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Alumni Reunions
Fifty years on
There was an extraordinary reunion of former UCL Geographers on 7-9 September 2007, fifty years after they first entered the department as undergraduates in 1957. Thirty eight appeared, almost a full turnout. Many had not met for 47 years, but little time was lost at the Friday departmental tea in reviving old friendships and recalling student days. The conviviality had developed further by lunch in College on Saturday, followed by an evening at the theatre (‘The Mousetrap’, of course!). Finally, some took a Sunday tour of Docklands, combining all available modes of public transport, including returning from Greenwich to Westminster by river.

Melvyn Roberts and Kay Jackson, who masterminded the weekend, compiled a unique document, in the form of a ‘yearbook’ based on a questionnaire which traced the lives so far of every member of the group. Most had been married (some more than once), now with grown up children. John Wearmouth has 9 grandchildren, and Jean Taylor 15 step-grandchildren. Ten live abroad – 3 in Australia and 2 each in Canada and the US, with the others in Nigeria, France and New Zealand.

How these geographers had made their livings did not necessarily follow the prejudice of the time. About half followed predictable routes - 8 as teachers, 5 town planners and 5 in higher education. The rest went in many directions, working, for example in the chemical and motor industries, retailing, insurance, transport

What's this, on duty in the departmental foyer? See page 3.
management, as a Chief Education Officer, in nature conservation, and agricultural and healthcare consultancy.

Many have interesting, if sometimes combative hobbies: Melvyn Reynolds chairs the Holly Holy Day Society, which, with the Sealed Knot, perpetuates the memory of the English Civil War battle of Nantwich. Brian Fitzgerald was a member of the British and Yorkshire rifle shooting teams from the 1960s to the ‘80s. Staying with sport, Roger Faulkner was part-responsible for bringing proper football to the United States. He founded Detroit Express, one of the first professional soccer teams in North America, attracting some top British talent in the late 1970s, including Trevor Francis and George Best. He went on to chair the group that successfully bid for Detroit to be a host city in the 1994 World Cup, heading the city’s World Cup organisation and later becoming Chair of the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame.

The 1957 arrivals also seemed quite balanced politically: Robert Hicks became a Conservative MP, while Anne Davis (née Cooper) married a former president of the UCL Union who later became a Labour MP, Privy Councillor and Secretary General of the Council of Europe. There has also been a lot of significant voluntary work. Trevor Wilson, for example, is the co-ordinator of the Shropshire Air Ambulance; and Clive Woosnam promotes Wales in Australia, as President of both the Sydney Welsh Voice Choir and the Dylan Thomas Society.

Were members of the group still identifiable as geographers after 50 years? Their wide range of international residential/travel experience was certainly notable. Many also now pursue environment/local history interests that reflect latent geographical perspectives. David Hogg had just published an impressive ‘Life and Times of Sir Arthur Lawley’, eminent Edwardian, based on his research at Tyntesfield, in Somerset. They were also such a jolly, sociable lot. Within minutes communal bonds were revived that must have first developed in field classes fifty years ago. Also remarkable, however, had been the adaptability of this generation to the many changes during the half-century since they first arrived at UCL.

Forty Years On
Most of the UCL Geographers who graduated in 1967 responded to the invitation from Linda Newson to join a reunion in the department on 22 June. About 18 came in person, many with partners, and about the same number sent messages from as far away as New Zealand, Sydney, Malawi, Beijing, Maryland, France, Brussels, Bradford and the LSE. An impressive staff turnout was lead by Bill Mead (92 this year) and Eric Brown, and included Gerry Ward (from Australia, via France), Hugh Prince, Andrew Warren, Anne Oxenham, and comparative youngsters such as Hugh Clout, Richard Munton and Peter Wood. The evening progressed to dinner at Bertorelli’s in Charlotte Street, with further social events planned over the weekend.

And even ... Thirty Years On
About thirty 1977 UCL Geography graduates held their 30th Anniversary get-together on 30th June 2007. Many had met regularly over the years, and short messages were also invited and received from many more (in the form of ‘30 years in 30 words’!). These vignettes offered a fascinating profile of life’s successes and setbacks, of travel and international experiences, and sometimes unpredictable career choices. Many children were now at university, some doing geography,
Launching the Pearson Building

After diffusing from Foster Court across Bloomsbury for 27 years, much of UCL Geography finally returned to its new permanent home on the College rectangle over the Easter of 2006. Our front door is now immediately on the left as you enter the main Quad from Gower Street. Meanwhile for another 2-3 years at least, Bedford Way will remain the home of about a dozen staff, with some graduate students and the Map and Reading Rooms.

Almost £5 millions of research funding for environmental and geographical information science have made this consolidation possible, and unified our scattered computing and science labs and related postgraduate training.

Surname Profiler

This machine greets visitors to the Pearson Building, inviting them to type in their surname to discover where in Britain it was most concentrated in 1881 and 1998. It is one outcome of a project associated with the ‘Spatial Literacy in Teaching’ (Splint) project lead by Professor Paul Longley.

See: http://www.spatial-literacy.org/?page_id=40

Try your own surname at: http://www.nationaltrustnames.org.uk/default.aspx

Tula Maxted, the departmental laboratory technician, shows alumini around the new laboratories during the ‘Pearson Opening’ reunion. Part of the national Science Research Infrastructure Fund was used to create a suite of labs dedicated mainly to environmental monitoring and the reconstruction of past environments. These allow the examination of diatoms, pollen and carbonaceous particles in soils, lake sediment cores and water samples; sediment sieving to identify macrofossils and ostracods; and the analysis of change over time in physical and chemical properties. The sediments can also now be stored in purpose-built cold rooms. The large microscope room has become the venue for a growing number of short training courses and lectures, attracting specialist trainees from the UK and abroad. Three store rooms also hold a wide range of equipment to support an extensive programme of field-based research and teaching.
Vietnamese Team Members Preparing for Field Sampling.

2006 marked the tenth anniversary of Ted Hollis’s untimely death. He had become an international leader in wetland conservation research, recognised at the time by the generous response to the Hollis Scholarship Appeal, which now supports PhD students carrying out wetlands research in the developed world. The latest, Musonda Mumba, completed her work on wetlands in Zambia early in 2007. The scheme depended on the continuing success of Ted’s Wetland Research Unit (WRU). Julian Thompson, who had worked with Ted as student and co-researcher, has lead the Unit since 1997. Here he gives an account of one of its key recent projects.

As in Ted’s time, the WRU continues to research freshwater wetlands, developing support for sustainable wetland management based on hydrological monitoring and modelling and the assessment of environmental change and human impacts. In the past 2-3 years it has lead an international team investigating the Tram Chim National Park in Vietnam. The Park contains the largest remnants of the once extensive Plain of Reeds, a freshwater marsh in the Mekong Delta. This used to be regularly inundated by river floodwater from Cambodia and monsoon rainfall, but the area has been extensively modified by canals built to promote drainage and improve agricultural productivity. Ironically, embankments constructed around the Park to counteract the impacts of these canals have maintained unnaturally high water levels and longer flood durations. They were also intended to prevent fire, although historically this played an important role in sustaining the ecosystem. The native vegetation has thus been changed, spreading alien invasive species and reducing water quality.

One particular concern for conservationists has been the loss of habitat for the endangered Sarus Crane, the tallest flying bird in the world. The higher water levels have also prevented the export and decomposition of dead plant material, increasing the risk of major dry season fires. We have worked with local experts to develop an Integrated Water and Fire Management Plan to restore historical water levels and ecological processes and reduce the risk of large uncontrolled fires. This links hydrology, water and soil chemistry, botany, aquatic ecology, fire ecology and the use of prescribed burning. The Plan was presented at a major workshop in October 2006 and is being incorporated into a multi-million dollar, Government-backed investment plan for the Park.
Maslin of the Arctic

The Cape Farewell 2007 Youth Expedition

In line with the changing departmental profile (see pages 6-8) our new Head, and Director of the UCL Environmental Institute, is a youthful Professor Mark Maslin. Mark arrived at UCL in 1994, after a PhD at Cambridge. Among his areas of expertise are the causes of past and future global climate change, Amazonia, ocean circulation, ice ages, East African palaeoclimates and human evolution. He has published in leading journals, including *Nature* and *Science*, but also written popular books, including ‘Earthquakes’ and ‘Storms’ for 8-12 year olds. He frequently appears on radio and television and is a regular consultant for the BBC (e.g. ‘Supervolcano’, ‘Superstorm’).

In September, Mark celebrated his new UCL responsibilities by fleeing to Svalbard (Spitsbergen) in the Norwegian Arctic. He was there to support the Cape Farewell 2007 Youth Expedition - twelve 15-16 year olds from the UK, Canada and Germany, learning about climate change. This was the Cape Farewell Project’s first youth expedition, following earlier expeditions involving adult artists and scientists, which attracted a lot of publicity in March 2005 (http://www.capefarewell.com/). This trip coincided with the International Polar Year in 2007, and aimed to give students a voice in the climate change debate, as they took what they learned back to their communities and families.

For ten days they carried out experiments, made artworks, including ice sculptures, videos and photographs, kept a blog, and set up live internet link-ups with schools around the world. Mark’s role was as Science Mentor, working with teacher Keith Brindle, of Frome Community College. Afterwards, Mark commented, ‘This was the most amazing expedition I have ever been on. We saw awe-inspiring sights, and did startlingly creative science and art. The students were fantastic and I am convinced each one will become a leading ambassador for climate change in their local communities and their country. I just wish we could teach all students this way. I am also still in shock that all of us swam at the 79 deg parallel in freezing water - and we have the pictures to prove it!’

For more information see: http://voyage4.capefarewell.com/about/

Award-Winning Paper

Following the account of ‘The Dustiest Place on Earth’ in our last Newsletter, Martin Todd, with his co-authors, has won the “Most Outstanding Article of the Year” award by the journal *Environmental Research Letters* for a paper entitled, ‘The Bodélé Depression: a single spot in the Sahara that provides most of the mineral dust to the Amazon forest’.
Comings and Goings

Staff turnover is an inevitable and generally beneficial feature of any large organisation. In fact, UCL Geography experienced remarkable stability over many years, based on a core of staff who arrived in the 1960s and ’70s. Most of this ‘old guard’ have begun to retire over the past five years, inviting the arrival of much new blood. Our staff profile now looks very different from what even recent graduates would remember. The main impact, apart from reducing average staff age, has concentrated into human geography. Our international base has widened, with new colleagues from Germany, Austria, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA. Fresh expertise is being directed into international cultural and social geography, including growing human mobility, and also research and teaching on Africa, contemporary geopolitics and environmental sustainability.

2007/8 saw the retirement of three departmental stalwarts:

Rick Battarbee, who was elected to a Fellowship of the Royal Society (a rare honour for a geographer) in 2006, is going into ‘semi-retirement’ from January 2008. He intends to continue research and writing as Senior Research Fellow in the Environmental Change Research Centre, which he founded in 1991. This now employs almost 30 staff, and has trained scores of Doctoral and Masters students in environmental science. Modern concerns have, of course, caught up with the Centre’s work, which has developed a range of scientific and historical techniques to examine environmental change, especially in aquatic ecosystems. The FRS marked the recognition by the UK science establishment of the leading role Rick and the Centre have played in developing modern environmental understanding.

Hugh Clout came to UCL as an undergraduate in 1962, going on to gain Masters and Doctoral degrees on the historical geography of France. He has since become the doyen of British geographers of France, receiving a Fellowship of the British Academy (1997), a D.Litt of the University of London (2001), and an Honorary Degree at the Sorbonne (2004), the first ever awarded to a British geographer. For the past 20 years he has pioneered local research into the restoration of French rural and urban landscapes after the two World Wars. For many years Hugh’s courses on France, Europe, rural geography and London have been amongst the most popular in the department. They have been founded on his commitment to regional geography as the basis for understanding the ways of life of other countries, both in the past and today. He has written many popular textbooks, and the ‘Times London History Atlas (1991)’ is now in its 4th Edition. Hugh has also been an important figure in College life, especially as Dean of the Social and Historical Sciences Faculty (1995-2004). He was particularly active, for example, in promoting UCL’s successful European Studies programme. He continues to teach his final year course on contemporary France, with the familiar queue of students beating a path to consult him in the Emeriti office.

Richard Munton came to UCL from Birmingham in 1966 as an agricultural geographer, but his interests evolved to encompass the study of agricultural property rights in the management of rural land. He became much sought-after expert on rural planning policies.
and, later, the institutional reforms needed to support sustainable rural resource management. Meanwhile, he played numerous influential roles on government and Research Council advisory panels and committees, for example on agricultural land use, forestry, the national diet and health, and the requirements of sustainable development. He gained perhaps his greatest notoriety within geography during the 1990s as a member and, from 1999, the successful Chair of the Panel that assessed the research quality of all UK geography departments. Meanwhile, he was also Head of UCL Geography from 1991-97, and then again from 2002-2005. In recent years, he has promoted environmental management issues through his teaching, supervision of PhD students, and the establishment in 2003 of the UCL Environment Institute.

**John Salt** came to UCL from Liverpool in 1966, as a specialist in the geography of labour market change. He widened his expertise in population geography over the years, and established the Migration Research Unit in 1988. Its aims were to monitor and analyse international migration patterns, particularly of skilled labour, based on his unique grasp of the complexities and often inconsistencies of available data. In recent years, of course, these issues have come under the spotlight of public debate, with John, somewhat reluctantly, in constant demand from national and international institutions and the media for his expert opinion. (e.g. The Economist, Dec 1st 2007, p.30). This expertise has also contributed to the core of human geography teaching for successive generations of UCL undergraduates. John is continuing a major programme of research for the Leverhulme Trust on the international movement of expertise, but he may find more time to pursue his other enthusiasms, including searching out bargains in fine wine.

In 2006, **Jacquie Burgess** moved to a Chair of Environmental Risk the University of East Anglia, and has since become Head of the School of Environmental Sciences. Jacquie came to UCL in 1975 and, as leader of the Environment and Society Research Group, developed innovative approaches to public participation in environmental policy, much in collaboration with Carolyn Harrison. Jacquie’s commitment and enthusiasm did much to inspire successive generations of undergraduates, also supervising dozens of postgraduate researchers.

The summer of 2006 also saw the retirement of **Claudette John**, our long-serving financial administrator, who first came to UCL as a part-time typist in the early 1970s. Claudette’s contribution always went far beyond her somewhat dry title. She was passionate about the quality of the department’s working environment, managing a succession of moves and refurbishments. She was also a great believer in the importance of its social life for both staff and students. On special occasions, her cakes were something to wonder at!

**Mark Bassin** also left in 2006, after 12 years at UCL, to take up a Chair at the University of Birmingham. Mark came to us from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, to continue the department’s tradition of East European Studies. He also developed a popular strand of new teaching in political geography.

**New Staff Arrivals**

**2005:**

**Jan Axmacher**: Bayreuth (PhD). A biogeographer, Jan is interested in the biodiversity patterns of insects and plants in East Africa and Northern China. He is especially concerned with the conservation of biodiversity in the face of changing climate, land-use, and the invasion of exotic species.

**Jurgen Essletzbichler**: from Vienna via UCLA (PhD). An economic geographer specialising in regional development in the US and UK and relationships between growth and inequality. His latest work is on the geography of job creation and loss in the UK.

**2006:**

**Alan Latham**: Massey; Bristol (PhD). A widely travelled New Zealander, with research interests mainly in urban geography. Most of Alan’s work focuses on the uses of urban space, in particular the relationship between commercial spaces and public spaces. He also researches on skilled migrants. Alan has held posts at the Technische Universität Berlin, and the Universities of Auckland and Southampton.

**Charlotte Lemanski**: Durham, LSE, Oxford (D.Phil). Charlotte has a multidisciplinary background, studying Politics as a first degree, a Master’s degree in development studies, and a Geography doctorate. She has lived and worked in South Africa, and her research focuses on its cities, especially housing and ethnic segregation in the post-apartheid era.

**JoAnn McGregor**: Oxford, Loughborough (PhD). JoAnn specialises on the politics and social history of southern Africa. Her recent projects include an ESRC-funded study of the modern Zimbabwean diaspora, and the relations between work and identity. She has just completed a monograph exploring historical claims to the Zambezi river based on research funded by the British Academy.
Some of the department’s new staff.

From left: Back row: Pablo Mateos; Jason Dittmer, Jan Axmacher; Sam Randalls, Jurgen Essletzbichler. Front Row: JoAnn McGregor; Ruth Panelli; Charlotte Lemanski; Alan Latham.

Ruth Panelli: Melbourne (PhD). Appointed to a Readership, Ruth is a social geographer whose doctorate addressed the social and power relations confronting women in Australian agriculture. She has also written on a range of issues related to rural society, place identity, collective action and environmental health. Her book Social Geographies: From Difference to Action, examined how people experience social difference and come to take individual and/or collective action. She is also co-editor of Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth, a new international collection of essays.

2007:

Jason Dittmer: Florida State (MA, PhD). Jason has wide interests in popular geopolitics, especially the role of popular culture and the media in shaping people’s attitudes and lived experiences. For example, what nationalist stereotypes arise from ‘Captain America’, a long-running superhero in US comic books, and what geopolitical imaginations are associated with certain evangelical religious groups?

Sam Randalls: Birmingham (MSc; PhD. Sam’s research is based on historical/cultural approaches to the relationship between weather/climate and society. His PhD explored the rise of ‘weather derivatives’, financial contracts traded to mitigate the effects of weather on business. He has more recently been exploring current climate change debates, including what is meant by ideas such as ‘climate stabilization’.

Russell Hitchings: UCL (PhD). Russell’s interest in the cultural geography of environmental sustainability has focused on attitudes associated with how we consume plants and ‘the outdoors’. For example, what does the experience of garden centres tell us about such attitudes? What about the rising use of patio heaters, or the decline of lawns? How important have been the recent fashions promoted by professional garden designers?

Caroline Bressey: UCL (PhD and Post-Doc). Caroline’s research is primarily on the historical and cultural geography of the Black presence in Victorian Britain. The focus has especially been on the varied experiences of black women in institutions such as Barnardo’s; in elite society; and in anti-racist politics. She is now also recovering the biographies of Black men as part of a new historical geography of London. She has worked on exhibitions at the Royal Geographical Society and The National Portrait Gallery, most recently curating a trail of 50 NPG portraits to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

Pablo Mateos: Leicester (MSc); UCL (PhD). Pablo’s research relates to population and urban geography, exploring new understandings of the nature of ethnicity, migration and mobility in rapidly changing cities and societies. He has developed GIS-based ethnicity classifications, relating surnames to ethnicity, to study residential segregation and healthcare in London. He is also studying mobile phone use to understand and represent everyday mobility in contemporary society.

Keeping in Touch

As well as meeting those who came to various reunions, we have received many individual messages from former students over the past 2-3 years.

These extend in time from:
Mona Cole (Boden) (1946)
Joyce Norton (1948)
Phyllis Banks (Olsen) (1950)
K J Green (1951)

To:
Mark Hayward (1977)
June le Count (Gibbons) (1977)
Jillian Russell (1977)
Rosemary Black (1977)

And:
and Gemma Paolucci (2003).

We can always be contacted at our Alumnus email address:

contacts@geog.ucl.ac.uk

The departmental website also contains up-to-date news, and an alumnus page, where we would be happy to post messages and news from you.

http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/