



University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

ISSUE 07 2021

CONNECT

The alumni magazine of the University of Nottingham

A full-page photograph of Max Thorpe, a man with short dark hair and a serious expression, wearing a dark blue t-shirt. He is standing in a rowing boat on the water. In the background, there is a large, craggy rock formation under a clear sky.

Sea King

How Max Thorpe overcame disaster in the Atlantic Ocean to claim a World Record in the toughest row on Earth.

ISSUE 07

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Following a tumultuous year both on- and off-campus, all of us at the University of Nottingham are looking forward to a new academic year with far fewer restrictions on our teaching, research and support for students. I am incredibly proud and grateful to colleagues across the institution who have worked so hard to make this possible and to prepare for our return to a thriving life on campus again.

I hope this latest edition of Connect also finds you, our Nottingham alumni, enjoying greater freedoms. Indeed, our focus in this edition is 'thriving in a post-pandemic world' where you can read accounts of how our teaching, research and alumni themselves are helping communities across the globe.

With the world's focus turning to the UN Climate Change Conference hosted in the UK this autumn, we feature our ground-breaking research into net zero aviation, part of the extensive contribution that Nottingham makes to tackling climate change and improving global sustainability. On the same theme, you can also enjoy an impressive bespoke piece of artwork by alumnus Tom Rook that gives expression to the university's sustainability initiatives.

While the risks of Covid-19 have not disappeared, we are beginning to navigate to a world beyond the pandemic with the same optimism, curiosity of spirit and intellectual rigour that remains the hallmark of a Nottingham education. I do hope you enjoy this edition and send you all my best wishes for your continued good health and happiness.

Professor Shearer West
President and Vice-Chancellor

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Editor's Note

As we begin to emerge into a new post-pandemic reality, thoughts turn towards what we'd like our lives to look like in a reimagined future. This issue, we explore how we can thrive in our professional and personal lives in a post-pandemic world. On page 16, we discover how Max Thorpe overcame the ultimate challenge and what he learned about resilience along the way. On page 8, we speak to Becky Yeung about achieving work-life balance, while on page 6 we discover how scholarships have enabled Eric Gyan to thrive at Nottingham. Meanwhile, as the UN Climate Change Conference takes place this autumn, we explore how the university's net zero aviation research is helping to create a cleaner, greener world. I hope you enjoy this edition of Connect, we'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback.



Faye Haslam
Editor

Contributors

Lily Fairless

Aspiring Bake Off winner and proud plant parent. Served with a side of tap dancing.

Faye Haslam (History, 2012)

Curious creative inspired by film, music, history and culture. A traveller at heart, always planning the next big adventure.

Chris Hickman

Studied at the other Nottingham university, but don't tell anyone. Loves to edit copy and hang out with his cats.

ROCK OF AGES

This year we asked you to share your formative gig-going experiences around Nottingham – here's a selection of the best!

1

The hall party season was always a great time for live bands, and the challenge among social secretaries was to book a band that later hit the big time. The night of our hall party came and the band I booked went down well. I was abroad for the summer and didn't follow the charts but back in September I was greeted in the bar with the comment, "Well done, that band from the hall party is in the top 10!" The band was Culture Club and a few weeks later they were at number one with Do You Really Want to Hurt Me? I don't have any photos but still have the contract, never managed to get it signed. Bet that you can't get Boy George for £750 now!

Chris Lakin (Chemical Engineering, 1985)



2

In Sherwood Hall in 1992, we had The Pogues play our summer party. There were about 15 of us who set up the stage and acted as crew for the day. Several students vacated their rooms for use as dressing rooms but The Pogues' manager took one look and demanded somewhere bigger, so they commandeered the JCR. The problem was it contained the TV, on which we'd been hoping to watch the Euro '92 match, so Joe Strummer let us in to watch it with them!

Lee Hill (Physics and Philosophy, 1994)



3

I have fond memories of a Sunday performance at the old Nottingham Playhouse at which a very young Judi Dench read poetry to the sound of live jazz. There were so many of us that some students had to sit on the stage!

Judith Padden (Physics, 1962)

4

We saw Teardrop Explodes in the early 1980s. The lead singer shouted at us all as we were singing so loud, he lost his way and had to start the song again! Any music by Human League takes me right back to my university days: hall discos, house parties and happy memories.

Deb Amos (Zoology, 1984)



5

Between performing with my band, Pantheon, seeing some amazing talent through the Rock Society (RockSoc), catching as much live music as possible and spending many nights at Rock City, I have so many fond memories of a fantastic, musically-charged time in Nottingham.

James Ray (Electrical Engineering, 2010)

Press Rewind:

What was your soundtrack to university life?

1978

Hong Kong Garden
Siouxsie & The Banshees

Jenny Hands
(Mathematics, 1982)



1980

Back in Black
AC/DC

Paul Weary
(Zoology, 1983)



1981

Don't You Want Me
Human League

Louise King
(History, 1984)



2008

Just Dance
Lady Gaga

Marisa Leridou
(Psychology, 2011)



1993

Two Princes
Spin Doctors

Bradley Miller
(Viking Studies, 1994)



1999

The Bad Touch
Bloodhound Gang

Rashidah Rahim
(Pharmacy, 2001)



Throwback Spotify Playlist

We love your musical memories so much we've created a special Spotify playlist for you to enjoy. Find out more at bit.ly/alumnitracks

A Guiding Light to Ghana

As a young man growing up in Ghana, Dr Eric Gyan (Cancer Immunology and Biotechnology, 2011) had a dream to become a physician. But only thanks to the university's international scholarship programme and the generosity of alumni donors was this dream able to become a reality.



Legacies

Words and photography:
Chris Hickman

One of the university's driving ambitions is to ensure our education is accessible to the brightest and most talented, regardless of their background. Thanks to our international scholarship programme we're able to offer hundreds of students across the world the opportunity to study at Nottingham who otherwise may not be able to do so.

This includes the Commonwealth Scholarship, given to talented individuals from selected Commonwealth countries who demonstrate the potential to make a positive impact on the world. The university has been a partner in the programme for many years and welcomed students from a range of countries including Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Zambia. One such recipient is Dr Eric Gyan.

"Even as a young man with very humble beginnings, I always wanted to help save lives, impart knowledge on the younger generation and undertake cutting edge research to advance medical knowledge. However, my ambition to become a physician was only ever likely a dream due to lack of financial support.

“

Even as a young man with very humble beginnings, I always wanted to help save lives, impart knowledge on the younger generation and undertake cutting edge research to advance medical knowledge.

”

"So studying cancer immunology and biotechnology at the University of Nottingham on the prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship became a life-changing experience. Having the opportunity to study outside my home country, Ghana, for the first time was an exciting moment. Living and studying in the UK, with the best educational and research facilities and world-renowned lecturers, was a humbling experience."

One of the reasons that gifted and determined people like Eric can benefit from a scholarship is thanks to the generosity of alumni like you. Which brings us to Professor Christine Humfrey MBE (Education, 1979). Not only did Christine study here but she then furthered her association by working at the university as founding Director of the International Office, her affinity clear for all to see.

Christine sadly passed away in 2020, but not before she committed the generous act of pledging to leave a legacy to Nottingham in her Will. Christine's legacy will soon be furthering our international scholarship programme, guiding gifted students like Eric and helping spread the light of learning. Something which her husband Michael knows would mean a great deal to her.

"My wife Christine had a profound - and reciprocated - affection for the university and for the many international students she welcomed so warmly here and whose lives were shaped by their experience. She would have been delighted to know that her legacy will be applied to the work of the International Office and its scholarship programme, transforming more lives like Eric's."

Selfless pledges like Christine's really do change the lives of so many talented students, demonstrated by the further success and continued determination of Eric to learn, save lives and be a guiding light to the next generation as a lecturer himself.

"On returning to my home country after my masters degree I qualified as a doctor, but realising the increasing trend of breast cancer deaths in Ghana, I knew I had to do more. I founded Med Cancer Care Foundation, an NGO which educates and screens for breast and cervical cancer for free. Through this, I have been able to impact the lives of many less privileged individuals in Ghana.

"It is without question that my ambition of becoming a physician would not have materialised without the two Commonwealth Scholarships I was privileged to be a recipient of."

Be a
**Guiding
Light**

Become a Guiding Light

If your affection for Nottingham matches that of Christine, please consider leaving a Gift in your Will and become a Guiding Light to others. Find out more at bit.ly/beaguidinglight

Interview: Becky Yeung

Words: Faye Haslam



Becky Yeung (Spanish and Chinese Studies, 2010) has established a thriving career as Regional Head of Brand Partnerships, Warner Music Asia in Hong Kong alongside setting up her own activewear brand, B.Y.O Active. She shares how she achieves a balanced lifestyle and how you can pursue both your professional and personal interests.

How did you start a business alongside your career?

"I've always wanted something of my own. I've worked in big corporates for a long time and as far as you continue up the ladder, you're still a small pawn in a large corporation. My family are business owners so I think I always had that drive in me, and a little bit of frustration with work helped. That was what started the journey and the ideas really came quickly because I based it on my passion for fitness.

"It wasn't a magical minute and my business was there. It was a step-by-step process over time, I started going to talks and meet-ups to learn how to start a business, and I didn't put any pressure on myself. At a similar time, my role at Warner came into my life and I had to think if I wanted to pursue something completely new in my career or focus on a business which I didn't know had any legs or not. I realised it didn't have to be one or the other so I decided to take on both."

How do you balance between the two?

"One drives the other, sometimes I have more energy for Warner because I'm learning something new about the industry and then there might be new aspects on the business side that leads me to focus more on B.Y.O Active. For me, it was the right thing to choose fitness as it was something that was already integrated into my life so my career and business dovetail. Even if you don't have that crossover, having different focuses can help spark fresh ideas and stop you feeling burnout, even though you're balancing two things."

How do you stay motivated?

"I'm very competitive so that naturally drives me! I think it comes down to how you gain your energy. I'm someone who likes to do a lot of things and be on the go all the time. That works for me, the busier I am the more productive I tend to be. I gain energy from people, and their feedback drives me and keeps me going. But if you're somebody that gains energy from being on your own, then you need to carve out time to do that. I think it's about finding out what works for you and your style and adapting to it."

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It's about learning different ways that you can adapt your skills and bring your strengths into each part of your life.

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How would you empower others to pursue their passions?

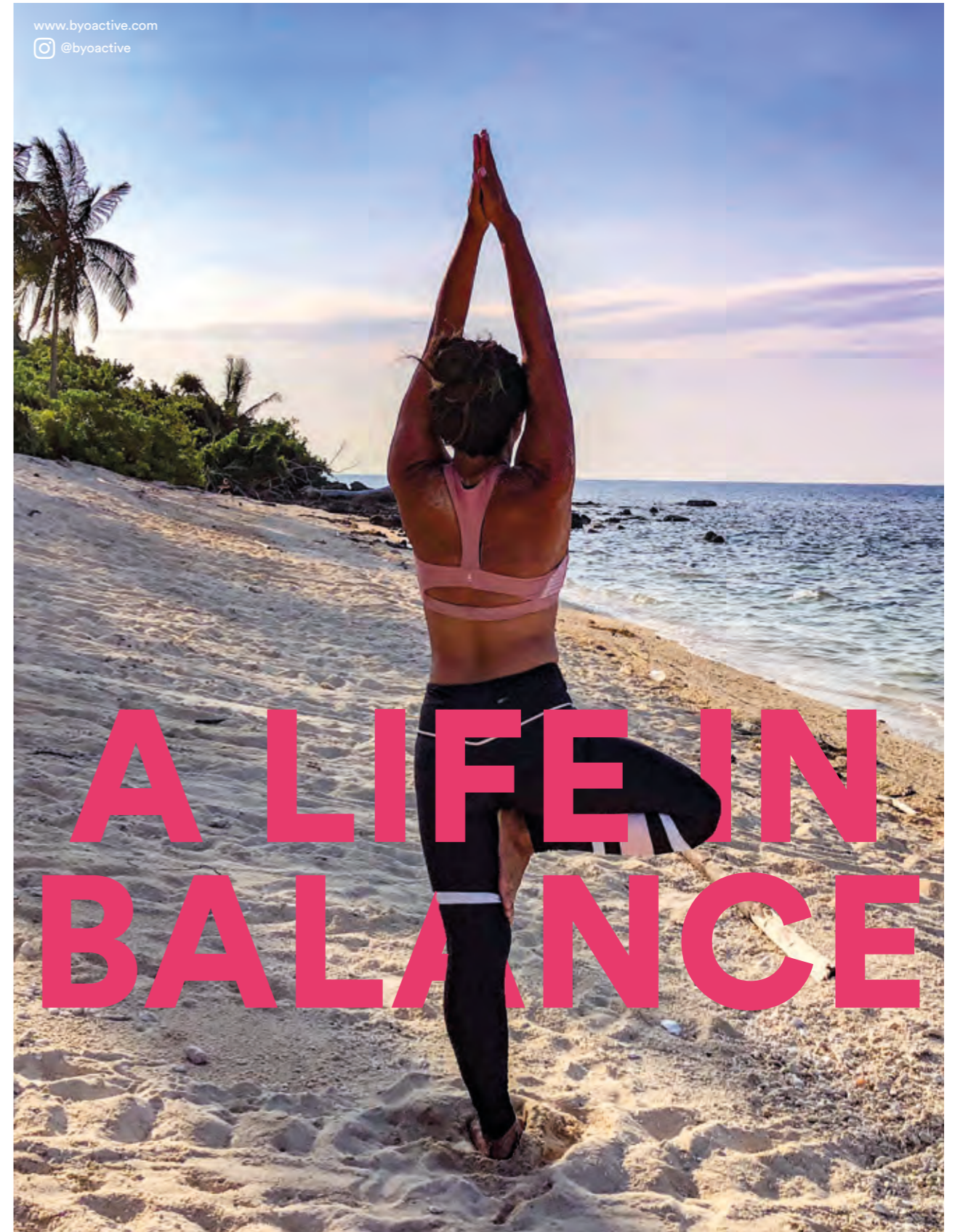
"Find one person, or other people, that will keep you accountable. When you're being questioned on why you're slacking, you can get annoyed, but there's no reason for it. You're stalling because you think, what if I fail? The biggest obstacle is imposter syndrome, but everyone goes through the same thing. You might get 90% of the way but if someone isn't there to give you that extra push, you can end up not taking that final step. Having someone you can rely on to keep you accountable is the most empowering thing."

How do you bring your strengths to both your career and business?

"You don't have to have everything figured out. When you start a business, you don't have to feel like you need to launch straight into it. It takes a while. I launched about a year and a half ago, but I probably had the idea three years ago and sat on it for a long time and slowly began learning bit by bit. It's about learning about different ways that you can adapt your skills and bring your strengths into each part of your life that you're pursuing."



Becky shares more advice to help you progress your career, along with fellow alumni leaders, in our Questions for Leaders series. Find out more at bit.ly/cwtleaders



ZERO ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE

The race to meet global climate change targets is one being run by some of the university's leading researchers.

Climate change has arguably never been higher on both the political agenda and within the public consciousness. From flooding in Germany, to wildfires in Siberia and countless other extreme weather events, the evidence of its impact is stark.

So November's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) has all eyes fixed on its outcomes. Ahead of the conference, the university is showcasing some of our leading research in the field of climate change.

Dame Jessica Corner, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange, explains why this is such a critical moment and introduces some of our research over the following pages.

"As the impacts of climate change around the globe become ever clearer, there has perhaps never been a more critical moment in our struggle to avert catastrophe. The decisions that world leaders make in Glasgow in November will shape the future of life on this planet.

"It's therefore never been more important that those leaders are supported with access to the best in current research and knowledge about the technologies, tools and policies on both adapting to and mitigating global warming. With the eyes of the world on the UK, British universities need to rise to this challenge and shine light on this most complex of policy challenges.

"I'm proud that Nottingham's academic experts are playing their part in this

vital moment in history. Our research offers invaluable insight to policy makers across a vast range of fields, not least of which is the challenge of eliminating aviation's huge carbon footprint and delivering sustainable travel for the future.

"The challenge is enormous, but a cleaner, greener world is possible. I hope these stories of the work being done in Nottingham to achieve it will inspire you and renew your hope for our shared future."

A passport to all-electric aircraft

Tackling climate change demands a radical transformation of aviation technology. This means tackling a series of discrete technological challenges such as battery development, high voltage high power electrical systems, sourcing new materials, and doing so at pace because the clock is ticking.



In conventional aircraft power is generated by the engines from fossil fuel; the bulk is used for propulsion and the remainder is transformed to hydraulic, pneumatic, mechanical and electrical power to supply different loads on-board - creating around 12% of all carbon dioxide emissions from transport sources.

Hybrid and all-electric aircraft are seen as the most ecological solution for generating, distributing and utilising electric power on-board for higher performance, efficiency and subsequent environmental benefits. Companies including Ampaire, Heart Aerospace and ZeroAvia are already designing aircraft - some already fly, some remain on the drawing board.

In such a complex landscape it would be easy for an absence of coordination to slow things down, because innovations are not compatible, because certain problems are being examined many times over whereas others are not being explored, or because regulatory and safety challenges are not being anticipated.

The University of Nottingham is a founding member, with three other key partners, of Solutions for Aircraft Electrification Leadership (SAEL), a world-class partnership of engineers and researchers from industry, academia and regulation.

The group is creating an open source technology framework to coordinate and integrate research, innovations and standards to bring sustainable aviation closer - accessible to the aerospace industry, ranging from academia, industry, regulatory bodies and policymakers worldwide.

It helps spot and address the critical challenges, invest in the most promising enabling technology approaches and find the best intersections of expertise. Without such a high level multidisciplinary and global approach, the future of sustainable flights is not likely to happen.

As engineers, scientists and academics, we are accustomed to working in our own spheres and protecting the new

knowledge and products we develop. This is quite understandable and logical because no one wants to do the hard work and then see our work copied and used by others without proper referencing or acknowledgement of monetary reward.

Yet I have personally witnessed the much deeper motivation and satisfaction that can come when we cooperate and share our expertise and knowledge while working together towards a loftier common goal. It helps spot and address the critical challenges, invest in the most promising enabling technology approaches and find the best intersections of expertise. Without such a high level multidisciplinary and global approach, the future of sustainable flights is not likely to happen.

Dr Sharmila Sumsurooah is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Aerospace Technology

The path to carbon neutral

Andrew Nolan, Director of Sustainability

The University has put the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the heart of its strategy and made a clear commitment to support the City of Nottingham's desire to be a net zero carbon city by 2028. We have set ambitious carbon reduction targets for the emissions we generate through running our campuses but we're also planning to tackle emissions associated with things like construction, food, paper and print and travel which make up around 80% of our total emissions. This will mean refurbishing more buildings and fewer new buildings, reducing high carbon foods in the catering we offer, reducing print and the business and commuting miles we consume through agile working. We've a lot to do but we're committed to making a difference.

Find out more at bit.ly/sustainablenotts



The emissions mission

The European Union funded Clean Sky 2 programme is one of the largest ever dedicated to reducing aircraft emissions - and the university is one of its key higher education partners, delivering 26 research projects worth over €50 million.



I was recruited by the university's Institute for Aerospace Technology (IAT) in 2014 to coordinate our Clean Sky 2 activities. The IAT is the place where we pull together over 50 academic experts and over 300 researchers to address the challenges of aviation.

My role is to connect, catalyse and integrate research work into high-quality projects, often with industry turning the results into real technology immersed into aircraft we fly on.

Through our research we have developed:

> New insights into power electronics, motors and drives. While electric and hybrid cars are now commonplace, our work is paving the way for the same revolution in air travel.

> New technologies to help us understand what is happening inside an aircraft engine gearbox. If we understand this better we can design new gearboxes which use less oil and allow the engine to burn less fuel.

> New technologies to cost effectively manufacture highly technologically advanced wings - meaning less energy is wasted producing the best quality metals and composites.

Ultimately this is about reducing the weight and increasing the safety and performance of the aircraft. Every kg of weight we put on an aircraft is another kg to carry, another 5kg of fuel to burn to keep the aircraft in the air and propel it to its destination, another kg of fuel to carry to the airport, and ultimately, more CO₂ pumped into the atmosphere. Similarly, every ounce of performance we can get out of the technology on the aircraft means the aircraft can go further and burn less fuel.

The work being undertaken is transforming the aircraft of tomorrow to be cleaner, leaner and greener.

Dr Hitendra Hirani is EU programme manager at the Institute for Aerospace Technology



Green light in the city

Maria Richards, Head of Public Programmes at the Institute for Policy and Engagement

It's not only our researchers that can make an impact. As individuals and communities, you too can contribute to the university's ground-breaking research by taking part in one of our citizen science projects.

This autumn, we're hosting an exhibition in Nottingham city centre showcasing the positive changes we can make to live sustainably in our homes and neighbourhoods.

We're collecting stories to feature in the exhibition about the innovative actions that students and alumni across our global community are taking to make a difference.



Get involved and share your messages at bit.ly/citizenstories

New Worlds

Through his beautifully intricate hand-drawn maps, Taiwan-based artist Tom Rook (Geography, 2010) offers a unique perspective on our urban environments. In a special commission for the university, Tom brings our UK campuses to life and showcases Nottingham's commitment to sustainability, from state-of-the-art carbon neutral buildings to energy saving initiatives to extensive green spaces alive with biodiversity.

In Connect Online, we head into the artist's studio with Tom to discover the hidden features within our campus spheres and find out how he creates his incredible artwork.

Find out more at bit.ly/sustainablecampuses

 Tom Rook Art
 @tomrookart



Interview: Max Thorpe

How Max Thorpe overcame disaster in the Atlantic Ocean to claim a World Record in the toughest row on Earth.

SEA KING

A full-page photograph of Max Thorpe, a muscular man in a black t-shirt and shorts, standing barefoot on a large, dark rock in the ocean. The background shows a rocky coastline under a clear blue sky. The title 'SEA KING' is overlaid in large, white, bold letters across the middle of the image.

The Atlantic Challenge. A 3,000-mile ocean rowing race from La Gomera to Antigua across the expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Nicknamed “the world’s toughest row”. Isolated, exposed, intense. And Max Thorpe (Politics, 2016) took it on twice.

Words:
Faye Haslam

Photography:
Guy Farrow

His first attempt almost ended in tragedy with a near-death experience following one of the most perilous sequences of events in the race’s history. After a dramatic rescue in the middle of a storm, Max survived the treacherous seas. But he had unfinished business with the race. Returning to the start line just two years later, Max went on not only to claim the pairs victory but a new World Record in the process. It’s a comeback story straight out of a Hollywood movie. But like any good story, we should start at the beginning. What convinced Max to sign up for the ultimate row?

“I’ve always been a competitor,” explains Max. “During my childhood I competed in five different sports to a pretty high level and I have no doubt that sport was one of the most influential factors in helping me grow and develop into who I am. However, in my late teens and early twenties my sporting commitment declined and it took a few years for me to face up to the fact that I’d lost track of those things which made me, me. In response, I made a drastic lifestyle change and started seeking a challenge that would really enable me to test my limits. In my search, nothing came close to the row.”

Challenge accepted. But how do you begin to prepare yourself, physically and mentally, for an experience unlike any other?

“It’s extremely tough. It’s like launching a start-up whilst training like an Olympian and doing it all alongside a full-time job. The first big hurdle is fundraising over £100k through partnerships and sponsors. These funds are used to procure hundreds of pieces of vital equipment required to survive at sea – including, of course, a specially built ocean rowing boat. Next is the technical learning that demands you pull yourself from novice to expert as efficiently as possible through a range of essential seamanship, navigation and safety qualifications. Then there is the gruelling physical and mental training: two hours a day of punishing workouts pushing the body to the limit. Put it all together and the investment is huge. It takes everything just to get to the start line. Trust me – I’ve done it twice.”



Photography: Ben Duffy / Atlantic Campaigns



“ There was this brutal realisation that our crossing was over and everything that we’d invested over that two-year period had fallen apart in front of our eyes.

”



3,000 miles
4,800 km

Following a rigorous two-year period of preparations, on 14 December 2017 Max and his rowing partner Chris Williams crossed the start line and embarked on what would become the most extreme experience of their lives. The first eight days went as well as the pair could have hoped, taking the leading pairs position and sitting comfortably ahead of the World Record pace. Then disaster struck. On the ninth day, a huge rogue wave picked up the boat and capsized it, slamming it upside down into the water. It was a dangerous moment but crisis was initially averted after the boat self-righted and the vital pieces of equipment on deck were recovered, including the emergency beacon (EPIRB), which is the most important piece of lifesaving kit on board. Max and Chris were safe, ready to pick up the oars and start rowing again. That is, until Max opened the cabin hatch and discovered the capsized had ignited a fire, causing irreparable

damage to all of the essential navigation and communication equipment and made the team’s safe space completely uninhabitable. It was a perilous situation – and then the conditions took a dramatic turn for the worse.

“It became an incredibly life-threatening situation. We were seeing these extraordinary waves and mountainous walls of water up to 15 metres high. I made the decision that we needed assistance so the emergency calls were made, we managed to activate the beacon and an international search and rescue effort was initiated.

“There was this brutal realisation that our crossing was over and everything that we’d invested over that two-year period had fallen apart in front of our eyes. But the real challenge was just beginning. From leading the toughest row on Earth to suddenly being in a race to stay alive – this pivot required a rapid

adaptation to a new goal. It was no longer about getting to Antigua, it was about survival. The ocean wasn’t going to wait for us to be ready.

“The instinctive human reaction when things start going wrong is to narrow our perspective. As pressure builds around you in an extreme environment, it often causes a tunnel vision with space only for panic. Countering this, we specifically focused on broadening our mentality horizon, enabling us to analyse our environment and gain clarity on what we could control and influence. It isn’t easy to achieve but you can start by focusing on communicating as clearly and concisely as possible. Describe what’s happening. Describe where you are. Describe what’s in front of you. Over-communication delivers results in a crisis.”

After eight or nine hours battling the relentless assault of the waves on deck,

and a torturous night locked in the storage cabin awaiting any sign of rescue, as morning approached the pair made the risky but pivotal decision to shine a laser flare around the horizon. And a light appeared. As the vessel approached, it soon became apparent what Max and Chris were facing – a 250-metre, 110,000-ton oil tanker powering towards them at seven knots.

“Its approach was breathtaking. It came at us head on and struck us on the front of the boat. The crew threw down a rope and a rope ladder but we couldn’t get hold of them in the conditions. Everything was happening very fast and suddenly we realised that we were starting to slide underneath the tanker and it was now slamming down on top of our ocean rowing boat. We were seconds away from being crushed. Although having been trained to never detach from our boat, we had to make a decision. With what felt like seconds

remaining, Chris grabbed hold of the rope and managed to clip onto a buoy. I only had one option, to grab the bottom level of the ladder, so I swung off as well.”

Hanging on to the side of the tanker for excruciating minutes, Max struggled to keep his grip and with nothing attaching him to the boat, he fell from the ladder and plunged into the ocean below. It’s an unimaginable scenario, faced with a life or death moment.

“It seems obvious to say but falling from the rope was the most profound moment I have ever experienced. It totals to just a few frantic seconds but my memory of it is clear and painfully slow. The moment I lost my grip, I was quickly trying to process the inevitable scenario that would face me once I hit the water. I was very much in survival mode, which spares little time for reflections on your emotions. It’s about using every ounce of energy to prioritise staying alive. As I

emerged from beneath the surface and saw Chris and the tanker powering away from me, there was a split-second thought to the rapid unravelling of the rescue attempt and how on Earth this journey had come to this point – you could say I was considering my fate. Those sentiments had to be immediately put on hold in place of battling back and swimming after the tanker.”

Miraculously, Max spotted a spare rope trailing out the back of the tanker. With his last stroke, he grabbed hold and clawed himself back in, utilising the momentum of the waves once close enough to leap and pull himself back onto the rope ladder. Slowly, Max and Chris were pulled up and onboard. The ordeal was over. They had survived. But Max’s pursuit of the Atlantic Challenge was not yet finished.



“

It feels like I've already had a lifetime's worth of lessons from these experiences. Articulating the authentic lessons of extreme experiences like these is a huge challenge – you have to pose provocative questions and dig deep.

”

“Initially when I came home, I was all over the place. I was managing thoughts and feelings I hadn't had before and challenging memories I never thought I would have to deal with. I was overcome with feelings of disappointment and a bleak sense of failure having not achieved what I set out to do. Amongst all of it there remained an unshakeable determination to find a positive path forward. Rather than being defined by what happened to me, I wanted to be defined by how I reacted to it. This is what really pushed me forward to go back and take on the race again.”

Two years later Max was back at the start line with a new racing partner, Dave Spelman, and a new perspective, even better prepared for the unpredictable ocean environment. Through the highs – swimming with pods of whales on Christmas and New Year's Eves – to the lows – the relentless soaking of salt water for days on end – to the inventive – fashioning a makeshift oar from the shards of the anchor after three had snapped in high seas – the pair propelled their way across the Atlantic. In a historic 14-hour sprint finish, they crossed the line on 18 January 2020 not only in first place but with a new World Record as the fastest pair to have rowed the Atlantic in 37 days, 7 hours and 54 minutes.

What makes Max so inspirational is not only the events he has lived through, but how he has translated the key components of his failures and successes so they can be absorbed by and benefit others. Among all that enabled him to bounce back from adversity, he attributes a large share of responsibility to something he calls the decision-causality loop.

“The decision-causality loop believes decisions impact decisions. It's simple but so powerful. It's about the role that big and small decisions have in people's lives. A decision you make today will impact a decision you take tomorrow. Having found myself at a crossroads – to end my pursuit of rowing the Atlantic or go back and take it on again – I became acutely aware of how a single decision could benefit or hinder me moving forward.”

Max also points to another fundamental concept – that resilience is a way of thinking.

“The experience of a worst case scenario became my superpower. It changed my way of thinking about the race, the future, and how to better prepare for uncertain environments. I think that's the first thing about resilience – you need to adapt your way of thinking about environments you operate in and challenges you might face. Opportunities and threats are commonplace, but in order to be truly prepared for both you need to stretch your imagination. Take my experience – no team had ever had a fire onboard their boat before we did. It is the same in business and in life – things that have never happened before, happen all the time. This is something I share a lot with teams I work with to trigger that shift in their mentality. More specifically, I believe resilience is determined by an individual's ability to 1) think clearly in the present, which is the ability to react, and 2) think critically about the future, which is your ability to plan. To achieve clarity in the present, focus on the controllables when your landscape is rapidly changing. Meanwhile, you can start building a criticality of the future by challenging your assumptions about how it might unfold.”

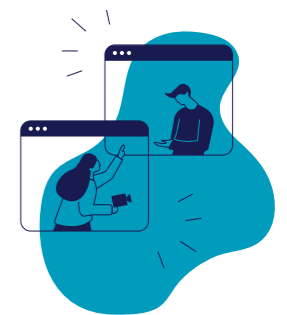
After crystallising his experiences into clear thought processes, the next challenge for Max was to create a vehicle that could deliver his lessons and theories to others. This led him to found his resilience consultancy Rogue Wave Scenarios, which specialises in scenario planning, providing a unique preparedness offer for businesses and teams operating in extreme environments.

“My experience is defined by extraordinary decisions and so naturally Rogue Wave Scenarios focuses on building resilience through optimising decision-making. I've been lucky enough to work with some of the best scenario practitioners in the world to create the business. In short, we build a range of bespoke scenarios that provide clients with a safe environment – both physically and psychologically – to

explore and test how they might plan or react. The scenarios they encounter are specifically designed to pull them to places they have never been before to experience challenges they have never faced – and encounter some uncomfortable truths about their own limitations. But, this broadening of their context eventually empowers them. These scenario experiences help them learn as they challenge their assumptions, identify blind spots, confront conflicts and resolve dilemmas. It's all part of building what we call a Storm Mentality®, which enables them to navigate uncertain environments, make better decisions under pressure and ultimately improve their resilience. Simply asking yourself 'what if?' is a good starting point when beginning this journey.”

Through challenge and adversity, achievement and triumph, Max's comeback story has become the foundation to inspire and motivate others. So, what does the next chapter in this incredible story hold?

“The allure of the ultimate physical and mental tests will always be there. Looking forward, I know there will be things that I want to achieve on a similar scale to the Atlantic, but for now all my focus and commitment is being channelled into leading Rogue Wave Scenarios on our mission to improve resilience for as many people as possible, which in this global climate has never been more relevant or more important.”



Max shares his story in our Webinar series, along with other alumni speakers, to help you find inspiration. Find out more at bit.ly/cwtwebinars

Fancy a dip? Free time between lectures in the 1930s meant a visit to the Highfields Lido, located on University Park Campus where the Djanogly Gallery stands today. Built in the 1920s, the lido remained a favourite part of campus life until the 1980s. Do you remember spending your summers at the pool?



Making a Splash

This year we launched Connected we thrive, our new programme of alumni activities.

**Connected
we thrive**

There's so much more to come

We hope that you're enjoying the programme so far. Here's just some of the highlights of our 2022 programme.



Masterclasses

Our first masterclasses will take place, hosted by our alumni experts, to help you learn new skills.



Webinars

Our webinar programme continues with our Grow series, with topics including growing your advantage in the workplace and growing your work life balance.



Future proof your skills

We'll be bringing you a new video series focused on skills for the world of tomorrow.

Explore our full programme at bit.ly/connectedwethrive

Help shape your alumni experience

Thank you to everyone who has helped shape our programme so far by sharing your feedback and voting on our activity. Continue to let us know what you think and help us keep improving your alumni experience in our alumni survey – it's open until 6 December. Share your views at bit.ly/nottsalumnisurvey

Obituaries



David Knowles-Leak 1944–2020 (Mechanical Engineering, 1971)

On 31 May, a number of Nottingham graduates attended the memorial cricket match for David Knowles-Leak, Students' Union President 1969–70.

David's sons, Michael and Robert did a superb job of organising the match at his local cricket club at Cookham Dean, near Maidenhead. The weather was perfect and the BBQ set just the right tone. The cricket was not of the highest quality, but the youngsters did very well. The older hands were found a tad wanting, and in some cases the cricket whites they were wearing had not seen the light of day for some years.

Under the rules in place when he died on 9 November last year, only a handful of people could attend his funeral, but many joined in via a webcast. When the rules changed it was felt that the cricket match was the most appropriate way for David's many friends to gather in his memory, and provided an opportunity for us all to contribute to 'Foodshare', David's favourite local charity.

Obituary provided by Tony Kaye (Economics, 1971). Picture shows from left to right: Jan and Tony Kaye (Vice-President and Deputy President), Bernie Coleman (Vice-President 1968–69), Nigel Dodds (Internal Affairs), Sir John Dunford (President 1968–69) and Aline (Fred) Odell, wife of the late Dave Odell (Union Treasurer).

We extend our condolences to the family and friends of those members of our university community who have died, including those who have lost loved ones as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We record the passing of alumni and staff on our website if you wish to inform us of a death or obituary: bit.ly/rememberingalumni

John Land 1938–2021 (Metallurgy, 1962)

John was born in Sunderland to Alice and Magnus. Magnus enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1939 and was lost at sea, presumed drowned. John was talented at all sports, but particularly enjoyed hockey. He played for his school 1st XI at 16, captained the university hockey team while at Nottingham and won 14 caps for Great Britain, including representation at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. From the early 1970s until his retirement in 2002, John's work entailed travelling across the world, including India, Poland, Yugoslavia, Australia and the USA. John was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease in 2015 and died on 6 January 2021. He leaves his wife Julie, his three children and six grandchildren.

Kate Akers (née Hagarty) 1971–2021 (Chemistry, 1992)

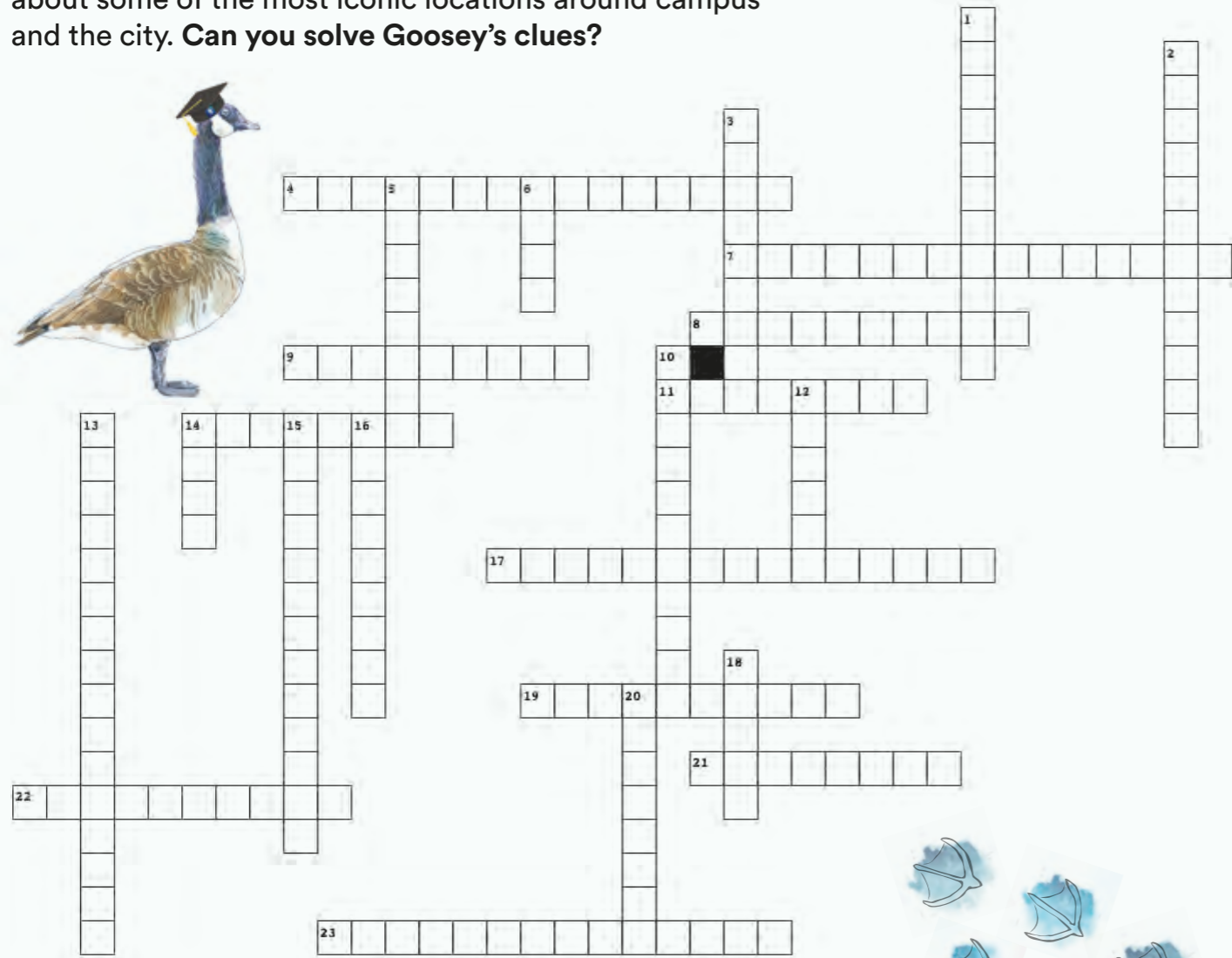
Kate passed away peacefully aged 49 on 1 February 2021 after a short battle with cancer. Kate spent three happy years at Nottingham, initially in Florence Nightingale then the Broadgate Flats and then a house in Dunkirk. She met her husband-to-be Mike at a concert in Wollaton Park and they married in 1998. Kate filled her time with her lifelong passions of nature, walking, gardening and tinkering with things and was an active supporter of many good causes. She leaves her husband Mike, her sister and parents.

Robbie Curtis 1997–2020 (Geography, 2019)

Described by his teachers as an 'unusually exceptional student', two core passions of Robbie's were philosophy and travelling, which he put into practice in his gap year when he spent time in Sri Lanka and India. Robbie also had a huge concern for environmental issues, apparent from the age of 12 when, by selling his toys on the beach, he collected enough money to save a few acres of Amazon rainforest. The R World Foundation is now established in his honour, dedicated to improving our world by targeting mental health and international development, two causes close to Robbie's heart. Robbie passed away on 17 August 2020.

Goosey's Games

Back by popular demand, this year's crossword is all about some of the most iconic locations around campus and the city. Can you solve Goosey's clues?

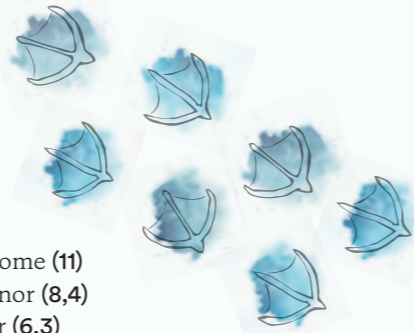


Across

4. Don't be late with your returns! (8,7)
7. Home to the Vet School (6,9)
8. Wide and swampy (10)
9. The city's most famous resident looking statuesque (5,4)
11. The stickiest floors in the city (4,4)
14. This building is home to Mooch (or the Buttery, depending on your age) (8)
17. There's a lot of concrete to enjoy (3,6,6)
19. Renowned for its culinary masterpieces (6,4)
21. Not quite beside the seaside (8)
22. The home of 'You pies' (6,4)
23. Take to the water here (10,4)

Down

1. Joining two sides of a home (11)
2. Hang out at Wayne Manor (8,4)
3. Home to the Goose Fair (6,3)
5. Meet you at the... (4,4)
6. Play some sport, at a shortened length (4)
10. Hear the sound of leather or willow (5,6)
12. The centre of health! (6)
13. A tranquil spot in the year 2000 (10,6)
14. The pontiff's building (4)
15. The very essence of the university (5,8)
16. Leafy inspiration for Peter Pan (9)
18. Go for a dance, not a swim (5)
20. Not the ups (3,5)



Discover the answers at bit.ly/gooseyanswers

Then & Now

What aspect of your time at university gave you friends that stand the test of time?

For Alan Williams (Industrial Economics, 1964), his time on the university football team is what he remembers most fondly about being at Nottingham.

Words: Lily Fairless



"We all looked forward to playing for the university on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons," said Alan. "We tended to regard them as the highlights of the week. Away games could mean travelling to London, Liverpool or Manchester and we often spent social time with other members of the team."

"My favourite memory is the semi-final of the AFA Senior Cup in 1963. The competition had been delayed by the weather and the match against Ilminster was arranged on a neutral ground in South London. The icing on the cake for me was equalising with 38 seconds to go (as confirmed by the referee afterwards) then going on to win in extra time, which was followed by winning the final at Wealdstone FC in Harrow."

"One important result of playing football at Nottingham was joining a London football team, Corinthian Casuals, where a couple of others from Nottingham played. Later on, I occasionally played against those I had met at university and I helped arrange reunions for players from my time at Nottingham, the first of which was in the 1990s. We also arranged a couple of golfing days and the occasional meet-up in London."

After sharing his university football team photo in our Memory Lane feature this spring, which generated lots of correspondence from old friends, Alan has expanded the network of football connections that he has kept up with over the decades.

"I'm still in touch with four or five players, and they are still important to me, even if now contact is largely by email and the occasional phone call."

Looking back at his university days, Alan would tell his younger self:

“

Enjoy the times that you have at university and make the most of them. You might not realise at the time how special they are!

”



The alumni magazine of the
University of Nottingham

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nottingham.ac.uk/connectonline