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Writtle 
College
A partner of the University of Essex

ARENA

WRITTLE COLLEGE IN HIGHER DEFINITION

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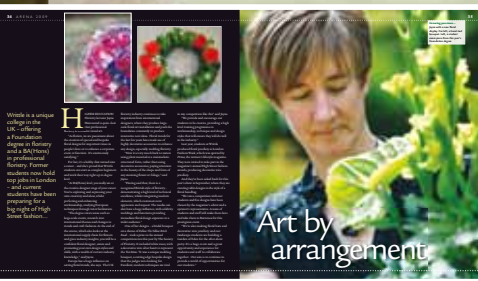
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ELCOMES TO the first edition of our new College magazine, *Arena*. We hope it will help you to discover much about Writtle that's new to you – and possibly provide a few surprises too.

The College has a long history, dating back to 1893, and we believe we have a great future. Like much of the rest of the education sector, we're facing some big challenges but we're tackling them successfully.

We grew up as an agricultural college and as recently as 1992 became a higher education institution. The early part of this century has seen some tough times but Writtle has always been a place of fantastic potential, willing to move with the times.

And so it remains. We've restructured to face the future stronger and with a clearer vision. We've four new schools and lots of new faces – and we're more efficient.

We're smaller too, with the transfer of Shuttleworth College, 65 miles from our main campus, to Bedford College. We've taken the decision to focus on higher education – while still providing further education courses. We're not moving away from further education, just shifting the balance so that, over time, we'll move from a 60:40 split to, perhaps, a 75:25 split. While our further education presence may be smaller, it will be of a higher quality, feeding into our higher education provision.

We're also growing closer links to our partner, the University of Essex, one of the UK's top 10 for research. The University, with whom we have a strong, long-standing arrangement, validates all our degrees. We are already doing joint Masters degrees and planning our first joint BSc in geography, with shared staff and the possibility of a new building. It's a positive move and is underpinning our academic credibility.

Overall, we have a distinctive course offering on a very pleasant campus. One of the areas that's been thriving is our new School of Design, which is adding to the distinctive flavour of our portfolio.

We're investing in core resources – moving away from some of our more marginal assets to help fund designs for capital building projects and other initiatives.

Our animal and equine courses have been growing strongly and horticulture remains a major field. We're focused on the core of land-based areas, committed to agriculture, and we see ourselves and what we will be doing clearly in the environmental area. That's an important response to the world we now live in. That specialised area is fundamental to the future prosperity of Writtle.

I've been asked where Writtle will be in five years. Well, we'll be more focused on higher education and one area we want to revive is the specialist agricultural area – arable agriculture is central to East Anglia and we want to become the specialist here.

Issues of designing the environment in relation to climate change will be key over the next few years. We have a genuine role to play in making that a success.

PROFESSOR DAVID BUTCHER, PRINCIPAL

FRONT COVER...
College Patron,
Alan Titchmarsh
reflects on
changing times

INSPIRATIONALLY ENVIRONMENTAL



Whether you are an international visitor, a graduate, a member of staff, a local resident, a current student, an industrial associate or simply curious about Writtle, we hope you will enjoy discovering more about our unique, distinctive and highly specialist College through the pages of *Arena*, the new annual publication designed to showcase our wealth of expertise.

Brought to you online and with a limited glossy print run, *Arena* celebrates the successes of former students – including famous TV

personalities. It highlights recent research achievements, gives you an insight into aspects about our history and shares the news that is helping to shape the world around us.

Challenges such as reducing the food waste that occurs between harvest and retailing, finding a cure for Japanese knotweed, developing groundbreaking design concepts and tackling the issues of climate change are among the serious projects being undertaken by staff and students. Alongside these, partnerships and connections that Writtle College is engaged in are covered in the magazine, all contributing to our ethos of being inspirationally environmental.

The content focuses on the work of our staff and our students within the College's four schools: Design; Horticulture; Sport, Equine & Animal Science; and Sustainable Environments, together with external contributors who are connected to them.

We are especially delighted to have contributions in this issue from national treasure Alan Titchmarsh, who is our Patron, BBC One's *The One Show* contributor Christine Walkden, a former student and lecturer at the College, and Matt James, *The City Gardener* who also studied with us – among many more. But whether contributors have celebrity status or are engaged in practical applications, all share a common passion for enhancing the environment.

No wonder that researching contributions for *Arena* has been a voyage of discovery for the editorial team. We hope you will enjoy reading the magazine as much as we enjoyed producing it and that you too will learn something new that will be of value and even inspire you within your own environment.

Do let us know what you think of *Arena*. If you have any comments, please email caroline.benyon@writtle.ac.uk Your views are valuable to us.

CAROLINE BENYON

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The professional

WHAT WRITTLE does well and wisely is adapting to changing times and staying ahead of the game. That's the view of its patron, celebrity gardener, TV and radio host and top novelist Alan Titchmarsh, who presents diplomas to successful students at the annual graduation ceremony at Chelmsford Cathedral.

"You cannot stay doing what you always did," he says. "You become extinct if you do that. Writtle has sagaciously kept an eye on the way the job market is going, the areas building up and the qualifications needed to succeed there, and those that are slackening off. When an industry shrinks, Writtle has to be careful to make sure it is not over-catering and wasting its efforts.

"The horticultural industry is much more diverse than it was with less well-defined areas, a lot of which are much more of a niche market.

"The one thing that shines through when you talk to students there – and it makes them more desirable on the jobs front – is their individual enthusiasm. We are far from the days when a degree guaranteed a job. To get to the top, you need that passion."

Alan says his involvement with the industry is now about encouraging amateur gardeners. One aspect of Writtle's offering is its garden design courses, where students learn things the proper way round. "Writtle is good at this – its students start expanding their plant vocabulary and their plant knowledge before they start talking about being a garden designer. That is entirely as it should be."

He says he's diversified quite a bit himself – a bit like Writtle. "In my case, it's been a case of spotting opportunities, recognising them when they come along.



ALAN TITCHMARSH...
It's a great honour

That and being a bit daring. At the moment I don't have a TV gardening programme but that's only because the right one hasn't come along yet."

If he's writing, a novel or his *Daily/Sunday Express* and *Gardeners' World* columns, he's finished his daily 3,500 words by 2pm and he's off out to his garden. The ITV1 afternoon chat show is doing well. It means working from September to Christmas and from mid-January to Easter. "That means the gardening months, the spring and summer, are free and I'm not bottled up in the studio. It works beautifully."

And his job as College patron? "I'm happy to stay as long as they want me. It's a great honour," he says.



CHRISTINE WALKDEN...
An exciting, innovative place

THE RESIDENT gardener on BBC One's *The One Show*, Christine Walkden, has seen both sides of life at Writtle – as a student and lecturer.

It's given her a rare insight into the organisation. "And the interesting thing about Writtle is that it has always gone forward," says Christine, who's still involved at the campus.

She studied there in the early 80s and has taught there for more than 20 years. This year she's been involved with weekend specialist courses – on vegetable growing and garden design.

Christine, arguably the most influential gardener in the UK today, has been working as a freelance for 20 years – as a plantswoman and horticulturist, lecturing nationally and internationally.

Aside from her broadcasting work – *The One Show* now attracts around four million viewers a day, and

point of view...

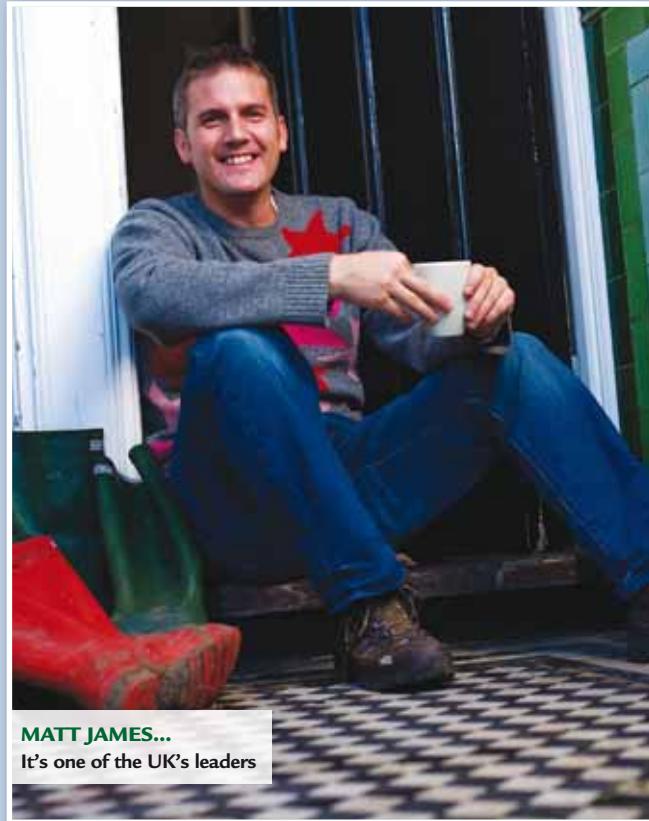


sometimes tops six million – she’s written several books as well as columns for gardening magazines and a web contribution for Quality Garden Tools.

“Writtle is an exciting, innovative place,” she says. “It’s no longer just a county college, or even a UK college, but operates in the international arena as well.

“Colleges across the UK have had to face some real challenges in recent times. They play an influential part in the lives of students and there are some phenomenal people at Writtle, very high-calibre staff committed to education and to developing students.

“I come across people from Writtle all the time in the industry. People of my generation rant and rave about it. Hopefully, we’re getting a new generation coming through that is also jumping for joy at being there. It’s a place that is forward-looking, supportive and encouraging.”



MATT JAMES...
It’s one of the UK’s leaders

I DON’T WANT to sound too sentimental but my degree from Writtle is important to me.”

The man speaking is Matt James, the gardener best known for his Channel 4 series *The City Gardener*. He also appeared on the same channel’s *Selling Houses* series and his US series *Urban Outsiders* and *Matt James’ Eco Eden* for UKTV.

Matt studied for his BSc in Horticulture at Writtle for three years until 1999. He’s been away from TV screens for a while after his move, two years ago, to Cornwall. He’s won awards for his work in recent years including Londoner of the Year: Environment and Regeneration and

two awards in California. He’s now a lecturer in garden design at University College, Falmouth.

“I wanted to try to re-engage with something else for a while. The job came up there and it was an opportunity to get back to teaching. I very much enjoy engaging with people who share my enthusiasm and passion for this subject of horticulture.”

Writtle helped nurture that enthusiasm, he says. “I absolutely loved my time there. It is a very inspiring, very enjoyable and a very professional place to study. I met some fantastic people – both staff and students – and in my eyes, and those of my compatriots, it is one of the UK’s leaders in horticultural and agricultural education provision.”

Matt says he’s still open to TV offers but is not working on anything at the moment. He’s just about to move house and will have a garden that’s ripe for development. “It’s about half the size of a football pitch, which for me is huge.

“I’m licking my lips at the prospect. I’ve lots of different projects I want to play with – lots of objets d’art I’ve been collecting over the years and plant combinations I must try.”

He says he’s been back to the Writtle campus just once in the last 10 years. “I don’t get up that way too often these days but I was in the neighbourhood and called in to see how things had developed.

“The grounds at Writtle were always something special and it was a lovely opportunity to see how things have moved on. My association with Writtle and the degree I got there is something in which I take great pride.”

Writtle's new School of Design is rapidly making a name for itself and attracting a growing number of students – and lecturers We've been finding out more...

JEFF LOGSDON, the head of the School of Design, has travelled a circuitous route to get to Writtle. His journey started in Iowa, in America's mid-West, and has progressed via Harvard, Versailles and then Edinburgh before his arrival in this Essex village five years ago.

In the last three years, the school, which has its origins in garden design, has grown to a faculty of 18 staff and around 140 students. On offer are undergraduate and Masters degrees and, now, a PhD in Landscape Architecture. Three new lecturers have just arrived – one from Greece, another from Turkey and the last from America.

The tally of students has risen to 170 this month with plans to grow that to around 240 in the next few years.

Four new degrees have been added this academic year and next – two BAs, one in Art and Design and the other in Fine Art, and two MAs, one in Fine Art and the Environment and the other Environmental Design and Management.

Jeff says: "All the schools at Writtle have seen an evolution from its days as an agricultural and horticultural college. With the authority to establish a genuine school of design, we've had a great opportunity to create a really open, progressive and creative dimension to the College and the freedom to explore new areas.

"We have developed an ethos for the school by bringing together art, landscape and architecture as the three disciplines that inform each other. It's relatively rare for a school to grow from landscape and gardens but that is what we're doing – and it's working."

Jeff is keen to stress the theory to practice approach that flows through all the courses. "We try to develop a good theoretical background and then

apply it. We are building a programme and a reputation for high standards of skill alongside conceptual and theoretical knowledge.

"We emphasise the context of a place and its links to its surroundings and the outside world. For example, in interior architecture if a site was selected for a music venue or other public space, we would want to understand the building, the site itself, how it linked to its neighbourhood and the systems of the city. Students need to understand all aspects as part of their research programme."

Undergraduates progress to the third-year final design project, which is one of their choosing, based on their own interests and certain criteria. Most feature real sites and the vast majority of organisations involved with the site will be given access to information and final designs, because of the help they lend.

The College has a large and growing network of alumni, practitioners and colleagues who form a big support network. "A lot of our projects are in London, with some organisations keen to have our intense design input brought to their situation," said Jeff. "Whether they become a reality or not is another question."

Many graduates traditionally take a year out before returning to do a postgraduate degree – making five years in total. Among a range of external partners, the school is also working with the RSA on its art and ecology programme.

The postgraduate Landscape Architecture course has been accredited by the Landscape Institute and is one of the school's greatest achievements, says Jeff. "It's one of the top programmes in the country and is creating a real reputation for Writtle," he said.

Designs on the future



SIDELINES

◆ **WRITTLE'S MASTERS** in International Horticulture has a reputation second to none with students attracted from all over the world by its excellence.

Eighteen of the 28 students taking the course in the past two years have been international students.

The Masters is jointly offered with HAS Den Bosch (University of Applied Sciences), Netherlands – partners with Writtle since 1995 – and is an advanced course for students who want to develop an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the international production and marketing of horticultural products.

Students spend time at both institutions during their course.



◆ **AS SENIOR LECTURER** in landscape management, Andy Boorman has created perhaps one of the prettiest areas of the Writtle site – a half-hectare meadow of native wildflower species, which is used for study by undergraduates and graduates and for his own research into creating sustainable wildflower areas.

Since 2001, Andy has been undertaking a matched experiment with Dr James Hitchmough at Sheffield University using the same protocols, designs and treatments and comparing results for plants suited to Essex or Yorkshire.

Andy has discovered traditional September mowing may not create best conditions for wildflowers: “It encourages grasses by letting the light in. A cut during the dormant season – late winter or early spring – gives the wildflowers a better chance.”



◆ **A GROUP OF** Writtle students could joke that their course project was a real fag – they constructed a smoking shelter as part of their horticulture degree.

The dozen 2nd year students built a decorative, softwood shelter and landscaped it in half an acre. They made timber benches set in black Indian limestone paving and crushed silver granite, and sheltered the site with six white birch trees. Raised beds completed the effect.

“The shelter complies with a legal obligation to provide an outside smoking area, but forms a high-quality, attractive part of the site,” said module leader Greg Allen, senior lecturer in landscape studies.

He said the students developed their design and practical skills, but also learned the business side of running a landscape contract, such as bills of quantity, specification, construction drawings and contract procedures.



Designer Profile

Emily Rachel Barrett

Early Years:

Emily was raised in Witham, Essex, living in a property within the Romanesque Revivalist Church.

Training:

During 1988-91 Emily gained a Higher National Diploma in Landscape Construction at Writtle College. In 2008 Emily returned to Writtle, joining the staff of the Site Landscaper and Garden Design Programme. Employed by Writtle for 10 years, she has worked on all aspects of a professional design.

Background:

Emily has worked as a designer for over 10 years within the field of residential garden design. Initially working for 4 years as a Landscape Construction or Design Technician, she took on more design roles and subsequently becoming self-employed as a site manager for her own clients and also for 3 years as a landscape architect.

Personal Design Philosophy:

Her aim as a designer, whether for private residential gardens or public open spaces, is to improve the quality of life for the user by improving the living environment and providing a safe, functional and all-encompassing design, leaving a legacy for future generations.

Interests Outside of Work:

Emily naturally enjoys working in her own garden, but also enjoys voluntary work, decorating and home improvements, home fitting and sitting out.

Project Profile

Rickstones Community Park

Location and Context:

The site is located in the village of Rickstones, South Essex, near the A12, with a view of the sea. The site is a mix of residential and commercial buildings, with a mix of housing types, from small terraced houses to large detached houses. The site is a mix of residential and commercial buildings, with a mix of housing types, from small terraced houses to large detached houses.

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Design Statement:

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SIDELINES

◆ **NEW RESEARCH** at Writtle is helping explode the myth that male horses are superior to females.

Geldings account for around 70 per cent of competition horses – mainly because of anecdotal evidence they are easier to train, have better temperaments and perform better in competitions.

Now the College has conducted a statistical analysis of the performances of 1,200 male and female eventing horses.

“The analysis showed almost no difference in performance,” said Dr Tim Whitaker, head of the Centre for Equine and Animal Science and head of Research at the College. “Our results challenge what people are doing in eventing.”

Specialist trade media have published the findings, including *Horse and Hound* and *Horse Deals*.

Former student Lisa Redwin, who collected the original data as part of her BSc Equine Studies course, now works in the City.

◆ **WRITTLE COLLEGE HAS** a proud record in encouraging hearing impaired students to apply for courses and supporting them in their studies.

There were nine such students at the College in the last academic year, seven at FE level and two HE. A small team of trained communicators assists the students, with sign language for the profoundly deaf, and helping others with note-taking to avoid language discrimination.

In May, a special open day was held for groups of deaf Essex 11-16-year-olds, providing a taster for various courses, including a science session on ‘What’s inside your dog?’

Margaret Hopkinson, co-ordinator of deaf students, said many of the deaf students had excelled at the College, with one achieving a first class honours degree, and others going on to running their own businesses, such as dog-grooming.

About half the world’s food production gets lost between the time it is harvested and the time it reaches consumers. Writtle is a UK specialist in dealing with damage, disease, storage and other losses...



Harvest

IT’S CALLED POSTHARVEST and if companies and food growers across the globe took it seriously, it could make a mighty contribution to solving many of the world’s food shortages.

That’s the view of reader in postharvest technology Dr Chris Bishop, part of the College’s postharvest unit, which carries out commercial trials and consultancy and also supports a range of research by PhD and MSc students and others.

Writtle is working in specialised areas and is highly regarded in the area of high-value horticultural crops – fruit and vegetables, including potatoes. It is also involved with work on both the transport and packaging of cut flowers.

Chris’s unit has worked, in the last two years, with some of the UK’s major supermarkets – including Morrison’s, Sainsbury’s and Somerfield. Chris is also on the pesticide reduction panel at Marks & Spencer.

On one occasion, the unit was able

to tell one chain that what they thought was a disease issue was actually handling damage that allowed disease to get in. “We can reduce losses or produce a more attractive product so that more people buy it. We don’t always tell them what they want to hear but that’s not what we are paid for.

“Just to put this in perspective, I think it’s fair to say there will always be some losses,” said Chris. “What we’re talking about is a matter of education,

AROUND THE WORLD



The postharvest team is involved with projects around the world – and mainly in Africa. Reader Dr Chris Bishop has worked recently in Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Egypt, Ethiopia and Rwanda.

◆ **In Rwanda**, he helped design a cold store at the airport in the country's capital, Kigali, as well as the handling and grading facilities there. He prepared tender documents – which ran to 100 pages – to build the infrastructure, designed to World Bank standards.

◆ **In Egypt**, where work has finished for the moment, he visited around 20 farms that are producing beans, strawberries, grapes and spring onions. On one, he designed cooling and storage facilities that were then used to demonstrate good practice to other exporters.

◆ **In Ethiopia**, he was involved with hands-on training and helping to set up trials to evaluate procedures. Two more visits are planned in the next few months.

◆ The unit also liaises with other universities, such as the **University of California Davis**, one of America's top public research universities, and the **University of Almeria** in Spain.

home

training or better storage facilities. We'll always have the possibility of some mould on strawberries, for example.

“In most cases, we could reduce the amount of current wastage by up to half. In the UK, we're good at storage because, fortunately, we don't have the very high or low temperatures of some parts of the world. And some parts of the Third World are doing a good job, for example Kenya with its export crops.

“Globally though, there are high losses. Take potatoes – in this country, losses are round 10 per cent. In Mexico, they can be around the 30 per cent mark. We could reduce that to 20 per cent easily and to around 15 per cent at best.”

Chris has worked on assignments around the world and says some of the work can be solved with low-tech solutions. Keeping things cool from the moment of harvest and making sure it is not left in the field for very

long is an easy way to make savings.

“The difficulty is that in the past people would pick things and eat them in 24 hours or so. Now they want to sell part of the harvest and that's where losses have become significant. Another factor, in some parts of the world, is that people accept that losses are inevitable. Part of the job is persuading people that they can change things.

“And there are techniques to be learned. If you cool, say, plums wrongly

there are problems. If they go down to 5°C, there's chilling damage. If you go down to 1°C, there's no damage. Chill bananas to 5°C and they go grey and they don't taste good. For bananas, about 13.5°C is about as low as you'd go.”

Work on packaging, some funded by WRAP in the UK, is also under way and, on site, the College is working with Fresh Technologies on the use of bio-degradable packaging that will also prolong the life of produce.

Writtle College is the sixth name that's been used for the institution since it opened its doors in 1893. There have been one or two other changes too...



Then and now... the main College building in 1960 and today...

The test of time



Going Dutch... flashback to 1899 and the members of a study tour group to Holland, one of two during that year

Time for reflection...
Clive with the College arms, originally presented on November 10, 1951, by the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, Sir Francis Whitmore

IT BEGAN LIFE as the **County Laboratories**. In 1903 it became the **County Technical Laboratories**, with facilities including two lecture rooms, three biology labs, three chemistry labs, butter and cheese-making rooms, two cheese-ripening rooms and a museum.

By 1912 it had moved on to be the **East Anglian Institute of Agriculture** and by 1939 it was **Essex Institute of Agriculture**. Thirty years later, **Writtle Agricultural College** was unveiled and it wasn't until 1989 that it became commonly known as **Writtle College**.

During all those six names changes over all of those 116 years, it has still had just 12 principals – and that includes four in four years between 1909 and 1912!

The man at Writtle who knows more than many about its history is postharvest researcher and lecturer Clive Beale. He was co-author, with former warden Geoff Owen, of the centenary history of the College, *Writtle College – the first hundred years*, published in 1993 – and one of the world's worst-selling publications of all time, according to him!

“We took about 18 months to research and write the book, which was designed to have lots of snippets of information showing the personality of the place through the years.”

The College owes its origins to the temperance movement of the late 1880s. A tax on spirits, called whisky money, had been introduced in the Budget of 1890 in order to compensate brewers for losses resulting from the closure of pubs. However an enlightened MP argued that a total of £350,000 of the revenue should be diverted “for the purposes of agricultural, commercial and technical instruction, as defined in clause 8 of The Technical Instruction Act of 1889.” And so, Writtle College was born.

The book carries lots of anecdotal detail, such as the 10pm bed-time rule of the women's hostel in the 1930s and the Principal's expense allowance of £15 per year for the official use of his motorcycle in 1911.

During his research Clive interviewed several past students, including May Cutts who had been a student at the time of the Armistice in 1918. She recounted how she would attend four courses per year, each lasting three or four weeks. In between she looked after the vegetables and milked the cow at a large house in Writtle village. As a star pupil, she was offered a post at Kew but turned it down due to the lack of accommodation. When the officers returned from the war, she found herself the only female student among 80 men.

Clive has found it interesting how the curriculum has changed over the years. “Back in the 1890s the emphasis was on horticulture, dairy husbandry and the emerging area of agricultural science. The care of horses would have been on the curriculum because of their use as draught animals. However, by the 1920s an agricultural tractor course had been developed for ex-servicemen. Move on to the 1990s and horses had reappeared on the curriculum, this time for leisure.”

Clive, who is involved with College research for some of Britain's biggest supermarkets, says that several research areas have re-emerged over the years. “For instance, the effect of increased salinity on soils and crops was being investigated back in 1897, after the flooding of 20,000 ha of coastal Essex when the sea walls breached after a storm. Today we have a PhD student looking at the same topic in the context of climate change and rising sea levels.”

As Writtle's motto says, *Time tries the truth in everything*. Writtle has clearly stood the test of time.

◆ **FORMER HOCKEY INTERNATIONAL**

Kirsten Spencer has hung up her stick after two decades at the top of her sport. Kirsten, senior lecturer and newly appointed course manager of Sports and Exercise Performance, has decided her body can take only so much. “You need to train a lot and it's taking me longer to recover from niggling injuries,” said Kirsten.

She began playing hockey at five, progressed to senior level with Clifton and Ipswich, and represented England at under-18, under-21 and full international level.

A snapped cruciate ligament in 1992 cruelly ended her international career when just 23 and prevented her being in the winning England team at that year's European competition. She continued at Premier level for Ipswich, winning League and Cup, plus silver and bronze in European cup competitions.

“It's a great sport and I've loved the team spirit and social side,” said Kirsten, who will continue coaching and take further exams. She's also working towards submitting her PhD on the effect of coach gender on team performance.



◆ **WRITTLÉ PROVIDES STUDENTS** with the opportunity to progress up the academic ladder at one establishment – many students undertake an FE course and then continue on to HE.

James Oxley entered the College as a 17-year-old, taking a National Certificate in Animal Care. He progressed to a BSc (Hons) in Animal Management graduating this summer, and in September goes one further when he embarks on his Masters.

Katherine Farr, HE lecturer in animal science, said: “James is a prime example of the progression that is possible at Writtle. He has developed enormously over the years and has excelled at degree level.”

◆ **WRITTLE COLLEGE IS HELPING** secure the future of an extremely rare, endangered wildflower – the Sick-leaved Hare’s-ear which is believed to grow at just one site in Britain, a small roadside area to the west of Chelmsford. A member of the carrot family, it was first recorded in the UK by Victorian botanists.

The plants do not reproduce easily, and the School of Sustainable Environments has been gathering seeds under licence, propagating new plants, and planting them back in the wild.

Project leader Alan Roscoe, said: “As far as we know, the plant is now only found in the wild at the Essex site and is, arguably, Britain’s rarest plant. We have increased the wild population by a massive 38 per cent!”

John Cullum, senior lecturer in the School of Horticulture, has been contributing his expertise in seed germination and horticulture degree student Gillian Butcher looked at ways of overcoming the plant’s seed dormancy as her final year dissertation.



◆ **VALENTINE’S DAY ROMANTICS** could be boosted by a greenhouse project at Writtle College!

Students have worked with local plant breeders Seedlynx of Maldon to grow a new range of winter flowering sweet peas under glass with an August / September planting enabling harvesting by February 14, one of the biggest days for florists.

The sweet peas grew well without supplementary heat, other than frost protection, and achieved excellent quality and stem length. Undergraduate and postgraduate horticulture students managed the trial, and professional floristry students made innovative use of the flowers. “Our trials indicate winter-grown sweet peas have commercial potential, especially with growers feeling the pinch from high energy costs,” said Simon Hart, senior lecturer in commercial horticulture.

◆ **STUDENT JOE IACOBUCCI** has been awarded the Seabrook Scholarship 2009 at Writtle College.

Joe, from Ipswich, will receive £3,000 a year to attend the two-year Foundation Degree in Horticulture with Landscape Construction, having achieved his National Award with distinction in Horticulture and Garden Design at Otley College, Suffolk.

The scholarship is sponsored by Easy Gardener gardening products and named after gardening writer and broadcaster Peter Seabrook, a former student and Fellow of the College, who writes a weekly gardening column in *The Sun*.

It is awarded by a judging panel to a student who is able to demonstrate a commitment to, and excellence in, practical and applied horticulture.



Mark's top

Winning combinations...

The College offers a Sports and Exercise Performance degree course either on its own, or with business or event management, as well as a foundation degree

Talk to Mark Walker and he'll soon tell you there's more to sport than just speed, strength and stamina...

for effort

FOR MARK WALKER – who has been course manager for sport and exercise at the College for two and a half years – there are a myriad of factors to take into account with sport and exercise.

The psychological side of competitive sport for a start. “We look at why some choke at crucial points, or how mental rehearsal can improve performance. Sport is not just about pure physical ability,” he said.

Students also use video analysis equipment and software housed in the Lordships Science Centre to analyse key aspects of a team's play.

“It might be a sequence of unbroken passes, successful tackles, how many times they lose the ball. All things that can pinpoint strengths and weaknesses that teams and individuals can work on,” said Mark.

For his own part, Mark has been undertaking research into something rather cryptically entitled the Central Governor Model of Fatigue. Mark puts it more graphically: “It's how the brain intervenes to prevent you from exercising to the point where you could kill yourself.”

He says the theory holds that when pushing yourself hard, the brain kicks in and limits the amount of skeletal strain you can apply, reduces the strain on the heart, and on physiological pressures in general. This may change at the end of a running, cycling or rowing event where speed may increase. “The governor may be holding something back in reserve,” said Mark.

All this would be a bit of an eye opener to Mark's former colleagues. “When I obtained a job here, colleagues at my previous job asked me whether Writtle actually did sport. They thought it was purely an agriculture college.”

In fact, the College offers a Sports and Exercise Performance degree course either on its own, or with business or event management, as well as a Foundation degree.

The courses cover essential theory with plenty of practical experience in coaching – including the opportunity to complete National Governing Body coaching qualifications – and participation.

The number of students taking sport has almost doubled since Mark has been at the College – from 35 to 65 currently. The London Olympics can only increase the attraction of the course for potential students.

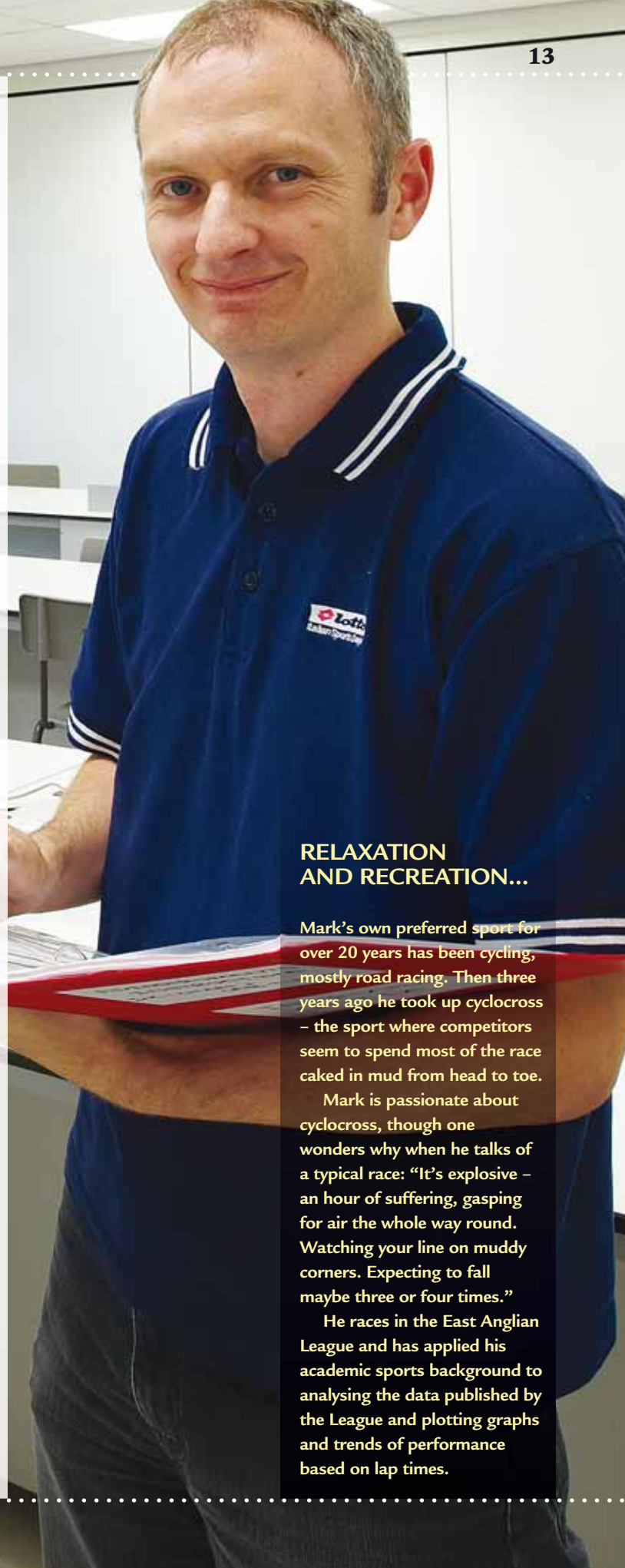
As well as attracting traditional students, the courses have appealed to mature students who want to retrain, including someone from the City, a single mother who played for Ipswich Town Ladies Football team, someone who competed at the LA Olympics, and others looking for a second chance in education.

Many graduates go on to train as PE teachers, with others opting for further training for a Masters in physiotherapy, or in the NHS as a cardiac exercise physiologist.

Earlier this year Mark was promoted to deputy head of the School of Sport, Equine and Animal Science and he believes his appointment is recognition of the higher profile that sport is attaining at the College, both within and outside.

“The external examiner was impressed with final year studies,” said Mark. “We've had a healthy growth in student numbers. It's a department that's going places.”

● Senior lecturer Kirsten Spencer will take over from Mark as course manager of Sports and Exercise Performance for the coming academic year.



RELAXATION AND RECREATION...

Mark's own preferred sport for over 20 years has been cycling, mostly road racing. Then three years ago he took up cyclocross – the sport where competitors seem to spend most of the race caked in mud from head to toe.

Mark is passionate about cyclocross, though one wonders why when he talks of a typical race: “It's explosive – an hour of suffering, gasping for air the whole way round. Watching your line on muddy corners. Expecting to fall maybe three or four times.”

He races in the East Anglian League and has applied his academic sports background to analysing the data published by the League and plotting graphs and trends of performance based on lap times.

SIDELINES

◆ **A DOZEN WRITTLE STUDENTS** who completed their studies in BA (Hons) Interior Architecture and Interior Design showcased their work at the 24th annual New Designers exhibition, held in London.

They were among 4,000 students hoping to catch the eye of the 18,000 design conscious professionals and others, many there to check out the top talents that will form the next generation of designers.

The students raised half of the £3,100 cost of exhibiting, with the College meeting the rest. Each student exhibited his or her own design project and the stand included videos, animation and 2D and 3D plans and models.

This is the fourth consecutive year that Writtle School of Design's interior's programme has participated at New Designers, and it again returned with extremely successful results, rating it with the best Schools in the highly competitive arena of design in the UK.

◆ **STUDENT YVONNE OWEN** has sorted out monkey business at Paradise Wildlife Park. The park was concerned that five red-bellied tamarins were stressed and aggressive when caught in nets while being moved between enclosures.

Yvonne produced special transport cages and accustomed the monkeys to them through a 65-session target training programme that reinforced positive behaviour using wooden shapes associated with food. After the training, the tamarins quietly climbed into a transport box and started eating almost immediately on arrival in their new enclosure.

Yvonne undertook the work as part of her BSc (Hons) Animal Science

course and her impressive dissertation – appropriately entitled “Softly, softly, catchy monkey” – won best presentation at the Annual Student Welfare Conference.

Presenting the award, Dr Vicky Melfi, of Whitley Wildlife Trust, said: “Yvonne’s study was a great example of hypothesis-driven research. Her presentation was compelling and she certainly deserved accolade of best speaker.”

Yvonne’s supervisor, Dr Jon Amory, senior lecturer in animal behaviour and welfare, said: “It was outstanding work with potential for best practice in other zoos.”



◆ **STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM** condition from Doucecroft School undertook a project to build 37 specially-designed, greenhouse benches needed for strawberry trials.

Writtle College students then used the two-metre long benches to support growbags containing the plants, which could be top fed and micro-irrigated. The strawberries could also hang down away from soil contamination.

Special schools co-ordinator Paul Hill said: “The project provided the Doucecroft pupils with an excellent vocational experience and taught them meaningful woodworking skills.”

Applications for research posts at Writtle are up threefold on last year. We’ve been looking at the range of work going on on campus...

THE BEST WAYS to package and transport cut roses, lameness in dairy cows and the carbon footprint of food products from Kenya are among the areas being researched at Writtle College.

The most effective way to warm up horses in dressage events at elite and Olympic level competition is another area under the microscope.

For Dr Tim Whitaker, it’s all part and parcel of daily life as the College’s research co-ordinator. “My job involves the co-ordination of the student undertaking a research project that leads to a Masters by research, an MPhil or a PhD. It begins with their recruitment, and continues through application, admission and supervision at College and then to examination and graduation.

“We have around 13 research students currently at various stages and we normally recruit between three or four a year. This year we have six definites and another six or seven possibles after a drive to increase numbers, in line with the new higher education focus of the College.

“They will submit their thesis and are then examined orally by two examiners for between two and five hours. Invariably, they will be asked to rewrite parts of the thesis, which can run to 40,000 words for a Masters and more than 100,000 for a PhD.

“As an institution, we offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses and an essential part of that culture is a research element to what we do. There has been a sea change in our attitude to research in recent years and a greater understanding of its contribution to the culture and ethos of Writtle.”

A Masters degree normally takes a year of study. A PhD takes up to three, with both allowing another 12 months to write up the thesis. Both attract a wide range of people. “There are some individuals who are set on an academic career and a PhD will help them enormously,” said Tim. “But we also have researchers looking at a career change or who are in a position where they are retiring early and want to do extra study.”

At Writtle, research falls into five main clusters – animal and equine science, crop science, postharvest technology, art and design and habitat conservation.

The College may have a particular piece of work it wishes to do, which is advertised. People outside the College can also approach Writtle with a clear idea of what they want to do. “We’ll assess whether we have the capability of delivering adequate supervision in those circumstances and may suggest a different approach,” said Tim.

Other individuals are involved, often through their day-to-day work, with the generation of outputs from different processes, which can be of genuine interest.

And those research topics at the start of the article? Well, they’re not esoteric flights of fancy. Real economic benefits could result from the roses research. Lameness in dairy cows results in a reduction in the amount of milk produced and if tackled could also boost farm output. The carbon footprinting could lead to environmental improvements and the dressage research could have far wider implications for other sports.

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.

PAPER CHASE...

In the five years to the end of 2008, the College produced 80 journal papers, 150 conference proceedings and 30 books or book chapters. Before appearing in a peer review journal, a research paper is reviewed in a blind, anonymous process by two members of the journal's editorial panel of independent experts. "For an institution of our size, we do well," says Tim. "It's a quality seal on research that has reached the required standard."

Research numbers climb



Research role...

Dr Tim Whitaker, left, co-ordinates cross-College research including dressage warm-up and, far left, studies on the transport of roses from Kenya with Seo Tshwenyane

From lupins to



Field work...
Darren in Farndon Wood
Nature Reserve in Harlow

wildlife

ONE OF FORMER student Darren Fazackerley's first horticultural jobs was helping in the garden of pop singer Elton John.

"It was only for a month or so and came after I completed the three-year HND course in amenity horticulture in the early 90s," says Darren. "It was at the substantial property he owned in Windsor. I remember, in particular, that one of his garden passions was lupins and I spent a lot of time looking after and adding to his collection."

It's a long way from his current role as landscape and biodiversity manager for the district of Harlow. In between the two, he has also worked at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh – a fantastic time, he says – on a rare conifer project in California and on botanic garden placements in Chicago and Philadelphia. He's also completed his BSc at Writtle.

His current role means managing the parks and gardens maintenance contract with consultants Kier and his portfolio covers the grounds, grass, trees and shrubs, parks, open spaces and nature reserves.

"The built environment is very much part of the ethos of the new town," says Darren. "But the jewels in its crown are its green spaces. We manage those areas to encourage biodiversity and to attract wildlife. We've also managed to increase the number of nature reserves and wildlife sites we have."

Four years ago the town won a gold Green Apple award for its management of long grass areas and increasing public awareness of biodiversity. "We've explained to them why we do have areas of long grass and that it is not just left unkempt – and we don't get complaints any more," says Darren. This year, Farndon Wood reserve, which he manages, received a Green Flag award on its first application.

Darren, who is also a volunteer at the RHS's Hyde Hall garden nearby, says he still has a passion for plants such as lupins – as well as the bee orchids now found on 40 different sites in Harlow. "The town is like a large botanical garden with a huge variety of large and rare trees. It's wonderful. We even have a veteran trees website at www.favouritetrees.com – and I am really passionate about it."

He is also passionate about Writtle College. "It's my spiritual home," says Darren. "I love the place. Here I am, a lad from the slag heaps of Wigan, who studied at Writtle and ended up with this fantastic career. I can't speak too highly of the place."

◆ **TWENTY YEARS** after he first left Writtle, Simon Lee is back for a second bite of the cherry.

He's now completing his BSc in Landscape and Amenity Management two decades after his HND at the College. In the interim, he's become the superintendent of some of London's great parks – Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park – and he confesses it is his dream job.

"I've had horticulture in my blood all my life and I'm very privileged indeed to be able to manage these wonderful open spaces. Writtle's contribution to my career has been huge – and gave me the chance to see just how important they are."

The City of London supports the three open spaces – which he says are more rural than the countryside – at no cost to the taxpayer, even though they cost £7 million a year. The money comes from a fund the City accumulated over the centuries called City Cash. "I'm a very lucky lad," he says.

Hampstead Heath is four miles from the centre of London and was created by an Act of Parliament in 1871 – that's 20 years before the birth of Writtle. The Act sits on his desk and he refers to it at least weekly.

"It's at the heart of what we do and sets out that the Heath shall be open, unenclosed and unbuilt upon," said Simon. "It was the first open space to be saved by the public for the public. At that time, the Lord of the manor was planning to build an estate on it and local residents thwarted him at every turn."



Green flagging...
Sandra and Andy
in one of the
shelters at
Promenade Park in
Maldon

Park

Two of Writtle's senior horticulture lecturers are judges for the Green Flag awards, the national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. We've been asking them how green is Essex...

ASK SANDRA Nicholson and Andy Boorman to name a good park in Essex and there's a moment's silence.

Then the names start tumbling out.

"I've been privileged to judge Promenade Park in Maldon this year," says Sandra. "It's wonderful. I used to take my children there and it's been fascinating to judge it with a more critical, evaluative eye."

"Belfairs Park in Leigh on Sea,"

says Andy. "It has the most wonderful ancient woodland – mainly oak and hazel, and a great place for moths and butterflies – and it's very diverse. There's something there for everybody – a golf course, play areas for the kids, cafes and horses. Everything a park should be."

For the last two years, they've been on the judging panel for the area's Green Flag awards, an award of merit that's a bit like the Blue Flag award for Britain's beaches. "We look at a range of stringent

criteria," says Andy, "including cleanliness, security, sustainability, accessibility, community involvement, marketing and management standards. The awards are now run by Keep Britain Tidy, after a period with the Civic Trust.

"It's all about standards and local authorities being able to show their residents that their parks are great spaces that meet or exceed national standards. It's a question of pride sometimes and there are potential financial rewards if they



life



win consistently. It makes it easier for local authorities to access Heritage Lottery Fund money for proposed improvements.”

Sandra says that the benefits of being judges come back to Writtle too. “It has huge rewards for us personally – not just with being involved with all these public spaces, but the contacts we make and the lessons we bring back to our lectures here.”

Both judged three sites this year – with judging normally accompanied with an introduction

for the local authorities and their community partners, as well as any external contractors involved. Last year’s scores and any issues raised are addressed. “We will have already studied the application details and the management plans,” says Sandra.

Weather can have a big impact – judging in the rain must not affect scores, even if another site is seen later the same day in bright sunshine.

Andy said: “One of the parks in Southend is a very urban open space

and can’t be judged in the same context as, say, a country park. Of course, there is some vandalism but what matters is not that it exists, but what is done about it and what their policy is.”

One park Sandra judged has installed a graffiti wall which has led to an excellent rapport with local youngsters. “It seems to limit graffiti to that one area – and they also have a youth area, separate from that for the young children,” she said.

A big plus for a park is a strong

involvement with its local community. “The best parks have enthusiastic, knowledgeable people to run them and actively involve local groups. At Maldon, they have a Friends group which started as a campaign against the removal of the swimming pool and is now helping to look after the new wildlife gardens.”

The good news, they say, is that local authorities are upping their act. This year there are 1,000 Green Flag awards in England and Wales. Last year it was just 800.



Reclaimed, recycled or found...
The winning garden and, below, Steve

◆ **A GOLD MEDAL** at Chelsea is the height of achievement for garden designers.

And former Writtle student Steve Hall, below right, should know. He won one this year for a garden he co-designed with work colleague Jane Besser.

Their Fenland Alchemist garden also took the Best Courtyard garden at Chelsea this year. "Everything about the garden was found, recycled or borrowed," said Steve, who was finishing his BSc in Landscape and Garden Design just as he was helping to build the garden at the Chelsea site.

He's principal designer at Giles Landscapes in Welney, Cambridgeshire, but the Fenland, wild garden was not his first at Chelsea. "I've tried five times – and worked up from a bronze with my first in 2001.

"I've worked out that getting a gold is all about getting your brief right, building well so that it doesn't wobble, getting the plants in the right place and just getting the detail right. People don't want to stand there and not 'get' a garden. In a way, what

we are creating is theatre, it is not high design."

He first studied at Writtle in 1991 for a diploma in garden design – and he is enthusiastic about his education there. "It's such a great place," he said. "All of the modules are excellent but some of them – world gardens for example or contemporary and traditional planting – are just fantastic. I don't think you'd find that at any other university. It's been a privilege and I'm going back if I get the chance. A Master's degree, that's what I'm aiming for next."

And Chelsea next year? "We've been inundated with work since the gold," says Steve. "I'm working on a large estate in the Cotswolds and big house near Wisbech. We'll see."



Why Chelsea's important

The Chelsea Flower Show is one of the pinnacles of the horticultural year. Writtle has been closely involved for nearly two decades. We've been finding out about the College's involvement and some of its successes...

CHELSEA FLOWER Show's an essential place for Writtle to be seen, according to course manager Ben Wincott.

He's the man behind this year's Writtle College exhibit at gardening's premier showcase – a look at how climate change will alter the traditional English country garden over the next 100 years. It's already happening, with the increasingly use of plants such as olive trees and banana plants in UK landscapes and gardens.

"Chelsea's a great place to show some of the research we're doing, as well as for networking with a wide range of contacts who can help the College. It also allows us to reinforce the prestige of Writtle," said Ben.

The Royal Horticultural Society loved the touch screen technology developed specially for the stand so much that they used it at the more recent Hampton Court Garden Show. Writtle students helped to build the stand – providing valuable experience for them of an event like Chelsea.

Among other contacts, Writtle is now linked to the creation of a designer hub that will help standardise the philosophy of garden design.

"We have a number of fingers in a number of pies that would never have happened without Chelsea," said Ben, who has appeared on TV himself several times and reached the final of Channel 4's *The Great Garden Challenge*, filmed at Blenheim Palace in 2005.

Another benefit of Chelsea is the opportunity to enrol future students. "We need to recruit just one person because they have seen our stand – and it pays for the stand," he said.

This year's stand managed a very creditable silver award. The only thing that stopped a gold was that judges thought some of the dates shown on kick boards of the stand could also have been above the stand and on the touch screens too, so they could still be seen when a crowd had gathered.

Ben, who also has his own garden design business, is already working hard on designs for 2010. Sponsored by Tiptree Jams and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute, he'll be producing an entry for the urban garden section.



◆ **A JAPANESE STUDENT** of Ben's, Tomoko Osonoe, took a silver gilt with her entry in this year's Chelsea show. Called *The Modern Rock Garden*, it was a simple, low-maintenance garden suitable for a stylish new building, she said. It drew inspiration, said Tomoko, from the Utrecht Botanic Garden in the Netherlands, where she worked as a gardener. It was arranged on several levels, each supported with rock-filled gabions. She also exhibited at the Hampton Court Flower Show.

Highlights from recent years

- ◆ **2003** – Writtle wins a prestigious gold medal for its exhibit examining the use of stinging nettles. Called *The Nettle: Friend or Foe?*, it showed the varied uses of nettles – from fashion to food and medicine. It included clothing made from nettles for the Gurkhas.
- ◆ **2004** – Writtle takes two silver awards, one for its *Tell Tale Plants* installation, the other for a big pyramid featuring a new range of foxgloves.
- ◆ **2005** – A gold for the College's *Taste of The Wild* looking at how a garden can benefit wildlife while still looking good.
- ◆ **2006** – Silver gilt and silver, one for the *Turning Red Tomatoes Green* stand, which examined the use of waste materials and stems, and was based on College research, and the other for the Stock Pyramid, in a collaboration with *The Sun's* gardening columnist Steve Bradley.
- ◆ **2007** – Silver for students who designed an eco-friendly garden highlighting recycling, water use sustainable practices and garden miles.
- ◆ **2008** – Silver gilt for an exhibit with Essex County Council called *Driest County, Floral Bounty*, and showed a traditional Essex flower garden.

Foundation supports 2,000 children

The time, efforts and savings of a Writtle College programme manager are helping around 2,000 children in 20 orphanages in Sri Lanka.

Dr Tom Jeyendran, from the Management Education Centre in the School of Sustainable Environments, is also the secretary of the Optima Foundation, which raises money to support a programme of aid for children in the homes.

He has been at Writtle for two years but his work with the foundation – which does not have any employees and uses all money raised for feeding, child care and self-sustaining projects – stretches back to the 1990s.

Over the years it has supported children in a number of countries – in Bosnia, Romania and Ukraine, as well as near Chernobyl, the Russian nuclear power plant. But one of its main focuses now is Sri Lanka after the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami.

At one orphanage, Swami Vipulanandra Children's Home, a self-sustaining project has seen the purchase of dairy cattle and, most recently, seven acres of arable land. Rice has been planted as a trial, along with 250 coconut saplings, 500 banana saplings and other crops. More opportunities are being explored to produce fresh water fish and free-range chickens. "We want this to be a fresh-air activity and a pleasure, not a chore for the children," says Tom.

Tom has been unable to visit the orphanage since the civil unrest but is in regular contact. One child at the orphanage has just started his

first university degree. "Most of my money and the savings I have go into the charity work," said Tom. "That's the way I want it. I am a born-again bachelor but in Sri Lanka alone I have 2,000 children to care for."

For more information, email Tom on tom_jeyendran@yahoo.co.uk or visit the www.optimafoundation.org website.



Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries of the former Soviet Union. One Writtle lecturer has been experiencing it first-hand...

Where life is hard...

SENIOR LECTURER Henry Matthews has worked around the world in the last seven years – in Kenya, Romania, Belarus, Russia, Sri Lanka and Tajikistan.

His role is providing his agricultural and business management skills to projects funded by a range of organisations including the World Bank and the European Union.

The Tajikistan project – now complete – involved three visits by Henry. "There is extreme poverty there and the north is particularly poor," he said. "The three main aims of the project, facilitated by a German non-governmental organisation, were environmental, infrastructure

and business development.

"I was involved with the last of those, providing support, advice and training for agriculture and small rural businesses – growing grapes, apricots, nuts, rearing livestock and producing milk or just adding value through the processing of wool and making carpets as well as in tourism. We conducted seminars on more effective marketing as well as quality issues. One outcome was the development of a machinery association to encourage sharing among villagers."

Another result has been the creation of a small, renewable energy business – importing solar



Soviet scenes...

From left, children in the village of Dardar in the Zarafshan Valley; two scenes of potato planting in Gorna Matcha; a solar cooker in the village of Shing in Penjikent district of Tajikistan



dishes from nearby China. “There is a shortage of power in Tajikistan – they have electricity for only a few hours a day. But there’s a lot of sun and these dishes come with a frame mounted on the front that can boil a kettle in about 15 minutes or act as a cooker. It’s for ordinary households.”

He was also there for most of last September, working for Oxfam, looking at the market for agricultural food. “I worked with a local consultant. What people have is small areas of land – essentially kitchen gardens where they produce food for sale. We were looking at how that could be made more effective.”

The project is now complete and, looking back,

Henry is the first to admit that his work will not make a massive difference. “But in their world of such abject poverty, any difference is definitely worthwhile. I do get a sense of achievement from all this. I wouldn’t do it otherwise.

“I was there for the first two weeks of January with about three hours of power in the morning and four at night. My time clock was out of skew and I was wide-awake at midnight. There was no electricity in this freezing flat and I’m wondering ‘What am I doing here?’ But the work that’s being done is very good.”

He has two weeks planned in the Ukraine doing management training for larger farms with the

country’s Rural Youth Movement, funded by a Swedish NGO. He’s already worked there on a supply chain and logistics project funded by the EU.

His involvement with the Ukraine has led Henry to put his money where his mouth is. He now has a 30 per cent share of a 1,500-hectare arable farm in south east Ukraine that grows sunflowers, maize and barley. He tries to visit as regularly as he can.

“It’s still quite challenging, if I am honest,” he says. “Our yields could increase by 70 per cent in some cases with judicious use of inputs – fertilisers and sprays. This is my personal investment but it does feed in to my teaching at Writtle.”

◆ RESEARCH IS BEING

undertaken at Writtle into growing novel crops that will tolerate saline conditions.

PhD student Catherine Keeling is researching saline tolerance in Swiss chard and heritage varieties of tomatoes, using a hydroponics system under glass. Growers may have to turn to salt-tolerant crops as rising sea levels flood farmland, especially in the east of England.

◆ FROM SEPTEMBER 2010,

Writtle College will exploit a niche in the market and offer courses in sustainable food management.

Food management co-ordinator Jenny Ruth, who is trained as a food scientist, said: "Our courses will differ from those at other establishments in taking a broad, holistic approach, essentially from Farm to Fork."

Students will cover all aspects of the food supply chain from on-farm production, through food science, technology and processing to marketing, retail and regulation, emphasizing the need for an integrative, sustainable approach.

Full and part-time courses will be available at degree, foundation degree and higher certificate levels and aim to produce highly employable graduates.

◆ **WRITTLER HAS A** sophisticated Computer Assisted Semen Analysis (CASA) system for rapid analysis of animal semen.

SpermVision is used in conjunction with work on the College stud and provides a service unique in the UK – the nearest similar facility is in Ireland.

Based around a high quality microscope, the software can assess the motility, morphology and viability of a sample, providing more objective information than possible with the naked eye using a microscope.

SpermVision can be used on semen from any animal species, such as rabbits and poultry, pigs and cattle.

GROWING PORTFOLIO

A new degree – based in horticulture but with a therapeutic specialism – is on offer at Writtle.

The BSc (Hons) in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture shares around three quarters of the modules with the BSc(Hons) in Horticulture with a research dissertation on social and therapeutic aspects.

Validated by the University of Essex last year, it will run for the first time this academic year.

Head of the School of Horticulture Martin Stimson said: "Horticulture as a therapy provides a non-threatening, safe environment for individuals. Practitioners are attracted to horticulture because they can use nurturing plants, creating landscapes as metaphors for recovery from psychological and physical illness.

There are many emotional gains, as well as the pleasure from the physical activity provided by horticultural activity for the therapist to use."

Much of the therapeutic background to the course has been completed with the help of Ambra Burls, who is completing her PhD in ecotherapy.

Martin said the school was looking at other new degrees focusing on the big issues, such as climate change. "These are the sorts of issues on our minds and I'm sure they will be reflected in courses we offer in the future. One hopes that as youngsters move through school into higher education, that the next generation will have a greater awareness of these subjects and that there will be a market for these new courses."

Research tackles climate issues on UK's uplands

Climate change is starting to have major effects on the uplands of the North of England – and Writtle College Principal Professor David Butcher is researching aspects of the changes.

With funding from Severn Trent Water – one of the UK's biggest water companies – and other utilities, he's been researching the uplands for the last 30 years.

"My background is as a hydrologist," Dave says. "I've undertaken significant research in this field at the University of Huddersfield, the University of Central Lancashire and then Nottingham Trent University. This was initially funded by Yorkshire Water, who asked us to look at water discoloration, which started to be a problem the year after the major drought of 1976.

"Customers certainly don't like discoloration and it's expensive for water companies to treat. We'd been working on reservoir sedimentation and moved on to water colour. Progressively over the last 30 years, what was seen as quite specialist has become much more mainstream because what is coming off the moors is carbon – a substance of enormous importance."

The moors have been seen as a net sink of carbon but are now releasing carbon, which is a tremendous concern to the water companies. Treatments that have been tried are environmentally expensive. The colour is the organic material being released as the peat dries out.

"The last four or five years, I've been working with a colleague at Nottingham Trent and the solution to this problem appears to be to keep the moors wet.

"With Severn Trent, we have achieved this by blocking ditches, taking grazing off the moors and stopping the burning of the moors. We monitor the water colour for a couple of years before doing these things, then do the work and monitor the colour

again. It's been a very long project and it's just about coming to an end. The answer is always more complicated than you imagine.

"When you do these things, there is an initial release of colour, which appears to make things worse, and then it settles down. Of course, it will also reduce the amount of water coming off the moors, which is a worry for the water companies because they need that volume. It's a delicate balance."

Dave lives in the Peak District at weekends and is still involved with research, even after his appointment as Writtle's Principal two years ago. "Part of my job is to have credibility as an academic, as well as the financial and managerial side of my role. I think it's important too as the teaching we do at Writtle is research-based."

Other research he's been involved with is on pollution travel times in rivers in Yorkshire and East Anglia. "What we do is put dyes in rivers and monitor its track through the river. It's all about when something spills into the river course and how long it takes to get down to the water intakes."



On the moors...
Professor Butcher during part of his research


Writtle joins fight against knotweed

Writtle is undertaking research trials to help combat the highly damaging Japanese knotweed, which costs the country hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

The weed rapidly crowds out neighbouring plants and is so strong it can penetrate tarmac, brick walls and into pipes. It can regenerate from a tiny fragment of rhizome left in the soil and is present at the main 2012 Olympic Games site in East London.

The School of Horticulture was in 2007 awarded a £100,000 Department of Trade and Industry research grant to fund a Knowledge Transfer Project to improve eradication techniques for Japanese knotweed.

A team led by Dr Pascaline Le Lay and Dr Clive Ireland has collaborated with Thurlow Countryside Management, a company specialising in the eradication of invasive weeds, and will present final findings later this year.

A photograph of Margaret Somerville, a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a light blue jacket over a plaid shirt. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is standing in a greenhouse, surrounded by numerous potted plants, many of which are Japanese knotweed. The background shows the structure of the greenhouse with large windows.

Growing problem...
Margaret Somerville in one of the College greenhouses with pots of Japanese knotweed

Page turner...
Mick in one of the
gardens at the
Writtle campus

There are writers galore at Writtle College – not to mention some of its students. We've been talking to some of them...

Putting in a good word

SENIOR LECTURER Mick Lavelle is the author of a number of successful gardening books – but he's still not sure he should describe himself as a real writer.

"My editor tells me I should stop saying that," said Mick, who has been at Writtle for nine years.

"I write some of them with my wife, Christine, and to be honest we're still the only writers who have won the Garden Media Guild best practical book of the year award

twice. The latest was for *How To Create a Wildlife Garden*, in 2008, and the first time was with *Organic Gardening*, back in 2003."

Talking to Mick, it's soon clear that the word practical is the important one. "If writing was only ever done by gardeners, it would become very uninspired, very quickly. However, no matter how inspired and stylish writing is, you can't beat the fact that somebody has to know about horticulture.

"One of the things I've always

been lucky with is the fact that I have worked with good editors. I actually thanked all editors at the Garden Media Guild last year – they're the ones who pull us into shape. It's when I get the scripts back marked in red pen – like I do with students here – that I realise I still don't know it all. I'm challenged to explain things better and I appreciate that."

The book that came second in those 2003 awards was the Monty Don compendium, *The Complete Gardener*. "It outsold ours many

times over and good luck to him," says Mick. "There is clearly a place in the hearts of the book-buying public for that and I have no problem with it at all. If they can inspire people to garden, that's great."

His latest work is a pocket book – *101 Ideas For A Wildlife Garden*, written for the *Gardeners' World* series. He's now putting the finishing touches to his next book, which is on sustainable gardening and is due out next April from Crowood Press.

SIDELINES

◆ **ONE OF THE TWO MEN**

working on the most-read page in any UK newspaper is a former Writtle student and lecturer.

He's Steve Bradley – known as Brad – and he writes the Saturday gardening page for *The Sun* newspaper with his wife, Val, and gardening guru Peter Seabrook.

“Peter writes the lead article – on a topical subject – and Val and I do the rest,” he says. “We’ve been doing it for seven years. We meet up at *The Sun* most Tuesdays for lunch and talk about what’s happening.

“One of the things we produce every week is a column with readers’ questions. We get about 2,500 every year and answer every one of them. In the seven years, we have failed to answer only four.”

He and Val have also written about 50 books – the most successful of which is the original book for the BBC

Ground Force programme. “We also produced booklets for 12 of the series.”

He studied at Writtle in the mid-70s for the then National Diploma in Horticulture and was a lecturer for seven years until 1990 – even teaching TV gardener Christine Walkden, with whom he remains a great mate. He works with Christine on the annual open weekend at Kings Heath Park in Birmingham. He moved on to become head of horticulture at Merrist Wood College in Surrey.

He has regular slots on local radio – including BBC Radio Essex. And he’s been teaching pop star Katie Melua – who was bought a three-day session with him as a present.

“For the people I know in the industry, Writtle still retains its high esteem,” he said. “If it wasn’t for Writtle, I certainly wouldn’t have the career I have now.”

◆ **DR JEREMY STRONG**, Writtle’s head of higher education, published an article – The Modern Offal Eaters – in *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, published by the University of California Press. He wrote the piece after noticing the trend of more offal appearing on London restaurant menus, as well as featuring more prominently in cookbooks and TV programmes. “The piece has produced quite a few responses; people quoting it in blogs, websites, and other academic journals though perhaps the most surprising place where I found a reference to it was the Air Canada in-flight magazine,” said Jeremy.

Jeremy is currently editing a collection of essays that will form the book called *Educated Tastes: Food, Drink and Connoisseur Culture*, due out in late 2010 or early 2011.

◆ **SENIOR LECTURER Simon Hart** contributed an historical feature on plants used in the production of botanic and herbal ales for the national magazine *The Horticulturist*.

He says his interest was sparked by the many and varied uses to which plants can be put. He said recipes for brewing with plants such as nettle, dandelion, ginger, sarsaparilla, burdock, coriander and chamomile were, he says, delightfully simple – and the results were cheaper and less intoxicating than beer. He is now under contract to produce a new work on tomatoes.

◆ **READER IN POSTHARVEST**

technology Dr Chris Bishop has contributed to several technical publications in his specialist area. He is one of three co-authors of *Potatoes Postharvest*, a 432-page book published in February by CABI. Its target audience is professionals, academics and advanced students.

He also contributed to the book, *Environmentally Compatible Food Packaging*, published in 2008, and co-authored the University of California booklet *Air Transport of Perishable Products*.



Well read...
Brad with his
wife Val

◆ **FORMER STUDENT Martyn Cox** is the gardening columnist of *The Mail on Sunday*, *Saga* and *Grow It!* magazines and works on other publications. He’s written several books, including *RHS Wildlife Garden* and *101 Ideas for Small Gardens*. His fifth, *Big Gardens in Small Spaces: Irreverent Advice for Urban Gardeners* is due out next spring.

What horticulture he teaches at Writtle is, he says, ornamentally-based but is very much about the ecological management of landscapes.

And his own garden? “Well, I have a dog, a boy of four, a baby daughter and a job that takes me about 30 miles away every day. The garden is OK but it’s not somewhere I’d want to open to the public. It’s only small and it’s in the centre of Colchester – and I’m just developing part of it into a wildlife garden, which my son is really interested in.”



Mayor of London Boris Johnson can expect a letter soon from former Writtle student Lucy White, left, with plans to transform part of the East End of London.

Lucy, who now works for an architectural practice in Shoreditch, completed her Masters in Landscape Architecture at Writtle with a project, a scheme called *The Broadwalk* for a stretch of two miles of elevated, disused and overgrown railway line starting near Liverpool Street and dispersing into areas of Shoreditch and Hoxton.

“My idea was intended to improve the condition of this forgotten railway line and create an urban park for a lively, environmental, landscaped green way” said Lucy. “It would improve the ecology and wildlife of the city and lift people above the hustle and bustle of traffic and pollution.

“It would give shelter, vegetation, activity and atmosphere to a bland area of the city. It has a rich history and a strong culture and I just know how important it could be to local communities.”

Lucy, who got a first-class Masters degree with distinction, said: “The city we live in is built in fragments – this offers the opportunity to fuse the disjointed areas together. It fits well with the ambitious plans to recover and revive the capital’s underground rivers, which have been buried and covered up for years. The same principles and concepts I applied to disused railway lines could be applied here.

“The project has been lying on a shelf but I’m working with my tutor at Writtle to get something together for Boris Johnson to look at.”

Lucy has good things to say about her time at the College, where her studies continue. “It’s like being part of a family – something I hadn’t come across in my earlier studies at Nottingham and Chelsea. The course has given me much more confidence and made me decide to continue my studies. I still go back to Writtle if I’ve got questions – there are great contacts there. Everyone wants to keep in touch and stay part of a developing organisation.”

SITES FOR SORE EYES

Cambridge University’s deputy head gardener Mary Atkinson, right, couldn’t get enough of Writtle.

After studying at the College for her HND in horticulture and amenity management in the mid 90s, she trained at Cambridge Botanic Gardens, before moving to the city council and then to the university.

And she has just finished a three-year, part-time course to gain her BSc in Horticulture. “I did it over three years, one day a week and one of the great things was that I was able to choose the modules I wanted to do,” said Mary. “At work, there is a team of 18 gardeners and we look after sites all over the city – the university departments, the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Vice-Chancellor’s Garden. We also look after the interior plants in many of the departments. We don’t look after any of the college gardens as they have their own staff.

“I’m quite lucky because I get to do

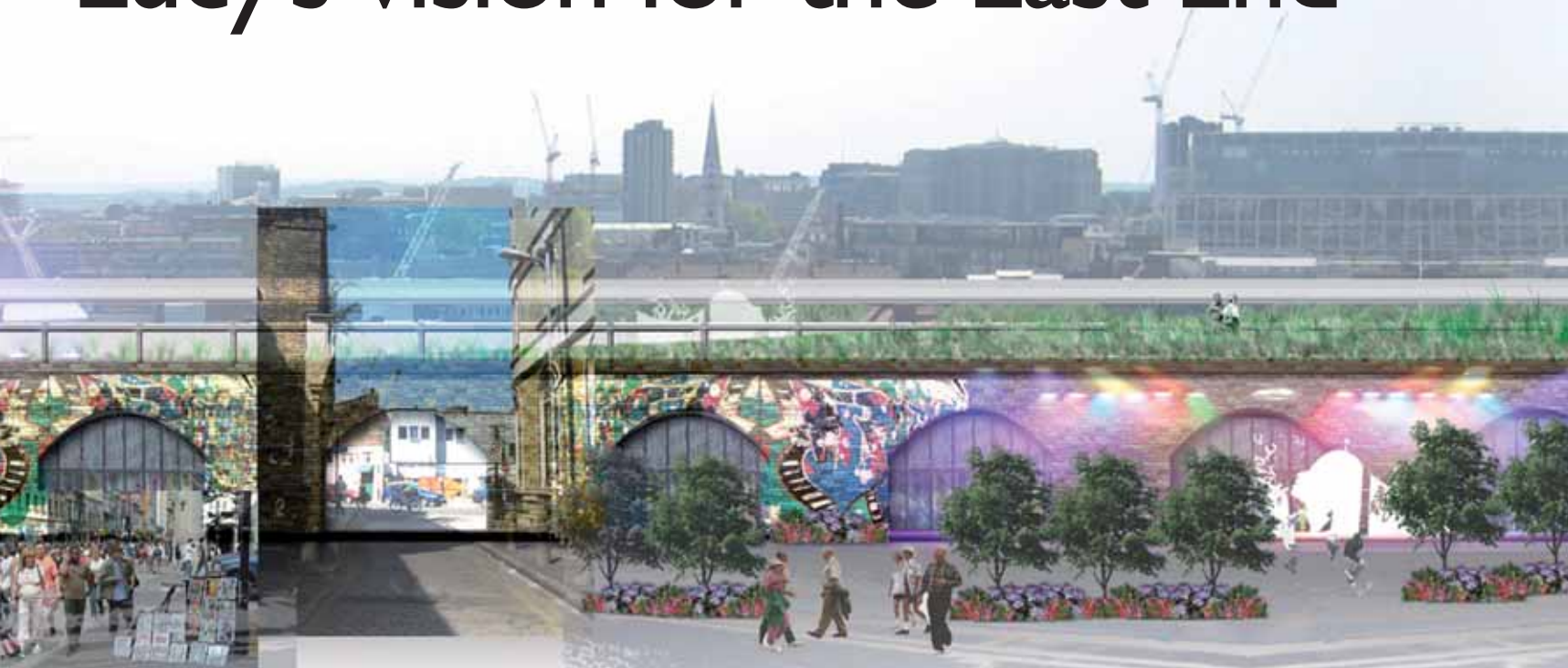
a bit of everything. I run a nursery where we grow bedding plants and shrubs – and sometimes we sell to the public. So it can be quite hands on.

“One of the things that has changed enormously over the last 10 years is that I get involved with a lot of assessments and record keeping – there’s a lot of legislation now – and the reason I went back to Writtle is because they offered me what I wanted to top up my understanding. The lecturers are fantastic and really care about what they’re teaching. They’ve passed that on to me.

“The outside spaces and gardens at Cambridge are places where people go between studying and it is important they have somewhere pleasant for that. It’s also the first impression people receive when they visit. If you have somewhere aesthetically pleasing you will be able to relax more, it will lift your spirit more. It’s important to have high standards.”



Lucy's vision for the East End



SIDELINES

◆ **A NEW BOOK** written by School of Design lecturer Tim Waterman sets out the basics of designing outdoor space.

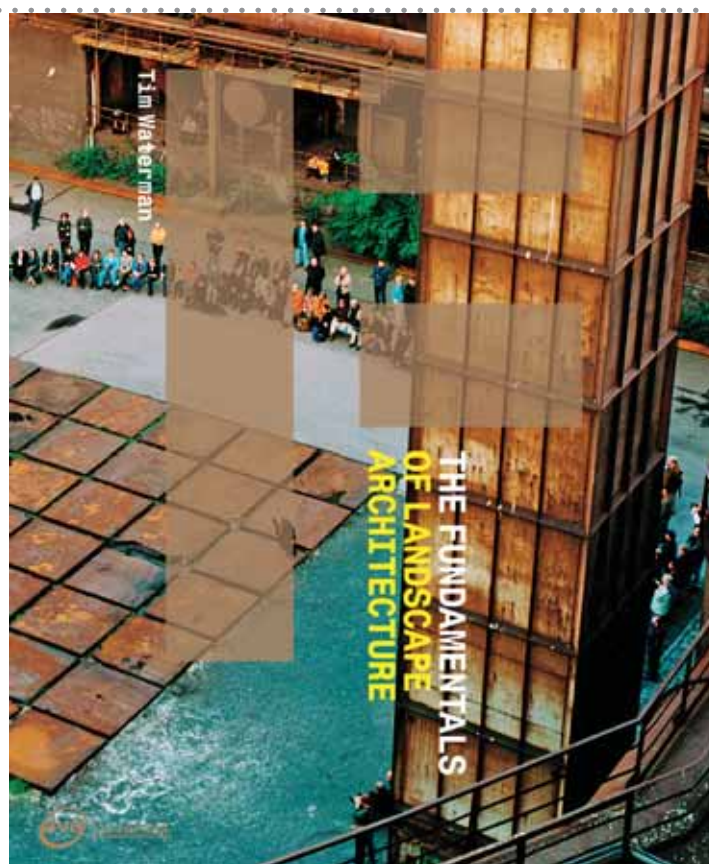
The Fundamentals of Landscape Architecture provides an introductory text for students as well as good advice for associated professionals like planners and architects.

“Landscape architecture is such an exciting field,” said Tim. “It affects our civic identity, community and environment. It contributes to how we live and enjoy life.”

Tim studied landscape architecture and urban design at the University of Idaho and the Rhode Island School of Design, but has also been a writer, artist, project manager, garden designer and restaurant owner.

Later this year a further book by Tim, co-written with Kingston University lecturer Ed Wall, will be published – *Basics Landscape Architecture: Urban Design*.

Both books are published by AVA Academia.



◆ **WHEN THE IDEA** of charting the history of Writtle's landscape and plant collections was sown a couple of years ago, no one realised just how quickly the project would grow and flourish.

Current and former staff, students and others have submitted a priceless cache of photos, documents and memories dating back to the outbreak of World War II when the current site began development.

Horticulture senior lecturer Sandra Nicholson, who is overseeing the project, said: “The response has been amazing. I have a room next to my office piled high with material.”

Sandra, who has an MA in Conservation (landscapes and gardens) from the Architectural Association, is cataloguing the material in digital format and it has rapidly become a valuable resource heavily used by students and staff.

Photos of landscaping at the College illustrate changing planting and design fashion. For example, once popular hardy annual borders have been superseded by other plant groups such as grasses, herbaceous perennials and subtropical bedding.

SIDELINES

◆ **SENIOR LECTURER** in Business Management Chris Heppa has in his spare time, over more than 30 years, meticulously documented the lives of a community of folk singers in east Norfolk in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

He has collected stories from relatives, photos, early recordings and other relevant material. One singer, farm labourer Harry Cox, knew some 150 songs by heart and sang them in local pubs. "It seemed a shame such a rich history would be lost without proper documentation," said Chris.

Chris has co-produced a double CD of original recordings of the fabled singers, presented papers at international ballad conferences and contributed to folk publications. He is working on a further CD and still making new contacts in the area.

◆ **EVERY YEAR**, up to 20 international students attend courses at Writtle on the EU's Erasmus programme.

Under the initiative, higher education students in 31 European countries are funded to study for part of their degree in another country.

For more than a decade, students from the Netherlands, Finland, Greece and Germany, plus some central European countries, have opted to study at Writtle.

"Generally they come for half the academic year, with their credits counting towards their degree," said Erasmus co-ordinator Simon Hart.

◆ **A DECADE OF STAFF** and student exchange visits supported by the Government's Department of International Development has helped a Nepalese university meet its objective of 'producing skilled manpower essential for the development of Nepal'.

Each year, several members of staff from the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science, part of Tribhuvan University, have visited Writtle for two weeks to gain experience on student-centred learning and subject specialisms within horticulture and, more recently, animal science.

Writtle's staff have made similar visits to Nepal to help develop IAAS's systems, management and courses, especially agribusiness and Masters level. Two students have also spent time in Nepal.

Lecturer in international horticulture Linda Blunt, said: "It's been an excellent relationship and we've seen their teaching move from structured and rote, to embrace more student-based learning within their limited resources."

One part of Writtle College has been attracting the attention of artists for years – and helping to enhance the student experience at the same time. We've been finding out more...



IT'S CALLED CADE – and it stands for The Centre for Arts and Design in the Environment.

For co-managers Jill Raggett and Steve Terry, the 's' on the end of Arts is important.

"CADE is a mechanism to spark the imagination – it's about learning and inspiring people to do things," said Jill. "By looking at all the arts – from sculpture, music, poetry to art and design – we have a huge resource to draw on. We can do poetry about plants with some of our students as a way of helping them learn. It could just as easily be dance."

"Steve is a designer and I am a horticulturist but we love the arts as well. We feel they have a vital part to play in enriching the curriculum at Writtle and we make that possible by cutting across boundaries. What we do has to make our courses more dynamic."

Steve said "We involve students in things they never thought they'd tackle but we also want to reach out to the wider community as well. We work with regional and national organisations to promote art and design. Our projects tend to operate in three spheres – by encouraging research, outreach and consultancy."

CADE has strong links with artists and designers across the UK – and that might mean that they join CADE to work with a plant scientist, for example.

"One artist we worked with, from France, helped students to learn more about science by considering the technical terms linked to the natural world" said Steve. "She wrote these terms from the soil to the stratosphere on the structure of the scientific laboratories at the College, so making the building a visual expression of the learning

Project enrich

The art of Writtle...
 CADE's Jill and Steve.
 Inset, David Leviatin's
 bricks made of wood and
 a ceramic head by Anne
 Schwegmann-Fielding for
 The Mosaic Meadow
 project

experience – so finding new ways to help students appreciate and remember.”

They admit that some of what they do surprises students but it has earned them an international reputation. They now teach in Finland, have strong links with a college in Canada and have carried out courses from Japan to Europe.

Recent collaborations have included:

- Craftsman and scholar David Leviatin – now based in the 15th century Lordship Barn on the campus and is using the space as a ‘workshop of ideas’ to widen his portfolio from timber-frame buildings to work that challenges people to reconsider traditional definitions of purpose and value.
- Local artist Gordon Flemons has, among other things, created a number of inflatable follies made

from polythene bags, which commented on the folly of consumerism.

- Lisa Temple-Cox, inspired by the tropical glasshouses at Writtle, produced a series of paintings and images that explored memories of childhood.
- Anne Schwegmann-Fielding worked with an academic researcher on a number of projects – including a landscape installation called The Mosaic Meadow.

CADE works regularly with external bodies from schools to health care trusts and in the last year, it has expanded its work with schools. One result was a day conference at Writtle called PULSE, for art and design teachers in Essex. It included workshops on digital approaches to design and learning through the natural

environment – as well as a chance to meet other creative professionals.

In a collaboration called Stepping Stones, it works with Chelmsford Borough Council, Arts and Business East and Essex & Suffolk Water, allowing art and design students to participate in a mentoring scheme to develop their professional skills.

Summer schools run by CADE allow school pupils to experience higher education at three-day residential courses.

“The student experience is at the heart of what we do,” said Jill. “We make sure we hold hands with a range of organisations that will benefit them. We have a strong ethos here – we are very positive, very collaborative and we always deliver. If we do commit to something, we deliver to a high standard.”

- **Jill was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship Award by the Higher Education Academy for innovative methods of enriching student learning. As a result, she was able to join this year’s Garden History Society study tour to Brazil to experience the Modernist landscapes of Roberto Burle Max. Her thesis was on the emergence of Japanese-style gardens in the British Isles and she travels to Japan regularly to pursue her research.**



High standards...
David Fearon in his tower block office near Euston

Designer David's new city challenge

Student David Fearon is already clear about the contribution Writtle College has made to his career – and how the College is changing.

He's just coming to the end of his MA degree in Landscape Architecture and is completing the 25,000-word dissertation for October, his final hurdle to achieving his degree.

His job with the Atkins Global organisation, based on the 30th floor of the Euston Tower in central London, allows him a day off a week to complete his course. "It's pretty full on at the moment," he says. "I'm probably working on my MA for 30 hours a week on top of my job."

His dissertation focuses on the emerging discipline of landscape urbanism and examines the use of communications technology as a tool to develop urban spaces. He

completed his Writtle BSc in Landscape and Garden Design in 2006.

"Writtle has changed a lot since I first went there in 2003," says Dave, who worked on the 2012 Olympics site and is now working on a project to create a new city in an oil-producing area of Azerbaijan. "I would not be doing what I am now without the College – it has been absolutely invaluable," he said. "The atmosphere and its reputation have really come on. I've seen first-hand how the design momentum has picked up.

"They have given me the tools to get on in my profession and they push you hard compared with the people I know in the industry who are studying at other institutions. I knew they were dramatically increasing standards there and it is working. I can personally testify to that."

GREEN STRATEGY TARGETS PUBLIC VIEWS

Former student Stuart Anderson has plans for the parks of Brentwood – but it could be 15 years before they become reality.

Stuart, who gained his BSc degree in landscape and amenity management at Writtle in 2005, has worked with the town's council for nearly three years and has drawn up its open space strategy.

"The plan covers public rights of way of almost 1,500 miles in the borough, as well as 11 formal parks, four country parks, 15 allotment sites, 28 play areas, two sites of special scientific interest, grass pitches and an

18-hole golf course! It's a vast estate running into several hundred hectares," he says. "They are important spaces for our 70,000 residents right on the edge of London. I look out at Canary Wharf from my office window but this is a very rural area with large amounts of countryside."

He said, "The thing I find most rewarding is seeing people in the parks, kids playing and couples walking, especially on a lovely day like today. I've been involved in helping to create those memories."

Key to the strategy, now approved

by councillors, is significantly increased public involvement – and new ways of getting them involved are to be tried. "We have several sites of social housing and a high percentage of people living in flats. Our open spaces are critical for people to get out and enjoy their environment. So many take it all for granted and don't realise the gems they have on their doorsteps."

Of Writtle, he has nothing to offer but praise. "The combination of the coursework and the work experience was ideal for me. You get to see in practice what does and doesn't work. My time there was fantastic."



SIDELINES

◆ A NUMBER OF FORMER

Writtle students have used their BSc in Animal Science to go on to train as vets.

Stuart Drewrey graduated in September 2003 and then took a five-year course at Liverpool Vet School. He now works at the Wylie Veterinary Centre in Upminster, Essex, undertaking small animal work.

"The vet course was hard work, but worth it," said Stuart, who advises others to get wide experience on a variety of farms – dairy, sheep, pigs, etc. "This is the first thing vet schools look at."

Kirsty Barron graduated from Writtle in 2006 and is now training at Edinburgh University at The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies.

She said: "The Animal Science degree from Writtle was very useful – it's hands-on and so is a lot of vet training."

"I absolutely love the course and Edinburgh. Unfortunately, doing vet as a second degree is extremely expensive, and so bank and parents need to be made aware."

◆ WRITTLÉ'S SCHOOL OF

Design is forming a group of alumni volunteers to perpetuate contact, further their professional development and reinforce the national and international links of the School.

"It will benefit the graduates and the School," said head of the School of Design Jeff Logsdon. "Design is a relatively small world, and keeping up contacts and meeting people at conventions and conferences is part of the professional business and learning process."

The design alumni group is being developed in connection with the overall College alumni programme. It is expected that the design group will hold conferences and social events every three years with annual events for year classes and subject areas.



◆ **NEARLY 3,000** primary school children and their teachers attended Essex Schools' Food and Farming Day at Writtle on a glorious day in June.

The children learned key elements of the food and farming story by following a trail of five zones – machinery, crops, livestock, food and countryside & environment.

Local and regional organisations provided interactive stands and displays, where children could try milling wheat, sausage making, identifying and tasting fruit and

vegetables, insect and bird recognition games, plus watching livestock displays and farm machinery demonstrations.

The day – organised by Writtle College's Centre for Environment and Rural Affairs (CERA), Essex Agricultural Society and Essex County Council – built on last year's successful inaugural event.

Sophie Blythe, CERA co-ordinator, said: "It was a great team effort involving months of preparation and hundreds of helpers. Feedback from schools and children has been really enthusiastic."



◆ LONG-DISTANCE

LEARNING has taken on a new meaning for Spanish mature student Mikel Pagola – he has commuted every week for two years from San Sebastian to Writtle College.

Mikel, who runs his own landscape and resource management business in Spain, flies to Stansted to spend two days each week on his MA in Landscape Architecture, which he will complete in October. He already has an MA from Reading University in Landscape Management.

"He's highly enthusiastic about the Writtle course," said Jeff Logsdon, head of the School of Design. "His new qualification will enable his business to bid for a wider spectrum of larger projects with a higher design content."

◆ **THE WRITTLÉ SCHOOL OF DESIGN** will be contributing to the planning and design debate on the future of Chelmsford town centre.

It is working in partnership with the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and Chelmsford Borough Council Urban Planning programme in developing the postgraduate Advanced Design Studio titled Urban Territory Project.

The project, under the leadership of Jeff Logsdon, Head of the School of Design and Saruhan Mosler, Lecturer in Landscape Architecture, will be undertaken by a team of post-graduate students.

They will examine and progress a variety of issues relating to Chelmsford's development, with a final presentation due in January 2010.



Writtle is a unique college in the UK – offering a Foundation degree in floristry and a BA(Hons) in professional floristry. Former students now hold top jobs in London – and current students have been preparing for a big night of High Street fashion...

HIGHER EDUCATION Floristry lecturer Jayne Hammond is quite clear that professional floristry is a creative visual art.

“As florists, we are passionate about the creation of special and bespoke floral designs for important times in people’s lives or to enhance a corporate event or function. It’s enormously satisfying.”

For her, it’s a hobby that turned into a career – and she’s proud that Writtle students can start as complete beginners and work their way right up to degree level.

“At BA(Hons) level, you really are at the creative designer stage of your career. You’re exploring and expressing your own creativity and ideas, whilst perfecting and enhancing workmanship, studying European techniques through tutor facilitation.

“The degree covers areas such as large-scale events, research into international themes and changes in trends and craft fashions. At the end of the course, which also looks at the international supply chain for flowers and gives industry insights, you will be a confident floral designer, aware and promoting your own design styles and skills, with a wealth of current industry knowledge,” said Jayne.

Europe has a huge influence on setting floral trends, she says. The U.K

floristry industry continues to take inspiration from international designers, where they produce large-scale floral art installation and push the boundaries constantly to produce innovative new ideas. Floral trends for the last few years have made use of highly decorative accessories to enhance any design, especially wedding floristry.

“Now it is very much back to nature using plant material in a minimalistic structured form, rather than using decorative accessories, paying attention to the beauty of the shape and form of any stunning flower or foliage,” said Jayne.

“Having said that, there is a recognized British style of floristry – demonstrating a high level of technical excellence, whilst integrating modern elements, which customers now appreciate and request. The media can also have a huge influence, with celebrity weddings and functions providing immediate floral design exposure to a wider audience.”

One of her designs – a bridal bouquet on a theme of *Follow The Yellow Brick Road* – took a prize in the annual competition run this year by The Society of Floristry. It included white roses, with a decorative wire silver heart to represent the Tin Man. “It was a unique wedding bouquet, a cutting edge bespoke design that the judges were looking for. Excellent, modern techniques are vital

in any competition like this” said Jayne.

“We provide and encourage our students to be creative, providing a high level training programme in workmanship, technique and design styles that will ensure they will do well in the industry.”

Last year, students at Writtle produced floral jewellery at London Fashion Week, which was spotted by *Prima*, the women’s lifestyle magazine. They were invited to take part in the magazine’s annual High Street fashion awards, producing decorative wire jewellery.

And they’ve been asked back for this year’s show in September, where they are creating table designs in the style of a floral handbag.

“We ran a competition with our students and five designs have been chosen by the magazine’s editor and a sponsor’s representative. A team of students and staff will make them here and take them to Battersea for this prestigious event.

“We’re also making floral hats and decorative wire jewellery and our landscape students are building a Garden of Eden for the after-show party. It’s a huge event and a great opportunity and experience for students and staff to collaborate together. Our aim is to continue to provide a world of opportunities for our students.”

Growing passions...

Jayne with a new floral display. Far left, a hand-tied bouquet. Left, a student exam piece from this year's Foundation degree

Art by arrangement

INSPIRATIONALLY ENVIRONMENTAL

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