



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# OLD JOE USA

Welcome to the latest summer newsletter for alumni and supporters of the University based in the USA. We hope it has been a successful and happy 12 months for you all. This newsletter is intended to supplement the award-winning *Old Joe* magazine produced by the alumni relations team back in Birmingham – and will provide updates of University activity with a US ‘flavour’ to it.

In this newsletter, you can read about some of the latest research being conducted at the University, including innovative studies to use honey to combat antibiotic resistance and academics partnering with the local Birmingham hospitals to look at concussion in sport. The University’s outstanding work is reflected in its rise in the rankings in the 2020 *Guardian University Guide* and *The Complete University Guide* 2020. Both guides

named the American Studies degree as the best on offer in the UK.

The alumni programme of events for the last year has gone ‘coast to coast’ with formal receptions in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, plus a number of successful Global Alumni Gatherings across the country. Join the official Facebook group @uobusaalumninetwork for the latest events line-up.

Looking forward, we hope to see some of you in November at the launch of the University’s world-changing campaign. If you’d like to find out more, please contact the alumni relations team.

**Dave Drinkwater (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1987)**  
Chair, Birmingham Alumni Network – USA



## Turning honey into hope

Honey products developed by researchers in Birmingham could provide a potential solution to the healthcare challenge described as the 21st century’s biggest medical crisis.

Antibiotic resistance, also known as antimicrobial resistance, could claim 10 million lives annually across the globe by 2050. In the US today, there are already 2 million people who develop a resistant infection each year.

With natural antibiotics, called Reactive Oxygen Species, honey is capable of killing bacteria and pathogens. Promisingly, honey can be bioengineered to maintain consistent levels of its bacteria-fighting properties. But its sticky nature is limiting its potential as an alternative to current antibiotics.

A research team led by Dr Sophie Cox is transforming bioengineered honey into sprays, creams and powders that can be used widely across the body.

Sophie explains: *‘Excitingly, bacteria have shown no resistance to bioengineered honey to date. We hope our research will lead to honey products being used to combat infection across more areas of medicine such as surgery, crisis situations and even in your first aid kit at home.’*

To learn more about how you can help transform the future of healthcare, visit [www.birmingham.ac.uk/honey-USA](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/honey-USA)

### Do we have your correct contact details?

Our community of alumni in the USA is believed to be more than 3,800 in size, but we are aware that not everyone is receiving the latest news and communications from Birmingham. If you think you’re not receiving emails from the University that you’d like to see, or know any fellow alumni or supporters who are missing out, please fill in the enclosed form. You can mail it back to the UK, fill in an online version, email or call us.



# Inspiring the next generation

Alumni ambassador Dr Maria Velissariou (PhD Biochemical Engineering, 1992) celebrated the achievements of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) when she returned to the Birmingham campus earlier this year.

She is currently the Chief Science and Technology Officer at the Institute of Food Technologists and sits on the Chicago Council of Science and Technology. During her time at PepsiCo, she was a founding member of the PepsiCo STEM Executive Council and Chair for Million Women Mentors, an initiative that promotes STEM education and careers with girls and women.

In the lead up to International Women's Day 2019, the Women in Engineering Society were delighted to welcome Maria back to the Birmingham campus to speak at their event and celebrate inspirational women in STEM subjects.

Speaking to *SATNAV* magazine after the event, Maria said: *'I see a bright future for women in STEM, even in fields that traditionally have lagged behind. However, we should not take things for granted and our work is not done yet. Girls and young women still need the institutional and personal support to pursue STEM choices on an equal footing with men.'*

*'We still have work to do to achieve pay parity, openly deal with implicit bias, reduce attrition – especially in the early career years, and ensure that women of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds achieve their full potential.'*

The crucial role of mentorship between women in science was a recurring theme in her talk. Indeed, Maria took the opportunity to form a new mentorship with a current student at the University.

*'It was not always plain sailing, but when you love what you do, surround yourself with great mentors, women and men, and have a higher purpose you find a way forward.'*

As an alumni ambassador, Maria offers advice and guidance to students and alumni on careers in a specific industry or moving to a new area. If you have some expertise to share with our students, or could volunteer to support Birmingham in other ways, please email [volunteers@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:volunteers@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

## Heading up research for concussion in sport

It is coming up to ten years since the National Football League (NFL) announced a comprehensive overhaul of the league concussion policy, with considerable coverage of the need for better understanding and treatment of concussions and repetitive head blows in the sport.

The University is leading the way in enhancing our understanding of concussion, with a view to developing a 'pitch-side' test that could help in assisting return-to-play decisions and accurate diagnosis across all sports, from grassroots to professional, in addition to other settings including in the military.



Image Credit: Spandan Photography



Soccer players from the UK's Premier League are the subject of the latest study that builds on work being carried out by the University and University Hospitals Birmingham (UHB) NHS Foundation Trust, with Rugby Football Union players.

Saliva and urine samples are collected from concussed players by club doctors and then brought to campus for analysis using the 'Birmingham Concussion Test', pioneered by academic neurosurgeon Professor Tony Belli.

The test looks for molecules in the blood, known as microRNAs, which can act as biomarkers to indicate whether the brain has suffered injury.

Professor Belli says: *'Early and accurate diagnosis of concussion is one of the biggest challenges we face clinically and is a major concern in the sporting world. This study is an important addition to the breadth of research we are undertaking into concussion and player welfare in sport.'*

Find out more about research into the long-term effects of concussion at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/ageing](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/ageing)



# Connecting Birmingham to you

It's been a busy 12 months for the Birmingham Alumni Network-USA, with old classmates meeting friends and academics from the University at a series of events from coast to coast.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir David Eastwood hosted an alumni reception in New York, outlining the University's recent successes and plans for the future.

Dr Rebecca Mitchell, Reader in Victorian Literature and Culture, met alumni in Chicago in January to share her research as part of the 'Bringing Birmingham to You' series.

And friends reunited in May and June to reminisce on their time at Birmingham as part of the annual Global Alumni Gatherings.

Back in the UK, almost 300 alumni returned to Edgbaston for the Alumni Reunion, which was held on the same day as the launch of the inaugural Green Heart Festival.

Celebrating the new 12-acre parkland in the very centre of campus, guests enjoyed hands-on exhibits, music and dance performances, and the Birmingham Prom, performed by the University of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

Would you like to attend a University alumni event? Let [alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk) know your email address to be kept up to date, or join the Facebook group [@uobusaalumninetwork](https://www.facebook.com/uobusaalumninetwork)



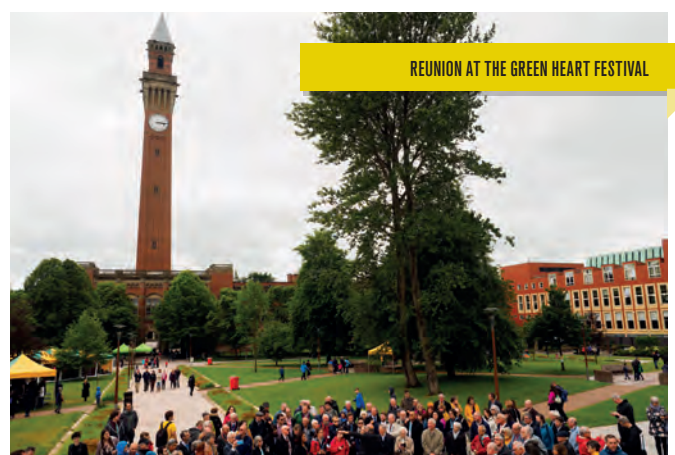
DR REBECCA MITCHELL, BRINGING BIRMINGHAM TO YOU, JANUARY 2019, CHICAGO, IL



GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, MAY 2019, SAN DIEGO, CA



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S RECEPTION, OCTOBER 2018, NEW YORK CITY, NY



REUNION AT THE GREEN HEART FESTIVAL



GREEN HEART FESTIVAL



VICE-CHANCELLOR'S RECEPTION, OCTOBER 2018, NEW YORK CITY, NY



GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, JUNE 2019, NEW YORK CITY, NY



GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, MAY 2019, SAN FRANCISCO, CA



ALUMNI RECEPTION, FEBRUARY 2019, SAN FRANCISCO, CA



GLOBAL ALUMNI GATHERING, JUNE 2019, CHICAGO, IL



## Join in and help change the world

This autumn we're holding events across the globe to launch a world-changing campaign. Join us in New York or San Francisco to hear about how Birmingham academics and students are dedicating their lives to helping others.

Find out how you can help beat cancer, open up education for everyone, protect our planet and more. You can book your place by visiting [your.bham.ac.uk/autumn-launch](https://your.bham.ac.uk/autumn-launch), or email the alumni events team at [alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumnievents@contacts.bham.ac.uk) to find out more.

13 November 2019

**Birmingham in New York**

(Four Seasons Hotel, New York Downtown) at 6.30pm

14 November 2019

**Birmingham in San Francisco**

(Waterbar Restaurant) at 6.30pm

# A rewarding research trip

Thanks to the generosity of the Hawgood family, the annual J A Hawgood Travel Award for American History Postgraduate Research provides travel assistance for a postgraduate researcher into any field of American History.

The award was established in 2005 in memory of John Arkas Hawgood (1905–71), Professor of American History at the University.

Rob Fitt (MA Contemporary History, 2018) was the beneficiary of the 2018 award. The funding gave him the opportunity to visit state archives in Austin, Texas and to consult the collections at the University of Texas, supporting his research into the New Right movement.

Rob says: *'There is something of a gap in our knowledge about the role of activists in building the New Right movement that we saw in the US from the 1970s onward. My research explored how they sought influence over the content of high school textbooks as a means of controlling how students were taught American History, in the hope of instilling New Right ideology in the minds of future voters.'*

He believes the work can shed new light on the origins of modern 'identity politics' that underpin an increasingly divided political landscape.

*'The Hawgood Award has proven to be invaluable to this project. Access to the archives gave the research conclusions a real authority. It would simply not have been possible had it been researched solely from the UK. These awards are crucial in an increasingly competitive academic climate in which funding is scarce.'*

The project itself has garnered significant interest at academic conferences and is being prepared for publication in a journal.

Find out more about how you can support students, or contact us if you'd like to find out more about making a gift by emailing Helen Carey at [h.carey@bham.ac.uk](mailto:h.carey@bham.ac.uk)



# The Quest for knowledge

What drives researchers in their work? The desire to constantly question and advance knowledge in such a way that improves lives and has far-reaching effects across the world. The essence of this academic pursuit is at the heart of Quest, the new home for stories about research at the University. Rather than viewing research solely as a means of providing answers, in Quest, getting to grips with the right question is paramount.

One of the projects profiled in Quest is the analysis of the effect of microplastics on the environment. Tiny particles of less than five millimetres in size, microplastics are now known to be abundant in our ecosystem. These microplastics are 'transformed' by rivers and oceans, interacting with organisms with as yet unknown consequences for human and environmental health.

True to the nature of Quest, experts at the University are investigating the scale of microplastic pollution and the potential impacts they may cause now and in the future.



You can read more about this research and other stories from across the University, by visiting [www.birmingham.ac.uk/quest](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/quest)



# Recognition for Gail

The University's pioneering work on scholarship support for students was recognised in the 2019 New Year Honours with Gail Rothnie, Head of Outreach, receiving an MBE for services to Widening Participation in Higher Education.

Gail has been Head of Outreach for 13 years and is responsible for the University's strategy for outreach work related to widening participation and fair access. She manages a team of 18 Outreach Officers whose activities include the Access to Birmingham (A2B) programme. A2B is the central pillar of the University's outreach work and is fully funded by alumni. Since 2008, more than 900 students have realised their dream to study at Birmingham because of it.

Gail says: *'I am delighted and honoured to have been given this award in recognition of my work to widen participation in higher education over the last 15 years. It is also a testament to the hard work and commitment of my colleagues in my University outreach team. We are all committed in our work to ensure that students who are currently under-represented in our universities are supported to access them, fulfil their potential and progress into rewarding graduate careers, and I feel privileged to work in this field with such committed colleagues and fantastic students.'*

If you would like to find out more about A2B and how your support can transform the lives of students, please contact Helen Carey at [h.carey@bham.ac.uk](mailto:h.carey@bham.ac.uk)



## A commanding presence

General David Petraeus, one of the most prominent modern-day US military figures, has accepted an invitation of a three-year Honorary Professorship in the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University.

General Petraeus served for 37 years and finished his career with six consecutive commands as a general officer, leading the Multi-National Force – Iraq (overseeing all coalition forces in Iraq), the United States Central Command and the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Following his military service, he served as Director of the CIA.

As part of the role with ICCS, he will share insights from his career with students and researchers through a variety of interactions in Birmingham and virtually, having previously made two visits to the Edgbaston campus for speaking engagements.

General Petraeus says: *'I am most appreciative of the opportunity to be a small part of the superb work and impressive intellectual critical mass at the University of Birmingham's Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security. I look forward to further engagements with the faculty and students there and elsewhere at the University, having greatly enjoyed my two visits in the past several years.'*



Find out more about the ICCS at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/iccs](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/iccs)

## 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 [alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

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