



## In our Time: Adult Education and Birkbeck: Extra-Mural – An Experiment 1988–2009

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In this article I suggest that three strands of adult education in the nineteenth century contributed to the experiment of the affiliation of Extra-Mural Studies and Birkbeck between 1988 and 2009: those of the mechanics' institutions, the University of London, and Extra-Mural ('Extension'). Although these strands had distinct origins, they were all respondents to the popular demand of the day for access to education by adults excluded from further and higher education in Oxbridge, which was full-time, residential, expensive, and confined to Anglicans and young men. The alternatives that adult education offered were secular and non-residential. They included part-time, evening teaching of subjects that reflected student demand. Adult education from the 1820s provided classes in practical science, mathematics, modern languages, English literature, and vocational training in mechanics, and in London University, medicine and law. In their parallel development, during which they all changed radically, these types of adult education were unmistakably hybrid, imitating each other in course selection and delivery, and sometimes competing for students. Extra-Mural joined the university in 1904 as its External Department, while Birkbeck joined the University of London in 1924 as a separate college, giving up, however, its daytime teaching, its intake of students of all ages, and the teaching of economics, to fit into the university without friction. The second part of the article explores one example of a productive partnership in the college between Extra-Mural and a Birkbeck department: English in Extra-Mural and the Department of English over the two decades that Extra-Mural was part of Birkbeck. Lastly, the article considers how the college privileged the other strands of adult education and shed Extra-Mural by integrating its full-time staff and on-site courses, and silently obliterating its vast provision of classes across the capital. A colour-coded Timeline follows this article to help trace the development of adult education that impacted on Birkbeck, and its lurches and adjustments to survive, from 1823 onwards.

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## Introduction

Two anniversary histories of the college commissioned by Birkbeck in 1924 and 2022 catch Birkbeck in the throes of fundamental adjustments.<sup>1</sup> In 1924 ‘Birkbeck College’, a free-standing, independent institution, had recently joined the University of London; and in 2022, it was on the eve of the radical restructuring recently undergone in which, among other changes, the Department of English has been closed and ‘integrated’ into a larger unit.<sup>2</sup> The subject of my article follows a similar but undiscussed effort by Birkbeck to transform itself, when it bolted on the University of London’s Department of Extra-Mural Studies (DEMS) to the college in 1988, and ‘integrated’ and destroyed it twenty years later in 2008–09. Birkbeck’s alliance with Extra-Mural during those years extended its democratic remit beyond the provision of affordable part-time adult education at degree level from a Central London site, to provision of part-time adult education outside the institution in local venues across London. Increasing inclusion, in its outreach to a far greater number of students who wished to pursue lifelong learning in different forms, Extra-Mural offered shorter and more flexible courses than degrees — term-length and sessional, and certificate courses accrued over years. Its structured progressive learning consolidated new areas of study and provided qualifications or access to further professional development. Birkbeck’s joint offer in these twenty years of programmes inside and outside the walls made it an impressive provider.

In this article I suggest that three strands of adult education in the nineteenth century were in play in the experiment of the affiliation of DEMS and Birkbeck: those of

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<sup>1</sup> Respectively, by C. Delisle Burns, *A Short History of Birkbeck College* (University of London Press, 1924); and Joanna Bourke, *Birkbeck: 200 Years of Radical Learning for Working People* (Oxford University Press, 2022). This piece has been made possible by colleagues, former and contemporary, from Birkbeck and elsewhere, who generously shared their resources, their knowledge of the history of adult education, and their experience in interviews and in writing during the Birkbeck years. They include staff from the former Faculty of Lifelong Learning, School of English and Humanities, and School of Social Science, History, and Philosophy; two former postgraduate students; librarians at the Birkbeck, University College London, and University of London archives; and the former London district organizer of the Workers’ Education Association. I am particularly grateful to all of them for sharing their knowledge of the rich field of the history of adult education, the complexity of which has intrigued and at times defeated me. Here they are, in impersonal alphabetical order: Isobel Armstrong, Heike Bauer, Carolyn Burdett, Fiona Candlin, Liz Carlin, Sandra Clark, Richard Clarke, Hilary Fraser, Lawrence Goldman, Sarah Hall, Anne Jamieson, Louise Lambe, Naomi Lightman, Jonny Matfin, Fleur Rothschild, Tom Schuller, Ana Parejo Vadillo, Christine Wilson, Robert Winckworth, and Miriam Zukas. The imaginative and deft research assistance of Robyn Jakeman has been invaluable.

<sup>2</sup> Over the timespan of this article, the name and nature of the ‘Department of English’ changed, in concert with new degrees and structural reorganization of the college: Department of English, 1968–98; School of English and Humanities, 1999–2009; Department of English and Humanities, 2010–19; and Department of English, Theatre, and Creative Writing, 2019–23. In August 2023 the department lost its departmental status with its incorporation into a larger school.

the mechanics' institutions, the University of London, and Extra-Mural ('Extension').<sup>3</sup> Although these strands had distinct origins, they were all respondents to the popular demand of the day for access to education by adults excluded from further and higher education in Oxbridge, which was full-time, residential, expensive, and confined to Anglicans and young men. The alternatives that adult education offered were secular and non-residential. They included part-time, evening teaching of subjects that reflected student demand. Rather than confining itself to the syllabus of the ancient universities, adult education from the 1820s provided classes in practical science, mathematics, modern languages, English literature, and vocational training in mechanics, and in London University, medicine and law. In their parallel development, during which they all changed radically, these types of adult education were unmistakably hybrid, imitating each other in course selection and delivery, and sometimes competing for students.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, one (Extra-Mural) was completely subsumed, and destroyed, by a combination of the other two.

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<sup>3</sup> In the [Timeline](#) that follows this article, these main strands of adult education are differentiated from each other by colour coding.

<sup>4</sup> In its early years, University College London (then London University) offered several types of education, which distinguished it from the degrees of Oxford and Cambridge. The age range of the London students was also wider, ranging from 14 to 62. In these early years its flexibility in response to student demand resembled that of the mechanics' institutions and adult education, in the content of the courses it offered and the time of delivery. Medicine was the largest single category of courses, and they were designed with multiple outcomes: students wishing to complete a certificate in medicine could complete them over three or more years; and medical practitioners could take a single course or courses to hone their skills. They were offered during the day. A second category of courses appeared under the heading of 'Popular Lectures' which were taught in the evening: 'several short Courses of Lectures on such parts of Physical Science as admit of explanation without mathematical language: these will be adapted for medical Students, and various persons already engaged in professions or business, and in general to all who do not desire to pursue the science into minute detail, or mathematical investigation' (*London University Calendar for the Year MDCCCXXXII* (printed for Taylor, [n.d.]), pp. 59–60). These 'Popular Lectures' were short, part-time, separate courses offered twice a week over the academic session, 6–8 weeks each: in astronomy (term 1), mechanics and hydrostatics (term 2), and pneumatics, optics, and the mechanical theory of heat (term 3). They seem to be an attempt to attract students who might have attended the London Mechanics' Institution (LMI), although the university courses were more expensive, and offered in a related group which could be taken consecutively. A third category was a university preparation package of courses on junior Greek, junior Latin, and mathematics for the youngest layer of students invited to attend London University. In the early years, only three law courses were on offer. And while UCL saw itself as an alternative to Oxford and Cambridge, and primarily in the university sector, the age of its students was not confined to 18 to 21. Students taking preparatory courses for university entrance were as young as 14, while law, medical, and physical science students at London University preponderantly ranged from 17 to 23, but with some students significantly older: 27, 28, 40, 45, 60, and 62 (The ages were often recorded in the Register of Students, University College London College Archives, UCLCA/2/4/1/1-Student Register 1828–30; UCLCA/2/4/1/2-Student Register 1829–31; UCLCA/2/4/1/3-Student Register 1831–32).

The LMI routinely offered one-off lectures during the day, largely attended by the middling classes with leisure to do so, as well as more popular evening classes for working people. Interestingly, both London University and the LMI started schools for young learners: the former, the London University School in 1830, a classical, secular, day school for university prep (to which George Birkbeck sent his sons); and the latter the Birkbeck elementary schools in 1848, for

The admission of Extra-Mural in 1902 and 'Birkbeck College' in 1920 to the University of London was carefully tailored to avoid overlap and competition with the London colleges: both Extra-Mural and Birkbeck were strictly confined on joining to part-time teaching, and to adult students — that is, not of undergraduate age. Birkbeck was required to discontinue its daytime teaching, and to refrain from teaching economics, which was deemed the province of the London School of Economics and other colleges.<sup>5</sup> As Birkbeck was entering the university as a constituent college, it had to abandon a range of vocational qualifications for which it prepared students, and other types of teaching it offered alongside University of London degrees. Extra-mural teaching, which was also secular, part-time, non-residential, and geared to adults, had a wider remit than the college, as it was safely and helpfully distinct from university provision in two core characteristics: it did not offer degrees, but a range of other outcomes; and its courses were delivered outside the university, in local centres across Greater London. In 1988, in conjunction with other factors, the similarities between Birkbeck and DEMS endorsed affiliation, and later severance, with the elaborate Extra-Mural infrastructure for delivery to a huge student body in local centres shed.

While appreciating the generic tensions between these siblings of the adult education family, and the unremitting and diverse financial pressure on part-time adult education from government policies,<sup>6</sup> I argue that such an extreme solution by

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working-class children. See Richard Clarke, 'Social Economy in the Classroom: The London Birkbeck Schools', *London Journal*, 48.3 (2023), pp. 239–60, doi:[10.1080/03058034.2023.2170687](https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2023.2170687).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, then, with the exception of Oxford and Cambridge universities, the sectors of education were not sharply delineated. School, university, and adult education overlapped, with the university simultaneously offering (mainly) part-time study, but also a short course for university prep, and a medical course leading to a certificate, pursued part-time or full-time over three years or more. In its earliest printed 'Plan of Instruction', it makes its openness to attendance at single courses clear, 'so that it is practicable for those who must enter upon their profession at an early period of life to carry on their education as the same time' (*London University Calendar*, p. xxxi). So, in 1831 London University was committed to lifelong, adult learning, like the LMI, as well as to traditional, continuous university studies. As late as 1855, King's College London introduced evening teaching.

<sup>5</sup> Bourke estimates that in the nineteenth century, 20 per cent of LMI/Birkbeck students 'studied in the daytime', but that this proportion 'dropped dramatically' after Birkbeck joined the University of London, when part-time teaching was made a condition of joining (*Birkbeck*, p. 523). For reference to daytime teaching by science departments in the late nineteenth century, and how its resumption proved unsuccessful in the 1960s for a variety of reasons, including as a response to the Robbins Report of 1963 calling for an increase in university provision, see Bourke, *Birkbeck*, pp. 530–34, and the special college prospectuses for science courses.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the headline legislation detailed below in the third section, significant contextual factors in the diminution of adult education included the removal of block grants from university extra-mural departments in the 1980s, and a diminishing unit of resource for extra-mural teaching paid to the universities. From the mid 1990s, Extra-Mural's partners such as the Workers' Education Association and local authorities were gradually undermined through financial constraints that included the narrowing of funded provision to award-bearing courses and eventually exclusively to vocational studies. The division of funding into the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) divided extra-mural provision and partners, and further education colleges were given an increasing remit, which they guarded in a spirit of competition that affected the entire sector.

Birkbeck in 2009 was not inevitable, despite an undoubted national trend.<sup>7</sup> Through an examination of English at Birkbeck, which was taught simultaneously in two faculties, the Department of English and Extra-Mural, I offer a counterfactual glimpse of what the long-term benefits of productive collaboration between the parties might have been. My article is multivocal: it moves generically, from historical mapping in the first section to microhistory in the second and third sections: memoir and investigative scrutiny, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

In the first section of this article then, I offer a version of the histories of the college, of Extra-Mural Studies, and the University of London in the nineteenth century, separate but overlapping, to understand better how the experiment of 1988 to 2009 worked itself in and out in the teaching of English literature at Birkbeck in that period. These two decades nearly accord with my own career at the college as an academic, where I taught both in Extra-Mural, under its different titles, and the Department of English.<sup>9</sup> I had also experienced Birkbeck in the 1960s, before Extra-Mural had joined the college, as a doctoral student, a research assistant, and occasional lecturer in the Department of English.

### **Birkbeck's roots: adult education 1823–1920**

While universal provision for the education of children was debated throughout the nineteenth century until 1870, before that date it was largely provided in England by religious societies associated with the Anglican or National Schools, and the Nonconformist or British Schools. At the beginning of the century, until the mid-1850s, higher education in England was similarly affiliated to religion in the restriction of degrees awarded by the ancient universities Oxford and Cambridge to Anglicans.<sup>10</sup> The opening of secular/non-sectarian colleges in London and Manchester in 1828 and 1851 respectively were rare exceptions, designed to accommodate Nonconformists as well

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<sup>7</sup> Birkbeck was among the last to capitulate, four years after Leeds, for example; partly, it is argued, because Birkbeck Extra-Mural in London was specially protected by government due to its visibility in the capital, which, having gradually faded in the wake of the other closures, was left to quietly disappear.

<sup>8</sup> For more on microhistory, see Jonny Matfin, 'Mass Higher Education under the Microscope: An Analysis of the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birkbeck, University of London, 1963–2003' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birkbeck, University of London, 2023), pp. 32–33, doi:[10.18743/PUB.00052477](https://doi.org/10.18743/PUB.00052477).

<sup>9</sup> The catalogue of titles was as follows: Centre for Extra-Mural Studies (CEMS), 1988–99; the Faculty of Continuing Education (FCE), 1999–2007; and the Faculty of Lifelong Learning (FLL), 2007–09.

<sup>10</sup> No such national religious restrictions seem to have applied in Scottish universities. From 1854 Dissenters could matriculate at Oxford University and take undergraduate degrees, while Cambridge, which had allowed Dissenters to study but not to take a degree, removed this restriction in 1856. However, in neither institution were higher degrees, fellowships, or university offices open to non-Anglicans until 1871, when the Test Acts were rescinded.

as other students.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, before the formation of a cluster of women's colleges in the last third of the century, higher education normally provided exclusively for young men between the ages of 17 and 22, whose families could afford the fees and the time for their sons to pursue full-time, residential education for three years, and before that, the acquisition of a classical secondary school education required for university entrance. While Oxford and Cambridge did offer subjects related to professions such as medicine and law, the main underlying vocational orientation of the syllabus, insofar as it was vocational at all, was to the Anglican Church, which a significant proportion of students would eventually join as clergymen. In filling the huge numbers of 'livings' (or parish posts), which colleges had at their disposal from the land they owned, university graduates entering the Church through this preferment system consolidated the links between the universities and the Church, and the colleges and their local envoys across the country, in rural locations, towns, and cities. Higher education in this form remained accessible to a tiny proportion of British male subjects in this age group throughout the century, although the University Test Acts that restricted entry or graduation to Anglicans were removed in 1871.

The impetus for adult education in the nineteenth century was, by contrast, intent on widening accessibility: it was secular, non-residential, largely taught in the evening, and targeted a larger (and later) age range.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the 1820s, its earliest nineteenth-century form was the mechanics' institution movement, the main appeal of which was to adults of diverse sorts: men in work, such as literate 'mechanics' or artisans interested in improving their knowledge of science and letters, and especially chemistry and physics, which related to the growing industrialization of manufacturing. Established in 1823, the London Mechanic's Institution [sic] was a response to demand arising from new modes of working and skills engendered by industrialization and from ideas of democracy deriving from eighteenth-century France and the United

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<sup>11</sup> London University (1828) and Owens College in Manchester (1851). Earlier in the eighteenth century, dissenting academies such as Manchester Academy (1786–1803) had been established. Later supported by Unitarians such as William Gaskell and James Martineau, it underpinned nineteenth-century descendants, variously non-sectarian and theological: Manchester College York, 1803–40; Manchester New College, Manchester, 1840–53; Manchester New College, London, as a theological college, 1853–68; Manchester (New) College, Oxford 1868–1990; and Manchester College, University of Oxford (1990–96) and Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford (1996–), both catering for mature students only.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the category of 'adult education' in the early period of its history, the ages of students at both the London University and the University of London/University College London varied considerably. Students in classes, as well as lectures, at the LMI were often widely divergent in age, with very young and old learners in the same classroom. Less expectedly, the student lists of London University (UCL) in the 1820s indicate enrolment by boys of 14, 15, and 16, and mature men of 40 and 62. The early years of the University of London did not replicate the pattern of full-time students at residential colleges which typically attracted a male student body between 17 and 22 at Oxford and Cambridge.

States (Fig. 1).<sup>13</sup> Its inauguration pre-dated by some fifty years both the push for full-time education for children realized in the Education Acts of 1870 and 1880 and the concomitant extension/extra-mural adult education movement of the 1870s and 80s.

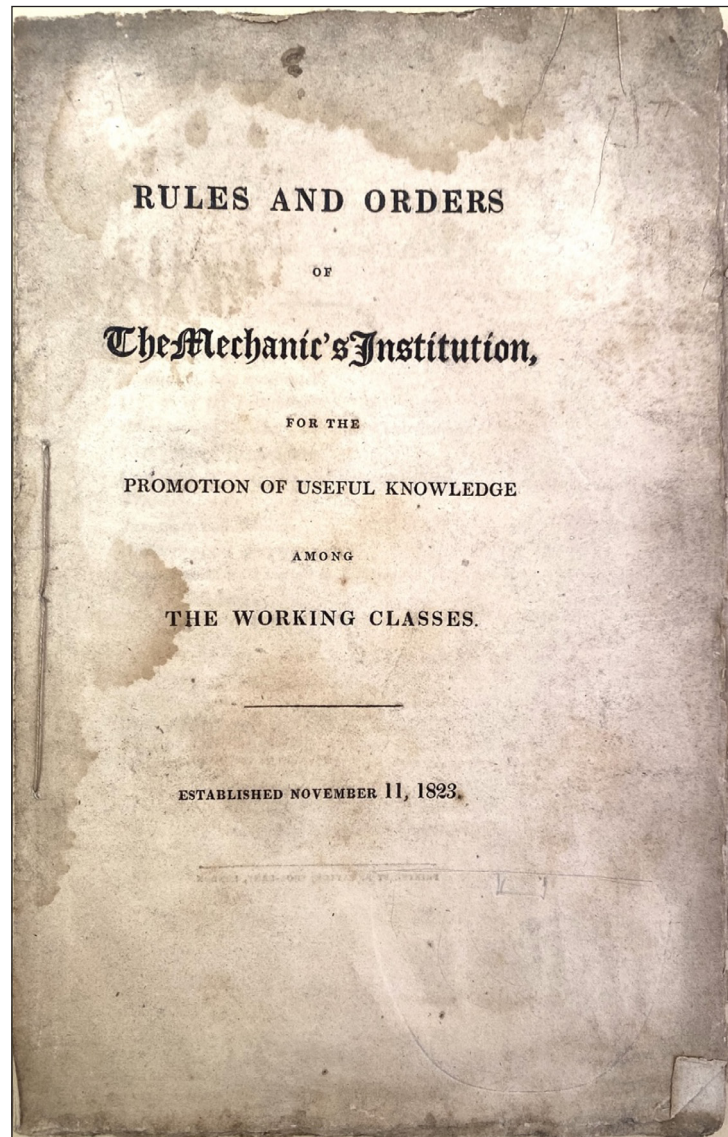


Fig. 1: An early document of the London Mechanic's Institution. Issued for the meeting at which the institution was founded, it shows the initial spelling of Mechanic's, which was soon replaced by Mechanics'.

<sup>13</sup> The apostrophe in the title of the London Mechanic's Institution was unstable to begin with, and in 1823 it appeared in various forms: without an apostrophe, with an apostrophe after the 'c' (Mechanic's), and after the 's' (Mechanics'). It quickly stabilized to the London Mechanics' Institution. See early documents of the institution illustrated in Bourke, pp. 15, 16, 23. For the apostrophe in the title of the *Mechanic's Magazine*, see n. 16 below.

The vocational impetus of the London Mechanics' Institution (LMI) in 1823, from which Birkbeck sprang, is unmistakable, in its primary orientation to science. But it did not exclusively teach science to mechanics. It also attracted attendance from the middling classes — businessmen, manufacturers, teachers, and women, through one-off lectures in the daytime or evening, on a variety of topics. In June 1839, for instance, it was offering lectures and courses on a wide range of subjects, including 'English grammar', 'writing', 'literary composition', and

arithmetic, book-keeping, mathematics, practical geometry, drawing — architectural, mechanical, perspective, and ornamental — drawing the human figure, modelling, landscape drawing, geography, shorthand, French and Latin, [...] French conversation and several for the various branches of vocal and instrumental music, for admittance to which an additional subscription is required.

There was mutual instruction in 'literary composition, chemistry, experimental philosophy, natural history, phrenology, Latin' and 'Concerts [which] are occasionally given in the theatre, the performances consisting chiefly of those by the members of the music class'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the part-time mode of study, in the day or evening, made them accessible to skilled workers and other adults who could afford the fees for membership of the LMI and its facilities, and additional fees for lectures and classes. At this date, subscription to the LMI was 6s. per quarter, with a 2s. 6d. entrance fee.<sup>15</sup>

The initial programmes were not geared to continuity or aimed at examinations. Large numbers of listeners attended lectures on one-off topics, some of which were followed by weekly short courses that accommodated a small number who wished to delve further, affording them the opportunity to pursue the subject and to submit writing for assessment if they wished. In addition, mechanics' institutions offered their members coveted access to libraries, at a time before the Public Libraries Act of 1850 enabled the provision of free municipal libraries. Women were soon offered access to lectures and library membership in many institutions. Through the century, as local mechanics' institutions proliferated across the country, their provision, student bodies, mission, and emphases changed in response to local demand, and to national changes in educational and cultural provision. Their titles reflected their regular transformations: the LMI of 1823 became the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution in 1866; part of the 'City Polytechnic' in 1891; and went on to rename itself three more times — as Birkbeck College in 1907, Birkbeck College, University of London in 1920, and Birkbeck, University of London in 2002.

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<sup>14</sup> Burns, pp. 55–56.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.



In the same decade as the creation of the LMI, the University of London began to form, when two colleges in London, one secular and one Anglican, were founded in 1826 and 1829: the first called London University (now University College London), which opened to students in 1828; and the second King's College London. As an Anglican institution, King's received a Royal Charter, while the secular alternative to Oxford and Cambridge, London University, did not, nor did it confer degrees, but Certificates of Honour. The University of London filled this role after 1836, when two Royal Charters were conferred — on a new, degree-examining entity, the University of London, and on UCL, now renamed as a university college, still unable to issue degrees, as was King's. Both were dependent on the new, federal University of London, which also held this power for other colleges within the metropolis or elsewhere in the UK. Indeed, from 1858, without belonging to the university, the LMI also offered its students — among a variety of lectures, short courses, certificates, and classes directed to vocational qualifications — the opportunity to prepare for and sit University of London degree examinations. From this date, with its access to University of London degrees, the LMI became the main provider of part-time university education in Britain.

Birkbeck as we know it today emerged out of experiments in adult education in the nineteenth century. It was secular and open to adults, especially working men, which determined other core characteristics: it was part-time, non-residential, and initially largely vocational. While it began as an independent mechanics' institution in London, it accrued characteristics from and affiliations with two other strands of adult education developing separately in the nineteenth century: the University of London, as we have seen, and the University Extension Movement.

George Birkbeck was one of the original founders in 1823 of the LMI. While he was a London physician with a keen interest in science, two others, Thomas Hodgskin and James C. Robertson, were editors of the *Mechanic's Magazine*, a new title that reflected the growth in the Industrial Revolution of a potential new readership — the 'mechanics', largely literate craftsmen and artisans at the upper end of the working classes, who had a small amount of disposable income.<sup>16</sup> First published on 30 August 1823, a month after the establishment of the first phase of a mechanics' institution in

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<sup>16</sup> See the nuanced account of the role of Francis Place in the founding of the London Mechanics' Institution in [Ian Newman's article](#) in this issue of 19. The full title of this 3d. weekly in 1823 was the *Mechanic's Magazine, Museum, Register, Journal, and Gazette*. Published by John Knight and Henry Lacey on Saturday mornings, it quickly identified with the LMI, which its editors helped found. Through March 1824 it remained closely affiliated with the LMI, despite the increasing dissent of one of its editors, J. C. Robertson, who from July to September 1824 attacked the LMI committee in the periodical and in meetings. In the first year and volume of the magazine, its title referred to the individual mechanic, the *Mechanic's Magazine*; but in 1824 it altered the title to refer to mechanics as a group, the *Mechanics' Magazine*, making it accord with the title of the London Mechanics' Institution, which it assisted into existence with the group title from the start. See issue 1 of the magazine.

Liverpool,<sup>17</sup> the *Mechanic's Magazine* published on 11 October a proposal to establish a London Mechanics' Institution similar to the Glasgow Mechanics' Institution in Scotland, to which it had been alerted by another periodical, the *Glasgow Free Press* (Fig. 2). It was to this call that George Birkbeck responded. By this time three mechanics' institutions, in Scotland and England, had already been founded in the preceding two years.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the establishment of the LMI in 1823 (Fig. 3) spurred a movement of mechanics' institutions, and their proliferation across the nation and abroad.<sup>19</sup>

Adult education and its 'mechanics' were part of the strident 'march of intellect'. They, along with University College and Henry Brougham, were among its agents, which propelled, shaped, and drove it forwards (Fig. 4). In parallel with industrialization and the momentum of the mechanics' institutions was the dynamic explosion of serial titles and their looming importance in the 1820s, as Hilary Fraser illustrates in *her study of the Westminster Review* elsewhere in this issue of 19.<sup>20</sup> A quintessential form and voice of the distribution of many causes at the time, the serial was an important player in the shaping and establishment of Birkbeck.<sup>21</sup> Though embroiled in the birth of the LMI, the editors of the *Mechanic's Magazine*, Robertson and Hodgskin, registered formally from as early as November 1823, and more strongly from June 1824, their vehement disagreement with Francis Place, as well as George Birkbeck, Henry Brougham, and other wealthy liberal participants in the early formation of the LMI.<sup>22</sup> The issue

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<sup>17</sup> The Mechanics and Apprentices' Library, established by a philanthropist, Egerton Smith, opened in Liverpool in July 1823, followed in 1825 by the Liverpool Mechanics School of Arts, renamed Liverpool Mechanics Institution in 1832. For an account of its history, and its transition into public ownership and a teaching institution, see *Liverpool Mercury*, 23 January 1824, pp. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> In Edinburgh, 16 October 1821; in Liverpool, July 1823; and in Glasgow, November 1823.

<sup>19</sup> Following those in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Glasgow, and London, new ones quickly followed, for example, in Ipswich and Manchester in 1824, and Wakefield in 1825. The *London Mechanics' Register* regularly reported news from mechanics' institutions other than London, its patron. In its issue of 4 November 1826, it published news from institutions in Bury, Devonport, Dewsbury, East London, Hackney, Southwark, and Stepney, and announced the establishment of a new mechanics' institution in Wales. Joanna Bourke estimates that 'by the middle of the nineteenth century, there were an estimated 610 mechanics' institutes in England, 55 in Scotland, 25 in Ireland, and 12 in Wales. Institutes were also flourishing in the US, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere.' See Joanna Bourke, 'A Brief History of the Mechanics' Institutes', *Birkbeck Perspectives* <<http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/bbkcomments/2023/10/24/a-brief-history-of-the-mechanics-institutes/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Scrutiny of periodical contents at the time bears this out. In 1824 the quarterly *Westminster Review* ran a series on 'The Periodical Press', publishing articles in successive issues, in January, April, July, and October. In November *Blackwood's* weighed in with [William Stevenson], 'On the Reciprocal Influence of the Periodical Publications and the Intellectual Progress of the Country', November 1824, pp. 518-28. On the roles of the magazine and meetings in the establishment of the LMI in 1823, see *Ian Newman's article* in this issue of 19.

<sup>21</sup> For the reach and resonance of the serial in the early nineteenth century, see Clare Pettitt, *Serial Forms: The Unfinished Project of Modernity, 1815-1848* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Earlier in 1824, on 13 March, the *Mechanics' Magazine* published a supplement including the transcript of the recent quarterly general meeting of the LMI on 3 March.

was whether the institution should be funded and run exclusively by its proposed membership of mechanics, or by wealthy philanthropists and liberal and utilitarian political backers solicited to augment membership fees through donations to develop the project to its full potential.

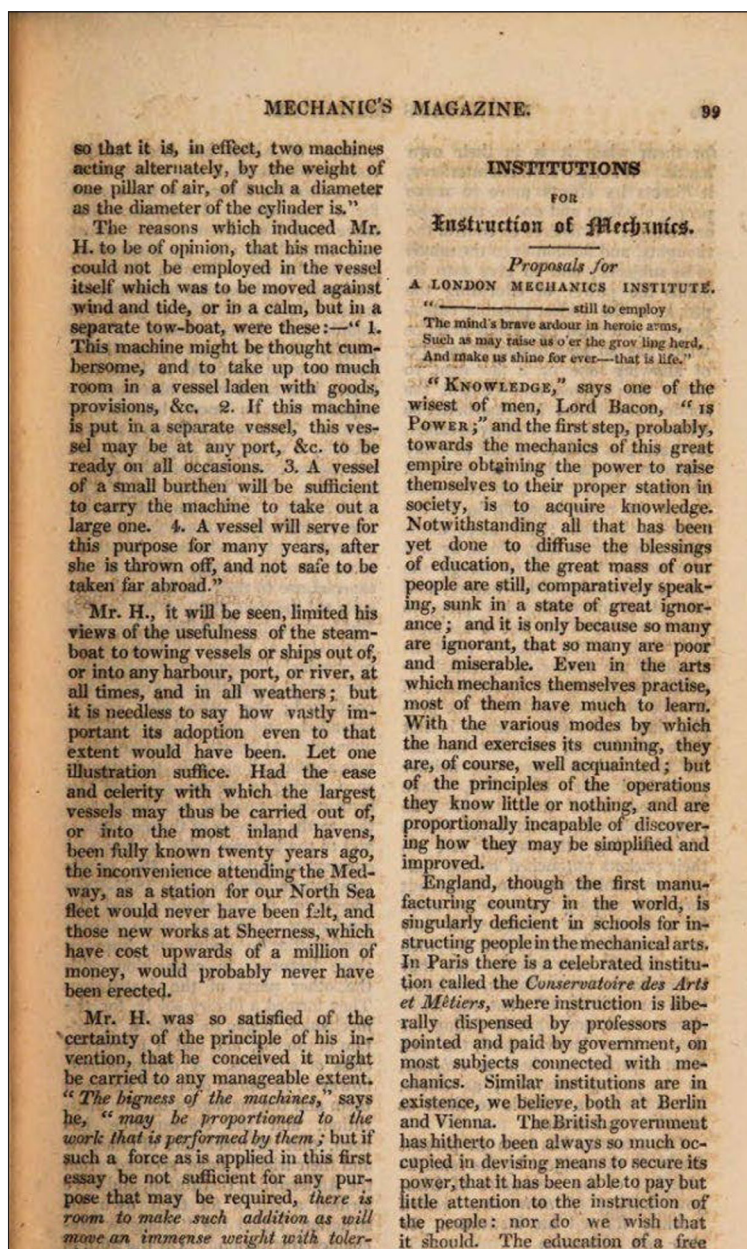


Fig. 2: Invitation to a meeting to form the LMI. The invitation to its readers published by the *Mechanic's Magazine* (11 Oct. 1823) to attend a meeting to discuss the establishment of the LMI, to which George Birkbeck among others responded.

**LONDON MECHANICS' INSTITUTION.**

**T**HE Committee of Managers, having taken possession of the Premises, No. 29, SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS, Holborn, as a permanent Establishment for the Institution, beg to inform the Members, that **READING ROOMS** are now open for their accommodation, every Day (Sundays excepted), from Ten in the Morning till Ten at Night.

The Members are also informed, that a Course of Lectures on Astronomy, by Mr. NEWTON, will commence on Friday next, the 24th instant, at Half-past Eight in the Evening, at the temporary Lecture-Room of the Institution, in Monkwell-street; and on Wednesday, the 6th of October, Mr. COOPER will deliver the first of an extensive Course of Lectures on "Chemistry, as connected with the Arts."

By Order of the Committee, **J. FLATHER, Sec.**  
29, Southampton Buildings, Holborn.

Fig. 3: Southampton Buildings. The financial backing of wealthy philanthropists and middle-class patrons of the LMI enabled it in 1824 to acquire capacious new premises, Southampton Buildings, in a more gentrified area of London.

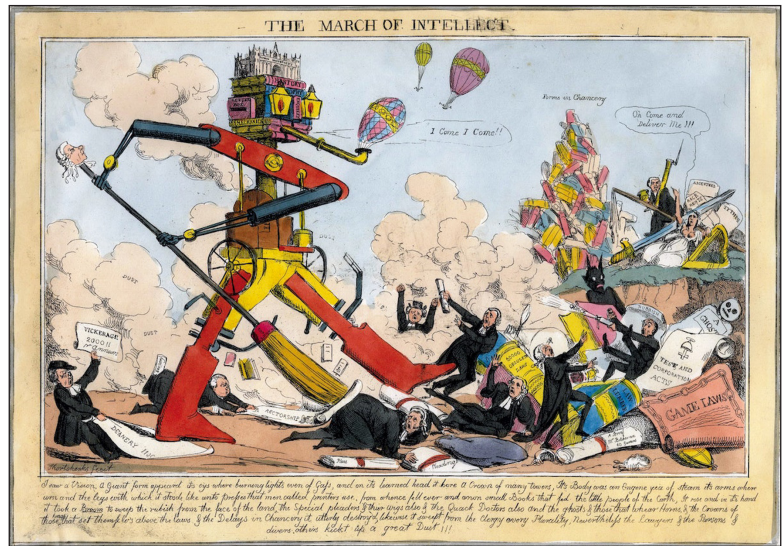


Fig. 4: March of Intellect. As London University and the mechanics' institutions were forming, William Heath was producing a series of satiric prints on 'The March of Intellect' (1825–29). This cartoon by Robert Seymour (c. 1828) appeared during vigorous debate of 'the "march" in the 1820s about the danger or benefits of educating children and working-class men.' Seymour's mechanical monster wears London University on its head as it strides through the land, clearing all impediments to progress.

Robertson, especially, took their dissent to the pages of the *Mechanics' Magazine* in 1824 while Hodgskin expounded his position in an anonymous pamphlet published by the journal.<sup>23</sup> On 2 December 1824, when the foundation stone of the theatre addition

<sup>23</sup> For Hodgskin and his relation to the *Mechanics' Magazine*, the LMI, and to George Birkbeck who supported his lectures in the LMI, see Richard Clarke, "Really Useful" Knowledge and 19th Century Adult Worker Education – What Lessons for Today?, *Theory & Struggle*, 117 (2016), pp. 67–74, doi:10.3828/ts.2016.17.

to Southampton Buildings was laid, Robertson did not attend, and Hodgskin, who did, had recently withdrawn from his position as editor.<sup>24</sup> By this time, too, the LMI had sought to challenge the views of the *Mechanics' Magazine* with its own periodical, the weekly *London Mechanics' Register*, which first appeared on Saturday, 6 November 1824 (Fig. 5).<sup>25</sup> With its new direct access to the public, the LMI alluded pointedly to the obstreperous campaign of the *Mechanics' Magazine* and others against it:



Fig. 5: *London Mechanics' Register*. The *London Mechanics' Register* (1824–28), a cheap weekly, was founded and published by the London Mechanics' Institution as a house organ, as an alternative to the *Mechanics' Magazine* which broke with the institution it had launched in 1824 over the issue of artisanal control.

<sup>24</sup> See articles in the *Mechanics' Magazine* in the summer of 1825 on this debate, for example, on 24, 31 July and 21 August.

<sup>25</sup> The *London Mechanics' Register* survived until 1828. At the end of its first series (no. 112, 4 November 1826), it announced a new series to begin in the next issue of 11 November; retitled *The New London Mechanics' Register, and Magazine of Science and Useful Knowledge*, it would cost more per week, and continue under the patronage of the LMI. See address 'To the Readers of the *Mechanics' Register*', *London Mechanics' Register*, 6 November 1826, pp. iii–iv. Its new form, it admitted, was largely a compendium of lectures delivered at the LMI.

the best institutions in the metropolis have risen into note through much difficulty and opposition [...]. Never did a body encounter more obstacles, or have to contend with more calumny; but the mist has been dispelled by the patient perseverance of its managers, and the Institution is now a new feature in our national character.<sup>26</sup>

In 1825 six similar institutions germinated, inspired by the LMI, in what we now regard as the Greater London area.<sup>27</sup>

The need for capital, and membership and class fees, and the wish to keep them low to attract mechanics and others, while high enough to cover costs and support the programme, were key indicators of the breadth and tensions of the mechanics' institution project, which was from the beginning a project built on membership, involving a fee to join. The mechanics at this time, who were not general manual workers, but part of the labour aristocracy who could read, had to be able to afford the fees immediately set by the founders to access lectures, classes, and library. Indeed, they were a class of skilled workers who protected the status of their trades by opening them only to those who could afford to undergo and complete an apprenticeship, for which a bond was paid.<sup>28</sup> However, the LMI catered for a spectrum of social classes. In addition to evening classes for working people, it soon offered single lectures on topics of general interest during the day. Attended by those who had the leisure to attend — men of business, manufacturers, and families of members including women — these events were priced at a higher rate than evening classes and provided additional income to sustain the LMI. When the London Working Men's College opened in 1854, its founders regarded it as an alternative to the mechanics' institutions, which J. F. C. Harrison suggests were 'distrusted by large segments of the working class'.<sup>29</sup> Emanating from a group of Christian Socialists around F. D. Maurice, the London Working Men's College offered its students a rounded, liberal arts education, rather than the largely utilitarian one geared to professional improvement at the LMI. The other principal difference was its

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<sup>26</sup> 'Address', *London Mechanics' Register*, 6 November 1824, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> In Camberwell, Deptford, Hackney, Hammersmith, Bermondsey, and Spitalfields. See Thomas Kelly, *George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education* (Liverpool University Press, 1957), p. 209.

<sup>28</sup> C. Delisle Burns, a staff member and author of the centenary history of the college, goes so far as to claim continuity between the class of members of the early LMI and the middling classes who frequented it in 1924, after it joined the University of London: 'Birkbeck College is now [...] an institution for part-time adult education of those who are actually at work in commerce and industry, in journalism, in the Civil Service, or in the schools' (p. 13). While this perception may invite scepticism, the change of name by the London Mechanics' Institution to the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution in 1866 suggests that Burns's claim for the continuity of an admixture of social class is apt.

<sup>29</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living: A Study in the History of the Adult Education Movement* (University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 79, 86. Quoted in John R. Reed, 'Healthy Intercourse: The Beginning of the London Working Men's College', *Victorian Literature and Culture* (formerly *Browning Institute Studies*), 16 (1988), pp. 77–90 (p. 78), doi:[10.1017/S0092472500002108](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0092472500002108).

commitment to associationism, whereby the classes associated in social and communal activities, to ‘draw different classes together in mutual respect’.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, John R. Reed is certain that, as with the LMI, the students of the Working Men’s College

were not mainly navvies and operatives, not what we would call blue-collar workers. They were chiefly tradesmen, clerks, and skilled craftsmen [...], men who already knew the discipline of an occupation, who already understood [...] the importance of managing one’s time. (p. 88)

‘Birkbeck, University of London’ retains something of its hybrid origins in its present title, which combines Birkbeck and the university. The relation of the University Extension Movement to the university sector was different than that of the LMI: the roots of University Extension lie inside the universities. Having begun as site-specific residential institutions, to which students gravitated from across the country, the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge wished to increase access to university education in the later nineteenth century by expanding their reach into hubs ‘outside the walls’, into Britain’s towns and cities. Thus, instead of being confined to locales like stand-alone institutions such as the mechanics’ institutions and literary and philosophical institutions, the University Extension Movement created networks of local centres and classes, of which the initiating universities were the generating centres and overseers.<sup>31</sup> Developed in the 1870s and 1880s and dedicated to establishing outposts of education across the country, Extra-Mural, as it was subsequently called, differed most from the mechanics’ institutions and the new university colleges in its nimble proliferation of classes in various geographical locations under overall university oversight. The other distinction of the Extension Movement was that classes were predicated on continuity, unlike the scattergun approach of the mechanics’ institutions. So, while the LMI and London University both originated as parallel modes of adult education in the 1820s, the 1870s saw the commencement of the first teaching programme of the similarly independent London Society for the Extension of University Teaching (LSEUT) in 1879, which was overseen by the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, and London.

Readers should consult the [timeline](#) following this article to trace the trajectory of the success of this movement in establishing classes, and specifically, the remarkably buoyant programme of learning in and around London offered by the LSEUT. From 1885

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<sup>30</sup> Reed, p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> Standalone institutions, like the LMI, had a strong local appeal and character, recruiting students from the locale in which they were based. Bourke notes that the nature of LMI/Birkbeck students changed as it moved around the city (*Birkbeck*, pp. 522–23).

it offered sessional certificates, as well as a certificate for continual study, which pupil teachers could use to help themselves qualify.<sup>32</sup> Having stemmed from the universities, the LSEUT was not as dominated by science as the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution, and in 1889 25 per cent of its courses were on English literature.<sup>33</sup> Like the LMI/Birkbeck, LSEUT was an external body that gravitated to the University of London in the twentieth century and, like other mechanics' institutions, to the status of the university in the educational hierarchy. It joined the University of London in 1902, where it was known as the Board to Promote the Extension of University Teaching (BPEUT).<sup>34</sup> In the year before its transfer to the university, it issued 2257 certificates.<sup>35</sup>

At the University of London, the BPEUT and its successors functioned for eighty-six years as the 'extension' body of the university, where it offered an augmented programme of non-accredited tutorial and sessional courses, and extension courses in which students worked towards certificates and diplomas. The system of tutorial courses flourished particularly in its partnership with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA, from 1903), under the inspired vision of Albert Mansbridge. Summer schools, which began in 1894, continued;<sup>36</sup> and, reflecting the importance of access to libraries to membership in the early mechanics' institutions, the university initiated a small scheme in 1910 of 'travelling libraries' for the extension of university libraries into external classrooms, which expanded post-war with student numbers into a dedicated, well-stocked extra-mural library, from which boxes of books for classes emanated.<sup>37</sup>

It is helpful then to see the history of Birkbeck in the furnace of nineteenth-century adult education, in which the heat of social change and industrialization

<sup>32</sup> John H. Burrows, *University Adult Education in London: A Century of Achievement 1876-1976* (University of London, 1976), p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Lawrie, *The Beginnings of University English: Extramural Study, 1885-1910* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> The LSEUT joined the University of London 23 years after it was founded, and 18 years before Birkbeck. It entered, however, as a 'board' [entity] of the university and not as a constituent college; and at the time 'disappointments were often expressed that a "great Central College for evening students" as envisaged by R. D. Roberts had not been established' (Burrows, p. 25). The LSEUT underwent two more name changes after it joined the university: in 1928 to the University Extension and Tutorial Classes Council; and in 1952 to the Council for Extra-Mural Studies, before becoming the Department of Extra-Mural Studies in the university.

<sup>35</sup> Burrows, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> The first summer school in English, for foreign teachers of English, dates from 1904 (Burrows, p. 116).

<sup>37</sup> For the centrality of libraries to the mechanics' institutions and to the later growth of free libraries, see Martyn Walker, *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond: Supporting Further Education for the Adult Working Classes* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 122-32. The transfer of books in customized book boxes between regional hubs (or unions) of mechanics' institutions and local mechanics' institutions in the North is a model extended in the University of London Birkbeck scheme of 'travelling libraries'. By 1976, Birkbeck's Extra-Mural library was 'the largest for the exclusive use of extra-mural students' in the UK, with 170,000 volumes, 42,000 of which were despatched to 850 classes and 6 summer schools (Burrows, p. 112). For the quality of the library of the LMI/Birkbeck, which varied erratically before Birkbeck joined the University of London, see Bourke, *Birkbeck*, pp. 122-23, 133.



produced a variety of institutions originating in different regions, different classes, and different spurs to learning which, once launched, then honed themselves in response to a succession of changing demands — from backers, prospective students, and opportunities for survival. In their continuing attempts to forge organizations that work, the various institutions faced similar problems and solutions, and not only learned from one another, but initially shared board members and directors.<sup>38</sup> Birkbeck, which began as a mechanics' institution, morphed within a century into a literary and scientific institution, a polytechnic, an independent college, and a college within the University of London, all of which were forms of adult education.

The two sections that follow, on English in Extra-Mural and the Department of English, and the 'integration' or 'incorporation' of the Faculty of Lifelong Learning, make the case for my hypothesis: that the complicated histories of three traditions of adult education in Britain significantly informed the teaching of literature in English in the departments of English and Extra-Mural Studies between 1988 and 2009, and ultimately the outcome of the Birkbeck and Extra-Mural experiment.

### **Extra-Mural and the Department of English, 1988–2009 (with a short preface)**

I spent two sustained periods at Birkbeck: the first in the Department of English from the mid-1960s, before Extra-Mural joined, as a postgraduate student, a research assistant, and an occasional tutor; and the second between 1988 and 2008 as the academic in charge of literature in the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies (and its successors), a recent addition to the college.

When I first arrived at Birkbeck in the mid-1960s, with an American BA, the distinctive characteristics of its undergraduate studies and teaching immediately confronted me — part-time, in the evening, and mature students over 26, who were required to be in work. Compared with my undergraduate peers in Boston, Birkbeck students of English were very well read, serious readers in college, and focused on their studies, despite the distractions of work and personal life. Once they gained confidence, they were often thoughtful and willing contributors to seminars. This was a period when the University of London was still a confident federal institution, with an array of constituent colleges that included giants such as Imperial College, King's College, the London School of Economics, and University College London; smaller institutions such as Bedford, Birkbeck, Royal Holloway, the School of Oriental and African Studies,

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<sup>38</sup> Brougham and Birkbeck were both active participants in the founding of the University of London and the LMI, as were other supporters of the LMI (Kelly, pp. 153–54). For the effect of the university on the formation of the LMI and its Birkbeck descendants, see Burns, pp. 138–56, who singles out events in 1858, 1891, 1898, 1888, 1891–92, 1913, and 1920.

Queen Mary, and Westfield; and many thriving and well-established institutes. The university library was open to all members of the university and, given that the site of Birkbeck was next door, Senate House Library was heavily used by our students and staff. It was well stocked and up to date with new titles, including a wide-ranging Periodicals Room of current issues in all subjects. On the adjoining floor above, bound runs of nineteenth-century periodicals and modern titles devoted to the nineteenth century filled open stacks. It was an ideal combination for my doctoral research on the British press and nineteenth-century cultural criticism.

What was examined in undergraduate English emanated from a centralized University Board of Studies, comprised of representatives from each Department of English in the federal university. To my surprise, the cut-off date for core papers was 1880, though set options did allow for some later literature to be taught and examined. But the scope for teaching remained with the colleges, and Birkbeck English shaped teaching in those years to address the situation of evening study for working people. To enhance engagement with texts, a system of lecturing in bursts was devised; that is, instead of allocating the teaching of long texts to an hour per week over, say, six weeks, the text was taught every evening per week that students attended, in a 'burst' of perhaps six hours over a fortnight.

Birkbeck's postgraduate community in the 1960s was relatively large, but it was very low-key and seldom met as a group. This was a period in which postgraduate study was rarely organized beyond matching a student with a supervisor. Although there was a fortnightly research seminar, it was irregularly attended, and we were largely left to ourselves. Like many postgraduates, I worked part-time, while initially doing the course full-time. Supervisions tended to be limited to occasions when chapters were submitted at the student's pace. I only survived because, once I had devised an argument and agreed a plan with Professor Tillotson, I made some friends in the library, revelled in the nineteenth-century stacks and the British Museum Reading Room, and got on with the writing. And as I wrote regularly, I saw my supervisor, who proved helpful and friendly, and I was lucky enough to thrive. Without an ambient postgraduate programme, everything depended on the one-to-one relationship between supervisor and student. This was a great contrast to the vibrant and cohesive postgraduate community I found when I returned fourteen years later.

However, as I finished my research, I did have closer contact with the department, and with undergraduate teaching, because for three years (1971–73) I was a research assistant for Barbara Hardy, the new professor of Victorian Studies at Birkbeck, and head of department. There I saw the 'burst' system first-hand and met a cluster of the remarkably motivated undergraduates as their personal tutor or seminar leader. I also

got to know the staff through departmental meetings, shared tasks, and occasional stints of working for the two other professors in the department: Harold Brooks and Rosemary Freeman, both of whom were great scholars. It was a department that was committed to its adult students and its part in a unique form of adult education among the colleges in the university. It was also an exciting period in the history of the subject, when English was reassessing itself and scrutinizing the canon, feminism was appearing in the academy, and Frank Kermode was running a literary theory seminar for staff at UCL. I left at a moment of change: in the department under Professor Hardy, and nationally, as the claim of theory worked its way into teaching and scholarship.

By the time I returned to Birkbeck in the autumn of 1988 to join the new Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, the three strands of adult education at Birkbeck constituted parts of a hybrid institution, containing conflicting elements. Insofar as Birkbeck undergraduates were mature, working, and studying part-time at night, Birkbeck staff in the Department of English and the institution more generally were conscious and proud of their distinction from other universities and the colleges of the University of London, whose students were largely young, full-time, taught during the day, and prohibited from working during term time.<sup>39</sup> There was a palpable sense in the college's Department of English that its mature students were largely more motivated, more focused on their degrees, and better read than their younger contemporaries. While we were sympathetic and alert to the limited time for study that full-time work and family life permitted, we vigorously promulgated the academic standards of the university, and adherence to the system of essays, examination papers, and degree classifications which the Boards of Studies in the University of London of the day monitored, and in which we participated. That is, the Birkbeck of 1988 was an institution that closely identified with the academic ethos and system of higher education, despite its differences of delivery and the age of the student body. Birkbeck undergraduate students took the standard three-year University of London degree in four years. This arrangement made university honours degrees accessible to those who had missed out as younger people and, once in the workforce, could pay modest fees to gain a degree delivered in a form and at a time they could manage. It was as important to these students as it was to the staff at Birkbeck that their status in the university system was as assured and unexceptional as possible. This strong commitment to degree study, research, and academic university

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<sup>39</sup> Standard university education, by definition, occupied a period in men's lives otherwise devoted to paid work, which it delayed. Suitable secondary education, university fees and living expenses, the necessity to refrain from paid work, and the sacrifice of years of earnings, rather than lack of ability, kept potential students of the middling classes and below from access for the first 125 years of Birkbeck. Even in the post-war period of the development of mass education and university grants, the participation rate in 1986 in higher education was 32 per cent, which includes paramedics and nursing students at Health Department establishments (Hansard, HC (series 6), vol. 142, col. 81 (28 Nov. 1988)).

education did occasion doubts in some members of the Department of English about Extra-Mural students and the quality and level of teaching part-time, adult education that Extra-Mural represented. English was not alone; it was a recurring note in the college; but in my experience, it was not dominant.

In looking back at the gestation of the college in which, for a century, academic degrees had been one of many outcomes offered by the LMI, the Scientific and Literary Institution, and the college, it is important to remember that this normalized commitment of Birkbeck exclusively to the academy in 1988 was hard won in 1920, and was relatively recent. Coupled with that, as a close sibling of Extra-Mural, Birkbeck might be expected to be slightly combative. A similar testiness was detectable in Extra-Mural. It had developed from the type of adult education rooted in the Extension Movement, in which the sites of teaching outside the walls called for different modes of teaching and topics than adult education inside universities. Extra-Mural Studies was similarly part-time and geared to working people, but it offered one-off public lectures and day schools, and shorter courses (typically of twelve, twenty, or twenty-four weeks) in vocational and academic subjects, and general studies, in a remarkable range of disciplines. These included performance studies and creative writing, contemporary topics like environmental studies, London studies, and women's studies, and traditional academic disciplines such as literature and history. Classes were delivered in convenient venues, near home and work, across Greater London. To such a tradition of teaching, the academy, its prerequisites, its formal syllabus, its calibrated degrees, its single hub, and its limited access, represented constraints to learning, even at Birkbeck. In the third section I will return to this mutual discomfort and alluring familiarity, which figured in the willing entry of Extra-Mural Studies to Birkbeck in 1988, and its willing 'integration' into Birkbeck in 2009.

The Centre for Extra-Mural Studies (CEMS), its first designation as a Birkbeck resource centre in 1988, offered general education/tutorial and certificate/diploma classes, daytime and evening, across the curriculum to adult students on college premises in dedicated buildings in Russell Square and Tavistock Square, and across the boroughs of London in village or church halls, school rooms (at night), and private sitting rooms. A significant distinction between the CEMS and the other resource centres in the college was that it was not organized or characterized by discipline, but by mode of delivery.<sup>40</sup> It was multidisciplinary, comprised of a variety of staff in a variety of subject areas such as archaeology, art history, development studies, ecology, film

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<sup>40</sup> Resource centres were a new unit of organization at Birkbeck in 1988 that replaced faculties. Resisted and derided by some, they were perceived as resourceless and, rather than gathering departments of like interests, separated them, linking English literature for example with modern languages, and severing it from history and history of art.

studies, history, law, literature (including creative writing and drama), music, science, social sciences, and women's studies. This array of subjects in a single administrative unit fostered interdisciplinarity in the development of courses. Moreover, scrutiny of annual course offerings and syllabi by a broad range of specialist academics nudged individual disciplines into the intersectionality of gender. A shared consciousness of diversity — of ethnicity, class, and gender, fuelled by subjects such as development studies, women's studies, and literature — influenced the range of courses in subject areas and the contents of individual syllabi, which were doubly monitored by individual academics and the multidisciplinary faculty as a whole. Just as part-time tutors in many Extra-Mural classes conferred with their students about their preferences for course topics and syllabi for the following term, full-time lecturers conferred with tutors after receiving course proposals, and submitted agreed proposals for approval to a faculty committee that monitored them for diversity and equality. At each stage, adjustments were frequently requested and made.

The Extra-Mural programme changed significantly on an annual basis. Concerted work on the annual prospectus began early in the new year in each discipline to develop a programme mostly comprised of new courses, in extant and new venues, taught by established and new tutors. Because course selection reflected requests from students and perceived aspects of the market, we often had to conduct interviews for new staff to teach such courses, for example in science fiction or on comic books. In 2005–06 the four subjects in Extra-Mural for which I was responsible — creative writing, literature, drama, and Victorian studies — offered 109 classes in twenty-two venues (Figs 6, 7, 8, and 9).<sup>41</sup>

When the Department of Extra-Mural Studies of the University of London joined Birkbeck in 1988, it suited the University of London to divest itself of this component of its external division, as part of its reduction of its role as a federal and teaching body and in response to changes in government funding. It similarly suited Birkbeck, which had recently undergone a serious financial crisis in 1986, to append the Extra-Mural department as one of its new resource centres, as Extra-Mural arrived with a healthy funding base, comprising a greater number of funded students than its host at the time,

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<sup>41</sup> In 2005–06, shortly before Birkbeck began to discuss the integration of the Faculty of Continuing Education, the breakdown of the number of courses was as follows: Creative Writing Certificate, 10 and Creative Writing General Studies, 53; Drama General Studies, 6; Saturday School, 1; and two Summer Schools. Literature Certificate, 32 and Literature General Studies, 10; Victorian Studies (interdisciplinary), 9; Study Skills short courses, 2. This huge programme, that the Literature team managed, gives readers a notion of the size of the Extra-Mural operation when one remembers that 41 other subject teams were included in the prospectus for 2005–06.

and some additional external funding.<sup>42</sup> That both parties were engaged in part-time and adult education recommended this transaction to all concerned.

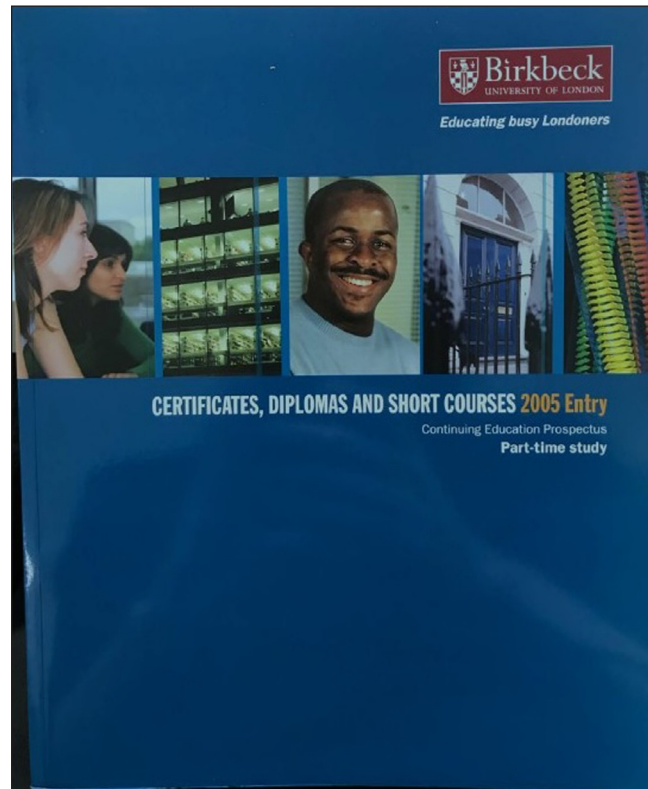


Fig. 6: The cover of the Extra-Mural annual prospectus 2005–06.

Like the Department of English, the CEMS in 1988 was committed to its distinctive mode and type of adult education: university-endorsed, part-time courses, general and award-bearing, but delivered locally, across London, often in cooperation with partners such as the Workers' Education Association, and activist community groups. Extra-Mural Studies also offered courses during the day as well as in the evening, to suit students with different categories of availability; for example, home workers, carers, shift workers, and full-time employees.<sup>43</sup> An important characteristic of the CEMS ethos reflected the diversity of our students and of the timing of the teaching: although access to university study was among the routes of CEMS courses, it began and

<sup>42</sup> The merger added 18,000 Extra-Mural students to the college's cohort of 6000 (Bourke, *Birkbeck*, p. 560); on the 1986 crisis, see Bourke, *Birkbeck*, pp. 553–65.

<sup>43</sup> The addition of daytime teaching to Birkbeck's provision by Extra-Mural has its ironies. Historically, Birkbeck had offered daytime as well as evening teaching between 1823 and 1920, and Extra-Mural's model of flexible delivery followed Birkbeck's example and that of the other mechanics' institutes.

remained as one outcome among others. In traditional subjects, such as history of art, history, literature, and drama, structured, examined certificate courses that mirrored University of London degree syllabi were offered. They allowed students to accrue credits from the successful completion of four courses to gain a diploma, which could then be submitted as the basis for university entrance. These accredited and accessed courses were the category of learning that eventually became associated with ‘access’ in higher education nomenclature. For the college, as its funded student numbers dipped, the outcome of Extra-Mural study eventually narrowed to mean access to Birkbeck degree courses specifically, and a perceived consolidation of the path between Extra-Mural and undergraduate Birkbeck degrees as the approved outcome of Extra-Mural studies.<sup>44</sup>

<b>Welcome to Birkbeck</b>		<b>1</b>	Economics	77	Philosophy	221
<b>Using this prospectus</b>		<b>2</b>	English Language, Academic Writing and Study Skills	81	Preparation for Higher Education	227
<b>Why Birkbeck?</b>		<b>4</b>	Environment, Ecology and Conservation	92	Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy	231
<b>Study at all levels</b>		<b>6</b>	Film and Media Studies	99	Religious Studies	250
<b>Courses across the capital</b>		<b>8</b>	Garden History	110	Renaissance Studies	260
<b>Choosing a course</b>		<b>12</b>	General Studies	113	Science and Mathematics	263
<b>Help with English language and study skills</b>		<b>16</b>	Geological Sciences	114	Science and Society	271
<b>Assessment and progression</b>		<b>19</b>	Gerontology	117	Social Anthropology	273
<b>Further study opportunities at Birkbeck</b>		<b>20</b>	Health Sector Management and Health-Related Studies	119	Social Policy and the Care Sector	276
<b>Supporting students with disabilities</b>		<b>22</b>	History	128	Teaching in Lifelong Learning	279
<b>Student services</b>		<b>24</b>	History of Art and Architecture	144	Victorian Studies	281
<b>Subject chapters</b>			Humanities	155	Volunteering and Community Action	284
Archaeology		28	Information Technology	156	World Arts and Artefacts	286
Arts Management		43	International and European Studies	160		
Communication Skills		49	Languages	168	<b>How to enrol</b>	<b>290</b>
Counselling		51	Law and Legal Studies	172	<b>Fees</b>	<b>293</b>
Creative Writing		59	Literature	177	<b>Faculty staff</b>	<b>296</b>
Criminology and Sociology		67	London Studies	184	<b>Address list</b>	<b>298</b>
Development Studies		71	Management	189	<b>Subject index</b>	<b>304</b>
Drama and Theatre Studies		75	Multimedia	204	<b>Central enrolment form (loose insert)</b>	
			Music	207		
			Performance Studies	214		

Fig. 7: Contents page of the prospectus. The range of Extra-Mural classes by subject at a glance, 2005–06.

<sup>44</sup> This restriction of outcomes of Extra-Mural studies in the twenty-first century echoes the loss of multiple outcomes in 1920. When Birkbeck College joined the university, it had to discontinue its daytime teaching (phased out in 1925) and refrain from offering economics, which was deemed the province of the London School of Economics. On the constraints on Birkbeck imposed by the university, see Bourke, *Birkbeck*, p. 132; on the Master's tenacious campaign to convince the university to admit the college, see Bourke, *Birkbeck*, pp. 126–32.

Other areas of study with different outcomes that Extra-Mural regarded as equally weighty investigated innovative approaches to knowledge, most of which were not taught as degree courses in Birkbeck in 1988.<sup>45</sup> The CEMS offered some of the earliest courses in these new fields of study in the country. Upskilling was another motivation for students who were already practitioners, who followed classes in arts management, creative writing, higher education teaching, business, performance studies, and volunteering and community action. Extra-Mural students on a course on literary theory included a cluster of teachers and lecturers, civil servants, community activists, health workers, and would-be writers, lawyers, and field workers for NGOs. But the high number and range of tutorial and sessional courses also offered students who wanted to cultivate a new interest or return to an old one the opportunity to browse and select from a tantalizing menu. The extent to which the annual issue of the prospectus was keenly anticipated was indicated by attendance at open days, requests for copies, and a flurry of enrolments.

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20 meetings  
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Paul Paschiera, BA, MA, MFA  
London School of Economics  
FFCW01UJCA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

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Carol Barker, BA, MA, PhD  
London School of Economics  
FFCW01UKCA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

**Wed 11 Jan, 10.30am–12.30pm**  
20 meetings  
£145 (£70)  
Tamar Yoseloff, BA, MPhil  
Birkbeck Malet Street  
FFCW01ULCA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

**Sustain Your Writing**  
Many writers, after initial enthusiasm, encounter various difficulties, such as uncertainty about how to proceed with a particular piece of work or problems with writing generally. This module offers supportive strategies for writers. You will share your work-in-progress (including longer pieces), ideas and difficulties, write exercises and assignments, and discuss working practice.

**Thu 12 Jan, 6.45pm–8.45pm**  
10 meetings  
£70 (£35)  
Caroline Natzler, MA  
London School of Economics  
FFCW013UBCA CE  
7.5 CATS points at Level 1

**Fiction Writing: An Introduction**  
We will explore ways of generating ideas for writing fiction. Practical exercises in character, narrative, point of view and dialogue will help you develop your own writing process. You will benefit from constructive critical feedback on your work.

**Tue 10 Jan, 6.45pm–8.45pm**  
20 meetings  
£145 (£70)  
Clare Colvin  
London School of Economics  
FFCW015UCCA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

**Thu 12 Jan, 6.45pm–8.45pm**  
20 meetings  
£145 (£70)  
Amy Prior, BA, MA  
London School of Economics  
FFCW015UDCA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

**Writing Fiction for Children and Teenagers**  
Writing fiction for young people is a great challenge. This module looks at which sorts of writing children need and deserve. We will work on story, character, place, viewpoint, genre, and understanding age groups. Through both reading and writing, we will explore creatively picture books, short fiction, novels and teen fiction.

**Wed 11 Jan, 6.45pm–8.45pm**  
20 meetings  
£145 (£70)  
Sally Pomme Clayton, BA, MMus  
London School of Economics  
FFCW017UACA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

**Spring 2006 Modules: Poetry**

**Writing Poetry: An Introduction**  
Explore the basic issues involved in writing poetry: finding a voice, structuring and shaping a poem, developing an ear for the music of verse. Works by contemporary poets will be used to illustrate techniques and exercises will be set to stimulate ideas. You will also present your own poems for critical discussion.

**Wed 11 Jan, 6.45pm–8.45pm**  
20 meetings  
£145 (£70)  
Tamar Yoseloff, BA, MPhil  
FCE 32 Tavistock Square  
FFCW026UACA CE  
15 CATS points at Level 1

Fig. 8: Extra-Mural Creative Writing classes 2005–06.

<sup>45</sup> These included creative writing; development studies; environment, ecology and conservation; film and media studies; gerontology; London studies; performance studies; and women's studies.



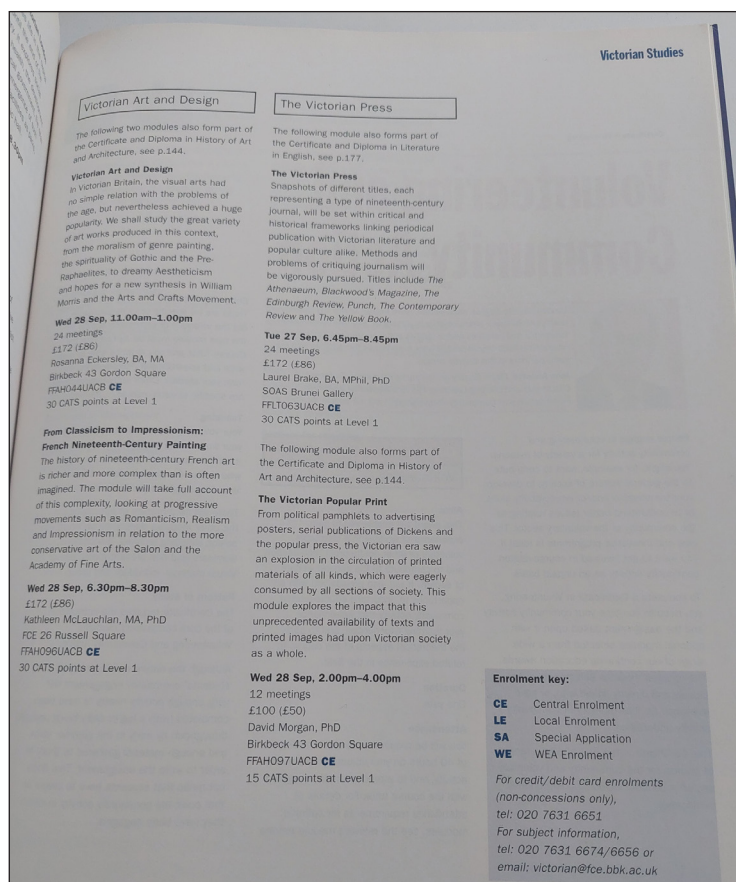


Fig. 9: Extra-Mural Victorian Studies classes 2005–06.

In this spirit of meeting educational needs as they arose, Extra-Mural was open to offer to devise and run courses in English for Academic Purposes within the college. While departments across the college expressed a common need to help students, prospective and extant, to improve their written English, no department was willing to provide it. In August 1998 the CEMS developed promptly, on demand, a varied programme, which commenced in September that year. Prepared by a literature tutor who happened to have such qualifications, it was immediately heavily subscribed during term time, as an in-house resource to departments, through referrals from lecturers and the student union, and to students in other institutions.<sup>46</sup> From 1999 Extra-Mural English established a bespoke, free version for Birkbeck students. Once extended into late summer, with additional staff, it filled with enrolments from students in London about to commence degree courses in the autumn, in Birkbeck and elsewhere. In 2010

<sup>46</sup> Dr Fleur Rothschild was a literature tutor in Renaissance studies in the CEMS when she took on English for Academic Purposes.

its designer — as the learning development tutor — and the course moved to the School of Arts, and in 2015 to a Learning Development Unit serving the three faculties and nine schools in the college.

Tutorial and sessional courses catered for students who wished to continue learning in a structured way, and in a local group that studied together over years. Many of these students already possessed university degrees and had no interest in pursuing additional qualifications. While in 1988 these courses were not accredited, by 2005 they were attached to a scheme for the attainment of degree qualifications through an accumulation of credits, an aspiration not shared by the many graduates in Extra-Mural classes. Their commitment to continuing education was regarded as legitimate and warranted as that of students working towards certificates and degrees.<sup>47</sup> That the UK government gradually and stealthily decided over a decade (1995–2005) that public funds would no longer support this type of study is an expression of diminishing resources and political values, rather than its educational, cultural, and social value.<sup>48</sup> A famous report of 1919 in the wake of the First World War put this brilliantly: adult education was fundamental to citizenship:

The necessary conclusion is that adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but that adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong [...]. The opportunity for adult education should be spread uniformly and systematically over the whole community, as a primary obligation on that community in its own interest and as a chief part of its duty to its individual members, and [...] therefore every encouragement and assistance should be given to voluntary organisations, so that their work, now necessarily sporadic and disconnected, may be developed and find its proper place in the national educational system.<sup>49</sup>

Most of the tutorial and sessional courses in literature were offered in local centres. They were taught by a large, qualified body of part-time staff, some of whom made

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<sup>47</sup> It was this group especially, of General Studies students, who were excluded from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding, once the principle of ELQ (equivalent or lower qualification) was introduced. Many Birkbeck degree students, who held previous degrees, were similarly defunded in the early 2000s.

<sup>48</sup> This was managed incrementally by rules requiring 'completion' in the mid-1990s through attendance minimums, accreditation through required assessed work, and, in 2007, barring support for students with an equivalent or lower qualification than their Birkbeck course under the ELQ edict.

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Reconstruction, *Adult Education Committee: Final Report* (HMSO, 1919), p. 5. For contemporary thought, analysis, and reports on adult education in Britain, see the Centenary Commission <<https://centenarycommission.org/>> [accessed 10 September 2024].

Extra-Mural teaching their profession and taught three courses of twenty-four weeks annually, while others taught less, combining their Birkbeck work with other responsibilities, jobs, or vocations. In conjunction with the subject team, full-time academics such as myself shaped and developed the overall programme: we responded to requests from students or tutors and developments in the field; found, trained, and supervised tutors; monitored syllabi; oversaw the provision of book boxes; negotiated with venues and the WEA; kept tutors abreast of national and college education policy; and observed classes, while the WEA made local arrangements, helped with recruitment, and maintained close contact with tutors, students, and Birkbeck. Tutorial and sessional classes not in Central London were often held during the day, although some were scheduled in the evening to accommodate commuters.

In 1988 and probably in 2008, enrolments of Extra-Mural students were far higher than that of the college, not only in figures but in funded students. However, the Extra-Mural advantage was offset by an expensive departmental structure. The high numbers of part-time lecturers and courses, the multiple locations for delivery of teaching, and Extra-Mural's many external partners presented a complex task of organization, which warranted a different type of infrastructure for delivery, focused on what is now termed 'outreach', rather than on college departments. In addition to the academics (heads of subject areas) and the external part-time tutors, administrative in-house layers were attached to each programme, including an academic-related subject officer and an executive officer.

The subject officers who liaised between the Extra-Mural full- and part-time academics and external partners had academic-related, management, and administrative roles. Eventually designated 'Programme Managers', the subject officers were a principal element of difference between the administration of college degrees and Extra-Mural classes: academic-related staff employed to manage large and complex programmes. They were responsible with full-time lecturers for planning the annual programme of classes, and liaising with tutors, the faculty, and the college in relation to the programme, providing figures and stats as required, and annually producing detailed copy for the extensive Extra-Mural prospectus, which listed course topics and contents, tutors, venues, dates, and times for each class. They also organized and managed day conferences and workshops for the public, and regular in-service training days for tutors. While the Faculty of Continuing Education (FCE) had its own publicity office for many years, the subject officers organized publicity for individual programmes, the termly open days, and the 'pitch' of recruitment.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The title of the Centre of Extra-Mural Studies (CEMS) changed in 1999 to the Faculty of Continuing Education (FCE).

Executive officers dealt with enquiries from students, venues, and part-time tutors, finessed registration, and prepared typescripts and distribution of all documents, including class outlines for distribution to students. As in other faculties in the college, this infrastructure attached to each subject area or department in the FCE, but unlike other faculties or schools, multiple subject units were clustered in a single faculty to manage the large numbers of students, subjects, courses, and venues.

So, unlike the Department of English, the Extra-Mural programme in English was not located in a central college system with a library and other resources on the premises. Extra-Mural delivered a cluster of its courses in Bloomsbury, in two buildings in Russell Square and Tavistock Square, and other courses in Central London, at University College London, the London School of Economics, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the City Literary Institute, but most of the teaching and learning took place in small groups of twelve to thirty students in local accommodation across the boroughs of Greater London. Each literature class was supported by the contents of a book box selected by tutors and shipped from the Extra-Mural Library in Bloomsbury to venues at the beginning of the academic year.

A difference between Extra-Mural and the Department of English that I devised soon after I arrived was to adjust the Extra-Mural focus on literature from 'English Literature' to 'Literature in English'. In the spirit of the expansion of the subject of English underway at the time, the change opened the programme to literature in translation, including classical literature. Courses dedicated to international authors and their works included, for example, African, American, Australian, Canadian, French, German, Irish, Italian, and Russian literature. This shift also prompted tutors to rethink their syllabi, to include literature outside national and canonical borders, and the possibility of including formerly marginalized figures, work, and topics. That we could do this in English showed the flexibility of the Extra-Mural system, which was at liberty to respond rapidly and freely to student interest or the changing nature of the subject. Extra-Mural enhanced inclusive education in various ways, through what was taught, by whom it was taught, and to whom it was taught, widening access as it did through its outreach into the community.

All of the Birkbeck Extra-Mural courses had the added value of the imprimatur of the university: expert tutors selected by the university, who developed syllabi in an environment of current research. Classes were augmented by a portable library in each venue from which students could borrow books, and optional fee-bearing Saturday schools in Bloomsbury, in which students could have contact with the university, and meet students and tutors from other classes. They could also hear guest lecturers, on topics of interest, and learn of new research on, for example, the novels of A. S. Byatt, a

current production of a Shakespeare play, the nineteenth-century Russian novel, or the work of William Faulkner. Lecturers for the day schools were drawn from specialists from British universities, including Birkbeck's Department of English, and where appropriate, authors: A. S. Byatt spoke at the day school dedicated to her work. Tutors and students alike attended what were often lively sessions. The day schools also helped keep tutors abreast of current research, literary debate, and contemporary scholars and scholarship. In addition, there was a layer of sessions exclusively for tutors: termly workshops on common teaching topics, such as poetry; or techniques to encourage student writing; and termly meetings of subject teams, consisting of tutors with the academic and subject officer, to discuss current developments in the faculty, national education policy, problems raised by tutors, and ideas for future day schools.

Workshops and summer schools were also regular parts of the academic year. Residential summer schools at Westonbirt in Gloucestershire were organized for students who wished to study in a congenial location with academics, tutors, and students. Literature was always among the courses on offer. At Birkbeck, the drama lecturer and tutors annually held residential and non-residential summer schools in Bloomsbury, where working directors, actors, and playwrights from the London stage augmented the teaching staff; and students on the Creative Writing Certificate Course attended a non-residential annual workshop as part of their course where, among other types of learning, well-known authors spoke or held masterclasses.

All in all, Extra-Mural provided an ambitious programme of lifelong learning of a high standard for the population of Greater London. Its scope and character were imperfectly understood in other faculties, beset by a lack of respect for 'sub-degree' learning, and an indifference to research by some Extra-Mural academics, at a time when accountability of academic performance through periodic scrutiny of research had been recently introduced. As one of the earliest appointments to the new CEMS in 1988, I had been closely questioned about my research plans, productivity, and publications before I was appointed. On arrival, I helped establish a staff research seminar, and a rota of research leave for those of us with projects and/or grants. As the university's Department of Extra-Mural Study had offered no postgraduate courses in the University of London, the new centre at Birkbeck initially continued in this vein, but Extra-Mural colleagues variously made arrangements with the university and elsewhere to offer master's degrees, and later developed postgraduate degrees in subjects not catered for elsewhere in the college, such as development studies, environment, ecology, conservation, and gerontology. But having myself come from the research culture of Birkbeck, and most recently from a university department with postgraduate students and degrees, I continued my research life in conjunction with

the Department of English, in which I supervised doctoral students, and contributed to the teaching of the MA in Victorian Studies. In turn, I helped to establish with colleagues a similar research culture in the CEMS, and among the tutors in English through day schools and tutor workshops.

The establishment of a new MA/MSc was a splendid example of how Extra-Mural and the Department of English worked together closely to found and deliver a cross-faculty MA/MSc in Gender, Politics and Society that commenced in October 1991. Originally, we were three, from CEMS and the Department of English, one of whom was a social scientist and, united by a shared interest in women and gender in our subjects, we devised an interdisciplinary degree with help from a colleague in Politics and Sociology.<sup>51</sup> Located in the Department of English, our MA/MSc was designed to be taught by lecturers with similar interests across the college, from development studies, English, film studies, French, law, history, history of art, politics and sociology, and psychology. As one of the leaders and organizers of this interdisciplinary course, I not only became familiar with colleagues in many departments but with the infrastructure and management of the college. Interdisciplinarity was a tall order, and required a lot of help, advice, and goodwill to make it work. Thus, unlike some of my colleagues in the CEMS, where disciplines were typically represented by a single academic each, who might feel isolated as subject directors at faculty level, I began to feel integrated into the college as a whole. I had literature colleagues from the Department of English, with whom I taught and conferred; I attended the Department of English's research seminar, benefited from annual research reviews, and helped plan MA teaching; and I had Gender colleagues from other departments whom the new course flagged up. It was an exciting time.

I particularly enjoyed a group of nineteenth-century specialists, in the English department, and across the college and university. In the early 1990s, a new professor of English, Isobel Armstrong, created a London seminar for nineteenth-century studies, and a year later an interdisciplinary Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies that soon included postgraduates as well as staff. Pooling our individual networks, we formed a network of our own, fostering the identity of the research group in the college, comprising staff in visual art, history, and literature, and generating ideas for

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<sup>51</sup> The original three were Mary Kennedy, an historian, who created and ran the Women's Studies programme in CEMS; Professor Isobel Armstrong, from the Department of English, who had recently published an anthology on nineteenth-century women's poetry; and myself, from CEMS, who came to Gender from a research interest in Walter Pater. Sam Ashenden from the Politics and Sociology department joined us early in the planning stages, and Carol Watts from the Department of English entered the planning group as soon as she arrived. Professor Lynne Segal, whose interests lay in psychology and gender, came to Birkbeck as an Anniversary Professor in 1999.

lectures, day conferences, and projects. It was a hub of regular events, making Birkbeck well known for years for its nineteenth-century work. The centre was frequented by scholars and students from the colleges in the university, and from abroad, passing through. One of its projects was groundbreaking — this periodical. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* was an open access, scholarly, electronic journal when it first appeared in October 2005. Conceived and overseen by Professor Hilary Fraser, it was developed by her and a team from the centre, attracted by the possibilities afforded by digital publication, such as longer articles, regular inclusion of illustrations (in colour), searchability, international visibility, a larger readership than subscriber-based, paper periodicals, and an additional site for circulation of interdisciplinary nineteenth-century studies. As someone already involved in a digital research project on historical periodicals, I was happy to continue related work in this new project. Produced at Birkbeck, and still developing, it was overseen and curated more recently by Carolyn Burdett for a decade, and subsequently by other Department of English staff together with David Gillott (a recently completed Birkbeck PhD), and paid postgraduate interns, who had the opportunity to learn the skills of digital editing and production. It was a pioneer of its kind at the time, and it remains a model of its genre today.

The other MA course in the Department of English to which Extra-Mural contributed was the MA in Creative Writing. The director of our creative writing programme, a novelist herself, had developed a certificate course from scratch to meet a perceived demand from her sessional writing students.<sup>52</sup> The certificate course was not as open to entry as Extra-Mural courses usually were, but although it required submission of work and an interview for a place, it was so successful that its director eventually suggested that an MA in Creative Writing might have a similar reception in London. I approached the Department of English with her proposal, and Extra-Mural commissioned her to write an MA course, which became the basis of the MA which the Department of English launched in the autumn of 2003.

The structure of the Department of English is predicated on its direct link to the research interests and expertise of its staff. While until 1989 undergraduate courses tended to consist of compulsory period courses that conformed to the university scheme and syllabi, a goodly amount of selection by lecturers was always available within the parameters set by the University English Board of Studies: lecturers could shape the contents of the syllabi to an extent, and/or share teaching with colleagues. Moreover, ‘Special Subjects’, a category in the university degree scheme, might accommodate research-based teaching. From October 1989, however, Birkbeck moved to its own

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<sup>52</sup> Wendy Brandmark was the director of the creative writing programme in these years at the Faculty of Continuing Education.

system of ‘course units’, which gave students and lecturers much more choice, and was more responsive to individual staff members’ current research interests. Moreover, in the flourishing array of taught master’s degrees, there was significant scope for current research — in devising the overall topic, the core courses, and the options which varied annually, depending on the research interests of available lecturers. The stimulus of a large postgraduate research community of students was a pronounced element of the robust research identity of the department as well, and there were a significant number of student-led research groups that met regularly. When I joined Birkbeck in 1988, a self-evident distinction between full-time Extra-Mural lecturers and the Department of English was the degree to which their respective programmes imbricated research. Once the university’s Department of Extra-Mural Studies joined Birkbeck, new lecturers in Extra-Mural studies had research written into their contracts, like other academic staff.

### **The ‘integration’ or ‘incorporation’ of the Faculty of Lifelong Learning, 2009**

By 2006, as indicated in college documents and the press, Birkbeck was grappling with yet another financial crisis brought on by government policies and an accretion of cuts from the mid-1990s that implemented a gradual defunding of part-time higher education. At first, Extra-Mural students who did not complete their courses (through attendance and assessed coursework) became ineligible for inclusion in reported student number statistics. A requirement that *all* courses be accredited followed, in order to ‘mainstream’ Extra-Mural provision and fit it into a national credit accumulation scheme to enable transferability of credits between institutions and courses. Finally, funded student numbers were further cut by the national policy of Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ). Mooted in 2007 and implemented in 2009–10, it was a devastating and final blow. Under this policy, students who were proposing to study for equal or lower qualifications than those they had already acquired were no longer eligible for government funding and inclusion in funded student numbers. This meant that a would-be student who already had an undergraduate degree or professional qualification at degree level was financially discouraged from enrolment and further study to enhance or change career, or to pursue lifelong learning. This last stipulation not only decimated the funded enrolment figures for the Faculty of Lifelong Learning (FLL), but those throughout the college. Many mature students had prior degrees or higher qualifications. Although Birkbeck and the Open University lobbied the government against this disastrous policy which impacted most on institutions dedicated to mature, part-time students, it survived to do its worst.<sup>53</sup> Fifteen years later, in the midst of rapidly changing technology and an evolving job market, the

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<sup>53</sup> Birkbeck’s Annual Review for 2007–08 shows that the abandonment of the FLL was already mooted, in anticipation of the implementation of ELQ in 2009–10. University of London, Birkbeck Library Archives, GB 1832 BBK/10/1.



disincentive of ELQ to retraining has convinced the government to rescind it; the policy of ELQ whereby funding is unavailable for courses at an equivalent or lower qualification than the applicant has already achieved is to end in 2025.<sup>54</sup>

For a problem that affected the whole of the college, was the severance of the Extra-Mural faculty the only means by which it could have been addressed? From the perspective of the college, the deployment of the term ‘integration’ echoed that of the supporters of the Extension Movement in 1902, when the Extra-Mural system developed by the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching was not ‘integrated’ into the University of London as an independent college but attached to the university as a department and managed by a university board. As a best-case scenario that was never realized, the definition of the ideal integration into higher education remained obscure. In 1988 Birkbeck’s location of Extra-Mural in relation to the college replicated that of the university, in its creation of a unit separate from the other academic centres and teaching in the college; so, not ‘integrated’, and *in* a college but *not* a college.

So, what did Birkbeck have to gain from the integration of Extra-Mural Studies into its Central London hub? In addition to considerable savings from the shedding of most of the huge numbers of part-time staff and the repurposing of full-time staff, there were other lucrative income streams: vacated accommodation, including two buildings; and the dismantling of an expensive infrastructure of in-house administrators, external venues, a library, book boxes, partnerships, etc. Integration also offered the potential of additional student numbers, through teaching an increased number of students on the premises, and the explicit link of Extra-Mural education to a single outcome: access to degree studies at Birkbeck. At a moment when funded student numbers at Birkbeck were threatening to decline, the integration of the FLL appeared to the college as a recruitment strategy for increasing the numbers of degree enrolments in the college. The single route — Certificate, Diploma, BA/BSc — which had been available at ‘Birkbeck College’ from 1852 for a few exceptional, tenacious students was now marketed exclusively as in-house and degree linked. In the twenty-first century, Extra-Mural students could pursue this progressive route to degree study at Birkbeck, but with far higher fees.

I had retired shortly before plans for the closure of the FLL became clear, so the account and analysis that follow are derived from annual reports and reviews, prospectuses, interviews with colleagues, and the press. To ensure financial stability, from autumn 2009 the college was restructured into three ‘Super Faculties’, scooping smaller schools into larger units; the FLL alone was abolished. The paper trail shows

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<sup>54</sup> See the government policy paper ‘Lifelong Learning Entitlement Overview’, updated 10 May 2024 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifelong-learning-entitlement-lle-overview/lifelong-learning-entitlement-overview>> [accessed 17 September 2024].

that this was a gradual process. Following a paragraph on Equivalent or Lower Qualifications, plans for the integration of the FLL into the college were announced by the Master in the Annual Review of 2007–08, which also recorded extremely healthy enrolments of part-time Extra-Mural students, and the qualifications they achieved.<sup>55</sup> The gradual diminution from 2007 of a key element of Extra-Mural provision, that of education in local venues, culminated in the entire disappearance of Workers' Education Association classes from the prospectus in 2008–09, and the incorporation of central courses into Birkbeck's Bloomsbury premises from autumn 2009.<sup>56</sup> This process was evident from a variety of generic titles of the prospectuses from 2006, which ceased to identify the prospectuses with Extra-Mural teaching or the FLL: they were titled 'Teaching Matters' (2006); 'London's Evening University' (2007); 'Part-time Matters. Certificates, Diplomas and Short Courses' (2008); and 'London's Evening University. Certificates and Short Courses' (2009–12).

That four similar prospectuses with the same title continued to appear after the demise of the FLL, between 2009 and 2012, suggests continuity of the faculty and suppresses the rupture, but it also indicates the degree to which 'short' courses survived in diminishing numbers after the faculty had been disbanded.<sup>57</sup> In so far as these publications presented the short courses together, in a ghostly conclave of their former faculty, they retained the lineaments of Extra-Mural culture — breadth of topics, variety of learning forms, and accessibility. From 2013, once the separate prospectuses ceased, the remaining short courses were fragmented into separate listings in appropriate departments in the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses. Losing numbers annually, delivered only in Central London venues or increasingly at Birkbeck itself, and subject to a significant rise in course fees in 2012, the deracinated programme had been overtaken by mainstreaming. With all forms of part-time adult education narrowed to a single framework — the progressive attainment of qualifications at degree level, and subjection to quantified measurement of learning (accumulated credits) towards that end — fees for

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<sup>55</sup> Birkbeck Annual Review, 2007–08, p. 2. In the FLL enrolments were 11,720 compared with 4171 part-time degree students. In 2006–07, 1571 certificates and diplomas were awarded, a figure that rose in 2007–08 to 1608, but fell, predictably, in 2009–10 to 1300, after Extra-Mural teaching had been disbanded and certificate courses integrated.

<sup>56</sup> The break-up of the WEA-Birkbeck Extra-Mural partnership was initiated by Birkbeck, not the WEA. Its local classes survived and thrived for about five years. Then due to a combination of factors, including retiring organizers, amalgamation of branches, the loss of Birkbeck tutors, funding, library provision, and the success of the (free) U3A, the network of local WEA classes offering liberal arts education itself largely disappeared.

<sup>57</sup> The term 'short courses' itself derives from the imposition of the academic model, in which courses lead to qualifications, typically long courses such as degrees, which in the British system formerly required three years of full-time, continuous study in a structured syllabus that, completed satisfactorily, resulted in a final qualification. Short courses of 6, 12, 22, and 24 weeks or one day do not fall into this category. Some part-time Extra-Mural courses were designed to lead to certificates on the completion of the designated number of modules comprised of 'sessional' courses, those lasting for an academic year.

short courses moved from moderate to astronomical. The Extra-Mural project emanating from the University Extension Movement, of offering accessible, open-ended, part-time, continuing education for adults in the community throughout their lives was dead.

By all accounts, the destruction of the Extra-Mural programme in Greater London was managed without opposition, and a tradition of education in the community over 120 years old was scrapped. Neither the dean of the Faculty of Lifelong Learning nor any of its staff publicly objected, even in the governors' meetings. How can this silence be explained? Shock? It has been reported that no one from the faculty had been part of the decision-making process. Morale in the faculty has been described to me as very low, a result of cumulative pressure (internal and external) on accounting, mainstreaming, and recruitment, and ineffective leadership, as funded student numbers were stripped away by government, the provision of book boxes discontinued, and the well-stocked and capacious Extra-Mural library and librarian integrated into the college library. Moreover, there was the allure of a haven for those FLL lecturers who were research-oriented in often reluctant academic departments, with the possibility of the integration of individuals into the college with colleagues in cognate fields. For their part, some departments welcomed this restructuring of the college, regarding its increase of their staff numbers an advantage.

The college did patient work to ensure that nearly all Extra-Mural full-time academics were absorbed into extant departments. Some social scientists who did not easily fit were accommodated in a well-managed and motivated new social science cluster, the School of Social Sciences, History, and Philosophy (SSHP). The rest of the subject teams, the programme managers and executive officers, were reallocated to generic pools of staff in the other faculties, to do a mixture of school, faculty, and college administration and management. The former dean was retained as Pro Vice-Master for Widening Participation and Community Partnerships, while other members of the higher echelons of the FLL management were appropriately relocated in the college, filling vacancies, or augmenting services. Some of these full-time staff report that, over time, happy and productive relocation ensued for individuals.

To what extent did this fractional integration of the Extra-Mural faculty imbue the college with the Extra-Mural ethos of financially accessible public education, in the community, with a variety of learning outcomes? As discussed above, Extra-Mural courses survived in a gradual process of managed decline, and I have been told reliably that 'some colleagues [...] really did care'. Sources from several departments recall the presence of certificate courses incorporated into degree options, while some Extra-Mural part-time tutors remained employed in cognate departments for years. However, the inclusion of short courses was not universal, but confined to a handful of departments. The new faculty, SSHP, developed a programme of public and internal

lectures, 'Be Birkbeck', to maintain the element of lifelong learning in college and in the larger community, which survived for a few years.

Recently, a decade after the demise of Extra-Mural, the college reintroduced lifelong learning modes of study, and currently offers a wide selection of 'short courses', which may be seen on the college website and in the online prospectuses. All of them are credit-bearing, and most — foundation courses and certificate and diploma modules — are focused on academic outcomes as access courses, at pre-degree level. Most surprisingly, there are also standalone modules, similar to Faculty of Lifelong Learning tutorial classes, with no entry qualifications or prescribed outcomes. While this Birkbeck profile does revive elements of Extra-Mural modes of teaching, and gestures towards widening access, their integration into the academy entails crucial differences: the high fees for short courses, c. £1400 per module, are at least seven times that of Extra-Mural fees, making them accessible to a small proportion of the former Extra-Mural demographic; and they are delivered in the university, in a single location, rather than spread across the city.

Looking, however, at the new social context of lifelong learning, I note that many of these courses are offered remotely and online, which extends access beyond the city or UK to an international student community. The notion of local communities of learners studying face-to-face in a recurring group of neighbours disappears, but the geographical breadth of access expands as does the flexibility of access for the student, tailored not to the group but to the individual, who foregoes much of the social bonds of Extra-Mural tutorial classes. Students can tailor their online participation to their individual out-of-hours life. The other crucial difference, from next year, is the groundbreaking difference that the Lifelong Loan Entitlement will make. It will mean that would-be students can borrow funding from the government in the course of their lives for types of learning at a variety of levels, not just university or apprenticeships, and on a wider range of subjects than are found in any single university or college. So, although the lifelong learning modules *are* expensive, access to them will be supported by this new eligibility for support through loans.

To sum up, in 2009 the jobs of the Faculty of Lifelong Learning Bloomsbury staff were salvaged, and its members silenced, convinced by the college's explanation that there were no alternative options to resolve Birkbeck's projected financial losses than the abolition of Extra-Mural studies in London and that, just as for other large Extra-Mural departments in England, government cuts and hostility to part-time adult education were irresistible blows to the sustainability of Extra-Mural at Birkbeck.

I have tried to show that, in 1988, Birkbeck College, an adult education institution securely located in a higher education federation, with which it closely identified, appeared a harbour for Extra-Mural studies, with which it shared a history and a

mission; but it proved not to be. There is lots of evidence of the benefits of partnership that the affiliation afforded. I offer here one example, in my experience of the productive relations between Extra-Mural Literature in English and the Department of English over twenty years; one that introduced, in the Gender MA/MSc, a course that, unusually in Birkbeck, involved multiple faculties across the college. It exemplifies the immense potential of a model of integration of these two types of adult education, with goodwill on both sides.

Evidence from 2008 and 2011 endorses my argument — that a dearth of understanding and a lack of appreciation of the value of the Extra-Mural project to Birkbeck by the Master and his team were significant factors in the college’s decision-making in the face of anticipated financial problems in 2006. As always, the challenge was not only financial, but also a question of how the college could best adjust itself to minimize the damage, that is, with integrity. Such decisions define core values and institutional identity. It is a matter of interest that Birkbeck had embarked on a prestigious and government-endorsed experiment of widening participation at degree and certificate levels in a new location in Stratford, East London in 2007, just as it decided to shed the FLL: as Extra-Mural closed in 2009, Stratford opened. It ignored the value of the reach of Extra-Mural into the communities of London at hand, rendering its loss invisible in a series of press statements. In anticipation of the abolition of the faculty, in May 2008, Birkbeck’s response to the new ELQ policy at this time was glossed by the college in *Times Higher Education* as a plan offering ‘new opportunities’: ‘The college will aim to create a “seamless” student experience and progression routes. Rather than existing as a separate department, lifelong learning will be integrated into each of the “Super Schools”.’<sup>58</sup>

In 2011, in the aftermath of the closure of the FLL, the occlusion of Extra-Mural from Birkbeck was complete, when the Master published a letter in *Times Higher Education*, headed pointedly by some subeditor, quoting from the letter, ‘Misleading Mechanism’. Here the Master protested that a perceived loss of student numbers by Birkbeck was no such thing, as the missing students were ‘not Birkbeck students’ *because the physical location of their learning was elsewhere*. He unblinkingly glossed the high numbers of (Extra-Mural) students who disappeared from Birkbeck’s statistics between 2008–09 and 2009–10 as a ‘change in the mechanism’ of reporting to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, without mentioning the closure of the FLL in his explanation:

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<sup>58</sup> Rebecca Atwood, ‘Birkbeck Mulls “new opportunities” to Soften Blow of ELQ Funding Cuts’, *Times Higher Education*, 29 May 2008, p. 11.

In 2008–09 Birkbeck was leading a lifelong learning network of higher and further education providers. The Higher Education Statistics Agency's [Hesa] reporting mechanism at that time required students enrolling on lifelong learning courses at any of the institutions within the network *to be reported as Birkbeck students, despite them not receiving any of their teaching at the institution.*

A change in the mechanism in 2009–10 meant that these students were then reported by the actual institution that provided their teaching. Therefore, the students shown in the Hesa dropout figures for Birkbeck were *in reality just the product of a change in reporting.*<sup>59</sup>

To this day no one has acknowledged the enormity of the destruction of the University of London Extra-Mural project, with its multiple outcomes, its thousands of students, its intellectual and geographic accessibility, its community partnerships, and its summer schools, workshops, and day schools. These features of the Extra-Mural provision, along with its rapid response to new education markets and its negotiation of syllabi with students on extended tutorial courses all complemented traditional university courses.<sup>60</sup> That affordable, part-time, non-vocational, and non-degree adult education across London at present is impoverished is undeniable. Providers that remain, like the redoubtable City Lit, the Highgate Institute, or Museums and Galleries, offer non-subsidized high-quality courses at high or very high fees. The University of the Third Age (U3A) is alone student-led and affordable, but its current London branches barely touch on literature.

The loss to Birkbeck of its effective agent of outreach into the entirety of the metropolitan area seems to have been unrecognized in 2009. Every local Extra-Mural course not only brought impressive adult education of a Birkbeck standard to an additional tier of students, but it also carried Birkbeck's name into London's array of neighbourhoods, local authorities, and partners. Birkbeck's silence about its disappearance and its denial of the affiliation and its loss exist until the present day. In the midst of our current financial crisis which coincided with our bicentenary celebrations in 2023, a timeline of 'Key Events in Birkbeck History' appeared on the Anniversary website of the college. Extra-Mural studies is not mentioned, neither its entry to the college nor its closure (*Fig. 10*).

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<sup>59</sup> David Latchman, 'Misleading Mechanism', *Times Higher Education*, 28 April 2011, p. 31, emphases added.

<sup>60</sup> See the admixture of university subjects with others on offer across the faculty in the Prospectus for 2005–06 in Fig. 7, and the variety of courses in literature in the same year.

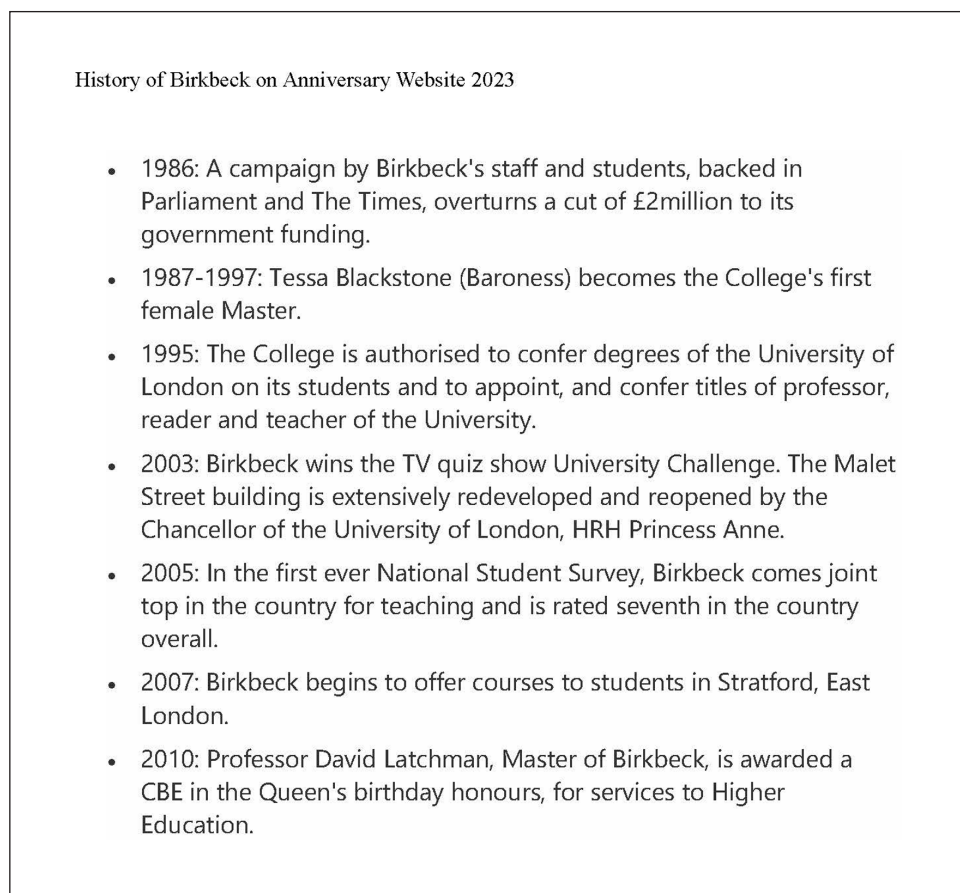


Fig. 10: Representation of the history of Birkbeck on the Anniversary website (2023), without the addition and 'integration' of Extra-Mural studies 1988–2009.

Arguably, the sounder model was a tolerated and demarcated *extension* to university teaching. Positioned as complementary to the traditional colleges, and tailored to avoid competition, the thriving network of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching was incorporated into the University of London in 1902, in which it comfortably remained until 1988.<sup>61</sup> With hindsight, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the experiment of Birkbeck with Extra-Mural, from cradle to grave, was largely financially motivated. Moreover, despite its great potential for success, demonstrated as I have argued in the case of English literature in the college, the educational significance of its outreach beyond the walls of the university was carelessly overlooked

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<sup>61</sup> The LSEUT which eventually became the Department of Extra-Mural Studies in the University of London (DEMS) was confined to part-time, mature students. While the move of DEMS to Birkbeck in 1988 was also impelled by institutional change at the University of London, the transfer was notable for the serious consideration by the university of the future safety of DEMS in Birkbeck, a concern that seems never to have surfaced at Birkbeck in 2008–09.

and undervalued, and perhaps not understood by many of the decision-makers in the college. Acquired and then removed during financial crises in 1986 and 2009, it was a callous case of last in, first out. But the enduring struggle of the college and Extra-Mural to cohabit over these two decades seems in part due to their similarities as well as their differences, in their common roots in nineteenth-century adult education, and in their divergent relationship to the university, with the college gravitating to ‘within’ the walls of the university (if part-time), and Extra-Mural, also part-time, to ‘without’; a tension, it might be suggested, common between siblings.<sup>62</sup>

A postscript: followers of Birkbeck’s fortunes have been aware of the most recent instance of its resort to wholesale restructuring in response to a projected financial crisis in 2023. Again, its resolutions were ideological, reflecting its current values: on this occasion, English, the Humanities, and Social Sciences were selected by the college as most prominent among those to take the hit. In 2019 the name of the Department of English and Humanities was changed to the Department of English, Theatre, and Creative Writing.<sup>63</sup> In 2023, the department, renowned for its research and having just been placed second in the country in the Research Excellence Framework ratings (REF 2021) was divided into its constituent parts.<sup>64</sup> Theatre and creative writing were ring-fenced, and the historical and critical theory component of English subjected to a 50 per cent reduction in staff. Integrated into a new Super School, the School of Creative Arts, Culture and Communication, the Department of English lost its name, its visibility, and its distinguished history as a department. While degree teaching continues in a challenging environment, colleagues in English continue to develop their research and research-led teaching. Until quite recently, the undergraduate prospectus offered, alongside the BA in English, the legacy of Extra-Mural provision — short courses in literature as part of a Certificate in Higher Education as one of the entry levels to literary studies offered by the college, but that pathway has now disappeared for English, although it remains for over a dozen subjects, some of them in the arts.

As we have seen, the lives of adult education institutions are historically turbulent, dynamic — and resilient, tied as they are to changing student markets and, for over a century, to forms of government policy, influence, and funding.

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<sup>62</sup> This element of their relationship in the specific setting of Birkbeck is also noticed by Joanna Bourke in her recent history of the college, where she detects an occasional sense of rivalry between the college and Extra-Mural over student numbers and recruitment to competing subjects (*Birkbeck*, p. 560).

<sup>63</sup> Three internal sources document October 2019 as the correct date of the change of title of the department, an alteration not reflected in the college prospectus until 2021. Thanks to tenacious investigation by Luisa Calè and colleagues, the record established here is accurate.

<sup>64</sup> ‘REF 2021: English Language and Literature’, *Times Higher Education*, 12 May 2022 <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/ref-2021-english-language-and-literature>> [accessed 10 September 2024].

