The School of History’s second Alumni Reunion Day was a big success, with nearly 200 former students and staff arriving on campus on Saturday 11th October.

Highlights included a tour of Canterbury Cathedral, a trip on the Kent Wheel, and the chance to have memories recorded by our History Projects team. Professor Kenneth Fincham, Head of School, gave a presentation on ‘50 Years of History at Kent: Past, Present and Future’, and a number of information stands provided details on our Gateways to the First World War Project, The Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, The Centre for Political Economies of International Commerce, The Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540-1835, and DocExplore, a programme that creates interactive digital versions of historical manuscripts.

The day was rounded off with a lecture from Professor Grayson Ditchfield on ‘1714 – A Hanoverian anniversary’, and a drinks reception. It was great to welcome so many former students and staff. The full collection of photographs from the event can be found at the School of History’s Facebook page.
The First Decade at UKC: 1965-75 - Personal Reflections
Professor David Harkness

We are very grateful for this memoir from Professor David Harkness, one of the first five teachers of History at the University when it opened in autumn 1965.

I was appointed Assistant Lecturer in History early in 1964, to start on 1 October 1965. It was at Beverly Farm, in the warm autumn sunshine, that the first History Board of Studies meeting was held, out of doors. Professor Lyons had raided the Farm outbuildings and produced five deckchairs. Alas, when we sat down their canvas proved to have rotted and we were dumped unceremoniously on the grass. Not an ideal omen, you might think, but we turned out to be a harmonious group – Lyons, Read, Jack, Larkin and Harkness and this attribute was maintained, despite minor disagreements, as our numbers increased over the next few years. We did double, after all, in 1966 and add a further 50% in 1967, with several specialists thereafter, including Roger Anstey as second professor in 1968.

Eliot College gained much publicity at the opening of the University and the photograph of some of the pioneering 500 students approaching the entrance attracted wide attention. Serving all purposes in that first year – teaching, accommodation, recreation, dining – it proved to be a remarkably versatile building. I had a teaching room at the end of a male student corridor. Other corridors were female only, and there were rules about visitors of the opposite sex, with strict segregation after 11pm when all students were required to be in college.

At an administrators conference my wife Hilary was greeted by an enthusiastic senior lady administrator from another establishment who had heard that the College life was to be so regulated. She went white on discovering that at 11pm students of the opposite sex were being locked into the building together! I have no way of knowing how well-respected the regulations were, but for a few weeks, when Hilary and I lived in a college guest room, it was noticeable at 11pm that there was activity as female guests departed. After that, there was generally an increase in communal noise as the male students congregated in the kitchen or kicked a waste-paper basket up and down the corridor, happy in the knowledge that their girlfriends would be back in their own corridors and beyond further male competition. This reinforced my recollection of Cambridge where I would dutifully see Hilary back to her college at the same designated time, 11pm, and then return to my own college to enjoy male fellowship or even, dare I say it, do some work. I do recall trying to persuade Kent undergraduates that they could have the best of all worlds if the colleges became single-sex institutions, but I don’t think anyone believed me.

Those first ten years were very stimulating times, creative, enjoyable, fulfilling. We were a young community and could have been more or less self-sufficient: new friends, new courses, new ideals, new activities. Our founding professors committed themselves to as much interdisciplinary study as possible – hence the Boards of Studies rather than the more traditional Departments, with their associations of separateness. And this worked best with History and English. Yes, the first year in Humanities embraced languages, classics, and philosophy and the course ‘Britain in the Contemporary World’ was taught by us all and the topics which followed were interdisciplinary, but the most natural cooperation and interdisciplinary teaching embraced those two disciplines and led to many jointly-taught seminars. Though attempted throughout the university, this ethos never really gelled as successfully elsewhere and as time went on even in Humanities this early enthusiasm did diminish.

These of course are my impressions. When we embarked on proceedings in Eliot College the campus was still largely a building site, with Rutherford under way and the Library and a joint science building the other working structures – Oh, and there was also a squash court. Did this reflect the sporting enthusiasm of the first Professor of History and second Master of Eliot, Professor Lyons, Irish Squash international in his day? Perhaps, but the builder, following the traditional measures for such a court, found that there
was no reference for height (originally this was an open air activity without ceilings). Unfortunately his ceiling was a little too low and once the main sports hall was constructed with several well-dimensioned courts, the original was demolished. It had been good fun while it lasted.

 Indeed, that was true of our first decade. We enjoyed the continued expansion and experimentation, the camaraderie, the growing body of students and the number of societies that accompanied them. In that first year we were all excited by the task ahead. And we mixed with everyone. To begin with there was just the one college and the one staff common room, and one took coffee with colleagues of all disciplines. In time of course separate science buildings opened with staff common rooms, the old separations resumed and the opening togetherness was lost, though early friendships were maintained.

It was a time of University growth. Afterwards many of us found that the reverse policies of successive governments meant that we were concerned primarily with damage limitation. Life became more serious and innovation was increasingly stymied. But in those first ten years many of us were happily developing our new courses, manning the University’s growing number of committees, as well as settling in to our new friendships and sharing, many of us, experience of growing family life: our own three children were all born in the Kent and Canterbury Hospital, in 1967, 1969 and 1972. My first academic book was published in 1969 and study leave for the Easter term in 1970 enabled me to get on with writing the next one.

We were also learning fast. The University’s basic structure had to be manned by a small number of staff so that even an assistant lecturer gained administrative responsibility early. When the second college opened in 1966, I was very happy to accept the offer of a tutorship there and switch my allegiance to Rutherford, the pastoral side of university teaching adding a welcome dimension. I got to know some of my tutees very well and they were, by and large, well motivated and able and a pleasure to know. Kent had, I am sure, taken the trouble to appoint a fairly mature first 500, deemed intellectually sound and mentally robust, equipped, in other words, to cope with being pioneers, without the comfort of a cohort of students above them by which they might judge their own likelihood of survival. At least one of them, I believe, chose to use Kent as a finishing school and a launch pad for a subsequent Oxbridge application, but the students as a whole were committed to making their university a success and they soon developed into a fairly representative group amongst UK universities. There was no doubt early on of the success of recruitment, all being interviewed, many jointly, especially joint-honours candidates. We gave students we thought most able generous A-level targets, telling them not to worry about exams and to get on with their education. We hope we steered a number of top students our way as a result.

Appointment to the University Senate also came early. Other opportunities soon presented themselves and Hilary and I and our two young daughters were happy to embark upon the first leg of a four-year Teaching Exchange Programme between UKC and the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, jointly agreed by both History and English. Our return home was followed by promotion to a Senior Lectureship and election to the post of Chairman of the History Board of Studies. That is what it was like in those days. Before all that, however, other things characteristic of the period had occurred, for example the student ‘unrest’ of 1970.

This began with the student occupation of the newly built Cornwallis Building, which housed both administrative and staff offices, and teaching rooms. The issue was ‘political files’ and soon led also to demands for appropriate student representation on the University’s decision-making bodies. Lasting two weeks, the sit-in provided lessons for all concerned. A sense of unreality grew within the Cornwallis – almost a feeling that just one more day of occupation would see the fall of capitalism! It produced a fast learning experience for the senior management and Kent was not alone amongst the new Universities affected: the issue was precipitated by earlier unrest at Warwick. Common sense in the end prevailed and concessions were made to the more reasonable demands.
Professor David Harkness’ memoirs cont.

The men who inspired the University and those who held the chief positions deserve some mention for all were well known to us lesser beings: Geoffrey Templeman, the Vice-Chancellor, Eric Fox the Registrar, and his assistant, Jack Brandon, Bursar Hughes, Librarian Darlow and Finance Officer Linfoot. The architects of the academic world were the early Professors and for Humanities the Dean, Guy Chilver (classics), Leland Lyons and Reg Foakes were probably central, with Philosophy headed by Patrick Nowell-Smith, French by Bob Gibson, German by Ken Knight doing their bit. Harry McWilliam added Italian a little later. The popular Alec Whitehouse, first Master of Eliot, was a theologian but I don’t remember theology having a presence as a subject. Some of these figures were well caricatured in InCant, the in-house staff/student journal, by undergraduate Ted Harrison. FUSS, the Forum for University Staff and Students, was another internal medium of communication in those early days.

Even in 1975, there were surprises and ominous clouds appearing on the horizon. For one thing part of the Cornwallis building collapsed due to the subsidence of the underlying railway tunnel: a physical shock for the Administration. For another, even then questions were being asked about the over-supply of university places. What would become of these new universities should any of them be required to close? An open prison was thought to be a possibility for UKC but mercifully such speculations proved redundant and UKC expanded into the University of Kent that we know to-day, with its further campuses in Kent and beyond.

I live too far away, in retirement, to be a frequent visitor to Canterbury, but in this year of celebration leading to the 50th Anniversary it is gratifying to find such a developed and welcoming campus and so confident and mature a university. Those pioneer professors and administrators designed well.

Celebrating 50 years of Kent: History Projects

The University's 50th Anniversary celebrations began this academic year, and dozens of History and War Studies students have volunteered their time to produce exhibitions covering the history of the University, its campus, and its students and staff.

These exhibitions will play a key role throughout the anniversary celebrations, and the images, interviews, and information gathered will form the centre of the University's new archive.

Back in March, former student Robin Pitman, one of the first 500 students to study at the University, opened the 50th Anniversary Project Room, officially launching the start of work on the projects.

Find out more information on what they’ve been up to and share your memories of Kent here.

News round-up

We now have a new School of History news blog, where you can find up to date news items and pictures from all the events that take place within the school. Go to: blogs.kent.ac.uk/history/.
Friends of the School of History WW1 trip

Our new group, the Friends of the School of History, was launched at our second Alumni Day in October.

Members of the group will be invited to attend Open Lectures on a variety of historical topics from both our academics and visiting speakers, keep up to date with the latest news and events from the School with our alumni newsletter, as well as enjoy social events, and receive invitations to our dedicated Friends trips to places of historical interest.

The first of these will be a day trip to Ypres on Thursday 12th March 2015, where Professor Mark Connelly will be giving a tour of the battlefields of the First World War, and there will be the opportunity to attend the Last Post ceremony.

Tickets will cost £35 each, and will be allocated on a first come first served basis as spaces are limited. For more information, and to book your place, please contact Sam Crooks on s.l.m.crooks@kent.ac.uk.

To find out more about the group, and to sign up to become a Friend, please see here.

Dates for your diary

Gateways to Military Lives Study Day

Wednesday 25 February 2015, 9.30am-4pm

Our Gateways to the First World War Centre will be hosting a free Study Day at the University of Kent.

The day will feature talks and workshops focusing on research into the military services in the First World War. You will have the opportunity to talk with academic and heritage experts about resources and techniques for researching military ancestors, and develop ideas for your own centenary projects.

Featuring an introduction to the Imperial War Museum’s Lives of the First World War project, advice on applying for support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and talks on researching the Great War.

For more information about this, and the Centre’s other upcoming Study Days, please see here.

Napoleon and the Hundred Days: Some Neglected Aspects

Thursday 26 March 2015, 6pm

2015 is a fascinating year for major anniversaries including Gallipoli, the Second Battle of Ypres and the Battle of Loos (1915).

Beyond the Great War centenary, there is another pivotal moment of British, European and global history to consider - the culmination of the Napoleonic wars in the 200th anniversary of Napoleon's return from exile and the final battle of the conflict at Waterloo.

The Centre for War, Propaganda and Society will be marking this fascinating period in a lecture given by Professor Munro Price (Bradford University), and all are welcome.

For more details please contact Mark Connelly on M.L.Connelly@kent.ac.uk or Ambrogio Caiani on A.A.Caiani@kent.ac.uk.

New appointments and farewells

The School of History has recently welcomed a number of new staff members. Dr Ben Marsh (American History), Dr Omar Nasim (History of Science) and Oliver Godsmark (Imperial History) all started with the School in September. In the upcoming year, we will also be appointing a new Medievalist, a Military historian (covering the period 1700-1900), a Tudor historian and a historian of the British Empire.

We have also recently welcomed Rianne Dubois as Postgraduate Co-Ordinator in American Studies, and Dr Sam Carroll as Community Heritage Researcher for the Gateways to the First World War project.

We have also said a sad farewell to some members of staff in the past few months. Dr. Alixe Bovey left us at the end of the winter term to take up her new position as Head of Research at the Courtauld Institute, and Dr. David Grummit left in January to take up a new post at Canterbury Christ Church University. Professor Grayson Ditchfield, Professor David Ormrod, Dr David Potter and Professor Crosbie Smith retired in September 2014. Good luck to them all!
Research News

Please find below a round-up of recent research and publication successes from the School.

Professor Grayson Ditchfield gave a talk at the Simon Langton Girls’ Grammar School, and was asked to become Patron of the School’s History Society.


Professor Gaynor Johnson has been invited to join the editorial board of the leading peer-reviewed journal, Contemporary British History. The journal publishes articles on all aspects of twentieth and twenty-first century Britain, including cultural history.

Dr Juliette Pattinson has published a co-written article ‘Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War’ appeared in a special issue of Journal of War and Culture Studies that she co-edited with Lucy Noakes & Wendy Ugolini entitled ‘Incarceration in the Second World War’.


Dr Danielle van den Heuvel has been offered a visiting fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo from 22 June to 22 August 2015. She will be working with Professor Masashi Haneda, an expert of Ottoman urban history, and one of the programme leaders of Core to Core, a new global history collaborative involving Tokyo, Princeton, Berlin and Paris universities.

Dr Giacomo Macola has been selected as one of the experts entrusted with the task of evaluating applications submitted to the ‘ERC Consolidator Grant – 2014’.

Dr Charlotte Sleigh’s AHRC project Metamorphoses was featured on ITN Meridian News on 16 October. The project will examine art and science relationships through the analysis of a 300-year-old English copy of Ovid’s Metamorphoses.

Dr Sleigh will work alongside scientist Simon Park and artist Sarah Craske for the project, ‘reading’ the book through a biological lens, analysing the bacteria, fungi, viruses and skin cell it has picked up as it has been passed from reader to reader. Their findings will be displayed in an exhibition. Find out more about the project on our School blog.

Oliver Carpenter gave a paper titled, ‘Emerging as a National Figure: Walter Runciman and the Rise of British Tramp Shipowners’, at a Research Seminar as part of the Blaydes House Maritime History Seminar Programme at the University of Hull on 4 November.

Dr. Julie Anderson appeared on Channel 4’s ‘Secret History: Forgotten Heroes of WW1’ on Sunday 2 November.

Following our success in the latest round of applications for the Leverhulme Early Career Fellowships, we look forward to Dr Christine Whyte (Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies) joining us. She’ll work with Dr Giacomo Macola and Dr Emily Manktelow on her project, ‘Fostering Civilization: Liberians, imperialism and the family home, 1822-1865’.

Professor David Welch has been appointed Emeritus Professor of History in recognition of his long service and distinguished contribution to scholarship in his field.

Dr Phil Slavin has received a short-term Mayers Fellowship at the Huntington Library, San Marino (California), to work on late-medieval manorial documents relating to Battle Abbey, providing a unique glimpse into 15th- and early-16th century economy.

Following their successful Wellcome Trust-funded conference, Professor Ulf Schmidt and his colleagues, Professor Andreas Frewer and Professor Dominique Sprumont, have been offered a contract by OUP (US) for a 180,000 word edited volume on ‘Human Research Ethics and the Declaration of Helsinki’, to be published in 2015/16.

Dr Rebekah Higgitt has secured £1,242 of KIASH funding for a visit from Thomas Söderqvist, Professor at the University of Copenhagen, and Director of the Medical Museion, Copenhagen.

Jan Vandeburie has been awarded the three-month Brill-Centre for the History of Arabic Studies in Europe fellowship at the Warburg Institute to work on sacred spaces in the East.

If you have a news item, an upcoming event, or simply an idea for something you’d like to see in the next issue of this newsletter, please get in touch with Sam Crooks on s.l.m.crooks@kent.ac.uk.

The School of History is now online!

Keep up to date with the latest news, events and reminders from the school

Follow us on Twitter and Like us on Facebook!