Remembering Brian Easlea

Compilation, Mike Hales : version 6 : 13jan14

Brian Easlea died on November 24th 2012. This is a collection of things that people have since written, or gleaned, containing remembrances of Brian, his times and his influence. Presented in alphabetical order of authors' surnames; copyright by each author.

A paving stone in honour of Brian, on the University of Sussex campus, in Library Square leading to Arts A.

David Biggins : December 2012

Perth, Western Australia

I met Brian at Sussex University in 1970 when he gave his first lectures in the area of science and society. He was an enormous influence on me. I was a graduate student in science but saw something I thought I could do and that I thought was really worth doing. Subsequently I retrained in history of science and in philosophy, and eventually was a founding faculty member of the "Science, Technology and Society" programme at Griffith University in Brisbane, the first such programme in Australia.

I think the programme at Griffith largely arose because the first Head of the School of Science there was Gus Guthrie, a chemist at Sussex during Brian's time.
Brian influenced the education of scientists, and others, in Australia through programmes that were developed at Griffith, Murdoch, Wollongong and New South Wales, and even the more conservative universities like Melbourne and Sydney.

Brian was a charismatic lecturer. Within a couple of weeks, his first series of lectures, "Principles and Perspectives of Science", became a phenomenon, attracting a huge audience. Within a couple of months a rumour was circulating that the next School in the University was to be the School of Science and Society.

In the late sixties and early seventies the Left briefly gained ascendancy and revealed, in particular, its cultural potential. Brian created and expressed some of life's real possibilities. On one occasion he gave a lecture on quantum physics at the Brighton Underground, a nightclub. Throughout the lecture a young couple near the front were continuously, passionately, kissing. Then at one point they broke apart and interrupted him: "But didn't you just say that 'E' was equal to 'MC squared'?" Brian awakened us to the profound longing and search for fulfilment that is the source of all passion - intellectual, material and spiritual.

Brian was a humble person, largely unaware of his own remarkable qualities. I recall more than one conversation in which he expressed admiration for something I'd said, and asked where I'd got such an idea. "From you, of course." He seemed genuinely perplexed.

I was privileged to have Brian as a friend. Happily, I was able to visit him in October this year, shortly before his death in December. He continues to inspire me.

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Mike Hales : January 2013

Seven Dials, Brighton

Brian Easlea (born 1936, died Nov 24th 2012), scholar, teacher and advocate for a more beautiful world.

Brian Easlea joined the University of Sussex in 1964 to lecture in theoretical physics but his life was transformed visiting colleagues in Brazil. Profoundly moved by grotesque social and economic inequalities, and the military regime's brutal repression, the ghost of nuclear weapons was haunting for him as a theoretical physicist. Brazilian people remained in Brian's heart through the years.

Back in Sussex, he transferred to history and social studies of science, a field itself in upheaval. Devouring quantities of literature across disciplines, he created an influential undergraduate course, 'Principles and Perspectives of Science'. Brian's lectures, a phenomenon, attracting hundreds from across the university, later became a ground-breaking book, *Liberation and the aims of science: an essay on obstacles to the building of a beautiful world* (1973).

In 1980 he published *Witch hunting, magic and the new philosophy: an introduction to debates of the scientific revolution 1450-1750* and this gender-agenda was followed up in *Science and sexual oppression: patriarchy's confrontation with woman and nature* (1981). Brian's seminal work, *Fathering the unthinkable: masculinity, scientists and the nuclear arms race* (1983), brought his critique of sexual politics and scientific reason home to his original field of study. He was influential elsewhere: for example in the creation of Australia's first undergraduate teaching programme in science studies at Griffith University.

Brian retired in 1987. Science studies was becoming an increasingly complex and politically diverse field and by then his passionate commitments and breadth of scope were perhaps out of tune with the professionalisation and specialisation of the field that he helped create.

Those who came to know him later may have seen a man passionate about nature, keeping a concerned eye on the birds inhabiting his local park. In 2008 he published a book of practice rather than theory: *Birdwatching at the seaside - living with peregrines and other birds in a Sussex coastal city*. A teacher to the end, some of his last 'tutorials' (on birds) were with a neighbours' eight-year old daughter.

Brian's passion could be uncomfortable for others - perhaps also for Brian himself. But he is remembered with affection and regard by many students, colleagues and friends, for the force of his ethical, intellectual and spiritual commitments.

Brian is survived by his wife Kimi, brother Chris and sister Joan.

> Submitted to *The Guardian*, 'Other Lives' website <*http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2013/jan/15/brian-easlea-obituary*>. The published version has been cut in one or two places by the editor.

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Mike Hales : December 11th 2012 (revised January 2014)
Radical Science Journal *editorial collective, 1972-1979; Greater London Council (Industry & Employment Branch/Economic Policy Group), 1982-84*

Bright air, hard frost, reflections

As I write, the body of a man who I took as a big influence, at an important time in my life, is being laid in the ground. It's a beautiful day - hard frost, clear blue, bright light - and his burial is in a beautiful place: the south-facing poppy meadow of the burial ground next to Bonny's Wood at Clayton, in the lee of the Jack and Jill windmills on the South Downs.

The man is - was - Brian Easlea. Along with Pauline, who I met in January 1970 and married in October, Brian was the key influence in my first year as a postgraduate at Sussex, 1969-70. He was passionate about change, paranoid over the violence and deep reach of capitalism, and driven to talk and talk; just the sort of companion I was hungry for, to reflect my own desperate need for change (leaving a multinational company, an engineering discipline and a northern-English hinterland), for words, and for channelling my dread and disgust towards socially approved objects (anti-capitalism, the critique of science and scientific reason). More positively; Brian seemed so much more spiritually and politically alive than the other faculty in the Division of History and Social Studies of Science at that time. Between them, he and Pauline gave me reason to feel ashamed of some of the harshest beliefs I was allowing myself to hold, with regard to how people could properly be treated, and they motivated me to begin learning to be compassionate. It continues! As Brian is laid in the ground, and those days of 1970 are remembered for the first time in years, it continues....

Brian was very much in his head: endless words, thoughts, ideas. The rationalist in him, which had first made him a physicist, really was wedded to ideas and paragraphs: poured out in lectures to packed theatres (he was a hot ticket, a ticking time-bomb of passion, pacing the floor of the cockpit, fist full of file-cards), in tutorials (Wednesday evening, him and me, his flat), on to the pages of his first book: 'an essay on obstacles to the building of a beautiful world'. The pressure to agree with him was huge, his need to have companions at his side in his opposition to the status quo intense, his paranoia tangible; his yearning for beauty beyond all satisfying. What a shame he had no children; such a shame that the man who later wrote his Frankenstein-story, *Fathering the unthinkable*, had not by that time in his life had a child! My heart aches for him. It might have made such a difference?

In those years at Sussex, this choice of the heart is the really good choice that I made: to live with and love Pauline, to have and love our child, who is thirty-nine years old, *today*. And at the present place in my life, I have to say that this good choice has greater weight than the poor one that I was also making at that time: to subscribe, on Brian's model, to ideas and words on the page, and to bringing down (through literary fiat!?) the economic and intellectual institutions of the world as we know it. It was twenty-five years before I began to even suspect light at the end of that long, dark tunnel of wordy negativity; and now, on this brightest of December days, I find myself very aware that Brian may have spent many years believing that there would be no end to his own tunnel.

Within a year I had begun to find the pressure of Brian's need for a lieutenant and loyal companion-at-arms hard to handle. Other political-intellectual arenas emerged, and groups that formed around a *Mai '68*-inspired 1971 conference on workers' self-management in science, and subsequently around *Radical Science Journal*, were more congenial. Their libertarian/anarcho orientation to workers' self-management and their attempts to 'unify mental and manual labour' both resonated with my tangled sense of class. And the conference/*RSJ* contexts offered two things that seemed beyond Brian's scope. First was a 'psychodrama' strand from Situationism (courtesy of a *Solidarity* presence within the conference group); for example, in 1971 *Solidarity* republished writing by Wilhelm Reich, on (the failure of) class consciousness, 'the authoritarian personality' and the mass psychology of fascism. And second was a post-Freud/Klein/Bion psychoanalytic orientation which Bob Young and Margot Waddell, particularly, brought to the journal's critical repertoire. Although we in the journal collective all were very much in our heads too, there was also a practice, of collective work and of explicit attention to emotional logics, which at least held a space open for future more adequate developments of the heart in relation to the head: a feminist-marxist politics of feeling, here-in-this-space-we-are-sharing-right-now, as we choose to speak and act. Brian's heroic crusade of ideas against ideas (moving deeper into solitude as the gender-agenda developed?) was unappealing; in 1974 I left him to it and left Brighton (to be a subversive, 'an organiser', in Imperial Chemical Industries and, yes, in due course, write my own books!). I didn't - until a week ago - look back.

Brian's burial today prompts my reflecting on movements in the ferment of that time, and choices that we radicals and 'revolutionary' intellectuals were making between and within them. All in their season, there were radical academics (philosophers, economists, statisticians; etc etc), and de-schooling society, and radical professionalism; Science for the People and social responsibility in science. There were consciousness-raising groups and *Capital* reading groups, sit-ins and work-ins, Maoist red-paint throwing and Trotskyite newspaper street-selling, flying pickets and joint shop stewards' combine committees. There was dig where you stand and the tyranny of structurelessness, a new trade-union politics of workplace health and safety and lecture courses on new social movements. There was Habermasian rationalist critique of technical rationality (very German), Althusserian theoreticism (very French), and the worker-writers' movement and many other species of (very

English, very EP Thompson?) oral history. Standing where I stand today (digging where I stand, as always - even when the hole sometimes just gets deeper!) I can see that, following signals from the post-Grundrisse, 'new Marx', scholarship of the time, I chose to go with 'theory of practice' (*praxis*) and theory of culture; and especially, theory of how practice is continuously ordered, live, in the present moment; and most especially, theory of how we manage to seduce and trap ourselves in 'ideology' and prevent ourselves from carrying through the revolutions that we write manifestos for. Over time, many variants arose along this trajectory: Situationist theory of the spectacle, neo-marxist labour-process theory (radically adapted to address the work, within 'Late Capitalism', of graduates like myself - 'thinkwork', cultural-production work - rather than the manual-working class; how 'neo' can you get?), psychoanalytic theories of the formation and action of the psyche (and of its reflective reconstruction in the psychoanalytic space), the splendid New Left 'culture and society' oeuvre of Raymond Williams; later, ethnomethodology's fly-on-the-wall insights into how we rebuild our practical, collective world even as we stay afloat in its currents; and at this present stage in my life, the lovingly disciplined reflexivity of 'mindfulness' practice.

An opposition between science and ideology was part of the radical common sense at the time. I suppose (given my orientation to 'practice' rather than 'ideas') I more or less refused the distinction, regarding knowledges of all kinds - especially 'sciences' - as differently-evolved species of 'ideology', belonging to differing practical niches. I thus unwittingly put myself among the enemies of Karl Popper's Open Society - not that I would have given even a second's consideration to that valuation: the debate seemed old and stale, belonging to another generation of cultural politics. And there were others: dyed-in-the-wool rationalists, wedded to values of 'science' and reason, and wishing to midwife a science for beauty and liberation rather than science for oppression and commodity-slavery. This was the ground where Brian conducted his battle of ideas about ideas, and others rallied to the same flag. As science studies became a field, though, and acquired specialisations and examinable courses and professorial chairs, scholarship in the field came itself under the pressure of commoditisation, in the bums-on-seats, competing, universities of the Thatcherite 80s. Liberal studies declined and arts/science crossovers - the terrain of Brian's passionate and dramatic cross-disciplinary expeditions - got shuffled off the new map of knowledge at the New Universities, and eventually, from the Polytechnics too. I don't find it surprising that when the waters of 70s' radical-this and radical-that had receded, and Brian needed to leave his home of twenty years in the maths-and-physics school at Sussex, he found himself unwilling to take up any of the homes possibly available to him 'on the other side' of the campus, took early retirement, and turned instead to the comfort of the beauty of birds.

I'm truly glad that birds have made Brian's latter years happy, at times. But this is outweighed by sadness that he had the books and words that he was wedded to, and much influence through the manifest force of his feelings about ideas about ideas, but not children; and that, at the last, he wanted no-one to gather at his graveside today, to celebrate the waves that he made. The sky is intensely blue; pigeons, crows and

small birds, perhaps a hawk, must be flying in and out of the wood next to the burial field just a few miles from here, under the Downs. And the choices that we made forty years ago continue to be made hour-by-hour: theory and practice; science and ideology; words and emotions; truth and comfort; friends, colleagues and allies; life-partners and the printed page; liberation and oppression; certified professionals and self-schooled breakers of new ground. You deserved greater happiness Brian, and no-one will begrudge you your rest, after swimming so hard in the tides.

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Glenn Heaton : May 2013

A St Ann's Well Gardens friend

I shall greatly miss Brian. He had a wonderfully eclectic range of interests, many of them overlapping with my own. A single short chat in the park might easily encompass: the whereabouts of the latest (feathered) migrant visitor; the fortunes of his beloved Norwich City; and the shortcomings of the local Council. Often a conversation would be interrupted as I had to wander off with my two year old ('Laura the Explorer' as Brian dubbed her), only to be resumed precisely where it had been left off a whole ten minutes later.

Brian's opinions on any subject were never dull or predictable. He didn't think much of the current Barcelona team (widely thought the best club side for 50 years) and their 'tic-tac' style of play. He averred that they wouldn't be half the team if they didn't have Lionel Messi.

Since Brian's death I've been astonished to find out about his previous academic career and about the books that he wrote. He never really talked on these subjects in our conversations and I'd have loved to have discussed them with him. How infuriatingly modest he was ! Having said this, I guess Brian had decided to put a lot of these 'big thoughts' behind him after retirement and lose himself in the joys of the local fauna.

I shall so miss the easy access to such a wealth of knowledge of birds and butterflies. It's such a dwindling band. But I'd like to think that Brian is somewhere above Brighton, flying with the Starlings and the hairstreaks this summer. Maybe he'd tick me off for being so sentimental – but I'm not so sure?

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Tabitha Heaton : May 2013

A St Ann's Well Gardens friend

I think I am very privileged to have met Brian and to have learnt so much from his wide knowledge of birds. I would not be surprised if I have learnt more than 50% of my knowledge about birds from him!

One of my favourite bird experiences that I enjoyed sharing with Brian was when he found and showed us where the Great-spotted woodpeckers were nesting. We were very excited and interested and tried to meet him at the hole at least once or twice every week during this time. At first me and Brian used to stand under the tree with our binoculars facing the nesting hole and watched as the male and female hollowed out the nest. In a few weeks time Brian said that the female may have laid and soon the eggs will hatch, and just as he had predicted, not long after, we heard the quiet chirping sound of chicks. Both me and Brian were very excited and soon began to see little faces poking out of the hole. When this happened Brian showed me how to tell a male chick from a female but we soon discovered that there was a chick who had female and male markings!

I had a very interesting time on those outings with Brian and, I think, before I met him, I could have probably written a chapter on birds but now I feel I could write a whole book!

I loved coming across Brian in the park and was always very pleased to see him because we always had so many nice conversations and so much to talk about. I will miss him a lot. I just hope I can carry on finding out about birds and their amazing habits and I will always think of him when I spot a new species of bird.

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Zoe Heaton : May 2013

A St Ann's Well Gardens friend

We first met Brian in St Ann's Wells Gardens around 2006 when our first daughter Tabitha was a toddler and we spent a lot of time wandering around the park looking at plants, wildlife etc. Brian was a regular sight there, with his binoculars permanently in hand, walking slowly and stopping to listen, watch and feed the birds.

After a couple of initial chats my husband Glenn and I soon realised what an amazing fund and depth of knowledge he had about birds in particular, and we suspected, about other things too. He was always a delight to talk to as he was so genial, interesting and his enthusiasm and a gentle humour came through his words. I can clearly remember the lovely warmth and tone of his voice.

He took an early interest in Tabitha too, as he could clearly see she had a real love of nature and natural curiosity to learn. She has always had an unusual ability to speak with clarity and interest to adults and as the years progressed she learnt more and more from Brian about the birds in the park.

I think we all had a special bond with Brian. Personally, meeting Brian renewed my childhood love of bird-watching which I enjoyed on holidays in Scotland with my Dad and at home in Hertfordshire with friends. Roaming the countryside, identifying and spotting birds. I realised I still knew quite a lot and Brian once called me a lucky

charm for being with him when he first spotted a Grey Wagtail at the pond. I was happy to share this moment with him, but took no credit for its' appearance! However, I was pleased he was impressed that I knew what it was!

We lost a bit of contact with Brian as Tabitha got older, went to school and we spent more weekends further a field instead of in the local park, though still coming across his familiar face from time to time on his regular jaunt.

In more recent times, this friendship was renewed as our youngest daughter Laura was born, and once again we found ourselves popping to St Anns Gardens to wander around. He was greatly amused by Laura's 'adventurous' spirit, a kind way of describing her more wayward leanings keeping me and my husband busy chasing after her all the time and distracting us from our chats with Brian!

During this time, Tabitha now 7-8 years old, spent many happy times talking with Brian about different species of birds, his worldwide travels, migration patterns, bird songs, and I'm sure, many other bird-related topics. Brian enjoyed conjuring up the image of our 2 daughters, grown-up, on exciting wildlife explorations, Tabitha taking intellectual notes and Laura paddling the canoe! I truly believe it was a special relationship from which both Brian and Tabitha benefited. She, learning from his fund of knowledge, and picking up on his passion too. He, I think, enormously enjoyed passing on his knowledge to an avid listener and took pleasure in cultivating her interest. Her obvious enthusiasm gave him hope and comfort for the future.

During Brian's final few months when he was unable to get to the park, although now I wish we had done more, we did manage to call on him at his flat and speak on the phone a number of times. Sometimes he and Tabitha would speak for an hour or more whilst she looked up birds in a very special book he had given her as an 'unbirthday' present. She was awed and impressed when visiting his house seeing the walls covered in bird photographs and illustrations. At this time he was pretty ill and very keen to pass on some particular items to her, including more bird books and a special bee-eater jigsaw puzzle. I felt moved and a little upset at the time as I realised he felt his time was short and it seemed important to him to ensure something of his was bequeathed to young and safe hands which would value them. Now though I'm glad he was able to do so and that it gave him some comfort and we are glad to have a few tangible reminders of a wonderful man.

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Tony Leggett : 2003

In his Nobel Prize lecture

In the fall of 1967 I took up a lectureship at the University of Sussex, and for the next few years, in the intervals allowed by my teaching duties, I continued to work on various problems in low-temperature physics, including liquid 3He. However, I found myself becoming increasingly bored with this area of research, and indeed with much

of conventional physics; at the same time, thanks in part to a remarkable series of lectures delivered by my colleague Brian Easlea, I got more and more intrigued by the conceptual foundations of quantum mechanics, and by the summer of 1972 had made a firm decision that I would abandon the sort of physics that gets published in *Phys. Rev. B* and devote myself full-time to foundational studies.

> Found at the University of Sussex <*http://www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni/newsandevents/news?id=16785*> and on syndicated science websites <*http://www.myscience.cc/wire/obituary_dr_brian_easlea-2012-sussex*>.

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Nick Maxwell : January 2013

Emeritus Reader in Philosophy of Science, University College, London

I must have first got to know Brian in 1973 or early in 1974. For some time I had been struggling to find a publisher for a manuscript entitled *The Aims of Science* when, in some anguish, I read a review in New Scientist of a book called *Liberation and the Aims of Science* which sounded, from the review, as if it was exactly my book. I had been scooped! Dillons didn't have a copy yet, so I bought a copy from the publisher and read the book in a café in 30 minutes. I concluded that it was indeed my book, but only the author and I would appreciate the fact.

I knew nothing of the author, Brian Easlea, but nevertheless I wrote him a letter in which I told him how much I admired his book. I got no reply. Some months later I stumbled across a meeting of the *Radical Science Journal* collective: I was there to pick up a friend. The people at the meeting were being resoundingly scolded for their lack of revolutionary purity and ardour. The man doing the scolding - who I later learned was Bob Young - said at one point "Our heroes are Marx and Freud, and yet the two things we can't talk about are money and sex". Sitting on a bed, looking very unhappy at the proceedings but saying nothing, was a man with a flourishing beard, a voluminous jersey full of holes, and big boots. I thought: that has to be Brian Easlea. When the meeting was over, I asked him, and yes, it was Brian.

He was delighted to meet me, and said immediately "So, you wrote THE LETTER". He said he was astonished that a philosopher of science had liked his book. It was from that quarter that he had expected to receive the fiercest criticism. Almost immediately, we became good friends, and whenever I visited him in Brighton and he introduced me to one of his Sussex University colleagues he would say "Nick wrote THE LETTER", and they knew straight away what he meant.

Brian became a very dear, good friend. I thought of him as my best friend. He and I saw ourselves, I think, as engaged in a common endeavour: to get across the profound importance of creating a new kind of science, a new kind of academic inquiry more generally, that puts people, humanity, life of value (as I might put it) or liberation, a beautiful world (as Brian might put it) at the heart of the enterprise. I at least saw it

in that way. But we also had big differences, and sometimes Brian would burst out abruptly in fury at me. I disapproved strongly of his admiration for the Soviet Union and Maoist China - and I suppose Brian thought me blind to the evils of capitalism.

Brian was the most wonderful lecturer. Rare in academia, he spoke from the heart. In ensuing years I would, every now and again, come across someone who had been to Sussex University as an undergraduate. “Did you ever come across someone called Brian Easlea?” I would ask tentatively. Their eyes would light up and they would exclaim, “The only person there I learnt anything from”. And they would hold forth about how wonderful his lecture course had been.

I once heard Brian give a marvellous talk to the South Place Ethical Society at Conway Hall in London, in which he talked about the Pygmies of the tropical rain forests of central Africa, as described by Colin Turnbull in *The Forest People*. And of course Brian in those days often talked about the Pygmies. I was rather startled when Brian indicated that he was a bit upset at my using this as a metaphor for an ideal science at the beginning of my first book *What's Wrong With Science?* - especially as I paid tribute to Brian for introducing me to the Pygmies' singing, and Turnbull's book. But that was not a serious disagreement.

I was shocked and dismayed when Brian took early retirement – because of the demise of his Department at Sussex University, as I understand it. I drove down to Hove, and helped Brian move flat. It seemed to me – and still seems to me – a disgrace that Sussex University could not find a place for such a wonderful teacher and writer. Nor any other University, for that matter, either. Not for one moment did I think that something somewhat similar would happen to me a few years later. I took early retirement from UCL in 1994 because of horrible things going on in my Department.

The last time I saw Brian was at our wedding. My wife and I had lived together for decades but we only got married in 2008. Brian was best man. There were just four of us: Brian, me, my wife Chris, and Chris’s sister Pauline. We were married in Islington Town Hall, and afterwards the four of us celebrated at our home in Islington. It was a happy occasion.

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Erik Millstone : December 2012

Professor in Science & Technology Policy, SPRU, University of Sussex

Brian Easlea was first appointed to the faculty of the University of Sussex in 1964 as a lecturer in theoretical physics, by when he had already taught in Denmark and the USA. He had a great a talent for theoretical physics, but his life and intellectual agenda were transformed by a visit to physics colleagues in Brazil.

While there Brian was irredeemably shocked by the grotesque social and economic inequalities that he witnessed, and by the brutal repressiveness of the Brazilian military regime. While the regime was enthusiastic about promoting science and technology, Brian was profoundly troubled by the ways in which science and technology were being deployed by powerful incumbent interest. Before he had even returned to Sussex his intellectual focus has been shifted to a concern with the ways in which science and technology were being directed and deployed. He transferred from the Physics into the History and Social Studies of Science subject group, which was located in the School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences. His transformation from a scholar in physics to a scholar of the social studies of science was encouraged and supported by Prof Chris Freeman and colleagues in the Science Policy Research Unit.

Brian was a consummate scholar and a brilliant lecturer. Brian devoured vast quantities of literature in the history, philosophy, sociology and politics of science and technology. He distilled many of his insights into an undergraduate course entitled ‘Principles and Perspectives of Science’ that was taken by undergraduate students in the science schools. He encapsulated his analysis into a ground-breaking book entitled *Liberation and the Aims of Science*, which was published by the University of Sussex Press in 1973; it was subtitled ‘An essay on obstacles to the Building of a Beautiful World’. That volume displayed not only his ethical agenda and scholarly rigour but also his ability to combine cynicism with optimism.

His contributions to the history and sociology of science included a highly influential book entitled *Witch hunting, magic and the new philosophy: an introduction to debates of the scientific revolution 1450-1750*, published in 1980, closely followed by *Science and Sexual Oppression: Patriarchy's Confrontation with Woman and Nature*, in 1981. He then applied his analytical critique to developments in the 20th century in his seminal work *Fathering the unthinkable: masculinity, scientists and the nuclear arms race*, which was published in 1983.

Brian Easlea retired from the University in 1987, but his unquenchable appetite for learning remained with him through his life, although it was tempered by his growing enthusiasm for ornithology, a characteristic that was also shared with Chris Freeman. In 2008 Pen Press published his most recent book *Birdwatching at the Seaside*.

He is remembered with enormous affection and respect by the many students, colleagues and friends whose lives he enriched.

Obituary published in the University of Sussex Newsletter.

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Chris Perry : December 2013

A neighbour and birdwatching friend

I met Brian on Brighton seafront in 1994, near the West Pier. I spotted an interesting-looking man intensely watching some birds on the Pier, and, being a keen naturalist, I asked him what he had spotted. His binoculars were focused on a Peregrine falcon, a rare sighting, as their populations had diminished over previous decades. I found this exciting and our meetings continued by the Pier, enjoying the myriad of Starlings congregating at dusk, often pursued by a hungry Peregrine.

He immediately inspired me with his positive passion for wildlife, particularly birds. I remember in the summer of 1995 leaving a note on my front door for my girlfriend: “Down by pier with Brian”.

We met frequently near the Pier for a few years, as the Peregrine population increased, and Brian was particularly excited when we noticed signs of the birds breeding. He did not mention much about his academic or home life, but we shared stories of similar childhoods, roaming our local countryside and learning about wildlife. I was brought up near Bookham Common, Surrey, where I remember there was a breeding Red-Backed Shrike, a bird that was most significant and inspiring in Brian’s early life.

One day, a local bird enthusiast got access to the balcony on a high-rise building near the Pier where the Peregrines roosted. To Brian’s horror, carcasses of the Peregrine’s food cache revealed some scarce birds. This killed Brian’s enthusiasm for the falcon and, from then on, he did most of his bird watching in his local St Ann’s Well Park.

I continued to enjoy Brian’s company and relied on him being in the nearby Park whenever I visited. I felt a bit lost if he was absent. We would sit on a bench in front of the pond, watching birds and putting the world to rights. I enjoyed asking Brian about his worldwide bird trips. He would always show me new birds’ nests and teach me birdcalls while I helped him identify the Park’s trees. We shared our disappointment in the human destruction of wildlife habitats, and Brian often consulted me with his letters of complaint to the local Council about the continuous culling of the Park’s vegetation. I tried to introduce Brian to using a computer for writing his letters, but he resisted, so I sometimes printed out a new petition for him, regarding the gardeners’ ceaseless manicuring of the Park.

Brian’s experiences on the seafront and in the Park inspired him to write a book about the local birdlife, and I was flattered to be given his first draft to read. He fell out with one friend who seriously criticised his writing, so I was politely diplomatic in my feedback, suggesting that certain pieces could be a little more succinct. After Brian died, I saw his volumes of diaries. His daily visits to the seafront and the Park were described in amazing detail.

My wildlife and conservation interests are not specifically focused on birds, so I was delighted when Brian started his love of butterflies in the Park. He was so good at spotting and pointing out some of the rarities.

He made many friends in the Park and hopefully inspired them to have more interest in wildlife.

About 2 years ago Brian told me the shocking news that he had a colon cancer problem, but said he did not want any exploratory surgery. After that we still often met in the Park and I happily noticed no change in his condition, as he continued to greet me with smiles and excitement on his latest wildlife sightings. My Park visits were based on the hope that Brian was there, and he would often say that it had been a long time since he had seen one of his favourite birds. So I enjoyed scouring the trees in an attempt to help him fulfil his wishes. Sometimes I would spot the elusive bird, and he would always say that I brought him luck. It was probably the other way round.

A year ago (September 13th), after I had noticed he had not been for his daily jaunt in the park for a while, I met him in the street and he looked very pale and thin. I suspected the worst, and phoned him a number of times, with no response. I was very concerned, as I did not have any contacts for his family in Norwich or other friends. Five weeks later, he phoned me, asking if I could collect a prescription of pain killers for him. I was relieved to get his call, and flattered that he had contacted me, but realised when I visited him that he was seriously ill. I had the feeling he wanted to die alone at home. Morphine suddenly improved his condition, but eventually his brother Chris arrived and Brian reluctantly went to hospital, where he became much happier, healthier and philosophical.

In hospital, the TV did not transmit the channel which was showing the latest series (series 3) of “The Killing”, a Danish-language police-procedural programme that he talked about most times we met! Each show was repeated a few days later, so he tried to get transferred into a hospice in time to see the repeat! Unfortunately he never recovered successfully from an operation, and he died 3 days later, on November 24th.

It was the Christmas card season, and I took on the task of trying to contact friends using his address book and phone list, which was in an innovative numerical order! In talking to his family, friends and colleagues, I discovered so much about Brian, hearing wonderful anecdotes about his impressive past achievements, language skills and foreign bird trips. To me, he was always such an unassuming personality. I wished he had arranged a party for all his inspiring friends before he died.

Brain is being remembered in St Anne’s Well Gardens Park by a tree, which will be planted this coming winter. It is to be a Whitebeam. This is a tree he once asked me to identify, because it was the most popular with birds.

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Ian Michael Pirie : December 2012

Retired University of East London principal lecturer (liberal studies/political philosophy/corporate social responsibility); WEA tutor

I got to know the work of Brian on 'science and liberation' when I was working with a group at UEL originally responsible for teaching 'Liberal Studies' (later called Related Studies) - in other words, we tried to get science and engineering students, and others, to be more aware of the social context of science and technology. Several in the group were involved in BSSRS (Tony Hargreaves, Dave O'Reilly, David Albury).... Most of us were on the left (a few on the anarchist) spectrum, and there were several radical/feminist women - in fact I think it was Judy Greenway who introduced me to Brian Easlea's work, especially 'Science and Sexual Oppression'....

I have to say that I was stunned by the idea that scientific thought and method could have been so deeply affected by attitudes to women in the 17th and 18th centuries. I've always been interested in the philosophy of science, and in feminism, though my main interest is political philosophy, and I found the link between these fields that Brian provided very convincing. Inter-disciplinary study has also always been an important part of my outlook - it scares me how people get caught up in the confines of a discipline and then lose sight of its limitations and of any negative impact it might have on society (Oppenheimer...)....

As mentioned in the draft obituary of Brian for *The Guardian*, there was (in the mid-70s?) a shift in emphasis round the issue of science and society: several members of the group - led by David Albury - came up with the idea of designing and teaching a degree in Innovation Studies. My view at the time was that the main impetus for this came from those members of staff being frustrated with teaching in a servicing role (i.e. the students were not 'ours' but based in their respective science, engineering etc departments). The 'political' argument that was used to defend the idea of the proposed course was that students on this kind of course would be the future gatekeepers between workers and management - ie workers who were versed in new technology would be able to resist any misuse or exploitation by management.... I felt that running a degree in innovation studies would undermine the role of the ex-liberal studies group, and that a servicing role actually gave us more opportunities to bring critical ideas into students' programmes....

I am a firm believer that ideas once developed can live on, and as someone who is now involved in green politics, it seems to me that the project of re-thinking the nature of science is an ongoing one. *Liberation and the Aims of Science* has many thought-provoking ideas - from the rise of the 'permanent war economy' and Keynes, to the counter-culture and Roszak, and the need for a 'beautiful world' - ideas that I wish were more at the forefront of contemporary discussion!

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Ted Timms : 2011

Research Professor, Centre for German-Jewish Studies, University of Sussex

My New Year's resolution for January 1964 was to overcome my reticence. As children we were told 'Don't talk to strangers!' while at Cambridge it was regarded as bad form to speak to someone casually encountered – you waited to be introduced, usually by your surname. But the newly founded University of Sussex encouraged us to take risks.

'Hello,' I said to the young man standing next to me in the lunch queue at Falmer House. 'What's your name?'
'Hi,' he replied, 'I'm Brian Easlea and I'm teaching theoretical physics'.

We soon struck up a friendship, for Sussex had an Arts-Science scheme that promoted interdisciplinary dialogue with courses on the Impact of Science taught by lecturers from both sides of the divide.

Brian struck me as a man of the world, for he had already taught in Denmark and the United States. As a full lecturer he could afford to rent an apartment at 7 Marine Square, a Regency development on the seafront. By contrast with opulent schemes like Lewes Crescent, Marine Square encouraged a sense of community. Set back from the coast road by a crescent-shaped approach, all the neatly designed terrace houses overlook the secluded garden. Brian's flat had one of those wrought-iron balconies that are such a feature of Brighton, and there I would join him over coffee, drinking in the spectacular view and debating the claims of science. Advances in the study of sub-atomic particles gave young Sussex physicists a sense of mission, but they accepted me as a sparring partner, ready to question the political consequences. The idea that society could transformed by science was making headlines after Harold Wilson's speech setting out his vision of a 'new Britain' – forged in the white heat of modern technology. Citing the Austrian satirist Karl Kraus's critique of the machine running out of control, I took a very different line, holding the scientific community responsible for the nuclear arms race.

The location of Marine Square, a sheltered enclave at the heart of Kemp Town, made it a perfect meeting place. There was a sensuous quality about the seafront architecture - was there a correlation between balconies and bikinis? Opposite the square was an antiquated public lift on which you could descend to the beach for an evening stroll or a ride on Volks electric railway along to Black Rock swimming pool. At weekends our discussions might spill out into the garden, sloping gently towards the sea. Clustering on the lawn, we debated whether we could avoid the dangers described in *Brighter than a Thousand Suns*, Robert Jungk's critique of nuclear weapons. Or would we regress into a savagery, as suggested by William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, another cult book?

The mathematician Gavin Wraith, who also lived on the square, took a sceptical view of our phobias – his passion was for English folktales and Indian music. Towards

evening he would revive us with a tray of drinks, descending into the garden like one of Arthur Rackham's benevolent goblins. Although there were thirty houses on the square, few people used the garden, neatly tended by the Borough Council. Were they inhibited by some unwritten 'Keep off the Grass'? The lace curtains twitched as elderly residents peeped out to see what was happening. There was a palpable gap between the new generation pursuing radical ideas and a retired population nostalgic for the glories of Empire. While our elders were grieving over a long-lost past, we were saving the world by pursuing liberated relationships within an international framework.

Even in the Arts my colleagues at Sussex were remarkably multicultural. It was a surprise to discover how few of the English faculty were of English origin. David Daiches was the son of an Edinburgh rabbi whose mother tongue was Yiddish, while Angus Ross spoke with a strong Scottish brogue. Other lecturers in English included Larry Lerner from South Africa, Sybil Oldfield from New Zealand, Gabriel Josipovici from Egypt and Gamini Salgado from Ceylon. The scientists were even more diverse. Gavin Wraith could trace his mother's line back to the Jewish community in Istanbul, while Brian's circle included Costas Costanados from Greece and Farhad Faisal from Pakistan, as well as two Turkish postgraduates, Cengiz Yalcin and Saime Göksu.

> Excerpted from 'Breakthroughs in Brighton', chapter 8 of the memoirs of Edward Timms, *Taking up the Torch: English Institutions, German Dialectics and Multicultural Commitments* (Sussex Academic Press, 2011). Clipped from the web <*http://history.phys.susx.ac.uk/People-Easlea_BR*>.

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Brian Easlea : 2002 (?)

> *Finally, here is an extract from a 6,600-word piece of Brian's writing: 'Why I love birds so much', written in or after 2002. Thanks to Chris Perry for discovering this. Dropping his academic style (though not his footnotes), there may be no other piece of Brian's writing that contains so many exclamation marks.*

Not all Starlings congregating each winter in the West Pier are resident in Britain through the year. Some are migrants from northeastern Europe (Scandinavia and Finland) to where they return to breed in the summer months. In the 1950s a fascinating, now classic experiment was done with these migrating Starlings as they returned from breeding grounds to their wintering quarters in the northern parts of western Europe. One autumn over 11,000 of them were caught in Holland and then transported to sites in Switzerland where they were released. Whereas juveniles flying to wintering quarters for the first time simply continued in their original compass direction to end up in very unfamiliar Spain, adult Starlings actually changed direction on to a course taking them to their intended destinations, with some of them even managing to arrive at their traditional wintering sites. Thus the adult

Starlings had seemingly, somehow or other, determined where they were at their release sites relative to their intended destinations and had taken compensatory counter-measures! At the dawn of the new millenium, a foremost expert on bird migration confessed that 'it is still completely unclear how such site determinations and goal adjustments are carried out by birds - making this the last great mystery of animal migrations'. When during those winter sunsets I look at the swirling clouds of Starlings around the West Pier, I often wonder just how many of them have come from northeastern Europe with the location and image of the West Pier engraved in their brains and determined to arrive no matter what obstacles those pesky, ubiquitous and still very puzzled ornithologists interpose en route! Birds certainly do possess the most amazing abilities.

But even if we understood all the mysteries of bird migration, we would surely still marvel - or at least I would - at how such small creatures are able to arrive at the same hedgerow or same farm shed where they bred the previous year after journeys of thousands of miles to and from their wintering quarters, across seas, deserts, and tropical forests. How I marvelled at the Red-backed Shrike. As a boy I couldn't have found my way to Norwich on my own, yet a small bird had both the stamina and the skill to journey from southern Africa to that very same hedgerow on the northeast Norfolk coast it had claimed for its own the year before, much to my delight. How I admired the Red-backed Shrike!

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Of course, in this strange Universe we inhabit, planet Earth will eventually be engulfed by the Sun and all its life will be extinguished. Long before that happens, however, natural happenings will wreak periodic havoc with life on Earth, not least more collisions with asteroids like the one which, it is thought, led to the extinction of all (non-avian?!) dinosaurs and much else. But not all life will succumb in such disasters. Humble bacteria will remain as indestructible as ever and evolution will continue in its unpredictable ways until the Sun eventually frizzles all life. I, though, am happy to have lived at a time when birds had not yet been eradicated by humans and when the natural world could be, and certainly has been, a source of so much joy. Bertrand Russell once wrote: 'When I come to die, I shall not feel that I have lived in vain. I have seen the earth turn red at evening, the dew sparkling in the morning, and the snow shining under a frosty sun; I have smelt the rain after drought, and have heard the stormy Atlantic beat upon the granite shores of Cornwall.' I would just like to add to that, 'I have seen a pair of Wallcreepers just a few feet away at their breeding site in the Transylvanian Alps, I have seen male Cocks-of-the-Rock displaying in the Ecuadorian Andes and a female incubating her eggs in a nearby ravine, I have listened so many times to the song of the Willow Warbler in the English countryside'. I am very content to have passed this way.