The Fabian window

A piece of Fabian history was installed in this School this April.

Prime minister Tony Blair officially unveiled the window, originally commissioned and designed by George Bernard Shaw, which will sit alongside the famous Nicholson pictures of Sidney and Beatrice Webb in the Shaw Library.

The Fabian window was made by stained glass artist Caroline Townsend in 1947, commissioned by Shaw, a founder member of the Fabian Society. It shows Shaw, Sidney Webb and E.F. Powys, secretary of the Fabian Society, helping to build a "new world."

The figures are in Elizabethan dress which was to poke fun at Powys who evidently existed everything medieval.

The Fabian Society's coat of arms is shown as a wolf in shears' clothing.

The people grouped at the bottom were leading members of the Society, most of them members of the Fabian executive, with on the far left, HG Wells, who is seen 'cocking a snook' – evidently a reference to his unsuccessful battle with Shaw and Webb for control of the Society. Third from the left is Aymer Maude, well known for being a translator of Tolstoy, and, on the far right, Caroline Townsend, who produced the window.

The window was unveiled at Beatrice Webb House, near Dorking, when the house was formally opened as a conference venue on 13 September 2006.

Fabian and Labour archives at LSE

During the early years of the Labour Party, the famous socialist couple Sidney and Beatrice Webb believed that working with the Liberals and Conservatives was the most effective way to create a fairer society. However, by the 1910s they had abandoned this idea of "meremanagement" and started to work more directly with the Labour Party. As Beatrice wrote in her diary in December 1912: "...the Labour Party exists and we have to work with it. A potter fences, but not our own."

Sidney Webb helped draft Labour's constitution, including "Clause 4"; he was Labour MP for Seaham, 1922-29; and he served in the first two Labour governments, 1924 and 1929-31. In the 1930s the couple distanced themselves from the Labour Party and concentrated on writing, speaking and broadcasting.

The Webb’s archive at LSE, the Passfield papers, contains 126 boxes of material relating to the Webb’s political, professional and personal lives.

The Webb Memorial Trust

The Trust was established in 1944 as a memorial to Beatrice Webb. Trustees at the time included Walter Citrine, Richard Tauber and Harold Lasik.

"The Trust's first act was to obtain a substantial mortgage from the Transport and General Workers Union to purchase a large Victorian country house near Dorking in Surrey and rename it Beatrice Webb House. It became a resource to further the education and organisational skills of bodies involved in the Labour movement and was widely used by the Labour Party, the Fabian Society and trade unions for weekend and summer schools for around 30 years.

Following considerable decline in the demand for such facilities, the Trust was obliged to sell the property in 1986. The proceeds were invested and have been used to fund a number of projects both in the UK and in Eastern Europe to promote economic and social justice and democratic structures. Over the next three years the Trust will be funding a major resource project looking at changes in government policy over the last 60 years aimed at reducing deprivation, identifying what has worked and what has not, and suggesting what new roles to be done. The project will report in 2009, the 100th anniversary of the publication of Beatrice Webb's Minority Report to the Poor Law Commission.

Installation of the Fabian window was made possible through a £50,000 donation from the Minority Report to the Poor Law Commission fund.

A new voice? Al Jazeera is due to launch a 24 hour transnational news channel in English this summer.

It matters if we, in our different places around the globe, are to seek ways of living with each other. The School is launching a new teaching, research and debate initiative called POLIS. Roger Silverstone explains more.

If we don't understand how the media go about their daily business, we are less and less likely to understand and respect each other. The School is launching a new teaching, research and debate initiative called POLIS. Roger Silverstone explains more.

Sometimes in the middle of the war in Afghanistan, during a period of intense airborne propaganda by the US forces, and not unlike bombing, a blacksmith was interviewed on the BBC's Radio 4 lunchtime news programme, World at One. Why, he was asked, did he think all this was happening around his village? It was, he suggested, because Al Qaeda had killed many Americans and their donkeys and had destroyed some of their castles. He was not, of course, entirely wrong.

What was so significant about this man’s momentary appearance on the British airwaves? We are accustomed to learning about the world from our media. Indeed the world today's our immediate experience reduces us almost entirely on screens and speakers and in the screaming headlines of this nation’s news. Yet the voices and the images that tell us how it is, how to make sense of the otherwise invisible and unintelligible, are almost entirely, our voices, and the world which is reported emerges through the taken for granted lens of our regular newscasts or online reports. The Blacksmith in Afghanistan, the fisherman of Sri Lanka, the dispossessed and starving in Dhafour, our friends and family, our names and our suffering.

It matters if we, in our different places around the globe, are to seek ways of living with each other. And in times of significant discord and polarisation – our times – the role of the global media offer their readers, audiences and users, are fundamental to the way in which the world is understood and the way in which the world will be conducted. By providing us with sequenced and stories, in news and documentary, but also in drama and reality shows, the media create a blanket culture for those who use them, and, at least in the developed world, that’s most of us. This is a visible and audible culture, of course, full of human beings – those like us, or claimed to be like us, as well as those who are different. And in this 24/7 mediated world, the invitation is to acknowledge and engage with all those whom we see, minute by minute. This is what news, perhaps above all, is for, after all, if much of this pass, simply blinking on the screen of more immediate experience, yet its presence is a constant reminder that we are all alone in the world.

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and impoverished humanity which, for those of us not directly involved, exist almost entirely through the media's reporting of them. Both the live and the dramatic, as well as the belated and the satiric, have opened up the great sorrows of the present, but have also had dramatic consequences way beyond the media's own representation of them. On the ba-

sis of what has been seen and heard on the screen — and then not always actually heard and seen, but sometimes only heard about — positions have been taken, judgements made both on television as well as by the rest of us, the men and the women in the street. And lives have been lost. Offence has been taken. Evil has been identified. Responsibility has been acknowledged or, just as often, denied.

The mediated 21st century is also, nevertheless, seeing a sea change in the ways in which news and current affairs appear and make their presence felt. These changes are prompted by technology. The digital revolution is beginning to take hold and news is no longer a property of the transnational media corporation or the national broadcaster. News is everywhere. On-mobiles. On-PDA. And it is no longer singular. It is increasingly becoming a shareable product, with alternative sources and interactive content. While its status as a moral remnant, for news by definition involves judg-

dements about the world. It is far from clear whether its increasingly diversified future will reinforce or challenge our ability to the human condition, and whether that condition as a consequence will become less, or more tolerant and hospitable to the strange. But if possible and the threatening.

There is, however, one new initiative that might, or perhaps should warn us of trends. The Halifax- based television station Al Jazeera遵循Electronic Media at 24 hour transnational news channel in English. This summer. For the first time, well-known Americans will have a systematic opportunity to see and listen to the non-western interpretation of our world as well as their own. This is the result of the Afghan blacksmith writ large, very large. And it is reasonable to suppose that even if not many of us actually watch it on a regular plane, or even at all, its very presence will shift the economy and cultures of western media in significant ways and, I would hope, for the better.

Treasure seekers

Julie Masal argues for more transparency and better self-regulation to tackle the illicit trade in antiquities.

Many countries rich in archaeological heritage face the demand by collectors for ancient art objects, and the exorbitant profits to be made by those who can supply them. Many ‘source’ countries have suffered extensive looting and consequent loss of their cultural heritage. The illegal trade in antiquities has been valued at between US $150 million and $2 billion, and attempts to regulate the market at both the international and domestic level have met with limited success. The 1970 UNESCO Convention and complementary 1995 Ithaca Convention attempted to create a legal framework for prohibiting the export of stolen cultural property and providing restitution measures. But the provisions apply only to stateless persons, and the nature and extent of any legal remedy depends ultimately on the details of each state’s implementing legislation. Where these fall short, self-regulation by museums, auction houses, and dealers should theoretically fill the gap. The International Council of Museums Code of Professional Ethics sets out standards of conduct, including the duty to ascertain the origin and legal status of an object prior to acquisition. Unfortunately, adherence to such codes is voluntary and transparency is still lacking in many transactions. Those in favour of unregulated trade often point out that source countries are not doing enough within their own borders to prevent smuggling, and, indeed, the UNESCO Convention requires states parties to take steps to protect their resources. For example, China has some of the world’s most extensive archaeological resources, and as a result of recent market reforms, there has been a sharp increase in the theft of cultural property. Government regulations have been criticised as too decentralised, leading to conflicting and unpredictable laws. Furthering the confusion is China’s system of determining an object’s level of protection based on its subjective value. Insight of the huge US market for Chinese antiquities and China’s recent efforts to improve its regulatory scheme and prosecute looters, its request to the US for import restrictions under the UNESCO Convention may be granted.

When seeking restitution, the party making the claim often bears the burden of proof to show that an object was stolen, a particularly difficult task when it comes to antiquities. Objects whose existence was previously unknown do not show up in databases of stolen art, and their ownership history can be more easily forged. Notions of fairness and common sense are not always taken into consideration. After decades of disregard over ownership rights to the Ephesos Krater, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has finally agreed to return the unique 6th century BCE (before the Common Era) vase to be part of a loan-exchange programme. Throughout the negotiations, the museum insisted that Italian authorities must provide incontrovertible proof that the Krater had been illegally excavated and exported — although there had been years of widespread suspicion over its origin, even amongst museum staff themselves. Had Italian authorities not managed to acquire photographs and documentation linking the Krater to a smuggling operation, the outcome may have been different. Regardless, the loan-exchange programme is a concept that could be a wake-up call to disputes over poorly documented objects.

War and occupation, of course, have also led to widespread looting of artifacts destined for the inter-
national market. Although there have been attempts to prevent destruction of cultural property, primarily through the Hague Conventions, civil looting is another story. When the Iraq National Museum was seized by the US and Iraqi police, many blamed the US for failing to provide protection and for its continuing failure to control the widespread blurring of archaeo-

logical sites. Despite claims may be postulated on moral grounds, under generally accepted interpretations of both codified and customary international law, an invading power is only obligated to prevent its own violations against cultural property, and those of state actors, not those of private individuals. Even the more recent 2nd Protocol to the 1949 Hague Convention does not explicitly require prevention of looting by individuals. Given that most looters are impoverished locals, and the ‘middlemen’ selling to dealers often receives more easily forged. Notions of fairness and common sense are not always taken into consideration. After decades of disregard over ownership rights to the Ephesos Krater, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has finally agreed to return the unique 6th century BCE (before the Common Era) vase to be part of a loan-exchange programme. Throughout the negotiations, the museum insisted that Italian authorities must provide incontrovertible proof that the Krater had been illegally excavated and exported — although there had been years of widespread suspicion over its origin, even amongst museum staff themselves. Had Italian authorities not managed to acquire photographs and documentation linking the Krater to a smuggling operation, the outcome may have been different. Regardless, the loan-exchange programme is a concept that could be a wake-up call to disputes over poorly documented objects.

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ROGER SILVERSTONE

Instructor of Media and Morality (Politis) in September 2006

A cyber café in Bangalore

Charlie Beckett has been appointed as POLIS director, beginning on 1 June. He was most recently programme editor for Jon Snow’s Channel 4 News at ITN in London. Before that he spent ten years working across a range of BBC news and current affairs programmes.

He began his career as a local journalist in south London before joining London Weekend Television (LWT). He was a Reuters Fellow at Green College Oxford, researching digitalisation and the developing world, and has won various awards for film-making and programme editing.

POLIS is a new journalism initiative, launched in 2006, between LSE’s Department of Media and Communications and the University of the Arts London/London College of Communication (LCC).

The then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP, officially opened POLIS with a lecture on ‘The News We Deserve’.

PUBLIC core activities are:
• public lectures, ‘Chatham House’ style seminars, and open debates on the changing role of news media and the challenges that they face, leading to a series of publications reporting on the debates and making specific policy interventions
• postgraduate teaching and short courses based at LCC, including a jointly taught master’s programme geared towards mid-career UK and international journalists
• media research, with POLIS researchers based at LSE, and working with LCC faculty and practising journalists in London and worldwide

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