



# THE SEELEY *History Faculty* Newsletter

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## A WELCOME FROM RICHARD EVANS, CHAIRMAN OF THE HISTORY FACULTY



**W**elcome to the first of what will be an annual series of Newsletters keeping Cambridge History alumni in touch with what's been happening in the Faculty, outlining recent achievements and future plans, and perhaps reviving memories of what it used to be like to study History at Cambridge.

As I write, the famous (or notorious, depending on your point of view) building in which the History Faculty has been housed since it was first opened in 1968 is undergoing extensive refurbishment. Lightsensors have already been installed in the public areas, to reduce energy consumption, and are already having their effect. It comes as a vivid reminder of the profligate days of the 1970s to be told that the architect, Sir James Stirling, originally intended all the lights to be left on all night, to provide the effect so memorably captured in the photograph of the building on the Faculty website. New, elegantly designed metal signs have been put up on every floor to help those who experience difficulty in finding their way through the maze. Over this summer, a new disabled access corridor running from the lift to the Junior Combination Room will be constructed,

while the JCR kitchen will be relocated next to the window now overlooked by the Divinity Faculty, and those who encounter the Faculty plumbing will see a distinct improvement. In the next two years we hope to install, finally, an air-conditioning or 'comfort cooling' system for the entire building that will keep the maximum temperature in summer down to a bearable 23 degrees Celsius (nearly 40 degrees have been recorded during heatwaves).

But it's what the building houses that's really important, of course, and that's the Faculty and its members. We're just beginning a period of major change in personnel, with a series of resignations and retirements. In 2009 **Professor Tim Blanning** retired, and he will be followed in 2010 by **Professor John Hatcher** and **Professor Gareth Stedman Jones**, while **Dr Adam Tooze**, **Dr Melissa Lane**, **Dr Derek Peterson** and **Dr Richard Drayton** have all gone to major Chairs, in, respectively, Yale, Princeton, Ann Arbor and King's College London. We have been fortunate to appoint **Dr Emma Spary** in eighteenth-century European History, **Dr Felicitas Becker** in African History, and **Dr Sujit Sivasundaram** in World History, while **Dr John Robertson**, from Oxford, fills the Professorship of the History of Political Thought (formerly of Political Science) and **Professor Alexandra Walsham**, from Exeter, the Chair of Modern History. And, with the help of a significant gift from Trinity College, we are in the middle of appointing a new Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History, to succeed **Jonathan Riley-Smith**, who retired as long ago as 2005. Despite the current chilly financial climate for

universities, we are determined to retain our place at the forefront of historical research and teaching, and we are full of new plans and ideas for the future.

The History Faculty at Cambridge enhanced its reputation in the 2009 Research Assessment Exercise, in which every university in the country was graded on its research achievements over the previous six years, Department by Department, to provide a basis for research infrastructure funding: 40% of the publications we entered for the exercise were graded 'world-leading', a higher percentage than in any other History department in the country except UCL, which is less than half our size. And the Faculty's staff-student team made it to the final of the inter-departmental 'university challenge' quiz put on as part of Cambridge's 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, though unfortunately we were beaten by a very well prepared team of mathematicians.

I hope you enjoy this Newsletter, and if you have any memories to share, or opinions to express about anything that's in this Newsletter, please do get in touch with us; you will find details at the back. There will be an opportunity to visit the Faculty, and meet old friends and maybe some of your old teachers too, in September's Cambridge Alumni Weekend, when the Faculty will be opening its doors to host a reception at 11 o'clock on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> September. I hope to see you there.

*Richard Evans is Regius Professor of History and President-elect of Wolfson College*



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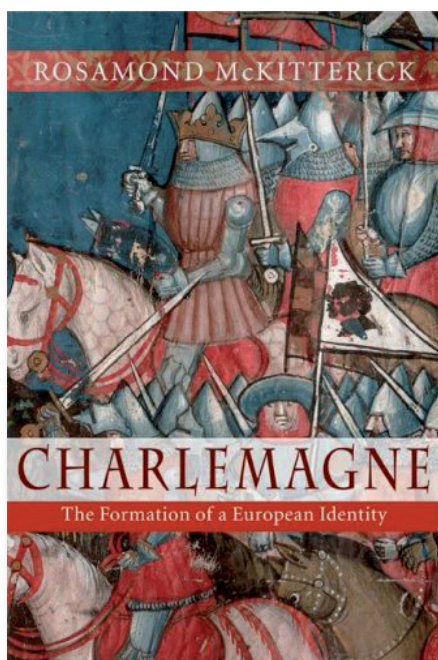
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## OUR HEINEKEN PRIZE-WINNER,

Professor Rosamond McKitterick



*Rosamond McKitterick has taught in the Faculty for more than 30 years and has written or edited more than 20 books since 1977, mainly on the Carolingian period, which have now won a very special recognition from the Royal Netherlands Academy with the award of a prestigious Heineken Prize for 2010. Her most recent books is Charlemagne: the Formation of a European Identity, published in 2008 by Cambridge University Press and (in German) by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.*



*The citation for the Heineken Prize emphasizes the extent to which your research has transformed our understanding of the Carolingian age. Can you say a little more about how your work has changed views of that era?*

All I can say is that I have always maintained a particularly strong focus on the transmission of texts and the original manuscript evidence, and an emphasis on testing the security of our evidence. I have tried to chart the development of a specifically Christian culture and learning in the Carolingian period: the emergence of a particular Frankish understanding of history and sense of the Roman and Christian past, of Carolingian historical writing, and of the special political configurations and moralized politics of the later eighth and ninth centuries. The Heineken Prize citation states that “historians long assumed that – following a lengthy period in which very few northern Europeans could read or write and ideas were transmitted orally – literacy began to revive once again in the eleventh century” and expresses the view that I have “up-ended this image completely with research that was initially considered highly controversial...Drawing on meagre source material, she has managed to sketch a surprisingly complete picture of Charlemagne and his empire, of how people then regarded their own past, and of how politics, religion and scholarship were interrelated.”

*Your recent book on Charlemagne carries the subtitle ‘The Formation of a European Identity’. In what ways did Charlemagne contribute to what one might call a European identity?*

I argue throughout the book that Charlemagne created and developed an extraordinarily enduring complex of power and knowledge, with a strong religious inflection to kingship which had far-reaching political and cultural consequences. He played a crucial role in anchoring post-Roman western Europe in its antique Roman past, not least though his patronage of Latin learning, and in cultural and religious terms he helped align western Europe with the Christian Rome of his own day. For Charlemagne, the acquisition of knowledge, and the exercise of power were yoked together, and the outcome was to create a distinctive cultural identity fundamental for the subsequent development of western Europe.

*One reading of Charlemagne’s career*

*might emphasize the mass slaughter of the Saxons and other less savoury aspects of his reign. How do you feel a historian should deal with such events?*

Any historian needs to confront the evidence for all aspects of Charlemagne’s reign head on, but at the same time avoid imposing modern values and concerns. There are in any case some curious anomalies in the evidence available. An example is the simple fact that not one of the many Carolingian palaces built in the late eighth and ninth centuries was fortified. The mass slaughter of 4,500 Saxons in one day in 782 is a very interesting case if examined in the context of Frankish and Saxon comments about it. It is first reported in a very laconic fashion in a near contemporary source (between 788 and 793) in the context of rebellion. By the time we reach Einhard’s account, written in his famous *Life of Charlemagne* (written between 814 and 817), the misfortunes of the Saxons are presented as entirely their own fault. If the figures we have of 4,500 executed and 10,000 driven into exile are in any way accurate, we have here what might in the modern world be regarded as genocide. And yet in his lament on the death of Charlemagne, the so-called ‘Saxon poet’ of the late ninth century reiterates his view that Charlemagne ‘caused my nation to know the light of faith’.

*There is a tendency nowadays to shy away from the term ‘barbarian’ and to stress instead the inheritance of Rome in early medieval western Europe. Do you think this is the right direction and can it be taken too far?*

It is manifestly the right direction in terms of surviving evidence. It might only be taken too far if the degree of change is forgotten as well. No one would suggest that the political, social, economic, religious and cultural structures and achievements of the sixth century are the same as those of the fourth. Equally there were some elements of social and economic organization in different parts of western Europe that simply ceased to exist or were violently disrupted at some stage between c. 400 and c. 600. But the dynamic relationship between all the peoples of the successor states in the West – in Gaul, Spain, north Africa, Italy, and even Britain – is wonderfully complex and interesting. The concept of the transformation of the Roman world has proved a far more productive and nuanced analytical framework than the old cruder notions of ‘decline and fall of the Roman empire’ or ‘collapse’.

# A TYPICAL DAY OF A HISTORY UNDERGRADUATE

Gemma Steinhart

**8.45am**

Wake up and realise almost late for lecture

**9.00am**

Arrive at the Faculty only to find that yes, although it is a Thursday, it is now week 5, and that lecture course only ran from week 1 to 4

**9.04am**

Enter tea room in the Faculty for the desperately needed caffeine boost

**9.58am**

Enter Seeley dressed in layers, well prepared for the temperature deficiencies

**10.00am**

Look up book in computer catalogue and see that it is available

**10.03am**

After searching the shelves, accept that the book is definitely not there

**10.06am**

Return to catalogue to find that the book is now 'on loan'

**10.20am**

Enter the UL to find said book

**11.00am**

Lost in the UL still without the book

**11.20am**

Somehow found the tea room, but not the now desperately needed book

**12.00am**

Finally leave the UL with book

Time until essay deadline: 8 hours

The life of a historian is said to be relaxed, yet we all know that even with our minimal lectures and no laboratory hours, there are times of stress. That 'crucial' book is never where we need it to be, and suddenly the essay deadline is but a few hours away.



are then challenged by world-renowned leaders in the field.

Moreover, the Faculty nowadays maximises its teaching resources by taking advantage of the technology on offer; with its wonderful website, electronic books and online lecture handouts, it brings history into the twenty-first century. Many of the courses even provide opportunities above and beyond the regular framework of teaching, for example trips to the opera.

Furthermore, where better a place to study history in 2010 than in a world-renowned educational institution, which has just celebrated its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary? From Hugo de Balsham's Peterhouse to Henry VI's King's College, a walk through town can almost compare to a journey through history.

Even as a stand-alone degree, without functioning as the prelude to further study, reading History at Cambridge certainly allows you to hone skills useful for any future employment. Whether it be law, media, business management or banking, graduates enter careers geared and ready to start their life. Providing opportunities to work in a team, improve public speaking skills and think independently, a degree in History is certainly a valuable attribute even in this modern era.

*Gemma Steinhart is an undergraduate in her third year at Murray Edwards College (formerly New Hall).*

## DR MARK GOLDIE TO TAKE OVER AS FACULTY CHAIRMAN

Reading History at Cambridge, although a challenging feat, is a marvellous opportunity to examine the past. It not only allows you to gain an insight into what happened and why, but also the future consequences of such events. From the fall of Rome to the formation of the European Union, the course is so broad that there is always something for everyone. In 2010, with such wonderful courses and new developments on offer in hundreds of courses at dozens of universities, it may seem difficult to understand why the study of the past is of such an interest and remains so popular. However, when examining the course at Cambridge, it becomes far easier to explain.

That always rushed essay, which never feels good enough to hand in, is minutely scrutinised: nothing goes amiss. Yet the supervision system, which can often feel daunting, is unsurpassable, enabling you to form your own opinions and develop your own arguments each week, which

Richard Evans steps down as Chairman of the Faculty on 1 October 2010, after two very successful years, to be replaced by Dr Mark Goldie of Churchill College, Reader in Intellectual History. He is currently working on an intellectual biography of John Locke. In the early 2000s, he led a collaborative project to publish *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice*, a substantial Restoration diary, which appeared in six volumes in 2007 to wide acclaim in the national press. He shares his teaching between the history of political thought and early modern British political history.

Meanwhile, we wish Richard Evans every success as the new President of Wolfson College.



## LIFE AS A PHD STUDENT

Alyssa Bandow

If there is such a thing as a typical Cambridge research student, I'm probably not it. Although I studied Classics as an undergraduate at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and wrote an undergraduate thesis on the ancient Athenian grain trade, I did not proceed directly to graduate studies but pursued a slightly broader and more meandering path. After a three-year career start as a commodities trader, the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake beckoned to me yet again. With the intent of eventually returning to write a doctoral dissertation, I moved to Rome to study Latin and language pedagogy with one of the Vatican's official translators. The classes during the school year were held at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where I concurrently enrolled in a philosophy course, a curriculum designed primarily for Catholic seminarians.

Although this was all quite enriching, I knew that if I wanted to contribute anything substantial to the world of knowledge, it would have to be in my native language - English, and certainly not Latin. Reluctant to repatriate to the States, I applied to do an MPhil in Ancient Philosophy in the Faculty of Classics at Cambridge. My first taste of Cambridge academia was enough to incite me to remain, but my ideal subject for a doctorate still eluded me, and I decided to move on from philosophy. Backed by the guidance and encouragement of David Abulafia, who had been talking to me about the history of the Mediterranean he has been writing for Penguin, and then of my supervisor, Peter Sarris, I hammered

out a topic designed to integrate many of my wide-ranging interests and abilities - trade and economics; social history; languages, both ancient and modern - while challenging these same abilities and interests with an area of history largely unfamiliar to me but connected to the ancient world I knew - the Byzantine world.

I am reluctant to say I have 'arrived', and certainly I hope that this academic trajectory will continue at length, but from where I sit (mostly in the Reading Room of the UL, actually), the History Faculty is an enviable place to find oneself. To start with, it is easy to take for granted the wealth of physical resources - books, manuscripts, computers, etc. - that we graduate students, particularly, have at our fingertips, even though it would be difficult to point out where else in the world it is surpassed. The seminars - whether graduate or Faculty-wide - have been enjoyable both intellectually and socially, particularly when they continue in the Granta pub. Most importantly, though, Cambridge historians are really quite supportive. Certainly, the historians with research interests mirroring my own have always freely and cheerfully given their time to discuss some point of interest or difficult aspect of my work, but for me, the most rewarding connections have been among historians in my own college, King's. From undergraduates to the most senior members, regardless of the time period or historical aspect we choose to study, our shared vocation solidifies us as a community within a community.

*Alyssa Bandow is in the second year of her PhD, working on Byzantine merchants.*

## LA POUBELLE: RUBBISH AS HISTORY

Tom Stammers

How to write the history of rubbish? In pitching my next research project, I've had to endure a fair amount of teasing, if not outright bewilderment, from those who suspect it incarnates the worst excesses of modern cultural history: frivolous, antiquarian and irrelevant. Yet I'm interested in rubbish as a way of connecting the history of humble, everyday and worn-out artefacts with urban behaviours, cultures and ideas. My focus is Paris in the 'long nineteenth century', roughly from the fall of the Bastille through to the Belle Époque. Paris has been hailed in this period as the epicentre of modernity, mother of revolution, crucible of civic redevelopment, and showcase for the commodities, department stores and shopping arcades that have entranced generations of Marxist scholars. Junk, however, represents the necessary and neglected flipside to the story of rampant consumerism: in an age of mass-production and mass-consumption, what happened to the outworn, the obsolete and the unwanted?

Thanks to the pioneering work of nineteenth-century statisticians, we have a large quantity of data about the tonnage and types of waste thrown out by Parisian households. What we lack is any attempt to make sense of what disposal meant to contemporaries, or how it shaped their attitudes towards the pace and costs of change. One way forward has been to investigate changing policies and social practices, from administrators like Eugène Poubelle (the prefect who gave his name to France's dustbins) to the disconcerting army of street-sweepers and rag-pickers who stalked the boulevards and the artistic imagination. Immortalised by Baudelaire, Manet and Atget, the *chiffonnier* could appear as an ingenious parasite, a modern Diogenes or a custodian of faded glories and yesterday's news. As the journalist Victor Fournel claimed in 1858, thanks to the rag-pickers, 'nothing can get lost in Paris'; everything, even the smallest shards and remnants, was salvaged and swept back into circulation.

But rubbish is inextricably tied to certain places and topographies. Most obvious was the distinction between centre and periphery; superfluous things and undesirable residents were both expelled out to the margins of Paris, whether the flea markets at Clignacourt, the

rancid second-hand clothing stalls of the Temple or the sprawling rubbish dump at Montfaucon (location of the gallows under the old regime). There was also the differentiation and sorting that occurred *within* institutions. For instance, beneath Hôtel Drouot – hailed from the 1850s as Europe’s premier auction house – there existed a parallel labyrinth of salesrooms known as the *mazas*, a fetid underworld of impoverished dealers with soiled and illegitimate goods. By tracing the trajectories of objects as they shuttle back and forth between such sites, I hope to cast light on the ‘politics of value’ over this period: what was kept, what was cast out, and what oscillated between trash and treasure.

Paris has often been analyzed as the theatre for revolutionary change, the city where, in Marx’s formulation, ‘all that is solid melts into air’. Yet I want in this project to explore a different vision of urban life, one in which discarded things were not so much vaporized as recycled, passing through many hands and many uses, subject to decay or reclamation. The research has so far led me not just towards the minutes of municipal meetings, but also to mud-larks, barricade-building, socialist theories of property and the Surrealist love affair with the *objet-trouvé*. Such themes perhaps have special resonance for us as historians, fellow scavengers in the ruins; but they also went to the heart of debates around the perils and potential of modern life. For some nineteenth-century critics, the mounting piles of rubbish were a horrifying sign that civilisation would eventually be swallowed up by its own excesses, buried underneath its own mounds of filth; for others, though, the dizzying turnover of objects promised a chance to re-imagine and re-order their material world.

*Tom Stammers read History at Emmanuel and was elected to a Research Fellowship at Caius in 2009.*



## PUBLIC HISTORY: CAMBRIDGE INITIATIVES

**Bernhard Fulda**



In 2005, when I was a Research Fellow, Helen Weinstein and I founded a new seminar series aimed at both junior and senior members of the Faculty called ‘Public and Popular History’. Helen has worked as a BBC Development Producer, and is now director of the newly-founded Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past at York University, which is the only such institute in the country. At a time when history was being trumpeted as the ‘new gardening’, they wanted to explore the practice and characteristics of public history in the modern world. What happens when history narratives are produced not for library bookshelves but for a mass audience? Does popularization of history automatically mean dumbing down? Who are the people who write, produce or comment on history for the wider public, and what are their motives and priorities? Over the last four years, the seminar has organized talks and panel discussions on topics such as TV history. Those taking part have included people from the media, academics, publishers. Here is a selection of names:

- *From the media*, Janice Hadlow, Controller of BBC2; Mark Damazer, Head of BBC Radio 4; Greg Neale, BBC’s *Newsnight* history correspondent; Laurence Rees, former Creative Director of BBC Television History;
- *Among historians*, David Starkey, Niall Ferguson, David Reynolds, Peter Mandler, Nigel Spivey and Simon Schaffer;

- *At a session on biography and historical novels*, Alison Weir, Stella Tillyard and Lauro Martines;
- *From the world of publishing*, Simon Winder, History Editor at Penguin, the agent Andrew Wylie and Richard Fisher, head of the Arts and Social Sciences division at Cambridge University Press;
- *Among other speakers*, Duncan Robinson, former Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, and Dame Liz Forgan, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The seminar has also organized script-writing workshops and internships. Perhaps not surprisingly, the new venture quickly developed into the Faculty’s most popular seminar series. It is the only seminar that attracts a significant number of undergraduates, as well as graduates and Faculty members with a diverse range of research backgrounds. Undergraduates have found the seminar very valuable in preparing for the Part II paper entitled *Historical Argument and Practice* that has replaced the old *General Historical Questions* paper. Events regularly attract more than 100 people: Top Gear audience numbers by Cambridge standards. The feedback received from students and participants has been enthusiastic. As usual, the seminar runs on a shoe-string budget which makes it impossible to invite US-based speakers. But if any of our readers feel they have something they can offer to the seminar, we should be delighted to see if we can fit you into our continuing programme, and we should be glad to have the chance to host you in Cambridge. Bernhard can be contacted at [ddf20@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ddf20@cam.ac.uk).

*Dr Bernhard Fulda is Fellow and Director of Studies in History at Sidney Sussex College.*



# THE SEELEY FLOURISHES

Linda Washington

*The Seeley Librarian describes daily life at the heart of the History Faculty building – not for nothing do most students call the building ‘the Seeley’.*

For several decades academics, library staff and visitors to the History Faculty building in winter were accustomed to the sight of students studying in the Seeley Library whilst dressed as if for an expedition to the Antarctic, clad in mittens, scarves and the occasional parka. Since the move to the Sidgwick Site building, library users have confronted some of the most widely-publicised and intractable structural and environmental challenges in modern architectural history. In recent years, we have been able to make great progress in remedying some of these design ‘flaws’, resealing the impressive but leaky double-skinned glass roof and installing secondary panels to the vertical glazing. Yet, while readers battled unfavourable conditions, the library continued to attract admirers and architectural students from all over the world.

Today, the Seeley’s stunning open-plan construction has come into its own as a model of a very modern library, or ‘information commons’. Constructed

to span the L-shaped teaching and administrative block, its innovative radial design seats over 300 readers, and combines a traditional loan collection with a wireless network and computer workstations which permit readers to access thousands of electronic texts and databases. Forming the heart of the building, it has also become the social focus, facilitating student ‘networking’ and the opportunity to share ideas, rather than just borrow books. Many readers base themselves in the Seeley for the entire day, arriving in groups which disperse for study, gathering together again at lectures, for coffee or as the closing bell rings. This gives it a much more companionable and supportive atmosphere for the hard-working but gregarious student than many traditionally-designed libraries, though the outer perimeter of seating does offer the option of more seclusion.

James Stirling planned the Seeley with a generous amount of shelving, and the printed collection now numbers over 90,000 volumes. It was first established in 1807 when John Symonds, Regius Professor of Modern History, gathered its nucleus of 1,000 books. In 1895, the greater part of a memorial fund commemorating Sir John Seeley’s services to the Empire and to the University was devoted to the endowment of the library. Even so, space and finance are finite and staff must now carefully tailor the acquisitions policy to support the teaching programme. Collaboration with the University Library on the acquisition of online databases, participation in the Journal Coordination Scheme and

investment in an e-book project also help to maximise the use of resources. Yet, despite repeated predictions about ‘the end of the printed book’, demand for loans has not diminished and in a single day the library staff can handle over 1,300 transactions, with over 1,400 reader visits.

The five full-time Seeley library staff are supplemented by term-time evening and weekend invigilators and one of their priorities is user education, instructing students on how to navigate an increasingly complex information network. It is gratifying for staff to observe the ‘novice’ fresher at one of the library induction sessions develop over three years into a disciplined scholar well prepared to undertake the demanding final exams, though in the last stressful few weeks of the summer term they often find themselves offering moral as well as practical support. Many challenges still lie ahead for the Seeley as it evolves alongside twenty-first century librarianship, the closer relationship between information provider and user, and the requirement for personalised content delivered not just within the confines of a building but ‘on demand’ and ‘on the move’.

*Linda Washington has been the Seeley Librarian since 1998, and was formerly at the National Army Museum and then the Whipple Library in Cambridge; her PhD was on subversive warfare against Fascist Italy from 1940 to 1943.*





## WHY I DISLIKE THE HISTORY FACULTY BUILDING

Gavin Stamp

I first entered the History Faculty building the year it opened, 1968, when I was a second-year undergraduate. I had enjoyed working in its predecessor, the ground floor of Cockerell's wonderful Old University Library, but I was predisposed to admire James Stirling's creation. I had somehow got it into my head that it was the contemporary equivalent of the tough, bloody-minded High Victorian Gothic buildings, by Butterfield, Teulon etc., that I was learning to admire. How cruelly was I disappointed. I soon realised that I was working in a building full of practical stupidities – rooms in which one could hear three lectures at once, for example, or the greenhouse effect exacerbated by its ill-considered orientation – designed by an architect who, for all his protestations, had little real interest in function and nothing but contempt for those who would use his masterpieces. Stirling has a lot to answer for, as the manifest failings, and

sheer crudenesses, of his History Faculty encouraged my growing antipathy to modernism and made me realise what a fraud so much of the cult of Cambridge New Architecture, celebrated in that eponymous paperback guide, really was. A few years later, in 1976, further informed by Edward Norman about the Faculty's problems with its architect – I particularly liked his story about how, when a BBC film crew arrived to make a film about the genius of Stirling, he made sure the gaily-painted air extractors at the apex of the glass roof were turned on so the building was functioning as designed, and as the resulting vibrations upset the cameras, the resourceful architectural genius took out the fuses – John Casey published an article I had written about the failings of the building in the *Cambridge Review*. This, I am proud to say, was the first properly critical analysis of Stirling's architecture that had appeared, but it provoked a painful correspondence with Geoffrey Elton, anguished by any criticism of the building he had helped commission. The article was noticed by, and republished by, the national architectural weekly *Building Design*. Shortly afterwards threats of physical violence were relayed to me from the great architect (then rather short of work as word was getting around about the problems with his masterpieces). In 1984, what with the exterior industrial tiles falling off and problems with the

glazing, the History Faculty seriously debated demolishing and replacing its home. I remember discussing this with Neil McKendrick, then chairman of the Faculty, and imploring him not to allow it to be demolished. Dead buildings tell no tales, and had it gone Cambridge would have created a martyr and been condemned for its philistinism in destroying a great modern masterpiece. Better that it should survive so that the failings of its architecture remain evident. Today the building seems to me a pathetic period piece, and the least successful and interesting of the three pseudo-industrial university buildings created by Stirling – the first and best, the Leicester Engineering Building, significantly being designed when he was in partnership with James Gowan. But I never imagined that the advent of Norman Foster's structure for the Law Faculty could ever have made Stirling's History Faculty appear modest and almost sensible.

*Gavin Stamp is an eminent architectural historian and an Honorary Professor at Glasgow University. He read History at Caius between 1967 and 1970.*

Do you have a more favourable view of the building? If so the editor, David Abulafia, would be glad to hear from you ([newsletter@hist.cam.ac.uk](mailto:newsletter@hist.cam.ac.uk) or at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge CB2 1TA).



## UNDER THE VOLCANO

David Abulafia

A day or two after I first became a Fellow of my College, I found myself sitting at lunch next to another History Fellow I had not yet met. He asked me what I did and I explained that my research was focussed on Italy and Sicily – indeed, I had just returned from the better part of two years spent in Rome. “Where do you go to find *your* documents?” I asked. “I work on the Manchester cotton industry,” he answered rather ruefully. My love of travel neatly combines with my historical interest in the Mediterranean, while the Italian (and Spanish) passion for *congressi*, *convegni* and *colloqui* has enabled me to enjoy the superlative hospitality of friends and colleagues in Mediterranean lands. Economic recession has rendered it less likely that one will be greeted at the conference hotel with a pile of free books, of varying interest (but it would be impolite to leave any behind), as well as a lavish folder filled with pens, pads and brochures and possibly some local ceramics or silk or leather goods, though the thoroughly excellent requirement that banks must support cultural enterprises of this sort means that the events will continue so long as the banks survive. Occasionally I have had to buy an extra suitcase for these gifts, as in Salerno a few years ago when the tally was 25 books.

However, I never fully realised the value of Mediterranean hospitality until the start of the Easter Term 2010, when I innocently wended my way to a conference in Naples, only to find that a volcano left me trapped for five days – originally, in fact, it looked as if it would be a whole week. The paradox was, of course, that it was the wrong volcano: Vesuvius was quiet and the trouble came from the edges of the Arctic. One Neapolitan colleague took me to Pompeii, which I had not visited for years, and I travelled with another volcanic refugee, from France, to see Herculaneum once again. As you can imagine, I had soon had enough of volcanoes. Meanwhile the

clock ticked in Cambridge: term began, important meetings had to be missed, and – however pleasant exile in southern Italy might seem – the sense of being trapped, for no one knew how long, occasionally dampened my enthusiasm for a rather rainy Naples, despite its extraordinary Renaissance as a vibrant, energetic and increasingly safe city with the best *espresso* and finest pizza in Italy. Traffic even stops at red lights nowadays, though there are plenty of main roads where crossing the street amid a surge of cars and scooters remains a high art form.

I was offered the use of an office at the History department of ‘Frederick II University’, on the ninth floor of a glass castle that inevitably reminded me of the Seeley, but was blessed with a view over the Bay of Naples towards Ischia and Pozzuoli. It was the usual story: large piles of heavy books were given to me and had to be put in the post, since once again I had run out of space in my luggage. In theory, one can buy the right sort of boxes at the main Post Office, but in fact, *ah! sono tutti esauriti*, they have all sold out, and so I head for stationery shops, and it is the same story there, so I go further and further, deeper and deeper into the old city, until hidden away in a remote *cartolibreria* I find a pile of jiffy bags, and then all the way back to the Post Office, where it turns out that the special book rate has just been abolished, and packages weighing 2 kilos each cost 19 Euros per jiffy bag to send... But this is Napoli, nothing is straightforward, everything takes longer than you possibly expect (indeed, if you rush things only take still longer), and that is an essential part of the experience.

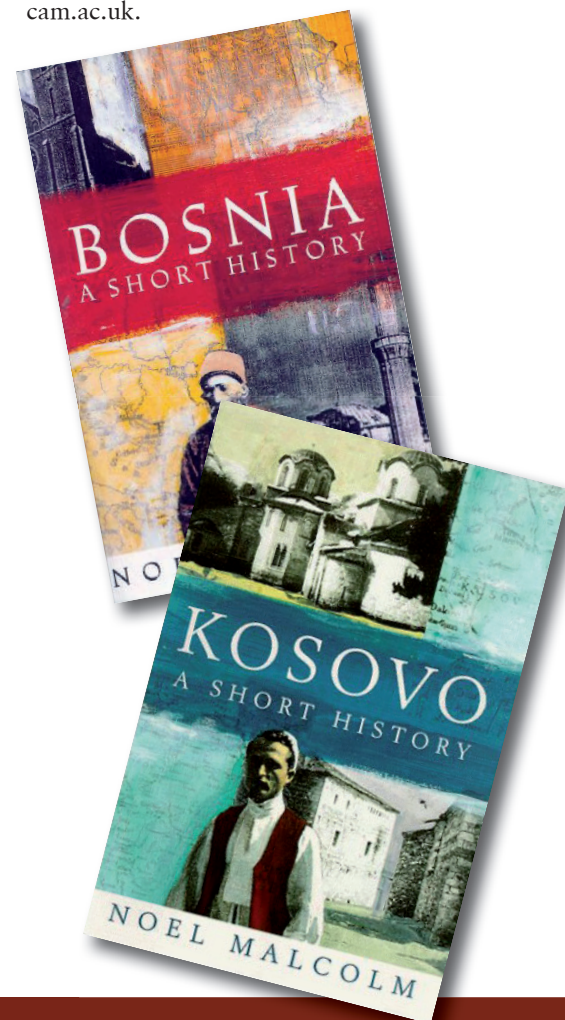
*David Abulafia, editor of this newsletter, is Professor of Mediterranean History and a Fellow of Caius.*

## STOP PRESS

New promotions: the University has announced the following promotions: Dr Simon Szreter (St John’s), from Reader to Professor; Dr Stephen Alford (King’s), from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer; Dr Carl Watkins (Magdalene), from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer.

## THE TREVELYAN LECTURES FOR 2010

The History Faculty is delighted to announce that the Trevelyan Lectures for 2010 will be delivered by Dr Noel Malcolm, FBA, Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, and formerly Fellow of Gonville and Caius College. The Trevelyan Lectures are the major annual series of visiting lectures organized by the Faculty, and they are open to all who are interested. Dr Malcolm is the author of fundamental studies of Thomas Hobbes and of much-praised histories of Bosnia and Kosovo, so it is no surprise that his diverse interests have come together and that his topic is *Early Modern Europe’s Encounters with Islam*. The lectures will be held on 28 October, 4, 11, 18 and 25 November and 2 December in the Mill Lane lecture rooms – further details from the History Faculty website or [md494@cam.ac.uk](mailto:md494@cam.ac.uk).



## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

A newsletter for alumni should be a two-way conversation. Some, most, many, maybe all our alumni will have vivid memories of the History Faculty, and we

should like to record those, as well as voices from within the Faculty: memories of colourful personalities such as John Saltmarsh of King’s or Walter Ullmann and Kitson Clark of Trinity; reactions to Gavin Stamp’s forthright views about Stirling’s History Faculty building; or suggestions about what we might include in future issues. We, of course, will want

to tell you about the many successes of what we believe to be the best Faculty or department of History in the country, and, we would also like to think, the world. If you have something to say, please contact the editor, Professor David Abulafia, at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge CB2 1TA, e-mail [newsletter@hist.cam.ac.uk](mailto:newsletter@hist.cam.ac.uk)