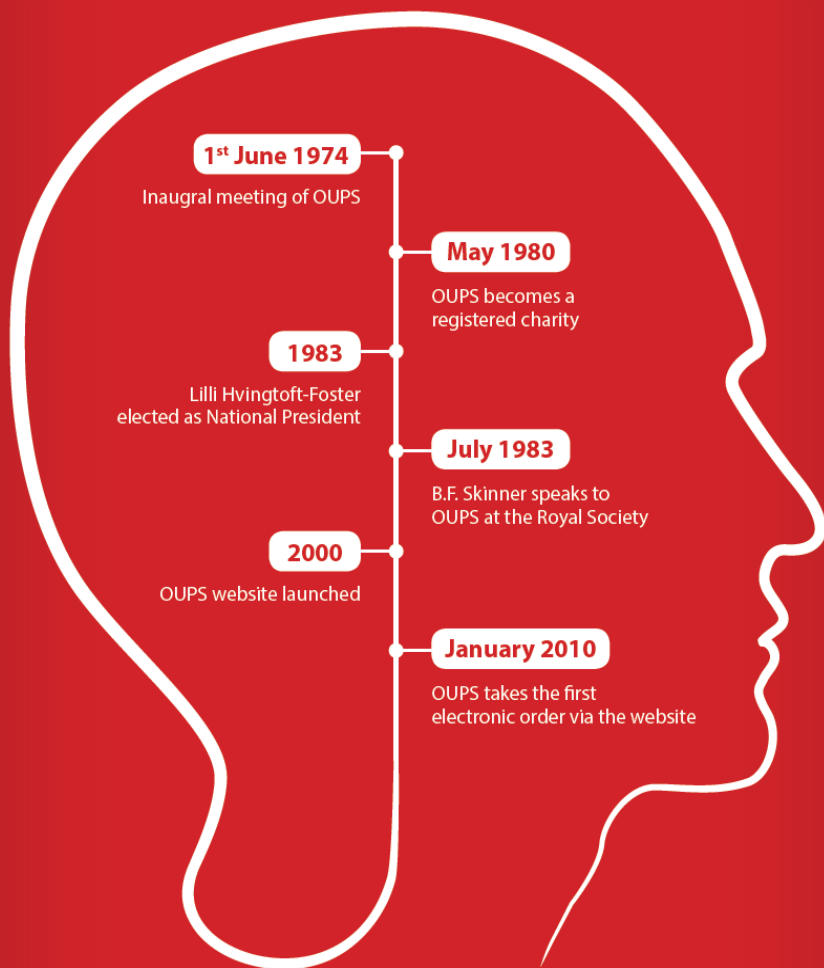


# NEWS & VIEWS

Commemorative Edition | June 2014



**Celebrating 40 Years of the  
Open University Psychological Society**

# What does OUPS do?

The role of the Open University Psychological Society (OUPS) is to advance public education in psychology amongst members of the Open University and elsewhere who are taking, have taken, or are preparing to take courses in psychology or cognitive psychology subjects with the Open University or elsewhere. The management of the Society is carried out by members elected to the Executive Committee who are unpaid volunteers.

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Lorna Rouse

**FROM THE EDITOR**

Welcome to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *News & Views*. It has been a great pleasure to edit this commemorative edition of the newsletter. I have enjoyed reading the stories of graduate members and the role that OUPS has played in supporting their journeys through the OU Psychology degree and beyond. The majority of articles I have received have been the result of my pleas through email and Facebook. This was an option not available to many of my predecessors and looking through back editions of the newsletter where editors asked for contributors to 'type their articles where possible' suggests that the job previously involved different challenges! The greatest challenge in putting together this edition has been that I have received so much material I could not fit it all in! A very nice problem to have so please feel free to keep sending your memories and stories and we can keep the theme going for the rest of the year.

In fact, I have received so many inspiring stories about studying psychology with the OU, that I have kept back those that do not directly relate to OUPS and will be sharing these with you in a special August edition.

The current edition focuses on the Society and it is great to hear about the positive impact of attending OUPS events, not only in relation to improved understanding and confidence in specific courses but the broader experience of

deepening understanding of and enthusiasm for psychology. This comes from the opportunity to interact, discuss and debate with fellow students, tutors and members of the course teams as well as to hear and question inspiring, eminent and sometimes controversial speakers.

It is not only the enthusiasm and input of students that keep the Society going but also the commitment and dedication of many committee members and tutors over the years. In this newsletter you can read some of their memories of OUPS, experiences with the OU and psychology and their thoughts on the future directions that OUPS might take. The overwhelming theme of these interviews is that involvement with OUPS is such a mutually rewarding experience. Current and former students gain from attending events, but committee members and tutors gain valuable experience and a sense of happiness and wellbeing, an idea neatly captured by Professor Neil Frude in his interview.

Thank you to everyone who submitted articles and took part in interviews and the archivists at Walton Hall. Particular thanks to Vince Gledhill and Sarah Clevely, former newsletter editors who have been a mine of information and provided some fascinating documents. I had a feeling there might be old editions of the newsletter hidden away in lofts and garages somewhere, but was very pleasantly surprised to actually find them! Thanks to Vince and Sarah you can read additional material on the website including the 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary editions of the newsletter <http://www.oups.org.uk/newsletters>.

I have enjoyed putting this newsletter together, I hope that you enjoy reading it.

### The History of OUPS — 40 Years of Supporting OU Psychology Students

By Lorna Rouse

I feel I should begin this article with a disclaimer. As a relative newcomer to the OUPS committee this information does not come from personal experience. I have spoken to current committee members, delved into the archives of the OU and OUPS. Inevitably the information I have found is selective and has depended on the people I have been able to speak to and documents that have survived. I could find no first hand reminiscences from the original committee.

The story of how the Open University began and its establishment and success often in the face of some scepticism and hostility is itself a remarkable one. In 1964 Harold Wilson appointed Jennie Lee Minister for Arts and asked her to take responsibility for the 'University of the Air' project. The OU was officially established as a university and granted a royal charter on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1969. In January 1971 it opened to 25,000 students (The Open University, 2014). In the prospectus and first official publication of the OU in November 1969, Vice-Chancellor Walter Perry wrote that the OU's intention was *'to offer real opportunities to all those of you who have long wished for a chance to improve your role in life by one of the few means that brings lasting satisfaction – education'*.

In the early years students could not study for a psychology degree but psychology courses were available under Social Sciences, one of four multi-disciplinary foundation courses. The first Social Sciences course was

Understanding Society: A Foundation Course (D100). The course proposed to *'consider five different views of man – the economic, sociological, psychological, political and geographic – in order to highlight these various facets of his life in society'* (The Open University, 1969) The 1974 course description describes psychology as *'the most experimental of the disciplines with which we've worked'*. From 1973 students could study the module D205 Psychology – principles & methods (The Open University, 1974). To a recent OU graduate, all the early course materials have a familiar feel including timetables, methods books, study guides and project booklets.

One thing that has changed is the psychology kits sent to students. The cognitive psychology course (D303) kit included a timer 'for timed experiments and games to help understand problem solving theories'. Items sent for SD286 – Biology, Brain & Behaviour included an aquarium which students were asked to fill with Siamese fighting fish and 'experiments were performed to monitor behaviour of the fish' (The Open University, 2014).

#### The first 10 years of OUPS

The idea for an OU Psychological Society was proposed in 1973, at around the same time as the first psychology modules became available. With the start of the Introduction to Psychology module (DS261), OU student Ann Humphries wrote a letter to the OU student magazine Sesame in November 1973, asking that any students, course staff or people with an interest in psychology contact her to indicate an interest in the possibility of an OU Psychological Society. The idea had the backing of Professor Annett, the Chair in Psychology who developed the

## HISTORY OF OUPS



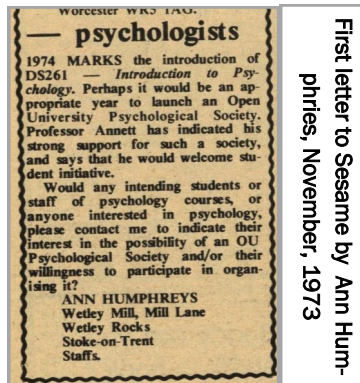
**Cognitive Psychology Kit on display at the OU Library , Walton Hall**

Introduction to Psychology module. In the April/May 1974 edition of *Sesame*, Ann Humphries wrote a second letter. Despite what must have been a small number of people studying psychology with the OU at the time, she had received so many replies from across the UK that Ann had written to one person in each region asking them to form local groups. Ann suggested that local groups be based around study centres, connecting and represented by an elected national committee. Local groups would organise their own talks and social events. The national committee would co-ordinate, perhaps produce a newsletter and run an annual conference. The Society could be of interest to those specialising in or just interested in psychology. Finances were a concern, with Ann Humphreys making a plea to her correspondents to include a stamp addressed envelope or *'her OU funds will be at breaking point by the time this society gets going!'*

OUPS held its inaugural meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1974 at Aston University in Birmingham. Professor Annett from the OU helped to draw up the constitution and membership fees started at £1.

In her article on the first 10 years of OUPS (1994) Dr Elizabeth Cowne names the founder members as Ann Humphries, John Clapham and Len Brown. The first Chairperson, Mary Winning stressed that *'OUPS is a student society with the prime*

*purpose of fostering and expanding student interests and activities.'* The first OUPS AGM/national psychology day was held in London on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1975. Ann Humphries was elected National President with Professor Judith Greene as Vice-President. Judith Greene was Professor of Psychology at the OU and involved in developing early courses with Richard Stevens, so OUPS had close links to the OU Psychology Department. In both the 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary editions of the newsletter, Lilli Hvingtoft-Foster (current President of OUPS) writes of these 'courageous' founder members to whom OUPS owes its existence. OUPS was started without funding and was *'built on their enthusiasm'* (OUPS, 1984;1994). Early regular events included a humanistic weekend and weekend schools for courses which did not have their own summer school (Social Psychology).



An important concern of the fledgling Society was that OU graduates were not considered eligible for BPS graduate recognition. Ann Humphries envisaged a benefit of the Society would be to help negotiate BPS recognition and membership so that OU graduates could make a career in psychology. OUPS

## HISTORY OF OUPS

worked with Professor Greene to promote the idea of an OU honours degree to satisfy BPS requirements for graduate membership. In the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the newsletter, Professor Greene writes that one of her first contacts on joining the OU in 1976 was with OUPS and recalls the role of OUPS members in bringing the problem of BPS recognition to her attention. As the OU offered more psychology courses including cognitive psychology, the BPS recognised the degree for graduate membership in 1978. According to Professor Greene, OUPS contributed to the success of the OU psychology degree over its first 25 years, during which the OU degree went from *'grudging acceptance to a benchmark for other universities'*.

An OUPS flier from 1988 claims that once the principal aim of BPS recognition had been achieved, the purpose of the Society became to *'provide a wider experience of psychology for its members.'*

### Lilli Hvingtoft-Foster

Lilli joined the London region as Events Secretary in 1979 and her contacts and skills in procuring star-studded speakers led to some major names at OUPS events including Donald Broadbent, John Bowlby, B.F. Skinner and Noam Chomsky. The talks by Skinner and Chomsky were both recorded by the BBC. Following his talk, Skinner was presented with a cut-glass goblet engraved with two pecking pigeons! Lilli became national Chairperson in 1982 and President in 1983 – a role that she still holds today. Katherine Pemberton in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the newsletter recalls when attending her first weekend event that Lilli stood out by her 'elegance, charm and a certain... something!'

One of the earliest OU students and members of OUPS, Lilli recalled the particular need for support at this early stage due to a lack of previous students or exam papers to turn to. *'Therefore the creation of OUPS was a lifeline. It gave OUPS members the opportunity to share, exchange and discuss views and knowledge with other students, whenever we met at OUPS events. It also brought the course tutors and guest speakers much closer to the students, who otherwise may have been, to them, just*



**Lilli Hvingtoft-Foster & B. F. Skinner**

*student numbers on a piece of paper.'* The articles and interviews in this and previous newsletters echo this view of the value of OUPS today. *'We were therefore deeply grateful for this splendid, new, supportive Society and in return some of us felt encouraged to contribute whatever skills we had to develop it further. My contribution was a determination to bring the world's best to our members.'* Clearly this was something she achieved!

Something in the nature of OU students that hasn't changed – *'no speaker escaped being questioned, provoked or criticised by the audience.'* In particular, John Bowlby had been challenged to such a degree that Lilli felt she 'had to terminate the argument'. It is clear from her own and the writings of others that

## HISTORY OF OUPS

Lilli drove the move to bring this success to the running of national events. There are many mentions of her in this newsletter as bringing on board long-term committee members and tutors.

OUPS became a registered charity in 1980 and continued to go from strength to strength. By 1988 OUPS was running a general psychology weekend, courses, workshops, a September revision weekend and a humanistic weekend. Regions flourished and extended to Europe, OUPS produced an annual journal *The New Psychologist* which published some of the best OU student projects as well as articles from members of the OU Psychology department. The Society even produced its own merchandise including mugs and cuddly toys (known as 'guilt presents' for family left behind for the weekend). By the 1990s membership and event numbers were high with up to 800 students attending revision weekends, more than attended OU summer school!

### OUPS Present & Future

As technology moved on OUPS developed a website and became more concerned with online bookings than stamp addressed envelopes. There is now a thriving OUPS Facebook community, especially with the recent development of the ask Fred and OUPS page by administered by Abi Robbins <https://www.facebook.com/groups/258905300944457/>.

There has been a strong commitment to OUPS by committee members and tutors throughout the Society's history. Speaking to the current committee not only reflects this but conveys a sense of determination to take OUPS forward and excitement about the Society's future. All agreed that although OUPS faces

challenges as the OU changes courses and adjusts schedules, this has led to a new and exciting way of thinking about future events. Reading through the newsletter archives and listening to OUPS members today, it is striking how very similar the concerns of those early OU students were to current students 40 years later. The benefits that OUPS members and delegates gain from OUPS events also remain the same. More than anything attendees highlight the value of contact with other students, tutors, course team and committee members. It is the opportunity to talk to others who are in the same situation or have been there. This shared experience improves confidence, learning, understanding and experience of studying Psychology with the OU. As seen in the stories of the graduates in this edition of the newsletter, studying psychology with the OU is an adventure that brings many highs and lows but is a huge and often life changing experience. The role of OUPS has and continues to be the provision of support to ease some of the challenges of distance learning and add to the enjoyment of that experience.

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OU prospectus & course materials accessed at the Open University archive, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes <http://www.open.ac.uk/library/library-resources/the-open-university-archive#contact>



## INVITATION

### OUPS' 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party

July 5<sup>th</sup> 2014

University of Warwick

We are proud to announce that 2014 will be the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of OUPS. Come and help us celebrate. We will be holding a party to mark the occasion on **July 5<sup>th</sup>** at Warwick University during the conference weekend.

The Birthday Party package will include:

- **Free Drinks reception**
- **3 course Buffet Dinner**
- **After dinner talk by Neil Frude**
- **Disco and time to talk and catch up with old friends and new.**
- **Bed and breakfast accommodation**

We have negotiated a special price of £90 (ensuite room) or £80 (standard room).

The celebrations take place during our annual conference which will be on **'The new neurosciences – friend or foe'**. If you book to come to the conference weekend the party is included in your weekend rate.

We hope that many old and new members will come to share in our celebrations and to reminisce about OUPS past and present as well as look forward to the future! Please do let all your OU and OUPS friends and colleagues know about the celebrations so they can join in as well.

For more details and to book online go to [www.oups.org.uk](http://www.oups.org.uk) or to contact our Business Administrator phone on 0208 315 0049 or email [info@oups.org.uk](mailto:info@oups.org.uk)



OU Students  
Association

OUPS is a not for profit registered charity: number 282744

We are affiliated to OUSA: the Open University Student Association

Find us at [www.oups.org.uk](http://www.oups.org.uk) and on facebook



# The new neuroscience

Friend  
Or foe?

OUPS  
Annual Conference  
Warwick University  
4-6 July 2014

The conference is designed to stimulate discussion on the social relevance of this rapidly-developing science

Frederick Toates, Open University, Introduction to conference

Lance Workman, author of the widely respected textbook *Evolutionary Psychology*

Gina Rippon, Professor of Psychology, Aston University

Raymond Tallis, Doctor, clinical scientist, and philosopher (Author of *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity*)

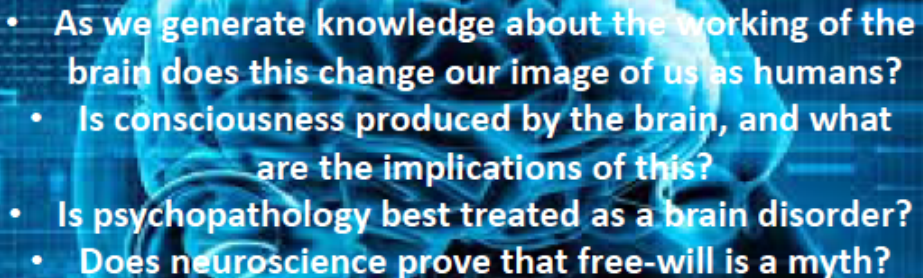
Morten Kringelbach, Professor of neuroscience, University of Oxford, director of *Hedonia*.

Simon Thorpe, cognitive scientist, paranormal commentator, director CNRS laboratory, Toulouse, France

Iain McGilchrist, author of best-selling *The Master and his Emissary*

Adrian Raine, University of Pennsylvania, author of *The Anatomy of Violence*

David Lorimer, *Scientific and Medical Network*, author of *Thinking Beyond the Brain: A Wider Science of Consciousness*

- 
- As we generate knowledge about the working of the brain does this change our image of us as humans?
  - Is consciousness produced by the brain, and what are the implications of this?
  - Is psychopathology best treated as a brain disorder?
  - Does neuroscience prove that free-will is a myth?

Prices from £220 members: £240 non members. Ensuite rooms: additional £59  
Non residential day rates available

For information or to book visit [oups.org.uk/events/annual-conference](http://oups.org.uk/events/annual-conference)

Email [info@oups.org.uk](mailto:info@oups.org.uk) or phone 0208 315 0049



**Dr Alan Pechey**

## **Letter From the Chair**

Looking back over the history of OUPS makes me feel very proud to be associated with the society; a society which has supported so many OU psychology students, so well, for forty years now.

Unfortunately when I was working towards my psychology degree with the OU [1972 to 1979] I was never aware of the existence of OUPS; despite the fact that it was clearly already developing into a thriving student society. [So our current concern with establishing student awareness of OUPS is not a totally new one!]

And I'm sure that I would have enjoyed the OUPS events. I certainly enjoyed the residential schools at the time. There were residential schools for many more courses in those days and these provided a very stimulating learning environment (despite my failing to find the hordes of wild housewives promised in the News of the World).

I did meet some of the key figures in the OU at the time though. In particular Professor Judith Greene, who did so much to get the OU psychology degree recognised by the BPS. I can remember a

residential school where I ended up partnering Judith at a barn dance. Luckily she was very light, as at one point the man was expected to carry his partner the full length of the room!

I only became aware of OUPS a few years after I started tutoring for the OU in 1991. One of the deciding points was attending an excellent talk by Richard Stevens organised by OUPS in Oxford. Richard is a very charismatic speaker who has had a long association with OUPS; and is one of our Vice-Presidents today. I also worked at D303 residential schools with some of the tutors such as Sandy Aikenhead who taught at OUPS Revision Weekends. When one of them dropped out they suggested that I joined the team at Nottingham. I think that it was in 1995 when I first taught at the Revision Weekend.

This was also when I first met Lilli who persuaded me to join the OUPS Executive Committee [initially as publications officer]. Lilli is a very persuasive and very powerful lady; just the kind of person needed to get a society growing and to attract speakers of the highest quality for the conferences. [Although not necessarily the easiest person to work with if one wants to introduce changes to the organisation to which they are committed; and in the early days of my chairmanship we had some very stormy committee meetings!].

I have now been Chair or Vice-Chair since 1999. This is a long stint – many might say far too long! We have seen some big changes during this period such as the introduction of our first paid employee; which I think was an essential innovation as the society grew in size and one which has proved very successful.

But what of the future? OUPS certainly faces some big challenges in the next few years; both due to the restructuring of the psychology degree and to changes in the OU course calendar year. But I have no doubts that OUPS will meet the challenge effectively; as it has in the past. And this has only been possible because of all the voluntary work put in by all the committee members over the years.

So many, many thanks to you all.

*Alan*

Dr Alan Pechey OUPS Chair



Hi there,  
I hope you are all well and enjoying your studies.

Our Annual Conference this year, entitled 'The New Neuroscience - Friend or Foe' will take place at Warwick University from 04 to 06 July.

At the same time we are holding a 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. To this end we have negotiated a special rate to allow friends old and new to come and join us, without having to spend the whole weekend. All details can be found on our website [www.oups.org.uk](http://www.oups.org.uk).

You can book online or, if you prefer, call me and I will take your details and process the booking on your behalf. Over the same weekend we also have the DD307 Consolidation and Inspiration Weekend as well as the Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Workshop. Attendance of the Party is included in the Weekend cost for all delegates: there is no added cost to anybody coming for the whole weekend.

This is followed in September by the ever popular Revision Weekend for DSE212, DD303 and DD307 (5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September). Parallel to this we also have the SDK228 Springboard Weekend which is aimed at students starting their course in October.

I look forward to seeing you at some point at Warwick!  
Kind regards, Irene

## **BUSINESS UPDATE**



**A Powerful  
Experience -  
Memories of  
OUPS from  
Professor  
Frederick Toates**

**How did you become interested in psychology?**

I was doing Systems Science at University in London and I had a research project which involved the eye and how the eye works and so I got interested in biological systems with a psychological flavour to them. I liked the biological application more than the pure systems theory or the systems theory applied to chemistry or engineering. I read Norbert Wiener's book on cybernetics and that confirmed my interest. Then I read an article in the Observer about a difference of opinion between Sir Cyril Burt and Stuart Sutherland, who then was Professor of Psychology at Sussex, in which Stuart Sutherland said that what we need is more people from a Systems theory background in psychology. I contacted Sutherland, got an interview at Sussex, then transferred into Psychology at Sussex University and never looked back.

**Did your Systems background help you?**

Absolutely it did because I used the ideas of systems theory - cybernetics to try to understand how psychological behavioural systems work.

**When did you first become involved with the OU?**

I got a job at the OU in 1978, mainly teaching Biological Psychology. OUPS really only came to my attention in about 1983 - Lilli was responsible for that. Lilli invited B.F. Skinner to London to speak, I went along and I met Lilli who got me teaching at an OUPS weekend school on Biological Psychology, so that's thirty one years of association with OUPS.

**Do you think that OUPS has changed much in the time that you've been involved?**

It's certainly got more streamlined, it's more professional, partly because of the appointment of Irene, it has become in some ways easier for us. In the early days I used to carry around my hand-outs in a suitcase, quite literally, I used to carry them on the train from Bletchley up to Bedford and then across up to Nottingham so the idea of reproducing all the hand-outs and sending them, it was just paradise compared to doing them all myself and carrying them up in a suitcase. Of course then there's the online bookings and the whole use of new technology, but I don't think the basic principle has changed much. There's still no alternative to face-to-face tuition. I don't think the students have changed that much if at all - they're still as enthusiastic, still as challenging and it's still as enjoyable a task to teach them I would say.

**So do you think the role of OUPS is still the same as it was in the early days?**

I think it is - to give support to students. It is becoming more difficult because of the economic situation. There are fewer students now compared to then on our weekend schools so in that sense it's more difficult, but I think that the students are much the same as ever, they're still fired with the enthusiasm to learn and it's great to teach them.

**That's interesting, so you don't think OU students themselves have changed, the nature of the people who are studying?**

I think that the evidence is that they have changed somewhat in that in the early days we were mopping up a large population of school teachers that didn't have degrees and now that teaching is a degree profession we're getting teachers that want to change direction.

Otherwise, I see the same wide spectrum of people here from different backgrounds, much the same number of eccentrics the same number of everything here that ever was, I don't think that's changed much at all.

**Has the psychology degree changed a lot?**

Well yes it has and I regret that Biological Psychology has been dropped from it. The whole thing has changed in the sense that summer schools are now not really what they were. They're on the way out because they're too expensive and I think that's a bad move. I mean when I

joined the OU it had been created not many years earlier. It was the brain child of Harold Wilson, Jennie Lee and others, and it really was a land of milk and honey you could do what you liked, it wasn't bureaucratized in the way it is now and OUPS somehow benefited from that.

**Do you think that the role that OUPS plays will change in the future?**

I think that there is a strong need for the role that OUPS plays because the OU can be a very lonely place. In some ways the need for OUPS is greater now than it ever was, with no summer schools and fewer face-to-face tutorials, I think there's no substitute for things that are face-to-face. Social interaction is all part of a university experience, you build up confidence dealing with other people, now in my view you can't do that with a computer terminal, you really can't.

**Do you think face-to-face interaction is the main benefit of OUPS ?**

It has so many benefits but I think students remember and understand things by virtue of social interaction amongst other things. You remember some crazy question someone asked at a tutorial here or a joke someone told. It's all a means of understanding and I don't think that computers can ever substitute for it. I don't want them to ever substitute for it, I'm a Luddite!

**What do you get out of your involvement with OUPS?**

Oh an immense amount, an immense

## **FROM THE VICE-PRESIDENT**

amount of positive reinforcement, an immense amount of intellectual stimulation, of self-worth, social approval and a feeling of having done a job well. OU students tell you what they think and if it's good it's very good, if it's bad they'll tell you. Compared to conventional undergraduates they're much more confident and expressive. They are lacking self-confidence in many cases but they also know how to express they're opinions. They're paying good money to be here, they're not here because mum and dad want them to be or because they're expected to go, they're here because they want to be here and they want good value for money and if they don't get it they're likely to tell you, more so than conventional undergraduates in my experience. So the rewards are immense. Meeting Lilli at the Skinner lecture was one of the most significant things ever to have happened to me in my life.

### **Have you had a favourite speaker?**

Well Skinner because of his fame I suppose. That's a tricky one to say whether there is one in particular – Robert Ressler, the Director of the FBI Behavioural Sciences Unit sticks in my memory as a very impressive speaker on a very powerful topic.

### **How did Lilli persuade Skinner to come and speak for OUPS?**

She went to Harvard one day and she saw 'B. F. Skinner' on the door, so she knocked on the door and Skinner said

'come in and have some tea,' and so she said 'I want you to come to OUPS'. I think she charmed speakers, she had the total self-confidence to go and knock on Skinner's door and say 'well we want you to come to OUPS,' which he did.

### **What direction would you like to see OUPS take in the future?**

I'd like it to take the same direction it's always taken, whether that is realistic now in this economic climate, where costs are going up and with the reorganisation of the timing of the courses is such that unfortunately we coincide with the conventional academic year. When we were out of synchrony it made life much easier. We've somehow got to accommodate this new situation. Maybe we need to broaden our appeal much more to all sorts of other people like A-level students, for example, who want or are planning to go to university. Maybe we need to have events that are so broad that we appeal to a very wide audience with a few key speakers defending various positions, debates, discussions, that sort of thing. Maybe we need to have poster presentations because some people only get their funding if they're giving a presentation of some sort. We need to explore and think outside the box.

### **Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience with OUPS?**

It's a very good one, a very powerful one. One of the most relevant, important experiences of my life has been OUPS.

**STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY AT THE  
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

*By Christina Spencer*



**Christina Spencer**

**Happy 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary OUPS!** Over the years I have read many inspiring accounts of the massive impact studying with the OU has had on so many lives. This MY personal account!

From the age of 21 I was drawn to the study of Psychology. Newly qualified as a teacher and newly married I applied to do a part-time degree at Birkbeck college. The effort of evening attendance three times a week, getting to grips with a new job and trying to live up to my version of a “perfect” housewife soon took its toll. Reluctantly, I gave up.

The next few years were dominated by the demands of marriage, full time work and the birth of two children. Yet still, deep within my subconscious, my goal to study psychology remained. I applied again.

Sadly, this time, before I could start, life dealt a blow with long-lasting effects. At the age of two, my younger son suffered a stroke which left him with hemiplegia, learning difficulties and epilepsy.

The years that followed were hard but also a huge learning curve. I learned about damaged brains, acquired dyslexia, cognitive impairment, and the effects of epilepsy on memory... all of which *increased* my resolve to study psychology.

In 1994, I embarked on one of the most exciting journeys of my life. I joined the community of OU students. What followed was DSE202, ED209, D317, D309, etc. Each module with its batch of new materials brought feelings of excitement, trepidation and fascination. I was hooked.

My enjoyment was confirmed by tutors’ comments and high marks. ‘Is it really *me* they are talking about?’ I wondered. I discovered a commitment, drive and determination in me that I never knew existed. The OU’s flexibility enabled me to continue working full time, study and attend to my son’s needs.

In fact, my son’s condition caused a change of direction in my career. Because of his inability to learn or read and his poor memory, I decided that I wanted to specialise. I wanted to understand what happens to the brain when there is localised damage to the speech centre, how it affects learning and if anything can be done about it.

After proudly receiving my psychology degree in Brighton and joining the BPS, I took two post-graduate diplomas in dyslexia, joined a small team of specialist teachers and worked for a London borough screening, assessing and teaching.

How did I discover OUPS? OUPS was introduced to me in my final year of study by a fellow student who praised the usefulness of its revision days and weekends. How I wished I had known



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about it sooner! But then I discovered the day and weekend conferences also offered by OUPS.

After gaining my degree I felt a sense of disconnection and purpose. All the inspiring people I had met along the way, the fun and hard work of three summer schools, were gone. OUPS filled this gap and reconnected me to the OU. The events offered were not only interesting, inspiring, informative, and relevant to peoples' lives but gave me the opportunity to hear many eminent speakers. I was privileged to listen to names I had come across in my studies and whose books I had read and sometimes whose faces I had seen on television. People like Susan Blackmore, Richard Stevens (Fusion of East and West 2008), Daniel Nettle, the controversial Oliver James (Happiness and Well-being), the amazing Frederick Toates who can make the most difficult subject feel easy (The psychobiology of Well-being 2007).

The conference on "Memory in Distress" 2009 brought home to me the devastating effects of memory difficulties and memory loss with presentations by Alan Baddeley and Sue Gathercole.

The wonderful, inspiring, humorous Ros Blackburn (Differences and Difficulties in Child Development 2011) whose account of autism drew on her own experiences of living with severe autism, made me want to laugh and cry at the same time.

One day conferences covered topics such as "Do we need a god?", "Mental Health and Psychology," "The effects of abuse and neglect on development", and "The psychology of personality." I became a Life member of OUPS!

There are too many wonderful people and conferences for me to mention here –

and, of course, I mustn't forget to mention the social side! Making new friends and meeting up with old friends-finding out about their lives, achievements, hopes, aspirations. I always came home happy and inspired.

I returned to OU study in 2011 to do SDK228 "The Science of Mind" –just for the fun of it and, of course, the interest! I was slightly thrown by my on-line experience. My struggles were never to do with content, material, or understanding – only battling with the computer! But in the end I won!

Please OU, bring back your Psychology Masters. Even at the age of 70 I am ready, willing and hopefully able to return to study.

Keep up the good work OUPS. I shall continue to support your events for as long as I can and once again happy 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary!



**Dr Richard Stevens**

**MEMORIES OF  
PSYCHOLOGY,  
THE OU & OUPS  
FROM  
DR RICHARD  
STEVENS**

**What led to your interest in psychology?**

At school I specialized in English literature. I enjoyed reading novels, poems and plays. My first career was as a theatre director. But I also found literature too subjective. I was fascinated by the human condition - what it is to be a person, but I wanted more systematic knowledge. So I took an honours degree in philosophy and psychology to seek greater understanding in this area. I still find psychology a deeply intriguing though often a problematic discipline.

**When did you become involved with the OU and what was your role?**

I also studied music and directed plays when I was an undergraduate. Several of the plays I did were at the Edinburgh Festival- for example, one of the first productions of Tennessee Williams *Orpheus Descending*.

On graduation, I went to BBC TV in London where I became probably the youngest TV drama director in the UK and perhaps the world. However, eventually I missed the ideas and academic stimulation of philosophy and psychology and when an opportunity arose I moved to Trinity College, Dublin where I became Lecturer and subsequently Acting Head of Psychology. When the Open University began, it was a natural move to go there. I was excited by the concept of open education and it enabled me to combine my experience

and interests in both television and academic psychology. My particular role at the OU was to set up the course in Social Psychology.

**Can you tell me about the production of the BBC programmes?**

The TV programmes for OU psychology courses were a challenge because psychology is more a conceptual rather than visual discipline. But this pushed us to be creative. I remember one set of programmes for the social psychology course where we used actors improvising in a party setting. We edited one of the interaction sequences between a young man and an older woman. I then showed this to seven psychologists coming from very different perspectives (e.g. Michael Argyle analyzing non-verbal behavior, Len Zegans doing a psychoanalytic interpretation, Basil Bernstein looking at language structure). I asked them how would they approach understanding the interaction sequence and then to give us an account of what they saw as going on. We could use video techniques (e.g. slowing up facial expressions) to illustrate their points. It was a great way to help students understand how different perspectives can provide very different accounts of the same behaviour.

Radio is great for academic material because you can use it to comment on the course material and engage academics in debate and discussion. But there is a buzz to a television studio which I love, especially if the programme is going out live. If you work with the right production team, filming can be very creative as well as being fun. I really enjoyed, for example, working on the *Making Slough Happy* series where we had to try to put into actual practice techniques for increasing wellbeing. It

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pushed us to think up new strategies beyond the more established ones.

### **Did you ever encounter negative reactions towards the OU and distance learning?**

Only at the very beginning. In the early seventies when the OU was just beginning, there was some snootiness, particularly from members of the older universities about what was not seen as a proper university at all. But this was just ignorance, entrenched conservatism and lack of imagination to think about new forms of university education. They soon changed their tune when they saw the impact that the OU was having and the quality of our courses. In a recent survey of teaching quality for example, the OU came fourth out of all university level institutions in the UK, just above Oxford.

### **What were the challenges and advantages of putting together a distance learning course?**

Putting together a distance learning course (at least in the OU) is very different from preparing a course in a normal university - much more exciting and challenging! First of all you have time. Typically a full credit course will be at least 2 years in the making. Secondly, you work in a team. This includes fellow academics who comment on each aspect of the course as well as contributing to the written, broadcast and project materials. The team also included designers and editors from publishing and BBC producers who add their own skills and ideas to the mix. There is usually a substantial budget which allows the team to commission external contributors and assessors. These are often eminent figures in psychology. For example, on the Social Psychology

Course D307 we had Jerome Bruner (arguably the most respected psychologist in the world) as External assessor for the course.

Best of all, working in this way allows you the luxury to rethink what psychology is about and discuss this with very talented colleagues. This meant that when we created the first Social Psychology course for the OU – we came up with a very different approach from the orthodox one of the time.

### **How did psychology courses change during your time there?**

Early on in my time at the OU, I encouraged Judith Greene to join us. With her help, we managed to negotiate with the British Psychology Society so that the OU courses in psychology were recognised as an honours degree. My particular contribution was to create D305 - the first full credit social psychology course. This was highly innovative. It followed my belief in a multi-perspective approach in psychology. Most psychology courses tend to focus on one perspective only. However, I see human behaviour and experience as a complex topic. Biology, meanings, social context all play a role. So the course drew on a whole range of psychological perspectives to try to give rich understanding of why we experience and behave as we do. These included evolutionary psychology, psychoanalysis, existential psychology, social constructionism, and cognitive behaviourism. Of course, these operate with very different conceptual ideas and underlying assumptions and they are often seen as in opposition rather than as complementary. So one important feature of the course was the 'Metablock'. This compared the different perspectives and discussed

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epistemological issues. How far and in what ways are they different? On what kinds of methodology and assumptions do each of the perspectives depend? What are their strengths and weaknesses? And what do they tell us about fundamental aspects of being human - are we determined or do we have autonomy? So not only did the course provide a rich set of understandings about being human, but it also provided a 'map' of how different psychological perspectives inter-relate and the philosophical issues this gives rise to.

Of course, as a social psychology course, we also included the standard topics as well like the study of attitudes, person perception, interpersonal attraction and group behaviour. In particular, we tried to make it relevant to each student's life.

It was an enormously challenging and exciting project. One of the great features about working at the Open University is the opportunity not only to interact with highly able colleagues in a course team and also to draw on its wonderful facilities like publishing and broadcasting, but also to commission work from some of the best psychologists in the world. In the original course, we had several outside contributors from the UK and USA including, among many others, Michael Argyle, Rom Harré, Laurie Taylor and Alan Elms.

This multiperspective approach set the scene for subsequent social psychology courses (except from the current course). Because of our large number of tutors (about 80 each year) teaching the course, many of whom were lecturers in other universities, I think it is fair to say it also impacted on the teaching and thinking about social psychology in the UK more generally. This has become

much more open to areas like consciousness and experience and evolutionary psychology as a result.

### **Can you tell me more about the residential schools?**

I don't know what they are like now but in years past they were wonderful - quite extraordinary experiences. Tutors and students would come together for 6 days of intensive teaching and also fun. They could be amazingly stimulating. There was great value in having the summer school integrated within a course because then there was material and ideas which students had worked on and had familiarity with. That made discussion and lectures so much more valuable. Teaching and practical project work would go on all day. Then in the evening there would be specialist lectures to allow students to broaden their knowledge by hearing tutors talk about what interested them. Then, many students would go on to party and either argue and discuss or dance (or both) into the night. In the early days we could also invite a guest lecturer. I can remember guests at my summer schools including Richard Gregory, Michael Argyle, Windy Dryden and many other well known names in psychology. Distinguished people were flattered to be asked. Our students had a reputation for being a stimulating audience. I have known no other experience quite like summer schools, except possibly on a smaller scale the weekend courses now run by OUPS.

### **Can you tell me about your role within OUPS? When did you first become involved?**

I became involved right at the beginning of my time at the OU, probably around 1973. Several students were interested

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in setting up a Psychology Society and asked me to help with this. We held day schools in London, Oxford and other places. The new Society also established an annual residential school. We used Abergavenny - a lovely place in Wales for the first of these. We also offered alternative activities like encounter groups. Speakers at the day and weekend schools included the most interesting and eminent psychologists in the UK - Donald Broadbent, Richard Gregory, Hans Eysenck, Margaret Boden, Richard Benthall, Alan Baddely, Simon Baron-Cohen and many others.

### **Do you think the role of OUPS has changed over time?**

OUPS has become a more professional and efficient organisation. One of the most important changes came with the involvement of Dr Lilli Hvingtoft - Foster as President. Lilli's particular skill was to bring to speak at OUPS the most eminent of world psychologists. So our list of guest speakers now included figures like B.F. Skinner, Noam Chomsky and Philip Zimbardo. OUPS now is run by an excellent and established committee who manage events very well indeed.

OUPS also expanded into Europe with branches and events in Belgium, Switzerland, Netherlands, France and Northern Italy.

### **In addition to Dr Lilli Hvingtoft-Foster, were others important in founding and continuing the work of OUPS?**

OUPS started in the early seventies, almost as soon as the first OU Psychology courses were presented. It was due to the initiative and enterprise of several students including Ann Humphries, John Clapham and Len Brown, along with Mary Shepherd, Mary Winning and many others. One of their

main efforts, that later proved successful with the help of Judith Greene, was to get the OU psychology courses recognized by the British Psychological Society. The London region was started by Elizabeth Cowne and John Platts with Margaret



**Richard Stevens with Lilli Hvingtoft  
-Foster**

Green. I can remember day schools in London with some excellent guest lecturers as well as tutors. When the social psychology course (D305) came on stream, to our disappointment it was not allocated a summer school, so OUPS set up excellent weekend residential schools in Abergavenny to fill the gap. At that time humanistic psychology was quite prominent. OUPS began to hold encounter groups at a place I seem to remember was called Lower Shaw Farm. I did some of the early ones and then they were taken up by the late Vivian Milroy and subsequently by Pam Murphy. A Newsletter was started and edited over the years by Vivian, David Joyce, Lou-Lou Brown and Martin Dyer-Smith.

Lilli actually came onto the scene in around 1979. Her first role was as events secretary. Her drive and

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preparedness to ask big names to come and lecture helped to make the Society what it is today. One of the most extraordinary aspects of OUPS is that it has hosted most of the celebrated names in world psychology as guest lecturers. These include B.F. Skinner, Noam Chomsky, Michael Argyle, Donald Broadbent, Liam Hudson, Richard Gregory, John Bowlby and Jonathan Miller. No student psychology society in any other university can even compare with this record. Lilli was also very effective at getting OUPS finances into a healthy state.

OUPS was started and has been run ever since by a remarkable collection of dedicated Committee members. They have given and still give enormous energy, enthusiasm and skill to make it so successful. All of us who have participated in OUPS events have much to thank them for.

### **How do you think the OUPS benefits OU psychology students?**

Without doubt, belonging to OUPS is a wonderful accompaniment to an OU course in psychology (or come to that any other subject). OUPS offers so much. First of all, from the perspective of doing well on your courses, it runs superb support and revision events. These are staffed by some of the best teachers in the country including Neil Frude, Graham Mitchell and Peter Banister. (Peter is current President of the British Psychological Society. Interestingly, OU psychology course tutors have included at least four past Presidents of the BPS). Tutors at OUPS revision schools also include the best of Open University course team members like Fred Toates.

Secondly, as the list of speakers indicated above shows, it offers the

opportunity, as no other psychology society in the world does, to hear and talk with the most eminent psychologists in the UK and in the world. It also opens students up to innovative ideas and controversial topics in psychology. There was a great series run by South East Region of OUPS organised by David Goddard, which had Hans Eysenck, Rom Harre, Margaret Boden and others giving their very personal views on where psychology should go in the future and why.

Thirdly and by no means least, OUPS offers the opportunity to mix and talk with like-minded students and tutors – to discuss problems, ideas, get support and also to have fun! Participants at weekend schools not only work but usually have a great time!

### **What do you get out of your involvement with OUPS?**

I find it one of the most exciting aspects of the OU. For me, the OU has not only given me the opportunity to rethink psychology through working on our courses, but also to come into contact with students who are actually interested in and excited about the subject matter they are studying rather than in just getting a degree. There is also such a range of OU students, with very different backgrounds and who are often graduates in other subjects. All the students bring the perspective of their own life experience and that can be refreshing and stimulating.

### **Have you had a favourite conference speaker?**

I have heard too many superb speakers at OUPS events to be able to choose between them. If I had to pick, I might mention Hans Eysenck – who I like for his openness and preparedness to be

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controversial, or Professor Colin Blakemore from Oxford for his penetrating insights. However, the speaker I have probably most enjoyed - not only for his ability to come up with original and unusual takes on psychology but for his belly-rattling humour, is Professor Neil Frude.

### **What directions would you like to see OUPS take in future?**

For me, one of the most important events that OUPS puts on is not the great revision school but the Summer Conference. It is here that OUPS not only provides teaching but actually contributes to moving psychology on. We have had some great conferences in the past - on evolutionary psychology, on consciousness, on sexuality. One, in particular stays in my mind, with speakers like David Halpern from the Prime Minister's Office, was on well-being and how far and in what ways public policy might help to make us all happier. There is what promises to be a great one coming up in July on neuroscience.

So what I would like OUPS to place emphasis on in the future is events such as these; not just teaching psychology, but moving psychology forward and, in particular, creating new ways of using psychology for human and planetary well-being.

### **Do you think that OUPS has inspired the subsequent work of students?**

It is hard to separate the role of OUPS from the OU experience more generally. There is no doubt that doing OU psychology has been very inspirational to so many students. I have met them all over the world. As OU and OUPS tutors, teaching psychology at other UK universities or practicing as clinical

psychologists; also running departments in Hong Kong, working in the Houses of Parliament and as fellows of Cambridge colleges.

The OU and OUPS has certainly inspired my own thinking. Without the opportunity to develop OU courses, my ideas on psychology (for example my trimodal theory) would probably not have emerged as they did. The enthusiasm and interest in the material that OU students have, particularly those who come to OUPS events, has made it feel all so worthwhile!

*Dr Richard Stevens, who is currently a Vice President of OUPS, was one of the first members of the Open University Psychology Department. He has been active with OUPS since it was initiated in the early 1970s. Richard was Chair of the first Social Psychology course at the OU (D305), contributed to all but the most recent of the Introductory courses in Psychology and the Social Sciences Foundation courses. He has been an active tutor for many years at OUPS events and has organized and chaired several of the national conferences including those on Consciousness, Key thinkers in Psychology ('Mindshapers') and the Psychology of Well-being.*

*In a prior career he was a theatre director and also directed drama for BBC TV. Richard often presents and contributes on psychology matters to both radio and TV programmes and led the team for the four part BBC2 Series Making Slough Happy. He is the author of several books on psychology and Editor of the Mindshapers Series for Palgrave Macmillan.*

**A long road travelled – my personal  
journey with the Open University**



*by Joy McKie*

My educational journey with the Open University started over twenty four years ago. It has been both challenging and frustrating but I look back mainly with happy memories and can at last smile at my endless struggles with the computer and SPSS. I think of the times I read and re-read chapters that made no sense and then - the eureka moment - the fog cleared and I finally understood! It was a wonderful sense of achievement to reach my goal despite my unconventional approach. I hope this summary will motivate and encourage other students on the journey towards their ultimate goal.

To say I didn't enjoy my formal school years is an understatement. I loathed every moment. My overriding passion was to be with horses. It was an obsession. From my first rocking horse at the age of four until I left school nothing else mattered. Teachers did not consider working with horses a viable option, it was considered a 'dead end' job. I was persuaded, or rather, coerced not to follow my dream but to undertake a further year at school to study A levels

and then progress to Art College. This did not transpire, I was a very determined child. During the summer holidays I used all my accumulated pocket money to buy a pony and then refused to return to school in the September. This was not well received by the headmaster or my parents! Consequently my formal education ended and the responsibilities and implications of owning a pony began. The realisation that a pony was an extremely expensive undertaking resulted in a diverse range of employment to fund my passion. I still had no particular aims or goals and really had no idea what I would do in the future.

It was to be twenty years later that I discovered the Open University. I had moved from the South of England to a farm in North Yorkshire to establish a small livery stable and fulfil my continuing ambition to keep horses and ride every day. Whilst living this idyllic life and spending many happy hours trekking over the moors I contemplated the people I had met over the years and reflected upon their individual differences. I wondered why I was happiest with my horses whilst others sought a more gregarious life. I thought about emotions and what might trigger them. I questioned the complexity of interpersonal relationships and also the autobiographic memories that unconsciously popped into my head. I felt these uniquely human experiences required further exploration. Seeing an advertisement for studying psychology with The Open University I decided to apply. I took a second level course 'Exploring Psychology, (DSE202)' which incidentally could not count towards my psychology degree achieved so many years later. The content by then had been superseded which is understandable as, on reflection, I realise how far psychological knowledge has



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progressed from the 1990's, particularly with advances in neuroscience and newer research methods.

The course materials in those days were only available by post, and programmes associated with them were televised either extraordinarily early or late in the day. This was also prior to computerisation and so, never having learnt to type, the TMA's were handwritten and delivered by post. Hence, after completing the essay, if I found spelling mistakes or needed to elaborate a point, I started all over again. I didn't like crossing out and the inevitable re-writing made for a long and laborious process. The word count was also done manually - I never estimated! This does make me sound rather OCD but I learnt a lot about patience, tenacity and commitment. I vividly remember having to write an essay by candlelight when a blizzard cut off the electricity. I think my obsessive nature has actually become a strength as persistence has certainly proved my strongest point.

I didn't attend any tutorials and learning was a lonely occupation. Horses however, once in their stables, proved a relatively attentive audience and whilst they flicked their ears and closed their eyes I practised my revision on them. OUPS was in it's infancy and ways to gain knowledge of it were quite limited. It was certainly a long time before I became aware of it's existence. This was my first encounter with the Open University and whilst I still didn't acquire the understanding I sought I had begun a journey that was to become my OU learning obsession.

Some fifteen years later with a wealth of life's experience (including a divorce) behind me, I found myself back in the South - a great deal less financially secure and minus my beloved horses.

This however remains another story. I was looking for an intellectual challenge and the ability to gain a better understanding of my current situation. I decided to give the OU another try. Computerisation had clearly come about whilst I was living my Victorian existence and it was now necessary to learn how to use both internet and computerised course materials. I started with the Social Sciences foundation course which was a very sensible move. This was followed by a couple of short courses but my study had no clear aim so I decided to try Psychology again. Seeing a Level 3 course in Social Psychology I jumped straight in.

What an eye opener this was! I read words I didn't realise existed, they certainly hadn't been encountered on my previous courses. Epistemology, phenomenology are two that stand out. This was a big step forward. It was challenging and very exciting especially designing and conducting my own project. One participant I selected to interview lived in Scotland. This necessitated a three hundred mile drive but was a great adventure. Many hours were spent analysing the transcriptions and there were times when I thought it would never be completed, however putting it together was a very enjoyable experience and I was amazed how much knowledge I had gained. At this stage I still hadn't heard of OUPS and no one had actually mentioned it. My haphazard way of working was about to come to an end and I sought advice from the Open University as to what I should do to gain a qualification by a recognised route as quickly as possible.

With this new found advice from the OU I had a plan to work towards a BSc (Honours) in Psychology. To speed up the process, although now working full time, I

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embarked on two courses in the following year. (DSE212 and ED209). This was a lot of work and, to produce the TMA's for each course, I found myself just reading for the essays and skimming the other chapters. It was during a ED209 tutorial that a student mentioned OUPS and their overview and revision weekends. I googled OUPS and it was like a light at the end of the tunnel. I joined and attended the revision weekend at Warwick for ED209. The lectures were excellent and really brought the course to life. Staying on a campus gave me a better insight into university life and I didn't want to leave. The environment was something I hadn't experienced before and I liked it.

The following year I took DD303 and this time was better prepared for Level 3. I attended the research methods weekend as statistics had proven not to be my strong point. The tutors helped reduce my fears and actually made statistics and SPSS fun! Much of my previous anxiety caused through lack of computer and statistics knowledge during the DSE212 project vanished and I came home very happy and positive. My final revision weekend was for DD303 which I would strongly advise students to attend. Even with an excellent tutor at this level it really helped me to focus on what was important. Every aspect of the exam was explained and sample examination questions were worked through. Handouts for chapters that might come up in the exam were well written and explained in depth. There was even a session on how to overcome examination stress through relaxation. It was a wonderful though busy weekend with enough time remaining to enjoy the company of lecturers and students in a relaxed and jovial environment.

Due to my slightly unorthodox way of

working through the courses I still have DXR222 residential school to complete this summer. Having completed my exams I will miss the revision weekends but I am very much looking forward to the conference in July where I can relax and enjoy the weekend with the knowledge there will be no exam looming in October.

I have made many mistakes in life and my chaotic study plan meant I made hard work of getting through the necessary courses. For all the challenges and set backs I really enjoyed every course. I have gone over the chapters that I initially skimmed to find that they are now almost comprehensible!! Re-reading these books has made me realise both how far I have come and how much further I need to go. I admire the knowledge and skill of the tutors who were able to explain complicated concepts in ways that enhanced my learning and prepared me for future research. I have very much enjoyed my time studying with the OU and leaving it behind is like a bereavement. Using the on-line forums I realised, as students, we all shared similar problems and the willingness to help each other was very evident. I am now looking to train as a High Intensity Therapist which will enable me to use my skills within the social environment. I have a much better understanding of myself and a more tolerant and empathetic understanding of those who have influenced my life. I hope in the future to have the opportunity of helping others who need to gain an understanding of themselves and take control of their lives, therefore enabling them to realise their full potential.

Graduation will mean the end of my current OU journey, I will however continue with my OUPS membership and look forward to meeting old and new friends at this year's conference before a new journey begins.

## THOUGHTS FROM THE COMMITTEE



Alex & Evelyn

### Interview with Alex Sandham (Treasurer) and Evelyn Slavid (Revision Weekend Officer)

#### How did you become interested in psychology?

**Evelyn:** I did a psychology degree because I was a teacher and I thought that I would go into educational psychology. By the time that I'd finished my degree I'd moved into teacher training and I stayed in that, then because of the work I was doing with students I decided to do a Masters in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

**Alex:** I started a psychology degree because my son was born with Down's Syndrome and it appeared to me that anybody who was going to have any influence on our lives had 'psychology' in their title. Just talking to parents, they'd found it quite difficult to deal with Psychologists and the feeling I was getting was that war was waged by parents and Psychologists, so I thought if I needed to wage war I had better know on what terms I was waging it, hence the psychology degree.

#### How have you used your psychology degree?

**Evelyn:** I've used it in my training work with students in schools and indirectly it has led me onto a way of working with students and children in schools.

**Alex:** My undergrad degree led on to a Masters looking at the psychology of human and computer interface and then I did my PhD in investigative reasoning – the heuristics and biases of the hypotheses that we generate. For my work I use it directly for all sorts of things, looking at Human Machine interface design, perception, looking at attention - when people are looking at various displays how long can they remain vigilant and what types of tasks do they need to move away to carry out in order to have a rest before they come back to being vigilant again. Also detecting deception, investigative interviewing and decision making in many of its different forms, so all sorts of ways. I consider myself very lucky that I use quite a broad spectrum of psychological theory in what I do.

#### So when did you first become involved with OUPS?

**Alex:** I started my Open University degree in 1992 and went to my first OUPS event in 1995. I think I first came across OUPS that very first summer school that I went to.

**Evelyn:** I started my degree in 1989 and went to as many of the OUPS revisions weekends that I could. I was asked to go onto the committee to help by Lilli in about 1990. I've worked as the revision Weekend Officer now for about twenty two years and I've loved it.

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### Has OUPS changed a lot in the time you've been involved with it?

**Evelyn:** I think we're much better now at adapting and changing. When I first got involved we were at Nottingham University and we've moved to Warwick, which is much better for our students. So it changed geographically, but it has changed, I think, in that we've got better at evaluating what it is that students want. I think we've got a very cohesive committee who work well together with the students' interests at heart.

**Alex:** I suppose for me, OUPS has changed in the same way that the OU has changed - technology's made a big impact. What is not different is the reason for OUPS existing. The whole committee is made up of people who have been through the OU experience, have been involved with OUPS as students and want to carry on that support. I do see it as a support mechanism for the students of the OU and that ethos hasn't changed at all. I think that will remain as it goes forward because OUPS is a charity and it exists in order to provide that support to OU students and that is its sole purpose.

**Evelyn:** One of the big differences from when I started is that we didn't used to have a Business Administrator. When I started as revision weekend officer, before the internet, I took everybody's name over the phone, I'd make little cards of everyone who wanted to come and it was really slow. We've now got Irene, who is a fantastic Business Administrator and so some of that work has gone. I think it is important to emphasise one of the things that people

still don't know is that we are all volunteers, I think that is something if I look to the future I'd want people to be clearer of the roles that people have.

### What direction would you like to see OUPS go in in the future?

**Evelyn:** I think as the OU changes we're going to have to work with that. We're going to have to think a bit more outside the box about the courses that we run if we're going to keep students coming in. I think we should work at broadening our horizons. At the moment we offer fifteen free places which I think is good but I would like it if we could expand that.

### What were the student numbers like earlier on?

**Evelyn:** They were huge. I can remember a revision weekend with 800, that was in the early days and then the recession hit and it more or less halved. We had a lot more money and now it's tight because it's tight for students and the cost of degrees is really expensive, so we're going to have to work really hard to keep our numbers up if we are going to keep breaking even. All we ever want to do is break even.

**Alex:** We need to continue to negotiate hard with the University to get the best rates that we can for our delegates to keep the costs down for the students. As Evelyn said it's just to break even, we just need to make sure that we cover our costs.

**Evelyn:** I suppose one of the things that I would like to see is more OU students finding out about us. In the old days the OU used to advertise us very freely and I

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think there's been a slight change there. I think the argument is because it's not open to all students. We have worked and worked at making it open to all students through our free places, through giving the students lots of warning about when we're going to be running our courses so they can save money. So in that respect I'd like to work at getting more students to find out about us.

### **How does it work with the free places?**

**Evelyn:** Well people write and apply for free places and we look very carefully at the criteria. Something that's new is that we now have someone to support the students with special needs which we didn't have in the old days.

**Alex:** We're not looking at anyone's bank accounts. It's pretty broad brush in terms of if they're receiving certain benefits then somebody else has done the assessment and they must fall into the criteria. It's a difficult balance because you could argue that if we charged students more we could have more free places but that's not fair on the other students, so it's a tough call.

### **What do you feel you've gained from your involvement with OUPS?**

**Evelyn:** I think for many of us we've made really good friends. Whilst it is a lot of hard work we've actually gained an awful lot. I think I've gained through the people I've met over the years. When I think of the fantastic students we've had, many with special needs, many working full time and doing degrees, I feel privileged to have met them really and if I can support them I will.

**Alex:** It's also a continuation of the stimulation, the whole interaction with peers and students that keeps you on your toes and stops you getting complacent.

### **Have your roles on the committee changed?**

**Evelyn:** No, I started as revision weekend officer and I've stuck with that really.

**Alex:** Well, I did five years as treasurer and then I had a rest for eight years and now I'm coming back. During that eight years I did my PhD. I've got some space in my life now and I'm coming back so that I can rekindle some old friendships and also it's about giving something back. I had such a ball at the OUPS weekends whilst I was a student and it was so invaluable to me in terms of the help the OUPS weekends gave me for my final degree that it's nice to do it for others, whilst still getting the academic stimulation. That's something you don't get when you're in your chosen field because when you're seen as the expert there's nobody there to challenge you, so it's quite nice to get into debates because I'm not in academia so I don't get that on a day to day basis.

### **Do you think that OU students and what they want has changed over the years?**

**Evelyn:** It's really interesting how many people are studying with the OU instead of going away to university. I'm sure that's to do with fees, so I think the demographic has got younger. In the early days we met people who were just studying for the fun of it, that sort of person isn't here anymore. The people that are studying now are mainly the

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ones doing the degrees. They're earlier to go to bed after the disco because the pressure is much greater than in our day I think.

### **How do you think that OUPS benefits OU psychology students?**

**Evelyn:** For me it was absolutely invaluable, I had a young baby and it was absolute pandemonium. I was supported so much by OUPS and I think one of the main things was the contact with other people, the fact that you could say this is a weekend away from home where you could actually just think about your course, talk to your peers, moan if you wanted to. It was just contact with other students at a time when you felt very isolated really.

**Alex:** I don't think I would have got my First without OUPS because I didn't do any exam preparation until I arrived here and then I just basically followed the story that the tutors laid out. To a large extent it reduced stress levels because I knew once I'd booked on the weekend, that I'd get my structure and then I could take that structure and implement it, so it wasn't 'oh my goodness where am I?' Like a metronome, it gave me a marker where I started and a pattern that I could follow. I delivered good answers in the exam because of the interaction during the weekend and the input from the tutors. For me it was invaluable. I hate to think how I would have managed on my own really.



The following article was written by Dr Lilli Hvingtoft-Foster in 1984. OUPS owes a huge debt to Lilli who was a driving force behind the Society. In 1993, Lilli was awarded an honorary Masters by the OU for her instrumental role in the founding of the OU Psychological Society. In the article below, taken from the 10th anniversary edition of the newsletter, Lilli recalls the early days of OUPS. The resemblance between Lilli's description of the role OUPS filled early on and the comments by students, committee members and tutors in this edition of the newsletter and at recent events is striking. Both emphasise the need to mix and feel a sense of connection with other students - to feel that you are not alone. It is clear that over the past 40 years, the fundamental role of OUPS set out by the original team remains the same.

### **MY DEBT TO OUPS**

The path to gain a psychology degree can at times become very strenuous and you might often feel desperately lonely. Friends might see a decision to study with the Open University, and especially to study psychology, as a threat to the set pattern of an existing friendship, they may fear that potential development might influence and change and – perhaps break up that friendship.

From the day I joined the Open University my life began to change. As a student of psychology I encountered much scepticism and heard endless remarks as for example – ‘Be on your guard – she is analysing every word you utter’.

Therefore it was with a real need to meet other students of psychology that I joined the Open University Psychological Society. It offered the opportunity of meeting and mixing with other psychology students. The Society arranged both ‘General Psychology’ events and ‘Revision’ weekends at various Universities. Here I would meet other psychology students who perhaps also had (as I had) the need to discuss and exchange views and ideas about essays and projects. Burning topics like ‘unjust tutors’ and ‘incomprehensible units’ were discussed at length.

My many moments of despair and doubt, of wondering why I voluntarily submitted myself to the agony of studying, were pushed aside when stimulating arguments and discussions with fellow students took place. New breadths of vision developed after an endless process of searching, anticipation, verification and conflicts with myself and others. It was not just that I gained new information from other students, but in discus-

sions and interaction with tutors and students I often suddenly realised that in fact I knew and held certain theories in my own mind, that, until then, I had not been able to fully express.

By realising how much I was benefiting by meeting other students at the OUPS events, I felt I wanted to encourage other students to join the Society to gain what I felt the Society had contributed to my own development. I therefore joined the Committee of the London Region of OUPS, at first as an event organiser, later as chairperson.

Before I began studying with the Open University I had been privileged to know some highly esteemed psychologists, whom I knew as approachable and generous with both their experience and knowledge as well as with their time. I invited such psychologists (as well as many others) to lecture at OUPS day and evening events. Such experienced lecturers gave clear concise talks which stimulated and inspired us to further study and research. Memorable speakers are Michael Argyle, R. L. Gregory, John Mayhew, Basil Bernstein, Jonathan Miller, John Bowlby, Peter Wason – to mention but a few.

As the London Region of OUPS became a successful, financially self-supporting branch, some of the committee members felt they would like to contribute their experience to central OUPS, and were elected onto the central OUPS Executive Committee in 1982. Through many sessions of discussions, arguments, and hard work, the Society has more than doubled its membership over the past few years. The 13 OUPS Regions have been encouraged and assisted and now arrange Day and Evening Regional Events for their members. Every year the Society arranges four University Week-end Events in different parts of the country where many hundreds of students attend. A 'humanistic' week-

end also takes place once yearly. The publication of four editions of the 'new' *Newsletter* has been welcomed and praised by many members who besides the *Newsletter* also receive the yearly journal the *New Psychologist*'.

This year OUPS has affiliated with OUSA, this brings with it benefits which give us the use of facilities for postage, printing, publicity and membership, which are important and costly factors now with membership continually increasing. Nevertheless OUPS retains its autonomy and is the biggest and most active of all the Societies within the Open University.

The importance and acceptance of our Society in the psychological world was well demonstrated when Professor B. F. Skinner accepted our invitation to give a talk to our members last July. This event we held at the prestigious 'Royal Society'. It attracted psychologists from all over Britain. Many more members wanted to attend the occasion than space allowed and the BBC recorded and broadcast Professor Skinner's talk on two later dates.

Without the courageous founder members of OUPS, Ann Humphrey, Pat Linley, Len Brown and John Clapham and others who supported them, we would not be able to talk with pride about OUPS, and it is with admiration and thanks that we must look back to these people. I consider it an honour to have had the opportunity to play a part in the development of OUPS.

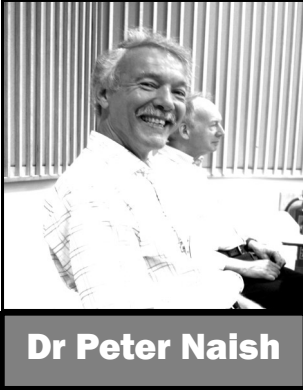
To the future I look with hope, hope that all coming executive committees will continue to further the benefits of the Society for its many members, and hope that the members will involve themselves more in the continuing development of 'their' Society.

L.H.F.





## Cognitive Column



**Dr Peter Naish**

### Cognitive Column – OUPS 40th

Our self perceptions, sense of self-worth and so on are very much defined by our memories. They are the sort of thing that make us reluctant to act out of character – “That’s not the kind of person I am.” One theory of posttraumatic stress disorder (that disturbing condition that can follow a severe trauma, leading to repeated ‘flashbacks’ of the event) is that the memory cannot be fitted neatly among the rest of our autobiographical memories; it simply does not map onto anything we’ve ever experienced before. In contrast, recalling happy memories increases our sense of wellbeing. A very long time ago the American psychologist Danny Kahneman carried out an experiment on university students. He asked them two questions – “How happy do you feel right now,” and “How many dates have you been on in the last week?” (Do people actually use the term

‘date’ any more?) Kahneman found that the happiness rating was higher if the date question was asked first, presumably because it got people remembering a nice occasion before being asked to consider how happy they felt.

In response to a request from the Orange telephone company, I once did something of the Kahneman sort. At that time mobile phones had started to have cameras, but they didn’t have a great deal of storage capacity, so couldn’t hold too many pictures. Long before the ‘Cloud’ idea, Orange decided to let their customers upload photos to a personal space, from which they could view them at any time. The company wanted to be able to claim that this would make people happier. To test the idea we asked a lot of people from an office block to bring personal photos to work. At the end of the afternoon, just after work, they were divided into three groups; one set sat and drank a glass or two of wine, another ate chocolates and members of the third were asked to spend a little while looking at their pictures. After about ten minutes all the people were asked to complete a wellbeing questionnaire and, better even than wine or chocolate, it was looking at pictures of their friends, family and holidays that made them feel really good. As social animals, I think it is memory of pleasant interaction with our fellows that makes us feel especially content; it confers a sense of belonging. In our early evolution it would have been valuable if a sense of wellbeing was engendered by being safe within the group and, correspondingly, if unease was experienced by an individual who became separated and alone.

Many organisations foster a feeling of belonging, the military being an obvious example; a strong sense of camaraderie helps to weld a powerful fighting force. Even when the organisation is as large and amorphous as a nation, the 'belonging' feeling is important, at least for many people. This must be a large factor in the UKIP phenomenon. Because it is politically correct to do so, they dress up their message as a case of protecting British jobs and services (and for some people this may genuinely be all that matters) but for many there will be a fear of outsiders joining our group – xenophobia. It seems to me that this must almost certainly be a natural response, to which we are genetically predisposed. Of course, this is no excuse for displaying such prejudices. For anyone who considers themselves educated and civilised, racism must be on the list of instincts that, although 'natural', will not be countenanced.

So, back to happy memories. The OU has been a source of good ones for so many students, and has certainly given a sense of community to its alumni. Within that throng there is a very special place for those who have been involved with OUPS; this edition of the Newsletter bears witness to the wealth of happy memories the organisation has given us in its forty years. For distance learners, so many memories will be of slogging away alone, but OUPS has been the vehicle for that so-important element of human interaction. In a small way I tried to foster that when I first started writing this Column. It occurred to me that, unlike students in a conventional university, our budding psychologists had no idea of what went on in *their* Psychology Department; I set about telling them. As longer-term readers

(who display remarkable resilience) will know, I soon ran out of anything fresh to say, so began to cast my net rather more widely. The rest, as they say, is history, but I had better say a few things about my own OU/OUPS history, just to stick with the theme of the Newsletter.

Sadly, I can't claim to have been there at the inception of OUPS – I came on the scene just a few years later. I was in Oxford, researching for my doctorate, when I first got to know both the OU and its Psychology Society. A friend had alerted me to the possibility of being a Summer School tutor, so I applied and was accepted. My very first week was teaching on the introductory level Psychology course (DS261 in those days) at Warwick. My Course Director was a Portuguese lady, Manuela D'Oliveira, who, together with her husband, had fled to England to escape the totalitarian regime at home. (The Psychology Department lost an excellent member of staff when, following the 'Carnation Revolution' of the Seventies, it was safe for the couple to return to Portugal.) At about the same time as I was starting my very long association with residential schools, I was contacted by the OUPS President, the redoubtable Lilli. She wanted me to come and speak at a conference in London and, if I remember correctly, it was at that first occasion that Donald Broadbent (theories of attention) was also speaking; he was at Oxford too, so we travelled down together.

Both OUPS invitations and Summer Schools continued, and both convinced me that the OU was an excellent organisation, with ideals that chimed with my own. Members of the Psychology Department soon became friends and eventually I began to write

materials for the courses, build apparatus for Summer School and so on. I'd often ask whether they had any posts going, but they never did, or at least they didn't at times when I would have been in a position to apply. Eventually, at a stage when I was feeling particularly disenchanted with my then job, the OU advertised for a Psychologist. This was another rest-is-history turning point and at long last I became a 'real' OU person. As an insider I was especially useful to OUPS when putting together a teaching team for the Revision Weekend, so that became as regular a feature of my year as going to Summer School. Both provided me with something very special – the chance to interact with students. It's all too easy for Milton Keynes-based staff to forget quite what students are like, what they need, what sorts of course material work for them, and so on. Perhaps it is in recognition of my enthusiasm for student contact that, even though I am now retired, the OU continues to recruit me for Summer School and OUPS still asks me to Revision Weekends. I am grateful to both.

I must conclude by returning to the idea of social grouping. I don't think our ancestors came together merely because there was safety in numbers; it also permitted diversity among the group members. As long as the group could be kept safe through some of its members having physically strong, aggressive characteristics, it would be possible – indeed advantageous – for others to have had different strengths. Diversity is just as important in our own group. There are, of course, the leaders and organisers, planners and decision makers – the people without whom this enterprise could never have lasted forty

years. These good people, past and present, have put in enormous amounts of time and energy, to keep the Society going. When they ask you, as they often do, to consider volunteering in some way, then you really should give it serious thought. Nevertheless, groups not only make diversity possible – they make it essential. Chiefs need Indians as much as Indians need Chiefs. So, if playing a more high profile role in OUPS isn't really the kind of person you are, then don't feel guilty. You are none the less essential, and you are the kind of person I love to meet, who for many decades has been contributing to my portfolio of happy, happy OUPS memories.

The very best Fortieth wishes to you all, and many, many happy returns!

Peter

## THOUGHTS FROM THE COMMITTEE

### Interview with Denise Ward (Secretary & Summer Weekend Office) and Janet Simpson (Student Support Officer)

**Can I start by asking you both how you became interested in psychology?**

**Denise:** Even when I was at school I'd always been interested in psychology but I was terrible at sciences. I thought you had to be good at biology to do psychology and nobody told me any different, so I didn't go down that route. I went into marketing and research and I started running focus groups. Everybody else who ran focus groups was a Psychologist and everyone assumed I was too, so it just kept on coming up in my life and I decided that I should do something about it.

**Janet:** I did most of my education as an adult so I did an A-level in Psychology whilst I was working as a nurse because I thought it was nice to have a bit more insight. When I decided to go to university that's what I thought I'd do a degree in. It was a nice transition so that if I wanted to go back I had a relevant subject area.

**Do you both use your degrees?**

**Denise:** I think you use it without even thinking, it sort of infiltrates. In a formal way, yes I have because I went and did a Masters in Occupational Psychology and I've done a little bit of work on human-computer interaction. I also went down the career counselling route which was part of the Masters, I've been a careers

coach and I'm also teaching psychology with the OU now.

**Janet:** I started off teaching adults at A-level and combined that with doing my Masters. That's why I decided to do a taught Masters with very broad subject areas because, especially for A-level, you touch on lots of different areas. Now I tutor psychology the OU and I'm an examiner for the International Baccalaureate, so I use it a lot.

**How did you find it moving from being an OU student to tutoring for the OU?**

**Denise:** I think it really helps and I think that OU students like to know that their tutor was an OU student because we understand where they're coming from and what the problems are. I think it's very different to teaching at a more traditional university, which is something I wouldn't want to do actually. I like teaching OU students because they want to learn.



**Denise Ward**

**Janet:** I think it's helpful because you know the system and you've got a lot of knowledge of what works and what

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doesn't, so you bring a lot to the role.

### What was your introduction to OUPS?

**Denise:** I think my first event was a revision weekend for ED209. Having come to one revision weekend it became an essential part of the study. It just was built into the programme, I couldn't imagine carrying on without it.

**Janet:** A friend of mine had found out about OUPS and we came together for the Exploring Psychology revision weekend. It was actually through Fred's teaching that I got a distinction and I'm sure it was because he just pulled it all together and it made sense, so when I sat in the exam I felt really confident. I missed the revision weekend for ED209 because I'd just had a baby and it was like the security blanket was gone.

### How did you become involved in organising OUPS events?

**Denise:** I'd enjoyed the revision weekends and I'd got to know a couple of people on the committee, one of whom I'd studied with and she was actually running the revision weekend. The year that I'd finished the degree she needed some extra help at the revision weekend and she asked me if I'd come and help out. I happened to be working with Alan at the same time so the combination of those two strands meant that at the AGM during that revision weekend I was pulled onto the committee! I'd never been on a committee before, but I'm really pleased I did now.

### What about your role with the London region?

**Denise:** That was by default really. There was a point when all the committee were finishing at the same time so we needed a fresh new committee. Lilli brought in some old students and tutors to get London going and I said I'd support them. They ran it for a few years and then they stopped and so I just thought I can't let the London region die really, it's a huge region and I live in it. Then Karen came forward and said she would get the London region going so I said 'if you do it I'll do it with you,' and it's been good.

**Janet:** I saw an advert in *News & Views* for a Special Needs Coordinator, so I wrote and applied for it. I'd done a disability module during my training as a rheumatology nurse practitioner, so I thought I was well qualified and I enjoyed coming to the weekends. The Chair then phoned me up and interviewed me. So I was actually interviewed to come onto the committee.

### Is Special Needs Coordinator a role that's changed a lot?

**Janet:** Originally I came on to support a particular student who used to come to events regularly and I didn't do a lot of the other sorting out diets and things like that, but then it sort of evolved. We get far more requests now than we ever did, so I do far more pre-weekend than actually at the weekend, so that's changed.

## THOUGHTS FROM THE COMMITTEE

**Denise:** I think having Janet in the role has raised our awareness of our responsibilities and I think we are more proactive about helping now. It's about opening up opportunities for as many people as possible to come here. You still find that people say on the forums 'I wouldn't be able to go because I have this special need' and then we say 'look tell us about it and I'm sure we can help,' people are quite surprised that we can accommodate them sometimes.

**Janet:** It's about assessing to see if they can accommodate some of our students here at Warwick. The University are pretty good at adapting accommodation, so it's just working with the University and thinking about how to change things. It's also things like sending people, for example with dyslexia, hand-outs before the weekend.

The OU gets a lot of students that for one reason or another can't attend a brick university so therefore, I think percentage wise we probably get a lot of students who have additional requirements and you often have a lot of diverse needs to accommodate. I don't think we've ever not accommodated anybody.

**Denise:** No and I can remember one person that had a lot of anxiety and really worried about coming to the weekend and Janet sort of mentored him before and during so that by the end of the weekend he was socialising with people and it was a huge step for him, so it was

great. You're not just helping people academically at the OUPS weekend but you're actually helping them in their personal lives as well.

### **What do you think students gain from coming to OUPS events?**

**Denise:** I think they gain on all sorts of levels. I think they gain on an academic level, but they also get a huge boost of confidence. We know from the feedback forms that people say 'I was really struggling but now I've got the confidence I need'. Motivation – sometimes they're flagging in the middle of a course and coming here gives them a fresh aspect and motivation. There's also the social contact. The OU's getting more isolating I think because there's more and more electronic learning. Students are not actually meeting other students and I think that's a really important part of learning. It was a really important part of my degree. I made some really good friends too and I think you make friends at OUPS events because it is intense. So I think it's social, its academic, its confidence building, it's all sorts of things.

**Janet:** You get the opportunity to speak to academics and you don't necessarily have that otherwise, especially for students who can't attend their tutorials. They can meet experts in the field and they get to network as well.

**Denise:** I think the conference is really good there. I know the first time I went to a conference – it was hearing what I'd

## THOUGHTS FROM THE COMMITTEE

been learning about, actually hearing somebody outside the OU talking about it and putting it more into a real life context. The conference speakers help expand your knowledge, help underline that what you're learning is up to date and correct and it's a great networking opportunity for people wanting to move into a particular field.

**Janet:** You also meet lots of diverse people, so in that sense you can network in different ways - not just with a focus on psychology although obviously you have this shared interest.

**Denise:** It's amazing the different jobs people do, from Opera singers to dancers to engineers to doctors – everything. It's fascinating how they've all come into psychology from different routes.

### What do you gain out of your involvement with OUPS?

**Denise:** I'd never taught before and I wouldn't have thought about teaching if I hadn't been part of OUPS. When I first started we didn't have Irene so I was taking all the bookings for the weekend that I looked after. I had a lot of students phone me about the weekend and I found I was giving them advice about the course and so that was one strand of it. When I came for the weekends I got to know all the tutors really well and they were very encouraging to me to actually tutor, so my involvement with OUPS led me to tutor, it kept up my involvement, interest and learning in psychology and I've made some great friends on the

committee. I'd never done event management before in my life and I really enjoy it so OUPS sort of gave me, all be it voluntary, it gave me a new career and new skills.



Janet Simpson

**Janet:** I like the whole team aspect, because I think working as a tutor for the OU you're job is quite isolated, so I do a lot of marking, you're sat in front of the computer and you don't have much interaction apart from the face-to-face tutorials. It's quite nice to come away and actually have discussions with other tutors, to meet the students and hear about their experiences. That informs your own teaching, hearing about what they like and what they don't like, what they see as useful and not useful.

**Denise:** As a tutor on an early course it's really nice to come to the weekends and catch up with your students that you might have taught two years ago and find out how they're getting on because usually you don't get to hear, so that's nice as well.

## THOUGHTS FROM THE COMMITTEE

### What sort of direction would you like to see OUPS take in the future?

I think the direction we're taking is to a certain extent being driven by the programming of the OU. It's quite a challenge keeping up with the changes and predicting what's happening, but I think it's a really good thing. It's directed us to search for other ways that we can help students. We're thinking a lot about how we can offer more across module skills workshops; we've already started doing quantitative and qualitative workshops over the last couple of years. We're now thinking about doing more writing skills, critical evaluation skills, referencing and so it has pushed us to look at what we offer, which I think is a really good thing. Recently we've talked about doing postgraduate skills workshops, I think there's a need for these, so as well as supporting courses and the social side of OUPS, skills work is becoming more and more important.

**Janet:** I think it's making sure that we maintain our standards as well. We are quite proactive, we do look ahead and think about what we need to do and I think it's just keeping on top of that, progressing it and being open to new ideas and suggestions.

**Denise:** Getting new blood onto the committee from time to time as well because it is very easy as an established committee to think 'this is what we're doing'. For a long time OUPS did the revision weekend in September and the

summer weekend in July with the conference, it's easy to think this is what we do. I think we've really moved away from that and are carrying on moving away to think what else can we give.

**Janet:** And there are gaps, lots of gaps we can plug with study skills – OU students have resources that they can access but actually I'd be quite interested to know how many of them actually access them. Realistically you're quite limited in how much you can cover in a two hour tutorial.

**Denise:** The levels of ability are very different in a tutorial group as well. You might well have a PhD student and they don't want to learn about writing skills, then you could have someone who has not got any qualifications at all - in any tutorial you could have a huge span. To spend tutorial time working on skills can be difficult, whereas if you have something here and people can choose to come because it's the right level for them, that's different. You also get the chance to meet people from other courses. Students don't normally get that opportunity but when they come to OUPS events they can talk to people who are doing their course for next year.

**Janet:** We also offer a floating tutor, which is a really good thing to have and because a lot of us are quite experienced with the OU, we know about the system – as a student or tutor we've gone through it so we can actually advise. They can also talk to some of the lecturers about



## THOUGHTS FROM THE COMMITTEE

careers pathways and whether their expectations are realistic because quite often they're not. So I think there's a lot we do that we don't talk about because we just do it, but there's also a lot of potential.

**Denise:** I think it is really important to say that we are all volunteers and we are all really busy so these weekends are really useful for the committee members in that we have a lot of meetings. We don't get the chance to get together very often; we live across the whole country and try to keep our committee meetings down to the minimum because of expenses. The weekends are a chance for us to talk face-to-face and throw round ideas. Ideas, I think, don't get thrown around by email. They only come when you're all together, so we do use these weekends to do that, which we've done quite successfully this weekend.

### Have you had a favourite speaker?

**Denise:** I really liked Robin Dunbar who spoke at our evolutionary conference. I really enjoyed his talk but there's been loads that have been brilliant. The other person that stands out in my mind is Bernard Gesch who spoke on nutrition and psychology, he's a very surprising speaker and a very entertaining one. There have been so many good ones it's difficult to choose. Probably another day I'd have picked a different two.

**Janet:** I like controversial speakers like Julian Boon who did the forensic weekend. A couple of people walked out

because he was quite contentious in what he said, but he was very entertaining as well as very informative and I like people like that. Some of the non-academic speakers we've had – Deborah Wearing talking about her husband Clive. I think it brought home the actual day to day experience of living with memory problems and brain damage because you can sometimes get caught up in the theories and lose sight of that real experience.

**Denise:** We do make a deliberate attempt to make the Saturday evening talk at the conference experiential, which just puts a slightly different perspective on it. Clive Wearing was also a case that everybody knew about because it's in the course books. It was great to actually hear somebody talking about it who was part of it. That's another benefit of the conferences, I can remember when I first started coming to the conferences, to hear people like Alan Baddeley, who I had read about in a course text book, talking in person – I was so impressed with that. Really important people in the field whose theories are absolutely fundamental to the topic, to hear and see them in person and then to talk to them in the bar afterwards, where are you going to get that chance another time? I think people don't realise the value of the conferences. Just because it's not course related people think it's an extra, but it really structures and expands your understanding of psychology as a whole.



## **Psychology, the OU, OUPS and Me**

*By Nigel Beesley*

My interest in psychology began in my early twenties during a spell of temporary work where part of my job involved scoring a form of psychometric profile for people looking for work so that they could be matched to vacancies notified by employers. The idea that individual differences and preferences could be assessed and used this way fascinated me and sparked what became a life-long interest in psychology and what makes people who they are.

A few years later and after several false starts in the jobs market, I decided to try the Open University to study for the degree which I'd not attempted straight from school. I hadn't made a great success of secondary education but I did know I was capable of better than my A-level results suggested. I began with the humanities foundation which confirmed that I could study effectively the OU way and I particularly enjoyed the breadth of the course, the tutorial support and the way in which self-help groups organised and ran locally. The atmosphere was supportive, encouraging and involving - education in its best sense, aimed at drawing out and developing individual interests and abilities. Summer schools added a taste of the traditional university experience, with a full-time focus on the subject matter, an active social life and renewed inspiration for the rest of the course.

The social sciences foundation course introduced me to the academic study of psychology and sociology and I was soon well and truly hooked. I followed this with 30 point courses in both disciplines and then an early presentation of the OU's first social psychology course D305, written by Richard Stevens. Here I found the sort of material that had fascinated me in the first place, a broad view of psychology in action in the social sphere, looking not just at individual differences but at the way interactions take place and how individuals are changed by them in a process of constant flux and development. If the OU had re-awakened my interest in learning, OU psychology gave my personal interests academic respectability and helped me follow my interest in people, how they work, what motivates and supports them and how they work together in society. It also widened my perspective on psychology, sociology, science and philosophy, exploring and valuing the connections between them rather than the constraints of the separation of disciplines. The more I studied, the more convinced I became that this was the area where I really wanted to work.

The summer schools that had been so valuable in extending my earlier courses became more scarce as I took second and third level courses and it was in this context that I first came across OUPS. The revision weekends OUPS organised, usually then at Nottingham University, proved invaluable to me, integrating the course modules, clarifying the concepts and reassuring those of us that needed it about the way in which the exams would not only test our knowledge but provide the opportunity to demonstrate our real understanding of the material and its context. The level of academic support from tutorial staff and course team

## **MEMORIES OF OUPS & THE PSYCHOLOGY DEGREE**

members was excellent, with discussions about the courses often extending late into the night, academic debate (suitably lubricated) merging with an active social side.

As with the “official” summer schools that characterised the foundation and some second level courses, the mini summer schools that OUPS ran parallel to the annual conference provided a mid-year boost for anyone whose spirits might be flagging. Courses then ran only from February to October and a July refresher, focusing on current assignments, future modules and likely exam themes was very valuable, just as they are today. Note that this was in the late 1970s and early 1980s; TMAs were handwritten, or typed if you had the skills, personal computing was the province only of geeks; there was no e-mail, no world-wide web with its wealth of online information and face-to-face contact with academic and tutorial staff was very much more important than it is now. OUPS, by facilitating and encouraging face-to-face contacts, made a real difference then for me in achieving the success I did.

I finished my first degree in 1982 with D303 (cognitive psychology) although I'd had to withdraw from my first attempt at it the year before due to the pressures of a new family and a long and tedious commute for work. I succeeded in passing the second time around but the financial and other constraints of family life meant that further study wasn't possible for me at the time, neither was a move into working in psychology, and I took an enforced break from the OU. However, I did maintain my membership of OUPS.

It was to be another ten years before I

studied again with the OU, this time for an MBA degree with the business school. My impressions of this course were heavily coloured by my earlier studies and I came to see management not so much as a separate hard science but rather as a particular example of applied psychology. Individual differences as crucial to recruitment, selection, training and other aspects of personnel management; theories of social behaviour and organisation underlying politics and economics; theories of motivation impacting on personal and organisational performance and so on. The highpoint of these studies was a course entitled “Creative Management” (B885) which to me most clearly represented psychology in action. Jane Henry's excellent course reader, with its detailed exploration of creativity, still has a prominent place on my bookshelf more than twenty years later, alongside Richard Stevens' “Understanding the Self” and other influential texts.

Technology had moved on by this time and we were by then using the “COSY” e-mail system, working over a dial-up link using a 300bps modem. Slow but effective electronic communication and an early form of academic networking known as “First Class” supported our studies with both general and course-specific online discussion forums.

Five years further on and I'd realised that I could no longer stay in the line of work I'd been in for the previous twenty-five years. Reviewing my options suggested a sideways move into occupational psychology and I looked into updating my first degree to qualify for graduate membership of the BPS. To my surprise, I found that my then thirty year old degree still counted and that I could achieve

## **MEMORIES OF OUPS & THE PSYCHOLOGY DEGREE**

GBR, again through the OU, by completing a Diploma in Psychology (Conversion for Postgraduates). All I needed to do was to complete the current Introduction to Psychology (DSE212) and the long-running course on child development (ED209). A welcome re-acquaintance with the psychology faculty and with OUPS followed and two years later I had my graduate registration, aided once again by mini summer schools and revision weekends.

However, suitable opportunities in occupational psychology were hard to come by and, having previously benefitted from counselling following episodes of being bullied at work, I explored my suitability for and the possibility of training as a counsellor myself. I took introductory and foundation courses at the University of East Anglia, renowned for its training in the person-centred approach pioneered by Carl Rogers whose work I'd first come across in D305 many years earlier. This initial training was more practical and experiential than theoretical, totally different to my OU studies and a new experience for me but one which confirmed that, with further training, I could become an effective counsellor and practice professionally. The opportunity for me to retire early came a while later, shortly after I'd been accepted for professional training to degree level in integrative counselling with a local specialist provider and, by October 2010, I was 60 years old and a full-time student with a discount card and a bus pass.

My experience of OU study and of the OU psychology faculty during all my previous studies has helped me very considerably to appreciate the theoretical

underpinning of my subsequent counselling training. It has enabled me to see the range of different therapies offered in their overall psychological context, how they relate to one another, what they share and how they differ. I'm continually fascinated by the field of counselling psychology and continue to explore its links with the wider fields of social and developmental psychology, sociology and philosophy that I've studied previously. The knowledge I've gained has helped me to become a much better counsellor than I might otherwise have been. The on-going support of OUPS through annual conferences and local events since I last studied with the OU has kept me in touch with the faculty and the field and provides valuable support to my on-going professional development and research.

I'm now a fully qualified integrative psychotherapeutic counsellor, registered with the BACP, UKCP and the BPS, practicing professionally as well as voluntarily with local not-for-profit organisations.

And so, to summarise:

### **What the OU has done for me**

- ◆ Rescued me from a mismatch with conventional education;
- ◆ Showed me I could study and succeed at degree level despite not delivering through GCE O and A levels;
- ◆ Encouraged me to find my own route to higher education;
- ◆ Introduced me to a whole new world of interests and interesting people;
- ◆ Widened my perspective on psychology, sociology, science and

**MEMORIES OF OUPS &  
THE PSYCHOLOGY DEGREE**

philosophy, seeing the connections rather than the separation of disciplines;

- ◆ Helped me further to develop my thinking skills and to use those skills constructively.

**What OU psychology has done for me**

- ◆ Helped me to follow my interests in people, how they work, what motivates and supports them and how they work together in society;
- ◆ Given my personal interests academic respectability;
- ◆ Supported me towards a further professional qualification and a second career when many people are ready to retire;
- ◆ Helped me to become a better counsellor than I might otherwise have been and hence to help other people;
- ◆ The key for my personal development and subsequent future career was that my original OU degree with psychology as its main theme could still help me attain graduate membership of the BPS and attain further professional qualifications.

**What OUPS has done for me**

- ◆ Provided very valuable support in my first degree;
- ◆ Run excellent residential schools for OU courses when the OU itself didn't provide them;
- ◆ Run excellent revision weekends for core modules in psychology;

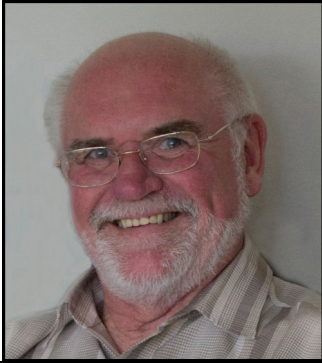
- ◆ Encouraged and supported myself and many other students in all aspects of study;
- ◆ Helped me to maintain a continuing link with the OU and psychology in particular, even when I wasn't currently studying;
- ◆ Welcomed me back to conferences with themes relevant to my current work and interests long after I finished formal study with the OU.

**Overall**

My training in psychology at the OU and my experience with OUPS have been invaluable and life changing. I'll be at Warwick again for this year's conference and the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations and look forward to meeting at least some of you there.

## A Sting in the OUPS Tale

By Vince Gledhill



Vince Gledhill

Between the years of 1994 and 2003 I was deputy editor, then editor of the quarterly publication then known as *The OUPS Newsletter* and what a privilege and pleasure that was.

It was a privilege because I got to put something back into an organisation that I had benefited from during my years as an OU psychology student. It was a pleasure because by working for OUPS as editor and as a member of the executive committee helping to organise and run various weekend and revision schools I got to meet so many fellow OUPS members and hear their stories.

When I was made editor of *The Newsletter* I set out to make it more than just a publication promoting OUPS events, I wanted to also involve our members as much as possible. That meant encouraging members to

contribute through articles and letters to *The Newsletter* and lots of talking to people at OUPS events to find out what we were getting right and wrong – and occasionally come up with a story for *The Newsletter*.

Stories like Marium Camilla Forbes, (Photo) businesswoman based in Switzerland, who found the trek from Lenton Hall to lecture rooms in the Pope Building at Nottingham University too much, so she popped into a bicycle shop and bought herself a folding scooter to whiz back and forward between them during one revision weekend.



Marium Camilla Forbes

Then there was the amazing Ken Rosser, completely blind, but happily navigating his way around an unfamiliar campus on his own with the aid of a white stick and a device that vibrated as he neared obstacles. Carolyn Mason (photo) was also blind and also a very determined lady. She arrived at one Revision

Weekend with her guide dog, Emily, and friend Ann Brewer, and quite a tale to tell me. The three had been in a car on their way to the Revision Weekend in Nottingham when a lorry ahead of them braked hard and its trailer clipped Ann's car. The car veered into a crash barrier and took off. It flipped over before landing on its side trapping the women inside. Then they smelled the leaking fuel. "That was the only moment we panicked," Carolyn told me. "We really thought that it was going to catch fire and that we were going to die."

Fortunately they were fished out of the car by rescuers and three hours later they were back home in Portsmouth where they decided to try again to get to the Revision Weekend and this time caught a train to Nottingham, arriving just in time for the first lecture.




**Carolyn Mason**

So many OUPS members with so many stories to tell. Members like Jack Brockhurst who told me that he had cycled 560k across India and the same distance in China to raise money for the National Deaf Children's Society.

Daniel's son, Jack, was born profoundly deaf and at the time we spoke in 2002 he had given up work to look after Jack full time and was studying the foundation course DD100 and Child Development ED209 with the aim of finding a job working with deaf children.

**Pedalling the Yellow River for Jack**

One of your fellow OUPS members is about to undertake an extraordinary challenge to help children, like his young son Jack, who are profoundly deaf.



Jack and Daniel Brockhurst

On September 21 Daniel Brockhurst will fly to Beijing, China, on

**Daniel & Jack Brockhurst**

It was a privilege to meet so many OUPS members like Marium, Ken, Carolyn and Daniel and reflect the wide diversity of people who make up the OUPS membership.

But the one story that I will never forget happened in 2000.

This is how I reported it in the December 2000 issue of *The Newsletter*:

*"This year's Revision Weekend had the feel of a Hitchcock shocker for some of the tutors and organisers.*

*They woke early on Sunday September 17 to find the top floor of the Lenton and Worsley accommodation block at Nottingham University had been invaded by swarming wasps. On walls, ceilings, floors, windows and doors, the little stingers were everywhere.*

*The alarm was raised at around 6am by John Denner who discovered the invaders. (John was a police inspector and former chair of OUPS who was deputy Newsletter editor at the time) He alerted three other officials (including me) who were on the top floor, and with tutor Tom Ormorod, they made their way to the relative safety of a stairwell to formulate a plan of action.*

*With the help of a security officer and duty manager from the university, they agreed what needed to be done to get people out safely and quickly.*

*The plan worked well and one by one the occupants of the other rooms were woken and warned about the danger so that they could make their way to safety without antagonising the swarm.*

*Vince Gledhill said: "When I looked down the corridor it was like a horror film set with wasps everywhere and a ball of them beginning to cluster around the queen above the open window at the end of the corridor and the window ledge and frame just a black, moving shape."*

*"An hour after the alarm was raised I went into one room where at least a dozen of them were crawling over the bed. If John Denner had not raised the alarm as early as he did, the person sleeping in that bed would probably have woken to a nasty surprise."*

*As the top floor of the three-storey building was cleared, other OUPS officials joined in and helped to clear the*

*floor below it.*

*One of them knocked on the door of tutor Fred Toates. Fred's sceptical response to the urgent banging on his door was: "I've been to too many summer schools to be caught out by some social psychology experiment."*

*He later told students in his DSE202 Introduction to Psychology tutorial: "Just then, a wasp whizzed past my face and I thought WASPS!"*

*The Rentokil expert called out to deal with the swarm said there had been two nests in trees just outside Lenton and Worsley accommodation block.*

*When a new queen had flown through a third floor window, the others followed her lead. The Rentokil expert estimated the number of wasps from both nests totalled about 60,000.*

*Picking my way along that corridor surrounded by wasps on all sides and trying not to stand on any of them is one OUPS memory I would like to forget, but I haven't managed yet. By the way, we got all of the members out without any of them being stung.*







**PSYCHOLOGY,  
HAPPINESS &  
OUPS - AN  
INTERVIEW  
WITH  
PROFESSOR  
NEIL FRUDE**

**How did you first become interested in psychology ?**

It's down to my name. Frude is a very unusual surname and happens to be an anagram of 'Freud'. When I was at school (in an all-boys Catholic school - that shaped me in a number of ways!) some of the older boys began calling me Freud as a tease. I had no idea who this guy was so I went to the public library and borrowed *The Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. For a 13 year old this was heady stuff - all that libido and eros and Oedipal urges. Quite a change from Biggles, and much more interesting. So I read more of Freud and this began to influence how I understood the actions and personalities of my fellow students and the Christian Brothers who were my teachers (a lot of repressed sexual urges, and some not repressed enough). What I really got from reading Freud was the basic idea, which still fascinates me, that it is possible to understand ourselves and other people in systematic ways, through science and insight.

**How did those interests develop over time?**

I signed up for an evening class in psychology at the local "Worker's Education Association" (in some respects, a forerunner of the Open University). A junior lecturer (who later

became quite famous as a psychologist) came from a local university and gave a course of 10 lectures, none of which mentioned my hero Freud! So I saw another side of psychology, less stimulating hormonally but equally stimulating intellectually. By then I was sure that I wanted to do a degree in psychology and I went to Newcastle University. Towards the end of my course there I decided to specialize in clinical psychology and I trained in London at the Institute of Psychiatry (at the Maudsley Hospital). After qualifying as a clinical psychologist I moved to Cardiff to do a PhD. That was on "biofeedback" - the self-control of autonomic responses including heart rate, blood pressure and skin conductance. As soon as I'd finished that I gave up psychophysiology, became a lecturer and followed a very erratic and very enjoyable pathway of research interests. I did some work on smoking, then on human-computer interaction, then anxiety, then aggression, then family violence, then physical child abuse, then sexual abuse, then depression. This sounds a bit chaotic, and it was, but changing focus is how I manage to keep my interest and energy going. There are psychologists who spend 40 years researching the same topic in painstaking detail. That would drive me crazy. I get bored very easily (I'm a 99<sup>th</sup> percentile extravert) and I need to make frequent moves to new interests. I'm lucky that psychology is so incredibly broad in its scope and methods that I've been able to move from pillar to post without ever being seen as having lost the plot (as far as I know). I've tended to follow the Monty Python slogan: "... and now for something completely different". Once when I was asked to give a talk at a university, one of the lecturers pointed to his bookshelf and to three books that I'd written, one about family problems, one

about human interaction with robots and the other on SPSS. He suggested, in the nicest possible way, that I might have multiple personalities. Some parts of me were pleased at this suggestion.

### **What are your current interests?**

After 30 years as an academic, the opportunity arose for me to supervise the research projects of students who were training for their doctorate in clinical psychology, so I left the university and joined the NHS. I had worked with various charities to provide a clinical service but now I was also able to see NHS clients again. The availability of psychological help for people with emotional problems is very limited indeed and this disturbed me a great deal. I had been lecturing for 30 years to undergraduates on the benefits and effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) but I found that in the real world of the NHS at that time (2002) this type of help was only available to a very few people. I worked in a Community Mental Health Team with about 2000 people on the books, of whom 98% were on medication and only 40 (that's 2%) receiving psychological treatment. The waiting list for psychological treatment was between one and two years.

A radical strategy was clearly needed in order to deliver more psychological treatment and I came up with the idea of delivering CBT through high quality self-help books written by specialist psychologists. Providing therapy through books is known as "bibliotherapy" and I devised a strategy for delivering bibliotherapy by means of a "book prescription scheme". When people go to their GP with a mild or moderate mental health problem, the GP is able to prescribe a suitable book from a pre-set list of books that are stocked in public

libraries as part of the scheme. A book prescription may be offered instead of a prescription for medication, or perhaps in addition to this. Following the implementation of the original scheme in Cardiff, it was rolled out as a national scheme in Wales ("Book Prescription Wales") and this has now been operating for the past 10 years. Around 30,000 of the books on the list are borrowed from libraries every year, and similar (but more local) schemes have been introduced in Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, New Zealand and several other countries. There have also been similar local schemes in England and in 2013 these were coordinated into a national scheme. My 'invention' of this mental health treatment strategy is acknowledged in an exhibition on the history of psychology currently on in the Science Museum in London. I didn't know about this, but my son visited the museum and texted me "Hey, Dad, you're in the exhibition".

Along similar lines, I also have a strong interest in developing psycho-education packages for group delivery – a kind of "therapy by Powerpoint". This is another way of getting the benefits of effective psychological interventions through to lots of people who would otherwise not be able to receive such treatment. Ultimately I hope that these resources can be made available much more widely through the internet. As well as disseminating traditional CBT to people who have emotional problems, psycho-education can be used to help people to increase their wellbeing, happiness and resilience (all of which might well help to prevent the development of psychological problems). The new area of psychology known as "positive psychology" offers a great deal in this area and I want to explore ways of delivering this to maximum benefit. A couple of years ago

at an OUPS event I met up with another positive psychology enthusiast, Jan Stannard, and together we set up “The Happiness Consultancy” (<http://www.thehappinessconsultancy.co.uk/>) which offers training and consultancy on positive psychology topics (for example, employee engagement and resilience), mainly to commercial companies.

There are some very exciting implications of positive psychology for therapy, not only for people with psychological issues but also for people with physical illnesses and disabilities. I am now being invited to speak and train on this topic with health professionals from many areas, including stroke and cancer. The focus is on improving the quality of life through positive interventions. Increasing a sense of personal wellbeing has very significant benefits for people’s confidence, energy levels and motivation as well as for their mental health and their physical health. I have just written a chapter describing how knowledge gained from positive psychology research can be applied as “positive therapy” (Frude, 2014).

### **Can you tell me about your role with OUPS? How did you first become involved?**

I go back long enough to have been very excited when the Open University was first proposed and then got off the ground in 1971. I was a tutor for some of the early courses, especially in social psychology. I also tutored a few summer schools and marked a fair quantity of exam scripts, but when I became head of psychology in Cardiff I had to give up my OU involvement. In those early days, I must confess, I had little awareness of OUPS.

Then in 1993 I was asked to give the closing talk at a national conference for

PhD students being held in Cardiff. The stipulation was that, being the last talk, “it should be funny”. I almost turned down the invitation because it was a Saturday and also happened to be my birthday. Did I really want to spend my birthday giving a talk to a hundred PhD students? Well, I did it anyway. The talk was called “Getting a PhD – the Easy Way” and was a light-hearted guide to shortcuts that could be taken to make the whole process relatively easy. For example, I suggested that every PhD student should make sure that their thesis title contains either “neuro” or “cognitive” – preferably both – and that the title MUST include a colon. Thus an ideal title would be “The Social Contextualization of Knitting: A Neuro-Cognitive Study”. I said that external examiners of PhDs judged theses largely on the basis of the title. It was all tongue in cheek and played for laughs, of course, but I did actually smuggle in some good advice. The talk went down very well, with lots of laughter, as commissioned, and then at the end of the lecture one of the audience, a lady in her 70s, came up and thanked me. She also introduced herself as the President of OUPS and asked me if I’d be a guest speaker at the next event which was to be held at the University of Nottingham.

I said that I’d be pleased to do this, but I thought it unlikely that I would hear any more of it. However, I had underestimated the efficiency and determination of the lady who I now know to be Lilli Hvingtoft-Foster. She was indeed in her 70s and she was at that time completing a PhD in forensic psychology. Lilli is now in her 90s and is still the President of OUPS, although sadly she is no longer able to attend conferences for health reasons. But the current vigour of OUPS as an organization

owes an enormous amount to Lilli's formidable energy and enterprise sustained over many years.

So I gave my first OUPS talk in September 1994 – a Saturday night guest talk which I called “The Psychology of Sex and Drugs and Rock n’ Roll”. I gave it that title in order to bring in some students, because there were two other talks on at the same time, both by renowned psychologists, and I wanted an audience. When I told the students who turned up that I wouldn't be speaking about sex or drugs or rock n’ roll they were already seated and the doors were bolted, so I kept them. The lecture focussed on the gap between academic psychology and the emotional issues of people's everyday life. It was well received and I was asked back again the next year to do another guest talk. This happened once more and then I was asked to adopt a regular tutor role – no longer the guest but now one of the family! I had enjoyed my OUPS experiences very much indeed and was delighted to join the crew. And I've been on board since that time, for the past 18 years, mostly teaching social psychology. In 2012, however, I gave up the social psychology teaching in order to engage with two new OUPS ventures – workshops on research methods and statistics which I do with Jim Handley (an ex-student, colleague and friend) and a taster for SDK228 (*The Science of the Mind: Investigating Mental Health*) which I do with Fred Toates (colleague and friend). I was delighted to be invited to be the external assessor for this course by the O.U. and I enjoyed making a contribution to the team discussions as the course was being developed. We ran the taster course for the first time last year and the students were really enthusiastic about it and felt that it gave them a real head

start on the SDK228 course.

### **How do you think OUPS benefits OU psychology students?**

I really believe that OUPS is incredibly valuable, partly because of the excellent teaching that it provides but also because it offers many opportunities for students to meet with others who are doing the same course. The weekends provide an opportunity for students to compare notes, to share anxieties and to engage in mutual reassurance. These informal aspects are very important. The fact that tutors are available for consultation throughout the weekend is another valuable feature. There are also opportunities for students to meet with people who are currently studying the courses that they intend to enrol for the following year and to find out what is involved. The bookstall gives people the chance to discover useful books that they might not otherwise have been aware of, and tutors are able to provide advice on careers in psychology and ways of continuing to study psychology through higher degrees. The July conferences bring in very high quality speakers and the subjects for these conferences are very well chosen. The lectures are invariably stimulating and these events provide a really important opportunity for people who have graduated to maintain their interest in psychology, and also to remain part of the OUPS fraternity.

As well as the national events, of course, there are also many regional events and I'm sure that these often seed highly supportive relationships between people who live relatively close to one another and are able to meet to discuss course issues. Overall, OUPS is a fantastic organization and provides a really valuable service. Time after time, students who attend the weekends say

that their attendance in the previous year, for another course, made an enormous difference to their understanding of the course material and that it significantly enhanced “the bottom line” (i.e. their grade).

### **What do you get out of your involvement with OUPS?**

In a word, happiness. I could also have said ‘wellbeing’ or ‘resilience’ (remember, I’m a positive psychologist). Let me explain. There are various research-derived formulae relating to what makes people happy. I’ll use the one from Martin Seligman (2012), the “father” (some might say the “Godfather”) of positive psychology. His formula is “PERMA” – that’s Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. My OUPS weekend events (two or three a year) are great “short breaks” for me. P – I get lots of positive emotion – I experience appreciation for the work I do, I have lots of fun and I experience the ‘buzz’ that I always get from teaching enthusiastic students. E - ‘Engagement’ – reading course materials and translating them into personal teaching resources, and then delivering these for between 6 to 12 hours over a weekend, requires focus, dedication and enthusiasm, at least if you’re going to do it well. R - the next element in the happiness formula is ‘Relationships’, and the weekends always involve many highly positive interactions with a range of people. As well as contacts with students, many of the OUPS committee are now my friends. Some of these I have known for well over a decade, so the weekends involve something of a “gathering of the clan”. M - ‘Meaning’ – well, that too. There’s no question of “Is this worth doing?” or “Am I being of any use?” Students are depending on you and it’s very uplifting to

feel that you are being helpful. When Jim Handley and I teach our research methods courses for OUPS, we get a special satisfaction whenever we witness a “light bulb moment” whereby someone who has been struggling to understand a statistical concept eventually “gets it”. Squeals of delight in the classroom might be rare, but they are highly rewarding. A - And finally Accomplishment. Yes, I certainly get a sense of accomplishment when I have written a new block of teaching material or when I’ve delivered teaching over a weekend. So there it is – an analysis of how my involvement with OUPS contributes to my happiness – what’s not to like? (And did you notice that I slipped in a little lesson on positive psychology?)

### **What directions would you like to see OUPS take in the future?**

I think that OUPS is great. And it’s incredible that everything is so well-planned and so well-organized, always with an eye to possibilities for new ways of supporting students, by a committee that consists entirely of volunteers. Many committee members offer their services because they themselves benefitted from OUPS activities and feel that they want to put something back. Then, I think, their involvement gives them satisfaction (and PERMA happiness!) so that they stay on long after any ‘debt’ has been paid. People do come and go, of course, but many of the current committee have been around for quite a while and they are a really supportive, committed group of people who care a lot that students get the very best from the weekends and other events. They really do deserve a lot of credit for keeping the Society as strong as it is.

So I’m happy to leave it to the committee to steer the growth and development of

the Society. They are very savvy about what might be possible, and are now having to navigate the events programme through difficult waters with the changes of course start dates. My main regret (which is shared by the committee) is that OUPS is not known to many students studying psychology in the O.U. People have to learn about its existence largely through word of mouth because there appears to be no way in which OUPS events can be advertised via official O.U. channels. This is such a pity, because so many more people could benefit. Hopefully, social media and messages posted by students who have enjoyed OUPS events will help to get the message out!

### Have you had a favourite OUPS event?

There have been lots. I remember the 25<sup>th</sup> OUPS Anniversary event, held in Milton Keynes, and many of the July conferences (I'm normally teaching half time so I've been able to sit in on some memorable talks between my own teaching slots). I've also enjoyed attending and contributing to regional events in the north, south and the Midlands and, on one memorable occasion, in the Hague (students came from several European countries for a day on social psychology). If I had to choose a single event it would probably be the "Great Psychologists" conference which Richard Stevens organized in 2010. There were some great speakers and I was asked to do an amusing Saturday night talk as part of the conference (strangely reminiscent of how I started out with OUPS). My title was "How to Become a Great Psychologist" and I started by admitting that the only person who should be able to give such a talk would be someone who was him/herself a great psychologist. However, I explained, I did feel entitled to give such

a talk because, although I am a not a great psychologist, I am at least an anagram of a great psychologist! And that's where I came in!


### References


- Frude, N. (2014) Positive Therapy. In R. Nelson-Jones *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Therapy*. London: Sage (forthcoming).
- Seligman, Martin (2011) *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

*Neil Frude is a consultant clinical psychologist, Research Director of the South Wales training course in clinical psychology and an External Professor in the University of South Wales. He has published a number of books on topics as diverse as family relations, violence, disruption in schools, statistical analysis and human interaction with computers. In 2003 Neil devised a book prescription scheme for mental health which has since become a national scheme in Wales, England and several other countries. In 2004 he embarked on 'something completely different' and appeared as a stand-up comedian for 16 nights at the Edinburgh Fringe in his show 'The Language of Love and Lust'. In 2012 he co-founded "The Happiness Consultancy" which provides training and consultation in positive psychology. Neil is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and a Fellow of the British Association of Cognitive and Behavioural Psychotherapy. He has been a regular tutor at OUPS events for the past 20 years.*


## OUPS Events: 2014 - 2015

April 2014						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				


 Cambridge OUPS DD303 overview day

 LOUPS Overview Day: DSE212; DD303; D307


May 2014						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	


 DSE212 and ED209 Revision Weekend

July 2014						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				


 OUPS Annual Conference:  
*'The New Neuroscience – friend or foe?'*  
and DD307 Consolidation Weekend  
and Mixed Methods Weekend Workshop  
and OUPS 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party

September 2014						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1		3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

 DSE212; DD303; DD307 Revision Weekend  
and SDK228 Springboard Weekend (for  
those starting in October)

 Cambridge Evening Talk with  
Professor Susan Gathercole:  
*'Working memory and Classroom  
Learning'*

November 2014						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7		9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

 Cambridge Autumn Conference:  
*'Mental Health and Wellbeing'*

January 2015						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

 LOUPS Day Conference: *'Relationships'*

### Pubmeets:

SOUPS: Reading: 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month

## OUPS - the first ten years 1974 - 1984 Dr. Elizabeth Cowne

It was Ann Humphries who had the vision to launch OUPS. She first wrote to Seawise, in November 1973, and again in April 1974, putting forward the idea of an Open University society for psychology students. Ann suggested that, as the first psychology course offered by the OU was about to start in 1974, this might be an appropriate time to found a society to foster interest in psychology. Initially, it would be for those taking the course.

In response to her first letter to Seawise, students wrote from all over the country. There were so many of them that she divided them up among the 13 OU regions and wrote to one person in each region, asking them to help contact others and set up local groups.

In her second letter to Seawise, in April 1974, Ann shared some of the ideas sent in by the people who had contacted her. Ann had envisaged the Society as an association of local groups, each helping students to meet each other, and probably with other local groups, universities, and others, who had psychology as a common interest. A national committee would co-ordinate general activities, such as a newsletter and, probably, an annual conference which would be held in a different region each year. Affiliation to other OU societies was also a possibility. The external link with OUSA was in fact discussed for several years.

Affiliation to the British Psychological Society was also of interest, but this was not possible. The BPS allowed individuals to become Subscriber Members, but Student and Graduate Membership had to wait until the OU had enough courses on offer to lead to a degree that was, in effect, a psychology degree.

OU 1974-1984 PS



Valen Mirov



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