Learning to read and write was not high on the agenda for the working-class villagers of the Sussex Weald during the 19th century, but somehow 90 per cent of them became literate.

It is this surprising fact that has prompted a Sussex researcher to explore how and why literacy develops in impoverished communities.

Barbara Maidment, who is studying for a DPhil in historical linguistics, is appealing for old letters, diaries and other forms of writing from families whose ancestors lived in the Weald.

"Knowing what people wanted and needed to read and write helps explain motives for acquiring literacy," she says.

Barbara hopes her research might help in planning modern literacy programmes. "There are still more than 200 million people worldwide unable to read and write to an accepted level, 66 per cent of them women, so illiteracy is still a major problem," she points out.

"We may be able to better understand the problems these communities face by looking back at how England largely eradicated illiteracy."

"In the early part of the 19th century, the Weald was one of the poorest and most backward areas of the country," says Barbara.

"For the labourer in the field, whose occupation did not demand the ability to write, the benefits of literacy might have been only dimly perceived. Yet while every incentive to become literate was lacking, and long before school attendance was compulsory, more than 90 per cent of the population acquired a functional literacy."

Barbara used the marriage registers of the parishes of Withyham, Mayfield and Ticehurst to measure literacy rates. "It is our only statistical evidence," she says.

"Married couples had to sign the register. Of course, some may have learned to write their name for this purpose alone, and about ten per cent never married, so the registers aren't an entirely accurate record of literacy levels."

She is also exploring the impact made on Wealden literacy levels by some of the 19th century's great social upheavals, such as the arrival of the railways and the emigration exodus, when some of the Wealden poor were given assistance to start new lives in North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Families were separated – some permanently – by great distances, and Barbara expects to find that deep family ties and the need to keep in touch were among the factors that motivated people to value literacy.

Thousands claim their places at Sussex

In the days after A level students received their results last month, Sussex staff were busy confirming to more than 2,000 students that they had got their places for entry in October.

While other universities were still looking for students through the clearing process, Sussex had no need to do so as there were no spare places for students who had not already been given offers.

Applications to Sussex were up by 17% this year, compared to a national average of around 3.5%.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Alasdair Smith explained why the University is proving so attractive: "A combination of factors has produced this rise in Sussex's popularity. Our revised curriculum has proved attractive to applicants and we have worked very hard on engaging with schools and colleges in the region through open days and campus tours."
Sussex astronomer in NASA mission

Now that NASA has launched its new orbiting observatory, a University of Sussex astronomer is able to look at parts of the universe never seen before.

Dr Sebastian Oliver is one of just a handful of UK scientists involved in the largest project for NASA’s Space Infrared Telescope Facility (SIRTF), which left Cape Canaveral last week.

For the next nine months Seb will help to analyse data sent back by SIRTF on more than a million galaxies up to ten billion light years away, where infant stars are still emerging from dust clouds.

"This is the most exciting and the most important project I have ever been involved with," he says. "We'll be able to study the universe in detail when most galaxies were forming their stars. It will explain a lot about how and when galaxies are formed. Long ago, galaxies were much closer together, and we think that colliding galaxies triggered periods of rapid star birth and quasar activity. We expect to see thousands of colliding galaxies in the ancient universe."

The telescope uses infrared wavelengths to penetrate the interstellar dust, which obscures much of the universe. The pictures studied by Seb and his colleagues in the SIRTF Wide-field InfraRed Extragalactic Survey (SWIRE) project will provide the first glimpse of many distant galaxies when the universe was just three billion years old.

As the largest SIRTF project, they will have 851 hours of observation time over one month, just enough time to map an area of the sky equivalent to the space taken up by 360 moons.

"It's going to be hard work and hectic," said Seb before the launch. He is working with a team led by Dr Carol Lonsdale at the Infrared Processing and Analysis Center, California Institute of Technology. UK participants include Professor Michael Rowan Robinson at Imperial College London and Professor Matt Griffin at Cardiff, University of Wales.

Scientists begin unique study using detector half a mile underground

Scientists have begun a study of neutrinos using a unique detector situated half a mile underground.

Sussex is one of only four UK universities to be participating in the MINOS (Main Injector Neutrino Oscillation Search) project, which studies the properties of sub-atomic particles called neutrinos.

By sending a beam of neutrinos through the ground from a site near Chicago to a huge detector over 400 miles away in northern Minnesota, physicists can study the properties of these particles.

"We're responsible for the energy calibration of the detector," says Dr Philip Harris, Senior Lecturer in Physics at Sussex. "We designed and built a system that uses ultra-bright LEDs and 125 miles of optical fibres to help us do this."

The detector resembles an enormous loaf of sliced bread, the weight of a battleship, built half a mile underground, accessed only via a narrow 19th-century mineshaft. Huge hexagonal steel plates, 25 ft across, are interleaved with a special plastic that emits tiny flashes of light when charged particles pass through.

Of the billions of neutrinos that pass through it, only a tiny fraction will interact, creating a small shower of particles that can be detected by measuring these little flashes of light. Neutrinos come in three types - electron neutrinos, muon neutrinos, and tau neutrinos. The particles play an important role in stellar processes such as the creation of energy in stars as well as supernova explosions.

Experimental results obtained over the last five years have confirmed that neutrinos do have mass and that they switch back and forth between the three different types while travelling through space and matter.

Success for social sciences at Sussex

The University of Sussex was successful in more research bids to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the last financial year than any other university.

The success rate of Sussex’s applications to the ESRC was 46% compared with a national average of 29%. Of the 13 applications Sussex made, 10 were rated ‘alpha’ and 6 were awarded.

“These figures reflect the strength of the social sciences at Sussex,” says Professor John Holmwood, Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies.

“The research we do here is of real importance to the voluntary sector, business, government and the public sector, as well as to the wider public. Students benefit from being taught in such an environment.”

Sussex was also the biggest recipient of ESRC research expenditure in the country, with £6.1m awarded in 2002–03.
Unique degree in Music Informatics launched

A groundbreaking new degree programme that combines music composition with computing and artificial intelligence is being launched at Sussex.

While there are other courses in how to use technology as a tool for music making, the Music Informatics degree at Sussex involves programming computers to actually create the music. In this way, the course will develop undergraduates’ computing and music skills side by side in a creative and unique way.

“This course is about the next generation of music technology,” says Andrew Garland-Jones, Lecturer in Computational Music. “It’s about machines working with you to create rather than using them as dumb tools.”

Potential students don’t need to be experienced computer programmers, but they must be competent musicians as the degree also places a heavy emphasis on traditional music and music technology skills. “The computing skills that students on this course will gain are much in demand by employers,” says Andrew. “But as well as developing these skills, students also get to explore their creativity.”

The degree will be taught by staff from both the music and informatics departments, both of which are highly rated for the quality of their research. The music department was rated 8th in the 2002 Times ratings and 5th (the highest-rated university music department) in the 2003 Guardian guide. Both music and computer science were top rated in the latest government Research Assessment Exercise.

The new programme sits in the context of the Computational Creativity Research Group at Sussex, which explores computational aspects of creative activities.

“What we’re interested in are the musical possibilities created by new technology, and particularly the notion of interactivity and machine composition,” says Andrew, whose background is as both a composer and computer scientist. “Students on this course will be at the forefront of this exciting new area.”

Doctors use confusing language in cancer consultations

The public are confused by many of the medical terms that doctors use in cancer consultations, according to a new study by Sussex scientists.

Researchers from the Psychosocial Oncology Group on campus found terms commonly used by doctors such as ‘progressing tumour’ and ‘remission’ were poorly understood.

The study, published in the August issue of Psycho-Oncology, suggests there is an urgent need for doctors to change the way they communicate important information to patients.

“Growing evidence suggests the majority of people with cancer want to be fully informed about their illness whether the news is good or bad,” says Professor Lesley Fallowfield.

“A clear understanding of the situation can improve a patient’s treatment, recovery and quality of life. So it’s crucial that doctors avoid ambiguous language or medical jargon in consultations.”

About 100 adults in the Brighton area completed a questionnaire with scenarios containing potentially confusing words and phrases from 50 videotaped cancer consultations.

The researchers found that only six out of 10 understood that ‘metastasis’ meant cancer was spreading. Only around half knew the term ‘remission’ meant there was no detectable sign of cancer and understood that the phrase ‘the tumour is progressing’ was not good news.

Three out of 10 had poor understanding of the term ‘seedling’ – a euphemism for the spread of cancer – and two out of 10 were confused by the phrase ‘spots in the liver’.

Participants were also asked to rate how confident they were about their answers. The researchers found many thought they understood terms when they were actually quite confused by them.

“There’s an urgent need for doctors to reassess the way they explain the diagnosis and treatment of cancer to patients,” says Lesley. “Our results would suggest using plain language, steering clear of euphemisms such as ‘an abnormal growth’ to describe cancer, would help avoid confusion.

“Doctors also need to be aware that asking people if they understand what’s being said is likely to overestimate comprehension and it may be better to ask what they have understood.”

Changes to fines policy

From 6 October all overdue Library loans will be subject to fines. Long Loan items reserved by another borrower will be recalled and the due date reduced to two weeks from the date of recall. Short Loan fine levels have been reduced to a standard daily rate. New fine rates are: Short Loan, Audio Visual, Inter Library Loans: 50p per day. Long Loan, Documents: 5p per day. Overdue recalled Long Loan: 50p per day. Reserve Collection fine levels will remain the same. The maximum fine per item is £10.

New campus map now available

The University’s campus map has been updated, with all the new Schools and new buildings included. The Print and Reprographic Unit in Hastings Building have copies of the map and the new ‘How to get to campus’ leaflets. To make an order, call Vicky or Will on ext. 8216 with a budget code or email v.i.least@sussex.ac.uk. They can also advise you if you need the map for other purposes, such as in a publication. The free-standing map boxes around campus will be updated before the beginning of term.

Honorary degree nominations

Nominations are now invited for the award of honorary degrees in 2004 and should be submitted in confidence to the Vice-Chancellor by 12 September 2003. Nominations must be on an honorary degree nomination form, which is available online at www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/secretariat/honorary/ or from Lisa Carroll in Sussex House, ext. 3844.

Say goodbye to Robin

Robin Street is retiring after more than 30 years at the University. He will be ‘at home’ to friends and colleagues from 3.30pm on 26 September in the Quiet Room of the Meeting House. Please let Cella know if you are coming on c.l.alexander@sussex.ac.uk or ext. 8258.
Small ads

TO LET: Part-furnished double room in 3-bed house in North Laine. Suit PG/young professional. Available mid Sep. £300 pcm. Call Anna or Stuart on 624180 or 07904 423924.

FOR SALE: Honda II bass guitar, practice amp and leads: £75. Sony Super Audio CD player (SCD-X894): £725 ono. Call Sam Knowles on ext. 3450 or email skc20@susx.ac.uk.

TO LET: 3-bed maisonette, £900 pcm incl. Also 4-bed house, £1,000 pcm excl. Central B'ton. Suit mature/overseas/PG students. Call Dave on 699096.

FOR SALE: Ladies Raleigh bicycle, 5 gears, hardly used, VGC, £35. Tel. 07973 844246.


WANTED: Reasonably priced, clean, central accommodation for female PhD student arriving end Sep. Email Gail on g.hopkins@sussex.ac.uk.

TO LET: 3-bed furnished house off Lewes Rd. £900pcm. Available Sep. Call Julie on 704437 or 509401.

PROOF READING: Research proposals, theses. Experienced and qualified, competitive rates. Email Shumita on s.gupta@sussex.ac.uk.

WANTED: Freelance research work. Short- or long-term, up to 2 days pw. Desk-based and interview research skills. Social sciences, arts and humanities: all topics considered. Rates negotiable. Email Dr Maria Antoniou, mab@brighton.ac.uk.

TO LET: 3-bed unfurnished cottage in Saltdean. £350pcm. Available mid Sep/Oct. Call Andrew on 020 8313 1899 or 07956 349158, or email vs@sussex.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: Sharp 14" TV with Teletext, remote control, antenna: £50 ono. Hairdryer: £5. Tel. 247946.

BUILDER: Currently studying, available for building works incl. plastering, carpentry, renovations, extensions, etc. Email t-dub@ntworld.com, tel. 07739 516166.

FOR SALE: Servis washing machine, 1yr old, £100. Buyer collects - Lewes. Email a.rowen@sussex.ac.uk, tel. 07817 903647.

FOR SALE: Rover 618L Auto, T-reg (Aug 09), 44Km Air-con, leather upholstery, alloy wheels, ABS, MoT Aug 04. £4,195. Call Mike on ext. 3183, email m.j.bowensend@sussex.ac.uk.

WANTED: from Oct, accommodation in shared house for mature female staff member studying on p-t MA. Reasonable rent. Email yezdilii@susx.ac.uk.


Lectures, seminars, colloquia

Thu 18 Sep
10.00am Sussex Meaning and Grammar Group. Radical Construction Grammar, by William Croft. Arundel 1D.

IDS appoints new director

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has announced that Dr Lawrence Haddad will become its new director in July 2004. Dr Haddad comes to IDS from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington DC and succeeds Dr Keith Beazley, who retires after seven years at IDS.

As director of the Food Consumption and Nutrition division at IFPRI, Dr Haddad leads a group of 40 undertaking applied policy research.

His consultancy work has included the World Health Organization (working on intra-household food and asset distribution), the World Bank (nutrition and income growth) and the World Food Programme (HIV/AIDS, food security and nutrition).

Goodbye Press Office Pete

We're waving a sad goodbye today to our press officer, Peter Simmons, who is off to join the National Housing Federation as their press officer for the South.

Sussex graduate Peter joined the Press and Communications Office in 2000. He has been an invaluable member of our team, and we are sure that his skills will be put to good use in his new role.

He has helped with the communication of the massive changes that have affected the university's systems during the past year, and has also been involved with the rebranding exercise.

Peter says: "I've learnt a great deal during my time in the press office and I'm going to miss all the friends I've made here."

Senior press officer Jacqui Bealing says: "It's been great working with Peter. We'll miss his sense of humour, his intellect and his readiness to get to grips with the most baffling areas of science research in producing press releases. We wish him all the best in his new job."

Staff vacancies

Apply by 10 September
Senior Library Assistant, Reader Services, Library (ref 315)
Payroll Assistant, Human Resources (ref 307)
Conference Operations Asst/Technician, Student Services (ref 309)
Senior Catering Asst, Catering Services (ref 051b)
Senior Premises Asst, Estates (ref 315)

Apply by 11 September
Senior Library Assistant, Reader Services, Library (ref 315)
CASA Manager, SciTech (ref 306)
Supervisor, Pit Stop (ref 047b)
Rear Supervisor, Catering Services (ref 052b)

Apply by 12 September
Rear Supervisor, Catering Services (ref 052b)

For further details see www.sussex.ac.uk/units/staffing/personnel/vacs or contact Human Resources on ext. 8706, fax 877401, email recruitment@sussex.ac.uk

Bulletin

The Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field, Benedict Brook and Peter Simmons, with contributions from Jacqui Bealing. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from staff and students of the University. The next issue will be out on 19 September, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 12 September. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House on ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.