

1964

**SOMETHING
DIFFERENT**

**UNIVERSITY
OF ESSEX:
VISION AND
REALITY**

2014





Electronics student Julian Barber abseiling down Keynes Tower raising funds for the University's CAT scanner day, c.1988.

SOMETHING FERCIE

**UNIVERSITY
OF ESSEX:
VISION AND
REALITY**
**50 YEARS
OF STUDENT
LIFE**

Founding Vice-Chancellor Albert Sloman might have provided the blueprint for the University of Essex, but it was the students who shaped it and made it their own.

The tools for students to activate Essex were provided; progressive lecturers working at a freer, more daring and experimental University whose integrated architecture brings us together for study and socialising. With the components in place for a forward-thinking University, this sometimes disobedient institution has been defined by 50 years of students thinking critically and wanting to make a difference.

Something Fierce includes student memorabilia displayed alongside what the newspapers chose to print and collectors decided to archive. These are only a few of the stories to be told and we want to capture many more. Please add your memories to our website's memory map - we need you!

Jess Kenny
September 2014

ESSEX UNIVERSITY

FEBRUARY 10 11 12



NEAR ALBERT
1968-1969
In January 1970, Essex was one of 12 UK universities to have a student strike. The strike was led by the National Union of Students (NUS) and lasted for 10 days. It was one of the most significant events in the history of the university.



Expectation was high when in 1961, a University of Essex was proposed. It was to produce professional experts that would keep Britain up with the technological revolution being played out between the USA and USSR. Essex and the other six new 'Shakespearean' universities would be one of the final building blocks in regenerating post-war Britain.

Described by Albert Sloman as 'freer, more experimental, more daring' in his BBC Reith Lectures of 1963, the University was an exciting prospect to students wanting an education relevant to the world around them.

From the start, Essex was known as a 'liberal' University where, as Albert Sloman said, 'Apart from its formal teaching, a University ought to give students the chance to think and argue about the fundamental problems of life, and to stand on their own two feet.' To a certain extent, this has been achieved, with campus becoming a critical community that can think for itself.





Students in square 4. Photograph courtesy of Michael Thomas, 1968.

Essex became infamous for student unrest in the late 1960s. The intellectual freedom and close-knit community created by Albert Sloman meant students found a ready platform for discussion and debate.

There had already been demonstrations against Enoch Powell's and Harold Wilson's recent visits to Colchester, but things really kicked off when, on 7 May 1968, Dr Inch from the Ministry of Defence's chemical and biological research facility, Porton Down, was invited to speak on campus. It was a time when chemical weapons were being used in Vietnam to deadly effect. Protests led to Dr Inch's lecture being abandoned, and there was further outrage from many students and staff when Sloman suspended three students considered to be ringleaders. Students declared Essex a 'Free University' and instigated their own programme of lectures and debate. Later, the three suspended students – David Triesman, Pete Archard and Raphael Halberstadt – were reinstated and allowed to continue their studies. Interestingly, students subsequently reported in Wyvern that CS gas used against students in Paris in May 1968 had been developed at Porton Down.



Voting for a 'Free University' and a protest at the Vice-Chancellor's house, supporting the three suspended students. Courtesy Albert Sloman Library, 1968

WYVERN
University of Essex

No 38 Colchester Friday June 21 1968 6d

SUPRISE UNIVERSITY DEATH : Hundreds feared living in Disaster

TRAGEDY AT ESSEX



Monday, May 12th, was an historic day for the three and a half year old University of Essex. On that day it ceased to exist. A huge meeting in L.T.B. 6 and 7, attended by nearly all the University population, voted overwhelmingly to refuse to participate in the University—in its place a Free University was declared.

This unprecedented action was the response of the University, united for the first time in its short career, to the attempt by Vice-Chancellor Albert Sloman to exclude three students from the Campus. The three students, Pete Archard, Raphael Halberstadt, and Dave Triesman, were summarily sentenced for their alleged role as ring-leaders in the Porton Down demonstration reported in the last issue of WYVERN.

A fence above followed and proposals to hold the three students on Campus, and to block the Administration Offices in the Valley Block were occupied and many students signed a petition in the Square by Roy Bader's office. Heron students were in contrast the as students kept up a non-stop barrage of telephoned protests at the Vice-Chancellor's action.



Free University in action

A decade dominated by strikes, an oil crisis and the three-day week. It was a time of punk and glitter, grit and glamour. At the University of Essex, the 1970s were filled with protests – our students wanted to change the world and make a difference.

Through numerous protests, pickets and sit-ins, students supported striking miners, women's rights and anti-racism campaigns at home, while focusing on Latin America and the Middle East with equal fervour. Sociologist Emile Durkheim coined a term for these highly charged events, calling them 'moments of collective effervescence', when new ideas are born. There were damning headlines in the press, but it was also a time of great intellectual growth and creativity at Essex.

For example, by the end of the decade, the founding Professor of Sociology, Peter Townsend, revealed the extent of social inequality in the UK. The publication of his major survey Poverty in the UK (1979) revolutionised thinking about poverty.





A protest against the proposed exclusion of anyone with criminal convictions from study at Essex. Courtesy of Iain Moncrieff, 1970

This was the decade that saw the election of Britain's first female prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Building Britain up economically, she did so while dismantling the mines, selling council houses and lowering funds for universities, a decision Albert Sloman called 'profoundly mistaken and highly damaging'. She opposed sanctions against South Africa and declared Nelson Mandela's African National Congress 'a typical terrorist organisation'. Students often felt they had much to kick against.

By the end of the decade, the Berlin Wall had come down and the Cold War had ended. Environmental concerns were high, with the anti-nuclear campaign receiving continued support. Perhaps more than any other concern, the Anti-Apartheid Movement dominated the decade. The United Nations sponsored black South African students to come and study at Essex, creating dialogue and opportunity within a segregated community. It was also a decade when the University celebrated becoming the most international campus in the UK and was recognised for its academic achievements, entering the Top 20 in the country for its research.



"This is a very famous University
that has been involved in the
fight for human rights in all
parts of the world."
Nelson Mandela, 1997



Nelson Mandela was released from prison, the USSR broke up and Dolly the sheep was the first mammal to be cloned. New Labour came to power and the term 'Cool Britannia' was invented.

At Essex, camaraderie between staff and students led to those teaching and studying Latin American Art joining forces and starting their own art collection to aid their research; ESCALA was born. It was a decade when campus settled down to the business of studying. When, in 1996 a national day of action was called against cuts, Vice-Chancellor Ivor Crewe expected a grilling, but virtually no-one turned up to demonstrate, leaving him alone on his soap box.

Towards the end of the decade, the University awarded Graça Machel an honorary degree for her work supporting children's rights. She asked if she could bring her boyfriend with her, Nelson Mandela. He recognised the University's academic reputation, saying, 'This is a very famous University that has been involved in the fight for human rights in all parts of the world.'



Nadín Ospina, *Idolo con muñeca* (*Idol with Doll*), 2000, Artwork © Nadín Ospina. Image © ESCALA

The attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 saw the start of the War on Terror that dominated the 2000s and continues to reverberate today with dire consequences.

At home, the University of Essex expanded its numbers, and in 2007 reached 10,000 students coming to study here from around the world. This is a figure Albert Sloman had always hoped for, with a critical mass of students large enough to dominate the sometimes foreboding architecture. Tuition fees were introduced for UK students, with many on campus challenging the financial demands being made of them.

Since 2008, students have marked Human Rights Day on 10 December through numerous activities, including chalking steps between Squares 3 and 4 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a particularly international university, world events personally affect students, and recently campus was brought together in support of Syrian students protesting against chemical weapons used against civilians in their home country.



essex.ac.uk/fifty

The logo of the University of Essex, consisting of a vertical column of five squares. The top square is black, the second is grey, the third is black, the fourth is grey, and the fifth is black.

University of Essex

A black square tilted at an angle, containing the text "50 years" in white. The "50" is positioned above a horizontal line, and "years" is positioned below it.

50
years