announce the appointment of Professor Jeff Waage as the first Director, who is an ecologist with a career in international development. He was formerly Head of the Department of Agricultural Sciences at Imperial College, formerly Wye College, in Kent. The success of the establishment of the new Centre will be celebrated at an official opening on 8 November 2007.

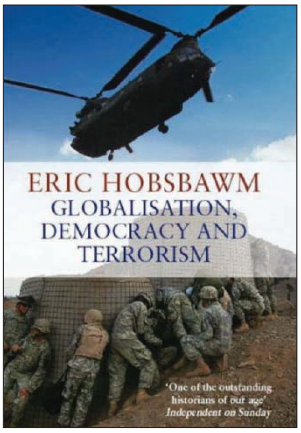
The IDC is the highest profile TBC activity so far but efforts continue to explore other exciting opportunities through collaboration to improve services and to release resources to support teaching and research in the partner colleges. As HEFCE also said in the paper mentioned earlier: "The kind of voluntary collaboration framework that is operating in Liverpool and Bloomsbury may provide a useful model for other institutions wishing to share services." Birkbeck is an enthusiastic partner in this venture and the results will continue to benefit its staff and students and the wider world.

Books and events

Current publications, and dates for your diary

Book review

Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism
Eric Hobsbawm
(Little, Brown 2007)



This is an engaging and provocative survey of our current globalised world, looking at the historical background and its lessons for the future, from one of Britain's foremost political historians.

In this collection of illuminating, incisive and thought-provoking essays, Eric Hobsbawm examines every aspect of the issues that have inspired the greatest debate – not only among politicians, academics and commentators but among all of us – in recent years: that is, the effects of globalisation, the plight of democracy and the threat of terrorism. As we are only too aware, all of these have the power to affect our daily lives, from the state of our economies to the fear of murderous bomb attacks in our cities.

Hobsbawm discusses war and peace in our lifetime, problems of public order, anarchy and terrorism, nationalism and the changing nature of the nation-state, and the future prospects for democracy, setting out the historical background and the lessons it can offer us. Above all, he turns his piercing gaze to the Middle East and Western imperialism.

Engaging, erudite and demonstrating his characteristically firm grasp of the facts and statistics, Hobsbawm's essays are indispensable to our understanding of the world we live in.

Eric Hobsbawm was born in Alexandria in 1917 and educated in Vienna, Berlin, London and Cambridge. A distinguished historian, he is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, with honorary degrees from universities in several countries. Professor Hobsbawm has been President of Birkbeck since 2002.

Other recent books

Regressive Fictions Graffigny, Rousseau, Bernardin
Robin Howells
Maney Publishing (2007)

The Orange Order: A Contemporary Northern Ireland History
Eric Kaufmann
Oxford University Press (2007)

Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland
Eric Kaufmann and Henry Patterson
Manchester University Press (2007)

Making Trouble: Life and Politics
Professor Lynne Segal
Serpent's Tail (2007)

Neuroconstuctivism, Volume 1: How the Brain Constructs Cognition
D Mareschal, M H Johnson, S Sirois, M Spratling, M Thomas & G Westermann
Oxford University Press (2007)

Neuroconstructivism, Volume 2: Perspectives and Prospects
D Mareschal, S Sirois, G Westermann, & M H Johnson
Oxford University Press (2007)

Public lecture

Wednesday 25 July, 6pm
Antipodean Gothic Cultural and historical discussion
Speakers Professor Ken Gelder (University of Melbourne) Dr Ian Conrich (Centre for New Zealand Studies)
Free, all welcome; Room B01 Clore Management Centre, Torrington Square, London WC1
Organised by Birkbeck's Centre for New Zealand Studies
Contact ian@ianconcrich.co.uk

Open Evenings

Thursday 6 September, 4pm–7.30pm
Birkbeck Open Evening
Royal National Hotel
To book online, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/openeve

Thursday 20 September, 4pm–7.30pm
Birkbeck Stratford Open Evening
Stratford Old Town Hall
To book online, visit www.birkbeckstratford.ac.uk

Erratum

We apologise for incorrect details being printed in the 2006–2007 Presentation Ceremony brochures. Below are the corrections:
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Sandra Hauber
MSc in Health and Disease

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"A **centre of evening education** at the **highest level** is as **essential** to a world city as a good transport system, especially to a city that attracts **ambitious people**.

There is still **no other place like Birkbeck** in the metropolis."

Professor Eric Hobsbawm
Birkbeck President