



# HumSci News

Keeping Friends of Human Sciences in touch

2020

## Welcome from the Head of the Institute

It is a little late to be wishing everyone a happy new year for 2021, and, in any case, we have all learned to protect such expressions of hope for the future with a barricade of caveats and crossed fingers. In looking back over the past year, and forwards to what the rest of 2021 will bring, it is impossible not to reflect on the fact that Human Sciences thinking – thinking outside the conventional boxes and silos – is going to be absolutely essential if humans are to overcome the huge challenges around health, inequality, and the climate emergency that none of us can escape (see report on the Webinar on Interdisciplinarity below – or watch the Webinar on our new [Human Sciences Youtube channel](#)).

2020 was a difficult year, in the first instance because of deaths in the department, particularly that of Marcus Banks at the early age of 60. Marcus was a firm friend of Human Sciences (as detailed below) as well as a stalwart and irreplaceable member of the School as a whole. More recently, in March 2021, we lost the even younger Iain Morley ([Remembering Dr Iain Morley | School of Anthropology & Museum Ethnography \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)), also a very good friend of the Human Sciences degree.

Those who did Finals in 2020 had a difficult time. Suddenly and at very short notice they were told that they had to prepare for online open-book exams. Gone was the psychological prop of dressing in subfusc and writing in a room full of others, all equally focused on the exam paper. In came writing on a computer, by oneself, with only self-discipline to keep one to time. In the event, the students rose to the occasion magnificently, overcame all difficulties, and were awarded a record number of First-Class degrees.

This academic year has, if anything, been even harder for Finalists. At the start of the academic year we hoped fondly that by January everything would – just maybe – be back to normal. How wrong we were. Getting through Hilary Term, with all teaching moved to Microsoft Teams, has been hard. Once again almost all exams will be online, using Inspira software that is, we are told, tried and tested in the Medical Faculty, even if it is new to us and our students.

Uncertainties about the future (and even the present) make planning ahead particularly hard. We are still firm in our commitment to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Human Sciences during the alumni weekend of 16th-18th September 2022. Exactly how it will be done will, I hope, become clear over the next six months, but we may have to live with a sub-optimal level of uncertainty even beyond that, as we have to do in so many other spheres of life as well. Please mark your diaries for those dates. If we can have a big dinner to celebrate as we did for the 40th anniversary, we will; if not, we will think of something else.

In times like these, when it is impossible to meet face to face and colleagues and students are frequently reduced to a pair of initials in a circle at the bottom of my computer screen, I am reminded

ever more forcibly how a degree as complex and wonderful as Human Sciences relies on a huge fund of good will and selfless collegiality. An extraordinary number of people all over the university give huge amounts of time and care to keep the HumSci show on the road. Only the students and Sarah-Jane White (and possibly some experienced and imaginative directors of studies) see the whole beast; the rest of us, as in the famous story of the blind men and the elephant, only see parts of the whole and, no doubt, as a consequence, have a very distorted and partial view. In that sense, with its radical division of labour and necessary mutual interdependence, with all of us reliant on the inputs and altruism (or enlightened self-interest) of others, Human Sciences could be seen as reflection of, maybe even a microcosm of, the modern world that it seeks to describe and understand. And so my thanks go to every one of those colleagues, as well as and especially to Sarah-Jane for her extraordinary efforts and commitment in keeping tabs on us all in this very trying year.

*Professor David Gellner*

### **Congratulations to:**

**Dr Alex Alvergne** who took up a permanent research position at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) at Montpellier University on 1 October 2020. Alex Alvergne held the post of Associate Professor in Biomedical Anthropology within the School of Anthropology and was a Fellow of Harris Manchester College. She was the convenor of the very popular third-year Human Sciences option on Evolutionary Medicine and Public Health and we will miss her contributions to the degree.

**Dr Susana Carvalho** who has been elected Vice-President for Ethics, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for 2020-2024 at The International Primatological Society. Susana is an Associate Professor in Palaeoanthropology in the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography and is a Fellow of St Hugh's College. She lectures and tutors for Human Evolution for both the Human Sciences Prelims paper on Genetics and Evolution and for the Finals paper on Behaviour and its Evolution which she has also convened. Susana is an Associate Director for Palaeoanthropology and Primatology at the Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique where she co-ordinates the long-term 'Paleo-Primate Project'. She runs the Oxford-Gorongosa Paleo-Primate Field School through which a number of Human Sciences students have benefited from the opportunity to gain multidisciplinary field training in animal behaviour and paleoanthropology.

**Professor Morgan Clarke** who was awarded the title of Professor of Social Anthropology in the 2020 Recognition of Distinction exercise. Morgan is a Fellow of Keble College where he is Director of Studies for Human Sciences. He is Director of the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. He is currently the Admissions Co-ordinator for Human Sciences and lectures on social anthropology for both Prelims and Finals.

**Dr Emma Cohen** who has received a major funding award from the James S. McDonell Foundation for her research into the effects of social support on fatigue in physical activity. Emma is an Associate Professor in Cognitive Anthropology in the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. She is a Fellow of Wadham College where she is Director of Studies for Human Sciences. Emma lectures and tutors on Evolution, Ontogeny, Culture in Humans for the Human Sciences paper on Behaviour and its Evolution.

**Professor Patricia Daley** who was recognised in the influential Black Powerlist 2021, published by Powerlist Magazine on 17 November 2020. Patricia is Professor of the Human Geography of Africa in the School of Geography and the Environment and Vice Principal and Helen Morag Fellow of Jesus

College. Her lectures on Borders, Migration and Citizenship for the Prelims Geography course are attended by Human Sciences students for the Society, Culture and Environment paper.

**Dr Pieter Francois** who has been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Pieter is an Associate Professor in Cultural Evolution, the Deputy Director of the Centre for the Study of Social Cohesion and the Founding Director of the Seshat: Global History Databank project. Pieter is a Fellow in Anthropology at St Benet's Hall where he is Director of Studies for Human Sciences and Tutor for Graduates.

**Professor Andrew Gosler** who was awarded the title of Professor of Ethno-ornithology in the 2020 Recognition of Distinction exercise. Andy is Director of Studies for Human Sciences at Mansfield College and has previously served as both Chair and Vice-Chair of the Institute of Human Sciences. He is the convenor of the Ecology section of the Prelims paper on Biology of Organism, the Evolution section of the Genetics and Evolution paper, the Ethnobiology section of the FHS Human Ecology paper and the Biological Conservation option. He is the Research Director of the Ethno-Ornithology World Atlas (EWA) which Andrew writes about later in this newsletter.

**Professor Vernon Reynolds** who received a lifetime Achievement Award from the International Primatological Society. Vernon is an emeritus fellow of Magdalen College and was a Departmental Lecturer in Biological Anthropology from 1972 until his retirement in 2001. His lectures on Primatology were much enjoyed by Human Sciences students. The award was primarily in recognition of his work for the Budongo Conservation Field Station which he founded in 1990.

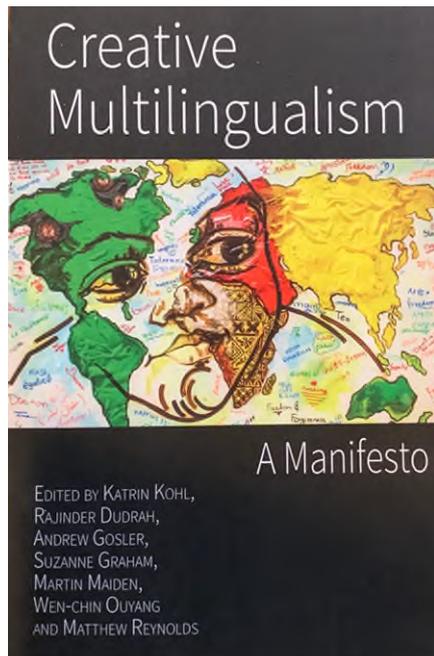
**Professor Ben Sheldon** who has been awarded the Linnean Medal in recognition of the Society's appreciation of his service in the field of Zoology. Ben is joint head of the Department of Zoology and his lectures on Animal Behaviour for the Biological Sciences degree have been attended by Human Scientists as part of the core paper on Behaviour and its Evolution. The Linnean Society of London is the world's oldest active biological society. The Linnean Medal is awarded annually to scientists for their contribution to the natural sciences.

**Dr Bronwyn Tarr**, who was awarded a 2020 Divisional Teaching Excellence Award (Early Career Stream) by the University's Social Sciences Division. Bronwyn is a Departmental Lecturer in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography and this year has given lectures and tutorials on 'Evolution, Ontogeny, Culture in Humans' to second-year Human Scientists for the core Behaviour and its Evolution paper. Bronwyn is a TORCH knowledge exchange fellow and post-doctoral research affiliate with the Social Body Lab, part of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology. The Social Sciences Divisional Teaching awards formally recognise outstanding contributions to teaching and learning and the academic development of students across the Division.

## **Ethnobiology and the Ethno-ornithology World Atlas**

Where might you find ornithologists, linguists, conservationists and anthropologists working together on issues of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development? An answer is in the young and rapidly growing discipline of Ethnobiology, as exemplified by EWA, the Ethno-ornithology World Atlas (<https://EWAtlas.net>), and the work of students and post-docs in the EWA Research group based across the two departments of Anthropology and Zoology (see: <https://ewatlas.net/news/ewa-research-group-current-students>). Initiated under a major award to Dr Gosler (then based in Zoology) from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in 2013, EWA was developed with colleagues: Dr Karen Park, Dr Felice Wyndham and Dr John Fanshawe (See <https://ewatlas.net/who-we-are>) as a public space to express the diverse ways in which people

interact or engage with birds and other animals and plants. As such, it has immense potential to affirm the connections, and promote the reconnection, of people with nature reflected in their own cultural perspectives. The intersection of nature and culture is a critical, but largely unexplored, domain for nature conservation and sustainable development.



As language is key to this, EWA's potential was recognised by being further funded by AHRC through the School of Anthropology and a major grant to Modern Languages (Creative Multilingualism see <https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/> ). In the last year of that funding EWA colleagues hosted four international meetings, two in Mansfield College, Oxford, and two in the University of Pittsburgh, and published a chapter in the ground-breaking volume that is the grant's major collective output: *Creative Multilingualism: A Manifesto* (above). EWA conferences brought linguists, ethnobiologists and conservationists together with indigenous scholars to focus on common concerns. Through EWA in 2020 were able to support indigenous communities in the Amazon to document their knowledge using conference and travel funds that would otherwise go unspent due to the pandemic. In October 2020, in

recognition of his contributions to research and teaching in ecology, evolutionary biology, ornithology, ethnobiology and conservation The title of Professor of Ethno-ornithology was conferred on Dr Gosler (formerly Associate Professor in Applied Ethnobiology and Conservation) by the University of Oxford.

Ordained Deacon in the Church of England in 2018, and Priest in 2019, and strongly reflecting his broad interests, Andy was invited to undertake a lecture tour of Aotearoa New Zealand in August 2019, speaking to diverse audiences in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin about his concerns in ecology, evolution, conservation and faith. He describes the interdisciplinary perspective of the Human Sciences as the prerequisite to healing a fractured world.

*Professor Andrew Gosler*

## **Remembering Professor Marcus Banks (1960-2020)**

It was with profound shock and sadness that the Institute learnt of the tragic death of Professor Marcus Banks in October 2020. Marcus was Professor of Visual Anthropology within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography and a Fellow of Wolfson College. He had read Social Anthropology as an undergraduate at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he went on to complete his doctorate, the subject of his research being Jainism in India and England. Marcus arrived in Oxford in 1987 initially as a 'demonstrator' in ISCA which began his long career within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography where he became the Head of the School from 2012-2016. During his career at Oxford Marcus contributed a huge amount to the Institute of Human Sciences, mostly notably as Chair of the Institute from 2002 to 2005, but also as a lecturer, examiner and tutor for the course as well as taking on other roles within the Institute. Mostly recently he was the convenor for the Prelims Anthropology course, giving the majority of lectures for this paper. He was involved in admissions interviews for Human Sciences and regularly contributed sessions to our UNIQ summer school. As a colleague, he was always patient, kind, dependable and generous with his time. His contributions to discussions at Institute meetings were always wise, courteous and fair. Marcus had a great respect for and love of nature and the environment, and over the last year or so had been a

regular attendee and supporter of the School's 'Green Team' meetings, helping to embed more sustainable practices within the School. During lockdown Marcus would take a photograph of a different flower each day during his daily exercise, attaching the photo to the e-mails he sent that day, bringing cheer to his colleagues. He will be greatly missed.

## UNIQ Summer School

Standing outside Oxford train station in June 2016, I felt weighed down by both my enormous suitcase and my nerves at the thought of spending a week in the city of dreaming (if somewhat imposing) spires. I had begun the very first day of what, unbeknownst to me at the time, would become my life as an Oxford Human Scientist. As I unpacked and settled into my little Hertford room, with noises from the King's Arms pub right outside my window, I remember being clueless as to what the week would entail and whether or not I would fit in there.

Looking back now, I still have fond memories of the week and realise how formative the whole experience was. We were guided around Oxford by two current Human Sciences students, who I looked up to in complete adoration. I remember sitting in the Pauling Centre in the stifling summer heat (perhaps a premonition of the years to follow...!), learning about everything from how to analyse hominin fossil remains, to the different folk classifications of bird species as explained by Andy Gosler. I remember being absolutely baffled by my first physiology lecture with Piers Nye about hypoxia, and slightly spooked by our visit to the Holywell Cemetery with Naomi Freud to examine life expectancy and causes of death from the perspective of Human Ecology. I came across Sarah-Jane for the first time – not realising then that she would be a presence for my entire degree, keeping all of the students and staff within the department sane. Almost immediately, I began to understand what was so special about Human Sciences at Oxford, including the kind and curious people that chose to study it.



*2019 UNIQ Summer School*

It was that initial week in June 2016 that led me to apply to Oxford. Before coming to Oxford, I had so many questions. Would I fit in here? What was so special about

Oxford? Would everybody have attended the same schools, shared similar backgrounds, and known the same people? Would every meal take place in fancy dining halls, wearing gowns and Black Tie? In retrospect, these questions seem a bit silly, but to a First Gen 17-year-old like I was, it is worries like these that can stop people from applying to places like Oxford. This is why projects like UNIQ are so crucial – for debunking some of the myths, and showing students from a host of different backgrounds why Oxford is one of the most incredible, awe-inspiring and homely places to spend three years of your academic and social life.

Coming back two years later in 2018 as an ambassador for the UNIQ programme, and again in 2019, it felt as though I'd come full circle – and having just finished my degree, I am sad to be leaving the university and city itself. Being an ambassador on the other side of things was a really interesting experience, and as I'd been a student on the summer school myself, I felt able to empathise with these 16-17 year olds, desperately trying to figure out what they wanted to study and what life at Oxford

was really like. I know for certain that my 17-year-old self would have loved to see ‘behind the scenes’ as the ambassadors did, cheerily catching up with the tutors at the end of sessions and navigating the city so effortlessly. To my delight, some of the lecturers from my own days on UNIQ continued to participate in the summer schools, and coming back to attend these lectures and seminars at the back of the room wearing a conspicuously bright yellow UNIQ top, clashing purple Ambassador lanyard and brandishing a walkie-talkie was as amusing to me as it was nostalgic.

I hope that when normality eventually begins to return, the Human Sciences department and glorious city of Oxford can welcome students, summer schoolers and alumni like me back again with open arms – though hopefully without the lanyard!

*Eleanor Piggott (St Hugh's College)*

## **‘Not my Field’ – The Importance of Interdisciplinarity in the Pandemic Era**

This was the title of our Webinar which took place on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2020 as part of the University’s Meeting Minds Global Oxford Week. The session was chaired by Professor David Gellner, our new Head of Institute, and five of our alumni spoke about the importance of the interdisciplinarity which the Human Sciences degree had introduced them to.

Dr **Dougal Jefferies**, was one of the first cohort of students to take the full three-year degree, graduating in 1973, and remembered being tutored by Niko Tinbergen and Richard Dawkins. After completing his degree, he worked as a research assistant in Biological Anthropology with Geoffrey Harrison before graduate research in Human Ecology in Australia and then going into medicine where he found the interdisciplinary approach very helpful in his career as a GP.

Dr **Lynne Jones**, another graduate from 1973, also pursued a career in medicine but focused on mental health, qualifying as a psychiatrist and then doing a doctorate on the cross-cultural study of peace and human rights activists. She brought all this together in her work in the humanitarian sector. She argued that humanitarian issues, as well as psychiatric problems, needed to be addressed through an interdisciplinary lens to get a cross-cultural and global perspective and to understand basic human needs for food, shelter and security, alongside social and psychological needs.

Professor **Hannah Bradby**, Professor of Sociology at Uppsala University, whose research looks at the intersection between health, migration and ethnicity, used the example of the disproportionate number of deaths from Covid-19 among ethnic minorities to illustrate how so many of the problems associated with the pandemic could only be understood and addressed by considering a range of social, demographic, epidemiological and cultural evidence. There are other global challenges such as climate change, antimicrobial resistance and obesity which are multi-sectoral problems needing sustained interdisciplinary solutions. This requires interdisciplinary training to be able to gather, analyse and communicate across a range of evidence ; to formulate research questions with breadth and depth and to create complex and relevant research designs.

After graduating in Human Sciences, **Rachel Stancliffe** took an MSc in Demography before working in Public Health. She is currently the Director of the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare and spoke about how her interdisciplinary training helped in making decisions based on multiple important factors. She raised the question of how the interdisciplinary thinking which the Human Sciences degree embodied could be scaled up to have a greater impact in society.

**Cathy Rogers** worked for many years as a TV producer making science documentaries before eventually returning to academia to study for a doctorate in educational neuroscience. She was shocked to discover how siloed much of academia still was, often creating barriers to interdisciplinarity with each discipline having its own methodology and valuing depth over breadth. However, the pandemic had highlighted how the world was interdisciplinary even if academia was not.

There followed a good discussion about the nature of interdisciplinarity, in which it was suggested that it begins with respect for the expertise of others. Thoughts were shared on how the processes for interdisciplinary thinking fostered by the Human Sciences degree could be formalised and built upon. You can listen to the webinar on the [Human Sciences Youtube channel](#). We'd love to hear your comments on how to encourage interdisciplinary thinking.

## **Meeting Minds Global, 12–17 April 2021**

As part of the University's Meeting Minds week in April 2021 the Institute of Human Sciences will be holding a Webinar. Dr **Emma Cohen**, Associate Professor of Cognitive Anthropology and Tutorial Fellow in Human Sciences at Wadham College, Dr **Thomas Püschel**, Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, and Dr **Rachel Tanner**, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Jenner Institute and Research Fellow at Wolfson College will discuss the topic of 'How Humans Work' from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives.

The Webinar will take place on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> April from 4pm – 5pm on Zoom. To join the Webinar register for the [University's meeting Minds Global week](#). Registration will enable you to attend any of the events taking place as part of the week across the University.

Human Sciences will also have a 'booth' at the Meeting Minds week and alumni who have registered for Meeting Minds Global will be able to call into the booth to chat (through Zoom) at advertised times during the week.

## **2020 Prizes**

### **The Bob Hiorns Prize**

This year's Bob Hiorns Prize was awarded to Sydney Vennin (St Hugh's College) for the best performance in the Final Honour School of Human Sciences.

### **The Wilma Crowther Prize**

The Wilma Crowther Prize for the best dissertation was jointly awarded to:  
Eleanor Piggott (St Hugh's College) for her dissertation on 'How the "AIDS Orphan" crisis of South Africa was constructed, and why the reality differs: An interdisciplinary understanding'  
Louis Torracinta (Wadham College) for his dissertation on 'MMR vaccine attitude and uptake research in the United Kingdom: A systematic review'  
and Sydney Vennin (St Hugh's College) for her dissertation on 'Anticipation in tree-time: How urban futures kindled the diversification of Lyon's street trees'

We asked our prize-winners to tell us about their dissertations.

## **How the “AIDS Orphan” crisis of South Africa was constructed, and why the reality differs: an interdisciplinary understanding**

When I began hurriedly researching HIV/AIDS rates in South Africa for my first dissertation proposal, I had no idea that my dissertation would come to focus on the outcomes of HIV/AIDS orphans, or that I would be one of the recipients of the Wilma Crowther prize. Having been interested in the modern history of South Africa, and the way in which this has shaped the present-day population, I knew that I wanted to carry out research in this country. Given the particularly high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, I was immediately met with tales of a population battling against this destructive virus, and how international agencies and charities (predominantly those of the “Western” world) would stride in to the rescue. As a Human Scientist, accustomed to understanding the nuances of local situations compared to global generalisations, I immediately wanted to challenge some of these notions in my writing.

Throughout the early 21st century, media across the world reported on the tragic fate of those orphaned by the HIV epidemic in South Africa. Central to the reporting was a focus on how this situation would later turn into a crisis, as these orphans would grow up in heightened levels of poverty, with no familial care or supervision, and unable to access the education and resources they would require to integrate into working adult life. After stumbling across an article written by Emma Guest about the poverty-stricken, desolate “wave of AIDS orphans” in South Africa that would turn to crime and delinquency, I was intrigued. I searched for hours to find updates about this generation of so-called AIDS orphans, to no avail. *How* did this entire generation seem to disappear? Where were the news stories, telling of their catastrophic outcomes and contribution to soaring crime rates? So began the *real* focus of my dissertation: how was the narrative of the troubled and poverty-stricken AIDS orphan turning to a life of crime constructed, and by whom?

The beauty of interdisciplinarity within the Human Sciences became evident throughout my research. I utilised the distinct but complementary disciplines of demography, sociology and anthropology in order to understand exactly how the category of the “AIDS orphan” has become imbued with a number of connotations and assumptions relating to criminal outcomes later in life. Demography, for instance, illustrated the impact of the epidemic on both national and regional scales, including the impact of HIV/AIDS in diminishing the numbers of young adults in the South African population and the consequent shift in dependency ratio. Sociology, on the other hand, provided useful theories to explain the links between particular features of orphans’ lives and their relation to criminal behaviour in later life. I contested the application of these theories in the South African context as they were written in a Western context for a Western audience. Understanding local particularities, and the criticisms of such theories, is where anthropology has proven especially useful. Anthropological studies on the subject have highlighted the empirical intricacies of orphans and criminal behaviour, and the wealth of assumptions and connotations that these categories evoke. Through an anthropological lens, I considered how even the *category* of “AIDS orphan” is a source of controversy, burdened with tropes and ideas about vulnerability and its consequences. I applied the anthropological concept of the “social life” of an object to describe how the category of the orphans appear to have “picked up” so many connotations.

My study came to a number of conclusions, though the most compelling message that I personally took away from the subject was that Human Scientists (among others) ought to consider how such categories can pick up connotations and assumptions that contribute to a wider narrative, to truly understand and mitigate the effects of a social “crisis”. Without doing so, we risk becoming well-intentioned but ill-informed rescuers, diving into situations that we do not properly understand.

*Ellie Piggott (St Hugh’s)*

## **MMR vaccine attitude and uptake research in the United Kingdom: A Systematic review**

I am very honoured to have jointly received the Wilma Crowther prize during this very unusual year, and I would like to congratulate the other winners and our entire finalist cohort on making it through the remote examinations. When I began my dissertation in late 2019, I knew I wanted to focus on vaccination access and public perception, but obviously I had no idea quite how relevant the topic would become in 2020. While I focused on British public health research of the MMR vaccine (which has been in use for over a half century), several lessons came to light in the literature which in my mind may be of relevance to our current crisis.

The first is that I've found vaccination to be as much an issue about public attitudes and perceptions as it is about basic equality of access. In the UK, many of the groups that are least likely to be vaccinated for MMR are not deliberately avoiding the vaccine due to online misinformation and 'fake news' (as is most often suggested in the UK media) but belong to key groups with reduced access to the NHS such as refugees, recent immigrants, or gypsy, roma, and traveller communities. As such, our discussions of the COVID-19 vaccine should be cognizant of these key groups who may be harder to reach but have equal or potentially higher risk of transmission of the disease. The second lesson relates more directly to interdisciplinarity - I found that those papers which utilised mixed methods research in the MMR literature were most impactful on our current understanding of the issues at hand. Indeed, I believe that if the approach and perspectives of Human Scientists, who are directly prepared to tackle a research question from several different angles, were more widely adopted, our understanding of COVID-19 and its impact on our society would likely stand to benefit.

*Louis Torracinta (Wadham)*

## **Anticipation in tree-time: how urban futures kindled the diversification of Lyon's street trees**

The streets of many other French cities are currently undergoing a 'diversification revolution'. The symmetrically arranged, identical plane trees which have for centuries lined streets' avenues are being replaced by genetically diverse maples, hackberries, cherry trees and more. These newcomer species, quietly growing, were the protagonists of my dissertation. So are those who planted them: cities' tree professionals.

Drawing on participant observation in the Trees and Landscape department of a large French city, my dissertation showed how the diversification revolution can be understood through an interdisciplinary approach to the futures of cities, trees and urban ecologies. Beyond preminent discourses on the services urban trees can provide for city-dwellers, argued that tree professionals are diversifying tree populations in order to increase trees' future "resilience".



*Lyon's Street Trees*

In a multi-level analysis, I explained the link between diversification and resilience as emerging first from tree professionals' engagement with 'tree-time' and their aspiration for transgenerational stewardship. However, I also showed how the institutional expression of the department and its'

actors' orientation with the future is changing. The practice of diversification substantiates this change from an expectation of continuity to the anticipation of change. I drew on tree professionals' knowledge of tree ecology and their understanding of anticipated global environmental changes to explore how the threats posed by climate change and emerging infections legitimise the (urban) ecological changes they enact. I concluded that it is only in light of these threats and of the relations between tree professionals and trees that diversification can be understood in its multifaceted anthropological and ecological context.

My dissertation has implications for the conceptual study of urban ecologies. The logic and practice of diversification demonstrates how 'urban natures' and human perceptions and practices are ultimately co-constitutive. The relations governing urban street diversification and the growth of 'ecological cities' more generally can be understood as complex assemblages, the study of which benefits from an interdisciplinary approach. More specifically, my research brought to the fore how multiple temporalities and futures influence the processes present in the emergence of such assemblages.

*Sydney Vennin (St Hugh's, 2020)*

*If you have any questions or are interested in hearing more about urban trees from a human sciences perspective, you can contact me at [Sydney.vennin@gmail.com](mailto:Sydney.vennin@gmail.com) and I'll gladly exchange about our leafy neighbours.*

## **Red phase: from 'old friend' cytomegalovirus to new foe SARS-CoV-2**

I am a virologist at the University of Cambridge. Normally, I study cytomegalovirus (CMV). It's a DNA virus which infects ~60% of adults and an ancient pathogen which has co-evolved with us for at least 6 million years. It might even fit into Graham Rook's definition of an 'old friend', bacteria, parasites



*Dr Charlotte Houldcroft preparing SARS-CoV-2 RNA for sequencing in Prof Ian Goodfellow's laboratory (Dept of Pathology, University of Cambridge)*

and viruses which are hypothesised to help educate our immune system. CMV doesn't usually cause symptoms in healthy people, but it's a significant problem for the immune suppressed, such as organ transplant recipients.

On 18th March 2020, university staff were told that all normal research must stop as we entered the 'red phase' of the COVID19 pandemic, with the exception of work directly focused on COVID19. On Friday 20th March, all my research was put on ice – literally at -150C in liquid nitrogen storage, as I froze down months of experiments. By 10am Monday, I was learning to sequence SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID19.

After studying Human Sciences at Wadham, I gained a PhD in Molecular Biology from the Wellcome Sanger Institute, focusing on genetic susceptibility to herpes virus infection, followed by a couple of

stints teaching Biological Anthropology, the Cambridge equivalent of HumSci, and a post-doctoral position at UCL. While in London, one of my projects was tracking the spread of another DNA virus,



*The palm-sized Minlon-sequencer*

adenovirus, between patients and across wards at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. If you know how similar the genomes of two viruses are, and how quickly mutations accumulate, you can make inferences about whether two patients are involved in a transmission chain or if they were independently infected. From early February, it became clear that the UK should be sequencing as many cases of COVID19 as possible, and I was interviewed by BBC Radio 4's Inside Science about how useful that sequencing could be. I was determined to help if I could.

Other people higher up the scientific food chain had had the same thought and set up COG-UK, a consortium of volunteer scientists from across the UK, working to sequence tens of thousands of SARS-CoV-2 genomes. I was one of the many scientists in Cambridge turning viral RNA samples from patients into cDNA which can then be sequenced on hand-held Nanopore MinION sequencers, under the experienced eye of Prof Ian Goodfellow - a veteran of sequencing Ebola virus outbreaks. The genome sequence of each virus can be used to track where the virus is spreading within and between



*Anonymised samples from COVID cases in East Anglia ready to be sequenced*

countries, and even to help establish who might have infected whom within a hospital or care home. By the time I was able to restart my CMV research, Cambridge had sequenced over 1500 SARS-CoV-2 genomes and supplied thousands more samples to other laboratories, and continues to do so. As the pandemic matures, this data will help to test the efficiency of NHS Test and Trace in the UK.

You can read about some of our findings on within-hospital transmission in the *Lancet Infectious Diseases* [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30562-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30562-4/fulltext) ; you can also read our preprint about the first wave in East Anglia's care homes <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.08.26.20182279v1> .

*Dr Charlotte Houldcroft (Wadham, 2009)*

## [Educere Alliance: The Practice of Anthropology: an introduction to anthropological methods on-line course](#)

This has been a highly valuable, painstakingly curated course. Much thought and care has clearly gone into its production. For some reason (pressure on supervisors' time, the wish to retain 'mystique' around fieldwork) detailed discussion about the practice of anthropology is neglected and researchers starting out may be expected to learn by doing, inspired by readings or past experience. I haven't seen advertised elsewhere the opportunity to scrutinise anthropological methods in depth so this course seems like a unique offering and the flexible online format has been ideal at this time. The slidecast presentations and anthropological dialogues distil the benefits of the course organisers' professional experiences in a very user-friendly format. Being able to pause and rewind and rewatch means this resource can be used flexibly. These features can make the difference between students grasping the point or not, so they are important.

*Alfred Dry (St Johns' First Year Human Scientist)*

## Graduate News

### 1974

**Charles Green** (Hertford) and **Sally Whipple** (St Anne's) met on the course in 1972 in Keble Road, two of the second ever cohort of Human Scientists to take the full three- year degree. They were married 17 years later and had a daughter, Ros. Sally had a career as a doctor, training after completing her Human Sciences degree in 1974 and Charles became an accountant. Both are now retired and having inherited an estate in north-west Shropshire in 2002, pursue a life of farming, rewilding, hosting AirB&Bs and wild campers. They are joint chairs of CPRE in the area and get involved in many local planning campaigns and local politics. Their daughter who is a professional ornithologist working for the British trust for ornithology recently married Alastair, an ecologist, lover of birds and the Antarctic. Both Ros and Alastair have Zoology degrees and their wedding was featured in *The Times*.

### 1976

**Charles MacKinnon** (Pembroke) followed a very conventional path into Finance after leaving Oxford, and give or take a couple of gaps, first when he spent his inheritance, second when he went to business school, and was a model citizen. However, in early 2000 he walked away and went back to school to take a postgraduate diploma in Garden design, and then started a design company. It was an economic failure, and went bust while busy winning gold medals at the Chelsea flower show. Charles then started a wealth management company, and this is where the Human Sciences comes in; they really tried hard to think about what people needed, as opposed to what was easy to sell them. He had become more involved with his old college, Pembroke, and started to attend lectures and read about behaviours, (e.g. Thinking fast and slow) and this then had a key determinant in how he worked, and what he did, how he made choices, both inside the company and for clients. This company worked out fine from an economic and emotional point of view, and it was sold in 2014. Charles was then tied economically, but not intellectually, to the successor companies until the end of 2019. For the last decade what he has been doing is to try to work out what makes people tick, what are their motivations, and to make sure that the various enterprises he is involved in can provide a positive response. Charles is on the board of a company that sells art online ([www.riseart.com](http://www.riseart.com)) which is in essence a complex system of algorithms to predict and provide images the customer will find pleasing; what people *say* they like is very different to what they *actually* like which in turn is different to what they *will hang* on their walls. This is all pure Human science, social structures, expectations, acceptance. He is also on the board of a company that teaches adults how to swim

([www.turnerswim.co.uk](http://www.turnerswim.co.uk)) which again is all about psychology; bodies float naturally, you do not need to swim, but you *feel* you need to swim. A lot of the work is with people who have a water phobia, a genuine terror of being in water, almost always arising from a trauma in childhood. The phobia is merely the expression of a deeper trauma that the client will very rarely wish to even acknowledge, and the instructors have been trained to recognise that, and the programmes are designed to lead people into the water around their fears, and then one day they look back and see where they are. For many, this is a cathartic experience. So the point of these examples is that the core learning about individuals, and how they operate both physically, socially and mentally that you build up while studying Human Sciences is a very fluid tool that you can use in a broad range of situations. It's such fun.

## 1982

**Sharon MacDonald** (St Catherine's), after working in various UK Universities, in 2015 moved to Berlin to take up an Alexander von Humboldt Professorship in Social Anthropology at the Humboldt University. She set up the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH – [www.carmah.berlin](http://www.carmah.berlin)) and has been able to gather a wonderful team of researchers and get involved in all kinds of debates and exhibition work that are going on. This has ranged from challenges of decolonising museums and heritage, remembering and forgetting the GDR, and questions of the anthropocene and heritage futures. In the face of Brexit, Sharon was lucky to be able to also be granted German citizenship. Getting involved in supporting European initiatives has also been close to her heart in recent years, and includes being a member of the Academic Committee of the House of European History in Brussels and a member of the Executive Board of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. But Sharon is also very happy to still have links with the UK, including being a Research Associate of the Pitt Rivers Museum, which she first spent time in as a Human Sciences student, and which is probably still her favourite museum in the world. And many relatives, including her three children, their partners, two grandchildren and a grand-dog all live in the UK. Sharon can't wait until the pandemic restrictions let me get back to see them all. And she hopes to get chance to see other Human Scientists in the not too distant and not so socially-distanced future too.

## 1991

**Jacci Bulman** (née Garside) (St John's) has a new non-fiction book coming out called *Talking God: Daring to Listen*. In it, she interviews a wide range of people with strong Christian faith, including our own human ecology and conservation tutor, Professor Andrew Gosler. The book is as much about the benefits of us learning to truly listen and understand each other, as it is about spiritual seeking. She considers how we can find unity with our beliefs, while accepting and respecting our wide human diversity. In the book, Jacci talks about the value of Human Sciences as a degree course which adopts a 'panoramic vision' of humankind, and which appreciates the discoveries we can make in the 'interlinks' of a network of connected ideas. She also considers what the word 'truth' can mean – in an absolute, conditional, relative, and poetic sense. In an interview with Professor Gosler, he describes his own fascinating ideas on 'spiritual evolution' – whereby, rather than evolution being a process of aggressive competition and 'who wins' over the 'other' being the main criterion, it could be understood as the development of 'niches' and ways to find peaceful harmony within our differences – of conflict resolution. *Talking God: Daring to Listen* is out with Lion Hudson publishers in June this year.

## 1994

**Nina Copping** (née Booth-Clibborn) (Somerville) is working with The Guy Foundation Family Trust, a charitable foundation set up to facilitate and fund exploration into quantum biology and bioenergetics

and their potential role in advancing health and medicine. Nina is relishing her role in facilitating constructive interaction and collaboration between scientists, including biologists, physicists, chemists and pharmacologists. Bringing scientists from different disciplines (and continents) but who have common interests into the (virtual!) room and seeing where the conversations lead is proving fruitful and several studies have been funded as a result. With Hum Sci as her first love she had felt that this was more than likely to be the case but says she finds it rewarding to see the value of interdisciplinary dialogue in action nonetheless. After a career in public health research and health charities she is very much enjoying this 'full circle'. It is this and the fact it's been 30 years since matriculation that has finally prompted Nina to send an update! Nina has fond memories of her Hum Sci years and would love to hear from the 1991 cohort with their news.

## 2003

**Catriona Horey** (née Matthews) (Lady Margaret Hall) is based in London with her husband and two boys and continues to love being a leadership and life coach. She works with private clients and organisations, primarily remotely, with some sessions offered in Battersea Park. Catriona also enjoys coaching people on their relationship with climate change and helping them connect with a sense of agency. In addition, she trains people in coaching skills and is one of the lead trainers at the MOE Foundation. More about Catriona's coaching journey can be found here: <https://www.thecoachsjourney.com/podcast/episode-4-catriona-horey-too-far-away-from-the-joy>. Catriona also gets great joy co-creating a podcast called "Unfurling" with Elizabeth Wainwright. Unfurling explores the power of the natural world to inform and inspire us – in our everyday lives, and in the complex challenges the world is facing – looking at topics like climate change, language, patience, confidence, listening, health, beauty, economics, and more. Unfurling is on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and all other major podcast platforms and there is a light site at <https://shows.acast.com/unfurling>.

## 2005

**Harriet Ball** (LMH) completed a PhD in Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry (King's College London). This was a fantastic experience, but she realised she wanted to be involved as a clinician as well as researcher. So she returned to Oxford to study medicine. She is now continuing her training in neurology in Bristol, including a 50% Lecturer role. She is particularly focusing on diagnosis and management of cognitive problems that fall in the grey area between neurology and psychiatry. She continues to be very grateful for the broad range of topics, and inter-disciplinary approach, that she was exposed to as a Human Scientist.

## 2007

**Anna Frangou** (Regent's Park) finished her Human Sciences undergraduate degree in 2007 after switching from Law. From 2008-2009 she did the MSc in Biodiversity Conservation and Management in the Geography department. She then worked as a research assistant in what was the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology from 2009-2010, when she started a DPhil at what was then the Life Sciences Interface Doctoral Training Centre (LSI-DTC), studying computational population genomics, specifically the interbreeding between modern humans and neandertals. The name has been changed to CDT now, and the LSI version no longer exists, but there are lots of other similar versions. Anna then moved to a postdoc in cancer genomics at the Big Data Institute (still at this university) where she has been for the past 3.5 years. For the past year or so she has got more involved in the start-up world, and in March will start a new position as a bioinformatician in a small spin out from the university called Nucleome Therapeutics.

## 2012

**Philippa Baines** (Magdalen) has been working as a copywriter in the advertising industry. Her first TV spot for Rustlers (<https://youtu.be/g9zWpTfdQU8>) won acclaim in the trade press and was selected as one of the top film ads of 2020 by Campaign Magazine. She took a new position as a copywriter and development assistant at Intermission Film agency in November, where she'll be working on film & TV/ streaming projects.

## 2013

**Hannah Beaven** (Harris Manchester) knew she wanted to do something related to the built environment and sustainable development. She did some research and found that Transport Planning is a growth area, with MSc courses offered at many good universities including a joint course between Imperial College and UCL. She was offered a place on this MSc Transport course, and won a Rees Jeffreys bursary of £10,000 to pay for the course fees. Typically, students on the course are civil engineering graduates, and occasionally geography graduates, but they were willing to accept candidates from other degrees providing they had some relevance to the Transport course and a good level of numeracy. Human Sciences, with its interdisciplinary breadth and environmental elements of the syllabus, has been an excellent foundation. Hannah was then able to apply for graduate transport planner/engineer roles – these exist with many large multi-disciplinary engineering firms and with local authorities – and she was offered a job with WSP. WSP is a huge growing company, with a workforce of approximately 8,000 in the UK and 50,000 worldwide, working on all the big UK transport projects such as HS2 and Crossrail. Although it was a bit too corporate for Hannah, it was a good training ground. With a bit of extra studying (three modules from an MSc in Civil Engineering by distance learning from Heriot-Watt University), this year, after six years at WSP, she qualified as a Chartered Civil Engineer with the Institution of Civil Engineers. The Institution of Civil Engineers is a highly regarded institution and very proud of its 200+ years of history of shaping the built environment. This year in particular, there is a big focus on members working towards Net Zero and collaborating to reduce carbon emissions. These environmental considerations are now absolutely integral to any role in the built environment. In June this year, Hannah moved from WSP to the public sector where she is now a Capital Project Manager for Wokingham Borough Council. This means she gets to shape the design of infrastructure in the borough, for example, planning how they can implement the best facilities to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport. She interacts with residents, contractors, designers, planners, environmental specialists on a daily basis and the role is very fulfilling.

## 2015

**Fleur Nash** (St Catherine's) worked for 2.5 years after graduation in a social policy consultancy, based in London and Brussels, working on evaluations of government policies and programmes for the UK government and EU commission – mainly in the area of health, social care, humanitarian aid, gender and energy. I then decided to go back into academia to do a MSc in Environment and Development at Edinburgh which led her to where she is now, doing a PhD at Cambridge in conservation. If you had told Fleur she would do a PhD when she had just finished HumSci in 2015, she would have thought you were kindly joking as she didn't think that was the path for her. But seemingly it has worked out that way and she thinks that a large part of that is the curious and questioning mindset that Human Sciences has programmed into her, that has left her with a thirst for learning and exploring new ideas. Fleur is currently out in Kenya for her research, where she is looking at the concept of participation in conservation – so how different groups of people work together in conservation projects in practice, from large INGOs to local organisations to local communities and pastoralists and the local and national government, and, how practitioners and researchers work together. Her work is based

around an action research approach, where she is working within a conservation project and learning from and with those implementing the project. This work to Fleur is exactly what Human Sciences teaches: humans and nature are interlinked and are not binary entities. Working in conservation for her is mainly about the people and how those decisions influence the non-humans and the environment - something she learnt from her first day in Human Sciences talking to Naomi around human ecology. She would love to connect with other alumni working in a similar space to share experiences and ideas

**Araminta Naylor** (Hertford) has been working as a Behavioural Science Consultant (following an MSc in Social and Cultural Psychology at LSE) for the past few years. Aside from the day job, she has spent the last year or so collaborating with other behavioural scientists from across the globe on a really exciting project - to form the [Global Association of Applied Behavioural Scientists \(GAABS\)](#). With behavioural science being such a fast-growing and unregulated field, GAABS is the world's first independent organisation aiming to safeguard and maintain the quality and standards of applied behavioural scientists. To help in this endeavour, GAABS has the likes of Daniel Kahneman (Nobel Prize Laureate), Robert Cialdini (Regents' Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University) and Maya Shankar (Google's Global Director of Behavioural Economics) on the Advisory Board. In the first month it's already seeing a truly global representation: Colombia, Singapore, Ireland, UK, Spain, US, Canada, Oman, Taiwan, and the Netherlands are just a few of the places its members are from. Araminta is enjoying being a part of such an exciting and evolving field! Anyone who wants to know more about the GAABS may be interested in a paper published in the *Journal of Behavioral Economics for Policy* on '[Changing behaviour change: The case for a Global Association of Applied Behaviour Scientists](#)'.

## 2019

**Elie Danziger** (St Hugh's) recently graduated from UCL's MSc in Medical Anthropology, focusing his dissertation research on the use of humanoid robots for therapy with autistic children in France. He is now starting an interdisciplinary PhD at the *Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale*, founded by Claude Lévi-Strauss at the Collège de France (Paris), as part of a project about the modelling of artificial life in enclosed environments. One site of ethnographic enquiry will be the Biosphere 2 programme in Arizona. Elie is also part of the 'Life in the Making' collective (<https://lifeinthemaking.net>), which brings together scientists, artists and decision-makers developing extra-academic projects (e.g. exhibitions, architecture) to rethink, and communicate on, our interactions with living systems, especially in relation to new technical systems. For more information about Human Science graduate research in Europe and related public scientific outreach, feel free to get in touch at: [e.danziger@icloud.com](mailto:e.danziger@icloud.com).

## 2020

**Esther Kaner** (St Catherine's) learned to appreciate the value of interdisciplinary research and thinking in engaging with a range of contemporary issues over the course of studying Human Sciences. In particular, she was drawn to integrated approaches that critically explore the relationship between human health and social conditions, highlighting the need for novel interventions that are biosocial from the outset. Although Human Sciences gave her ample opportunities to think through many such ideas, she worried that she would not be able to maintain this interdisciplinarity in pursuing further study. While searching through various options, the new Masters programme in Biosocial Medical Anthropology at UCL immediately grabbed Esther's attention. Now that she is a term into this course, she cannot recommend it enough for any Human Scientist interested in maintaining an interdisciplinary focus on human health. Knowledge in medical anthropology developed over the course of her undergraduate degree has really helped her feel on top of the material while the UCL

anthropology's own expertise in fields like psychological and psychiatric anthropology have opened her eyes to new areas. There is also a strong emphasis on applied research and biosocial methodologies, which the department prides itself on. This makes the course a great way to think about putting some of your ideas about interdisciplinarity into practice and will prepare you well for future biosocial doctoral research. Unfortunately, uptake to the course has been low so far, partly because it has been difficult to raise awareness of it. It would be wonderful to see more Human Sciences alumni applying as they are especially well placed to both succeed in and thoroughly enjoy the programme. If you'd like more information about applying or Esther's experience of the course, feel free to get in touch at [esther.a.kaner@gmail.com](mailto:esther.a.kaner@gmail.com). The team have also released some great videos introducing you to the course content and approaches which can be found on the UCL Anthropology YouTube page.

## Keeping in touch

### Human Sciences E-mail list

If you don't currently receive our newsletter by e-mail and would like to do so and be added to the Human Sciences e-mail list to receive updates on Human Sciences events, please contact [sarah-jane.white@ihs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sarah-jane.white@ihs.ox.ac.uk)

### Follow us on Twitter



You can also keep up with all the latest news from Human Sciences by following us on Twitter [@Oxford\\_HumSci](https://twitter.com/Oxford_HumSci) We are happy to pass on any news about HumScis which you think our followers might be interested in. Do contact [sarah-jane.white@ihs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sarah-jane.white@ihs.ox.ac.uk) if you have news for us to Tweet.

### Human Sciences Society Facebook Group



The Human Sciences Society has a group on Facebook which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/93254436688/>

### Human Sciences Linked-In Group



You can join the LinkedIn Group for Human Scientists at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8607787/>  
We are happy for HumScis to post career opportunities (job adverts and details of post-graduate courses) here.

### Human Sciences on YouTube



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