New book sheds light on Tolkien's 'Middle Earth'

The revived fascination for Tolkien, particularly with screen versions of his epic tales of elves and dwarves receiving global attention, is of little surprise to Sussex psychologist Dr Brian Bates.

Brian, whose latest book, _The Real Middle Earth_, explores the historical evidence for how 'fantasy' was an everyday reality for the people of Anglo-Saxon England, regards the interest as a backlash to our more scientifically driven, rational age.

"Our huge interest in fantasy books and films confirms our hunger to reconnect with the 'imagination' part of our mind," he says. "To ignore it, or relegate it merely to the realm of entertainment, is a kind of collective madness. Tolkien derived his stories from an age in which everything in life was coloured by people's creative imagination – the very thing business leaders say is desperately needed today. Science brings us great benefits, but our health and happiness depends on our being able to balance the high-stress, information-driven life with a more human-centred perspective."

Brian refers to the latest historical and archaeological research in providing evidence that our ancestors of 2,000 years ago saw the same issues that concern us today – hopes, fears, love, anxiety, luck and individual destiny – in vivid imagery. They viewed the world as a magical place populated by spirits and demons. Dragons slumbered under hills, dwarves forged magical weapons and real wizards cast spells and flew on eight-legged horses. When we say we feel 'dispirited' by our life, the people of the real Middle Earth would have interpreted it literally.

Although our knowledge of these beliefs has largely been forgotten, their legacy can still be seen today in the form of burial mounds, chalk hill figures (such as the mysterious Long Man of Wilmington in East Sussex), place names, and even the days of the week, which are named after spirits from Anglo-Saxon life.

Brian, who is also author of the best-selling novel _The Hay of Wynd_ (Wyrdd being the name the people of Anglo-Saxon England gave to the deep meaning of life), is recognised as the world's foremost expert on the psychology of spiritual life in ancient Anglo-Saxon England.

His academic work focuses on bringing together insights of ancient tribal traditions with leading-edge research in psychology and the mind sciences.

He has, as a consequence, been invited to work with the New York-based organisation The Ford Foundation as senior consultant on their project on worldwide tribal wisdom, supporting tribal elders in their communities, and learning from their ancient teachings.

*The Real Middle Earth* is published by Pan Macmillan on 15 November.

BELOW: Dr Brian Bates, the foremost expert on the psychology of spiritual life in Anglo-Saxon England.

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University wins £1.25m VAT victory

The University has won a landmark legal appeal and the right to a windfall of at least £1.25 million after emerging victorious in a lengthy struggle with Customs & Excise. Following the ending of a national agreement on VAT between Customs and the CVCP (the predecessor of Universities UK), most universities recognised that they had not been claiming as much refundable VAT from Customs as they were entitled to. Sussex had technically been underclaiming from 1973 to 1996. In November 1996 the University sought a rebate, but Customs said it was too late and refused to pay up. The University appealed and in 2001 won its claim in the High Court for full repayment. Customs took the case to the Appeal Court, where three top judges ruled in the University's favour on 21 October. They also awarded costs against Customs. The VAT money was repaid to the University after the High Court decision in 2001, and will now be put into general reserves towards the capital programme on campus.

"Justice has been done," said Steve Pavey, Finance and Business Director. "This is an extremely good decision for us."

Customs has until 18 November to petition the House of Lords if it wishes to appeal against the latest decision.

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In this issue

I'll have to hurry you! ‘University Challenge’: the inside view as Sussex take on Oxbridge and Peanut

Campus Fresh
Where do students go in times of need? We look at revamped student support

Not just a Blip
Art and science come together in an innovative event
Optical technology in orbit

A new device developed by scientists at the University of Sussex is set to help satellites and space craft in tracking their position and altitude through space.

Satellites and space craft use complex devices known as Startrackers, which rely on a heavily computerised process, to deliver accurate positioning information.

A new Startracker, developed at Sussex by Professor Chris Chatwin, Dr Rupert Young and Aristodimos Kouris in the Photonic Systems Research Laboratory, relies on optical technology to deliver faster, more reliable positioning updates.

"Because the new optical Sussex Startracker equipment is smaller and lighter than other devices, it fits well with the new generation of micro-satellites," says Chris. "It also uses less of the available computing power, which enables the satellite to function more efficiently and undertake extra tasks. The optical components also have a greater tolerance to radiation."

A commercialisation process for the new Sussex Startracker is well underway. Sussex IP which manages and commercialises the University’s intellectual property portfolio, has arranged and funded UK and international patent applications to ensure the concept is properly protected.

Russ Bown, a Sussex IP consultant based on the west coast of the United States, has recently met with manufacturers to discuss the design and what it has to offer. "NASA has shown interest and is willing to support applications for funding," he reports.

3D map of Universe bolsters case for dark energy and dark matter

Two Sussex astronomers are part of an international team that has made the most precise measurement to date of the cosmic clustering of galaxies and dark matter.

Dr Jon Lovelady and Liam O’Connell are participants in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS), which is refining astronomers’ understanding of the structure and evolution of the Universe.

“We have made the best three-dimensional map of the Universe to date, mapping over 200,000 galaxies up to two billion light years away over 6 per cent of the sky," says Jon.

The SDSS team measured the cosmic matter to consist of 70 per cent dark energy, 25 per cent dark matter and five per cent ordinary matter. "The real challenge is now to figure out what these mysterious substances actually are," says Jon.

The SDSS is the most ambitious astronomical survey ever undertaken, with more than 200 astronomers at 13 institutions around the world, including Sussex.

The findings are described in two papers, available at www.arXiv.org.

Binge drinkers can’t work out strategies

New evidence that binge drinking is associated with impaired brain function has been produced by University of Sussex researchers.

A study found that those who drank large amounts in a relatively short space of time once or twice a week performed worse in tasks that required them to develop strategies than social drinkers who spread their alcohol intake.

Experimental psychologist Dr Theodora Duka, who carried out the work with Dr Ruth Weissenborn, said the binge drinkers’ approach was more chaotic, suggesting damage to the frontal lobe section of the brain responsible for executive function.

“We don’t know whether changes in this part of the brain are the cause or the effect of binge drinking,” says Theodora. "We also don’t know, at this stage, whether the changes are permanent."

Theodora looked at the drinking habits of a sample of 96 people aged between 18 and 34. Bingers were identified by how many drinks they would have in an hour, how many times they had been drunk in the past six months and the percentage of occasions they would get drunk when going out.

The bingers and non-bingers were required to perform in a controlled environment four tasks that measured aspects of frontal lobe function, including a memory game, pattern recognition and spatial recognition.

The results showed that binge drinkers were poorer in their strategy scores and made more search errors than non-bingers in the spatial working memory task. They also made more errors in pattern recognition.

It was not that binge drinkers needed alcohol on board to perform because alcohol impaired performance in both groups and the groups remained different in their cognitive function.

Similar results were found in another more recent study by Theodora on binge drinkers and on diagnosed alcoholics who had undergone two or more attempts to “dry out”. Theodora said it appeared that withdrawal from alcohol, followed by a period of binging, was more likely to cause damage to the frontal lobe than consistent low rates of drinking.

Research funding opportunities

More details of these and other funding opportunities are available from your Research Support Officer in the Research Services Division. For an extensive listing of funding opportunities, search the Community of Science (COS) database at www.cos.com.

BBSRC Scientific Interchange
This short-term travel award provides grants to help scientists make and establish new contacts with their international counterparts. Funds are provided to contribute to fares and subsistence, with a maximum grant of £5,000. Applications are invited from current BBSRC grant holders. No deadline

ESRC e-society funding programme
Outline proposals are invited for the second phase of the e-society programme. Broad themes are: conceptual and contextual issues; management and organisation of work; social divisions of e-literacy; governance and power; mobility and ubiquitous information. Deadline: 21 November

AHRR Research Grants
Designed to provide support of between £5,000 and £50,000 to meet the direct costs of research projects for a varying duration up to a limit of five years. Costs eligible for the scheme include those for research assistants, clerical support; up to two research students, travel; consumables; project equipment. Deadline: 28 November

ESRC/BBSRC/NERC
Rural economy/land use
These awards, worth up to £50,000 over 12 months, develop interdisciplinary research by: social scientists working in a natural science department, or vice versa; an overseas researcher working in the UK, or vice versa; or a series of events involving social and natural scientists. Deadline: 28 November

Royal Society Conference Grants
The Royal Society invites applications for travel and subsistence grants to enable UK academics to participate in scientific conferences overseas. The conference must be on a subject within the natural sciences, Deadline: 1 December
What Paxman’s really like

Don’t forget to watch Sussex against Wolfson College of Cambridge University in the first-round match of ‘University Challenge’, on BBC 2 at 8.30pm on Monday 17 November. It promises one of the closest (and most exciting) finishes ever ...

Ros Levin
Creative Studies, CCE

I met my team-mates in the Students’ Union coffee bar: Dave Boyne (Contemporary History), Jon Watson (American Politics) and Andy Clay (Geography). They were a fiercely intelligent bunch of Sussex’s finest students but – and here was a cruel blow – not a ‘proper’ scientist or inky-swot mathematician among them.

So to the first hurdle. Granada, who produce the show for the BBC, hold regional heats – qualifying rounds that aren’t filmed. These take the form of a written general-knowledge quiz and a bit of probing chat with the researchers.

The other three teams were thoroughly interrogated about their strengths and weaknesses, and why they wanted to appear. With us, the researchers asked just one question: “I see you don’t have any scientists on your team. Are you OK with that?”

“Sure, we have hidden strengths,” I bluffed bravely. “Oh, really?”

In Manchester for the filming, we ate out. It was a nice meal, similar in a way to the condemned man’s, only not so hearty. We were all very abstemious as we felt a hangover might impair our lightning responses. Our call time at the studio was 8.30am, the filming scheduled for 11am.

We discovered next morning that this hanging about is really quite unnecessary (for the team, I mean – it may well be essential for the producers) as all it does is screw your already quite ‘jangly’ nerves to a whole new pitch of anxiety: the one where everything goes into slo-mo and people talk to you in Serbo-Croat.

The opposing team were also there waiting – a wholly postgraduate team, riddled with scientists. During the long wait each team was briefed on ‘University Challenge’ etiquette by someone from the Granada production pool. Ours was very nice, just no help really because everything she said made us even more nerve-racked. Knowing exactly how irascible Mr Paxman becomes after one too many cans of Pepsi Cola does nothing to dispel one’s butterflies.

Make-up was pretty cursory for the blokes, just a dab of powder on Jon’s nose and Andy’s rubicund cheeks and quite a lot of powder on Big Dave’s bald head. I, however, got the full ‘Coronation Street’ slap: lashings of mascara,budget-blue eye shadow, lippy, and foundation of a peculiar orange shade that took me back to my misspent youth.

The two teams walked along the corridor together, silently eying each other. We could hear someone warming up the audience. We knew there’d be a live audience, of course we did; we even had a few Sussex supporters in. But in truth, the idea hadn’t really struck home.

Knowing exactly how irascible Mr Paxman becomes after one too many cans of Pepsi Cola does nothing to dispel one’s butterflies.

until we processed onto the brightly lit studio floor in front of a couple of hundred clapping people and five or so TV cameras. Nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide!

Jeremy came in, be-suited, unechary in the extreme, brusque and forbidding. (He reminded me forcibly of a Tenniel illustration from Alice in Wonderland. I couldn’t remember which character though – my brain was a fog of lost details like that. In fact the whole proceedings took on that surreal Through the Looking Glass quality.) He walked over and posed briefly behind each team for a quick snap (see above). Note the rictus grin of sheer terror.

The voice-over man did a trial run-through, asking a couple of rounds of starter questions so that the technicians could get sound levels right and also to break the ice for the competitors. These opening rehearsal questions are not filmed and they do not count, but psychologically they are where the match really starts. We got 50 points; Wolfson got none – not one!

We also did a run-through of the really tricky bit, where the team members introduce themselves. It all went famously in rehearsal but then, when it came to cameras rolling, the real thing, my mind just went haywire. I almost literally could not remember my own name. I know. It’s idiotic, but watch the show and, unless they’ve done some clever editing, there’ll be a distinct hiatus in my introduction.

Oh yes, the rest of the quiz? Well, it was a damned close-run thing. Very exciting. Thrilling, in fact. Down to the wire and the final bonus question was, yes, you’ve guessed it ...

Andrew Clay
Geography, SocCul

“Can’t tell you”; “No”; and “Nice chap, slightly balding, and shorter than I expected”. These are the answers to the three most common questions I have been asked since filming my TV debut as a Sussex member of the ‘University Challenge’ team a few months ago.

The questions, of course, were: “So, did you win?”; “Do you really sit one team above the other?”; and “What’s Paxman really like, then?”

Following my own experience at the hands of the ‘Inquisitor General’, I almost started to feel sorry for the Government ministers who normally face his probing questions and cutting remarks.

I was somewhat surprised to have made the team – my previous quiz achievements totalling precisely one victory and two second places in the Park Village lounge pub quiz in my first year, and about 3% from the ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire?’ quiz machine in East Slope – and even more surprised to learn that I was the only member of the team who was not a mature student.

Still, I suppose the random snippets of trivia floating around my brain, filling up the space reserved for ‘Writing first class essays’, had to come in useful somewhere.

A number of questions with geographical leanings came up, and I hopefully didn’t disgrace myself too much. However, I would advise anyone with whom I have a conversation over the next, say, 30 years or so, to avoid the subject of river basins!

Despite the pre-filming nerves, the time seemed to go quickly and the contest went right down to the wire – the decisive answer coming in literally the dying seconds.
This autumn has been full of new innovations on campus. However, one of the less high-profile has been the introduction of a completely revamped student-support system.

Previously, student support was handled differently from school to school. In some places the emphasis would be on personal tutoring; in others it would be on student advisors. The introduction of the new schools provided an opportunity to rethink the entire system and to improve the University's student-retention figures.

"Our retention figures have got better as different elements of student support have kicked in," says Dr. Carlton Wood, Director of Student Support in the School of Life Sciences. "Hopefully they will improve again this year."

A common approach to student support has now been implemented across the schools:

- In each school a Director of Student Support heads up services in each school, setting policy.
- Personal tutors, who sometimes had very weak links to their students, now have a much more hands-on approach in dealing with academic issues.
- A team of student advisers can deal with a range of non-academic problems.
- Student mentors are also on hand for those students who may feel unsure about going straight to a member of staff.
- This is all backed up with information on websites, from school and departmental offices, and in handbooks.

A benefit of the new system is that the schools can work much closer together: "Co-operation is great between us," says Carlton, "and if one of us thinks, 'What on earth am I supposed to do here?,' we can help each other out." An example of this is the student-support leaflets setting out all the services on offer: "The leaflets were originally the Sussex Institute's idea. But since they had them, we all wanted one!"

But doesn't the expansion of support services in the schools mean there is an overlap between themselves and the Student Advice Centre (SAC) run by the Students' Union? Carlton thinks the two services are complementary. In fact they are keen to overlap services. "So, the school can help in applying for a hardship loan, while the SAC can help in showing students how to manage their money."

So, is the new system working? Carlton smiles, aware it's still too early to tell if everything is up to speed. "Things are still a bit manic, but everyone is much happier than they were before term. The induction programme worked really well and results so far have been positive."

**Students help each other**

A scheme encouraging students to seek help from their peers is now entering its second year.

Jacqui Shepherd, based in the Career Development and Employment Centre, is one of the driving forces behind the Peer Induction and Mentoring scheme. While working as a student adviser, she embarked on a project backed by the Teaching and Learning Development Unit to realise the full potential of mentoring.

One of the major changes, explains Jacqui, was to train up mentors before term began:

"Previously it might take until Christmas, by which time you've missed a lot of first years."

Inky Taylor, from Strasbourg, is studying experimental psychology and is a mentor in Life Sciences. Kiriakos Ioannou is an automotive engineering student from Greece and a mentor in Science & Technology.

"Students don't always know who the different people are in the University," explains Kiriakos. "I had one student who thought mentors and personal tutors were the same thing! So we act as a bit of a contact between students and more official people."

Their role encompasses everything from academic to pastoral issues: "I saw someone who was getting under 40% in all her assignments and thought she might leave. I did one-to-one sessions with her and she pulled through," says Inky, proudly.

In each of the schools, mentors get together and decide how to publicise their role. In Life Sciences the mentors have produced a PowerPoint slide with their details to be displayed after lectures. Kiriakos, meanwhile, is busy emailing all students directly in Engineering and Design.

However, the system is not without its problems. There is no common policy on how to run the scheme, leading to some mentors, such as those in Psychology, having a budget, while others do not.

Mentors also have trouble booking rooms. "Because there was no space elsewhere, we had to meet students in the common rooms. Who wants to talk about their problems there?" asks Kiriakos, who points out that mentors in Humanities have their own room.

Jacqui acknowledges that some mentors have it easier than others, but points out that the revamp of student support should help. Meanwhile, she is looking to the scheme's future: "We decide whether mentors should cover such general issues, or whether we go for peer-assisted learning or a more individual relationship between mentors and mentees." Jacqui is, however, full of praise for the work that mentors do.
The Big Blip

To mark its first two successful years, arts/science forum Blip organised a large event this month with speakers, performers and an exhibition of art and interactive technology.

Blip is co-ordinated by Sussex postgraduates Jon Bird, Alice Eldridge and Sam Woolf as well as Drew Garland-Jones, Lecturer in Computer Music, and two Brighton-based artists.

The group puts on talks and performances in Brighton and provides an opportunity for artists and scientists to show work in progress in an informal atmosphere. The Big Blip took that format and expanded it into a one-day event attended by over 400 people.

Among the speakers were Professor Phil Husbands, co-director of the Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics (CCNR) at Sussex. He and artist Paul Brown discussed the collaborative process between artists and scientists, drawing on their experience of working together.

Phil said afterwards, “The Big Blip showcased the enormous creative talent in Brighton, both at the universities and in the wider community. It highlighted the great interest in the cross-over between art and science. It was a tremendous day.”

The Interact lab, a research centre based in the Informatics department at Sussex, supported the Big Blip by providing some fun examples of the kinds of technologies that can be produced when artists and scientists work together.

These included ‘colour cubes’, which let people experience with colour mixing (without the mess!); and ‘virtual piñatas’. Here, you blow down a pipe to inflate a virtual balloon, which explodes, showering you with presents.

“Both of these are examples of our interest in novel forms of interactivity that bridge physical and digital worlds,” said Eric Harris, from the Interact lab.

The exhibition also included robotic sculptures by Sam Woolf from the Interact lab and Bill Bigge from the CCNR, among others.

The event was held at the University of Brighton’s Sallis Benney theatre. Sue Gollifer, course leader for digital media arts at Brighton, said, “This collaboration between scientists and artists from the two universities is very important. The event was an excellent way of facilitating discussion between people with diverse interests.”

The next Blip event is on Tuesday (4 November) at 7.30pm at Grand Central, opposite Brighton railway station. Jim Finer, artist and performer, will talk about his work. To book a seat, email info@blip.me.uk.

So, that’s one discussion about science, and a latte?

Two Sussex scientists have left the lecture theatre to support a new initiative in Brighton. Billed by the organisers as “science for the sociable”, Café Scientifique is a monthly event where ordinary people debate current issues in science and technology.

The first meeting took place earlier this month at the Sumo bar in Middle Street, where a speaker from Oxford University gave a short talk on “The Music of the Primes”. After a break to allow everyone to refill their glasses, there was an hour or so of discussion on the topic.

On 18 November, Dr Blay Whitby, Lecturer in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence at Sussex, will explain why “Robots Won’t Rule”, discussing how intelligent machinery is a generally benign technology, and why it will be easy for humanity to avoid a robot take-over.

On 16 December, chemist Professor Sir Harry Kroto talks on “Science, Society and Sustainability”. Harry argues that society must accept this issue as the most serious the world has ever confronted if we are to have a 50:50 chance of surviving the next century.

The meetings take place on the third Tuesday of every month, at 8pm. See www.cafescientifique.org for more information.

Boris was ‘ere!

A new exhibition at the Gardner Arts Centre on campus features photos of Brighton’s inhabitants that present them as “wild and indignant, possessed of fury”, according to the Sussex art historian who has curated the display.

In images taken over the summer, renowned Ukrainian photographer Boris Mikhailov explores the social life of Brighton for his first commission in this country.

Curator Professor David Alan Mellor says the artist’s visit in July 2003 was, in part, motivated by his fascination with the old and his questions about the fate of the elderly and their culture.

The images on show include a set of black and white photos of a women’s bowls tournament on Hove seafront. “The spectacle of the mature lady bowlers, figures of a reserved purity dressed all in white, against the green turf and hedges, riveted Mikhailov,” says David.

He describes the works as a “set of lyric narrative fantasies” in which Mikhailov presents Brighton’s inhabitants as “wild and indignant, possessed of fury – even while playing bowls – but also ageing and clinging to insignias of power”.

As well as photographing the social life of the seafront, the Ukrainian also took pictures at the Brighton station car boot sale and in London Road.

“His desire was to find some moment where both age and eroticism were conjoined,” says David. “Vivacity was the key for him as he photographed bright elderly women laughing at a bus stop on the London Road.”

The exhibition continues at the Gardner Arts Centre until 23 November. It forms part of the Brighton Photo Biennial 2003, which has received funding from the University of Sussex and for which David is chair of the board of trustees. See www.bpb.org.uk for details.
Science curriculum review: work begins

Earlier this month (3 October) the Bulletin reported on the appointment of the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Dr Evelyn Welch, and her role in championing work on the review of the science curriculum.

Since then, initial planning work and discussions have been taking place within the schools and departments, and among central teams. Members of the brainstorming groups in each school have been identified and are due to meet this week (Life Sciences) and next (Science & Technology).

Plans for market research are shaping up, involving teachers and students from local schools, as well as the possibility of buying national research to complement this.

This work has generated other ideas for promoting science at Sussex. For example, alongside the main prospectus, a 'Science at Sussex' brochure is now proposed for the 2005 intake, possibly linked to a more active direct-marketing approach. Other ideas being considered include a dedicated Science Open Day in the summer.

At the same time, staff in the sciences have been concerned to ensure that the curriculum review is given a proper chance to produce results. The Vice-Chancellor addressed this issue at an open meeting of Life Sciences staff on 22 October. In that meeting he made clear that the curriculum review was not a quick fix.

He noted that the science schools had already been given transitional funds of £20.5m for 2003/04 and would need to continue to be resourced adequately while the curriculum review is being implemented.

Latest information on the review is available online at www.sussex.ac.uk/sciencecurriculum.

Small ads

FOR SALE: IKEA shelves £25, desk £40. 4xrs old. Pine double bed + mattress £50. Email d.taylor@sussex.ac.uk or call ext. 2892.

FOR SALE: N-reg (94) 1.6 16V Ford Escort. Tax & MOT Dec 03. £1,500 ono. Contact Matt on 07939158256 or email m.p.lindner@sussex.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: 1-bed flat, Montpellier Rd. £114,950. Contact Peter on 07967 735 376 or email mobile_petet@hotmail.com.

HOLIDAY LET: 2-bed villa, in small urbanization. Southern Spain: sea 5 mins. Malaga airport 20 mins. From £250 pw. Email sgi25@sussex.ac.uk.

WANTED: Large room for mature female staff member. Pref. unfurnished or part-furnished, in house/flatshare, beginning Nov. B'ton/Hove. Email j.mullard@sussex.ac.uk or call ext. 3525.

HOLIDAY LET: Stone house in wooded valley, high in the Suisse Normande. Woodburner, CH, hot water, peace. Weekends from £200. Tel. 475137 or email xsv@btconnect.com.

FREE TO COLLECTOR: Upright wooden piano. To be collected from nr B'ton station. Email rm30@sussex.ac.uk, call 07816 071542 or 01749 813797.

FOR SALE: External CD reader/writer (Phillips Jackrabbit JR24CDR), practically new. £70. Ideal for laptop owner. Email a.r.owen@sussex.ac.uk.

TO LET: Furnished double room in 4-bed house, Upper Lewes Rd. Suit PG/visiting scholar. Available mid Dec 03 to mid Feb 04. £285 pcm. Call Andrea on 621059 or 07817 907823, email ac44@sussex.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: Teenager's 15-year mountain bike, + helmet. £50. Call 502943.

FOR SALE: Yew bookcase, 2 shelves, 2 small drawers, H75cm x W78cm x D27cm: £30. Fridge/freezer, H122cm: £3. Bendix tumble dryer: £8. Aiwa stereo system (CD, tape, radio), speakers: £70. Sofa bed (sleeps 2): free to collector. Small divan bed: free to collector. Email C.Leggett@sussex.ac.uk or tel. 07803 056694.

FOR SALE: Mellaware bread maker. £20. Email qfaba@sussex.ac.uk.

TO LET: Small room in 4-bed house w/ large lounge & garden. Margery Rd, Hove. Avail. 7 Nov: £175 pcm. Call 416543 or email c.ldo@sussex.ac.uk.

Pay negotiations 2003

Following two years of negotiations, the proposed pay award for this year and next has been linked to the adoption of a framework agreement between unions and employers, which proposes a number of measures to modernise pay in the higher education sector.

UNISON and Amicus/MSF have both voted to accept the pay award. The AUT has yet balloted its members.

The national Joint Negotiating Committee meets on 4 November, which means an earliest possible settlement date of early November and the promise of an update in the next Bulletin (14 November). For more details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/staffing/forms/payupdate.pdf.
VCs meet MPs to talk tuition fees

Professor Alasdair Smith, Sussex Vice-Chancellor and convener of the 1994 Group of universities, urged MPs to reach agreement over tuition fees at a House of Commons reception this month.

While acknowledging the difficult decisions that politicians face, Alasdair argued that the worst possible outcome for universities and for the country would be a political stalemate that offered no way forward.

"The status quo is unsustainable," he said.

"Universities need more funding. The question is not whether it has to be paid for, but who pays for it. It is unrealistic for the full cost of higher education to be paid for by the taxpayer; some of the cost has to be paid for by the individual graduate."

In response to the White Paper, The Future of Higher Education, the 1994 Group congratulated the Government on its recognition of the serious gap in higher education funding and supported the proposal to introduce variable fees paid through graduate contributions.

The Group particularly welcomed proposals to reintroduce grants for students from low-income families and to maintain the existing £1,125 fee waiver for them; and to switch from compulsory up-front payment of tuition fees to a graduate contribution.

Speaking at the reception, Education Secretary Charles Clarke MP said: "The White Paper and its debate can lay the basis for a profound strengthening for the university sector in this country.

"I hope that the changes we are talking about now will help us develop. The way we do it is going to raise a great deal of controversy but I am sure it's a very necessary debate."

Addressing Alasdair, the Education Secretary thanked him personally "for the very active way in which you have engaged in this public debate."

Since its formation nearly ten years ago, the 1994 Group, which represents 17 research-intensive smaller universities, has lobbied the Government on a range of issues affecting higher education.

The House of Commons reception, sponsored by Brighton MP David Lepper, was an opportunity to discuss the latest key developments.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith, is stepping down after four years as chair of Higher Education South East (HESE), an information network for 25 universities and higher education colleges, and therefore as higher education representative on the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA).

He has also stepped down from the board of Sussex Enterprise, which, he says, has given him "a useful insight into vocational training in Sussex and how local business sees education."

The Vice-Chancellor continues to serve on the board of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), where he has been chairing the employers' side of the Modernisation Working Group.

He says this has made him "much more aware of issues involved in fixed-term contracts and in equalities."

Outside higher education, Alasdair is at the end of his third year on the Prison Service Pay Review Body, which uses his expertise as an economist.

A walk on the wild side

David Harper and David Streeter LifeSci

Near the top of Boiler House Hill there is a lawn north of the road. If you walk diagonally across it into Trenton Laine Belt (the woodlot running up the eastern side of campus) you meet an immense Beech tree. Until the early hours of 16 October 1987, when a tremendous storm felled 15 million trees across southern England, it was one of many Beeches towering above almost bare leaf-litter.

This 'natural cathedral' has been replaced by a tangle of regenerating saplings. Just beyond the mighty survivor is a clearing with a Yew tree at its centre, and benches around its edges.

Students from Hove Park School have been studying the small mammals of this clearing by identifying the hairs left behind on sticky tape mounted inside toilet rolls.

Using this simple technique they confirmed that Wood Mice and Weasels sometimes climb up trees and bushes. The rodents are presumably searching for nuts and berries; are they then attracting the Weasels, we wonder? Shrews, which are insectivores, were only detected on the ground.

The clearing attracts many birds, including a Great Spotted Woodpecker. This is a strikingly pied bird as large as a Blackbird, with bright red under its tail. A small red patch on the back of its head betrays this bird as a male; his mate, who lacks this spot, spends most of her time between the Sports Centre and Library.

Among the saplings around the clearing are a number of young elder bushes, familiar in the summer for their tresses of white scented flowers and later for the hoped-for crop of berries with which to concoct elderberry wine.

At this time of year another characteristic feature of the shrub is more evident: the soft, deeply fissured, water-retainive bark, which is considerably less acidic than that of most other species. This has a neutralising effect on the acid deposition from aerial pollution so, if you want a rich array of moss, lichen and fungal epiphytes, elder is your plant and those in our clearing are no exception.

Other legacies of the great storm are the rotting stumps of the casualties of that catastrophic night. These were rapidly colonised by a host of wood-rotting fungi, two of which are sporting splendid clumps of 'brackets' at the moment.

The romantically named Dryad's Saddle, Polyergus squamosus, produces clusters of fruit bodies up to 20cm across, with a smooth brown cap covered by concentric rings of flat scales. In the dark it produces distorted white, branched fruit bodies that are curved and twisted like stags' horns and have long caught the attention of naturalists.

Another common bracket in the Trenton Laine Belt is Coriolus versicolor, with smaller, wavy-edged brackets, a velvety texture and distinctive dark concentric rings.

Neither of these are edible so, please, no claims against the Bulletin for epicurean disasters!
Lectures, seminars, colloquia

Mon 3 Nov
5.00pm Social Psychology Graduate Facutly Seminar: Amanda Rivas (Sheffield). Wanna be like them: Prototypes and conformity behaviour. Pav 11B3.
5.00pm Geography Research Seminar: Tarja Jazeli (Open), ‘Nature’, nationhood and the poetics of meaning in Ruthana (Yala) National Park, Sri Lanka. Arts C175.
5.00pm Education Open Seminar: Trisha Waters (Sussex), Therapeutic storytelling in the junior school. Arts C23.
5.00pm New Metaphysical Poetry: Paul Davies (Sussex), Sebastian Barker (London Magazine), Peter Abbs (Sussex). The art of retelling: The case of Nietzsche. Gardner Arts Centre.

Wed 5 Nov
2.00pm Music Graduate Research Seminar: Edward Dudley Hughes. Recital Room, Falmer House 120.
5.00pm Sussex Development Lecture: Nick Moore (IDS), Globalisation for the rich: Political underdevelopment for the poor? Arts A1.
5.00pm Q–soc – Physics & Astronomy Seminar: Andrew Coles (UCL), Exploring the solar system – from Britain! Chi Lecture Theatre.

Fri 7 Nov
2.15pm Freeman Centre Seminar: Andy Cunby, Rapid sea level changes in the eastern Mediterranean and the coastal sedimentary record. Pav 1A1.
12.00pm Inorganic Discussion Group: Wlodzimierz Stanczyk (Polish Academy of Sciences), Applied aspects of Ti3y1 [Ti3(trime-thylisilyl)methyl] chemistry. Chi 3R143.
4.00pm History Work-in-Progress Seminar: Roland Marden (Sussex), Pursuing happiness within the bounds of natural law: The American understanding of rights during the imperial crisis, 1763–1774. Arts A155.
5.00pm Psychology Colloquium: Charles Perfetti, title TBA. Pav 11A7.

Sun 9 Nov
5.00pm Monseigneur Heliot's Holiday (U)
8.00pm The Clay Bird (PG)
Flicks for free: two pairs of tickets to Bulletin readers for every film.

Exhibitions

Sat 7 Nov
2.00pm Brighton Photo Biennial 2003: Boris Mikhailov

Featuring a new series of works created in Brighton, the first solo show in this country from the Ukrainian artist who for more than 30 years has explored the position of the individual within the historical workings of ideology.

Sun 9 Nov
5.00pm Monseigneur Heliot's Holiday (U)
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Flicks for free: two pairs of tickets to Bulletin readers for every film.

Until Sun 23 Nov
Brighton Photo Biennial 2003: Boris Mikhailov

Featuring a new series of works created in Brighton, the first solo show in this country from the Ukrainian artist who for more than 30 years has explored the position of the individual within the historical workings of ideology.

Nov 11 Nov
12.30pm Life History Research Centre Seminar: Ann Day (University College Chichester), An accidental oral historian. Library Meeting Room.
2.15pm SEI Research-in-Progress Seminar: Sue Collard (Sussex). tute TBA. Arts A71.
4.00pm Biochemistry & Genetics & Development Seminar: Simon Cook (Babraham Institute), Regulation of apoptosis by MAP kinases in normal and tumour cells. JMS Lecture Theatre.

Thu 14 Nov
All day: What do we know about innovation? Conference in honour of the late Keith Pavitt. Freeman Centre.

Sat 15 Nov
9.30am GIS Symposium: Henri Brecklebank, Lynn Dyson-Bruce, Ian Wykes, Uwe Dornbusch, Geographical Information Systems for landscape studies, Chi Lecture Theatre.