

A Window to the Past

Tom Scott once famously said that campus as a three-year memory. And he's right



By [Chris Northwood](#), Technical Director (2008/09)
Monday 27 April 2009

Tom Scott once said that campus has a three-year memory. And he's right. There's no-one at Nouse who's been at York longer than 4 years and as this generation graduates in 10 weeks, gone will be the last few Nouse-ites who don't pay [top-up fees](#), those who remember [every bar being open every night of the week](#).

Of course, it's our job to report it here and now, but what about for future generations? Our Deputy Editor wrote a piece for the elections supplement about the history of YUSU, but there's wasn't really much to go on in the way of history, except for old copies of Nouse (which I've been informed by the library are available 24/7 in the microfilm room!) and the [folklore page](#), which I'm informed isn't the most accurate and unbiased account in the world.

Marie Thouaille of The Yorker recently wrote a [comment piece](#) on the Claudia Lawrence case, and she seems to have fallen into the same trap.

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People disappear in films all the time, but in real life – or rather, in our comfortable uni-bubble, the reality of which we may question – we don't expect such brutal realities to hit

It does happen, and it does happen with a worrying regularity, whether it's [unfortunate deaths](#), or something more serious. [The OU murder of the 90s](#) is just as shocking, but after that campus returned to normality as Marie suggested, and I'm sure it will do again. But, we should learn from the past to avoid it repeating itself.

Foy once called me a bastion of posterity (after I shouted at him for uploading an election photo of the day in a way that deleted old ones), and that's something I've tried to implement into the Nouse site. The 'Related Posts' plugin tries to show similar stories, or stories in the same form from the past, and the 'From The Archives' section on the News page, but they only go back as far as early 2005, there's still 41 years of Nouse history buried away...

The original Nouse site was launched in 2003, but for whatever reason the content on it was never moved when the site moved to [WordPress](#) in 2005. I've recently found a backup of the original site, and eventually will write a converter to move it to the current WordPress site, but reading back some of it is particularly interesting, especially in light of Summer Ball. Our [front page from June 2003](#) discussed moving the Gradball (as it was called then) from Elvington Airfield to the Racecourse, and some resulting controversy.

And not just the content is interesting, PDF archives are too showing the design of the paper over the years, the images and look of the time. One of the biggest criticisms I received internally about the new

site was the lack of a PDF archive, so it's been brought back and up-to-date, but without the tedious uploading process by predecessors had – opening the PDF that went to the printers into Photoshop, resizing and thumbnailing, and then manually uploading all the pages and images.

Apparently a couple of hours of work, all replaced by a Python script. (Linked [here](#), for the curious).

So our archives from here on forward will be on the web for all to see, but there's still some work to do with the past. Talking to the Borthwick Archives proved enlightening, but they brought up a good point which may prove the archives to be impossible – copyright. It's unlikely the original authors of the time would have consented their work to go on the web – especially as the web didn't exist for a lot of the time back then.

Of course some people are glad that campus only has a 3 year memory. That their deeds will go forgotten and they can perhaps leave a youth with mistakes behind them. But the Internet – Facebook, Flickr, Twitter – is changing all that and making one big collective memory. One I want to contribute to. Of course, that means my colleagues who actually do the journalism have a greater responsibility than ever.



7 comments

Emma Gawen

28 Apr '09 at 2:26 pm

I'm jealous of your Python scripting – certainly seems handy for the PDF archives. Doing them manually was a bit tedious but I'm pretty sure it took half an hour max so I'm not sure what those few hours were spent doing!!!

I did ask the Borthwick about old copies of nouse a few years ago – I think I was told at the time that they might be too fragile to scan. Would be fantastic if you could get some of them up here though..

[▲ Report](#)

Anon

28 Apr '09 at 7:06 pm

"[T]rust memory over history. Memory, like fire, is radiant and immutable while history only serves those who seek to control it."

[▲ Report](#)

Chris Northwood

28 Apr '09 at 7:09 pm

Emma, you might be right – I was just going off what Raf told me! I never did it by hand because it seemed so tedious :P

Anon, the point is that after time there is no memory any more in the community, leaving only history.

[▲ Report](#)

Emma

28 Apr '09 at 9:49 pm

I think my copy paste reflexes are fairly well honed ;))

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Thoulalalalalala

29 Apr '09 at 9:03 am

Chris, I must say I'm pretty honoured to finally be mentioned in Nouse, it'll have taken me a year and a half but, so it is, my claim to fame :)

Anyhoo, back to your point, I agree with you, I've struggled with this fact myself: when coming to York we have very little idea of precedents, I've spent (as an english studnet with too much time on her hands) an insane amount of time reading that Folklore page, hoping to find something that might be recorded elsewhere, or else be slightly historically accurate... At least our websites are here to serve as an archive medium for future generations, isnt that lyrical?

[Report](#)

... 29 Apr '09 at 11:03 am

Good article this one!

And your last point does prove that campus media do have to be even more careful with what they write, especially Nouse (as Vision don't have a website and The Yorker are far too timid to say anything that might offend or interest anyone...).

[Report](#)

Richard Mann 14 Jul '11 at 5:48 am

Hi there.

I am the founder of NOUSE. Is that of interest? I can tell you how and why it was started, the founding team and how it functioned.

Richard Mann (class of '67.)

[Report](#)

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