

Course and classmate memories

Our alumni share their memories of their courses and classmates. To add yours, please email alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk (<mailto:alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk>).

1940s

John Binks (MBChB Medicine, 1947)

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I have been in Australia since 1956, working as a surgeon to the local hospital for 35 years, so am very grateful for all news of present happenings.

I did my MB in 1947, so memories fading a bit but many are still delightful. I remember:

- First year, good old-fashioned Physics, Chemistry and Biology - I remember more from them than last week's *British Medical Journal!*
- The staff at the Medical School, especially Dean Smout and Dr Brandt, embryology
- My great friend Peter Gray, late Professor of Paediatrics, Cardiff; Sandy Clark, Canada; John Pougher and many others
- The squash courts were terrific after a day of lectures

1950s

Mike Butcher (BSc Mining, 1954)

Mining was a small department but at Carnival time we Miners were, per capita, the best. There was great but friendly rivalry between Departments, especially the Engineering departments. The Mechanical Engineers had as a mascot a very large structure in the shape of a spanner, covered in translucent fabric and with lights inside it. Our mascot was a mannequin dressed in coverall, boots, helmet and mine rescue apparatus. He stood in the small museum at the entrance to the Mining Department.

One afternoon we Miners were in the drawing office on the top floor of the Mechanical Engineering Department. The spanner was lying across the worktops in a smaller room next door. The fire escape led out of that room. A plan emerged simultaneously amongst us - steal the spanner! Two minutes later we were on our way down the fire escape with the trophy. One minute after that we were being hotly pursued by, it seemed, just about the entire Department of Mechanical Engineering. Battle ensued, during which the spanner was reduced to rubble. Victory was ours. But a few days later our mines rescue man disappeared from the Mining Department museum and was missing for many weeks.

The whole incident was almost forgotten by the time we came to the Miners Dance in the Union. Late in the evening the music stopped in the middle of a sequence and was replaced by a death march. What was happening? Then eyes began to turn upwards and we saw our mannequin descending from the gallery in the roof of the hall with a rope around his neck. It took a full five minutes for him to reach the dance floor where we miners had the ignominious task of releasing him from his noose and removing him from the floor amid tremendous applause from all the non-miners in the Union building. Ticket sales had been very good and now we knew why.

John Reckless (MBChB Medicine, 1954)

In 1952, having been elected as President of the Guild of Undergraduates, I formally withdrew from my final year of the Medical School and spent 12 full months as a sabbatical year involved full time in Guild affairs. Not having to attend lectures or ward rounds there were no distractions from my Guild duties.

In 1972, along with the former Professor of Medicine during my time as a medical student at Birmingham, we sat together with a few others as both of us were awarded honorary fellowships in the American College of Physicians. He for his lifetime achievements to British Medicine and me for my contributions to the developing science of psychosomatic medicine, while I was a faculty member at The Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, North Carolina, USA.

David Shearlock (BA Geography, 1955)

For various reasons, I had not revisited the campus since I graduated in 1955 with a degree in geography. Last year, my daughter wanted to give me a special treat for my 80th birthday so, without my knowing, she arranged for us to spend a few hours at the University.

We were met at the station by Mike Tanner, a retired but still working lecturer, and given a thorough tour of the Geography Department, which included their digging out my third year dissertation, as well as meeting various members of the staff. We also spent some time in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, with its magnificent display of paintings by great and lesser masters and had an excellent lunch.

It happened to be one of the days when degree congregations were being held, which meant that we could have a peek into the Great Hall and remember the day when I was given my degree by the then Chancellor, Sir Anthony Eden. Mike also drove us up the hill to the Queen's College, where I had been a hosteller for my final two years. It was altogether a splendid day and we much appreciated the VIP treatment.

The very Reverend David Shearlock, Dean Emeritus of Truro.

Robin Warner (BA Geography, 1959)

I am an 80-year-old, long-retired Fluvial Geomorphologist, who studied Geography in the Bristol Road Huts between 1956 and 1959.

It was not easy with all the other courses 'up the hill' on the main campus. I met my late wife at an Edmund Street party. Geography being so detached was a bit like a family affair and most people were happy in the friendly atmosphere there.

In 1960, I went to Australia where I taught at the Universities of New England and Sydney for 38 years. I have been back a few times but it is good to stay in touch via your newsletters.

Allan Williams (BSc Geology, 1959)

I am an old codger but still keep plodding along, now, as an Emeritus Professor at Swansea Metropolitan University. Coastal work still gets me to places like Malta, Holland, Turkey, Portugal with the occasional Far East jaunt and any spare time is taken up by novel (bad) and poetry (even worse) writing, stained glass window making and love spoon carving – a speciality in Wales. Life has been good as, I have worked in the Far East, Africa and North America for many years plus Europe of course. Are there any other old codgers still around?

Robert Spier (BCom, 1958)

The B.Com (accountancy, economics, economic history, law and optional subjects), was an excellent introduction to the contemporary world, how it worked and how we got here. Alan Walters later one of Mrs Thatcher's advisers, Michael Beesley inventor of BT privatisation and Prof Gothein were excellent. How did we manage without an i-pad, just a part free place, a backpack, a bicycle and the 2B bus? I well remember a group of us carrying out a marketing survey for the Co-op which took us into tower blocks where the first question sometimes was: "Are you from the Debt?" That brought us down to earth.

Membership of the Union Committee gave me a bird's eye view of student politics.

Students in the fifties were quiescent but at the first rumblings of rebellion the warden of Chancellor's Hall (brother of actor Michael Hordern) dismissed us as Boors. The Carnival was good fun particularly the USAF Band and enabled us to explore the city free of charge on the Corporation buses with a collecting tin. I'm still doing that today for the RNLI. Brummies were very generous and supportive of the University even if they had never attended. That made one humble. The Hungarian Uprising brought a group of students to Birmingham so we decorated a rented house in Edgbaston for them which was another skill.

In vacations as relief from cleaning out chicken houses on Wenlock Edge I ran a student exchange programme AISEC with Mike Stone (later best man at my wedding in 1965) which took me to a switchgear factory in Copenhagen in 1956 and later a hydro-electric turbine factory in the middle of Sweden. Although British manufacturing was still predominant I saw how changes were taking place particularly in Sweden. Maersk shipping was already growing while I later remember British ships returning from Port Sudan to UK so the crews could go on strike. What competition?

I cannot match the sporting achievement of others though I gained my A, B and C glider licences at the West Midland Gliding Club in Shropshire.

I became an articled clerk in accountancy in Birmingham and later worked for Price Waterhouse in Sudan, Yemen and Zambia before switching to the oil industry, real estate and venture capital. I am unsure what was the role of the B.Com but I think it helped exercise my brain being a radical departure from subjects taught at school. This was useful when I lectured at Khartoum University to support my work permit despite a revolution. When will UK catch up? Replacement of the Commerce Faculty by a business school seems to have produced a superiority complex which is unjustified.

Like many I was the first in the family to go to University though others went to technical colleges like Gosta Green and did well.

Marlene Simpson [née Wirth] (BSocSc Social Science, 1963)

I wonder if there is anybody who remembers a walking holiday along the Pembrokeshire coastal path, maybe in 1962? It was arranged by the Economic History lecturer, in the Social Science Faculty; to my shame, I cannot remember his name.

I didn't take part in many extracurricular activities at the University, Social Studies students were expected to do voluntary work in the communities in which they lived – no hall accommodation allowed. Even holidays were filled with placements, in special schools, factories, and social work departments. All were hard work, but mostly enjoyable and a good preparation for a career in social work.

I worked in different fields, mostly to do with children and families, apart from short spells in hospital social work departments, and ten years in social work training. I finished my career as a Senior Social Worker/Therapist, in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team, after doing a specialist postgraduate course around 1990.

Apart from my paid work, I have been a Licensed Lay Minister (Reader) in the Anglican Church for many years, and am very committed to the communities and churches in my area, in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, where I have lived for nearly 45 years.

I have two sons, three grandchildren and two step-grandchildren, so family contact is very important to me.

I managed to keep in touch with Chris Potts (née Webb) until about 18 months ago, but have not heard from her since; if anyone else knows more recent news, I should appreciate any contact. She lived in Wimborne Minster for many years. I am looking forward to the event in June, and hope that there will be other past students from the Social Science faculty.

Allan Wong (MEng Electronic and Electrical, 1965)

I stayed at High Hall on the 16th floor (I think) in my final year when Hamlin from the Civil Engineering department was the master of the Hall. The first one was the orientation program for foreign students and was held in Aug 1962 at University Hall which was then for ladies. I'm the one wearing sunglasses (below).



This second photo was the department of Electrical and Electronic engineering taken probably in 63 or 64. My Professor was the late Professor Allanson sitting in front (front row fourth from the left) I'm again the one with sunglasses.

The third photograph is the Evangelical Christian Union. I'm in the back row. The African gentleman is Dr Nathaniel Sodji from Ghana who was then doing his PhD in the same department as I was. He was appointed a Professor of Electronic engineering at a University in Ghana in the 70s and I met him in Singapore around 1987/88.



This last photograph one is another one from the Evangelical Christian Union with our then Honorary President, Sir Alfred Owen, who was then sponsoring Donald Campbell's land speed record attempt. He is seated next to Sodji.



Professor Qudrat Mahtabwally (MSc Physics, 1969)

I was admitted to Master's program in Physics in September, 1967 under the auspices of commonwealth scholarship commission in the UK. My department of Physics at that time was headed by Professor Moon. I started my work in Nuclear Physics group which was guided by Professor Burcham. My supervisor was Dr Mckee of the neutron section and other notable teachers were Professor Thouless, Professor Fremlin, Professor Walker, Dr Dowell and many more.

I enjoyed my two years at the University of Birmingham. My wife Shaharia joined me in February 1968 and we took up residence in Edgbaston. Our favorite shopping mall was the Bullring.

After completing my Master's degree, we left Birmingham in October 1969 with a lot of sweet memories. I wished to go back to Birmingham once more, but of no avail yet, however, we wish more and more success to the University.

1970s

Necla Cikigil (MA Shakespeare Studies, 1979)

I graduated with an MA degree in Shakespeare Studies when Westmere was the Shakespeare Institute on the campus, although there was a Stratford-upon-Avon library too.

We commuted to Stratford-upon-Avon frequently; and even to London to watch the plays and do further research. You will not believe this but now I cannot figure out the way to get to Stratford-upon-Avon from London, despite the numerous information sites on the internet. I used to hop on a train at Euston Station and at Coventry and get the Shakespeare Connection transportation facilities going through Warwick. Once I even came to Stratford-upon-Avon from London Heathrow.

1980s

Qingsen Huang (Visiting Researcher, 1982)

It has been more than 30 years since I went to the University. In the late 1970s, China had a very big change, and quite a lot of Chinese were sent to many universities of western countries as postgraduates or visiting scholars, supported by the Chinese Government. I was among them.

I arrived at Heathrow in the middle of November 1979, in my early 40s. After having a few weeks of English courses in Banbury, I joined the Mechanical Engineering

Department as a visiting Researcher in January 1980.

After staying in the department for two and a half years, I went back to China to continue my teaching career in a university in Beijing. During the time I gave lectures and finished some projects concerned with mechanics.

I retired when I was about 60, at the end of 1995, then created my own workshop as a small owner. A few years ago, I moved to Australia (Western Sydney) as a permanent resident from China.

Now I am getting to be 80 in about three years' time. However, the time I spent in the University and the friends I made there are unforgettable, and will be in my memory forever.

Pauline Kent (BA English and History, 1982)

I have so many wonderful memories of my time at Birmingham as a student of English and History from 1979 until 1982.

On my first day, I asked a mature student if he was my new lecturer. He was 80 and looked like Dumbledore, so easily done. I can't recall his name but he was a great guy with a lot of racy stories to tell.

Then, in my third year, I watched one of my friends take off as a musician. His name was Simon Le Bon and the band Duran Duran was to become the soundtrack for the 80s.

On the day I finished my exams, my boyfriend, a lovely guy called Andrew Garrett, decided to dump me. I cried for England but thankfully the story has a happy ending because we both met other people, got married, had children and are living happily ever after. And now one of my teenage children is considering Birmingham, so university life has almost come full circle.

Chris Leach (BA French and English, 1982; PGCE French, 1983)

I'm currently Headteacher at Great Wyrley High School, Staffordshire.

I have great memories of my year abroad in Montpellier in 1980-81, as well as lectures from Dr Jess Banks, Professor David Lodge and John Hurman in Education.

Also, I was UAU table-tennis champion in Men's Doubles with Steve Barby in 1983. Very happy days!

Phaik Hooi Tio (BSc Biochemistry, 1983)

My fondest memories of Birmingham were of Dr Kekwick, he was my project supervisor. Classes and lectures are a complete blur now but I sure enjoyed the activities at the Students' Union. I still keep in touch with a few of my friends from Birmingham as it is now so much easier with email instead of snail mail, plus you don't need complete sentences in emails.

Today I am in semi-retirement – I manage a small biotech company in my hometown of Penang, Malaysia, to which I returned in 2008. Happy to report that I'm still having lots of fun in the lab.

Kumasi Douglas (PG Diploma Development Finance 1987; MSocSc Accounting & Finance, 1988)

Birmingham impacted positively on my life. After my course in Development Finance, I came to understand the economic situation of my country Ghana in particular and the Third World in general.

Ghana has just had a successful national election. The largest opposition party is challenging the verdict of the country's Electoral Commissioner. As can be expected there is tension. The situation is not helped by the health of the economy, which is reeling under a 9% budget deficit.

I still have fun memories of my lectures in the ILGS Building, Ashley Building. Cannot forget about the Muirhead Tower either. I remember one day I overslept and missed a lecture on Balance Of Payment by Mr Andrew Nickson in the Ashley Building. The weather was simply too cold and the sleep was sweet.

I have moved on after Birmingham to be the CEO of a major state-owned enterprise turned into a limited liability company. We deal in bulk procurement of commodities such as rice, sugar, edible oil, cement etc. We also export non-traditional products like raw cashew, shea nuts, shea butter, sesame seed. I would welcome partnerships from interested alumni.

Jo Foster [née Voss] (BA Geography, 1989)

Unusually, I took a Portuguese subsidiary module throughout my three years. This led to me spending my third year studying (occasionally) abroad. With the help of the fantastic Patricia Odber de Baubeta in the Portuguese Department. I achieved a scholarship through the Portuguese Institute of Scientific Investigation and spent my third year completing my Geography dissertation in Portugal.

This was the best thing I did. I arrived in Lisbon in October 1988 with a smidgen of Portuguese under my belt (I was not a natural linguist) and came back to finish my fourth and final year as a fluent Portuguese speaker! That's not to say the first two years were any less fun. I made some great friends in Halls at University House; it was such a special place. I remember the gong sounding for dinner, the sherry evenings with the warden and his wife, croquet on the lawn and the dawn piper at the University House Summer Ball.

Coming from a comprehensive school I found this new social life thrilling. I went on to Birmingham Poly to read law but decided it wasn't for me. Bizarrely after watching an early series of *Prime Suspect*, I joined the Metropolitan Police. Due to my language skills I had a fantastic career in Special Branch. Twenty years on I still work in counter terrorism but with three young children, I don't get to do the exciting work I used to. I still speak Portuguese though and am trying to buy a home there this year.

1990s

Georg Michanickl (MScEng Engineering Project Management, 1994)

I am living in the south west of Germany. I graduated in 1994 as MSc (Eng) in Engineering Project Management. In our course, we came from all over the world and have mostly gone back into our home countries. As I did.

Last year I was on the way to Asia and stopped by in Istanbul to meet my friend from Birmingham. Turgut and I had a nice dinner close to the airport and refreshed memories and family status.

Another friend from the Netherlands passed my house in June last year on the way from his home in the Netherlands to Munich. One fellow from Nepal recently dropped me an email refreshing the contact after some years, which was very nice. I have not heard from Jaime in Mexico for a while and must drop an email to him.

Rahmah Sayuti (MA Teaching of English as a Second Language/TEFL, 1998)

I was a student in Birmingham in 1997-8 (MA Teaching of English as a Second Language/TEF) at the Shakespeare Institute.

I'm now a Master Teacher of English in a secondary school in Johor, Malaysia.

I have fond memories of the University, especially with the lecturers at the Shakespeare Institute (Corony Edwards, Dr Susan Hunston, Richard Caldwell, Dr Chris Kennedy, and many others). I also had the chance to be a student of Professor Malcolm Coulthard and Dr Michael Toolan from the English Faculty.

I remember those long walks to the campus from Selly Oak where I used to live as a student and the Balti restaurants along the way.

I was back in England in 2010 for a holiday but didn't get the chance to visit the University. I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Birmingham and look forward to the chance to go back and visit. I'm proud to have graduated from such a prestigious university and still keep some mementos from the Uni!

2000s

Fernando Oliveira (MA Applied Linguistics, 2009)

Studying at Birmingham was a really rewarding experience for me. Currently, I'm living in Brasília, capital city of Brazil and doing my Doctorate in Linguistics at the Federal University.

I still remember the full support I had from all the staff at CELS, especially Dan Malt and Professor Carmen Caldas Coulthard, amongst others. My graduation ceremony was awesome. It was breathtaking to hear the orchestra playing and the words of the Vice-Chancellor when he acknowledged all of the endeavours we had made to be there. As soon as I finish my PhD, I intend to visit Birmingham again, maybe as a post-doctorate student. Anyway, I am a proof that the future has only good things in store for those who have been blessed like me and taken the plunge to study at Birmingham.

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