Once again we would like to thank you for contributing to this important and productive study. Since Prof Lawrence Whalley established the Aberdeen Birth Cohort studies in 1997 much has happened with brain imaging research. We are hugely grateful to you and your friends and relatives who have supported you while contributing your valuable time, thinking abilities, blood samples, health data and brains to this study, whether in the past or more recently. Studies such as this are crucial to understand the normal brain as we get older and how we can prevent or lessen the impact of dementia.

This year we would like to update you on:
- What have we been doing since our last reunion in 2013
- Recent publications
- Ongoing projects
- Meet our current research team at the Aberdeen Biomedical Imaging Centre

Prof. Alison Murray
Roland Sutton Chair of Radiology
Director of the Aberdeen Biomedical Imaging Centre
Flynn effect
Dr Roger Staff and his team have recently published a fascinating study, using data from the 1936 and 1921 birth cohorts, investigating the Flynn effect, an observations that humans are becoming more intelligent through the generations. The team examined information from those born in 1921 and born in 1936 and found that at age 11 found an increase in IQ of 3.7 points which was within the range seen in other studies. However, comparison in late life found an increase in IQ of 16.5 points which is over three times what was expected. This large increase may be in part due to the remarkable changes Aberdeen has seen over the past 70 years. Yet again, the unique value of the Aberdeen Birth Cohorts for science is demonstrated!

Early life socioeconomic status and brain pathology
The question of how important our childhood, or even our prenatal experience in the womb is for our brain in later life was investigated by Dr Staff, Prof Murray and her team, in two papers. These papers investigated if hardship during early life might have long lasting effects on vascular disease in the brain, and the size of the hippocampus. These MRI detected indications of deterioration were compared in members of the 1936 cohort who were raised in affluent versus less affluent households during childhood. The team found that there was a small, but detectable increase in these important markers of deterioration in the brains of the less affluent group. This important work highlights that the challenge of keeping our brains healthy as we age starts far earlier than we first thought! Dorota Chapko, a PhD student with Prof Murray has spent an internship at the World Bank, an international institution in Washington DC, to raise awareness of the importance of early life environment for brain health across the globe.
CURRENT PROJECTS:
The study “Investigating Links Between Use of Information Technology and Cognitive Reserve in Older Adults”

Last year we invited you to participate in our new questionnaire study on the topic of information technology use (computers, telephones, television etc.). In this study we investigate if the use of information technology throughout the lifespan has any effect on brain functioning later in life. More than 130 of you returned completed questionnaires and some participated in the interview. In the spring 2015, our PhD student (Dorota Chapko) in collaboration with Dr. Leila Eadie (University of Aberdeen) and Dr. Robin Hill (University of Edinburgh) interviewed 10 Aberdeen Birth Cohort 1936 members and collected rich data about their attitude to and history with information technology. The interviews have been transcribed and currently undergo a thematic analysis. Our preliminary results were presented at the British Neuroscience Festival 2015 in Edinburgh. Most respondents reported experience with information technology and the majority viewed it favourably. Those who reported experience with computers and internet appeared to be more memory resilient than those who reported “none”.

Microparticles project

Moving into 2016, we are inviting a small number of 1936 birth cohort members to participate in a new study on biomarkers of cognitive function. This study will ask volunteers to give a small blood sample, which will then be analysed for extremely small fragments called **microparticles**. By testing these tiny particles in the blood, we hope to develop a useful test for detecting and treating diseases of the brain’s blood vessels, before they progress to more serious conditions such as stroke and vascular dementia. This project is led by Dr Isobel Ford of the University of Aberdeen.

Stratifying Resilience and Depression Longitudinally (STRADEL)

Our team in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh has been awarded £4.7million from the Wellcome Trust to study depression in the hope of developing better treatments. The study known as Stratifying Resilience and Depression Longitudinally (STRADEL) - uses data from Generation Scotland (GS) - a large family-based sample of over 21,000 people - including a sub-sample of people from the Aberdeen Children of the Nineteen Fifties (ACONF). As part of this study, we will look at early life data and how this relates to imaging biomarkers that are associated with dementia risk and risk of depressive symptoms. Work from the Aberdeen Birth Cohorts of 1921 and 1936 has been crucial to design of this study and to our success in obtaining funding.
Aberdeen Biomedical Imaging Centre would like to thank you for your continuous support and involvement in Aberdeen Birth Cohort 1936!

Depending on funding, you may hear from us in the near future.

We hope to contact many of over the next year and so we would ask you to keep us up to date with your contact details. Also, if you would like more information about the study please contact:

Aberdeen Biomedical Imaging Centre
Lilian Sutton Building
Foresterhill
Aberdeen
AB25 2ZD
Phone: +44 (0)1224 438365
E-mail: d.younie@abdn.ac.uk
You can also look at our Web-site:
http://www.abdn.ac.uk/birth-cohorts/1936