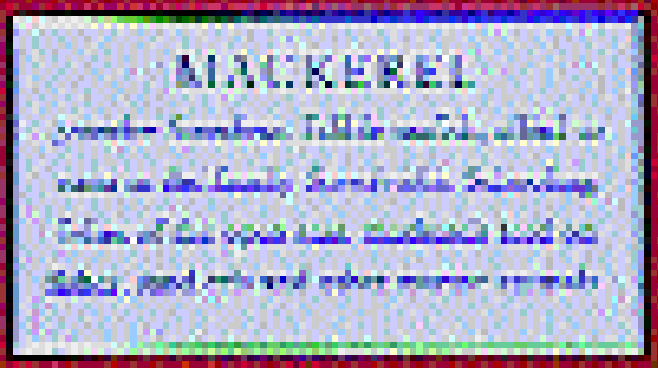
EDiT

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH MAGAZINE • ISSUE 11 • WINTER 1996-97



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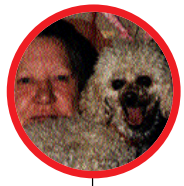
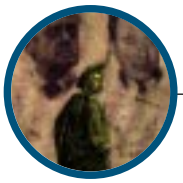




Publisher Information & Public Relations Services, The University of Edinburgh. Editor Anne McKelvie Assistant Editors David Eccles, Richard Mellis
Design Neil Dalgleish for Visual Resources, The University of Edinburgh Photography Tricia Malley, Ross Gillespie, Visual Resources, The University of Edinburgh
Advisory Panel Ally Palmer, John de W. Shaw.

Edit is available on the University of Edinburgh's Web server, EDINFO, at: http://www.ed.ac.uk
Advertising Sales Agent: the insider group, 43 Queensferry Street Lane, Edinburgh EH2 4PF. Tel: 0131 535 5555 Fax 0131 220 1203

Edit is printed on environment-friendly low chlorine content paper. Edit, The University of Edinburgh Magazine, is published twice a year.

letters

Readers' letters are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor.
Here is a selection of the responses to Issue 10.

A DIVINE PLAN

MY FIRST thought on reading 'The Seeds of Survival' was to connect it with Jewish liturgy, the Grace after Meals composed of four sections. The first section begins:

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who feeds the whole world with goodness, with grace, with kindness and with mercy. He provides bread for all living beings, for his kindness endureth for ever."

Dr Michael Turner and his team are part of the Divine plan in promoting the fulfilment of this blessing. They are to be congratulated on their excellent work.

ASHER S. KAUFMAN, BSc 1948, PhD 1954
Jerusalem, Israel

A VICE NOT A VIRTUE

THE ARTICLE by Tom Lappin of Peter Irvine's 'Scotland The Best' was a lovely dip into the book and has certainly enticed me to read it. One pet peeve, however, was reinforced in the short article. Peter Irvine may rationalise poor service by claiming that it is "relating on a more real level". However, people don't pay a hotel to "relate to" them by making it clear that they wish they weren't there. If a person is incapable of treating guests with civility, even if they don't like them very much, they should not be in a service industry. It is all very well to mock the American service ethic, but I would gladly take the professional, friendly service I have enjoyed in most American cities over the many cases of surly and grudging inattention I have endured in some English and Scottish establishments. Irvine should not try to turn a vice into a virtue!

DR JEAN MCKENDREE
Visiting Research Fellow
Human Communication Research Centre
The University of Edinburgh

THE MIXTURE

TODAY I received the Summer 1996 issue of 'Edit' and the illustration on p.30 took me back to 1932 - as you say on the cover 'Thanks for the memory, How the brain remembers'. There I was studying Materia Medica, looking at an anatomical background with scraps of paper lying round with Apothecaries' weights printed on them.

For the uninitiated, Materia Medica equals Pharmacology, but our study was more practical, in that we made up medicines, powders and ointments. Before starting the mixtures, the prescription had to be written. This was done in a mixture of Latin names of the ingredients, interspersed with Hieroglyphics and Roman Numerals, indicating the quantity of each ingredient. In the case of liquid mixtures, you usually ended your prescription with 'Aqua Ad', which meant that you topped the medicines up with water under the tap to what you thought was the right amount. All this was to make sure that no one other than a medic or a pharmacist knew what was in the bottle or the pot of ointment. Take, for example, 'Ung. Hydrarg. Oxy. Flav.' which has to be read backwards and means 'Yellow oxide of mercury ointment', which might be enough to put the patient off.

In addition to bottles of medicines and ointments, we had to make up powders. This was a very skilled task, and there was no 'Aqua Ad' to dilute your mistakes. First having calculated the exact amount of each ingredient, you tipped each in turn onto a chemical balance, and then into a mortar, where they had to be mixed and ground together to a fine powder. You then put a square of thin paper onto the scale, set the weight and tipped the required dose onto the paper. This then had to be closed by folding the paper in a most precise manner as instructed. This had to be repeated until the number of doses ordered had been weighed out.

How lucky the young medics are now, with MIMS and the chemist across the road to provide the necessary medicines.

DR ISOBEL ROBERTSON, MBChB 1940
Rondebosch, Republic of South Africa

The Glenkinchie Prize Letter

Memory and Memories...

IT'S NICE to know, in my old age, that
neurons are now "all the rage";
And that my frequent memory lapses
are caused by failure of synapses
To function in their normal state,
requiring special glutamate.
Still, "episodic memories" linger at
which one now might point the finger;
Drummond Street, the Highschool
Yard, the haunt of that great Scottish
bard,
Rutherford's, where many a grad has -
in his time - the pleasure had
Of sipping Scotland's gift to man, that
noble, limpid drink which can
The lowest spirit raise in song and keep
afloat the eve'ning long;
The Cowgate in the dark of night where
once a crone, an awsome sight,
Came sideling up to me and said
"young mon, Ah'm awfu' guid in bed";
The screaming gull who from on high
dropped feces on my college tie;
The City, seen from Calton Hill...or
Arthur's Seat, comes to me still
In all its grandeur, rain or shine, but
glorious when the weather's fine;
Those ancient golfers on the Links, and
each with fewer years, one thinks,
Than I have now...and memories, too,
in which "Auld Reekie" comes to view.

To EdiT, then, and Richard Morris,
Rick Lathe (and others) here's the
chorus:

To Memories! Let's lift our glasses
And drink before the moment passes.

F.H. KIM KRENZ, PhD 1955
Lakefield, Ontario

Mine's a Glenkinchie

WRITE TO 'Edit' and win a bottle of Glenkinchie 10 year-old lowland malt whisky.

'Edit' wants to hear your views on the issues raised by contributors. The writer of the most distinctive letter to the next issue of 'Edit' will win a bottle of Glenkinchie specially donated by United Distillers.

All letters are welcome and should be addressed to: Anne McKelvie, Editor, 'Edit', Information & PR Services, The University of Edinburgh Centre, 7-11 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9BE. Email: A.McKelvie@ed.ac.uk

The Editor thanks readers for their letters and regrets that space limitations mean some have had to be edited.

The Key to Climate

THE OPENING of a new laboratory in the Department of Geology and Geophysics will enable greater understanding of the causes of such diverse natural disasters as drought in Africa and Australia, cyclones in the Central Pacific, catastrophic floods in Central America and destructive storms in South America.

All these disasters have one thing in common, the El Niño event, a naturally varying pattern of temperature, rainfall and wind conditions in the tropics. This pattern is known as the Southern Oscillation and is responsible for much of the climate variation around the world.

The new laboratory has been created to study the behaviour of the Southern Oscillation from year to year over past centuries. This can be done by analysing the skeletons of reef-building corals which, like the rings of a tree, reveal a great deal about the climate throughout the period of their growth.

Coral sampling in Papua New

New Microelectronics Imaging and Analysis Centre

IN A UNIQUE venture with Scottish Enterprise and the private sector, the University has created a Microelectronics Imaging and Analysis Centre within the Electrical Engineering Department at the King's Buildings campus.

Using technical knowledge and expertise already available within the Department combined with the latest technology, the Centre fulfils a troubleshooting role for the already well established semi-conductor industry. It is anticipated that companies like NEC, Motorola, National Semiconductor, Fujitsu and Siemens, not to mention the indigenous microelectronics start-up companies which have become an intrinsic part of the Scottish economy, will benefit from this new initiative.

"The new facility", said Dr Clive Reeves of the Department of Electrical Engineering, "will enable us to inspect the microscopic details of state of the art microcircuits - evaluating the manufacturing process, checking for minute imperfections, and, where required, modifying the electrical layout of prototype devices. The Centre, with its unique combination of facilities, will be attractive to companies within the semiconductor industry either because they don't have the necessary equipment or trained staff, or simply because thir own facilities are being fully utilised."

Chloroform Sesquicentenary 1847-1997

A MAJOR medical conference will be held next year to mark the 150th anniversary (Sesquicentenary) of the discovery of the anaesthetic effects of chloroform by Sir James Young Simpson.

Although chloroform is rarely used nowadays, its discovery led to the widespread availability of painless surgery and the beginnings of the idea of painless childbirth, a matter of particular interest to Simpson who was Professor of Midwifery in the University.

The Sesquicentenary will be celebrated on 5 and 6 September 1997 within the University and comprises two days of lectures on the patterns of medical practice in the 21st century plus a variety of social events.

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal has agreed to be patron of the event.

Getting Connected

THE CONNECT programme, initiated by the University, is designed to support the creation, development and growth of technology-based ventures throughout Scotland.

The initiative is the brainchild of Edinburgh University Management School lecturer Ian McDonald who, with funding from Scottish Enterprise, visited the USA to look in some detail at the development of the uniquely successful San Diego CONNECT programme, founded in 1985 at the University of California, San Diego.

"There is plenty of recognition in Scotland", claims Ian McDonald, "that the creation and development of high technology ventures is essential to regional economic growth."

Edinburgh University Management School will establish a Centre to develop and administer the programme, funded through a mix of private- and public-sector sponsorship. Events and activities will initially be focused in the Lothians and Fife region, with activity being extended throughout Scotland over time.

photo KEITH BRAME

Chairman of SHEFC opens new Artificial Intelligence Laboratory

IN THE course of opening newly refurbished facilities in the Department of Artificial Intelligence at the University of Edinburgh, Sir Jack Shaw, the Chairman of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, witnessed a team of miniature robots playing 'ball' and was pursued around the laboratory by a robot capable of moving and reacting intelligently to its surroundings.

The recent refurbishment has created additional essential research resources including a large mobile robotics research laboratory, an expanded machine vision research laboratory, an enlarged library of robotics materials and a 100 seat seminar room, equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment.

New College Celebrates 150th Anniversary

HIS ROYAL Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, in his role as Chancellor of the University, has unveiled a plaque to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone for New College in 1846. The unveiling was the culmination of a week-long programme of events which included lectures, concerts and formal and informal gatherings with former Professors and teachers from New College.

As part of the celebrations the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity was awarded to His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I; Professor Ursula King; Professor Choan-Seng Song; and The Very Revd Professor Emeritus Thomas F. Torrance.

photo BARRIE ANDRIAN copyright STUA

Crannog Rises

THE FIRST timber crannog to be built for nearly 2000 years has emerged from the depths of Loch Tay. The replica roundhouse which is based on plans drawn from underwater excavations of crannogs known to be preserved in the loch, has been constructed entirely by students and volunteers.

Helped by support from specialist suppliers, the team, led jointly by Barrie Andrian of the Scottish Trust for Underwater Archaeology and Dr Nicholas Dixon, a Research Fellow in the University's Archaeology Department, have now completed work on the structure which can be previewed prior to the official opening next Easter.

Centre for Protein Technology

THE DEPARTMENT of Chemistry has, in the face of very keen competition, won some £1.25 million from the Department of Trade and Industry to be used to establish a Centre for Protein Technology.

The money, which will be matched by a consortium of collaborating companies, will fund research into the production of artificial vaccines and combinatorial libraries as potential drug leads for the healthcare industry of the future, particularly in relation to the ageing process and obesity.

Edinburgh won the funding firstly on the basis of its high quality research staff operating across a range of scientific and medical disciplines. Equally importantly, however, the concept was based on co-operation with industrial and commercial partners who look to produce the kind of high value, sophisticated goods on which the British economy is relying for growth.

Edinburgh International Science Festival

PLANS FOR the ninth Edinburgh International Science Festival, to be held from 22 March - 6 April 1997, are well underway and the programme to date is an eclectic mix of serious science and popular culture, as well as the exhibitions, workshops and hands-on activities which have come to characterise the Science Festival.

A half-day seminar on genetics and cancer, organised by the Clinical Oncology Department at Edinburgh's Western General Hospital, promises to be of great interest to scientists and the public alike. The seminar aims to explore the risk to individuals of developing cancer and possible strategies for prevention, and is certain to draw many experts in this field.

Another very welcome presence at the 1997 Science Festival will be the British Psychological Society with a series of three topical lectures on Road Rage, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Guns and Dangerousness.

Centre for Second World War Studies

A NEW Centre for Second World War Studies - the only one of its kind in the UK - has been set up within the University. The Centre is attached to the Department of History and is working with Lamancha Productions Ltd, a local independent film and television production company, specialising in 20th century historical documentaries.

The initiative arose from the outstanding success of a conference, 'The Soldier's Experience of War 1939-45', held in the University last year, as well as the unique concentration of experts in the field of Second World War Studies, both within the University and the Edinburgh area. These include Lord Asa Briggs, Dr Angus Calder, Professor John Erickson, Dr David Stafford, Dr Jill Stephenson, Dr Jeremy Crang, and Dr Paul Addison, Director of the Centre.

The Centre is devoted to the study of all aspects of the Second World War, including its origins and consequences, taking an interdisciplinary approach wherever possible, particularly in relation to conferences and research projects. It will also cooperate with Lamancha in the production of video films for an educational and popular market. A taught Masters course will be available from October 1997.

omniana

THE UNIVERSITY'S HIDDEN CURIOSITIES.

'Fancy and Tradition', a poem on Robert Burns, composed by Wordsworth in 1833 during a tour of Scotland, was first published in 1835 and is part of a collection entitled 'Yarrow Revisited'.

The manuscript belongs to the Laing Collection, the largest single manuscript collection in Edinburgh University Library, bequeathed by David Laing LLD to the University in 1878. The Wordsworth manuscript forms part of Laing's own correspondence with his contemporaries.

FANCY AND TRADITION

The Lovers took within this ancient grove
Their last embrace; beside those crystal springs
The Hermit saw the Angel spread his wings
For instant flight; the Sage in yon alcove
Sate musing; on that hill the Bard would rove,
Not mute, where now the linnet only sings:
Thus everywhere to truth Tradition clings,
Or fancy localises Powers we love.
Were only History licensed to take note
Of things gone by, her meagre monuments
Would ill suffice for persons and events:
There is an ampler page for man to quote,
A readier book of manifold contents,
Studied alike in palace and in cot.

William Wordsworth, 1865

ONCE I CAUGHT A FISH ALIVE...

A fish war erupted off the Scottish coast this summer after Greenpeace protestors clashed with trawlermen over the right to take huge quantities of tiny fish from the North Sea. Alastair Dalton, who covered the conflict for The Scotsman from the Greenpeace ship, Sirius, reflects on the experience.

Late that first night, I wondered what on earth I was doing. Just arrived on board and lying awake in the early hours on an unfamiliar bunk in the bowels of the ship, I found it difficult to clear nagging worries from my mind about what lay ahead. Should I have taken those sea sickness pills that the news editor had so strongly recommended? Would I sleep at all in a cabin right next to the throbbing engine room? And how would I feel at 5am, the reveille hour for everyone on board?

Being a news reporter is all about confronting the unknown, delving into unexplored territory and gaining new experience to interpret and pass on to the reader. But in approaching a new assignment, you sometimes feel a momentary shiver of uncertainty over the sheer unfamiliarity of the situation and how it's all going to work out. Like first night nerves, that's a little of how I felt.

It had all started for me just hours before, shortly after I had finished a Sunday shift at The Scotsman in Edinburgh, spent writing for the following day's paper about the first skirmishes in a fish war that, unbeknown to me then, I was about to cover at first hand.

The call always comes when you least expect it. I was sitting at home, looking forward to an early night after a tiring weekend. The phone rang. "Sorry about the late notice, but how would you feel about being in Dunbar at 3am?", the newsdesk enquired. Greenpeace had invited the newspaper to join its patrol ship, Sirius, which was making a brief visit to the East Lothian port before returning to the Wee Bankie area of sandbanks off the Firth of Forth.

There, 'industrial' fishing boats, mainly Danish, were trawling up massive quantities of sand eels, using fine-mesh nets you could not even push a pencil through, for pulping into fish meal and fish oil at massive processing plants in their home ports.

The environmental group's long-standing concern over the issue, which was being switched to direct action for the first time, is that the lack of any catch limits for the tiny fish is threatening the entire North Sea eco-system. Sand eels, they argue, are a key food source for a host of other creatures, including larger fish, such as haddock and mackerel, and seals and puffins. Without them, there could be devastating consequences for the entire marine food chain.

However, no one really knows what effect such unregulated fishing is actually having on sand eel stocks and the livelihoods of their predators. The fishermen point to the lack of scientific evidence, Greenpeace says there are circumstantial warning signs, and both scientists and the British Government agree that more research is needed. Meantime, Greenpeace is pledging to keep up the pressure for change in the lead-up to a major European ministers meeting in Norway in March 1997.

Back in Edinburgh, I decided immediately that an early morning rendezvous with the activists would all but cancel out any hope of sleep, and my best bet was to head straight to the coast to chance my luck with a few winks on board. Half an hour later, I had stuffed a rucksack with what I thought I might need for a voyage of unknown duration and in uncertain weather, and was directing a bemused taxi dxiver to the harbour, 20 miles away.

The direct action side of Greenpeace has the air of a conspiratorial, underground movement about it. In Dunbar, it had set up an office for the sand eel campaign in a back-street flat, the hallway

photo GREENPEACE

'If there is any discipline on board, it is unspoken, forged from the voluntary nature of everyone's participation and the common purpose that unites them.'

'Finally, one of the boats crosses the Sirius' path, striking her bows with a

We would like to thank Deep Sea World, Scotland's National Aquarium, for their help.

piled with red survival suits and one room full of maps, computers and communications equipment. At the deserted harbour, an orange inflatable craft emerged from the gloaming to collect us with two activists, German and Dutch, aboard. Clambering up a rope ladder from the inflatable onto the Sirius, moored just offshore, I was glad of the lack of a swell to make the transfer any more hazardous than it already felt.

I was greeted aboard by the skipper, Jon Castle, a veteran of the Brent Spar campaign who appeared to wear a permanent grin beneath his thick, red beard. It would not take much to transform him into a pirate captain, an image he in fact quite enjoys.

It is all very informal in the Sirius, a 150-feet former Dutch Navy pilot vessel, built in l950. There are some 25 people on board - a multi-national group of activists, fisheries campaigners - providing background expertise - engine room staff and a cook. In contrast to the vessel's former military role, if there is any discipline on board, it is unspoken, forged from the voluntary nature of everyone's participation and the common purpose that unites them. It's not exactly a ship of believers, but they are all driven by their cause.

I am advised against taking a sea sickness pill. The forecast is good, and the side-effects of taking one include drowsiness - the last thing I'll need.

5am and the threatened wake-up call. To add to the grogginess of the hour, the limited water stocks on board puts paid to any thoughts of a shower. Everyone is limited to one a week, but fortunately, among most of the crew it is difficult to tell.

An hour later, after a briefing session in the mess room, four high-speed inflatables are launched against a group of a dozen trawlers in a bid to stop them fishing. The activists started their campaign by trying to reason with the fishermen, but seeing their leaflets thrown into the sea, they turned to using swimmers, ropes and concrete blocks to try to stop the nets.

Anger flares amongst the fishermen at this unwelcome interference in what they see as a perfectly legal activity. The protestors, claiming non-violence, are at best antagonistic and it is easy to see why they receive such a hostile reception.

'How I wish I had followed my own instincts instead - don't rely on anyone

The action is initially all at a distance, viewed through binoculars - grappling hooks thrown at the inflatables, distress flares fired and an activist punched as the fishermen attempt to haul a Greenpeace rope on board.

Then suddenly, the Sirius itself comes under attack. Fishing boats abandon their trawls and give chase, looming towards it menacingly. Those of us on the ship's bridge are told to duck as trawlermen brandish flare guns, and finally, one of the boats crosses the Sirius' path, striking her bows with a glancing blow whose main effect is to topple the campaign mascot, a puffin, from its pole.

When out covering a story, news editors like to be kept in touch, and they appreciate it even more if you tell them that you're on to a good one. Paradoxically, the drama I had witnessed had unfolded so early that I found myself having to wait to call the office with the good news.

Leaving in a hurry to join the ship, I had been assured by Greenpeace there was no need to bring a mobile phone or laptop - the toys of modern journalism - and I conjured up images of a hi-tech floating media centre. How I wish I had followed my own instincts instead - don't rely on anyone else. Sure, there was a phone on the bridge, and it worked very well, but I had to constantly wait my turn between the Greenpeace staff's own calls. To give an idea of how difficult that was, one of the fisheries campaigners, Stefan, was nicknamed Mr Telephone by his colleagues because he had it glued to his ear for so long.

Sending my reports back to Edinburgh proved even more frustrating. Relief at being shown to a room full of word processors was short-lived when I found they were the worse for wear for having been used by crew members to play computer games.

It took several attempts to complete the first story after I had wasted precious time battling against faulty keyboards and frozen screens. My copy was finally faxed by satellite to The Scotsman - at the third try - to the considerable relief of both myself and the newsdesk.

Day two on board, and I had learned my lesson. With no repeat of the spectacular clashes, and Greenpeace turning to stealth tactics instead, such as dropping concrete blocks to close the fishermen's nets, I resorted to notebook and pen. I surprised myself how much simpler and quicker it was - composing the story on paper and reading it over the phone to a copy typist back at the office.

If the crew members on the bridge overheard the occasional disparaging reference to Greenpeace, they didn't show it.

Alastair Dalton graduated MA from the University of Edinburgh in 1987.

WRITTEN IN STONE

With the Stone of Destiny poised to return to Scotland, Tom Nairn looks at the study

"It's Coming Home" shrieked The Scotsman's front page on July 4th last. The news was not about the Independence of America or even (as in the recent 'ID4' film version) that of the whole world. What was coming home was a chunk of reddish-grey sandstone with a ring at either end, weight 458 lbs, 26 by 16 inches and about one foot thick, also known as 'The Stone of Destiny'.

The destiny it was once supposed to represent is that of the Scottish nation. Scotland's kings had been crowned sitting (or standing?) on it for some centuries before it was removed by the English king Edward I in 1296. He took it in triumph to Westminster Abbey, London, where it was lodged inside a specially constructed Coronation Chair. All the monarchs of what would eventually become 'Great Britain' (in 1603) have been crowned in this chair: seated – as it were – upon the soul of Scotland as a symbol of their right to rule over us. Not surprisingly, Scots have always had mixed feelings about the arrangement.

Seven hundred years is what most people would consider a long time. Yet anyone could see from The Scotsman's headline (and the three pages of comment inside) that it now felt like the twinkling of an eye. Nor was it only Scottish Nationalists who took this view of the matter. Had not Scottish Secretary of State Michael Forsyth taken broadly the same view, he would not have proposed the return of the Stone. Although the representative of an unbendingly Unionist government, this astute politico knew none the less just how much the event would flatter the *contemporary* sense of nationhood in Scotland. It was meant to be a gesture of recognition, suggesting that the British State (about 85% of which is England) now acknowledges the Scottish nation equally, as a consenting partner who does not (therefore) require a separate or independent government.

On the other hand, the move would have been pointless were there not plenty of Scots around who no longer consent. According to recent surveys, about two thirds of them seem to want either an independent government or one with some autonomy. In the 1930s, when Home Rule was forgotten and the Scottish National Party was still a tiny sect, none of Forsyth's Tory predecessors would have dreamt of making such a gesture. Had one of them gone mad and done so (it is also relevant to remember) the Imperial Monarchy and metropolitan opinion of those days would simply never have allowed it. In 1996 they hardly noticed.

It is also relevant to recall that before World War II not many Scots thought much of the relic. The popular fame which has turned it into a worthwhile symbol for the government dates back not to 1296 but to 1950. On the morning of Christmas Day that year, four young nationalist students broke into Westminster Abbey and removed the Stone from its chair. It was smuggled back to Scotland, held there until April 1951, and then left symbolically in the ruins of Arbroath Abbey – the site of Scotland's original Declaration of Independence. Two years later the Destiny Stone was being put to its proper (or improper) use again in the Coronation of the reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II.

In some ways the episode was only a student prank. Yet the fact is that it deeply aroused and affected a nation. The Scotsman columnist Albert Morris reported on it at the time and now recalls how, "From the reactions to our phone questions and the citizens stopped by reporters, it seemed that a flash of lightning, a breath of fresh air and a keen appreciation of a daring, but perhaps foolhardy deed, had swept across Scotland."

Daily Mail

POLICE CLOSE SCOTS BORDER

All-force hunt for Stone of Destiny

WATCH, JEMMY CLUES TO ABBEY THEFT

5 hurt in crash at hospital

BLANKET OF FOG SHROUDS THE WEST

THE MASTER BUILDER

Lord Lyon asks: Why no guard?

The last 250 quit escape port

TWO DIE IN BLAZING CABINS

LATEST

Scots planned a raid in secret

Front page of the Daily Mail, Tuesday December 26, 1950. That Christmas Day, most Scots discovered an unsuspected happiness.

> Just what is it about modern Scottish society which favoured the surprising response of 1950 and has sustained the long upsurge that followed? Why does a stone so readily

That Christmas Day, most Scots discovered an unsuspected happiness. The Stone was no longer a fusty medieval remnant: it had turned into 'the wee magic stane' of contemporary ballad and legend – as if something was indeed presaged or portended by its removal and homecoming.

What was genuinely presaged – and generated the 'flash of lightning' – was a revival of nationalist sentiment. John MacCormick, a leading figure of the Scottish National Party (and father of Neil MacCormick, Edinburgh University's Regius Professor of Public Law and the Law of Nature and Nations) was elected as Student Rector of Glasgow University earlier the same year. The leader of the raid on Westminster Abbey, Ian Hamilton, had been the organizer of MacCormick's campaign. It would be another twenty years before the SNP became a major force in Scottish politics and won nearly a third of the vote in 1974. Yet something vital was undoubtedly fed into this long development by the escapade of 1950 – a kind of vital spark which, forty-five years later, Michael Forsyth is still able to exploit for different ends.

Are nations natural realities defined by 'blood', and capable of semi-conscious or even unconscious survival across centuries – slumbering until 'reawakened' by the challenges or convulsions of a future time? Or are they 'inventions', communities defined by an essentially modern imagination in pursuit of economic and social progress – fictions of advancement, as it were, which reconstruct the fragments of time past to suit new aims? After all, we

illustration KIM McGILLIVRAY

know that in fact the Scots recovered quickly from Edward's depradations, restablished their Kingdom at Bannockburn in 1314 and (without benefit of the Stone) went on crowning Kings and Queens for another three centuries. As for the heirlooms of statehood, Oliver Cromwell's 17th century Republic inflicted far worse damage than any English Monarch: his programme of ruthless assimilation involved the removal of Scotland's whole state archive to London (and when that 'came home' after 1660 most of it was lost at sea).

And yet, there are features in the strange story clearly capable of supporting both interpretations. History is important in disentangling it. But so is sociology: the question here must be – just what is it about modern Scottish society which favoured the surprising response of 1950 and has sustained the long upsurge that followed? Also, why does a *stone* so readily assume this sacred character? The north and east of Scotland contains a great number of sacral and runic stones from the mysterious Kingdom which came before Scotland: Pictland, whose borderland

From Sir Walter Scott down to Hugh MacDiarmid and Dunn, writers and artists have played a front-line rôle in the preservation

probably lay somewhere near Scone in Perthshire. The Coronation Stone is also known as 'the Stone of Scone', and Edward seized it from there in 1296. It is reputed to have been kept there for four centuries previously, perhaps in honour of some Dark Age unification between the Picts and the Scots advancing from the south and west – the remote founding moment of present-day Scotland. Both social anthropology and archaeology must have something to tell us about this dimension of the problem.

Incidentally, the 'dimension' has now expanded from seven to eleven hundred years (and still counting). In his poem about the Aberlemno Stone, one of the greatest Pictish monuments, Douglas Dunn discerns a cry of 'lyric nationhood' all the more moving because the nationality commemorated has almost vanished from remembrance. Almost, but not quite: death is defeated once more in Dunn's eloquent evocation of what the stone may have signified. What about the unexpected reaction of 1950? Was it a faint echo of that cry, coming out of depths the Scots scarcely knew they had? Or was the lyricism simply imaginary – a response to post-war disenchantment and imperial decline which was then projected backwards on to available fragments of the past? Whichever view is right, important psychic depths were plainly involved. Hence disciplines like psychology and social psychology should be brought to bear on these. The same is true of cultural studies: from Sir Walter Scott down to Hugh MacDiarmid and Dunn, writers and artists have played a front-line role in the preservation and revival of nationalism. Whatever destiny attaches to the Stone, we know it will turn out to be partly their work, so it would be absurd to try and decipher the story without them.

'Multidisciplinary' is the relevant term for all this. Nothing else makes sense in the study of nationalism. No-one is quite sure what the '-ism' is, but practically everything else appears to be woven into it. Partly because it falls across so many academic boundary-lines, it was rarely studied systematically or as a whole. As a distinguishable academic area it dates only from the 1940s, but the zone became much better defined through the work of the late Ernest Gellner in the 1960s (a highly personal mixture of sociology, anthropology and philosophy). Since 1989 it has manifestly grown in importance, above all politically. The number of nation-states is mounting, and the number of nationalist claims is increasing even more quickly. Not before time, universities and publishers are investing more heavily in the study of the phenomenon.

Edinburgh's 'Nationalism Studies' MSc course is only a part of this, but the tale of the Stone of Scone underlines its appropriateness. Contemporary Scotland and Edinburgh seem guaranteed to provide

It has never been beyond doubt that the dull piece of rock at Westminster Abbey is the real

abundant raw material for students, as well as a relatively calm environment to work on it. So far Scottish nationalism has been non-violent, as well as deep, ancient, complicated, romantic, popular and also weirdly institutional. For example, how much of Scotland's present-day 'identity' is actually due less to stone icons than to the astonishing battery of self-managing institutions – the Kirk, the Law, and the native Educational system – conserved by the 1707 Treaty of Union?

The story of the Destiny Stone is anything but over. Since 'the nation' is an imprecise and spiritual location, no-one can decide where it should go home to: Scone, Edinburgh Castle, Arbroath Abbey, or the new Museum of Scotland? It has also never been beyond doubt that the dull piece of rock at Westminster Abbey is the real thing. It probably is the one Edward made off with; but what if he was deceived by the monks of Scone, and an original Dark Age wonder covered with images and inscriptions still lies hidden or buried somewhere? Indiana Jones would have nothing on this. On July 4th The Scotsman editorial concluded, actually quite realistically, that:

"In these newly heady devolutionary days the return of the *soi-disant* Stone of Destiny may fan those very flames of national yearning which it has been designed to douse. There are those who insist that this stone is not the real thing at all… Now, if a mere fake may cause such a frisson, imagine if the original rock were to re-emerge, as if from some Arthurian lake!"

However things turn out, keep watching this space.

Tom Nairn is an Honorary Fellow in the Departments of Politics and Sociology at the University of Edinburgh.

Details of the Nationalism Studies MSc course may be obtained from the Administrative Secretary, Graduate School in Social Sciences, 1 Surgeons' Square, High Schools Yards, Edinburgh EH1 1LZ

one

PETS and VETS

one
'Pollyanna' and 'Ross' Yorkshire terriers. Ross is feeling a bit sorry for himself, he's pulled a muscle in his leg.

two
'Poppy' - bitch with fertility problem.

three
'Ralph' - terrapin with sore eye.

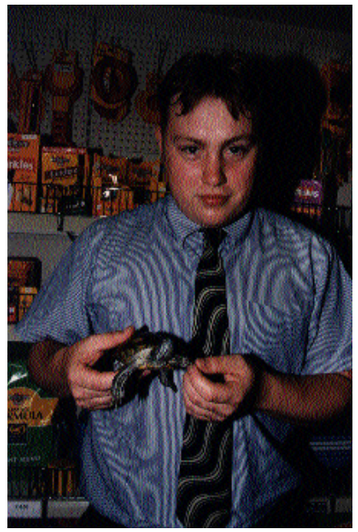
four
'Spliffy' - stray cat, to get injections.

five
'Peter' - budgie with a sore beak. He also has respiratory problems and can't fly.

The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies was founded by farrier's son William Dick in 1823. By the time of his death in 1866, the 818 students he had taught were to be found throughout the world and included the founders of veterinary schools in Canada, USA, Australia and Ireland. The School became a College in 1839, was reconstituted as an integral part of the University of Edinburgh in 1951, and became the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in 1964.

Today it's an Edinburgh institution for animal lovers and pet owners, particularly the Small Animal Practice and Clinic at Summerhall. Twenty vets, nine nurses, a radiographer and two kennel staff treat over 12,000 animals every year - everything from dogs and cats, to iguanas, guinea pigs and snakes. A new Hospital for Small Animals is planned at Easter Bush, next to the Veterinary Field Station, and fund-raising is well underway. But the 'Dick Vet' at Summerhall will continue to offer a first opinion clinic for small animals and their anxious owners.

two



three

four

five

The University has commissioned two bronze figures from Sir Eduardo Paolozzi. Professor Duncan Macmillan sees them as a symbol of the University's endeavours.

LIVING SYMBOLS

photo FRANK THURSTON

"Knowledge is wonderful, but imagination is even better." EINSTEIN

TWO YEARS AGO, Professor David Finnegan, Head of the Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology, came to see me to discuss the new Swann Building at King's Buildings. It was to be home to some of the most advanced investigations into the fundamental mechanics of life itself. Did I have any ideas for an artist who could provide something appropriate to decorate the building and symbolise the aspirations of this research? There seemed only one choice, Sir Eduardo Paolozzi.

There followed a meeting with Sir Eduardo and he responded to the idea with enthusiasm. Eventually a package was put together that made it possible to give him a commission. The last part was put in place recently with a grant from the Scottish Arts Council Lottery Fund. But Sir Eduardo's own generosity has done much to make the project possible.

His ideas have evolved over the time that has elapsed since the commission was first discussed. Indeed they will probably continue to evolve until the sculpture is actually in place. That is the way he works. But one thing has been constant. From the very start, he proposed a work based on two or more figures that would stand outside the building. The final commission is for two. Cast in bronze, they will be twice life-size, so they will stand ten feet high, be truly monumental.

But these will not be simple standing figures, like the forgotten kings and generals, redundant politicians who make up the bulk of monumental public sculpture. Instead, they are characteristic Paolozzi figures, a compound of human, mechanical, and geometric elements, cast separately, assembled it seems almost arbitrarily, and yet struggling into life. The scattered pieces of the jig-saw of understanding held together by the imagination.

So the role of the imagination in the astonishing feats of science is symbolised in their structure, but also in something else about them. From the start they were conceived as tumblers, acrobats, doing somersaults and handstands, performing feats of skill that few of us can emulate. As they are finally installed, one will be standing upright, the other standing on its head, a kind of perpetual street theatre to entertain the people working at King's Buildings, and sited so as to be visible from several directions; street theatre but also profoundly serious. They carry various mysterious implements and by their structure they pose the question: What happens when you take life apart and put it together again? Dr. Frankenstein is not far away.

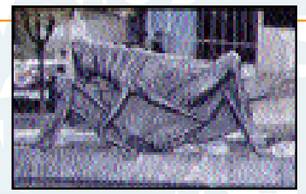
In his art, Paolozzi has worked to construct a vision of humanity that accommodates the profound changes wrought by science and technology. He has not simply looked in awe at the achievements of science. Nor has he condemned them and their impact on human life. He has commented on both these things. But he has above all kept in view the fact that science itself is the product of human aspiration powered by the imagination; that what is needed is a vision of humanity that can reconcile science with all the other human needs which may have been obscured, but have not been made redundant by the technological lives we lead.

These figures belong in a long development in Sir Eduardo's art. In the early sixties, he produced a remarkable series of machine men. Mechanical monsters, inhuman deities for a dehumanised technological world, they stepped out of Fritz Lang's Metropolis. This theme continued right through the seventies, but it was not simply pessimistic, and fifteen years or so ago, he started to look again at the classical tradition of the human figure shaped by the ideal. He turned especially to the great standing figures of archaic Greece, but sought to reconstruct them out of the fragmented, compound vision of modern life.

This classical inspiration has subsequently produced a remarkable series of works. In Edinburgh itself there are already two major public sculptures by him which reflect it. Near his birthplace in Leith Walk, there is the Manuscript of Monte Cassino, an extraordinary soliloquy on the whole theme of the humanist civilisation that derives from the classical tradition, its mighty past, its present ruined state, its doubtful future.

Then, for the Royal Bank of Scotland at South Gyle, he built the monumental Wealth of Nations, a gigantic, fragmented figure struggling into life, or a fallen giant, a permanent reminder to the bank that the true wealth of nations lies in the human potential of the imagination. Just to endorse the point, inscribed on the base is a quotation from Einstein, and it is equally relevant here at King's Buildings: "Knowledge is wonderful, but imagination is even better."

When the King's Buildings campus was begun at the end of the 1920s, this notion was evidently not so strange. All the first buildings were decorated with sculpture. Sir Robert Lorimer's Zoology Building, for



above and below:
details from Paolozzi's 'Manuscript of Monte Cassino', Leith Street in Edinburgh

'Science itself is the product of human aspiration powered by the imagination.'

instance, has a magnificent series of animal reliefs on it done by Phyllis Bone. Together, the decoration of these buildings probably constituted the largest group of works of art ever commissioned by the University. Since that brave beginning, however, there has not been much. The occasional principal commemorated in a portrait, a decorative mural in the Staff Club, but nothing significant. Art was seen as a luxury, but it is not.

A few years ago, Paolozzi put on an exhibition in the Museum of Mankind that argued why this is so. He called it Lost Maaic Kingdoms. It was an important statement of something central to his art - and to our lives. It was selected from the Museum's great ethnological collections, but he added work of his own and things that he had collected, disregarded products of modern culture. The point was twofold. The exhibition expressed regret at the loss of so many of the cultures represented in the Museum's collections, but more importantly it explored how we ourselves in our own culture have lost sight of these same magic kingdoms of the mind. And how we too need the life of the spirit and the imagination. We still need our totems and our taboos, just as much if we are scientists as if we are artists. But because our sensibility is so fractured, it needs a unique, comprehensive vision to forge something that can hold the disjointed parts together into the kind of single image that will serve that purpose for us. That is what we have here.

The result is peculiarly appropriate to the Swann Building and its function, but the sculpture will also provide a potent symbol for the whole King's Buildings campus.

This is how David Hume put it: "Tis evident that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that, however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another."

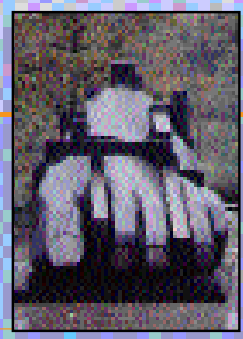
But Hume would not have supposed this was a simple equation. Nor would Paolozzi. He has recently made a great bronze figure of Newton for the British Library. As a kind of text for it, he took Blake's very ambiguous image of the father of modern science as the basis of his own figure. Blake's Newton is heroic, but he is "sunk in the waters of materialism."

Here in the same way, Paolozzi has taken his inspiration for the upright one of these two figures from an image also by Blake and from the same series of prints. It is of Cain running from the body of the murdered Abel, his hands clasped to his head in horror at what he has done. There is a parable here too perhaps. Science cannot be neutral. Moral questions are never far away. These sculptures are a fitting symbol in our time, not for the Swann Building alone, but for the University as a whole, a symbol of the complexity, the aspirations, and also the responsibilites of the quest for knowledge.

Professor Duncan Macmillan is Curator of the Talbot Rice Gallery at the University of Edinburgh

'The scattered pieces of the jigsaw of understanding held together by the imagination.'

photo FRANK THURSTON



'Characteristic Paolozzi figures, a compound of human, mechanical, and geometric elements, cast separately, assembled it seems almost arbitrarily, and yet struggling into life'

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MINE

by Owen Dudley Edwards

Born Dublin 27 July 1938. Grew up in Clontarf, North (unfashionable) side, near seafront (good walking with tide out, still unpolluted then). Asthmatic, cured at 12.

Doctor Ulster Presbyterian, daily injections from him hurt less than from all substitutes. Doctor clearly not damned.

But Catholic Church the One True Faith. Liked it (still do). Found out that imitating priests' sermons made grown-ups laugh. Liked grown-ups who talked entertainingly. Found that most who did had grown up in country, not city. Later realised most of these were teachers, school or university.

Mother a teacher from the Blackwater valley in north Cork, daughter of gamekeeper on estate of Sir Patrick Mayhew's great-aunt. Grandfather O'Sullivan served in World War I; his widow showed me his certificate of promotion in the field, but told me to close and lock the door beforehand. Teaching helped Mother escape poverty and buy her parents' home for them.

Teaching also had enabled Father's father buy a baker's shop for his father and move him out of the coalmines in their native Worcestershire. Grandfather Edwards was a Socialist who settled in Dublin with the nurse he met when he went into a London hospital to die about 1907. Grandmother poured his medicine

'Liked grown-ups who talked entertainingly. Found that most who did had grown up in country, not city. Later realised most of these

down the sink and bullied him into living forty years more. He gave his son, my father, a birthday present of H. G. Wells's The Outline of History around its year of publication, 1909. Father told me a week before his own death that he became a historian because of that book.

Father's profession is 'Historian' on my birth certificate, a euphemism for 'unemployed'. That year he had founded the first professional journal of Irish history, Irish Historical Studies with Theo Moody, a Protestant fellow-scholarship-holder at the Institute of Historical Research in London some years earlier (they washed dishes to feed themselves). Father was hired in his alma mater University College Dublin on retirement of incumbent at 77. Mother continued teaching intermittently but also worked at Celtic Studies, folklore, Irish and English literature and especially their interaction. Father's Chair was in Modern Irish History, publications spanning seven centuries.

They were great teachers. So were many family friends, and some (though not all) school and university teachers. Giants were the Kerry-born native speakers of Irish Tadhg 0 Murchadha at Belvedere and the curiously English-accented Jesuit priest Gerard Nolan: had Nolan not been promoted to the thankless task of Adviser on Drama to the ruthlessly repressive Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, thus losing me a great teacher of English Literature, my future academic life (if any) had probably been in that field. Many years later my contribution to Portraits, the official history of Belvedere, spanned the era from James Joyce (unmentionable in my school days) to myself: despite two world wars, Anglo-Irish War, Civil War, devolution and independence, it changed little in those sixty years. Neither had University College Dublin. Learning was deepened and professionalised, but we were still green Victorians.

Acquired notoriety as student when chosen by students at Queen's University Belfast to deliver Inaugural Lecture of newly-founded Humboldt Society publicised as fusion of the Two Cultures, hosts supplying identity of Professor Vincent J. Reilly of Miami University (this being protest against abominably old-hat visiting lectures): Reilly went undetected until story released after Belfast Northern Whig reported lecture as genuine. This probably

'Father's profession is 'Historian' on my birth certificate, a euphemism

accounts for my selection for Irish postgraduate scholarship in United States of America, since the US inquisitors were looking for native leadership quality (the leadership quality had come from Belfast, not Dublin). John Hopkins University granted an additional scholarship, in light of my previous research experience as assistant to Rupert Hart-Davis for The Letters of Oscar Wilde (arising from early article on forged Wilde MSS written up from collection in possession of Dublin bookseller who gave me holiday work and told me how he acquired them).

The USA 1959-65 meant training in United States history, first steps in undergraduate teaching, (admirably monitored by the diplomatic historian Waldo Heinrichs), civil rights movement sit-in campaigns under black leadership (whites having so much to unlearn in responses to violence), opposition under American leadership to American intervention in Vietnam, hitch-hiking to Presidential Conventions on expenses-less credentials from the Irish Times, a wonderfully co-operative and generous group of fellow-students at Hopkins, the discovery of the Pacific by bicycle from my first full-time teaching post at the University of Oregon.....and Barbara ('Bonnie') Balbirnie Lee, an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, who was bridesmaid at a wedding in Allentown, PA., where I was best man.

We were married two years later, my aunt saluting our engagement as 'the only sensible thing that boy has ever done'. She afterwards told me to seek and get a vacant post in Aberdeen, there being no permanent post for an American historian in Ireland (where in any case my appointment to UCD would be deemed nepotism, while anywhere else would have rightly deemed me a UCD spy, involuntary or otherwise).

It is pointless to disagree with my aunt (who has told me since Mother's death that she was acting under Mother's instructions): and having been an enthusiastic two-year student at Craiglockhart Training College thirty years earlier (which was twenty years after Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen met in the same building, then a World War I psychiatric hospital), she knew her Edinburgh.

And after two deeply rewarding years at Aberdeen, culminating in twin daughters (one a folklorist and one a nun today), we

'We were married two years later, my aunt saluting our engagement as 'the only sensible thing that boy has ever

too came to know our Edinburgh. Dublin reading in sickness and in health had taught me more of it than I had realised: Robertson's histories, Scott's poems, Stevenson's writings, Barrie's plays, Conan Doyle's structure and style, James Connolly's intellectual foundations, a bad sketch of Burke and Hare (by the first Earl of Birkenhead). More remotely still, a child's Catholic history of Scotland had taught me other ways of looking even at Catholic things - its Patrick was less the apostle of Ireland than 'the boy who was stolen by pirates'. Scots-Irish relations have a much more interesting ambiguity than Anglo-Irish: as Lenin put it, 'Who? Whom?'

My father told me when I went to Scotland that I could only succeed in teaching there if I got up the history of the country, and tried to contribute to its writing. I had been hired at Edinburgh by an Englishman, George ('Sam') Shepperson who took the same view. The work of making me a Scot was begun by my students at Aberdeen, by certain neighbours and colleagues, above all by the great medievalist Leslie Macfarlane.

And on the eve of our departure Leslie and Leila Macfarlane introduced us to our future leading Edinburgh Scottifier, Father Anthony Ross, O.P. It meant that becoming Scottish evolved from finding more about rural roots and medieval origins of the modern urbanising Edinburgh world. Perhaps the supreme shock was to realise that Arthur's Seat, amiably if sardonically outdating and outliving us all, could even be named from the great King, for the oldest Edinburgh poem is in Welsh —- Aneirin's Y Gododdin.

My American research had begun as history of Irish migration but quickly became history of American images of Ireland, and immigrants account for much though not all of their host culture's impressions of their home culture. Scotland gave me material for pursuit of similar linkage and interaction: hence my work on Burke, Hare, Conan Doyle, Connolly, Patrick MacGill, and on the Irish identities and influences on and from Burns, Scott, Carlyle, Macaulay (a Scot at one remove), Stevenson and Hugh MacDiarmid. Even my writing on the Edinburgh Festival into which Bonnie and I and the children (including the Edinburgh-born son, now a geologist) were drawn, derived in the first instance from observation of reactions to Irish productions. I am enjoying writing my current books on the impact of Ireland on Britain and American imaginations. But I have no intention of speeding their appearance by premature retirement. I still have far too much to learn from my students. Meanwhile, Edinburgh perpetually renews youth by its terrain and stimulates thought in its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural confluence, and even more as capital of the Once and Future Country.

Owen Dudley Edwards is Reader in History at the University of Edinburgh

Rosette courtesy of Carruthers Rosette Co.

Come the general election many of those on the campaign trail will be Edinburgh alumni. Gary Duncan traces the thread that has led them from student politics to the national stage.

Political Studies

"We travelled the same highway. Via student politics. We both ran student unions. So we have that. It's solid. And as we're both always saying, nothing we've encountered in the Labour movement has ever seemed to us one tenth as bad..."

So says the Labour leader's minder to an intimate in David Hare's Absence of War, the playwright's semi-fictional meditation on how Neil Kinnock came to lose the 1992 general election. Now as the parties gear up for the coming election, participants on both sides may be reflecting in much the same way on the adolescent beginnings in politics that they too made at universities.

Looking back, they may be pondering the lessons they learned outside the tutorial and the lecture room; those youthful skirmishes that then seemed so vital.

There is little doubt that the country's universities have been and remain the main nursery for its politicians. It is on campus that future MPs first acquire their taste for debate and manoeuvre. Pitting themselves against undergraduate contemporaries, they practise to persuade - and to deceive. The tangle of connections made here last through political lifetimes. Of course, Oxbridge has been and remains the most fertile breeding ground for the parliamentary species. But the Univerity of Edinburgh has been nearly as fruitful. A glance at the list of the combatants for the next election, and at the ranks of their aides and supporters, reveals a lengthy list of Edinburgh alumni.

One of those, George Foulkes, who was president of Edinburgh's Students Representative Council in 1963 and is now the front bench Labour MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, observes that his fellow alumni on the green benches of the Commons amount to "a very large number indeed.

"The total number is much more than one's perception of it," he says in a comment which is testimony to the observation of another made-in-Edinburgh politician that for all the connections "there is no Mafia" .

But if there is no Masonic-style network among Foulkes and his fellow Edinburgh graduates, the MP is quick to emphasise the importance of his time in student politics.

"It is the ideal apprenticeship," he says. Foulkes's period at Edinburgh at the start of the sixties meant he was in on the birth of perhaps the most radical era of student politics.

"It was certainly idealistic at the time," he says, recalling the great debate of the day over whether the SRC should become involved in issues outside the University such as apartheid, or should confine itself to matters that only affected "students as such".

Foulkes and fellow advocates of taking their fight to the wider world won that argument, going on to wage a successful campaign to force the University to divest itself of South African investments.

But success in the student arena is not necessarily an omen that the "glittering prizes" will follow. The MP for Carrick is a successful MP, on the frontbench. But he points out he has been overtaken by some of those who followed him into student politics.

"I have a picture of the SRC when I was President and there is this fresh-faced youth on the backbenches who had just arrived from George Watson's College."

1920. Rectorial campaign hit the headlines. David Lloyd George was elected.

'Energetic' rectorial campaigns continued into the 60s before other kinds of campaigning took over.

David Steel – a graduate, and once Senior President, became Rector in 1982.

"If you are not revolutionary when you are young, then when are you going to be revolutionary."

The youth was Malcolm Rifkind, now Tory MP for Edinburgh Pentlands and the Foreign Secretary. By an intriguing twist of fate Rifkind's dispatch box opponent these days is an exact Edinburgh contemporary, Robin Cook, regarded as the most formidable debater on Labour's benches. And Gordon Brown, now the Shadow Chancellor, also cut his teeth at Edinburgh in the late sixties and early seventies, shattering convention by becoming the University's Rector in 1972 while still a student.

"Perhaps I peaked too soon," says Foulkes ruefully.

But if he seems to agree with Hare's character about the solidity and impact of the student political experience, he disagrees when it comes to the question of this being a tougher experience than the "real" thing. If student politicking is cut-throat, it is, he says, "child's play compared with the real thing" - not that this difference stops student "hacks" playing their games in deadly earnest.

Other veterans of campus manoeuvering take different stances on the lessons that can be learned.

David Steel was also President of the Edinburgh SRC, in 1961, before going on ultimately to be Liberal leader. He agrees with Foulkes that the student arena is a good training ground. "There's no question about it," he says. But he thinks the level of nastiness in the Commons is just about the same, quoting John P Mackintosh's view that the "great thing about student politics is it teaches you how to deal with the rogues and villains".

That analysis would certainly be shared by graduates of the eighties era at Edinburgh. For politically interested students of a Labour persuasion at that time, it was the internal battles in their party, rather than the more inward-looking questions of the Union and the SRC that absorbed much of their energies.

In Edinburgh University's Labour Club in the middle of the Thatcher decade, students who are now on the bottom rung of the national political ladder were doing battle with what they saw as the "rogues and villains" of the Militant Tendency.

Moderate Labour students of the time included Pat McFadden, now an aide to Tony Blair himself, David Clark, who has risen to become a researcher for Robin Cook, and Adrian McMenamin, who will play an important backroom role during the coming general election, running Labour's much trumpeted 'rebuttal unit'. McMenamin plays down his personal role in the student struggle with Militant, recalling that he was "only the minutes secretary" of the Labour Club and how he also tried and failed three times to secure election to the SRC. But he believes what

1963-64. Students Representative Council, with Malcolm Rifkind in the third row and George Foulkes as Senior President.

he describes as the "pretty bad war" with the far-left was important. He also rejects the suggestion that for students to have fought a battle against a more radical element reflected a less "idealistic" age than, say, the sixties.

"I do not regard it as a terrible thing if people who are students and politically active are quite realistic," says the man who is now one of Blair's backroom boys.

Insisting this is not "an excuse for throwing away your ideals," McMenamin adds: "Nothing would wind us up more than the excuse people would give: if you are not revolutionary when you are young then when are you going to be revolutionary."

Explaining how Labour students played a significant role in the battle to defeat Militant led by Kinnock, McMenamin wishes it had produced a greater impact than it did.

"I would like to be able to say we made a bigger difference than we actually did because the Labour Party did not win elections and so on."

Nevertheless he believes the legacy may prove to be a lasting one: "When the Labour Party win the election next year they would not have been able to do that without the hard internal battles that were fought then. That's the achievement of my generation of students."

David Clark echoes these views, saying

"The great thing about student politics is it teaches you how to deal with the rogues and villains."

that "there is as much nastiness in student politics as in 'real' politics - as many dirty tricks". He does accept, however, that "you are not really playing for keeps in student politics".

Still, Clark also talks of his generation of Labour students as being in the "vanguard" of the reforms that have taken place in the party. And he too rejects the suggestion that the battle with Militant demonstrated any lack of idealism.

"I would not be doing the job I'm doing now if I'd lost my idealism," he says. "It's still a strong motivating factor."

But Clark, who will also be playing a backroom role in the general election, also recognises that things tend to appear more straightforward in the student arena. "When you are in your late teens and early-20s you think there are greater possibilities for change than there are..."

On the other side of the political divide, one finds as many Edinburgh alumni in Tory politics as among Labour's ranks. Charles Hendry, the MP for High Peak, was president of Edinburgh's Conservative Students from 1979 to 1980 and was on the SRC for four years. He now oversees the communications operation at Tory Central Office.

Another Edinburgh graduate of the eighties era, Alan Young, spent several years as special adviser to Ian Lang when he was Scottish Secretary. He believes it is unsurprising that so many student politicians end up in Westminster and Whitehall.

"I think the key thread that runs through student politics on to full-time career politics is that people who end up in politics usually do so because they are utterly absorbed by it. They find in universities an early outlet for that fascination."

Certainly that thread seems to be particularly strong at Edinburgh. Even now, the next generation of Edinburgh-bred politicians may be emerging - among them, perhaps, George Foulkes's son Alex. He is already following in his father's footsteps by being elected as External Convener of the University Students Association.

Gary Duncan, Parliamentary Correspondent of the Scotsman, graduated BCom from the University of Edinburgh in 1989.

TAILPIECE by Barbara Young

NURTURING Nature

Illustration ROSS GILLESPIE

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION isn't just for bird lovers, it's for everyone, and it involves much more than acquiring and managing important habitats such as nature reserves, or the species conservation work which tends to bag all the headlines - important though these things are. It embraces the philosophy that humankind and wildlife can and should co-exist, and that human progress need not always be achieved at the expense of wildlife.

One of its most important ingredients is the conservation of the enormously rich and wonderful variety of all the living things with which we share this planet, and the realisation that if we continue to destroy these things we not only impoverish and place at risk our environment, but also diminish ourselves. The new buzzword 'biodiversity' conveniently encapsulates this richness of life - a new name for something conservationists have known and cared about for years, but may not always have explained properly to others.

You think you know a country pretty well when you've grown up there, but it's amazing how much you miss or just never know about. I'm not just talking about seeing more birds and other wildlife - it goes a lot further than that. I can't look at a hillside without wondering about overgrazing, or a forestry plantation without wondering what it replaced.

Scotland, with its very big share of nationally - and internationally - important birds and habitats and rather more than its fair share of conservation problems, is very much in the thick of it where the RSPB is concerned. The essence of our work here is no better illustrated than on our Abernethy reserve which had its origins at Loch Garten in the late 1950s with the return of the osprey as a Scottish breeding bird. 'Operation Osprey' became world-famous, not just as a classic example of a protection scheme for rare breeding birds, but as a demonstration of how people could be shown birds, and how the whole idea of wildlife conservation could be revealed and explained to hundreds of thousands of people. My predecessors had dreams of a great reserve encompassing more of this fabulous area and its outstanding wildlife. They didn't call it 'biodiversity' in those days, but that was what they sought to preserve. Amazingly, it's all come to pass.

Abernethy, purchased over a period of years, is now believed to be one of the biggest nature reserves in Europe, owned by a conservation NGO, taking in not only one of the largest and best remnants of Old Caledonian Pine Forest, but also a substantial part of the CairnGorm-Braeriach plateau - which includes one of the most outstanding arctic-alpine eco-systems in Scotland. 'Part of our national heritage' might sound a tired old cliché, but that's exactly what it is. As importantly, it provides vital local employment and economic benefit for people.

> Illegal persecution of birds such as golden eagles, peregrines and

The pine forest, with its ancient granny trees, red squirrels, capercaillies and Scottish crossbills is a living link with the past, and one of the most remarkable llustrations of biodiversity I can think of anywhere. It is a perfect example, too, of how there's a whole lot more to wildlife conservation than putting a fence around something and declaring it a nature reserve. It will only survive if we learn how to manage it properly.

Understanding what makes a complex eco-system like Abernethy tick is vital if the forest is to be maintained and, indeed, improved. Part of the forest management has involved addressing the problem of overgrazing by red deer, and facing up to the reality of deer culls to reduce grazing pressure. I'm under no illusions about this, even though it means having to explain RSPB actions very carefully to a membership which might wonder why the Society is involved in such things. Conservation issues are often complex, and difficult decisions have to be made.

One of these difficult issues is the rising tide of calls for the control of birds of prey, which are accused of damaging sporting shooting. Birds of prey are specially protected by law and in most cases are still much scarcer than they should be. To talk about them increasing beyond acceptable levels is simply wrong. Illegal persecution of birds such as golden eagles, peregrines and hen harriers is rife. Focusing the debate on birds of prey distracts us all from the more important issues of effective management of habitat and game, so that there is room for both raptors and sporting shooting.

The raptor control debate generates ill-feeling between conservationists on the one hand, and landowners and their employees on the other. But when all's said and done, conservation in the wider countryside is all about cooperation. We share many common interests with other landowners, farmers and foresters, including the struggle to get them proper support in managing their land for wildlife, at the same time as for its economic value. It will be a major setback for everyone if we allow one issue to divide us.

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