Life and times of folk legend form new Sussex archive

A lifetime's collection of notes, diaries and observations by folk legend Bob Copper were presented to the University last week (14 April) in true Copper family style— with beer and song.

Three generations - Bob's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren - sang together in the style taught to them by Bob, who died last year at the age of 89.

Bob and his family are famous worldwide for their harmonised, unaccompanied singing of English folk songs handed down through successive generations for the past 200 years. The Copper family has lived in the East Sussex village of Rottingdean since the late 16th century, giving them an unbroken link with a distinct rural cultural heritage.

It was Bob's appreciation of this life that inspired his five highly regarded books, as well as poetry and observations on rural life and customs. Around ten boxes of notebooks, letters and scripts for plays, collected by the family following his death, will form the basis of the archive.

It includes a unique recording of a 1950 BBC radio documentary about Bob's father Jim; analyses of the songs; Jim's handwritten accounts of farm life at the end of the 19th century; and material collected during Bob's own association with the BBC.

Bob's work will share shelf space with a varied catalogue of literary contributions housed in the University's Special Collections, ranging from the papers of Virginia Woolf and Rudyard Kipling to the radio scripts of Frank Muir and Denis Norden.

Dorothy Sheridan, head of Special Collections, says: "Bob's archive is an important new acquisition and it fits well with Sussex's scholarly strengths in social history and popular culture. For me it is a particular delight - I used to sing in folk clubs and have admired the Coppers for years from afar!"

Jon Dudley, Bob's son-in-law, says: "We wanted to ensure that the material would be safe and shared with others. Sussex honoured Bob with an MA, which he was delighted with. We knew about the Special Collections archives so thought that the University would be the best place.

"Bob was an invertebrate scholar who was always jotting his thoughts on any scrap of paper he had to hand. His writings are sure to be of use to anyone researching his life, Rottingdean, agricultural history or folk song. An historian might be able to uncover some real nuggets and we would like to think it might lead to a Bob Copper biography."

Alun Howkins, Professor of Social History, who knew Bob and his work and recommended the idea of creating the archive, says: "Bob Copper is best summed up by his own work, his books and song collecting, as well as his singing."

- The Coppers are performing with a Brighton ensemble, TacoT, at the Brighton Festival on 18th May. New music written by Professor Martin Butler and Alison Kay and Matthew Pollard (both doctoral Sussex students), inspired by the Coppers' work, will be premiered at the concert, which takes place at the Old Market in Hove.

Student recruitment to Sussex received a boost this week with the publication of the Guardian newspaper's league tables, which ranked the University in 15th place in the UK. Outside London and Oxbridge, Sussex is now ranked ahead of all its regional competitors in the south-east of England.

This ranking is an impressive improvement on 2004, when the Guardian placed Sussex 28th overall (up from 33rd the year before that). The main reason for the University's rise seems to be the compilers' decision finally to drop Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) scores, some of which are ten years old.

"For various reasons, some of our early TQA scores didn't accurately reflect the strengths of teaching at Sussex," explains the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Aldo S. Smith. "This latest league table simply puts us up where we should always have been. The rest of the Guardian's top 15 were also in the top 15 last year.

The high overall placing for Sussex is reflected in the individual subject rankings, with no fewer than ten subject areas appearing in the top ten: American studies (4th), Anatomy and Physiology (9th), Anthropology (5th), Chemistry (2nd), Drama (10th), English (4th), French, German and Spanish (6th), Mechanical engineering (5th), Media studies (10th) and Philosophy (10th)."

"I am delighted that these ten subject areas have scored so highly," said the Vice-Chancellor. "And I note we have another seven in the top 20. The figures bear out the depth and breadth in quality at Sussex."

The tables do not include figures on postgraduate study or research. They are aimed primarily at those studying A levels or Higher who are planning to start a first degree.
Sussex aims to cut carbon emissions

Sussex has put in a successful bid to take part in an innovative pilot programme aimed at helping to cut universities’ carbon emissions.

Global warming is caused by greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, a by-product of all types of energy consumption. By using energy more efficiently, Sussex will reduce its carbon emissions and the environmental damage this causes.

Over the next 12 months Sussex will receive free support and consultancy from the Carbon Trust, an independent company set up by government to help the UK meet its climate change obligations. It works with business and the public sector to improve energy efficiency, cut carbon emissions and develop commercial low-carbon technologies.

The aim of the programme is to improve energy efficiency in universities’ academic, accommodation and leisure buildings and their fleets of vehicles.

The Trust will help to identify carbon-saving opportunities, provide software to analyse energy consumption and deliver workshops for staff and senior managers to improve their awareness of energy efficiency.

The Carbon Trust has already carried out an energy audit for Sussex and the latest collaboration will build on this work. At Sussex the architectural design of some of the buildings presents a challenge to improve efficiency and meet modern-day standards. The estates strategy is already meeting some of these challenges by updating the campus-wide heating system.

The pilot will run until the end of March 2006 and if successful will be rolled out more widely across the UK. By the end of the programme, Sussex should have started to implement a comprehensive energy strategy.

“This is an opportunity for Sussex to be at the forefront of carbon management in the higher education sector,” says Paul Feast, Head of Estates and Infrastructure, who is leading the project.

Undergraduates enjoy first overseas field biology course

Many staff and students escaped to sunnier climes during the Easter vacation. Among them were 35 second-year undergraduates, who spent a week in Portugal on the first overseas field course ever run by the department of Biology and Environmental Science.

“It is probably one of the most distinctive new offerings coming out of our curriculum review,” explained Dr Libby John, head of department. “The students had a wonderful time, as did the faculty who attended” (including the Dean of Life Sciences, Professor Jonathan Bacon). “We will definitely be going again.”

The group travelled extensively in the Setúbal peninsula just south of Lisbon, where the relatively warm climate means that there is plenty of biological activity at this time of year, with insects flying around and plants flowering. “It is also a wonderful area for studying geology and past environments,” said Libby.

The trip gave the undergraduates a chance to study field biology in a hands-on way, seeing plants and animals in their natural habitats. They saw a number of local habitats (such as sand dunes, salt marshes and ancient fossil reefs) and were able to study plant and animal adaptations to some of these environments.

Each student engaged in a three-day research project and gave a presentation on it at the end of the trip. They now have to write it up, which will be great preparation for their forthcoming final-year projects.

There were other benefits as well. By working and socialising together, the students – from Biology, Neuroscience and Human Sciences degrees – got to know each other better. In addition, of course, they enjoyed a departmental bonding experience with the staff who went with them.

Libby said: “For me, as head of department, it was great to get to know 35 of our students and spend some time with them, and it will greatly enhance our teaching interactions with those students from now on. We all learned a lot from the students and each other, as well as from being in a wonderful environment.”

Left: Students label coastal snails to test whether they display any homing ability to the place of origin. The result was that they do not, but they are very immobile at times of low humidity and will avoid crossing sand if it is dry; thus the result was inconclusive.
Bursaries and scholarships

The Bulletin of 8 April described the way in which the University will offer bursaries and scholarships from 2006. The criteria for receiving this money will apparently depend on family income, how many family members have already attended university, special needs, and general merit.

What is the University’s estimate, in cash terms, of the costs of implementing these arrangements? What steps will be taken to prevent fraud?

Dr John Haigh, Mathematics

Owen Richards, Academic Registrar, replies:

The projected costs of our scholarship and bursary scheme are set out in our submission to the Office for Fair Access (Offa), which is viewable in full at www.sussex.ac.uk/wp.

The key figures are in Table 2, which I cannot spell out in full here, but to give a feel: by year five of the new arrangements we envisage our scheme costing around £2.25m per year directly (i.e. money going direct to students), plus about £1.10m on overheads. The total ‘Offa’ investment, including various other strands of outreach, etc., is envisaged to be about £2.66m per year, which is about 20% of anticipated new fee income of £1.3m per year.

Everyone involved centrally in drafting this scheme has been keenly aware that these are large sums of money, and of the opportunity cost in terms of other kinds of internal investment that would also benefit students. We had to judge the right balance of our submission, in a situation where no consultation between higher education institutions was permitted and Offa’s own criteria for approval were unclear. In the event, our investment looks to be close to (perhaps slightly under) the average pledged by the sector. We can in due course review and propose changes to our scheme.

Regarding the potential for fraud, the first point is that the family-income information will come direct from the LEA/Student Loan Company, who validate it in ways that satisfy government audit. We are still considering how our scheme should respond to the point that family income can change over the duration of the scholarship. Validating truthful responses to our other internal criteria is indeed more challenging. In our current, relatively small, widening participation scholarship schemes, we seek to triangulate what the applicant says against at least one independent reference (often the UCAS referee). But we clearly need carefully to review this issue, and the design and ‘scoring’ system for application forms.

To help oversee that process we are setting up a new Scholarships, Bursaries & Awards committee, with academic members from each school, and USSU representation. I would be delighted if John would like to put himself forward to represent Science and Technology.

Obituary

Eric Peeling

Dr Eric Peeling, a member of faculty in the former School of Chemistry and Molecular Sciences, died on 4 April aged 84.

He obtained his PhD from University College, London and held posts at Cardiff and Leicester before coming to Sussex in 1962 as a senior lecturer. He was the second chemist, after Colin Eaborn, to be appointed here.

At a time when the University was expanding rapidly it was customary for each of the main science subject groups to have a member of faculty as Laboratory Director and Eric held this post from 1962 to 1979. He worked with architects, builders, suppliers and accountants to transform specifications and drawings on paper into a thriving complex of offices and laboratories housing 300 undergraduates and 160 research workers. The project was completed in three stages in about 10 years.

Eric retired in 1981 and we remember him for his skill in working with people, his scrupulous fairness, his patience as a teacher, and the kindness and encouragement he showed to younger colleagues.

Dr David Smith, Chemistry

A walk on the wild side

We have recently (Bulletin 18 February) written about Dunnocks, and wondered how some females of this bird species ‘live with’ several males while others have to ‘share’ one.

Watch out for the females guarding nests all over campus from now until late June. On territories with more than one male there is intense competition for matings, the bizarre consequences of which we will describe next time.

We recently had to apologise for our habit of lurking under bushes. Since then, we have been chided for our apparent habit of staring through windows. Sorry, but we have been busy watching the Goat Willow trees dotted around campus. Every spring, their catkins — widely known as Pussy Willow — attract many insects and birds.

In the case of Blue Tits this behaviour was obvious enough for our ancestors to call them “Willow Biters”. About 20 years ago Quentin Kye showed that the Blue Tits are collecting nectar, and that they carry pollen from male trees to female ones. Our observations on campus show that Blue Tits make only about a third of all bird visits to the catkins, and we are trying to work out which other birds are potential pollinators, and which are stealing pollen or nectar.

While watching a female Goat Willow to the north-east of the Arundel Building, we became aware of a dreadful pong. A few sniffs later we tracked the culprit down: a really handsome clump of Stinking Hellebore, Helleborus foetidus, between the rear entrance to Arundel and the SoTech loading bay.

Hellebores are well known to gardeners as choice plants for the woodland border, flowering in the early spring. Stinking Hellebore will grow to 80 cm tall; the leaves are evergreen and the green goblet-shaped flowers are edged with a fine purple line. As a wild plant it is rare, being most often found in beech or yew woods on calcareous soils from the South Downs to the limestone pavements of Yorkshire. However, where found close to buildings it is difficult to decide whether it is truly wild or the progeny of some cultivated ancestor. The flowers are pollinated by early flying bees and the seeds are said to be dispersed by slugs and ants.

The whole plant has a powerful and unpleasant smell. It is also extremely poisonous, as we can personally testify. One of us was careless enough to put his hand to his nose (a slight euphemism, we fear) after handling the plant and suffered brief but severe stinging sensations followed by palpitations!

Hellebores have been used as a vermifuge (to destroy or expel intestinal worms) since ancient times, Ελέλειος, being the Greek name for Lenten Rose, Helleborus orientalis. Gilbert White recognised the drastic nature of the remedy and it was said that, “Where it killed not the patient, it would certainly kill the worms; but the worst of it is, it will sometimes kill both”!
Design guidelines now online
Full guidelines for the design and presentation of University materials are now available online. The site is particularly useful for people putting together printed material (such as publications, course information or advertising) and includes advice on which fonts to use, the Sussex colour palette and even a suitable style for photographs. The easy-to-navigate web pages come a year after the introduction of the University's new identity and include practical guidance on everything from stationery to signage. Go to the Publications and Branding website at www.sussex.ac.uk/publications/guidelines to access the information. If you need any more advice, call Ria Gane on ext. 7569 or email publications@sussex.ac.uk.

Recognise exceptional work with a Chancellor’s Award
The closing date (6 May) is fast approaching to nominate someone for a 2005 Chancellor's Award. The scheme recognises exceptional contributions to the work and life of the University by any member of staff. Nominations can be made by any staff, student or former student, and for any activity, aside from direct teaching and research. For further information and nomination forms, see www.sussex.ac.uk/units/secretary/chancellorsawards.shtml.

Vice-Chancellor’s open meetings
The Vice-Chancellor will be holding two open meetings for staff this term: on Wednesday 11 May, from 11am in the Chichester Lecture Theatre; and on Thursday 12 May, from 3pm in the BSMS Lecture Theatre.

Library book sale
On Tuesday (26 April) a book sale in the Library will offer a large number of duplicate copies of books that have been withdrawn from the short loan collection, following detailed evaluation of usage figures. Books from most subject areas will be available, priced at £1 for hardbacks and 50p for paperbacks. The proceeds from the last sale (in October 2004) are being used to increase wireless access in the Library's public areas. Income from this sale will similarly be put towards Library improvements for the benefit of users.

Free to collector: 3-seater sofa & 2-seater sofa, floral style. £50
For sale: Land Rover 110, C5W. 1984. Low mileage, good condition, 12 seater, CD player. £2,100. T: 07768 405300, E: p.oniel@sussex.ac.uk.
To let: Unfurnished Hove flat in converted Victorian building. Suit professional or couple. Available May. £650 pcm + bills. £: pinkkitty@yahoo.co.uk.
Curtain maker: Also alterations for men and women. T: 480154.
Wanted: Reading Festival ticket for desperate teenager aiming to escape after GCSE. E: p.drake@sussex.ac.uk, ext. 7043.
To let: 1 bed Kemp Town flat + patio garden. £650 pcm. Available now. E: s.soutar@sussex.ac.uk or T: Alan on 07876 451047.

All articles are also featured on the internet at www.sussex.ac.uk/press_office/bulletin

Staff changes
The Director of Human Resources, Barbara Bush, has been offered an HR post in HM Treasury and will be leaving the University in the summer, probably at the end of July.

She said: "While this is an exciting opportunity for me, my focus in the coming months will be to help carry through the important HR agenda, and to ensure the Division is well placed to continue this work with my successor."

- Following Dr Carlton Wood’s departure to the Open University, Dr Karen Long has taken over his role as Director of Student Support in the School of Life Sciences.
- On 1 April Dr Liz James replaced Professor Maurice Howard as head of the Art History department.
- Dr Al Thomson will stand down this summer as the Director of the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) and his replacement will be Pam Coare

Small ads

Academic events

MON 25 APR
2pm Social and Political Thought seminar: Hayden White (California, Santa Cruz), A symposium with Hayden White: Against history. IDS 221.
5pm Geography seminar: Charles Williams, Climate change and variability over South-western Africa. Arts C175.
TUE 26 APR
5pm BSMS seminar: James D. Cameron (La Trobe, Melbourne), Arterial stiffness: A new cardiovascular risk factor. BSMS Teaching Building.

THU 28 APR
4pm History seminar: Ayse Leven, Nursing, childcare and family fostering by the London Foundling Hospital 1741-1800. Arts A155.
FRI 29 APR
2.15pm SPRUCENTRIM seminar: Mike Tal (Dept of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), Professional skills in government: A new agenda. Freeman Centre G24/25.
4.30pm Philosophy Society: Alison Stone (Lancaster), Realism, idealism and nature in German romantic philosophy. Arts C233.
TUE 3 MAY

THU 5 MAY
4pm History seminar: Helen Graham (Royal Holloway), The memory of murder: Mass killing, incarceration and the making of Francoism. Arts A155.
FRI 6 MAY
2.15pm SPRUCENTRIM seminar: Andrew Flynn (Cardiff), Ecological footprint study of the FA Cup Final, Freeman Centre G24/25.

Arts events

PERFORMANCE
Mon 2–3 May
8pm Sussex University Drama Society (SUDS) – As You Like It
Gardiner Arts Centre (GAC).
Wed 4 May
8pm House of Flying Daggers (15). GAC.
Thu 5 May
8pm Vera Drake (12A). GAC.

FILM
Tue 3 May
8pm A Very Long Engagement (15). Gardner Arts Centre (GAC).

The Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Benedict Brook, with contributions from Jacquie Bealing, Maggie Clune and Rob Read. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from the staff and students of the University. The next issue will be out on 6 May, with a copy deadline of 3pm on 29 April. Please contact the Press & Communications Office in Sussex House, ext. 8888 or email bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.