



# Follow the lady with the umbrella

Once every year, as summer draws to a close and the last master's dissertations are raced in to the departmental offices, all over the country odd, beautiful, experimental, interesting, exciting, quirky and peculiar buildings which normally are busy being used, are open to the public.

Houses and hospitals, photographic studios and theatres, laundries and libraries, piggeries and panopticons all throw open their doors to remind us how much there is around us that is inspiring, amusing, and uplifting. And now LSE has joined the list. The new Library designed by Foster and Partners, with its post-Guggenheim spiral staircase and its deathstar banks of traumatised computer tappers, is on the list of things to see in London. On the capital's architectural open day last September, nearly 5,000 people visited us to see the Library. Not yet Tate Modern, nor even the Dome, but we are on the way.

There is, of course, nothing new in tourists at LSE. Most students are familiar with the camera-clutching, guide book-dropping couples who stumble into Advanced Managerial Accounting looking for the Olde Curiosity Shoppe. But the Shoppe is closed, and the Library is open, and the initiative is now with us to take up the tourist challenge. Market opportunities have to be seized, and if the customers have beaten a path to our door even before we knew we had the perfect mousetrap, we need to move swiftly to respond to the demand. I have some ideas as to how we might do so.

Some years ago I was asked to give a lecture to a group of visiting students from the United States. The organiser of their trip, when she telephoned me, was particularly eager to arrange for the lecture to take place in LSE itself. I assumed that she simply had a problem finding an appropriate space and, since the visit was during the vacation, there were plenty of spare corners of the School and no problem about booking it. It wasn't until I was well into my account of bicameral legislatures and a four nation state that I sensed something was a bit odd. They had asked at the beginning if

they could record the lecture and, slightly more unusually, if they could take photographs. And not only were the tape machines humming, but the flashes were popping. Yet no one seemed to be listening too carefully to what I was saying. Things became clearer when we got round to questions. Did anyone want to find out more about nationalism in Scotland, or civil strife in Ireland, or the role of the monarchy? No. But how long did they have before they had to be at the Tower of London? And was it really true that I had taught Mick Jagger? And how many corgis did the Queen have?

So there it was. A lecture at LSE was on the tourist route, and was as much a part of the London experience as the ravens at the Tower, the Changing of the Guard, or a knees-up down the Old Kent Road with a pearly king and queen. I should have realised. A friend in Oxford had recently been asked by a visiting television crew if they could film a tutorial, and the producer had been aghast when sherry hadn't been offered to the essay-reading student. I don't think anyone expected sherry at LSE, but they clearly thought that a touch of Professor Branestawm was to be expected: 'Where was I?' 'Ah yes, the Webb cuneiform. Has anyone seen my ear trumpet?'

I must have disappointed my audience. It wasn't at all what an English university teacher was supposed to be like. I didn't lose my glasses on top of my head once, didn't drop lots of notes all over the floor, and wasn't even wearing carpet slippers. But next time I'll have been warned. I understand that the firm that supplies academic dress for graduation ceremonies also does a nice line in characteristic everyday academic dress: jackets with leather elbow patches, brown shoes, briefcases, ties with soup stains for the old guard, grey shirts with matching grey ties for the Young Turks. We still have time before the next inrush of visitors.

