



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# OLD JOE USA



Welcome to this special summer newsletter for alumni and supporters of the University based in the USA. As part of a community of more than 2,500 graduates from Birmingham, you are a unique group of international alumni, and we are thrilled to run a tailored programme to support your particular needs and goals.

We work closely with the Birmingham Alumni Network USA – headed by Dave Drinkwater – to offer a wider range of events across the country, giving you the chance to meet academic staff and hear about the latest research through the 'Bringing Birmingham to You' series. We hope to expand this further in the next academic year, and you can find out more about the programme inside.

Our new alumni ambassadors are available to offer advice to alumni, current and prospective students, and we are very grateful to the many

people who give their time and financial support to the University. We asked Grahame Conibear (BSc Medical Biochemistry, 1976) to tell his story on the back page.

With the Vice-Chancellor visiting the country in October, we hope to see you at the official reception – find out more inside. We sometimes lose touch with alumni, so if you are in contact with friends from your Birmingham days who are also in the USA, please do share this newsletter, and ask them to contact us if they didn't receive a copy. Please also get in touch to let us know what news you would like to hear from the University. We look forward to hearing from you.

**Claire, Helen, Jenny and Simon**  
Alumni Relations Team

# Birmingham confirms place among world elite

We were delighted to see the University confirm its status as one of the best research intensive institutions in the world by moving up five places in the 2019 QS World University Rankings.

Birmingham is placed 79th in the world in the 2019 table, which is the most commonly used global ranking and measures every university across the globe against a range of criteria. We moved upwards thanks to our sector-leading employer reputation, increase in citations (the impact and quality of research) per faculty and an increase in the number of international students.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir David Eastwood says:

*'The University of Birmingham is hugely proud of its standing as one of the world's leading universities. The latest QS ranking attests to our still-growing reputation, the importance and impact of our research, and the truly international experience we offer to our students.'*



## Meet the Team: Claire O'Sullivan | Associate Director (Global Engagement)

### Describe your role

I am responsible for our comprehensive USA engagement programme, working closely with the team to deliver a tailored range of communications, events, giving and fundraising programmes, volunteer opportunities and much more. I champion our USA alumni across the University, work with colleagues to bring innovations to our programme, and showcase the support our alumni offer to the University.

### Why are you excited about engaging with our US audience?

I'd love to know what our alumni want from their continued engagement with us. What do you most value? How do you want to connect with the University? What do you need to know? Working together with our network of alumni volunteers, we will take this feedback to develop our combined alumni programme.

### What's your favourite place to visit in the USA?

I love New York, and have family there so find myself returning every five years or so. I love the architecture and cultural richness of Washington D.C. But I also love California (Yosemite, San Francisco, wine county), Lubbock, Texas (home of Buddy Holly)... It's too hard, I can't pick!

## Meet the Team: Helen Carey | Senior Development Executive

### Describe your role

I travel to the US throughout the year to connect with graduates, updating them on the life and work of the University and exploring how they can be more involved with Birmingham today.

### Why are you excited about engaging with our US audience?

There are many exciting and innovative opportunities across campus that have the potential to transform many lives. My role is to discover the change alumni want to see in the world and how that passion can support the ambition of the University.

### What's the best thing about the USA?

The staggering natural beauty – I've been lucky to visit 18 states over recent years and love adding to my ever expanding trip wish-list. My highlights are undoubtedly McAfee Knob, VA (phenomenal views), Multnomah Falls, OR (incredible waterfall), Big Sur, CA (thrilling scenic drive) and Niagara Falls, NY (both sets!). Next on the list is Coyote Buttes, AZ...



# Birmingham Alumni Network USA – Meet The Chair | Dave Drinkwater



## What is the Birmingham Alumni Network USA?

When you graduate from the University of Birmingham you automatically become part of our global alumni community. The Birmingham Alumni Network USA is your main point of contact for alumni activities in the region and helps to bring alumni together through a series of regular events organised by the University and a network of alumni volunteers.

## Why should I get involved?

Getting involved with the Birmingham Alumni Network USA is a wonderful way to strengthen your social, academic, and professional networks and celebrate your connection to the University. It provides the opportunity to connect with friends, old and new, through a varied series of events and keep in touch with all things Birmingham through our social media channels and USA newsletter. We hope that the Birmingham Alumni Network USA is one that you will want to remain connected with, or re-connect with, no matter how many years have passed since you left the University.

## How do I find out more?

Please contact Dave Drinkwater (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1987 – pictured), Chair of the Alumni Network USA, at [davedrink@gmail.com](mailto:davedrink@gmail.com), or our International and Events Officer Jenny Staite at [alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

## Meeting the ambassador

The University hosted the United States Ambassador in June as His Excellency Robert Wood Johnson visited campus to meet some of our world-leading academics.

The Ambassador met Professor David Hodson to learn about how insulin-secreting beta cells can be made to work better during diabetes. He also talked to Professor Alberto Vecchio and Professor Andreas Freise about the Nobel Prize-winning Gravitational Wave Astronomy, and viewed the Birmingham Qur'an manuscript in the University's Cadbury Research Library. The Birmingham Qur'an pages have been found to be among the earliest surviving records of the holy text.

Ambassador Johnson was welcomed to the University by Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) Professor Robin Mason, before meeting Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir David Eastwood, (photographed meeting the Ambassador).

Ambassador Johnson says: *'I am impressed by the world-class breakthroughs in science and technology being made by the University of Birmingham. Most Americans will be very interested in these innovations, so we need to spread the word about the great work being done at Birmingham.'*



# Ears to the sky

Scientists from Birmingham are playing a leading role in NASA's new mission to detect thousands of planets orbiting the brightest stars across the galaxy.

The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) was launched in April from Cape Canaveral in Florida to survey stars by observing their resonant oscillations, which are caused by sound trapped inside the stars – known as asteroseismology.

Professor Bill Chaplin (BSc Physics, 1990; PhD Physics, 1994; PGCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2001), from the School of Physics and Astronomy, is leading the international work that will characterise bright, newly discovered exoplanet host stars – and hence their planets – using asteroseismology. By measuring the tones of this 'stellar music', it is possible to determine the properties of individual stars in great detail.

Professor Chaplin says: 'TESS will provide a unique census of stellar systems in the local solar neighbourhood, our own cosmological back-yard.'

'There will be stars with well-known names around which TESS discovers planets - we will be able to study them in unprecedented detail. On a clear night we will be able to point out these newly discovered stellar systems directly by hand.'

The mission will produce its first set of results by the end of 2018.



## Meet the Team: Jenny Staite

International and Events Officer

### Describe your role

I deliver our global alumni events programme, including the 'Bringing Birmingham to You' lectures and the Global Alumni Gathering. We've had 15 events in the US so far this year and it's been wonderful to see so many alumni join together to celebrate and strengthen their ties to Birmingham. I'm also the primary point of contact for alumni groups and volunteers around the world.

### Why are you excited about engaging with our US audience?

I'm currently working with a number of wonderful alumni volunteers and ambassadors to strengthen our network and create more opportunities for alumni to connect, by getting involved in events, mentoring, internships and student recruitment. I'm really excited to see how this will continue to grow and evolve.

### What's your favourite food from the USA?

Pancakes! I make American style pancakes for breakfast with my daughter every weekend and it's one of our favourite things to do together.

## Your invitation to the Vice-Chancellor's Reception

You are invited to join the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood, at a special reception in New York City on Thursday 18 October. Guests have the opportunity to meet and network with fellow alumni.

The reception will be held at Upper Story in Manhattan, with wine, soft drinks, and canapés served throughout the evening.

For further details or to register your attendance, please visit [www.birmingham.ac.uk/nyreception](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/nyreception) or contact the alumni events team at [alumnierevents@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnierevents@contacts.bham.ac.uk). We hope you are able to join us.

Upper Story · 979 Third Ave · 14th Floor ·  
New York · New York · 10022

Thursday October 18, 2018 (6.30–8.30pm)

# An eventful year

Alumni have been reuniting with old classmates and hearing from Birmingham academics at a series of events across the country.

As part of the 'Bringing Birmingham to You' event series, academics have been meeting our alumni community across the globe, sharing their latest research in an informal setting, ranging from coffee houses to pubs.

Dr Will Davies met alumni in New York to explore the social causes of mental illness while Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) Professor Robin Mason discussed the principles of game theory, using examples such as the trade arrangements in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and political manoeuvres of Brexit.

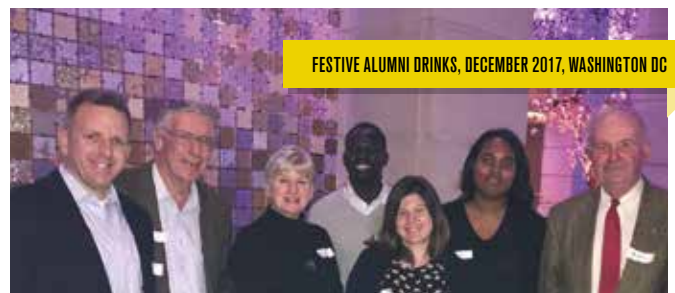
And groups of friends shared their memories of the University with fellow Birmingham graduates as part of the annual Global Alumni Gatherings in May, with events taking place on the East and West coast, as well as Atlanta, Georgia.



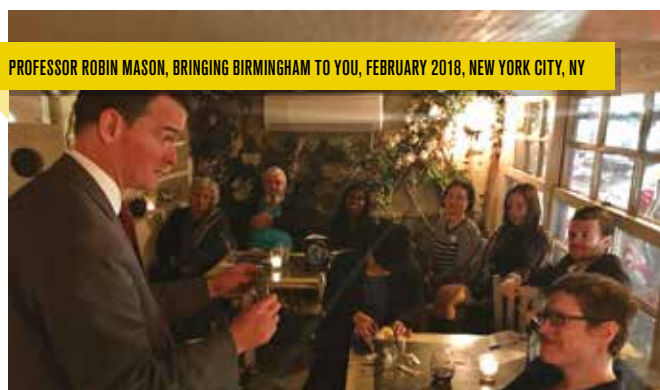
GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, MAY 2018, SEBASTOPOL, CA



ALUMNI GET TOGETHER, OCTOBER 2017, SAN DIEGO, CA



FESTIVE ALUMNI DRINKS, DECEMBER 2017, WASHINGTON DC



PROFESSOR ROBIN MASON, BRINGING BIRMINGHAM TO YOU, FEBRUARY 2018, NEW YORK CITY, NY



GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, MAY 2018, SANTA MONICA, CA



GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, MAY 2018, SAN DIEGO, CA

## Meet the Team: Simon Cleaves

Communications Officer

### Describe your role

I'm part of the communications team producing all the copy and videos for *Old Joe* and managing the alumni section of the University website. Essentially, I work to ensure that we're communicating with our audience in an engaging fashion and providing informative, interesting content to alumni across the globe.

### Why are you excited about engaging with our US audience?

I love to hear the varied personal stories of our alumni and supporters: how they came to study at Birmingham and what they have done in their careers since. As I have plenty of family abroad, I enjoy learning about life overseas, and to discover the connection alumni still have to the University.

### Top Gun or Independence Day?

I feel the need... the need for a big speech from Bill Pullman and some great interplay between Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum. Must go faster!



# From Barnstaple to Brooklyn

Our USA alumni ambassadors are volunteers based across the country, available to offer advice and guidance to students and alumni on careers in a specific industry or moving to a new area. Here we meet Grahame Conibear (BSc Medical Biochemistry, 1976), who is based in Brooklyn, New York. If you would like to get in touch with any of our ambassadors, or become one, please email [alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

## The 'one year move'

'I grew up in Barnstaple in North Devon but studied at Birmingham, as at the time it was one of only two universities in the country to offer a degree in Medical Biochemistry, which was very attractive to me. My final year placement made me realise I did not want a career in clinical chemistry, so I took my understanding of the pharmaceutical industry into senior marketing positions at ICI, Boots and then Adelphi. 15 years ago, the opportunity came up for a 12-month assignment in Adelphi's New York office, and I've been in the US ever since.'

## A New York minute

'There's a strong "can-do" attitude in the USA, so working in the evening and weekends is common. Life is very work-orientated: you start out with only two weeks of annual leave; maternity leave is just six weeks. Having lived in Macclesfield for many years, I was also used to the freedom to roam across the Peak District. In the US, you're very much confined to walking on paths in federal and state parks.'

## Workin' USA

'If you know someone who is thinking of moving from abroad to work in the US, the biggest way you could help them would be to find an organisation that will support them with their visa application. Coming over on your own to make a start would be difficult from a work point of view – finding a place to live shouldn't be hard.'



## Get in touch

We'd be delighted to hear what you and fellow alumni in the US have been up to since leaving Birmingham, and also the content and news about which you'd like to know more. Please contact us at [alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

University of Birmingham  
Alumni Network – USA  
f @uobusaalumninetwork

Development and Alumni Relations  
Tel: +44 (0)121 414 4724  
[alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk)  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni)



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

Edgbaston, Birmingham,  
B15 2TT, United Kingdom  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk)

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