



apex

Alumni Magazine

Issue 17
Spring 2006


ASTON
UNIVERSITY

IN THE HEART OF
BIRMINGHAM

GETTING INSIDE CHINA

Breaking into the Chinese market

ALL CHANGE ON CAMPUS

A close-up of new developments

you must remember this...

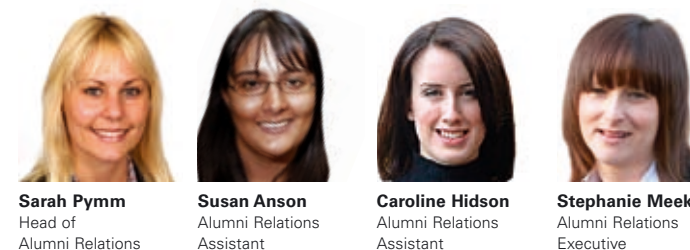


c.1992 students sit on the green outside The Sacks of Potatoes. Are you in this picture? Our archives suggest it was a shot for the University prospectus.

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Meet the team...



We also welcome Work Placement Student **Aftab Arif** to the Alumni Relations Team

Special thanks go to everyone who contributed to this issue of Apex. Apex is published twice a year for alumni of Aston University. Letters, photographs and news are very welcome but we reserve the right to edit any contributions. Please address all correspondence to the Alumni Relations Office. The opinions expressed in Apex are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Alumni Relations Office or Aston University. Apex is also available via the website in html or pdf formats, but please contact us if you experience any difficulties accessing the publication. Designed by Linney Design. Printed by Linney Print. Photo credits: Nigel E. Haverly – page 10 (George Johns) Courtesy of UCE – page 10 (Prof Upkar Singh Pardesi) Marketing Birmingham – page 23 Ed Moss – pages 2, 4, 16, 17 and 18

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All the latest news from the Alumni Relations Office, the Students' Guild and the Societies and Sports clubs.

GOING FOR GOLD



Aston University student, Griff Morgan, represented his country at the highest level at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia.

Griff, a first year student who is currently studying Logistics Programming in the School of Engineering & Applied Science, has been juggling his studies with training since being selected for the Games back in October 2005. Twenty-six year old Griff from Cardiff will be competing for a medal in the shooting event and, judging by his latest performance, has a good chance of taking back gold for Wales.

September 2005 also proved a good month for Griff because he competed in the Commonwealth Shooting Federation (European Division) Games in the Isle of Man. It was here that he shot his way to winning Gold in the Men's Individual event against many of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games competitors.

Griff has come a long way since first picking up a rifle in 1994 at Air Cadets and freely admitted: "I was by no means very good when I started!" The path to his success has been made through hours of dedication and nurturing at Air Cadets and at his home club, Torfaen Rifle Club.

“The idea of going to the Commonwealth Games and representing your nation is a very great honour and privilege.”

Nominations for the Games began about a year ago with the top Welsh shooters competing in a series of trials throughout 2005. A maximum of two people per shooting discipline were allowed to enter the Games, so an extremely tough qualifying criteria was set in order to select the elite. The purchase of a new rifle and Griff's success at Aberdeen's Grampian Open instantly made him a serious competitor for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. A natural to this high level of sport, he was one of the medallists of the Grampian Open after competing among some of Britain's top shooters.

It was at this club that his talents were recognised and he was given the opportunity of representing Wales at both junior and senior level and Britain in the under 25s Great Britain team. The star shooter will be joined by other members of Torfaen Rifle Club who are also competing in different shooting events. "The idea of going to the Commonwealth Games and representing your nation is a very great honour and privilege. Melbourne is a great city and one I am very much looking forward to visiting again," said Griff. The team has another two or three more training events in Gibraltar prior to leaving for Australia.

Aston hosts national admissions conference

Teachers and careers advisers from across the UK were at Aston University earlier this year for one of the largest events of its kind in the UK. The University's annual Admissions Conference enabled secondary and further education employees to share good practice with Aston University staff and hear about the latest developments in higher education that may impact on their work. Topics discussed included league tables and performance indicators and trends in graduate employment. There was also an opportunity for delegates to hear about student life and the latest subject developments at Aston.

Participants could also receive advice and guidance about how they can make the most of the national Aimhigher and NAGTY (National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth) initiatives for their students. Aston has a very successful programme of widening participation events which include masterclasses with local schools and a programme of lectures and workshops specifically for NAGTY.

Stewart Comfort, Director of Student Recruitment and Careers, said: "This annual event is a great opportunity for teachers and careers advisers to get together and discuss some of the latest developments that will impact on admissions and applications procedures for higher education. We are both pleased and proud to host this event again this year.

There's no doubt that Aston is a popular university, having seen a 28% increase in applications in 2005, but we warmly welcome students from all parts of the UK and beyond with a wide range of qualifications." The world of higher education admissions is constantly changing and updates on such topics as the UCAS admissions system and student finance are essential for the appropriate staff in schools and colleges.



Aston best for graduate jobs

Not only are Aston University graduates some of the most likely to get a job after they finish their degree, they are also the most likely in the Midlands to get a graduate level job.

Aston's strong position among mainstream universities in England and Wales for graduates finding employment was confirmed with the recent release of official figures by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). In yet another outstanding year of achievement for Aston, 81.4% of its first degree graduates entered employment within six months of graduation compared with the national average of 72%. This places Aston second in the UK for graduate recruitment and the ideal choice for students looking to quickly make their first step on the career ladder.

“Aston University students are sought after by some of the best companies in the UK.”

Further confirmation of Aston's strength comes from the new Government Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website stating the destinations of Aston graduates in non-graduate and graduate level jobs. The TQI statistics confirm that, of those employed, 76% went straight into graduate level jobs. This places Aston inside the UK's top ten for graduate employability and top among Midland universities including Birmingham University at 61%, Warwick at 62%, Nottingham at 65%, Loughborough at 68%, Leicester at 60%, UCE at 63%, Wolverhampton at 45% and Keele at 54%.

Aston's strong position in the graduate job marketplace is one of the reasons why applications from school and college leavers to the University have risen again this year. Applications to Aston have risen by more than three times the national average according to figures released by UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admission Service) earlier in 2005. Aston saw a 29.10% rise for its undergraduate course against a UK average increase of 9.2%. Around 1,900 places were available at Aston for entry in September 2005, putting applications at a ratio of seven per place.

Stewart Comfort, Director of Student Recruitment and Careers said: "The latest statistics from HESA and the TQI are fantastic news for Aston. Employers recognise the high quality of our degree programmes and their relevance to business and the professions. Nearly three-quarters of our students take a professional placement (sandwich) year as part of their degree, which gives them a massive advantage over other students in the labour market. Our students are sought after by some of the best companies in the UK."

profile on...



JOHN RUDD

John joined Aston as a part-time MBA student in 1996 and in his own words has "hung around making a nuisance of myself ever since". Prior to and also during his MBA studies, John has worked in various senior management roles for a variety of multinational retail, wholesale and construction organisations. John blames the MBA programme at Aston for his initial interest in an academic career: "Initially I remember being sceptical as to how an academic course might help me be a more effective manager. How wrong I was! The academic content was delivered in a really usable and practical way." From this initial spark of interest John went on to complete his PhD at Aston, joining the faculty as a Lecturer in Marketing in 2001.

John claims to have many roles at Aston, however, these converge into four main areas of research, lecturing, Management Education and administrative duties. John lectures on the MSc Marketing Management module and the undergraduate Strategic Management module, and has been awarded University and Business School Teaching Awards commenting: "I would be lying if I said that teaching was not my favourite part of the job; this is my first love. However as a whole, I do feel incredibly lucky to have found such a rewarding and interesting second career." The main focus of his research is strategic planning, organisational stakeholders and flexibility in organisations.

In addition to his busy role within the Business School he was awarded his PhD last year which he says: "is still sinking in"

Outside of his busy work life, John has recently started to play golf again (or a version of it, he points out) and also likes cycling (warm weather only, as he additionally points out). John is also a qualified PADI Rescue Diver, hence the picture!

new faces



STEPHANIE MEEK

Steph graduated in 1995 with a degree in European Studies and French. In 1999, she gained her Diploma in Marketing and has since worked in the Marketing/Communications/Event Management arena, within both the private and, more recently, public sectors. She joined the Alumni Relations Team just before Christmas and will be the main contact for all our MBA alumni and graduates of Aston Business School's MSc programmes. Steph will be contacting you in the near future to explore ways of facilitating the networking potential between you and your fellow Aston alumni. Watch this space... and if you're not already a member of the MBA online community, register at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/mba and join those already networking online!

As Faculty Advisor for Beta Gamma Sigma (BGS), Steph will also be working with BGS members in their final year on campus and long after graduation. For those of you who are not familiar with BGS, it is an American based Honour Society established in 1913, to recognise scholastic achievement. Since then, BGS has become global and now spans four continents. The main objective of BGS is to recognise the top students studying on business programmes which are AACSB accredited.

We hope to raise the profile of Beta Gamma Sigma on campus and have already established a series of skills sessions for those undergraduates inducted in the BGS Ceremony in November 2005. The sessions are being run in conjunction with the major professional firms and will provide an excellent networking platform for members and an opportunity to link more closely with employers. If you're interested in finding out more about what BGS has to offer, please contact Steph on s.d.meek@aston.ac.uk

AFTAB ARIF

The Alumni Relations Office welcomes placement student Aftab Arif to the team. Aftab is currently a student in Aston Business School studying BSc Business and Management.

Hailing from Burnley, Aftab chose to study at Aston because of its reputation for being one of the best universities in which to study business and its high position in the ranking tables. During his placement year Aftab hopes to put into practice what he has learned in the first two years of study at Aston and also to acquire new skills for when he graduates.

Whilst working with the Alumni Relations Team, Aftab will be involved in various projects. If you came to the AGM of Convocation in March you will have seen and no doubt read some of Aftab's work – he put together all the information, research stories and message boards which delegates responded so positively to. Aftab will also be completing some research projects and contacting former students of the University.

Find 'lost' friends on the alumni website www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/contactsdb or use our 'In-Touch Service' – see page 31.

For our alumni who find themselves outside the UK – either having returned home or having been posted overseas with work – join one of the e-groups and find out who's nearby. A full list of the countries where we have an e-group operating can be found at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni

Passing campus? Why not drop into the **Alumni Relations Office** and say hi? Join us for a cuppa and a chat about your University. If you regularly trip down Memory Lane, we can also arrange for you to have a look and a tour around campus, visiting all your old haunts and seeing the exciting new developments springing up.

STOP PRESS

THE NETWORK LECTURE SERIES

With the opportunity to hear about some of the most recent changes in the work environment and the chance to speak to fellow students, lecturers and professionals over a buffet, the Network Lecture Series is going from strength to strength as more and more students come along to hear what our alumni have to say.

Recently Aston has welcomed back Stuart Hutton (1999 BEng Electronic Engineering and Computer Science) a Design Engineer with Bentley whose lecture 'Driven by Cars' took us from the searing heat of Death Valley to the freezing snowfields of the Arctic, from high-speed test tracks in Southern Italy to secret sheds in... Nuneaton. Stuart gave a glimpse behind the design office door introducing the latest engineering techniques and forthcoming technology.

Managing the operational challenges of the fastest growing FMCG business in the UK was the topic of 'From Small Acorns' an insight into the key strategies and challenges faced by Mike Stevens (1998 BSc Logistics) Head of Operations for Innocent Ltd.

This lecture series has been running since 1997 and aims to bring students and alumni together in an exciting discussion forum. Aston graduates are invited back to talk on a topic of interest in a particular profession – a burning issue of the day. We have heard from linguists, engineers, marketers, financiers, lawyers and CEOs. The complete list of Network Lectures can be found at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/network.jsp If this is one of our projects that interests you and you'd like to come back and talk to a captive audience of students, contact the Alumni Relations Office for more details. This year the Network Lecture Series is sponsored by the JPA Group – a graduate recruitment specialist.

BIKING INTO RETIREMENT

“Some riders are intent on winning, but for most of us it is just an opportunity to see old friends, hear the bark of a starting line of old four strokes and maybe taste a bit of freshly dug dirt!”

In 1965, Tony Hagger graduated as a Mechanical Engineer from the Birmingham College of Advanced Technology.

After his retirement in 1988, Tony and his family moved to Colorado in the United States. Even before his retirement, work alone had never been enough for Tony. “Apart from a spell of extreme poverty when the kids were very young, my work interest has always been supplemented by motorcycling,” he enthused.

For Tony the States offers different things from the UK, with the biggest changes being the available space and the low population density. Tony explains: “This affects all aspects of living but especially the ability to ride. There is virtually no traffic outside the major cities, almost endless mountain scenery (the Colorado Rockies are about seven times as extensive as the Swiss Alps, with 54 peaks over 14,000 feet) and lots of trails for off-road riding.”

His collection began whilst he was still in England when the 1960 Norton Dominator Deluxe was purchased.

This was bought in 1975 and: “has been freshened up several times since then and still starts with the first kick,” Tony tells us.

A year later, in 1976, Tony added a trials bike to his collection. This was made from pre-1965 bits so that it was eligible, at that time, for vintage trials in England. Tony took the bike to the States with him and still uses it for a similar purpose. The other off-road bikes in his collection are a 1972 Triumph Rickman Metisse and a 1967 Norton P11, which Tony says is: “much too much a bike for me at 325 pounds and 750 cc.” The most recent off-road bike purchased by Tony is a 1967 Velocette Metisse. He explains: “This is probably the only one of its kind in the States and I confess to cheating a bit by buying a new frame kit for the old Velocette parts. Metisse frames, made and sold in the sixties and seventies by Don and Derek Rickman, were definitely the best available. They are still being built in England for vintage enthusiasts using the same fixtures that the Rickmans made.”

For road riding, the Norton Dominator has just been joined by a 1967 Velocette Thruxton and a 2003 Honda Gold Wing. The Honda was the choice of Tony's wife and he admits it is very comfortable for long spells on the freeways, although they don't use the CD player much.

Surprisingly, old bikes, which means mostly British bikes, are quite popular in the States. There are nationwide competitions organised by the American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association. This group was led for several years by Yorkshireman Jeff Smith, whom many of you will recognise as the European scrambles champion, and many times UK scrambles and trials champion from the sixties. Tony says that he is not only involved with the organisation, but he is still embarrassingly quick, along with his fellow septuagenarian BSA teammate Dick Mann.



It is an honour to be able to compete alongside these and other past greats. Typically, a vintage weekend for Tony will involve a trial on Saturday, followed by a motorcross event on Sunday, with maybe a barbecue on the Saturday evening. “Some riders are intent on winning, but for most of us it is just an opportunity to see old friends, hear the bark of a starting line of old four strokes and maybe taste a bit of freshly dug dirt!” he comments.

An unavoidable problem with all the open space is that there is a lot of travelling involved to get to each event. The first race on the calendar for Tony last year was in California, a one-way journey of 1,500 miles. He was a bit disappointed to arrive at the venue to be told the meeting had just been cancelled because of rain. “Fortunately, on the return run, we were able to drive via Yosemite Park and the Nevada Desert which, because of the recent rains, was a mass of wild flowers. So the trip was definitely not wasted, but towing a 14 ft. trailer 3,000 miles for nothing was a bit of a nuisance,” he says.

Another regular migration is to a classic bike auction in Las Vegas held every January. This is also a long (800 mile) day's drive, but Tony believes it's worth it. “Vegas is a fun place to be for a few days and the auction usually is for somewhere in the region of 700 old bikes, many of which are quite rare here. So it's more like a visit to a museum than to a sale and although I've been five or six times now, I've yet to summon up the courage, or cash, to buy anything there.”



CHANGES ON CAMPUS



It's been a busy year at Aston with new developments taking place throughout the University. Here is a quick rundown of the major changes.

Aston Business School's Conference Centre, the flagship residential venue for conferences, training and corporate events, is celebrating its reopening following an extensive £20 million expansion and refurbishment programme.

The Conference Centre features 80 stylish, luxury bedrooms which have doubled accommodation capacity to 163 and have transformed the Management Development Centre into a modern 21st century venue.

There is also a new 260-seater restaurant. The **Management Development Centre** offers a choice of both formal and casual dining experiences. The main restaurant delivers creative, international culinary delights, catering for all dietary requirements as standard and is complemented by a thoughtfully selected wine list.

The lounge provides an all day selection of light refreshments and the well-stocked bar provides relaxing surroundings for drinks and a varied menu of light snacks. Intimate private dining rooms are also available for groups requiring a more exclusive setting.

The **Great Hall** has been transformed into a lecture theatre which will accommodate large groups of students. The retractable seats rise up towards the rear of the hall seating over 600 guests. With multimedia screens and a hi-tech presentation kit, the Great Hall is proving to be a popular venue on campus. If needed, it can revert to its original flat floor layout for other University events such as graduation.

Where did you eat lunch? A few new eating places have sprung up around the University. **Subway** has arrived in the Blue Room for students to enjoy lunch and also **Caffè Libro** on the ground floor of the Library with a seating area where staff and students can sip cappuccino.



graduate George returns to Aston



On 5 December last year George Johns returned to Aston to have his photograph taken in his full ceremonial robes.

George was awarded his Advanced College of Technology Certificate (Associate of the College of Technology) in 1948. In 1967 he was awarded a BSc in Electrical Engineering and was invited to attend a graduation ceremony. Unfortunately, George had the flu at the time and was unable to attend. In November last year, George called the Alumni Relations Office asking if we could arrange for his photograph to be taken in his graduation robes – we were very happy to oblige!

George had his photograph taken with the Vice Chancellor, Professor Mike Wright, in the Council Room and afterwards was invited to tea in the Vice Chancellor's office, where he was presented with a set of Aston University glasses.

"I always enjoy meeting alumni who return to the University and finding out what they have been doing since they left. It was fascinating to hear about George's career," said Professor Mike Wright.

Aston alumnus receives award

Aston graduate, Professor Upkar Singh Pardesi, has been awarded the OBE for services to higher education in the Queen's New Year Honours list. Professor Pardesi studied part-time at Aston from 1985, gaining his PhD in Management in 1992. He is currently employed as the Dean of UCE Business School in Birmingham and he is also Professor of Enterprise Development.

Professor Pardesi has also held the position of Vice Chairman of the National Organisation of Asian Businesses and is currently a member of the West Midlands Regional Race for Opportunity Steering Group and an adviser to the Birmingham and Solihull Asian Business Forum.

Professor Pardesi is well known as an entrepreneurial academic and as someone who has made a real difference in the

community. He has a keen personal interest in the arts and is the Vice Chairman of the Board of The Drum, an Arts Centre catering for the needs of the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities in Birmingham. He is also Vice Chairman of the Birmingham School of Acting Trust Board and, until recently, also presented a weekly show on Radio XL for the Asian community called Asian Business Matters. In July 2005, Professor Pardesi was selected by the Institute of Asian Professionals to be included in Asian Power 100, a list of the hundred most influential Asian men and women in the UK.

"I am absolutely delighted to receive this award as it is a celebration of the work that people do in their local communities and the contribution that they make to the British society," said Professor Pardesi.



ASTON GRADUATE HITS THE BIG SCREEN

Susannah Mathieson (2004 BSc International Business & German) has recently become a TV star in Germany presenting a product she helped to launch on one of the world's biggest home shopping channels.

After graduating, Susannah joined the European Graduate Development Programme at ICI Paint in Hilden, Germany. Her career began marketing the 'Molto' brand – the German version of Polycell – but she has since moved into sales.

One of her first projects was to launch a new product in the German market – an anti-slip paint which can be coated onto any slippery surface, especially bath and shower basins.

"The actual product itself is quite complex," explained Susannah. "Coating involves a little more than simply applying the paint and because of this normal advertising channels didn't seem appropriate. I had the idea of approaching a shopping channel as you get ten minutes to demonstrate your product to a potentially larger audience."

Susannah approached the shopping channel QVC to gauge its interest in buying the product. The first step was to secure QVC's buy-in which involved inviting them to the offices for a product demonstration. After an interest had been shown, prices had to be negotiated.

"After we had the OK for the price," continued Susannah, "the product was sent to Quality Control for some rigorous tests. The final stage was sourcing suitable packaging which conformed to QVC standards. It sold in a bulk load at the beginning of the year."

QVC needed an 'expert' to present the product live on television. There were two choices, either paying someone to present the product or sending someone from the company to sell it themselves on TV. Two members of staff were chosen to audition – one of them was Susannah. "When my colleague didn't get through the casting, I was convinced that they wouldn't take me either as I wasn't even a native speaker! The other guy was our technical advisor and knew the product better than anyone else."

But during the casting Susannah was spotted by the selection panel as 'born for television' with a natural way of presenting. "I think this is mainly down to the amount of practice we had whilst

studying," explained Susannah, "as we always seemed to be preparing for one presentation or another in German!" Susannah went on live TV for a ten-minute slot on 15 May 2005.

We asked Susannah how she found the experience. "It was pretty nerve-wracking for me as I had to present the product on TV and in a foreign language

as well. My TV appearance went really well and we managed to sell enough products to get a second live slot on a Sunday morning at 2am!"

Susannah is currently working in Key Account Management for the customers Wal-Mart and Hagebau (a DIY store chain with approximately 300 stores in Germany).



With summer fast approaching, we are all starting to think about getting away and booking that holiday. Some of us will book a two-week package holiday in Tenerife, but the more daring amongst us will decide to go travelling all over the world. Gavin and Rowan Young (née McAlister) have created mytravelcompanion.com – a new website which helps you plan, record and share your journey with friends, other travellers and family back home.

Gavin (1996 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies) and Rowan (1997 BSc Modern Languages and French) met while they were studying at Aston. After eight years living the office life they felt that there was something missing and decided to take a break. A move to Buenos Aires in late 2004 fulfilled their passion for travel and proved to be the inspiration that they needed because by February 2005 the mytravelcompanion concept was born.

So what is mytravelcompanion.com and what benefits does it provide to its users? Gavin and Rowan explain: "mytravelcompanion.com is a new website for people who travel, helping them to enjoy their journey with friends and family. As well as all the fun stuff and because we know that sometimes things can go wrong, mytravelcompanion.com has some unique features designed to keep travellers safe. We can't stop the bad stuff happening, it's one of the risks of travel, but with mytravelcompanion.com we can at least take the sting out of the experience... think of us as a kind of first aid kit for the journey – just in case!"

When Gavin and Rowan left the UK in September 2004 to move to Argentina, their only plan was to see a bit of South America and to have a go at learning a new language. They seem to be happy with the move: "Buenos Aires is a cool city with friendly, optimistic, welcoming and happy people... and fantastic wine! When we decided to take a break Buenos Aires just seemed right and after 18 months here, we can confidently say that we made the right decision."

It was on 20 February 2005, whilst walking home from the Palermo Parks of Buenos Aires that the original idea for mytravelcompanion was born. "It was basically inspired by our own needs as travellers. The idea first came to us when we were planning a trip to Patagonia (in the south of Argentina), talking about how we should take copies of our important travel documents and keep them somewhere safe,

easily accessible, but away from prying hands! From there the ideas just started flowing and after talking to other travellers and reading stories about people stranded, attacked or worse, we knew that this would be a fantastic service for travellers, as well as their friends and family back home. A thorough grilling by our accountant also confirmed that it had the potential to be a viable business as well... which was nice!"

Gavin and Rowan's previous eight years of experience provided many of the skills that they needed to take the mytravelcompanion concept from 'just another idea' to a fully developed website and a viable business. After they had come up with the initial idea, they drew up a list of high-level user requirements for the site, undertook a market assessment and feasibility analysis and then spent a couple of months searching the world for a web development company that they could work with. However, as with all new businesses, they have been faced with their fair share of challenges. "Finance has been the primary challenge and having funded the development and promotion of the site entirely from our personal finances, we have a considerable incentive to make a success of this venture!" Another major challenge has been the fact that their development partner is based in Dubai, whilst during the development of the site they were based in South America. Managing a time difference of seven hours and a working week that runs from Sunday to Thursday has meant several months of very early mornings and six day weeks, which Gavin and Rowan claim is "definitely an overrated experience!"

mytravelcompanion.com went live in April this year, but Gavin and Rowan are not content to rest on their laurels. So what are their plans for the future? There are a number of exciting features in their development plan that will make use of emerging technologies to enhance the user experience and keep the site fresh for visitors. They also plan to broaden the potential user base by launching several foreign language versions of the site.

As for their own plans? "Our personal plan for the future is fairly simple – to travel and enjoy the journey..."

The core services offered to travellers, friends and family back home include:

mytraveldocuments provides secure online access to critical travel documents and information whilst travelling, just in case they are lost or stolen.

PocketPal™ a credit card sized card that provides emergency services personnel with access to critical information in the event that the traveller is incapacitated.

mytravelitinerary records future journey plans and, at the traveller's discretion, sends an alert to someone who can help if they don't turn up at a planned destination.

mytraveldiary provides the traveller with an online record of their journey in words and pictures.

mytravelphotos provides storage and sharing of travel photos.

For more information visit www.mytravelcompanion.com or send an e-mail to contact@mytravelcompanion.com



On your graduate update forms we ask you to tell us anything that you have done that would make interesting reading. Most of the comments we read are about your travels to fascinating countries across the globe. This issue we feature four graduates who have been exploring...

all around the world



MARIE SPEED (2005 BSc Marketing) and VICTORIA YATES (2005 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

We had always wanted to go travelling together and a tour of Europe after our finals was the perfect trip for our budget. Always up for a challenge, we planned to cram in eleven destinations in six countries in three weeks! We Inter-railed between cities staying in youth hostels and met an amazing variety of people from all over the world.

We began our tour in the infamous Prague, then on to Vienna, Budapest, Venice, Verona, Florence, Rome, Pisa, Monte Carlo, Nice and Cannes. It was a fantastic experience and we couldn't believe how much we did and saw.

Our favourite encounters began in Prague, where we soaked up the diverse culture (and absinthe!); Vienna, where we were wowed by the stunning architecture and Klimpt's 'The Kiss'; Verona where we visited Juliet's Balcony; Florence, where we visited galleries, viewing famous works by Michelangelo, Da Vinci and Botticelli; Venice, where we were serenaded on a gondola and ate far too many gelatari; Rome, where we recovered from the heat in the Vatican City by relaxing by our pool and appreciating 'happy hour' at a local cocktail bar and, of course, the glamorous French Riviera, where we finally relaxed on the beach in Nice and admired the yachts in Monaco.

From sharing a mixed dorm with 33 other people, to negotiating the Hungarian public transport system, to standing at the foot of the Colosseum, it was a truly unforgettable experience, which set us up nicely for launching into our new graduate jobs.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER GERALD GLOVER (1962 BSc Production Engineering)

After 17 years working in the heavy engineering industry, I gave into a boyhood yen and joined the Royal Navy as a Commissioned Officer in the Marine Engineering Specialisation.

In 1972 I joined the World War II Destroyer, HMS Caprice. We pottered about a number of British ports, eventually visiting Lisbon. The big adventure was to be sent on patrol to Iceland (the Cod Wars) in February 1973. Six weeks being tossed around in heavy seas certainly tested one's ability to cope with sea sickness!

In August 1974 I was on another new ship, HMS Zulu, a Tribal Class Frigate. We passed through the Kiel Canal and took part in the Kiel Sailing Regatta. Later that year we went on deployment to the West Indies and North America. Other places we visited were Fort Lauderdale, Jamaica, Caracas in Venezuela, Suriname, Trinidad, Belize, Grand Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Nevis and St Kitts. Whilst in Belize, I got dressed up as Santa Claus and distributed presents to the local children on behalf of the Royal Navy and British Army.

We were off on deployment to the Far East on another ship, HMS Coventry, in 1980. We visited Gibraltar, Istanbul and passed through the Suez Canal to Mombassa in Kenya where I went on Safari. We went on to Singapore, Hong Kong, Subic Bay in the Philippines and Shanghai in China. We were the first British warship to visit China in 30 years and were interviewed for television; I don't know what the local population thought of the performance.

Having retired in 1990, following open heart surgery, I purchased a 63ft narrow boat and now spend my summers cruising the inland waterways of Great Britain. Once a sailor, always a sailor.



ELISABETH JELLIE (2005 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

After graduating last year I decided that there would be no better way to unwind from all the post-exam stress than to take time out to travel. I'm so glad that I decided on South Africa. It is a country that is diverse in every way imaginable.

Whether it is leaping off the highest bungee-jump in the world, living it up in all the bars in Cape Town or chilling out by a camp fire on a secluded rocky beach gazing up at the stars, this country cannot help but leave you captivated. It is also one of the only places you'll get to see the most impressive of wild animals in their natural habitat. The friendliness of the locals is an added bonus. All this combined with the stark and exceptional history has left me in no doubt that I will be visiting this place a lot more than once in my lifetime.



CHINA



Breaking into new overseas markets can be difficult. Even after the most detailed feasibility studies and plans have been accepted, understanding local idiosyncrasies, different business practices, languages and cultures challenges even the most cosmopolitan of executives.

Many attest to the advantage of having 'local knowledge' to help facilitate market breakthrough and that local knowledge is best found at home in the target market. Peter Thong, Vice-President of Carhart Inc. Asia Pacific Operations and Chief Representative of Carhart Inc. Beijing Representative Office, told **apex** how his company has grown to assist the entrepreneur breaking into the Chinese market.

Carhart Inc. was established in Chicago, USA, in 1985 but it wasn't until March 2004 that it planted its Beijing office. "We are a total supply chain management service provider," explained Peter. "We develop business strategies, form consortia and apply operational research techniques with supply chain methodologies to achieve the desired return on investment for our clients."

Since its foundation in China, Carhart Inc. has expanded its operations rapidly and is led by executives and managers who each have over twenty years of personal experience of living and working in China. This substantial experience means that Carhart Inc. is able to achieve market entry into China for small and medium-sized manufacturing companies more effectively than companies who 'go it alone' or rely on less able partners. "Carhart Inc. knows the landscape, has already experienced the pitfalls and knows how to steer its clients around them towards success," reassures Peter.

The company works across art, aviation, automotive, bioscience, construction, food, forestry, steel, logistics and industrial machinery supply chain industries. "Greatest efficiency is yielded," explained Peter, "because it all originates from us – a single source."

The company offers clients an immediate presence in China through a fully staffed office which manages all administrative functions such as hiring and local payroll. One of the main difficulties is undoubtedly the language and here, too, Carhart Inc. supports its clients by providing dedicated employees who act as field sales agents fluent in Chinese and English, technologically proficient in the client's products and familiar with working in the international business environment.

“Greatest efficiency is yielded because it all originates from us – a single source.”

Peter brings a rich expertise to his role which he has enjoyed since 1984. "From 1970 to 1975, I worked as Production Manager, Financial Analyst and Sales Manager of large multinational companies in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia," recounted Peter. "From 1976 to 1984 I was CEO of a multinational company in Malaysia. With 22 years' business experience, particularly in the steel, construction and chemical industries, I can help SMEs succeed with large corporations."

Hotels and restaurants are world-class, telecommunications are excellent with nationwide coverage and the transportation infrastructure is good linking cities with world-class highways, rail services and airlines.

Peter believes that China is entering a new wave of development that amazes even its own citizens. "In the last ten years, a liking of the Western style of living has developed as a result of people travelling and living overseas. On their return, they are in a position to introduce new businesses, methodologies and services. The Chinese people are highly entrepreneurial and improve on what they learn from overseas, blending Western and Chinese culture – Fusion."

"In China, the overseas investor establishing new business is more common than those relocating existing business from elsewhere," observed Peter, "because the Chinese have become more demanding in terms of convenience of supply. It's all part of efficient supply chain management, taking advantage of manufacturing close to the market to achieve better customer service."

All businesses have an equal chance of succeeding in China. There are still market opportunities where services are not as mature and sophisticated as in other countries, for example in the catering, property management and hospitality fields. So we asked Peter what makes a successful business in China. "Confidence of one's operations, accepting and trusting one's staff as team members rather than outsiders," he replied. "Many businesses, both Chinese and multinationals, succeed because they are open-minded, proactive, innovative and realistic. They solve problems quickly and work well with their customers and vendors as supply chain partners." Much potential is on offer in China and with assistance from a local source, the journey for internationalisation goals might not be so bumpy.

2005 IMPORT AND EXPORT STATISTICS

1. Recorded 1 trillion pounds in foreign trade volume
2. Is the third largest trader in the world
3. Imports and exports grew by 23.2% over 2004 figures
4. Exports grew by 28.4% to 550 billion pounds
5. Imports grew by 17.6% to 470 billion pounds

China is an interesting market. New opportunities are emerging. The growth in export and imports shows the dynamism of China's economy and the buoyant trend is expected to continue as Beijing prepares for the 2008 Olympics and Shanghai prepares for the 2010 World Expo. Construction continues unabated and personal savings climb. Luxury is wanted in every sense of the word. Rural areas are being transformed into modern industrial estates well-equipped with business, vocational, educational and social infrastructures.

THE WORLD'S LONGEST LASER



Academics in the School of Engineering & Applied Science have invented the world's longest laser. They have transformed an optical fibre 75 kilometres long into the laser, which the team hopes will improve long distance transmissions across the world.

The new laser is special because it can transmit light signals over such a long distance without any loss of power, so the signal that is being sent barely deteriorates. When normal telephone conversations or data sent over the Internet are converted to light in order to travel through standard optical fibres, the signals lose around five per cent of their power for every kilometre that they travel. The signals then have

to be amplified to ensure that they reach their destination. But when the signals are amplified, the background noise is also amplified until it gets so high the signals can no longer be understood.

Now Dr Juan Diego Ania-Castañón and his colleagues have used a special process called the Raman Effect (a natural phenomenon that affects light passing through a material) to transform a long optical fibre into an ultra-long laser. Lasers inject light at each end, which makes some of the atoms of the fibres give out more energy and emit photons (particles of light) of a longer wavelength. These photons are reflected back into the fibre by special mirrors at each end of the optical link.

The fibre then stores a stable, uniform amount of laser light that travels with the signals and strengthens them, enabling them to move across the fibre at full power without suffering any loss, thus removing the need to amplify the signals.

The discovery is tremendously exciting, not only in the world of science, but in the world of telecommunications. Dr Ania-Castañón explains: "Lossless transmission of data has always been a dream goal in the world of communications. The development of a simple method to implement nearly ideal links between receiver and sender paves the way to important advances in long-distance telecommunications and opens exciting possibilities for research in other fields."



world-class conference centre

The launch event for Aston Business School's new Conference Centre was a real celebration of a world-class venue. The new building offers professional facilities and services for the business community within a stylishly funky environment.

Conference and event organisers, meeting planners and the great and the good from the meetings industry were joined by guest speaker Saira Khan, star of Sir Alan Sugar's hit TV series, *The Apprentice*, to view the inspirational transformation of the Management Development Centre following an ambitious £20 million expansion and refurbishment programme.

Hot on the heels of the launch of her new business development book *P.U.S.H. for Success*, Saira drew parallels with Aston's commitment and innovation in striving to achieve continued success and creating a new benchmark for an academic venue.

The new conference centre boasts world-class amenities for both residential and non-residential events designed around a contemporary courtyard garden, offering a contrasting solace to the vibrant city centre location.

“The launch event proved that not only have we created a venue with a definitive WOW! factor, but we can back it up with superior service and dedicated support.”

The conference and meeting rooms and Business Support Centre provide a corporate learning environment worthy of Aston's reputation as one of Europe's leading Business Schools. The hospitality facilities include a stylish and versatile restaurant catering for 260 people, a cosmopolitan lounge bar and 163 minimalist bedrooms that cleverly conceal every necessity. It's the clever contrasts, complementing each other so skilfully and unexpectedly, that really do set this venue apart. Lynne Snow, Head of Conference Services at Aston, championed the expansion programme with great vision. She explains: "Aston Business School's Management Development Centre is the flagship residential venue for conferences, training and corporate events offered by Aston University under its Conference Aston brand. The expansion was first commissioned back in 2002 to help meet the growing needs of Conference Aston's clients. We are now proud to offer an impressive five storey, cosmopolitan, state-of-the-art facility that presents a formidable challenge to the Birmingham city centre hotels, including the big chains like Hilton and Radisson.

The launch event proved that not only have we created a venue with a definitive WOW! factor, but we can back it up with superior service and dedicated support." The new build took place between 2005/6 and took 18 months. It cost £20 million and was designed by Architects Design Partnership. The original Aston Business School Nelson Building was built in the mid-1970s and the new MDC is an addition to this. The new restaurant, bar/lounge area, conference rooms and accommodation will no doubt build on the success of the Conference Aston brand even further throughout the region and the UK.

Aston's Management Development Programme itself provides customised training for public and private groups with training courses designed and delivered specific to individual clients' needs. A popular programme is the Certificate in Management by distance learning.

For further details of Aston Business School's Management Development Centre and the Conference Aston portfolio, visit the Conference Aston website www.aston.ac.uk/conferences or e-mail Louise Goncalves at l.m.goncalves@aston.ac.uk

COULD BUBBLES HELP INCREASE EARTH'S OIL RESERVES?



New research which could help salvage huge amounts of the world's oil that currently goes to waste is being carried out as a collaborative venture between Aston University and Nottingham Trent. Experts are looking at using Magnetic Resonance Image (MRI) scanners to find a way of increasing the oil quantity being extracted from porous rock, which is often less than 30%.

All of the world's oil is found in porous rock beneath the ground and is usually obtained by drilling two holes – water is pumped into the first, which forces oil through the second. However, only a small amount of the oil is ever taken before the water starts to re-emerge. Once this happens the borehole is closed and the remaining 70% of oil can never be recovered.

The research team, led by Senior Lecturer in Physics, Dr Martin Bencsik (Nottingham Trent) in collaboration with Dr Yvonne Perrie (Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutics at Aston) has received funding from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to develop a novel application for an MRI scanner, normally used to create an image of the inside of the human body.

MRI is known to be sensitive to water density so the team will be driving water containing micro-bubbles (known as liposomes) through small pieces of rock in order to make a three-dimensional image of its pressure. As the team builds up an idea of how the water pressure changes in this journey it is hoped they will be able to develop new ways to

increase the oil quantity currently being extracted. The gas-filled liposomes (micro-bubble fluid) will be designed and made by Dr Perrie at Aston University.

The research could also benefit the automotive industry as the team will look into whether they can improve the ability to drive resin into the porous woven fibreglass which makes up the majority of our vehicles. The fibreglass is shaped to whatever form is needed and is then reinforced with the resin making it stronger and less likely to fail.

Dr Bencsik said: "These research areas will make further use of MRI technology. Most people think of healthcare when they hear the words MRI scanner but we are certain that it can be used to achieve many other valuable uses, including this new research into oil extraction."

The micro-bubble fluid (gas-filled liposomes) will be designed and made by Dr Perrie at Aston University and the MRI work will be undertaken on a research scanner at the Sir Peter Mansfield Magnetic Resonance Centre at the University of Nottingham.

LANGUAGES EXPERT WINS 'OSCAR'

Many congratulations are due to Jane Willis, who is an Honorary Fellow in the School of Languages & Social Sciences. She is co-author of the book Teachers Exploring Tasks along with Birmingham University's Corony Edwards and the book has just won a prestigious national British Council Innovation Award.

These awards (otherwise known as 'Eltons') are for English language teaching (ELT) products and services and are the Oscars of the ELT world. They are offered to outstanding new language learning resources which use innovative ideas to help learners of English to achieve their goals.

Teachers Exploring Tasks is an innovative collection of thematically related 'classroom exploration' articles, prepared for language teachers by language teachers.

The British Council website gives further information about the book in a special section about the awards: "This rich resource of varied classroom experience encourages readers to use more tasks in their own lessons, giving insights into ways in which tasks can be designed, adapted and implemented in a range of teaching contexts."

Each of the 18 explorations illustrates how tasks and task-based learning can be investigated as a research activity, inviting practising language teachers and student professionals to explore for themselves aspects of task-based teaching and learning through their own qualitative studies."

One reader describes it as: "A great example of using small-scale projects to investigate aspects of the class you are teaching, demonstrating how teachers can give back to the academic community. I would recommend it to any teacher of English as a foreign language starting out or looking for a cure to feeling burnt out."

Praise indeed and a great achievement for both Jane and Corony, who said: "Thanks to the judges for selecting the book. We'd like to say thanks to the 19 teachers around the world who wrote the papers that make up this book."

Annie wins national recognition

Annie Bannerman, Project Officer in the School of Languages & Social Sciences at Aston, has been awarded national recognition for her work in opening up opportunities for all young people to study languages and promoting the benefits of learning languages. Her work is funded by the University's widening participation grant from HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England).



Annie has won the Chartered Institute of Linguists Threlford Memorial Cup for 2005. The cup is awarded for 'fostering the study of languages'.

She received her award at a special prize giving ceremony in London. It was presented to her for her work on a unique scheme called Languages for Life, which places undergraduate students who are studying at Aston in schools to talk about the positive experiences that learning a language has given them. The scheme also has a website with case studies of language graduates and their careers using language.

The School of Languages & Social Sciences offers degree courses in French, German and Spanish. Annie herself graduated from the University in 2000 as a mature student with first class honours in French.

She said: "I was both delighted and surprised to hear that I had won this award. It's a fantastic honour because it is the Institute's top award and it has only just changed its rules so this cup can be awarded to an individual. I'd also like to thank all the students, past and present, who were involved with the scheme and shared their experiences of language learning and how they use languages."

Peer Mentoring Scheme

Linking with peers to reflect on shared experiences is a vital part of learning and an important step in working towards continuing professional development. As part of this, a Peer Mentoring Scheme is being piloted in Combined Honours during 2006.

This scheme aims to support students at two important phases. The first stage 'transition' involves second year students mentoring first years to raise awareness of the importance of early career management. The second stage 'placement preparation' encourages final year students to mentor second years by helping them to prepare for placement.

Susanne Stoever, Peer Mentoring Co-ordinator, is central to the scheme. A feasibility report on the development and further expansion of the scheme across the University is planned through an audit of existing formal and informal peer support systems across the University and an evaluation of the pilot scheme. If the scheme is successful, it could be rolled out across all the Schools.

The first "transition" strand took place in semester one of the current academic year and it was a great success. Despite timescale limitations and delayed funding decisions, 32 mentors and 45 mentees were recruited and matched by subject. Recruitment was carried out through e-mail, posters and leaflets. Students found moral support, made new friends and advice was available if they encountered problems or difficulties. Mentees were able to gain pastoral support with all matters related to university life. The outcomes have been very positive with many new friendships being formed. The scheme has been of particular benefit to students living off campus as well as international students.

Nine mentors from the first strand have become mentees for the second strand of "placement preparation" which will take place in the second semester. Seventeen mentors and 21 mentees have been recruited through a combination of lecture talks, e-mails, leaflets and word-of-mouth promotion. The mentors are using their experience from professional work placements, summer placements and/or part-time work to support the mentees. Staff in Combined Honours are eager to see the outcome of the second strand and hope it will be as successful as the first one.

Ideas to pilot a third mentoring strand are being formulated. This would involve business mentors supporting final year students. PricewaterhouseCoopers has already expressed an interest in taking part in the Peer Mentoring Scheme by providing business mentors to support Aston's final year students. There might also be an opportunity for Aston alumni working at PWC to act as mentors for Aston students. As Aston already has good links with PWC through its employability skills courses, this third strand of the mentoring project seems very promising.

If you would like more details about the scheme or if you would like to investigate possibilities of linking with your organisation, you are invited to contact Susanne directly on s.stoever@aston.ac.uk



Cobras celebrate golden jubilee year

It will be 50 years this year since the Cobras, an Aston rugby team, were first founded. We caught up with David Taplin to find out more about one of the longest running clubs at the University.

David told us that the origins of the Cobras goes back to September 1956 when the 'Colleges of Birmingham Rugby Association' was formed in the Student Union of the Birmingham College of Advanced Technology. In the 1950s the Cobras were the soul and absolutely ONLY life for some at Aston – via the games themselves, the Duke pub, the occasional training and above all the camaraderie and friendships created and sustained. "Sustained in that we all still meet as friends fifty years later. Good evidence I think you'll agree. Also we played very good rugby, as the playing record attests.

The first thing that happened at a Cobras Hop (we had barn dances and waltzes in those days) was that we decided to raffle a girl. I bought as many tickets as I could possibly afford on my meagre apprenticeship wages, but John Butler had served in the RAF on Christmas Island for his National Service and so had higher wages. John bought even more raffle tickets, won the girl and is still married to her nearly 50 years later."

A golden jubilee match is planned for later on this year. Details through the Alumni Relations Office.



Above: 1959 Team photo

Below: Half a century later, some of the team meet every year



CHANGING TIMES AT THE STUDENTS' GUILD

The Guild kicked off the new academic year with Aston's legendary Freshers' Week. Social events took place throughout the week and clubs and societies jostled for student membership. All newcomers were made to feel welcome and part of life at Aston.

But the Guild isn't all about partying. There are many challenges to be faced this year, most notably to remain on an even financial keel. With a changing demographic and the differing needs of students, the Guild is facing the challenge of overhauling its existing business models to meet expectations.

A large scale market research programme has been commissioned by DVL Smith to determine what the Guild is doing well, what needs to be improved and also to look at its strengths and weaknesses in order to formulate a new strategy.

At the moment the Guild feels it could cater better for international and postgraduate students. Plans are being formulated to redevelop the second floor of the Guild, which is currently being used as an overflow facility, into a social study area for students. The area will be equipped with computers, a presentation space and lounge area. HEFCE has authorised funds for the project and it should be completed this summer.

The Guild is a vital part of student life and with the implementation of a five-year strategy, the Guild will remain central to student life for years to come.



Thank you. We are grateful to everyone who made a donation to the 2005 Aston Annual Fund.

Through your generosity, you help Aston University challenge thinking and create opportunities for students.

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WINTER IN THE CITY

Birmingham wheel

If you come to Birmingham you will notice a few new additions to the skyline. One of the most recent is the Birmingham wheel.

Standing at a height of 60 metres, the Birmingham wheel towers over Centenary Square providing picturesque views of the city.



The original wheel arrived in Birmingham in October 2004 and was only scheduled for a short stop but, due to its popularity, it has returned for longer – and this time it's bigger! The original wheel featured six-seat gondolas, but now it has 42 eight-seat gondolas and uses water as ballast to avoid having to dig foundations for the support.

The £3.5 million structure, built in Holland, is one of the world's largest transportable observation wheels. The wheel is owned by World Tourist Attractions Ltd and was recently moved from Paris to Birmingham on 22 trucks.

Interestingly, when the wheel arrived for the first time passengers had to listen to a French commentary about the River Seine and the Eiffel Tower. The company put this embarrassing hitch down to technical difficulties but thankfully this has now changed and a full commentary in English talks you through the wonders of Birmingham.

Christmas market

The famous Frankfurt Christmas Market in Birmingham City Centre was the biggest that Birmingham has ever hosted with more than 70 stalls. It was the largest German market outside of Germany and Austria and attracted tens of thousands of people to Birmingham including an unprecedented number of visitors from abroad.



Dig out your woollies! In our regular feature on the City of Birmingham, we're bringing you a snapshot of how we spent the winter season in the heart of Birmingham! How does this match up with your experiences of Birmingham when you were studying here?

More than 1.5 million people visit the market every year and around 500 coaches of tourists come to Birmingham especially to browse the stalls and taste the culinary delights on offer. The market is the most visible demonstration of the close ties between Birmingham and Frankfurt which date back to the early 1950s.

The Frankfurt Christmas Market is brought to Birmingham by the City Centre Partnership and Birmingham City Council in conjunction with Frankfurt City Council. It is supported by 96.4 BRMB and the Birmingham Mail and is part of Birmingham City Council's biggest ever programme of Christmas events and attractions.

Street ice

Birmingham City Council and T-Mobile joined together to bring T-Mobile Street Ice – Birmingham's very own stylish, outdoor ice rink in Centenary Square. Open to people of all ages the ice rink grew to be the perfect place for a family outing in the daytime and a trendy, cool alternative hang-out in the evening – the ultimate ice-skating extravaganza, with spectacular lighting effects, great music and DJs.

The rink was made from 1,200m² of real ice, taking the equivalent of over five million household ice cubes to build the ice pad. It took 18 days to construct and over 40 people were employed in the build of the project. The structures were supplied by Losberger UK.

where are they now?

Itching to find out what your friends from Aston are up to? Looking to see who's up to what and with whom? Well look no further because 'Where are they now?' is the place to find out the latest news from Aston's thriving alumni network. You never know, you might just spot someone you want to get in touch with. If you want your face noticed in the autumn edition, contact us at the usual address with your news – and, go on, send a photograph!

1970s

BOB DUNNING 1976 BSc Production Engineering

After graduating, I worked in different industries before entering the aerospace industry. In the early 1990s I was Managing Director of Accles and Pollock. During this time I did a great deal of travelling in the US, Middle and Far East selling the company's products. For the last four years I have been the MD of a French owned company based in Derbyshire and travelling much less – thankfully. I still foolishly support Walsall Football Club through bad times... and bad times. I still have a love for music that was developed at Aston, namely Yes, Kinks, Blues and Jazz. I still love good quality beer and am in contact with a few graduates from my year and plan to fly out to Australia next year to visit one of them.



NORMAN COTTERILL 1979 BSc Pharmacy

I graduated and stayed in the Midlands and did a pre-registration year at Boots the Chemists. After becoming a registered Pharmacist in 1980, I spotted an advert in the Pharmaceutical Journal for a job in Bermuda. I left the UK in August 1983 and have been on the island for most of the last 23 years. I have worked in retail pharmacy for the majority of that time, but have also been Caribbean Country Manager for the DHL courier organisation winning a global sales prize during my tenure. I have travelled just about everywhere in the Caribbean, US and South America and still get back to the UK whenever I can. I am currently running a retail business and purchase goods from the UK, USA and South America. I have no intention of leaving Bermuda despite my Birmingham heritage!



GRAHAM COX 1973 BSc Civil Engineering

In my second year at University I was in charge of the arrangements for the May Ball and later on I was appointed Entertainments Chairman with a place on the Union Executive. When I left University I enjoyed a career in road and bridge construction in the UK, Nigeria and the West Indies. After my 2½ year spell in Grenada and Trinidad, I undertook a five-week Air/Greyhound Bus tour of Mexico and the USA (Backpacking in 1979!). On my return to the UK, I became a Chartered Civil Engineer and settled down to a varied and interesting career in project management of commercial buildings. I am currently employed by Atkins (a major international multidisciplinary construction consultancy) as a Consultant Project Manager on mainly transport related projects. I have two daughters from my first marriage; the elder has graduated with an Event Management Degree (chip off the old block!) and the younger is studying Business Management. Living in Epsom, I am currently happily married to Susan who is a Senior Teacher (Biology) in a Girls Grammar School.

1980s



MOURAD KHOULANI 1983 BSc Mechanical Engineering

After graduating I worked for the commercial branch of Sonatrach, the Algerian national oil company.

I was dealing with petrol stations, filling and storage plants. I later moved on to work for Procter and Gamble, then for rivals Unilever. Recently I have returned to Sonatrach where I completely changed the field I was working in. I am now a Bunkering Station Manager in a very important petrochemical port of El-Djedid. I am located near the coast and from my office I can gaze upon the sea. This job changes me from the routine I was doing several years ago, but now it is quite interesting and I like it. I wish success to all Aston students. It's a place I will never forget and where I return at the first opportunity.



SURINDERJEET SINGH MATHARU 1983 BSc Civil Engineering

'Channi' joined the second year of Civil Engineering in 1981 and became friends with room mates Trevor Batchelor and John Galvez. On graduation he returned to work with the company that

had employed him prior to studying. In 1988 he became a Chartered Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. The same year he married Satwant Seehra, a 1984 Pharmacy graduate. In 1996 the opportunity arose to work on what was then one of the largest infrastructure projects in the world – the New International Airport, Hong Kong. What was meant to be a two-year stint in Hong Kong ended up being eight wonderful years. He is now working on another new airport project in Hyderabad India – one of the first of its kind, a private airport that will accommodate the new A380 Airbus.

spotlight on...



ALISON EVANS née Till 1986 BSc Modern Languages French and German

On graduating I worked in La Seu d'Urgell teaching English for 'Inlingua'. I was the only English person there apart from the school manager, Brian. We married a year later and spent three years building up the school. We then headed back to England and set up a new 'Inlingua' school in Cheltenham. After five years we became a large and successful school employing up to 100 people – some of them Aston graduates! I was Director of Studies, gained a TEFL Diploma and participated in marketing trips to various countries. We set up Trinity College teacher training courses and I have been a teacher trainer for several years involved in staff recruitment, training, all areas of personnel and general management. In 2004, with three very small boys, we took the opportunity to sell the business and give ourselves a break and time for the children.

1990s



NOMAN BASHIR 1997 MSc Marketing Management

I joined the MSc Marketing Management programme in 1995 after completing my first degree in Accountancy & Finance. Since leaving Aston I have held various positions in different organisations. I started off as a Key Account

Manager at Cable and Wireless where I stayed for four years. Having just got out of the British university system and joining a British firm, it felt like being at home. As C&W was pulling out of Pakistan, I later joined a local chemical indenting firm where I worked for a year. Since 2002, I have been associated with AIG (American International Group Inc.) as the Profit Centre Head for their Personal Lines Department (Auto and Home Insurance). The learning gained at Aston has helped me tremendously for getting where I am today and, with every passing day, whenever I execute new strategies, something of what I learned at Aston is there to support my decisions.



JONATHAN WHITE 1999 BSc Computing and Business

After University I went to work for Xerox for two years in Gloucestershire. I then moved back to the West Midlands and took a job as a

Chartered Management Accountant in Product Development at Jaguar Cars. More importantly, I married Sarah (née Buckell 2003 BSc Psychology and Management) in August 2003. The best man was Aston graduate Richard Paterson (2000 BEng Electronic Engineering and Computer Science) and the wedding was attended by many of our friends from Aston. Last summer, Sarah gave birth to our first child, Joseph David, weight 7lbs 7ozs. Eight months with him seem to have flown by and neither of us can remember what we did with our lives before he came along!



JEFFREY HARRISON
1990 BSc Pharmacy

After Aston, I completed my pre-reg at Shrewsbury Hospital. I then moved to Southmead in Bristol. Three years later, Bath clinical diploma in hand, Jen (my wife to be) and I worked our way to New Zealand before the money ran out and we had to come home. I moved back to Bristol and after three years I moved to North Staffordshire, having acquired a wife, son (William) and a PhD in Orthopaedics! After three years working in Cardiology/ Cardiothoracics and the arrival of our daughter (Katie) we moved to Auckland to work for Adis. I've now moved from medical publishing into academia and run the clinical pharmacy programme at Auckland and dine out on stories of playing rugby alongside former All Blacks.



ADRIAN WIGGETT
1999 PhD Chemical Engineering

After my PhD at Aston I joined Baker Petrolite – a speciality chemical company. I was based on rotation for three years as a Sales Engineer in the Sahara desert of Libya, where I met my beautiful wife Sara. In my last year I returned back to sunny Southport. We married and I transferred to the Regional Technical Team, hopping around even more rich oil fields of West Africa by helicopter. I found a little time somewhere to have our beautiful daughter Isabella – fatherhood is GREAT! I'm currently working offshore on a 4:4 rotation as an Account Manager on the first 'Deepwater' FPSO vessel in Nigeria. I'm responsible for chemical performance and the smooth running of the whole process onboard. This involves regular sampling and monitoring. After six years with the same successful and rapidly expanding company, I've had a fantastic time travelling extensively to different countries, experiencing new cultures and doing a huge variety of work, servicing and managing our customer accounts.

2000s



JAMES SEYMOUR
2006 MSc Marketing Management

I was able to study part-time whilst working for the University. Since starting the MSc my role has changed from Schools Liaison Officer to Head of UK and EU Recruitment at Aston, so I

can say that the programme has definitely been worth it in developing my career! The part-time MSc in Marketing has recently been relaunched at Aston Business School and allowed me to combine work with study. On many days I was learning the theory in the morning and putting it into practice in the afternoon! My team, the Schools and Colleges Liaison Office, co-ordinates events, guidance and publications related to Undergraduate study at Aston. We visit Schools and Colleges across the UK, working with sixth form students and their teachers/parents, spreading the Aston message as well as promoting the benefits of University education generally.



TASNEEM HABIB
2001 BSc Applied and Human Biology

Following graduation, I worked with Arrow Therapeutics in London. City life was not

appealing so I moved back to work with the University of Birmingham. After two years I had a desire to work abroad and working back home in Pakistan was something I always wanted to do. In the summer of 2004 I planned a trip to Pakistan, where I was employed as UK Business Representative for Amson Pharmaceuticals. This was a fun packed year travelling to and from Pakistan. I now work for Roche as the Implementation Lead for the West and East Midlands, making sure that breast cancer patients are tested for the eligibility of Herceptin. I am still residing in Redditch and frequently go to Birmingham to catch up with friends.



ANN DONAGHEY
2005 BSc Chemical Engineering

Graduating from Aston in July 2005, I started work straightaway for a global pharmaceutical company called Abbott Laboratories Ltd

as a Process Development Engineer within the European division of their Manufacturing Science and Technology Group. My job is international and involves troubleshooting activities and supporting process transfers. Within six months, I have worked with my colleagues in Chicago and this year will be transferring processes out to France and Spain as well as supporting plant expansion work in Italy. This job is helping me pursue my language and travel interests while working towards becoming a Chartered Member of the Institute of Chemical Engineering. I was also short-listed for the WISE Excellence Award 2005 and met Princess Anne.



MICHAEL HAWKSHAW
2003 BSc Information Technology for Business

2005 MSc in Operational Research & Performance Management

After I completed my Master's course at Aston, I started work at LogicaCMG where I work in the Space and Defence Division. I am currently working on the software for a small ruggedised computer that the British Army use, called the Fire Control Application (FCA). The FCA supports fire mission planning and generates accurate and safe ballistic solutions and is currently being used by the Royal Artillery and mobile forces such as the Infantry, Parachute and Royal Marine Forces. We are currently in the final testing stages and are looking towards another successful delivery. My first degree at Aston, BSc Information Technology for Business, has proved invaluable and I firmly believe was the main reason I was offered the job with LogicaCMG.



GUILLAUME EVRARD
2000 MSc Business Studies

After the end of my MSc I left England for Germany (Stuttgart) where I worked for Alcatel for two years in the Marketing Department. I conducted a market analysis for the booming mobile phone and Internet markets. I then moved to Paris in April 2002 to work for Michelin as Marketing Manager for the steel wheel business unit. I met great people there and still find it a great pleasure (and challenge) to work in the

automotive industry. Since April 2005, Michelin has sold its business unit to Mefro Wheels and I am now working for this group in Dusseldorf, Germany. In June last year I got married in Alsace (eastern part of France). I met my wife Laurence in 2002 at a wedding ceremony in the south of France. We realised that we were living in the same street in Paris and this was the beginning of a marvellous story!



VICKI ALLEN
2000 BSc Modern
Languages French
and German

After graduating from Aston I started work at Parceline in their international department, which involved liaising with parcel depots and customers all over Europe.

Although I enjoyed using my language skills in the workplace, in 2001 I decided to leave Birmingham to work in the finance industry in Jersey, Channel Islands. I began work in Mourant's Employee Benefits department as an administrator dealing with global employee share plans. Within five years I was working as a project manager dealing with the development of a bespoke share plan database. Last year I joined the Royal Bank of Canada Trust Company, also in Jersey, as an Assistant Manager in their Corporate Services department dealing with international pension plans, employee benefit trusts and property unit trusts.



JENNIFER McMAHON
née Harris
2000 BSc Human
Psychology

After graduating I went on to complete a PGCE at Sheffield Hallam with the intention of teaching for two years and then becoming an educational psychologist. Somehow though, I ended up loving teaching and after five years in the classroom have no plans to leave. At the beginning of my career in teaching I was set up on a blind date by my Assistant Head Teacher and I got married to Adam in July. We had a fantastic honeymoon in the Maldives and then returned to England to our new home in the country. I would love to hear from old Aston friends, you can get my contact details from the Alumni Relations Office.



LISA RUSSELL
2001 BSc
Psychology and
Social Studies

Since graduating from Aston in 2001 with my social science and psychology degree I continued my PhD studies at Aston. My PhD entitled 'Pupil Resistance to Their Schooling Experience' involved conducting fieldwork in Birmingham, UK and Sydney, Australia. I completed this in 2005 and went on to work as a Learning Mentor in Birmingham. I now work as a Research Fellow at Nottingham on a Joseph Rowntree Funded project that aims to map the alternatives to permanent school exclusions across two Local Education Authorities. I recently married James Wilson, an Aston Civil Engineering graduate. We spent our honeymoon relaxing in the Maldives and often reminisce about our shared time at Aston.



PAUL BUNCE
2005 BSc Marketing

After graduating in July, I spent two weeks in Portugal with my parents at their villa in Armacao de Pera. Sun, sea and a gorgeous stretch of coastline is the perfect way to relax after four years of studying! In October, I returned to where I spent my placement, marketing the Executive Education arm of Aston Business School. At the end of January the marketing position for Conference Aston became available and it was decided to create one role that spanned the two areas. It's been non-stop ever since. With the launch of a brand new distance learning package and planning the opening of the new Business School Conference Centre, my position gives me the opportunity to work with two different markets and is definitely putting everything I've studied over the past four years to good use. Being part of one of Europe's leading business schools and a world-class conference centre has been a great start to my career.

want to be in apex?

If you would like to be featured in 'Where are they now?' in the autumn edition of Apex, please send some information about yourself either by e-mail to:

alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk

or by letter addressed to:

**Alumni Relations Office, Aston University,
Aston Triangle, Birmingham, B4 7ET.**

Should you wish to send a photo to accompany your profile, please either post an original, which we will return, or e-mail one at high resolution (250-300 dpi). We are waiting to hear from you – don't be afraid! (Deadline for receipt of information is August 2006.)

re:UNIONS



UK

Bill Evans, Hal Crowther, Sydney Taylor, Peter Bloomfield and Peter Bate meet up regularly for an annual lunch at the Chateau Impney. Hal explains, "It was in September 1946 that the Birmingham Technical College in Suffolk Street offered a three-year full-time day course leading

to a Higher National Diploma in Electrical or Mechanical Engineering. Around 50 students enrolled of which 80% were returning ex-servicemen of various nationalities. A wide range of subjects was studied in the first two years while, in the last year, candidates specialised in their particular interest." The affectionately-known 'Tech' became the College of Advanced Technology – the forerunner of Aston University. This year will see the 60th anniversary of the first meeting of Hal's class.

Pharmacy

Elaine Shardlow (née Nightingale 1979 BSc Pharmacy) recently attended the Aston Pharmacists Association Ball with a group of fellow graduates. "We were contacted to say that this year is 40 years since the start of the Pharmacy degree at Aston," she explained, "and did we want to attend the ball which is usually for the undergraduates." Elaine contacted her friends and five of them spent the weekend of 11-12 February in Birmingham.



Beijing

Aston alumni in Beijing have formed our first overseas chapter. With a committee in place under the President Peter Thong (1970 BSc Production Engineering) regular meetings and a calendar full of events and outings are in place including Chinese New Year party (with fire crackers this year), picnics, karaoke, visit to the Great Wall and much more. Here's a taster of some of the outings. If you are in Beijing and not part of the alumni chapter, get in touch with the Alumni Relations Office at Aston and we'll put you in touch.



Paris

Gareth Griffiths, MBA Director, visited Paris and spent an enjoyable evening with Aston graduates across the Channel.



MBA – Munich and Frankfurt

Tim Anderson of Aston Business School found time to catch up with MBA alumni when he was in Germany.

calendar '06

Forthcoming reunions
and events for 2006

22 JULY: FONDUE MEMORIES

All graduates from 2001-2005 will be invited back to campus, so please keep your eyes peeled for more information on our website www.aston.ac.uk/reunionsandevents

6 OCTOBER: HOUSE OF COMMONS REUNION DINNER

Invitations have been sent to graduates based in the south east. If you have not received yours, contact the Alumni Relations Office.

Please contact the
Alumni Relations Office for further
details about any of these events.
Call 0121 204 4543 or e-mail alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk
Details are also available at
www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/reunions

News from Aston Graduates’ Association

Jenny Martin updates AGA members on the more recent activities of the Association.

Dinner for the discerning

AGA made its annual visit to The College of Food in January to help the students gain experience of hosting dinner for the discerning. We sampled a menu which included pigeon in bitter chocolate sauce and cod with broad beans. This event is always very popular – probably because it combines good food, good wine and very interesting guests.

Full steam ahead

In February AGA members were invited to an illustrated talk about The Severn Valley Railway. Clive Smith outlined the way in which the steam railway, which runs from Kidderminster to Bridgnorth, is managed and gave us particular insight into the job of maintaining the locos and track.

Aston Graduates’ Association Committee meets at Aston approximately eight times a year. If you feel able to help us in any way it would be most appreciated. Contact Jenny Martin through the Alumni Relations Office.

Dates for your diary

22 April Visit to Ryton Organic Gardens. A guided tour of the organic gardening research centre and a chance to taste the difference at the restaurant.

9 June Joint meeting with Birmingham University Guild of Graduates at Birmingham. Talk entitled “My experiences whilst serving with the Air Force in the Arabian Desert”.

the art of Aston University

Aston Graduates’ Association hosted an Art Exhibition during the week prior to the AGM in March. Aston staff, students and AGA members were invited to show their work in an attempt to highlight the creative side of Astonians. AGA awarded three prizes and the prize winners were chosen by Marylane Barfield, Honorary Graduate of the University and a past President of The Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. Our congratulations go to first prize winner Ady Yong for her work entitled ‘Air’, second prize winner Graham Stubbs for ‘Birmingham Disks’ and third prize winner John Penny for ‘Approaching the Hodsac Tunnel, Winter 1941’. The entries were of a very high standard and we would like to congratulate all those who had the courage to take part. It is hoped that a similar event will be repeated in the future.



Penning in a note

In November AGA members and friends visited The Pen Room in the heart of the Jewellery Quarter. Birmingham was the centre of the world pen trade and a number of dedicated people have established a museum solely concerned with this. As happens when a collection is made, it starts in a small way and grows out of control. This museum is housed in original workshops which are now stuffed with every conceivable item concerned with this trade from nibs used by musicians and doctors to the entire range of machinery used in their making.

There are large Victorian trade displays and the smallest nib ever made. There are facilities to practise calligraphy and classes to popularise this skill. In addition the museum holds a large archive concerning the manufacture of pens and the social history of those involved. On a personal note, my husband discovered his family had been owners of part of the workshops. Not bad for a Saturday morning out. If you missed this visit and do find yourself in Frederick Street, pop in. I’m sure you would find it interesting.

intouch

You’d like to find

A number of you take advantage of our in touch service to track down long lost friends. Whilst many are happily reunited, others remain far more difficult to locate. Do you know any of the following? If so, let us know!

JONATHAN CALVERT
(1980 BSc Pharmacy)

RACHEL COLLINGE
(1997 BSc International Business and German)

JOHN FLANIGAN
(1982 MSc Personnel Management)

RICHARD NUTT
(1997 MEng Chemical Engineering)

GOVIND PATEL
(1979 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

KATE WALKER
(2002 BSc International Business and French)

We’d like to find

The Alumni Relations Office has lost touch with the following graduates. Do you know any of them? We need your help to track them down...

GAMAL E ABDELAZIZ
(1998 PhD Civil Engineering)

CAROLINE ADAMS
(1991 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

PAUL ALISON
(1979 MSc Telecommunications Technology)

DALBINDAR AUJLA
(1995 BSc Pharmacy)

CLAIRE AZZOPARDI
(2002 BSc Human Psychology)

NIGEL BAILEY
(1983 BSc Biological Sciences)

MIRA BALAC
(1995 MBA)

IAN BARRETT
(1989 BSc International Business and French)

IAIN BENWOOD
(1989 MSc Computer Aided Design)

MARTIN BILLINGHAM
(1978 BSc Chemistry)

RUTH BLACKLEDGE
(2001 BSc Psychology and Management)

DAVID CAREY
(1991 MBA)

EARL CHAMBERS
(1987 MSc Public Sector Management)

YIU CHAN
(1990 BEng Engineering)

MARY CHILDS
(2001 BSc Optometry)

SUZANNE CULSHAW
(1989 BSc International Business and German)

ANDREA CUTTING
(1984 BSc French and Linguistics)

MOHAMED DA’ABIS
(1981 MSc Construction Management and Economics)

NICOLA DEARING
(2003 BSc Human Psychology)

SYLVIE DI MARTINO
(1992 MBA)

CARMEL EILON
(1979 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

AMANDA ELLWOOD
(1993 BSc Applied and Human Biology)

CHARLES EYRE
(1994 BSc Human Psychology)

RAFAEL FERNANDEZ
(1991 MSc Teaching English)

ARTHUR FIFIELD
(1981 BSc Production Technology and Management)

MARY FONCHA
(1978 MSc Pharmaceutical Sciences)

GURMAIL GANGAR
(1993 BSc Ophthalmic Optics)

DEBORAH GARGETT
(1985 BSc French and German)

PAUL GODDEN
(2004 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

NABDIP GREWAL
(1992 BSc Transport Management)

THOMAS HACKETT
(1979 BSc Mathematics)

JENNIFER HEAVEN
(1985 PhD Chemistry)

WILLIAM HIORNS
(2000 MSc Information Technology)

REBECCA HOUSTON
(1983 BSc Human Communication)

JOEY ISLAM
(1997 MSc Marketing Management)

HELEN JACKSON
(1978 BSc Geological Sciences)

MOUSA JAEDA
(1985 PhD Pharmacy)

GILLIAN JAMES
(1974 BSc Behavioural Science)

BARRY JOHNSON
(1992 MSc Teaching English)

JODDER KANJERE
(1984 MSc Construction Management and Economics)

MICHAEL KEELING
(1997 BSc Human Psychology)

FAUZIA KHALIFA
(2003 MSc Business Studies)

JOHN KING
(1988 BSc Chemistry)

PATRICIA KNIGHTS
(1991 BSc Modern Languages French)

BHAVESH LADD
(1991 BEng Chemical Process Engineering)

MARIANTHI LAINAS
(1987 BSc Modern Languages French)

RAYMOND LAW
(1978 BSc Mathematics)

BARRY LEMM
(2005 BSc Logistics)

DOREEN LEWIS
(1978 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

POH LIM
(1983 MSc Computer Science Applications)

JING-YI LIN
(2004 BSc Marketing)

JULIA LOCK
(1994 BSc German)

GWENDOLYN MACDOUGAL
(1979 MSc Educational Studies)

ANDREW MACLEOD
(1982 BSc Human Psychology)

STEVEN MARIN
(1991 BEng Engineering)

SALLY MEE
(1983 BSc Pharmacy)

JOHN METCALF
(1979 BSc Production Technology and Management)

GRAHAM MIVAL
(1983 BSc Human Communication)

COLIN MURPHY
(1996 MBA)

MANISH NATHWANI
(1991 BSc Pharmacy)

ROBERT NEEDHAM
(1984 MSc Applied Psychology)

SARAH NICHOLSON
(1993 BSc Modern Languages German)

BOBBIE-ANNE OBREY
(2002 BSc Accounting for Management)

AHMED OMAR
(1981 BSc Civil Engineering)

SUSANNA PAGE
(1995 BSc Applied and Human Biology)

RAKESH PANESAR
(1982 MSc Pharmaceutical Sciences)

ADRIAN QUINNELL
(1988 BSc Computing Science)

ADNAAN RAFIQUE
(2002 BSc Business Computing and IT)

SAMANTHA REED
(1996 BSc Modern Languages French)

ANDREW RENNARD
(1992 BSc Electrical Engineering and Computer Science)

CHRISTOPHER RICHARDS
(1978 MSc Personnel Management)

PATRICIA RILEY
(1980 BSc Human Communication and Philosophy)

DAVID RYAN
(1986 BSc Transport Operation and Planning)

KULJIT SAHOTA
(2001 BSc Optometry)

JEFFREY SALISBURY
(1982 BSc Human Psychology)

HELEN SAVAGE
(1997 BEng Chemical Engineering)

KATE SCANNELL
(1995 BSc International Business and French)

HELEN SMART
(2003 BSc Marketing)

ANDREW TAYLOR
(1994 BSc Transport Management)

ZEPHANIAH TSARA
(1985 BSc Metals and Materials Technology)

REBECCA VINCENT
(1994 BSc Maths and Chemistry)

EDWARD WALKER
(1978 MSc Systems Analysis)

LOUISE WALKER
(1988 BSc Human Psychology)

CHUNXIAN ZOU
(1994 MPhil Civil Engineering)

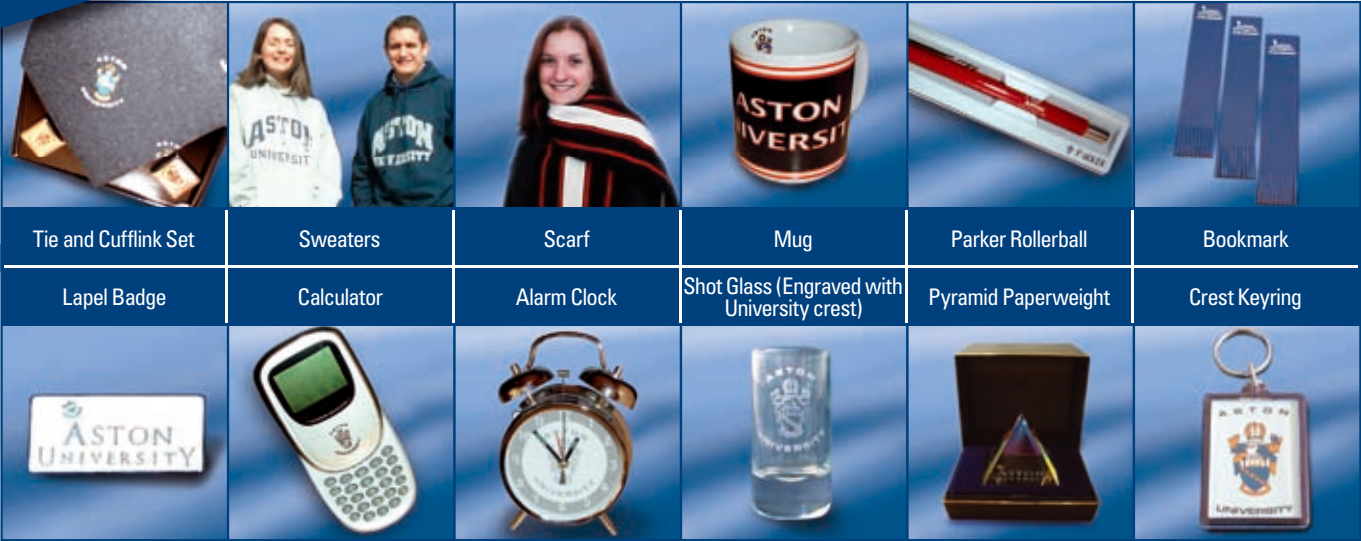
Looking for somebody from Aston?

If they aren’t listed on our e-mail directory on the website www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/contactsdb then contact the Alumni Relations Office and we will see if we are in touch with them. If we have a current address you will be invited to write a letter or leave your contact details. We will pass these on to the address we hold. As we rely on alumni telling

us when they move on, we cannot guarantee the person you are looking for will still be at that address. We would like to hope, however, that you all keep in touch with us and let us know of any changes to your address. The in touch service does not give out individual names and addresses to inquirers and all mail is treated in the strictest of confidence.

grab a guild gift!

In this issue ONLY we are giving you the opportunity to purchase gifts that are currently available in the Guild Shop on campus. Hurry while stocks last!



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5	Parker Rollerball	£4.00		

	Item Description	Price	Quantity	Total
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