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How did we get into this mess and how are we going to get out of it? The process of proposing a new graduate college has indeed been a muddle, and a mess if we still believe that Congregation is the place where important policy-making is made according to democratic principles. A better understanding of how this came about might tell us much about the unhealthy state of the University referred to in the earlier issues of the *Magazine* this term.

The first Congregation heard about Parks College was an announcement last December in the form (and style) of a press release simultaneously made available internally and to press agencies, a plan that was so unanticipated, even in the rumour mill, that it must have been put together in some secrecy. The speed with which the proposal appeared after Congregation's formal approval of the Strategic Plan (2018-2023) leads one to wonder: why the haste? The news release read in every way as if Parks was a *fait accompli*, such that any serious doubts were not to be expected and anyway would now be superfluous. But, as the Vice-Chancellor said in her 2017 Oration: "Over 2,000 years ago Tacitus pointed out that '*Truth is confirmed by inspection and delay; falsehood by haste and uncertainty.*' With the 24 hour news cycle and instantaneous social media coverage, no time is accorded 'inspection and delay'. It has never been more important for universities to represent and to inculcate a respect for 'inspection and delay'". (*Gazette*, Suppl. (1) to No. 5180, Vol. 148, October, 2017).

Parks College is the immediate outcome of a process that started with a Strategic Plan which itself raised serious concerns (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 398, 8th Week, TT

Haste and uncertainty

2018; No. 399, 0th Week, MT 2018; No. 401, 5th Week, MT 2018). The University and the city are already bursting at the seams: we find it difficult to believe that the majority of our colleagues want the more than one thousand increase in graduate student numbers—plus around half that number more undergraduates—being put into effect by the SP over the next four years. Indeed we wonder how many even realise this is happening. Those now defending the Parks proposals continue to repeat

the falsehood that there was no opposition to the SP at the Congregation approval meeting (see; *Oxford Magazine*, No. 405, 5th Week, HT 2019, p. 7). Nor should it be forgotten that the SP itself was, in truth, initiated under false pretences (see; *Oxford Magazine*, No 401, 5th Week, MT 2018, p.7).

The intended remit of Parks raises questions of self-interest. According to the December news release its initial academic aims as well as the specialisations of its staff and students involve only the MPLS division and the narrow area of AI and Machine Learning: one other area of environmental change is also mentioned but why this in particular relates to AI is far from obvious and is left unexplained even now. In the most recent among a constantly shifting series of iterations of the proposals "cellular life" has just been added. Apart from its futuristic appeal in the public and political imagination and the no-doubt limitless funding opportunities, where is the case that AI and MPLS deserve this special treatment compared to many others? They are not mentioned in the SP. "Democratic self-governance is a wonderful ideal, it is designed to protect the entire community, not as a mechanism for the promotion of self-interest." (Oration)

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The over-reachingingly ambitious way in which Parks has been presented to us undermines principles fundamental to how this university fondly imagines that it conducts its affairs. The fact that the proposals were not from the start, and have not yet been, brought before Congregation is an indictment of those in the position to manage information flow and with the power to control the timing of legislative procedures in the interests of news management. Equally, it is also a stark reminder of the apathy that makes Congregation so ineffectual at present. “One of the other rare and admirable attributes of this University is our system of democratic self-governance, but it requires engagement if it is to work, and it hasn’t been working well.” (Oration)

* * *

What sort of policy-making process has this been: the drip-drip emergence of details since the original short press release suggests either planning on the hoof or a strategy of secret policies only gradually disclosed? The most recent iteration, an 11-page document confidential to college governing bodies, continues to portray Parks as a *fait accompli*.

This landmark episode in the University’s history reflects the growing divide between academics and administrators: as they become increasingly immersed in their different worlds they understand each other less and less. A perhaps calculated reluctance to bring the matter before Congregation is suggested by the way in which the plans were first announced and in the fact that no Congregation meetings have been called this term. Could it be that the offer of Q&A sessions during the coming vacation merely serves to defuse and delay possible opposition?

But the subject of the new college must presumably come to Congregation next term and if our trust in democratic self-governance is to be restored the meeting must surely include—beyond the formal, legally minimal, requirement of approving a new society and the change

of use of the RSL—the option to discuss the possibility of cancelling the project in its presently proposed form. If Council does not itself schedule a Discussion meeting with the widest possible remit but merely seeks Congregation formal approval by default through a notice in the *Gazette*, it will be interesting to see if anybody puts down an amendment in order to trigger a meeting.

* * *

Is this the way we want our strategic planning to be conducted? There are many lessons to be drawn from this example of democratic deficit, and the Vice-Chancellor’s sentiments quoted above point to some of them. In particular, this sorry affair serves to reinforce the generally acknowledged need to improve the way Congregation works and in particular the way Council and Congregation can communicate and collaborate constructively and amicably in policy-making. This is the stated objective of the current Council self-review. We suggest that the following simple requirements are the minimal necessary preconditions for a realistically efficient and effective collaboration:

Congregation needs to be provided in a timely manner and well in advance with information about upcoming items on Council’s agenda where policies or plans of legitimate interest to Congregation are involved. Only then can Congregation be in a position to oversee policy development before it becomes irreversible.

Practical steps need to be taken to make it easier for Congregation members to approach University officers and Council members to raise concerns and to access further information.

Where appropriate the results of such consultations need to be reported back in notices (possibly on a dedicated “Congregation” website) to Congregation together with any recommendations for possible consequential Congregation meetings or other (postal) actions (such as opinion polls).

T.J.H

Parks College – a brief update

LIONEL TARASSENKO

GIVEN the importance of the Parks College project, we have decided that it would be helpful to provide regular updates through a variety of channels, including the Oxford Magazine. Since the start of this exciting project in Michaelmas Term 2018, I have spoken to more people, received more emails and visited more University committees than I thought possible. The business case for the project is still being developed and has been through many of those committees. The plans for the refurbishment are also taking shape, building on a very good start thanks to the work done by the Radcliffe Science Library redevelopment project team for the last two years.

At the various committee meetings, I have been given the opportunity to set out the latest thinking about Parks College, and I have then listened carefully to the points made by University colleagues. This term, the Parks College proposals have been discussed with graduate student representatives, the staff of the Radcliffe Science Library (RSL) and at meetings of the following Committees: GLAM Board, Curators of the University Libraries, Education Committee, Strategic Capital Steering Group, Conference of Colleges Graduate Committee, Conference of Colleges Domestic Bursars Committee, Conference of Colleges, Building & Estates Sub-Committee (BESC), Estates Bursars Committee, Finance Committee, Personnel Committee and Council. It is now intended that the proposals will be considered by Council on 11 March and Congregation next term. Through this consultation process, the plans are gradually evolving to take on new ideas and to ensure that concerns raised are understood and addressed. In response to discussions at BESC, for example, there is now a clear commitment that the old Inorganic Chemistry Lab will remain available for one of the Chemistry Centres for Doctoral Training until April 2021.

Issues that have been raised include the concerns that the Science Library would be pushed out of the RSL – this could not be further from what has been proposed from the start. We are devising plans which will inject new energy into the redevelopment of the RSL, offering a fresh, 21st-century service which includes access to scientific information of all kinds and support from specialist science library staff who will be an integral part of the college's research culture. The proposed library space will remain open to all University members and other registered Bodleian readers, on the same basis as all Bodleian Libraries services. A new graduate hub will be created for more informal study and interaction. The plans for the Museums storage space in the two basements will remain unchanged. There is no suggestion or proposal to reduce the opening hours of the RSL.

A further issue being considered by Personnel Committee is the selection of Parks College Fellows – which will be completed through an open call to all senior researchers in the University with no College Fellowships and with an active interest in interdisciplinary exchanges.

The issue that has probably been discussed more than any other is the span of subjects that Parks College will accommodate. The initial themes for its interdisciplinary research clusters will be (a) Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning; (b) Environmental Change; and (c) Cellular Life. All these themes provide exciting opportunities for participation by researchers from all four divisions. Other themes will be introduced as the College Fellowship grows. Once there is a full complement of graduate students, it is anticipated that Parks College will have 6 to 8 inter-disciplinary clusters.

The Programme Board (which already had strong GLAM representation) is now being expanded to include representatives from each of the four Divisions and it will continue to guide our thinking. The latest development is the launch of the Parks College website (www.ox.ac.uk/parkscollege), on which it is possible to register for the two 75-minute Q&A sessions for students (5th and 13th March) or for the two sessions for staff (19th and 25th March).

The support from the Conference of Colleges has been there from the start. The graduate colleges have been magnificent: two of them have offered the students and Fellows of Parks College access to their dining hall for lunch and dinner, until Parks College has its own dining hall. A third college has shared its accounts, which has helped us to develop the initial version of the Parks College budget.

The members of the various committees to which the proposal has been presented have asked searching questions, and we would expect them to do so, but the support which we have received throughout, from the Curators of the University Libraries to Education Committee, has been very heartening. Oxford has been at its collegial best in the help and advice it has given the nascent Parks College as it seeks to establish another academic community in the best traditions of the Collegiate University.

Professor Lionel Tarassenko is Senior Responsible Owner, Parks College Project, on behalf of the members of the Programme Board.

The next issue of
Oxford Magazine
will appear in
noughth week of
Trinity term

Some questions about Parks College

THE University is offering staff two “Q&A sessions to find out more about the proposed new college and redevelopment of the RSL site. The 75-minute events, which are open to all University and College staff, will be held during the vacation on 19 and 25 March in the Museum of Natural History.” Some colleagues may have their doubts about the efficacy of Q&A sessions, of which there appear to be more and more—attendances are limited by timing, location and seating capacity, and they are not necessarily representative, they are not minuted and they are not intended to lead to any tangible outcomes or practical effects. As one colleague put it, announcing a Q&A session is a tacit admission that whatever prior general consultation on a policy development had taken place was insufficiently meaningful.

For those in need of a reminder, “Parks College is a proposed new graduate college, which will focus on interdisciplinary research in the 21st century. Located in the heart of the University Science Area on the Radcliffe Science Library site, the college will draw together researchers from different disciplines to explore some of the big scientific questions of our time.” (University SSO website). It is important to note that the exact nature of what is being proposed is shifting as more documents are released.

Readers may have followed recent articles in the *Magazine* (by Oppenheimer, Evans, and Editorials) which raise a number of queries about the planning and implementation of the new college, ranging from matters as fundamental as whether it is in fact a college. Readers may also have struggled, as noted by a number of correspondents in our previous issue, to access information related to Council’s discussions of these plans.

Following discussions with colleagues the editors have put together the following questions—based on what we had been told by mid-term—in which we have tried to identify the uncertainties and concerns that may be felt throughout the University.

What facilities will the first few cohorts of students be offered given the need for conversion work in the RSL? According to the dedicated webpages on the University’s site—some of which are behind Single Sign-On—the first 50 students will be admitted to start in October 2020 and fellows appointed from this June; conversion of the building is “scheduled for the start of the 2021-22 academic year”. Further building work will take place on site: “the redevelopment of the western wing of the Inorganic Chemistry Lab, Abbot’s Kitchen and connecting spaces [...], with completion provisionally scheduled for the start of the 2022-23 academic year.”

What will happen to the RSL during the years of building works? RSL staff have voted to leave the building during this period so where will they, the books and readers go?

Has Chemistry democratically agreed to give up the part of its estate previously intended for a new doctoral training centre?

What plans are in place to provide residential accommodation for students?

Why have the other graduate colleges not agreed to take the expanding numbers of students? The student numbers in the existing graduate colleges (other than Kellogg) tend to be less than other colleges. Why is their existing dedicated provision designed specifically for the needs of graduate students and their room for expansion not being utilised?

The Strategic Plan envisages an increase of graduate student numbers of more than 1000 over the next four years. *How many of these will join Parks College?* The RSL site is very confined physically. Most colleges have traditionally been able to expand; the only scope for expansion at the RSL site would be some distance away.

How are the founding Fellows to be selected and by whom? Given that the new college will be administered under employment procedures applicable to a University department, how will the college’s and Wellington Square’s selection criteria be squared?

Artificial Intelligence is, on the face of it, a specific and narrowly defined scientific discipline. AI is already being researched in the Martin School and in the Department for Computer Science. We are told that the first students will be working in this area and, presumably, the first fellows who are to teach them will be similarly specialised. *What is the case for a new college devoted to expanding this specific subject area, as opposed to many other deserving areas?*

We are told that the fellows will be Research Professors (RSIVs) or Associate Professors/Senior Research Fellows (SRFs). This group comes from a very considerable number of senior researchers across the University who lack any college attachment. *Will the narrow remit of subjects so far proposed for Parks College (Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning and Environmental Change) not open up questions of fairness and equality of privileges?*

What will be the nature of the “teaching” duties that fellows undertake? We are told that these will amount to provision of “reading groups and seminar series”. *What are the graduate students getting for the fees they will be paying and how does this compare with what graduate students expect in other colleges?*

What specific connection does Environmental Science have with AI?

Given the “interdisciplinary” objectives in the proposals why is there no role for the Humanities, which seem to be excluded according to the early documentation?

Which budget is initially funding Parks College? Is the University’s recent bond issue providing funds? Is the intention in the longer term to find a donor? Will Parks be supported by the College Contribution Fund?

Is it true that a building (the RSL) owned by the University as a charity could never become a self-governing charity with a Royal Charter like other colleges?

In the longer term, with regard to the site’s current status—as a science library—will RSL library hours have to be reduced (as the proposals imply)?

Where will the undergraduate lending library move to?

Will current RSL librarians get preferential treatment as potential fellows of the envisaged dual-purpose college/library establishment?

Why was the proposal to create Parks College first presented to the University (and Congregation) in the form of what was seen as a “press release”, some two months after Congregation formally accepted the Strategic Plan? Why was it necessary to proceed in planning the college at such speed?

Why has Congregation not been further consulted this term, perhaps in the form of a Discussion meeting?

Why are the Q&A sessions being held over until the vacation? Why are the sessions for students being held before those for staff?

There are two final and most fundamental questions that have nowhere been adequately answered during the preparation of the SP. *What is the coherent and fully-evidenced argument for expanding our student numbers at all? If demand is so pressing in some areas, why has the case for maintaining overall student numbers by reductions elsewhere not been offered?*

The ‘Heath Robinson Society’ –bolted together from bits and pieces?

G.R. EVANS

In Sixth Week, on 19th February, details were published of the promised Q and A sessions on the proposed ‘Parks College’. These are to be held in the forthcoming Vacation, with ‘focus groups’ to be offered in April and May. The details are meagre, and require SSO to read them.¹ This cannot encourage confidence in the transparency and completeness of the plans. Under ‘Timetable’ it is announced that ‘plans for the new college and allocation of space will be put before Council and Congregation for approval in Hilary and Trinity Terms 2019’. But in exactly what is Congregation invited to place its trust?

Undoubtedly the most remarkable feature of what has happened so far is the constantly shifting (and sometimes conflicting) information available about the proposed new Society. I have heard (but have not seen) that there has since appeared a 11-page document sent to College Governing Bodies marked “confidential”. What possible reason or justification can there be for the continuation of the secrecy which has been evident from the very start? Surely the rushed founding of a new ‘college’ and one with the specifications so far revealed, potentially affects almost everybody in the University and the long-term balance of its graduate student provision. Such secrecy can only rouse the very lack of confidence which could and should discourage Congregation from giving its necessary consents.

It seems unlikely that Congregation approval of the changed use of space under Statute XVI,A,⁴ will go through on the nod with Library and Departmental interests so materially affected, and the description already growing more ambitious since December. ‘The proposed redevelopment of the RSL site will encompass the RSL site, the adjoining buildings (the western wing of the Inorganic Chemistry Lab and Abbot’s Kitchen), and the connecting spaces.’ The necessary building work is scheduled for completion at the beginning of the 2022-3 academic year and listed buildings are involved, yet no Planning Application has been made at the time of writing. The ‘College’ is to ‘make optimal use of the [RSL] building at different times of the day,

on different days of the week’, with, it seems, potential 24/7 use by the ‘College’ of the former Chemistry lab which had been earmarked for the new Doctoral Training Centre. That is to become a College dining hall, café and social centre.

The ‘Society’ itself will need Congregation approval too, under Statute V. But first it needs to be a great deal clearer what it is actually going to be. The hurry to rush it into existence (with the first 50 students (PGR) to be recruited at once, so as to begin in Michaelmas 2020), surely requires great clarity about the nature of the entity into which they are to be admitted?

The ‘Society’ has often been an acceptable Oxford device allowing an infant project to grow into a College within a defined but non-collegiate relationship with the University. My own College, St. Anne’s, began in 1879 as the Society of Home Students, partly to fulfil the desire of local dons’ daughters for a university education. It currently describes its beginnings on its website as ‘a manifesto rather than a location’.² It took until 1952 for St. Anne’s to get its royal charter and become a College.

The University first published its ‘manifesto’ for the proposed ‘Parks College’ in a press release on December 7th 2018.³ In its latest form ‘the vision for the college draws on the oldest Oxford tradition of a place where teachers and their students share together in college life’. That plays a little loosely with the history. And going no further back than the mid-twentieth century one cannot but be struck by the contrast between the thinking about ‘Societies’ then and the approach being taken now.

In the 1960s there was no UAS, no managerial class in the University, scarcely an administrator beyond the Registrar, and Congregation’s active participation and detailed consideration was visible throughout the University’s unhurried decision-making. Now a small group, with a membership partly identifiable through the listed Panel for the Q and A Sessions,⁴ seems to have carried this proposal to its initial press release and beyond, in a breathless hurry, with the nuts and bolts

scattered about and no instruction manual for their assembly.

The graduate-only Society a ‘dump for the unwanted’?

The 1960s was a period of heated national interest in graduate student expansion. *The Robbins Report on Higher Education* was published in 1963.⁵ In answer to a Parliamentary Question in August 1965, Anthony Crosland, then, Secretary of State for Education listed a growth in the number of postgraduate students from 1,400 in 1920-1 to 24,255 in 1964-5.⁶ There were demands for Oxford and Cambridge to do their part by increasing the number of their graduate students. Between 1964 and 1966 the Franks Commission was preparing for Oxford its *Report on the organisation and administration of the University in relation to the future of Higher Education in the UK*. Franks urged Oxford to ‘expand and improve its postgraduate work’, cross-referring to the *Robbins Report*’s view that it was the ‘manifest destiny’ of Oxford to ‘play a leading part in advanced training and research’.

However, Franks did not favour separating ‘graduate schools’ from undergraduate teaching in Oxford.⁷ *Robbins* took a similar line. It regarded the contemporary suggestion that Oxford and Cambridge should ‘transform themselves into postgraduate institutions’ as ‘totally unacceptable’, because it would force upon them ‘changes of structure so great as completely to alter their nature’:

“Only 18 per cent of the students at Oxford and Cambridge at present are postgraduate students; and the great strength of these institutions at present resides in large measure in their tradition of undergraduate teaching (214).”⁸

Should the number of graduate students be increased without restriction now with new ‘Societies’ created to put them into? And can this be done without damaging the essence of college life in Oxford? These are surely questions of immense long-term policy importance for the University, but the answer to this fundamental two-fold policy question for Oxford is being taken for granted by the proponents of ‘Parks College’.

Oxford’s graduate students currently number about 11,000, matching roughly the same number of undergraduates. The ‘manifesto’ of 7th December began from the ‘strategy’ of increasing graduate student numbers on a grand scale:

“Establishment of the new college responds to priorities stated in Oxford’s latest strategic plan, which aims—by 2023—to increase postgraduate taught students by up to 450 a year, and postgraduate research students by up to 400 a year, while maintaining quality”.

The press release of December 7th spoke of ‘recruiting 200 graduate students in 2019-2020 for admission in September 2020’ though only 50 are announced on 19th February with the ‘target’ of 200 deferred until 2022. So perhaps ‘maintaining quality’ is beginning to bite?

If more colleges are ‘needed’, should they be graduate-only? ‘The University is committed to ensuring

that Parks College students enjoy a rich and stimulating intellectual experience, which is on a par with that at the other graduate colleges’ says the February 19th statement. When the *Oxford Student* covered the plan for the new ‘Parks College’ on 1st February it seemed unconvinced:

“Everything I have seen thus far has pointed to these students being provided a sub-optimal experience compared to their peers at established colleges. We need a clear proposal of the goals of ‘Parks College’ and how they will measure success. It is not good enough to just increase graduate student numbers, there needs to be evidence of how the student experience and learning practice will be of the highest quality.”⁹

And now, with the publication of details about the ‘focus groups’ to be led in April and May by Professors Tarassenko and Milner Gulland it is admitted that they will be needed ‘to help inform the academic blueprint for the college by canvassing opinion about what a community of scholars should look like in the twenty-first century’. More scattered nuts and bolts still to be assembled if someone can find the instructions?

St. Anthony’s was founded in 1950 as Oxford’s first graduate college, at a time when it told Franks that it was felt appropriate ‘to try the experiment of a graduate society’. It gained its royal charter in 1953.¹⁰ In 1962 it was made a full College and by 1964-5 it had 66 students. The Franks Commission sent questionnaires to Linacre too in the process of gathering evidence from the ‘graduate colleges’. Linacre also described itself to Franks as an ‘experiment’, a ‘new type of society’. It mentioned concerns that it ‘would be regarded simply as a *pis aller* by those who had failed to gain admission to a college, and would become what one writer in the *Oxford Magazine* called “a dump for the unwanted”’. It had therefore made special efforts to promote student welfare and considered it had become a thriving community. It reported that legislation was now before Congregation ‘as a first step’ towards establishing Linacre as ‘an independent graduate college’.¹¹

However, there was pressure within the University in the 1960s for something quite different, a means of accommodating the growing number of academic staff who were without College fellowships. Franks recorded a trend. In 1922 of the 357 academic staff in Oxford 60% were Fellows of colleges but held no University post. By 1965 there were 1,127, of whom 86% held a University post.

There were now many University postholders without fellowships and they were demanding some. In 1965 ‘Congregation decided in future all senior academic posts would carry the right to a college fellowship’. This was read as a development of a ‘federal community’, ‘inhabited by a new type of academic, the ‘fellow-lecturer’, who has double loyalties, joint functions, and composite remuneration’.¹²

It was this group, not additional would-be postgraduates, which proved to have the ‘manifesto’ or ‘vision’. The first Norrington Committee formed to consider the ‘Relationship of the University and Colleges’ suggested the creation of ‘at least two new societies’ primarily to provide fellowships for academic staff.¹³ Congregation approved this plan on 25th February 1964, to be called ‘Isis’ and ‘Osiris’ while names were found for them.¹⁴

How far is 'Parks College' being promoted as a vehicle to solve the early twenty-first counterpart of this problem, for there is now once more a substantial number of University postholders without fellowships? The February announcement indicates that its Fellows are to be senior academics (Grades 9 and above) 'who do not currently have a college fellowship'. There are apparently to be fellowships for academic-related and administrative staff too. 'Associate Fellows who hold relevant internal or external or non-academic appointments will also be appointed, helping enrich the intellectual life of the college'. Post-docs and Research Fellows may be Research Fellows of the College.

Franks recognised in 1966 that the Societies were also meeting the need for somewhere to provide graduate students with a collegiate experience of a sort, for:

*"In addition to the colleges properly so called, there are three new societies (Linacre, St. Cross and Iffley Colleges) for men and women graduates, which are at present constitutionally departments of the University but which the University hopes will become full colleges in due course."*¹⁶

However, the admission of graduate students seems still to have been secondary to their purpose and Franks recognised that a Society was not a College.

The College-making machinery in the constitution

The process by which a Society may mature into a College of the University of Oxford has never been clarified. *Statuta (1961) On New Foundations for Academic Study and Education*, Tit. II, iii set conditions which include for any aspiring body 'that it have buildings suitable for the reception of students', and 'that its Members be incorporated by Royal Charter, or that provision have been otherwise made for the establishment of the Society on a permanent footing, and for the government of it'. At that date a vote of Convocation was also required.

The *Statuta* for 1965 no longer have this provision in Tit. I. Instead there are provisions at Tit. I, ii, iii, and iv, for 'Linacre House (College)', St. Cross College and Iffley College. For each of these there is a preliminary statement that it:

"shall be a Society through which persons who are graduates of other universities (or in the opinion of the governing body possess comparable qualifications) and who are not members of any college or other society may be admitted as members of the University."

They were therefore all recognised as graduate institutions and competent to present their students for matriculation, but that is all. They lack that essential independence from the University which marks the true College.¹⁷

Van Heyningen, writing about the founding of St. Cross, emphasised:

*"the advantages to students of the particular attention they receive from the dons of their own colleges; and ... the particular advantages that the dons derive from the fact that their Fellowship of a College gives them a great deal of independence (in some cases total independence) from 'the great central luminary of the University'."*¹⁸

When St. Cross became a Society in 1965 it was made clear that it was under the direct control at the time of its creation that St. Cross was under the direct control of the University and indeed had been given its name by the then Hebdomadal Council.¹⁹ St. Cross is still not a College. Kellogg joined St. Cross three decades later, as Oxford's second present Society, and still awaits its royal charter and its acceptance as a College by Congregation and the Privy Council.²⁰ So two Societies, one begun in 1965 and one in 1990, still have to become Colleges.

The route from 'Society' to 'College' may be full of potholes. Kellogg has been criticised by the Employment Tribunal for its apparent confusion about its identity. In *Carter Jonas v. Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford*, 2701958/2013, the Claimant had named Kellogg College as the Respondent. This was corrected by the Employment Tribunal at (2), which recorded that the correct Respondent was the University 'as Kellogg College is not an independent entity with legal personality'. (11.2) Kellogg, it said, was 'a small, new institution... working within the structure of a very large organisation, which has its own traditions and established management systems'. A Society may have By-Laws but it has no Statutes of its own. Its Fellows and other staff are subject to those of the University. The ET commented that a manager in the 'college' 'was ignorant of the University's procedures; and she was not alive to the imprudence of committing herself to the outcome of a procedure which she had not started' (11.22) and 'did not seem to know, that Oxford University procedures did not move at that speed, and that she would have to follow a proper process, possibly a prolonged one, in order to fulfil the requirements of the Respondent's disciplinary procedures' (11.26).

The PPH instruction manual

In the *Gazette* of Seventh Week is a reminder that the:

"Permanent Private Hall (PPH) Supervisory Committee, which is appointed by Education Committee, has regulatory, monitoring and reporting functions in relation to the Permanent Private Halls. Under the University's agreement with the halls each of them is to be reviewed in turn over a period of six years".

It is Wycliffe Hall's turn for review under the the PPH Supervisory Committee's terms of reference.²¹

It has not been envisaged that 'Societies' might benefit from regular review too, insofar as they admit students and present them for matriculation and have responsibilities for their welfare. The *Oxford Student* expressed further concerns about that on 23rd February, describing the proposal as seemingly only:

"a mechanism through which the University can rapidly expand the number of places without troubling itself with having to provide a meaningful college experience on a day-to-day basis".²²

¹ <http://www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation/future-projects-parks-college>

² <http://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/about/history>

³ <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-12-07-oxford-unveils-plans-new-graduate-college>

⁴ Panellists for the two Q and A sessions in March: Professor Lionel Tarassenko (nominated to Head of House), Professor Anne Trefethen (P-V-C for People, Gardens, Libraries and Museums), Professor E.J. Milner Gulland, (Director, Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science); Richard Ovenden (Bodley's Librarian), Catriona Cannon (Deputy Librarian), Toby Kitley, (Bodleian Estates Project Officer).

⁵ <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>

⁶ https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/1965/aug/04/universities-post-graduates#S5CV0717P0_19650804_CWA_270

⁷ (Franks)Report of Commission of Inquiry (Oxford, 1966), Vol. I, p.35, citing Robbins, Written Evidence, Part XI, p.180.

⁸ <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>

⁹ <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2019/02/01/new-grad-college-to-share-rsl-as-flexible-space-university-reveals/>

¹⁰ Commission of Inquiry, Evidence, Part VII, pp.190-6.

¹¹ Commission of Inquiry, Evidence, Part VII, pp.197-03.

¹² (Franks)Report of Commission of Inquiry (Oxford, 1966), Vol. I, p.27.

¹³ W.E. Van Heyningen, *The founding of St. Cross College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1988), p. 27.

¹⁴ W.E. Van Heyningen, *The founding of St. Cross College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 3 and 33.

¹⁵ To become Wolfson College.

¹⁶ (Franks)Report of Commission of Inquiry (Oxford, 1966), Vol. I, p.25.

¹⁷ The formula describing a Society in terms of what it could do and not what it was has continued to be used in subsequent pre-North statutes. The wording has been amended slightly in the current Council Regulations 11 of 2002, and has not been changed since:

1. St Cross College shall be a society through which persons who are graduates of other universities (or in the opinion of the governing body possess comparable qualifications) and who are not members of any college, society, Permanent Private Hall, or other institution designated by Council by regulation as being permitted to present candidates for matriculation may be admitted as members of the University, <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/517-122.shtml>

¹⁸ W.E. Van Heyningen, *The founding of St. Cross College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1988), p. 3.

¹⁹ At the second Governing Body meeting (13 October 1965), also held at Merton College, the title of Principal, assigned by the University administration to the Head of House, was changed to Master. Consideration was also given to what the name of the College should be. Options included naming the College after Robert Boyle, Christopher Wren, John Tyndall (FRS, d. 1893, physicist), John Wilkins (a 17th-century warden of Wadham and first secretary of the Royal Society), and Copernicus. In the event, it was decided simply to keep the name given by Hebdomadal Council to the new foundation, St Cross College, <https://www.stx.ox.ac.uk/about-st-cross/college-history/college-st-cross-road-1965-1981>

²⁰ In Tit. VII, Statutes (1987), p.37, s.V: *Of Rewley House* says (1). *Rewley House shall be a Society of the University* and includes rules which closely match the present Regulations. The Gazette (1st February, 1990), 518, records the approval of the Statute by Congregation on 23 January 1990:

'Whereas it is expedient to establish the President and Fellows of Rewley House as a society of the University, THE UNIVERSITY ENACTS AS FOLLOWS'.

This seems to suggest that Kellogg was established by the University in a form which constitute 'the President and Fellows of Rewley House' as the 'Society', though Kellogg has never been thus incorporated and has no royal charter and its fellows are not corporators. This Society was renamed Kellogg College from 1 October 1994, as listed in under Societies in *Statuta* (1995) Tit VII, s.V. The Council Regulations 10 of 2002, amended in 2003, 2007 and 2010, do not now offer any description of what Kellogg College is, merely what it may do, in the formula used for Societies from 1965, <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/516-122.shtml>

²¹ www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/520-122ll.shtml

²² <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2019/02/23/university-scales-back-parks-college-ambitions/>

Notes and Comments on the TEF Review Consultation

BEN BOLLIG

THE Department for Education announced last year a review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework, which is set to report in summer 2019. The TEF, as it is more commonly known, is a scheme to assess teaching and related matters in UK universities—or “the world’s first government-led university rating system” as it was called when launched.

Unlike OFSTED and other direct reviews of teaching, TEF uses proxies, such as drop-out rates, National Student Survey (NSS) scores, and graduate earnings, to grade universities in three categories, “Gold”, “Silver” and “Bronze.” These ratings are not absolute, but relative, against “benchmarks” based on student intake—a proxy, one might argue, for the “value added” by an institution. TEF is compulsory in England, and is linked to the ability to charge higher fees. Other UK institutions may opt in, but there is no link to fees. The current proposals include the expansion of TEF from institutional to subject-level grading.

Launching this latest review of the TEF, the then-Universities Minister, Sam Gyimah, said:

“Students deserve access to accurate, relevant and comprehensive information when they make the life-changing decision to go to university. I am committed to delivering this—the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework is an invaluable vehicle for translating the vast array of complicated data into useful and clear-cut ratings.”¹

The Terms of Reference of this review state:

“The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework was proposed in the Higher Education: Success as a knowledge economy White Paper, published in May 2016. Its purpose is to recognise excellence in teaching and student outcomes at higher education providers.”²

Dame Shirley Pearce, an academic and psychologist, and former V-C of Loughborough University, has been appointed to conduct the review. Completed at the beginning of the month, a “Call for views” aimed “to capture views and perceptions” via an online survey. Pearce herself said:

“This independent review is an important opportunity to look at how TEF is being delivered and to make recommendations for its future development. I am pleased to be taking on this role and look forward to hearing the views of the different providers of higher education as well as the students, employers and general public who are such important audiences for the TEF.”³

One is tempted to add that this is how “consultations” work: the questions are set in such a way as to constrain, indeed guarantee, the required outcome. A better question would be this: British universities managed for decades, some for centuries, without the TEF. What does it add?

As the Council for the Defence of British Universities puts it:

“The TEF purports to rate university teaching, categorising each institution as gold, silver or bronze. In reality, the metrics used do not measure teaching quality—they relate instead to graduate employment rates, retention rates and scores on the National Student Survey. This misuse of proxy indicators risks damaging the reputation of UK Higher Education. [...] We believe that this will encourage universities to find ways of gaming the results while doing nothing to improve the quality of teaching.”⁴

In a longer article, Norman Gowar, former Principal of Royal Holloway, describes the TEF as “misguided, bureaucratic and damaging”. It is worth quoting his piece at length:

“The TEF [...] focuses upon process rather than outcomes. Universities are judged by lengthy submissions rather than by educational and diversity success.

Where TEF and NSS do use concrete measures, they are misguided. The breathtaking proposal that brownie points will be awarded to universities whose graduates earn more reveals a deep misunderstanding of the purposes of a university to the individual and to society. Graduates with a top first in physics are considered of greater importance if they go into a career in the stock market rather than become teachers. Studying a humanities or science subject out of intellectual interest has no value at all. And this disease infects school leavers by the fact that it is intended to guide their choice.

[T]he high profit margin on students has changed the nature of universities. The priority has been to attract more students with money spent on marketing, including vast building programmes involving the dead weight of inescapable debt and maintenance costs, assuming the good times will continue to roll.”⁵

Criticisms of the TEF have come from perhaps surprising sources. For the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), there are problems with proposals to give rankings at subject, and not just institutional, level:

“The RSS identified statistical and scientific shortcomings [in the proposed subject-level TEF] in the July 2016 consultation, Teaching Excellence Framework: Year Two and Beyond. Our response outlined concerns ranging from the paper’s assumptions around causality, lack of evidence about a link between teaching quality and employment outcomes, and the way in which uncertainty was being handled.

These concerns have not been allayed by the Department for Education’s latest consultation, Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: subject-level, where two possible models, A and B were presented. The RSS, however, saw flaws in both models, and detailed its many concerns in a statement.”⁶

According to the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, there are serious misapprehensions among students, too—meant to be the beneficiaries of the information communicated by the TEF:

“Two-thirds of applicants who have heard of the UK’s teaching excellence framework mistakenly believe that the ratings are based on Ofsted-style inspections of universities [...]. The survey of 2,838 students who submitted an application to enter higher education in 2018 or 2019, commissioned by the Department for Education, found that only 43 per cent of respondents were aware of the TEF at the time they applied and only 15 per cent used it to help their decision-making, despite ‘better informing student choice’ being one of the assessment’s stated objectives.”

In the same article, Andrew Gunn, the researcher whose findings were quoted, stated that “[t]he TEF isn’t informing student choice on the scale the government wished [...]. If the TEF isn’t providing useful product information, as part of the ‘food labelling’ of degree courses, it’s not delivering one of its own objectives.”⁷

That misunderstandings exist is by no means surprising. See, for example, this description on the UCAS website:

*“The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) has been introduced by the Government in England to recognise and encourage excellent teaching in universities and colleges. It is intended to help students choose where to study, by providing clear information about teaching provision and student outcomes.”*⁸

As Ant Bagshaw, writing for the HE website WonkHe, puts it, “TEF doesn’t really measure university ‘teaching’, so it’s badly named. The input metrics are based on student satisfaction measures, retention and employment, all of which would be better badged as ‘student experience’ rather than teaching.”⁹

There has been much talk in HE circles about the use of graduate earnings as a potential or supplementary measure of “value added” or teaching “excellence.” Again, this is far from unproblematic. Simon Baker, writing in *THES*, pointed out a geographical bias in the measure:

“A metric in the UK’s teaching excellence framework that scores universities on graduate earnings appears to heavily reflect how far an institution is from London, data have revealed.

*Newly released data on English universities that would form the basis of TEF assessments this year suggest that institutions in London and the south east are much more likely to be flagged as performing well for graduate salaries.”*¹⁰

As Baker put it, adjustments for regional variation would need to be made, but even this seems like a sticking plaster measure. On the same point, writing in *The Guardian*, the former VC of De Montfort University, Dominic Shellard, argued that:

“Graduate earnings cannot offer an accurate reflection of a university’s quality of teaching, and they are not a measure of the added value of a university degree. This data is actually a reflection of the relationship between a regional labour market, the type of employment undertaken and a graduate’s socio-economic background.

The impact on social mobility will be even more profound, with many universities potentially being discouraged from recruiting students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. A graduate’s age, family, socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity and prior attainment are all factors that significantly affect earnings. [...]

And what of those providers that offer critical subjects with traditionally lower earnings, such as nursing or midwifery? What of the arts and humanities?

*The inclusion of LEO [longitudinal educational outcomes, a measure of post-HE earnings] data in the TEF assumes that a university education is fundamentally about economic success, as opposed to learning and development.”*¹¹

In 2016, the British Academy in its response to a previous TEF consultation, wrote:

“the Academy is primarily concerned that the metrics that are intended to capture teaching excellence are fundamentally flawed. Crucially, no working definition of excellence in teaching is offered. [...] Until there is a shared understanding of such a definition and an appropriate methodology for measuring it, there would be value in delaying the introduction of the TEF process.

It should be stressed that, in the absence of robust and shared definitions of excellence, in practice providers will be driven by metrics. [...] No quantitative metric exists that can adequately capture teaching excellence across the great diversity of teaching and learning approaches and environments found in universities. It is also clear that the core metrics proposed based on the National Student Survey (NSS) questions are not fit for purpose, for both substantive and technical reasons.

*Finally, due to the fundamental problems with the proposed metrics identified above, the TEF would be unlikely to identify low quality entrants to the market that are not focussed on providing teaching of genuine quality.”*¹²

One would expect the concerns of such an august body to have been taken into consideration in the intervening years. But in 2018, in response to the most recent consultation, the BA wrote:

“The Academy is primarily concerned that the metrics that the new framework intends to use to capture excellent teaching at subject and provider level are fundamentally flawed, and that attempts to measure either teaching intensity or grade inflation are highly problematic and may foster perverse behaviour. The current proposals also do not provide an adequate definition of interdisciplinarity or a robust process for evaluating interdisciplinary teaching Excellence.

The Academy welcomes the reduction in the weighting of the NSS metrics in TEF but remains skeptical of the value or reliability of the survey for assessing teaching quality. The results of NSS questions are based on student satisfaction, which often do not provide relevant or reliable information to measure the quality of programmes, as it represents nothing more than a snapshot of student feedback at a single point at the end of a degree. In addition, the metrics as they stand do not differentiate among the majority of providers, and there is a significant risk that they will not be able to differentiate among subjects and/or that such differentiation will result from omitted variables that are not measured or controlled for in the NSS.

[On proposed measures of grade inflation]: The Academy urges the Government to consider carefully the reliability and efficacy of such a measure in light of these concerns.

*The British Academy believes that the introduction of a measure of teaching intensity as set out in the consultation document will not contribute to the objectives of the subject-level TEF and might lead to unintended consequences.*¹³

The similarities to its earlier comments may strike readers as uncanny if not alarming.

UCU has recently commissioned research on the TEF among its members. In a report based on a survey of “over 6,000 UCU members working in universities and college-based HE providers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with the perspectives of the Chair of the TEF assessment panel and representation from the National Union of Students (NUS)” commissioned by UCU¹⁴, O’Leary *et al* state that:

“The TEF has proven to be an unpopular policy with the vast majority of the project’s participants, with only one in ten welcoming its introduction.

The implementation of the TEF has had a negative impact on the workloads of academic and support staff.

The TEF was reported as having a greater impact on institutional policies of teaching and learning than the actual teaching of academic staff. However, there was an increased preoccupation with teaching and learning from management across some institutions.

There were significant criticisms and concerns raised about the legitimacy and credibility of the TEF as an instrument of measurement of teaching excellence.

[T]he TEF fails to address how teaching might actually be supported and developed in any meaningful way. More worryingly, the very staff who are most involved in teaching are rarely part of institutional TEF planning and implementation, rather they often find themselves marooned outside the process, passive recipients of strategies and initiatives which are not informed by their day-to-day experience of teaching and learning in HE.

The TEF’s processes, with their increasing emphasis on employability and graduate salaries, reflect an adherence to a quintessentially competitive market model of HE that actually has little to do with teaching excellence. Indeed when it comes to the question of the TEF’s fitness for purpose in rating the quality of teaching in HE providers [the report argues] that it is of very limited value in defining teaching excellence, capturing examples of teaching excellence or promoting initiatives that support excellent teaching development across the sector.”

Thus rather than improving teaching, or helping students decide which course to choose, the TEF has instead encouraged further marketisation of HE, increased bureaucracy in universities, and undermined the perception of education as a public good. Perhaps more worryingly, as an assessment of universities it is ill-conceived and even bogus in its methods, as one colleague put it, a classic example of governmental interference and ineptitude in HE policy. Even on its own terms, the TEF does not achieve its aims. The desire for “clear cut” ratings undermines the provision of “accurate, relevant and comprehensive information” (Gyimah *dixit*). For the wider sector—for UK universities as a whole—and for students, one should consider how damaging it is to award universities, on at best a dubi-

ous basis, a “bronze”, thus telling the whole world that these universities are second-rate or worse.

Our colleague Dorothy Bishop, on the basis of detailed analysis of the statistical methods used in the TEF, puts it like this:

“TEF may be summarised thus:

- Take a heterogeneous mix of variables, all of them proxy indicators for ‘teaching excellence’, which vary hugely in their reliability, sensitivity and availability
- Transform them into difference scores by comparing them with ‘expected’; scores derived from a questionable benchmarking process
- Convert difference scores to ‘flags’, whose reliability varies with the size of the institution
- Interpret these in the light of qualitative information provided by institutions
- All to end up with a three point ordinal scale, which does not provide students with the information that they need to select a course.

*Time, maybe, to ditch the TEF and encourage students to consult the raw data instead to find out about courses?”*¹⁵

Our colleague David Palfreyman has published draft proposals for reforms.¹⁶ Like the UCU in its report, cited above, these do not duck the question of improving teaching quality, or ensuring students are suitably informed before choosing a course. Palfreyman has sketched a draft document of the data to be provided to potential students as standard. These include: staff-student ratios; typical contact hours; percentage of staff on permanent contracts; expected class sizes; amount of work set; duration and number of feedback sessions; percentage of fee income spent on teaching salaries; entry grades; socio-economic background of students; as well as NSS-type information on “satisfaction” or “life-enhancement” five or ten years post-graduation. The majority are concrete measures that universities can improve through targeted investment in and training of their staff.

In a recent press release, UUK, the body representing UK universities, has called on the government “to reconsider plans for subject-level assessment following the challenges arising from pilots in 89 universities, and to look again at its value for students, universities and taxpayers.”¹⁷ Professor Debra Humphris, Chair of UUK’s Student Policy Network, stated that:

“[T]he increasing complexity of the TEF process risks undermining its purpose, and this is a particular risk for subject-level TEF. While universities have engaged constructively with the pilot, there is no denying its potential to add complexity and considerable cost burdens to institutions. This in turn could force a diversion of resource away from other investment programmes from which students benefit more clearly.”

Meanwhile, I have struggled to find any meaningful information, beyond the University’s response to the 2016 Government Technical Consultation, that would shed light on Oxford’s institutional position with regard to the further expansion of this policy. I am sure that readers, too, would welcome enlightenment. Congregation might be interested to see drafts or summary provisional key points in responses to government consultations to be made in our name. The final submit-

ted versions become public property; these affect our working lives. Should Congregation not be encouraged to contribute, or even simply to take an interest?

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/higher-education-expert-to-review-tef>

² Department for Education. “Independent Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): Terms of reference.”

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/higher-education-expert-to-review-tef>

⁴ <http://cdbu.org.uk/>

⁵ <http://cdbu.org.uk/the-teaching-excellence-framework-misguided-bureaucratic-and-damaging/>; see also the recent CDBU blogpost by Prof Bishop <http://cdbu.org.uk/tef-an-ill-conceived-solution-to-a-wrongly-posed-problem/>

⁶ <https://www.statslife.org.uk/news/3812-rss-concern-over-statistically-inadequate-tef-consultation> and see also their damning submission to the current review, which states that some of the “serious statistical problems [...] invalidate TEF” https://www.rss.org.uk/Images/PDF/influencing-change/2019/RSS_Evidence_to_the_TEF_consultation_Feb2019.pdf

⁷ Anna McKie, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/two-thirds-students-think-tef-based-ofsted-style-inspection>

⁸ <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/choosing-course/teaching-excellence-framework-tef-what-you-need-know>

⁹ <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-beginners-guide-to-the-teaching-excellence-framework/>

¹⁰ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/tef-metric-graduate-earnings-reflects-distance-london>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/oct/03/graduate-salaries-are-no-measure-of-a-universitys-worth>

¹² <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/TEF%20Technical%20Consultation%20Y2%20BA%20response%20%28website%29.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/ResponseToSubjectLevelTEFConsultation.pdf>

¹⁴ “Understanding, recognising and rewarding teaching quality in higher education: an exploration of the impact and implications of the Teaching Excellence Framework,” Professor Matt O’Leary, Dr Vanessa Cui and Dr Amanda French <http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10092/Impact-of-TEF-report-Feb-2019/pdf/ImpactofTEFreportFEB2019>

¹⁵ Consultation submission on behalf of CDBU.

¹⁶ “The TEF by 2020”, http://oxcheps.new.ox.ac.uk/MainSite%20pages/Resources/OxCHEPS_OP60.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Government-urged-to-reconsider-plans-for-subject-level-TEF-.aspx>

Climate Strike in Oxford

TINA FAWCETT

ON Friday 15th February school pupils and their supporters joined in a growing world-wide movement by holding a ‘climate strike’ in the centre of Oxford. According to press reports, there were up to 2,000 people present in and around Bonn Square demanding action on climate change. The majority were school-age children and young people, with some university students, university researchers, activists and other members of the public there also. Most pupils were from secondary schools across the city, but there were also primary school children, often with their teachers.

This event was one of several happening across the UK, with many more happening world-wide. It is an expression of a youth movement inspired by Greta Thunberg, a 16 year old Swedish girl who began her weekly Friday ‘school strike for climate’ outside the Swedish parliament when she was 15. She speaks with extraordinary clarity and passion, and has taken her message to global political leaders and policy makers. Her call for action has obviously resonated strongly in Oxford, as the turnout for the strike was the highest per head of population in Britain.

The Oxford climate strike was a very positive and energetic event –with spontaneous marching in a circuit around the streets surrounding Bonn Square—as well as chanting, cheering and speeches, most notably from George Monbiot. Many of the pupils had come with their own placards, which were by turns witty, moving and very direct. The key messages included ‘the climate

is changing, why aren’t we?’, ‘system change not climate change’, ‘protect our future’ and ‘there is no Planet B’. Political leaders were directly challenged to take action: one placard depicted a melting globe topped with a blonde quiff and the slogan ‘you can’t comb-over climate change’. Another noted that ‘soon there will be no wheat fields left to run through’.

My 13 year old daughter joined the strike, and she was one of the reasons I was there. I was also there as an energy and climate change researcher at the University’s Environmental Change Institute. The school pupils are calling for the urgency and scale of change our research suggests is necessary. My colleagues and I wore badges identifying ourselves as climate or energy researchers and inviting people to ask us questions. It is a movement led by the young, but its aim is to get all of us to act, and offering information and expertise seemed the least we could do.

As a parent and as a researcher, it was inspiring to be part of this event. The young are demanding change in clear terms. Of course, the change required is very complex and challenging—socially, technically and economically. Without public support and demands for action, the decisions necessary to make this change are impossible. We all need to truly face up to the climate emergency. This movement might be the beginning of real and important change, particularly if we adults listen properly to what our children are telling us.

The Tanner Scheme at Hertford College 1965-1985

Or, how to get clever boys and girls from state schools into Oxford

LAWRENCE GOLDMAN

IT is common to hear in contemporary Oxford that ‘institutional memory’ is fading fast and that we are losing touch with the way we did things in the recent past, let alone more distant times. Recently I was asked by Hertford, with the support of an alumnus of the college, to investigate the history of the Tanner Scheme which between 1965 and 1985 brought to the college by an unconventional route a cohort of undergraduates who would not have applied otherwise. You have to be of a certain age and generation to have heard of the scheme, but it was really not so long ago, and it may instruct us in our current travails with the Office for Students and all the other critics of Oxford admissions. There may be some lessons from history—or at least in this case, an example—on which we can build so as to change our student profile.

The scheme emerged in the mid-1960s under Hertford’s Tutor for Admissions, the physicist Neil Tanner, an Australian by birth and education, at a time of considerable change and opportunity both inside Oxford and in British higher education more generally. In Oxford, the investigations of the Franks Commission in 1963-4 into the organisation of the University—really, the origins of the modern Oxford we know—quickened interest in change of all types and gave reformers a chance to influence the University’s procedures. In Hertford itself there was dissatisfaction with the academic performance and reputation of the college, its low status in the Norrington Table, and its reliance on applicants from a comparatively narrow range of fee-paying schools.

The wider context is also important. This was an era of University expansion in every sense: more young people were going to British universities and new universities were being established. Expansion won political support from the Robbins Committee on Higher Education in 1963 and its articulation of the famous ‘Robbins principle’ that University places ‘should be available to all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment’. The question was whether Oxford would be attractive and open to this new generation of undergraduates.

To keep up with the changes, Oxford and Cambridge joined UCCA (the Universities Central Council on Admissions 1963-1993, now UCAS) and the Oxford Colleges Admissions Office (OCAO) was established in 1963 by the colleges acting together. Up to this point there was no unified Oxford admissions system at all; applicants applied to colleges individually—often to several at once—and each college had its own procedures and entrance tests. It is interesting to note that the first Oxford prospectus for admission, containing information on courses, departments and the colleges, was issued as late as 1965.

It was in that year that Hertford, under Tanner’s guidance, made contact with grammar schools, many

of them in the North, to discover what might be done to attract applicants. Hertford arranged a ‘Schoolmasters’ Conference’ in April 1965 in Oxford to discuss these issues and the first ‘Tanner applicants’ were interviewed in September of that year for entry in 1966. Broadly, the best students in many grammar schools thought only of applying to local universities—Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds etc. Their schools had no tradition of sending boys to Oxbridge where the procedures were different from other universities. At this point, undergraduate entrance depended on examinations and interviews taken in the 7th term of the VIth form, after A-levels, and there was no provision for this in these grammar schools. Even had there been, ‘staying on’ was alien and also unaffordable in working class homes where sons should either be at school or at work: the idea of an extra term of tuition and then months off before going up to university was a luxury.

There was an opportunity here, as Tanner saw: if the college could induce applications from such schools it would be tapping into a vast new pool of talent. The standards in grammar schools, which were academically selective, were very high, regulated by A-levels which in this period were relatively more difficult and rigorous than they are today. (They were taken by fewer students overall and the proportions of A and B grades were much lower than now). The best students in these schools and this educational regime would be perfectly able to function in Oxford. To get them, Hertford decided to dispense with written tests. To ask students in the 4th term to sit the same examinations as those in their 7th term would be unfair; to make conditional offers based on A-levels attained after 6 terms would be no different from the provincial universities to which these boys usually applied. The aim was to get them early, before they applied to the local university.

The regime devised by Tanner involved headmasters recommending their best students and the college interviewing them thoroughly in the September of the second year of the VIth form (4th term) before their UCCA forms (applications) were submitted. Successful candidates would be offered what was effectively an unconditional place at Hertford, subject only to meeting the University’s matriculation requirements which changed over the years but generally required passes in certain subjects at O-level (Maths, English, a language) and two A-levels at any grade. For this reason, Hertford was said to be making ‘matriculation offers’. It was open to successful applicants to take the scholarship examination later in the autumn, but few if any did so: they had a place which they would take up a year later.

The Tanner Scheme was never based on conditional offers—on an offer of a place subject to the attainment of specific A-level grades. Although a few such places were given by Hertford each year in the early 1980s (at which point approximately 200 undergraduates across

the collegiate University were admitted in this manner), the scheme itself was free of any formal examination or expectation of later A-level success. The college trusted its own judgment to assess candidates in lengthy interviews, and it also trusted the judgment of the headmasters with whom it worked. They would only send to these 'early interviews' those students considered most able. As for the candidates, an application to Hertford was more direct than one to another college, and they knew the outcome swiftly.

For Hertford the scheme led to rapid popularity among applicants and academic success. Applications to the college rose from 155 in 1967 (an approximate ratio of less than 2 applicants for every place) to 414 in 1977 and 419 in 1981 (a ratio of over 4:1). In 1972 Hertford was 25th in the Norrington Table; by 1981 it was 1st. Hertford's popularity was maintained in 1974 when it became one of the first five Oxford colleges to 'go mixed'—to admit women as well as men. Women immediately became eligible for the scheme and came to Hertford by this route as well. How many women were Tanner scholars, however, is unclear because there are no surviving lists of entrants coming to the college in this manner for any year between 1966, when the first cohort matriculated, and 1985, when the last arrived at the college. In the initial years we can estimate that about 20 undergraduates a year were 'Tanner scholars'. By the mid-1970s when Hertford was admitting approximately 100 undergraduates each year, the figure was in the mid-twenties. So a reasonable estimate would put the total number of Tanner scholars over the twenty years at about 450. In addition, the very existence of the scheme encouraged more applications to the college from the maintained sector in the conventional manner, with additional impact on the social composition of the undergraduate body.

The OCAO collection in the University archives shows the degree of controversy that the scheme incited. It took 2-3 years for the other colleges to notice and understand what Hertford had begun to do. Then, in 1968-71, there was a period of protracted complaint. The arguments may be imagined: that Hertford was undermining a common procedure and thus contributing to the very confusion over admissions that the college said it was trying to end, and that the college was cherry-picking the best candidates who were encouraged to apply because they didn't have to take an examination or even work very hard for their subsequent A-levels. The controversy ended in 1971 when it was agreed between the colleges that Hertford could choose 25% of incoming undergraduates in this manner, about 25 students annually. However, criticism of the scheme continued throughout the 1970s and I have met old hands in Oxford who remember it and continue to criticise Hertford's maverick policy.

These critics, then and now, tend not to have understood the wider social cause that Tanner and Hertford were pursuing. This was not simply about securing a college advantage. Tanner wanted the best for Hertford, but he also wanted to open Oxford to students from any and every background. This is captured in several documents from the late 1960s, including a letter sent by Tanner and another Hertford fellow, Peter Ganz, to the Secretary of the OCAO commenting on the drop

in the overall number of undergraduate applicants for admission to Oxford in 1968:

*'The substance of the admissions problem overall is to ensure that Oxford is accessible to the best boys from all schools and to ensure that the boys and the schools understand this... It is not necessary either to sell or to apologise for Oxford; there is little doubt that the boys want to come to Oxford, but are frightened away by the reputation of privilege and exclusiveness and bewildered by the organization. We suggest that the admissions procedure in general should be re-examined with a view to making it simpler.'*¹

Neil Tanner was Admissions Tutor from 1964 until 1971; then he stepped down, returning to the role in 1980. He emerges as a very energetic figure, both determined and shrewd, who possessed a thick skin. Getting clever boys and later girls into Oxford was for him a personal challenge and an emotional commitment. He was proud of his scheme and intent on staying ahead of the game; as Oxford's admissions procedures evolved he kept tweaking and altering Hertford's procedures to get the best.

Despite initial misgivings, over time other colleges followed Hertford's example. By 1981, 10 colleges were making so-called matriculation offers on the model pioneered by Hertford with more colleges actively considering launching other schemes of this type.² 121 undergraduates were made matriculation offers across the University in Michaelmas 1982.³ The proliferation of both these and also conditional offers across the colleges, and the general sense that Oxford procedures were still opaque led to self-criticism. In 1982, when Keble announced that it too would make matriculation offers for entry in the following year, the criticism went public: the press was alerted and subjected Oxbridge procedures and the student body to renewed scrutiny.⁴ The University as a whole decided that reform was required and established the Dover Committee, under the President of Corpus Christi, to investigate and report.⁵ The Dover reforms may be seen as a measure of Hertford's success; they also led to the end of the Tanner Scheme.

Dover recommended a new system for the whole collegiate University. There were to be two parallel methods of entry. Under Mode E, candidates would take the entrance examinations in either their 4th or 7th terms and be offered unconditional places after interview subject only to two A-level passes at any grade. Under Mode N, candidates would submit written work and be interviewed in their 4th term, and if successful, receive an offer conditional on achieving specified grades at A-level. In effect, Mode N was the Hertford method, though in Hertford a candidate successful at this stage in the 4th term would not be set a high bar at A-level. In retrospect we can see that the key change in the Dover scheme was to re-focus the admissions procedure on 4th term entry: since the 1980s this has become the manner in which the large majority of candidates apply to Oxford. The recognition across the collegiate University in the mid-1980s that procedures had to vary and adapt to the situation of applicants from the maintained sector was Tanner's insight some 20 years before. In effect, the rest of the University had caught up with Hertford.

For this reason, the Hertford Governing Body agreed to end its separate scheme and to be a full player in the

new University-wide procedures. Tanner himself had reservations at this point, circa 1984, but when he tried once again to diverge from the agreed procedures by offering ‘early interviews’ in September to candidates thinking of applying to Hertford—once more trying to attract talent to Hertford before any other college—he was the focus of University-wide displeasure and backed down. The Tanner Scheme was at an end but it had shown a way forward, and in its very existence had demonstrated to the rest of the University that its procedures were unattractive to many clever potential applicants.

What conclusions can we draw from the Tanner scheme that have relevance for Oxford undergraduate admissions today? What follows is a set of personal reflections on the history uncovered here. Readers may and will draw other and equally valid lessons.

First, we should take inspiration from the approach and spirit of the Tanner Scheme. In the 1960s Hertford saw that by changing its methods, opening the college to talent, varying procedures, doing things differently and flexibly, they could achieve a remarkable trio of good outcomes: good for students who would not otherwise have studied at Oxford; good for the college, which remade itself socially and academically; and good for the University which, had it seen the potential in the Tanner scheme from the start, might have adapted its admissions procedures to attract more and better applicants much earlier. Franklin Roosevelt once characterised his New Deal as ‘bold, persistent experimentation’ and the collegiate University might adopt such an approach today.

Second, we should note an interesting transition in the scheme which has been overlooked: that it began as a partnership with grammar schools in the 1960s, but by the 1980s the college was largely working with comprehensive schools and with no diminution in the quality of the students brought to Hertford this way. Selective grammar schools were largely turned into non-selective comprehensive schools in the decade 1965–1975. At no point in the sources does anyone discuss this change and I see no evidence that it altered or affected the Tanner scheme. The objection could be made that Hertford’s experiment worked so well because it was a partnership with excellent selective schools whose best pupils achieved very high grades in academically rigorous courses. How could it have failed in such circumstances? Although more research is required, it continued to be successful even after the large majority of secondary schools became comprehensives. If so, this makes it more applicable to the current situation than it would have been otherwise: it cannot be dismissed as a response to a particular set of conditions in the 1960s and 1970s which have now passed.

Third, the Tanner scheme depended on the independence of an individual college and its creativity in an era when colleges were more autonomous than they are now. It would be much more difficult—probably impossible—for a college to break free of University-wide procedures in this way today. In 2007—and controversially—the administrative control of the Admissions Office passed from the colleges to the University under the newly appointed Director of Undergraduate Admissions. Centralisation and uniformity have followed. But in this story, Hertford acted as a pioneer. By being an

outlier, the college could test new ideas and procedures and eventually over time other colleges came to agree with it. The University followed, adopting much of the Tanner Scheme, above all its focus on selection in the 4th term of the VIth form.

Fourth, and following on from this point, as a way of targeting talent and bringing it to Oxford, the informality of the scheme contrasts with procedures used across the University in subjects today. The essence of Tanner’s approach was to seek out clever boys and girls who would have gone elsewhere, and having located them, to make it relatively easy for them to enter the University by dispensing with formal tests and hurdles. It was a scheme for discovering potential and it trusted teachers, head-teachers, and tutors to exercise their judgment and perhaps take a chance. This contrasts with the undergraduate admissions regime across subjects that has developed over the past 15 years or so. A successful applicant today has to reach a required level in an admissions test and then specified grades at A-level (never lower than 3 grade As, and usually higher). Most tutors also look for at least 6 A* grades at GCSE. This makes it impossible for a tutor to take a chance and militates against admitting a talented student from a non-standard educational or social background.

Let me take an example of this from my own faculty, History. When the History Aptitude Test (HAT) was first set in 2004 tutors were told that it was advisory. It was to help us make our choice of candidates to be called to interview, but not to determine that choice. At that stage, the Test was marked by tutors in the college of first choice: if they saw something interesting in a script, whatever its other defects, they could call that student for interview. But over time the marking of the HAT was centralised and anonymised so discretion was removed there: a tutor no longer read the scripts of his or her applicants. Then the HAT was turned into a pass/fail examination, used essentially to winnow out about a third of applicants who would not be interviewed. A student with potential who received a mark below 55% in an examination of a sort they had never sat before was now defeated at the first hurdle, lost to the system.

There are two different approaches here. Our present model (designed to deal with more applicants than ever) has become more rigid, centralised, uniform and exclusionary. It encourages many more applications (though not necessarily from the groups we want to target) and it puts everyone through the same procedures irrespective of their educational background and circumstances. This contrasts with the Tanner model which was used to target specific schools—though applications through the scheme were open to anyone—and to subject a small cohort of pre-chosen and talented students to a flexible, individualised and non-bureaucratic method of selection reliant on professional judgment rather than test scores. The University can certainly defend its present methods as open, fair, equal, objective, impartial, and given the longstanding criticism of the system for favouring applicants from private schools and middle-class backgrounds, this is to the good. But if now and in the future Oxford needs to address the under-representation of specific groups—Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), white working class, applicants from outside London and the South East, mature students, the disabled—the Tanner scheme in its essence

has much to recommend it. The procedures today will be different, but the spirit of the scheme should surely inform the spirit in which the University works with specific groups, just as Hertford began to work with specific under-represented schools and the whole class of 'grammar school boys' in 1965.

My suggestion would be to build on the links each college has made with schools in its designated region. Encourage ten schools in each district without a history of sending pupils to Oxford to send their 4 best students in each case for an early, in-depth interview in the relevant Oxford college in September and then set the best of them a realistic A-level offer, or even just a modern equivalent of a matriculation offer (we abolished matriculation offers when I was an admissions tutor in the 1990s). Presently we are hoping these students will apply and be chosen from amidst an expanding ocean of candidates; instead, target them and if they possess the right stuff, take them.

I can hear the complaints already—indeed, I used to make them myself—but if we are serious about meeting all the criticisms of our enduring exclusivity we need to do something radical (though in this case, very simple). It is defensible—after all, a long interview before two tutors is no picnic when you're seventeen—and it builds on a proven model from the past. And one interesting feature of the Tanner Scheme is that Hertford alumni are confused to this day about who was, and who was not, a 'Tanner scholar'. The college ensured

that admissions' decisions were made with discretion; there was no focus at all on the route into Oxford once they walked past the Hertford Lodge for the first time.

Neil Tanner saw talent and potential that was not being unlocked by Oxford and devised a successful method of drawing it to his college, with notable results. We can at least suggest that if Oxford today can locate other pools of untapped talent it could learn from Tanner's methods and the Tanner scheme as whole. There are any number of Oxford committees, working parties and admissions executives currently wringing hands (and necks?) over what to do about admissions. Look at the Tanner scheme, update it for the present, and, in the phrase of the age, *just do it*.

¹ Dr. Tanner and Dr. Ganz to The Rev. L. E Styler, 1 Nov. 1967, Principals' Collection, 34/2/13/3, Hertford College archives.

² 'Matriculation Offers: The Chairman reported that ten colleges had asked to be shown in the booklet with the estimated proportion of offers which they might make in this way'. Matters Arising, minute 13, Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee of the OCAO with college representatives, 11 Feb. 1982', Oxford University Archives, AD 1/53. The ten included Hertford, Balliol, Oriel, Jesus, St. Hugh's, Brasenose, Jesus, University, Pembroke and St. Peter's.

³ OCAO, 'Statistics based on places given through the Admissions Exercise October and December 1982' in OUA, *ibid*.

⁴ 'Keble College considers new entrance plan', *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1982.

⁵ 'Oxford hope for state pupils', *The Guardian*, 6 Nov. 1982.

NOTICE

Lucy Newlyn, literary editor of the *Oxford Magazine*, will be pleased to read literary submissions of any description—e.g. verse, critical prose, very short stories, segments of dialogue, reviews of new dramatic productions and books, etc. Submissions should be no longer than 750 words, and where possible should be sent by email attachment to lucy.newlyn@seh.ox.ac.uk together with a two-sentence biog.

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Literary Editor

Lucy Newlyn at St Edmund Hall

The Sheldonian Theatre

–350 Years of University Ceremony

ANDREW FAIRWEATHER-TALL

THE Sheldonian Theatre opened 350 years ago this year. Every student of the University walks through its doors to be admitted, all those who graduate are celebrated and congratulated within its precincts, and every year on the Wednesday of ninth week of Trinity term, it hosts the University Encaenia to award honorary degrees, commemorate its benefactors and celebrate the academic year past. It is also proudly provides the central and readily accessible meeting place for Congregation, the sovereign body of the University. As famous for its exterior metaphysiae heads as for its interior, it has served the University as its ceremonial heart since it opened on the 9 July 1669.

This article is a reminder of why the Sheldonian was built, by whom, and how the development of Oxford as an intellectual centre in Restoration England shaped its design and function. It then turns to what the building does and how it is run today, and ends with some of the thoughts of the Curators—of whom I am one—on how we will celebrate 350 years, and looks forward to the continuation of its ceremonial duties alongside its other role as a public venue at the heart of the historic central Oxford University buildings.ⁱ

Oxford, in the 1630s, went through a flurry of legislative improvements under William Laud, Chancellor of the University (1629–41). After a century of adjustments, especially under James 1, its medieval statutes which ‘had fallen into an unco-ordinated if not chaotic state’ were finally codified, and published; they were to govern the University for the next 200 years.ⁱⁱ A new Charter consolidated and extended the University’s privileges *vis a vis* Common Law, and reinforced the legal status of printing by the University Press.

The surge in building of spaces began with Bodley’s decision to refound the University Library in 1598, and continued without interruption until 1637. Alongside the Convocation House, Chancellor’s Court and ‘Selden End’ for the Library (1634–37) designed to decant daily University functions away from St Mary’s, several college chapels were renovated and both the Canterbury Quad at St John’s and the south porch of St Mary’s itself constructed.ⁱⁱⁱ Laud himself was a divisive figure who sought to reinforce the place of religion in Oxford—equally his energy led to new endowment, such as the Laudian Professor of Arabic with income from benefices in Bray, Berkshire^{iv} as well as the donation of manuscripts and other material to the Bodleian.

Laud anticipated the removal not just of day-to-day University activities from St Mary’s, but also ‘The Act’; the late medieval ceremony used to award senior degrees of the University—the Master of Arts and the higher degrees (doctor in Law, Medicine or Divin-

ity)—that admitted the candidate as a member, not as a student, of Oxford as a corporate body. The Act took place annually over a weekend and consisted of two sets of disputations—Vespers and Comita—held publicly before an assembled audience seated in a temporary wooden scaffold built in the nave of St Mary’s. An excellent description of The Act itself and its ceremonial purpose is available in Anthony Geraghty’s book^v but, as the culmination of the academic year and a public highlight, it was clearly conducted in a carnival atmosphere (*plus ça change*, the Curators remember a recent, very merry, postprandial graduation ceremony).

The high point was not the academic disputations, but the bawdy speeches. Two *terrae filii* (sons of the earth) delivered satirical commentaries on the current state of the University, playing the role of official jesters. Keenly anticipated by Oxonians and visitors alike, they were described by one modern commentator as ‘somewhat malevolent tour guide[s] of seventeenth century Oxford’.^{vi} Their speeches, often disseminated as manuscripts, were insulting of authority, rude to townsfolk, and in particular singled out notable aspects of dons’ behaviour for ribald ridicule; not for nothing are their speeches the documentary evidence element of The Act most likely to remain in the archives. Public Orators and *Oxford Magazine* contributors take note! Plans to remove the public spectacle The Act were proposed by Laud in the 1630s, but lack of a suitable site delayed the project.^{vii}

The conclusion of building works on the Bodleian in 1637 was rapidly followed by the outbreak of civil war in Scotland (1639), Ireland (1641) and England (1642), the trial and execution of Laud himself in 1645 and of Charles I in 1649. During the first civil war, Oxford was transformed from a university town to political and military headquarters of the royalist cause, fortified by artillery defences which finally fell to the New Model Army after a length siege in 1646. After the parliamentary triumph, a ‘visitation’ and ‘reformation’ of the University followed, together with the ‘correction of abuses’ and a political and religious purge. In the midst of all this confusion, the energetic building work of previous decades ceased almost completely. Only after the end of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, and the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, did the royalist-inspired generation return to Oxford, and to Laud’s plans.^{viii}

Oxford in the 1660s was a place of unfinished business; Oxford dons had suffered for their loyalty to the old King. Gilbert Sheldon himself had been Warden of All Souls from 1636, the year in which the Laudian statutes were published, until 1648, when he was physically

ejected as part of the purge. The new Chancellor, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, sympathetic with Laud's reforms, saw plans for a new building to become the ceremonial heart of the University as an opportunity to signify the re-establishment of Church and secular order. The link to Laud was strengthened by others key to its construction: to Sheldon, successor to Laud as archbishop of Canterbury (1663-77) and to Clarendon as Chancellor of Oxford University (1667-9), and John Fell, Vice-Chancellor (1666-69). Early in 1663, when Clarendon wrote to Walter Blandford, Warden of Wadham, proposing a building project to 'free' St Mary's from The Act, he was acknowledging that construction represented a return to established order for those college fellows recently returned to Oxford from their Commonwealth exile. This might explain why matters moved ahead so quickly. By March 1663, the City had approved a site to the north of the Divinity School along the line of the old city wall; by the end of 1663 the site had been cleared. Would that all Oxford building construction might proceed so quickly and smoothly with such a modicum of paperwork, planning or controversy.

The architect for the site was a scion of Anglican blood and from a loyal royalist family. Christopher Wren, Savilian Professor of Astronomy and also a fellow of All Souls, was the right man at the right time and in the right place intellectually and physically. His reputation was as one of the finest Geometricalians in Europe, at the time when the framework of mathematical practice included architecture. Paradoxically, the selection of Wren, by those looking back to the certainties of pre-Civil War Oxford and its gothic design, instead reinforced new architectural styles at Oxford, aligned with the progressive intellectual movements of the day, such as the Royal Society.^{ix} Hitherto, in Oxford's forty-year 'building boom', classicism had been poorly understood and perhaps derivative; the City would now no longer be dominated by perpendicular and Jacobean architecture. Wren made full use of his knowledge of Classical architecture, and in relating the new building to the existing Convocation House and Schools. His design looked forward to the achievements of English baroque, which reached an English apex in the rebuilding of St Paul's, and of course including Gibbs' 1749 Radcliffe Camera.

The building function was highly unusual: there had never been a 'conventional way' to build an academic assembly hall beyond, perhaps, the example of the Divinity School. Moreover, it not only had to be capable of staging The Act, but serve also as the building for the new University Press, with the printing presses in the basement, and the main roof space became a store room. Notwithstanding, the project continued to advance at pace, albeit less ambitiously than originally proposed: Wren's original plans, laid before the King, had to be scaled back. The budget would be constrained by coming from just one—private—purse: Sheldon's. Finding donors for buildings was as challenging then as now.^x The foundations were laid in July, and, when, from September 1664, John Fell became 'Treasurer for the Worke', the building work progressed quickly. By the summer of 1666 decoration of the interior had begun, and the exterior was completely finished in 1667.

Attention was also paid to the new building's surroundings, such as can be seen in the Vice-Chancellor's accounts, which showed that £365 was paid to pull down houses to the north of the theatre 'to make a paire of faire staires to their new erected Theatre'.^{xi}

Wren's technical and architectural design solutions focused on mirroring the temporary scaffolding set-up for The Act that had occupied St Mary's. The U-shape is redolent of court theatres in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, and ensured that the interior tiered seating focused all eyes on its primary function—the award of degrees. Calling it a theatre therefore reminded contemporaries of its function as a public showcase. We are reminded of the original Act that took place by the two boxes on the first floor, where those involved in the disputations could hold forth to the public and academic audience. When it was built the University's functional heart was still the Schools. The Sheldonian should also be viewed and entered from the south, where its ceremonial entrance aligns to the Divinity School. Today, entry the Sheldonian is most often from Broad Street through the 'paire of faire staires', note the self-consciously monarchist doorway with the royal Stuart arms and an inscription giving the style and titles of Charles II above it.

A team of master craftsman were employed on the building. The master mason, Thomas Robinson, employed up to 41 masons, paid 1s 6d a day, and 20 labourers, at 1s a day. The stone came from quarries across the county (with a quarry leased at Shotover), the ground storey in Headington stone, and smoother Cotswold stone for the upper story; some 48 fodder (roughly 48 tons) of lead costing £777 was brought from Derby; wood for the great roof beams and interior panelling came from various localities, including material supplied from the estates owned by New and Brasenose colleges, and Christ Church. The more elaborate interior woodwork was undertaken by two London craftsmen, brothers William and Richard Cleer. In an early example of prefab, their work was made in their London workshop, and then sent to Oxford by barge to be installed. The former's bill reached £1,347 3s 2d, the latter's, which included the Vice-Chancellor's chair, the shields with arms over the main doors, and decorative work on the galleries, amounted to £288 15s. 9d. The ceiling painting by Robert Streeter, Sergeant Painter to the King, cost £448; installing his 32 panels, sent down from Whitechapel by water, another £210. The interior painting, undertaken by an Oxford craftsman, Richard Hawkins, cost £235 3s. 1d. The final bill Sheldon paid was £14,470 11s. 11d, around £3.1 million today.

The Sheldonian Theatre officially opened on 9 July 1669. At 8 o'clock that morning, a special Convocation took possession of the Theatre with the Registrar reading the donation charter signed by Sheldon, and a celebration of the launch of the University Press. In the afternoon, the first Encaenia completed a day of triumphal ceremony, with The Act on the next day, Saturday, and the following Monday. The opening was also made memorable by a scathing attack by the University orator, Robert South, on the Royal Society. Ironically, although he was specifically excluded from South's attack, one of its principal members was Christopher Wren. It opened at a time when Oxford's (and Cam-

bridge's) traditional logic-based scholarship was being challenged by the new experimental philosophy championed by the Royal Society.

The Sheldonian then, seeing ceremony, celebration and controversy in its first few days, quickly entered the heart of Oxford. Architecturally, it was the first full-scale, free-standing classical building erected by the University or any of its constituent colleges—a very forward-looking gesture in contrast to the perpendicular style of the University's pre-war building boom. Its archiepiscopal patronage marked it as a clear statement of the re-establishment of monarchical order. As the University's first location for its Press, it provided a long-planned separation of University ceremonial and procedural business from medieval religious surroundings.

Those enjoying the first ceremonies might also have seen the building as a highly sophisticated technical and architectural achievement, at least in an English context. Admiring the ceiling, they would have recognised the importance of its subject matter: Truth descending to be with the Arts and Sciences, and the expulsion of Envy, Rapine and Ignorance. Undoubtedly those present recognised the symbolism of the visual allegory, as much as the Theatre itself representing a return to power and monarchical order. They might also have considered Wren's technical accomplishment:^{xii} the 24 metre unsupported roof span was a highly sophisticated effect that impressed contemporaries greatly. Oxford's taste for statement architecture is not wholly new.

The Sheldonian today continues to fulfil its role as the University's ceremonial centre. The exterior remains similar to that of 1669, although the roof was changed in 1802, when Wren's original circular rooflights were lost, and in 1838 the cupola was enlarged; the exterior stonework has been replaced and repaired at various points. The Press of course moved out comparatively quickly to the purpose-built Clarendon building in 1713. The interior underwent redecoration between 1720 and 1727, a new organ was installed on which Handel premiered his oratorio *Athalia*.

The ceiling has been repaired and restored several times. In the early 20th century, further work was undertaken, especially the provision of fire-proof staircases; electric lighting was only finally installed, with some reluctance, in 1934. As many will know, the philosophers' heads outside are the third set. The Theatre is now on its fourth organ, installed in the 1860s.

To bring the story up-to-date, the building's interior underwent extensive work from 2004-08, including the £1 million removal and restoration of Streeter's celebrated ceiling, and the reinstatement of Wren's original colour scheme. As a consequence of careful prior research that documented at least eight paint schemes over the centuries, the interior today is as close to the original Wren scheme as possible. In the summer of 2018, the upper gallery seating was altered, reducing the overall capacity, but improving the comfort and safety of those who use the building.

The Sheldonian is an 'University Body' as defined by the Statutes, and the Curators are charged with its running; since 2012 it has been well-supported by the Uni-

versity Estates as one of its managed building. There are three Curators elected by Congregation, the Proctors and Assessor and the Vice-Chancellor (or nominee).^{xiii} While the Curators are responsible for the building and its precincts, we could not discharge our duties without the excellent support of the University's professional staff. Estates oversee the staff of five who keep the building running, and provide a group of around 20 volunteers for events. The Academic Administration Division's degree conferrals team organises matriculation and degree ceremonies, and the University's events team support Encaenia and other University occasions. Keeping the Sheldonian running in top-order is a collective, collaborative effort.

In 2017-18, its total income was approximately £563,000, roughly one-third from JRAM allocation, and two-thirds generated from events and visitors. Expenditure, including staff, premises, maintenance and repairs (and of course a substantial contribution to University capital and infrastructure charges), was almost equal. Over the year, the Sheldonian hosted 223 hire events, 13 degree days, five Congregations (an exceptional number!), two matriculations, and of course Encaenia; many thousands of students, graduands and proud relatives are greeted, sensitively directed, and looked after by our staff and we pay tribute to their professionalism and sense in meeting many and varied challenges.

The Theatre opens annually for Oxford Open Doors in September, and this year 3843 visitors were shown around. We were also privileged in June to host 500 local school children from 10 different primary schools who performed a world premiere of 'We are the Children of the World' in seven different languages; the culmination of a project called Creative Multilingualism run by the Faculty of Modern Languages and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council with additional sponsorship from the Vice-Chancellor.^{xiv}

The improvement of the fabric of the building over the past decade, and the stability on the staffing side provided by Estates means that the Theatre remains fully fit for its ceremonial University role. The Curators will work to ensure this continues, as the Curators have done since John Fell and Christopher Wren in the 1670s. We have collectively discussed and agreed some project ideas that are outlined below for readers.

Our key objective, apart from celebrating 350 years, is to begin tackling the final improvements to the building fabric: renewal of the organ. Anyone who has heard the current instrument—electronic, and now almost 40 years old—will understand why this is a priority in our anniversary year. The Sheldonian needs an organ fit for its ceremonial role and this year is a timely point to begin planning. The cost may be considerable—somewhere around £400,000 for a new pipe organ less for an electronic instrument—although, properly maintained, this is a one-hundred-year investment. The Curators will explore how to raise the requisite finance and investigate options for its replacement.

The Curators also agree that more could be done to support use of the Theatre by local groups that might currently be deterred by the standard commercial terms

on which it is normally made available. Recently, we agreed a pilot scheme to invite local community groups, which had a demonstrable link to the University either through shared contacts or especially as a result of researcher engagement or opportunities to co-create public events. We expect there to be significant interest and that our wonderful theatre will be used by groups that might not otherwise be able to fund an event in central Oxford. Check our website for more information.

To fund all of this, the Theatre must continue to be available for hire. The Curators are very grateful for the excellent work of the Oxford University events venue team, alongside our own staff, to diversify its functional use to include award ceremonies, meetings, lectures and so forth. We will continue to ensure that such functions do not detract from its ceremonial use, and we are always mindful of its status, as a University building, and its Grade 1 listing. Despite tempting offers, we will not be holding any boxing matches, notwithstanding how perfect Wren's design is for such purpose.

The Curators also want to refresh and enhance the exhibition that currently occupies the attic to bring it up-to-date with the latest interpretations of the building and to explore immersive and virtual reality options. In conversation with colleagues in the History Faculty, we would like to develop high-resolution scanning of the interior, and then to do the same with the exterior as a new way of seeing and understanding the building. All of this would be packaged with the existing digital resources available in the Bodleian's Cabinet project (<https://www.cabinet.ox.ac.uk>) or in collaboration with another external provider. A small workshop will be organised later in the year to discuss the place of the Sheldonian in Oxford's intellectual and architectural history. We are also planning to revamp our current website to help visitors understand the building and its contents.

If you have not recently visited the Sheldonian, perhaps not since a half-remembered graduation, it is open, free, to all University members on production of a valid University card.^{xv} If this article has raised your interest in getting involved, keep an eye out in the *Gazette* for Curator elections. Maybe it has sparked ideas of how you or your colleagues might use the space for community engagement or to contribute to its celebrations with memories or photos. If so, the Curators would welcome your comments via curators@sheldon.ox.ac.uk.

ⁱ The 'state of art' analysis from which much of the first part of this essay is taken is Anthony Geraghty's *The Sheldonian Theatre: architecture and learning in seventeenth century Oxford*, Yale University Press (published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art) 2013.

My thanks to Professor Howard Hotson and fellow Curator Dr Stephen Payne for reading and commenting on a draft, and for all the Curators who have taken an interest. All grammatical factual and interpretative historical errors remain mine, and are there despite their best efforts!

ⁱⁱ https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/375-092.shtml#_Toc30485128 [Accessed 3 Feb. 2019]. My thanks to Professor Hotson for the reference.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cabinet.ox.ac.uk/south-porch-university-church-st-mary-virgin-oxford-1637-0> [accessed 3 Feb. 2019]. The St John's Canterbury Quad was built at Laud's expense between 1631 and 1636; St Mary's Porch with funds donated by Dr Morgan Owen, Laud's former chaplain. Its statues of the Virgin and Child were considered so redolent of Catholicism that Parliamentary soldiers shot off their heads in 1642. Not the last time that a statue in the vicinity of the High caused controversy.

^{iv} *The historical register of the University of Oxford : being a supplement to the Oxford University calendar, with an alphabetical record of University honours and distinctions completed to the end of Trinity term 1888* (Clarendon Press, 1888) p.57 <https://archive.org/stream/historicalregist00ounivuoft> [accessed 12 Jan 2019].

^v Geraghty, pp11-17.

^{vi} Kristine Haugen, 'Imagined Universities: Public Insult and the *Terrae Filius* in Early Modern Oxford', *History of Universities* 16,2 (2000), p. 14.

^{vii} Laud's first choice, land behind St Mary's that would eventually become Radcliffe Square, was unavailable.

^{viii} This paragraph in particular benefited from Professor Hotson's redrafting.

^{ix} Geraghty, p.48.

^x In June 1664, Sheldon subscribed £1000 to begin construction, by 1669 he footed the whole bill as no further benefactors came forward.

^{xi} Vice-Chancellor's Accounts 1666-7, cited in Crick Smith Architectural Report, April 2010.

^{xii} Wren designed a composite roof truss but he may also have considered a design for the ceiling by another early fellow of the Royal Society and Savilian professor (in this case of geometry), John Wallis: <https://www.soue.org.uk/souenews/issue4/wallis.html> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2019]

^{xiii} [http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/181-084.shtml#_Toc86825837](https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/181-084.shtml#_Toc86825837) [Accessed 13 Jan. 19]

^{xiv} <https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/projects/multilingual-concert-we-are-children-world> [Accessed 13 Jan. 19]

^{xv} Opening hours and other information is available on our website: <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/sheldonian/>

Paul Coones († 2018), Chair of the Sheldonian Curators, emeritus Fellow of Herford, Assessor 2006-07, passed away last summer. His dedication to the Theatre in his retirement was exemplary and the current Curators acknowledge his efforts in sustaining its ceremonial and musical life, and pay tribute to his dedication; we are all the poorer for his passing. His obituary was minuted by the Curators and will become part of the University record of the Theatre; a small mark of honour that we hope he would have appreciated.

A Disappearing Man

SUSAN MATTHEWS and MICHAEL BIGGS

LAURA Maud Dillon graduated from St Anne's (then the Society of Oxford Home-Students) in 1938. In the following decade, Laura took testosterone and underwent many surgeries to become Michael Dillon, complete with male birth certificate. It is not too anachronistic to call Dillon the first transsexual in Britain, and arguably the world's first female-to-male transsexual. Another transition of sorts came around 1960, when Dillon was ordained as a Buddhist monk under the name Lobzang Jivaka.

It is difficult to imagine a more extraordinary life or one with more perplexing contemporary resonance. Yet Dillon has all but disappeared from memory at Oxford. 'Visibility is important ... in a university city where many young people come out.'¹ So says the *LGBTQ+ Trail of the University's Collections*, launched during LGBT History Month two years ago. But Dillon has no place on this Trail. Searching all the University's websites (the domain ox.ac.uk) brings up a single substantive reference: three sentences in the Equality and Diversity Unit's *Transgender Guidance*.² Dillon also features under the 'Alternative Oxford Stories' heading on the TORCH website, though this page is inaccessible to Google search. The Hartland building at St Anne's portrays many notable alumnae and fellows, but makes only fleeting reference to Dillon as 'transsexual and Buddhist monk'. There is no photograph and nothing to suggest the historical importance of Dillon's time at Oxford.

Visibility was not always welcome for Dillon. The *Daily Mirror* printed a photograph of Laura in trousers about to cox the women's rowing team, under the caption 'Man or Woman?' This was his first experience of "the newspaper world which later was to become bitter indeed."³ His autobiography recalls "acid letters about making a freak of myself" from the aunts who raised him. This "regrettable incident" finds an echo in his 1946 essay *Self*, composed in the course of his decade-long physical transition. It describes those rare "travesties of manhood and womanhood" where "the body may approximate in essentials to one sex, male or female, but the personality is wholly peculiar to the opposite one". These people, he thinks, have "the most difficult life of all" for "their peculiarities are for ever being forced upon them by the thoughtless persons who gaze after them and loudly voice the question: 'Is that a man or a girl?'"⁴ For someone to whom the publication of a photograph was "regrettable", for whom a 1958 newspaper report made his "heart" stand "still", there are problems with commemoration.⁵

But Dillon was also determined that his story would not be forgotten. He told it twice: in coded form in the 1946 essay and in an autobiography finished shortly before his death, aged 47, in Ladakh. The TORCH webpage describes the autobiography as "an unprecedented account of what it was like to be a trans student in Oxford in the 1930s". In fact the narrative eludes any contemporary sexual or gender taxonomy. Not only did

Dillon wholeheartedly subscribe to a rigid gender binary, but he vigorously opposed the idea that women's mental achievement could ever equal men's. "The highest education cannot eradicate—even were it desirable for it to do so—the marked development of the emotional part which is woman's heritage".⁶ Paradoxically, just as these words were written, Oxford was nurturing (in the aftermath of the Second World War) talents like Elizabeth Anscombe, Phillipa Foot, Mary Midgley and Iris Murdoch, who would make lasting contributions to philosophy, the discipline which Dillon loved.

After Oxford, Dillon qualified as a doctor and practised as a ship's surgeon. The medical studies came in handy when he performed a do-it-yourself castration in his kitchen. This was required by Robert Cowell, as a prerequisite for genital surgery; Roberta then became Britain's first male-to-female transsexual. According to Dillon, "where the mind cannot be made to fit the body, the body should be made to fit, approximately at any rate, to the mind".⁷ When conflicting entries in *Debrett's* and *Burke's Peerage* outed him to a prurient press, Dillon insisted on resigning his post, believing that his female past destroyed his credibility with his patients. Although Dillon failed to value female minds, his achievement at Oxford—a third-class degree in Greats—can be appreciated only if we recognize his upbringing as a woman. Laura Dillon was educated at home by a series of maiden aunts and coached by a friendly vicar; she talked herself into a Classics degree even though (like most women at the time) she had little Latin or Greek.

At Oxford Dillon also began to explore sexuality. As he recalled, it was a place where "people who looked like me were not quite so rare".⁸ The word "transsexual" would not be coined by Harry Benjamin until 1956. A female "fellow and graduate" raised the possibility that Dillon was homosexual. "This was a new word to me and I investigated it and thought she was probably right, but it did not occur to me that, even so, one did anything about it".⁹ The consequences of doing something about it could be devastating. Dillon fell "madly into calf-love, primarily with one of the coxes who closely resembled Shirley Temple", nicknamed the Babe. Dillon's "dream world crashed" when the Babe became engaged. She confided that had Dillon "been a proper man she would have been hard-put to choose between us". Did that plant the seed for the later transition? Dillon subsequently articulated a conventional distinction between "moral" and "immoral" homosexuals: the former "deny themselves the fulfilment of their desires".¹⁰

Even Dillon's modest presence in St Anne's reveals a story he sought to hide in his lifetime: when he applied to study medicine at Trinity College Dublin, Oxford commendably supported Dillon's identity by issuing a new degree certificate. The problem of graduating from a female college was circumvented by substituting Brasenose, while the initials L.M. concealed his former

name. Perhaps Dillon's partial disappearance from Oxford memory can be explained by something familiar from women's history: the difficulty of tracking individuals whose names change. But Dillon sought to conceal his past, erasing his undergraduate years. Therefore he could not take credit for his enduring legacy for life at Oxford: turning women's rowing into a competitive sport, with rigorous training and matching uniforms.

We believe that Dillon deserves to be remembered. Eighty years since graduation passed without notice last year. Why wait for another decade? St Anne's should prominently display his photograph with an explanatory text. Speakers could be invited to talk on his life. His biographer, Liz Hodgkinson, has discovered intimate correspondence between Dillon and Roberta Cowell.¹¹ Jay Prosser, Reader in Humanities at Leeds, gave Dillon a key role in his landmark book on transsexual autobiography.¹² These suggestions are just a start. It is time for Dillon's presence to be recognised in all its complexity—as part of trans history and also as the story of a unique individual.

¹ <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/out-oxford>

² <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/transgender/transgenderguidance/7practicalissuesfortransstudents/>. Dillon is mentioned also on the personal webpage of the second author.

³ Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions*, Fordham University Press, 2017.

⁴ Michael Dillon, *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*, Heinemann, 1946, p. 50.

⁵ Dillon, *Out of the Ordinary*, p. 29.

⁶ Dillon, *Self*, p. 101.

⁷ Dillon, *Self*, p.53.

⁸ Dillon, *Out of the Ordinary*, p. 89.

⁹ Dillon, *Out of the Ordinary*, p. 81.

¹⁰ Dillon, *Self*, p.44-45.

¹¹ Liz Hodgkinson, *From a Girl to a Man: How Laura Became Michael*, Quartet Books, 2nd edition, 2015.

¹² Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, Columbia University Press, 1998.

The tenacious frog

A surimono poetry print of 1822 in the Ashmolean Museum

The calligrapher's brush
swept a little green frog
upwards into a willow tree.

It stretched for a twig
but grasped only air.
Splash! – back in the pond.

Scattering droplets, it leapt again,
touching the willow then falling back,
repeating its leap over and over.

Ono no Tofu put down his umbrella
to watch. His black court hat flopped
in the rain. Drops pinged on his ceremonial sword.

His kimono billowed over his tall wooden clogs
sinking in the mud. *Now it will give up*,
he thought. The frog focused again.

Once more it launched into the air.
Its haunches bulged. Its limbs quivered.
The willow bent down and the frog grasped hold.

It heaved its body onto a branch and clung on.
The branch lifted in the wind and waved the frog up.
The frog lay on its perch, panting.

Ono no Tofu went back to his studio.
He picked up a brush and painted the frog
in the willow tree, with its reflection in the pond.

Then, with his finest brush, he penned his poem.
It rippled down the willow tree,
ending in a flourish just above the water.

A dyeing art

Your paper is pulped flax; protect it from fungi.
Size with cucumber seeds; dye with mulberry juice.
Burnish with metal tools; scent it with myrtle.

For ink, use lamp black: gather soot with a feather.
Mix with water and green vitriol from copper.
Add gum arabic from acacia, gall nuts from oak
trees.

Bray the mixture in a mortar. Learn to judge
which ingredients to modify. For red ink
use madder root, or cinnabar for vermillion.

For ink reluctant to leave the nib, choose
broad-nibbed pens. Employ your finest calligraphy.
Centuries hence, the world will marvel at your art.

DEBORAH MASON

To Russia with Love

The fundamental need of the Russian soul is a thirst for suffering – Dostoevsky

Ce pauvre agonisant que déjà le loup flaire – Baudelaire

Leaving Saratov

THREE grey and ochre cranes, three empty barges. An autumn sky's torn rose. Loud-lipsticked laughter from three swart-skirted nymphs, like loose clusters that flirt and re-form across the go-between flood. Dispenser of a smirched abandoned largesse she bears her stiff brood of dividing selfhoods.

Under the dim-lit walls whose withering plaster cloaks flayed concrete, pink-flowered knotweed hides dismembered kerbs where kneeling vagrants grope for bitter ends beneath the burnished mystery of Troitsky Sobor. Soon through the hissing drizzle three fire-points beacon out of feculent hollows.

Upright high on the scoured deck metal I lose my grip when the pistons judder. Far down below a trio of booted fauns blurt up the quayside jiggling their shafts to asperge our snowmaid ship. Pitching dark chords as the scrubbed stern recedes they spell us fast, their stung elusory foes.

At Evening

after Anna Akhmatova*

CHORDS from the shrubbery bore up a pang that words could never bear. On a white plate of crushed ice fresh-gathered oysters sat drenched with the sea's incisive tang.

You murmured, 'Think of me as your friend – Truly, a friend,' and brushed my sleeve. (Not here the hungering grip of love in this light feathering of a hand).

A bird or a cat I'd stroke like this, musing at Diana as she passes erectly by (beneath those lashes' gilded mesh what mockery lies!)

But from behind the bonfire's fume 'Bless heaven,' the thin-voiced fiddles moan, 'That in one place, for the first time, you sit together, and alone'.

The Leningrad Symphony

Can this art attack evil? – Dmitri Shostakovich

From where a frost-white People's Pool once gleamed (and folk-gilt Redeemer's weightless helm now hovers) beneath unrelenting skies, past sentinel myriads impressing amber birch-blurs on flurrowy water we bear his question to where deep-pierced Piter gouting its thin but constant spirit-stream meted out each still-quick pulsing quaver from crimped flesh in long collected periods. Can ever the composed tear, the pain unbought gather enough gravity to efface terror? Watching each delicate leaf-tip swell its difficult drop to an hour-glass, swallowed into a mirror, we hear your strained atonement's respond tilt to its end, and pray it did not fall for nought.

CARL SCHMIDT

Redeemer: the new metropolitan cathedral of Moscow, re-built from the people's donations over a Soviet-era swimming-bath. Piter: St Petersburg.

*My thanks to Andrey Yakovlev and Judith Schmidt, lovers of Russia, who translated *Vyecherom* for me, 'together and alone.'

Not the Gazette

N.B. The Oxford Magazine is not an official publication of the University. It is a forum for the free expression of opinion within the University.

Seasons of Hinksey Pool

MARK LEECH

THE last swim in Hinksey Open Air Pool, south Oxford, before it closes for the winter is always a bitter-sweet experience. For those of us who swim there regularly, the pool becomes a companion. It's occasionally a bit wearing, but a constant that you have – and want – to come back to. Its season, April to September, covers the most radical climatic changes of the year, and it's this that I've come to enjoy most over my years as a member. This isn't exactly wild swimming, but I do feel closer to the seasons in the water than out of it.

In the early weeks the boundary between winter and spring is porous. Gentle rain one day, sun the next, then a gale. The pool stays open in almost all weathers, so there's no excuse not to go. The walk along suburban roads get there is gradually greening, even on the coldest day. Birds are beginning really to get into their stride, singing or calling in front gardens.

The water feels soft, as though it too is new and fresh. This is time that mallard ducks most often land in confusion on the pool rather than the pond or the lake just beyond in Hinksey Park. Sometimes it's pairs, sometimes single males. They are good companions to have as you do your lengths, now seen above – iridescent head, blue streak on the wings – and now below – feet nonchalantly spreading turn by turn as it dawdles over the surface.

When the fresh smell of spring – a sort of clean wetness – becomes overtaken by the thicker whiff of pollen, summer has moved in. May eases into June, usually with more warmth, more sun, and on very hot days the bitter taste of sun tan lotion in the pool water. The number of ducks in the pool falls sharply as the number of people goes up, but instead the very fringes of the water are frequented by bees and wasps. I assume they are there for a drink, but they spend a lot of time wandering to and fro. Quite often you come face to face with one as you turn at a length's end. For a second the intricacies of their compound eyes glitter back and there your ways part. I rescued a bee that had fallen in once, and it promptly stung me, killing itself.

Birds are always overhead at this time of year. The definitive markers of the season are the swifts. Their migrations, so far as is understood, are largely determined by day length, so they arrive always in the last days of May and are gone again in August. On a blue day their taut black bars streak repeatedly across the face of the sky, visible over a vast arc above the pool. Their screams tail after them and it would not surprise me if somehow they struck the water like sparks from a firework, fizzing and steaming. When the pool is open for one of the occasional evening swims, the swifts are replaced by the equally fascinating silhouettes of bats, also hunting the insects drawn by the moisture rising from the surrounding park.

Then, without fanfare it is September and the crowds thin out, the swallows on Hinksey Lake are becoming fewer. The air has a new feel to it – cold, but not icy. It makes a sharp contrast with the water, which holds you

like a huge liquid blanket. As I swim, I look down at the first autumn leaves to fall. They drift serenely just below the surface until the water soaks them thoroughly and they gather in clumps on the bottom. The shapes of the clumps are altered by eddies and swirls created by the swimmers above.

The leaves are still green on the trees, and birds are beginning to find their voices again after the August lull. But the year's last swim is coming. It arrives always on the last weekend of September. I try to make sure I'm there, even if only for a short while. By this time the water is colder. The ducks may well be back by this time, dotting the largely empty width of the surface. They can seem affronted by the intrusion of humans into their element.

I look at the sky, or the rain, I stretch out in the water. I remind myself that it is only six months until the whole experience starts again.

I just wanna be your Lust Maiden

You don't have to be my beau,
buy me flowers or put on a show
of being what you ain't
cos I'm no bloody saint,
I just wanna be your lust maiden.

There isn't a future with me
(much as you'd like there to be)
there's only the now
so please show me how
I just wanna be your lust maiden.

I don't want a diamond ring
posh dinners or anything,
I won't tie you down
to a mortgage in town
I just wanna be your lust maiden.

I don't want your babies and I won't meet your mum
I just wanna kiss you till my lips go numb
dress up nice so you can dress me right down
kick off my heels and unbutton my gown.
I just wanna be your lust maiden.

So take me upstairs in the whispering night
get off your kit – what a glorious sight
and roll me around until it gets light...
I just wanna be your lust maiden.

NICOLA HARRISON

Elizabeth Jennings

– poet of pain and praise

RICHARD HARRIES

ELIZABETH Jennings was one of the young poets that came to prominence in the 1950's and in the words of her publisher Michael Schmidt was "the most unconditionally loved" writer of her poetic generation.¹ Outwardly she lived a quiet, unspectacular life. The family moved to Oxford when she was six and there, except for short trips to the continent, she remained all her life. She had a happy childhood and was educated first at Oxford High School and then at St Anne's, College. It was whilst she was at school that the two determinants of her life emerged with great force, her Roman Catholic faith and her talent for poetry. This talent was recognised early and later in life she received two major awards.

Inwardly, however, her life was far from quiet, and she had to wrestle with inner torments and terrors. In 1962, at a time of great success when she was one of three writers included (with R. S. Thomas and Lawrence Durrell) in the first volume of *Penguin Modern Poets*, she suffered a major breakdown and was hospitalized, the beginning of a period of mental illness which was to last for 20 years. This was before developments when skilled use of modern drugs could keep people prone to mental illness out of hospital for much of the time. It was also the period when large mental institutions built in Victorian times were still the main repository for such people, some of whom remained in them for many years. This period in hospital resulted in 'Sequence in Hospital' from *Recoveries* (1964).² Not in the least self-indulgent, self-pitying or hysterical, but deeply felt in its restraint, it could usefully be compulsory reading for anyone working with the mentally ill. "I.Pain" evokes well "My storehouse of dread" "II. The Ward" recounts the snatches of conversation amongst the patients about grandchildren and gardens as well as the spring outside the window:

*'The great preservers here are little things-
The dream last night, a photograph, a view.'*

This is indeed what the 18th century poet William Cowper found in his depression. It was the little things in life which kept him going.

Many of her poems are about relationships, how much they mean to her and how they can go wrong. She was aware she could be awkward and she knew she could be badly hurt. People can be cruel. She could feel alone and inward turned. Through all this she sought to resist cynicism and bitterness, and to retain hope through every disillusionment.³ The pain of all this is a fundamental feature of her poetry. It is muted not shouted but none the less real for that. "I must know dark and carry it about".⁴ Yet out of this pain comes first a sensitivity to what lasting relationships require. One aspect for example, is knowing how to give the right gifts to someone, not only carefully chosen and not too large but which betray:

*'some lack that you have
Which I can help to heal and make you whole,
Like shyness, dark moods and even lack of love.'*⁵

This acute sensitivity to human relationships resulted in her beautiful poem "Friendship":

*'Such love I cannot analyse;
It does not rest in lips or eyes,
Neither in kisses or caress.
Partly, I know, its gentleness
And understanding in one word
Or in brief letters. Its preserved
By trust and by respect and awe.
These are the words I'm feeling for.
Two people, yes, two lasting friends.
The giving comes, the taking ends.
There is no measure for such things.
For this all nature slows and sings.'*⁶

Gentleness is a word that recurs in a number of her poems.

At the Christian centre of her poems is the daily discipline of following Christ by turning away from self to others and to God. This is the struggle in the soul of all Christian life and which the poems reflect. Poems on Narcissus recognise that mirrors are essential in the world, where we may learn to see ourselves, but they are also where we turn inward. What helped her to look outward was her imagination. Imagining is a key word which recurs and is itself the subject of some poems.

*'Surely an Act of the imagination
When a doubt brushes us.
Helps more than one of faith.'*⁷

She uses this imagination to take her into the situations and people around her. And this leads to the next great expression of her faith-grace. Indeed the title of her 1979 collection is *Moments of Grace*. She sees flashes of grace in so many aspects of her life:

*'And grace is caught in seconds unexpected-
Beads of light hung on a chain of stars,
The child's goodnight look.'*⁸

Particularly successful is:

*'I count the moments of my mercies up.
I make a list of love and find it full.
I do all this before I fall asleep.'*

*'Others examine consciences. I tell
My beads of gracious moments shining still.
I count my good hours and they guide me well
Into a sleepless night.'*

Here a number of ideas central to her poetry gather together: gracious moments, appreciation and gratitude

for them, her vocation as a poet and the imagination which makes this possible. It is important to stress that for her it was a disciplined imagination. The order she sees as so explicit in the universe, she sought to recreate in her poetry.

So many of her poems are acts of imaginative sympathy when she has turned outwards from herself to see and appreciate the lives of others, the parents who care for a Downs Syndrome child, the teenagers who question her at a poetry reading. This in turn leads to a sense of gratitude and praise. Gratitude is a word and theme which often occurs “I want a music of pure thankfulness”.⁹ Her 1998 collection was entitled simply *Praises*. She has poems about nature in all its aspects, the changing seasons, especially spring and others on a whole range of animals including ants and rooks. Like Rupert Brooke in his poem “The Great love” with its theme “These I love” Jennings has a list beginning:

*I praise those things I always take for granted:-
The tap my sister turns on for my bath
Every time I stay, -the safety pin-
And who invented it? I do not know-
The comb, the piece of soap, a shoe, its shine,...
I praise the yawning kind of sleep that's coming,
And where the spirit goes, the sheet, the pillow...¹⁰*

What kept her going through all her difficulties, in addition to her faith, was her sense of vocation as a poet, her belief that this was a gift, and the satisfaction that she had in writing poems. She believed that the mystic and the artist drew from the same source and in her the two vocations were fused.¹¹ Her soaring imagination, disciplined by her poetic skill, resulted in moments of revelation when the world suddenly seemed transformed and translucent. So it was that she

felt much at home with fable and myth which can also create another kind of world. She says to herself in one poem:

*‘You own
a gift that few possess.*

*Somehow you know how to make magic happen.
It's here before me with the curtains open*¹²

At the heart of that poetic magic was her catholic faith, even in the midst of so much heartbreak, enabling her to find grace and offer praise.

¹ Elizabeth Jennings, *New Collected Poems*, Carcanet, 2002, p.xix. Cited as NCP. If a poem does not appear in this collection, the original collection in which it appeared is cited.

² “Sequence from hospital”, NCP, p.62

³ “An answer to odd advice”, Elizabeth Jennings, *Moments of Grace*, Carcanet, 1979, p.8

⁴ “Walking in the dark.”, NCP, p.312

⁵ “The right givers”, NCP, p.287

⁶ “Friendship”, NCP, p.89

⁷ “An Act of the imagination.”, NCP, p. 297

⁸ A meditation in March 1979”, *Moments of Grace*, p.9

⁹ “Mid-May meditation”, NCP, p.321

¹⁰ “Praises”, NCP, p.319

¹¹ Elizabeth Jennings, *Every Changing Shape, mystical experience and the making of poetry*, Andre Deutsch, 1961, p.17/18. See also “A metaphysical point about poetry.”, NCP, p.322

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

**The editors invite and welcome contributions from all our readers.
The content of Oxford Magazine relies largely on what arrives spontaneously on
the editors' desk and is usually published as received.**

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REVIEWS

Yoruba Sonnets

Concert and Q&A

Venue: Wolfson College, Oxford
Tickets: Free Entry



WOLFSON College hosted an evening of West African culture on Friday 15 February with Yoruba Sonnets: an innovative combination of Yoruba spoken word and live music infused with funk, jazz, and Nigerian Afrobeat. Readings by performance philosopher Dr Olu Taiwo were woven together with music from Grammy Award winning Nigerian percussionist Lekan Babalola. Among his many accomplishments, Babalola is known for his collaboration with Malian stars Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabaté on the 2006 Best Traditional World Album *In the Heart of the Moon*. He was joined on stage by his Sacred Funk Quintet, comprising Kate Luxmoore on clarinets, Ray Butcher on trumpet, Reuben Reynold on guitars, Tom Ford on electric bass, and Marcus Copeland on kit. The event was organised by Creative Multilingualism, an Oxford-based research programme devoted to the study and dissemination of linguistic creativity and diversity.

Whilst the online event description presented the show as a hybrid of Afrobeat and Western funk, the band went beyond that, moving from reggae to New Orleans brass band music, Western contemporary music, and English folk. Audience members expecting an evening of Afrobeat, the genre pioneered by legendary multi-instrumentalist Fela Kuti in the 1970s and 1980s, might have been disappointed by this mixture of genres. But the band navigated them well throughout their two sets, despite some lack of coordination at the ends of pieces. Luxmoore, Babalola's wife and long-time collaborator, did a great job throughout the concert as musical director, subtly serving as prompter making sure all the bits of the show came together.

After opening with an instrumental tune, each set featured Taiwo interpreting verses from the *Odu Ifá*, the literary corpus of the Ifá religion (as we learned during the post-performance Q&A). *Odu Ifá* verses were traditionally memorized and interpreted by the Babalawo, the spiritual and scholarly leaders or *Ifá* priests. Throughout the performance, Taiwo recit-

ed these verses over the live music, touching on wide-ranging topics at the heart of Yoruba culture, including religion and divination, nature and the universe, death, and ancestry. Yet, as Taiwo emphasized during the Q&A, their interpretation was specifically adapted to the contemporary British context in which all members of the project live. The small size of the stage meant that Taiwo had to stand in front of it, but that did not prevent him from engaging the audience through his poetry, mime, dancing, and jokes. After a couple of initial songs that felt like a warm-up for both performers and audience (despite Luxmoore and Ford's display of virtuosity on clarinets and bass, respectively), things picked up in the third piece. As the audience stood up and danced to a fast-paced swing, Taiwo spoke of the orishas (Yoruba deities that mediate between the human and the supernatural), insistently repeating the mantra 'I shall inherit my ancestors' roots'.

After a short break, the second set opened with a 12/8, heavily percussive instrumental with clear tinges from traditional Yoruba rhythms. The show then became more powerful in the pieces featuring Babalola's own singing in Yoruba, often in unison with the trumpet melodies, which offered a perfect counterpoint to Taiwo's verses in English. But the show's climax was the most distinctive and beautiful song of the evening. Rooted in English folk, it featured Kate Luxmoore's fine singing in counterpoint with Taiwo's recitation, making the many elements of this extraordinary project come together: the English and the Yoruba, the traditional and the modern, all fused through sound and word.

Dressed in a light blue agbada (traditional Yoruba tunic), Babalola was certainly the king of the show. His enormous percussion set up included cymbals, various types of shakers, bells, congas, wooden bongos, a cajón flamenco, an udu drum, a triangle, bar chimes, and more. His remarkable mastery and agility were obvious from his constant switching of instruments and diverse rhythmic patterns. Yet his frantic energy almost made the performance seem like an unremitting solo improvisation, which at times distracted from the other musicians and from Taiwo's recitations.

Yoruba Sonnets was impressive for managing to keep its eclectic fusion grounded in Yoruba culture. Taiwo and Babalola combined their diverse knowledge and skills to spread Yoruba's rich

imagery as it is understood by the UK's Nigerian diaspora.

Websites: <http://www.lekambabalola.com/>;
<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/>

PABLO INFANTE-AMATE

Keep a civil tongue in your head

Keith Thomas. *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England*. Yale University Press, 2018. £25.



SIR Keith Thomas's brilliant study provides insights into definitions of civilization—the paucity of which were regretted in my review of the BBC's *Civilizations* (Oxford Magazine, 396, 2nd Week, TT 2018). He offers definitions of manners and civilization, and there is a precise lexicographic exploration of words, which makes the kind of information which the *Oxford English Dictionary* presents come vividly to life.

Broadly speaking strict codes of manners find more hospitable homes in hierarchical societies, but even as democracy develops the demands for civilised behaviour never entirely go away. This book concentrates on 'Early Modern England'—1500–1800, although there are excursions into Wales, Scotland and Ireland. It's a pity it stops at 1800, because in the first half of the nineteenth century, when individualism, industrialism and political reform were progressing, the operations of manners started to change at a quicker rate. This was when more and more people were upwardly mobile, and did not necessarily know how to behave, especially when they attempted to ape the systems of their betters. Clough's sceptical Mephistophelean spirit puts the case in *Dipsyduchus*:

'One's own dress too, one's manner, what one's doing
And saying, all assist to one's renewing –
I love to see in these their fitting places
The bows, and forms, and all you call
grimes.
I heartily could wish we'd kept some more of
them,
However much they talk about the bore of
them.
Fact is, your awkward parvenus are shy at it,
Afraid to look like waiters if they try at it.'
(4, 93-100)

It became apparent in this transitional period, and after, that 'good manners', far from being a means of putting people at their ease, can be a form of aggression and social exclusion. Scott Fitzgerald hit the nail on the head when he said in *The Crack-Up* that Emily Post's etiquette books were nothing but 'theories of how to make everyone thoroughly uncomfortable with a sort of systematized vulgarity.' Of course in earlier centuries 'courtesy books' helped aspirants to find their feet and put them in the right places. Castiglione's *The Courtier* (1528) is the classic example, although people who were naturally boring and gauche must have found elusive *sprezzatura* hard to achieve.

Sir Keith mines rich veins of material, and every point made is supported by extensive quotation. Often the book reads like an anthology. And there is no shortage of amusing examples, often supplemented by his tart remarks. Women used to urinate in church, 'but some allowance should perhaps be made for the length of seventeenth-century sermons.' There is no shortage of amusing nuggets in the book, as of Josiah Pullen (1631-1714), Vice-Principal of Magdalen Hall, who showed some ladies round Oxford and urinated 'still holding the [chief] lady fast by the hand, to her no small confusion.'

This is just one example in a long section on bodily functions. Farting features, although he does not have my favourite anecdote from John Aubrey concerning the Earl of Oxford (whom the lunatic fringe thought wrote Shakespeare's plays) who 'making of his low obeisance to Queen Elizabeth, happened to let a Fart, at which he was so abashed and ashamed that he went to Travell, 7 years. On his returne the Queen welcomed him home, and sayd, My Lord, I had forgott the Fart.' One can always guarantee Sydney Smith to come up with something pithy and amusing, and his phrase for dealing with excrement in a civilised way is 'faecal propriety'. Samuel Pepys should not be allowed to occupy the high moral ground when he referred to 'rooted nastiness' which 'hangs about the person of every Scot', since he had defecated into a fireplace on one occasion. One wonders whether Thomas made a note to himself, taking a leaf out of Gipsy's book in Tennessee Williams's *Camino Real*: 'file this crap under crap'.

There is a problem though. It is often very difficult accurately to chart social and cultural movements, and we often find ourselves in an 'on the one hand x, on the other hand y' situation. Often minority views are represented, but they do not reflect dominant attitudes or practices. Of the habit of children bowing to their parents when they approached them he says, 'It is not clear when these conventions eventually died away.' There is also the sense that many of the quotations are isolated, so that they do not have helpful contexts. Sir Keith does avail himself of imagi-

native literature, but I should like to have seen a bit more, since there one does encounter contexts. The novels of Jane Austen are a marvellous resource, but Thomas only quotes from them once (not indexed alas) on p. 327. She was intimately concerned with the point at which a kind of Romantic individualism was developing. She did not want to espouse it unreservedly, but she was critical of the stiffness of members of society who thought of themselves as entitled, so her works dramatise the tensions. She allows question-marks to be suspended over words such as 'civility' and 'ceremoniousness', and the fictional contexts act as elaborate glosses.

To come into the mid-nineteenth century I can think of no better example of the caste system in action than Book 2 chapter 6 of *Our Mutual Friend* when Bradley Headstone collides with the effete and supercilious Eugene Wrayburn. Literature is filled with revealing mini-dramas. I especially like the lovely Wordsworth 'Stepping Westward' (1803):

'What, you are stepping westward?'—'Yea.'
.....
The voice was soft, and she who spake
Was walking by her native lake:
The salutation had to me
The very sound of courtesy:

Thomas provides nice illustrations, but let me make a plea for Hogarth's illustration of dancing in *An Analysis of Beauty*, where elegant aristocrats are showing elegant deportment on the left and rumbustious country bumpkins are bouncing about on the right. This would strengthen his point about inelegant dancing: 'Even in their dancing, the lower orders were thought to be more boisterous, with much flailing of limbs and whooping with joy.' Incidentally in the painting version (c. 1745) the composition is reversed. When people were praised in the eighteenth century for having 'a handsome carriage' it did not mean that they owned a nice *barouche landau*.

Thinking of Hogarth brings up another point, that Thomas doesn't discuss: that the elaborate prescriptions for behaviour he discusses also had implications for literature, art and architecture, where questions of appropriateness and decorum and elegance were always being asked. There were 'high' and 'low' styles. When one looks at the Tower of Five Orders in the Bodleian's Schools Quadrangle it is obvious, if one is architecturally literate, that the more primitive and masculine Tuscan and Roman columns have to be at the bottom, and the lighter and more sophisticated Corinthian and Composite ones at the top. Grammar for writing was strict, and there was a grammar of architecture. Music too has its good manners; as Ulisses puts it in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, 'untune that string, /And hark what discord follows.'

Thomas tends to the view that good behaviour is best not enforced by statutes, although he reminds us that at his college the founder Richard Fox ruled that proper manners ('*morum honestas*') were necessary. What would he think of St Catherine's in our time where the undergraduates are said to be abandoning the tradition of standing up when the Master and Fellows enter the hall at formal dinners in the name of diversity? It gets worse; gowns are being abandoned. And Latin grace? They might as well be at Slippery Rock University. He has an aside in which he mentions that servants often behave more genteelly than their betters: 'as can be seen in some modern Oxford senior common rooms, where black-coated butlers wait impassively on gesticulating Fellows clad in sweaters and jeans.' True of Cambridge too I imagine.

A good deal of Thomas's book is depressing. One cherishes the idea that things get progressively better, but he cites many instances of where enlightened views in earlier centuries do not gather strength, but are reversed. A dominant regression was the prevalence of uncivilized behaviour and attitudes as the Empire grew, and it became convenient to maltreat the 'lesser breeds without the law' as Kipling describes them. One might hope that religious piety would translate into good manners, but Sir Keith writes 'civility was not relevant to the quest for eternal life; it could positively obstruct it.' It would be nice to believe that torture is diminishing, especially in the so-called civilised world, but the American Vice-President Dick Cheney was tricked into endorsing water-boarding by Sacha Baron Cohen, posing as an Israeli soldier, in *Who is America?* Although he preferred to call it 'enhanced interrogation'.

Not everyone cherishes progress, and a recurrent dream is the return to primitive states, beautifully stated by Gonzalo in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

I the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty; (2.i)

But it is also immediately mocked by his fellow castaways.

One problem with the whole question of manners and civility is that a shadow hangs over it of *de haut en bas*, that it is tied up with privilege and the kow-towing of the lower orders. People who want to adopt good behaviour do not have a direct reminiscence of Spenser, but something akin is shadowily in the background:

They teach us how to each degree and kind
We should ourselves demean, to low, to high,
To friends and foes, which skill men call Ci-
vility (*The Faerie Queene*, 6,10,23, 205-7)

There were sometimes strict ways of promoting good behaviour. It was my Bransenose colleague Martin Ingram who was on television not long ago with the scold's bridle. Which Lucy Worsley was made to wear, to the delight of some. And one recalls the skimmington rides—which survive even into Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and his poem 'The Bride Night Fire'.

Where are we now? Things are easing up, and perhaps it is no longer possible to

be cast into outer social darkness by putting one's milk into the cup before the tea and saying 'just as it comes dear', rhyming scones with stones, or holding one's knife and fork as if one was at a chimpanzees' tea-party (which many do). But codes and signals are as ruthless and inexorable as ever, and castigation for naffness is as strict as that meted out to some victim in the Sun-King's court. Except that now it might be because one's sneakers are old hat.

The necessity for guidance has not gone away, and many of us long for new etiquette books, in which breaking off a conversation to answer the mobile phone is listed as a major social crime. It would also be nice if there were a BBC etiquette

handbook for television presenters, telling them, as earlier courtesy books did, that gesticulation was 'an unpleasant foreign habit.'

One final thing: Sir Keith uses the phrase 'reached a crescendo'. I was hauled over the coals in public decades ago by Johnny Dankworth for this solecism. I know it's very common usage, but that doesn't make it right. It should be 'reached a climax.' This will doubtless generate correspondence, in which I am gravely informed that the facts of phenomena should not be allowed to dictate language.

BERNARD RICHARDS

Contacting Congregation-elected members of Council

As noted in the *Gazette* of 15th March 2018, the eleven colleagues elected by members of Congregation to serve on Council are happy for members to contact them to express concerns, enlist views and discuss business as appropriate. The elected members on Council and the committees on which they sit are as follows:

Dr Kate Blackmon, *Oxford Said Business School and Merton (Planning and Resource Allocation, Education)*
Professor Matthew Freeman, *Dunn School of Pathology and Lincoln (Research and Innovation)*
Professor Sir Rory Collins, *Nuffield Department of Population Health and St John's (Personnel)*
Professor Helena Hamerow, *School of Archaeology and Faculty of History and St Cross (Education)*
Professor Richard Hobbs, *Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences and Harris Manchester (Research and Innovation, Planning and Resource Allocation)*
Professor Tim Coulson, *Department of Zoology and Jesus (Planning and Resource Allocation, Finance)*
Professor Geraldine Johnson, *Department of History of Art and Christ Church (Planning and Resource Allocation, Development and Alumni Relations)*
Mr Richard Ovenden, *Bodley's Librarian and Balliol (General Purposes, Finance)*
Professor Fabian Essler, *Department of Physics and Worcester College (General Purposes)*
Professor Aditi Lahiri, *Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics, Somerville College (General Purposes)*
Mrs Tania Boyt, *Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics (Planning and Resource Allocation)*

How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

Questions and replies

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

Postal votes

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present ("on the floor") at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

Flysheets

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>
Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation.

Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk).

The new college

Sir – There are many questions provoked by the rather chaotically announced plans for the new Parks College, some of them going to the core of what we mean to do as a University. Among more practical resource allocation issues three seem crucial to me.

First, we all know that one of the major issues faced by Oxford is inequality of resourcing between different colleges. Is it sensible to spend major efforts on a new university society (which is immediately positioned as a kind of ‘part-time college’, on time share with other institutions using the space, and so providing considerably less value for money to its students or indeed to its Official Fellows than a ‘traditional’ college would) before we manage to boost the resourcing of existing colleges of more recent foundation?

Secondly, since the proposed college will not provide on-site accommodation, it will put extra pressure on the already stretched and overpriced rental accommodation provision in town. When we debated the issue of the Castle Mill flats in Congregation not so long ago, an argument was made that disappearance of a few flats with the removal of the top floor of the blocks would considerably distort the student housing market. Have these arguments been reviewed in light of the proposed graduate expansion, which dwarfs any impact that a reduction in the size of the Castle Mill accommodation could have? Have the views of the City Council on the issue been sought?

Thirdly, this University is rightly making an effort to improve its access record. Making major progress on that front, however, might require substantial resources being dedicated to bridging courses and conceivably extra undergraduate places created for candidates coming to Oxford via this or other access routes. What consideration has been given by Council to whether these plans will compete for resources with the graduate expansion plans? Potential clashes are not limited to mere expenditure, though this might become crucial with the dangers of Brexit and potential changes to the universities’ funding formula, but include allocation of teaching time by faculties, use of library and laboratory space, and other university facilities.

Yours sincerely
GEORGY KANTOR
St John’s College

Sir – One should applaud such initiatives as the new “Parks College” only if they respect the strong disciplinary foundations that must form the basis of any strong interdisciplinary programme. It makes no sense to jeopardise or sacrifice strong, experimental disciplinary research as a nod to perceived interdisciplinary aspirations.

TO THE EDITOR

It comes as a surprise, therefore, to find that a laboratory necessary for training the next generation of synthesis scientists in a major interdisciplinary programme is now earmarked for the new college dining hall, to function as a hub “mainly at lunchtime and in the late afternoon or early evening” (*Oxford Magazine*, No 404, Second Week, Hilary Term, 2019, p5)

Yours sincerely
PETER P EDWARDS,
STEPHEN G DAVIES
Chemistry

Oxford housing

Sir – In a letter to *Oxford Magazine* (No. 400, Second Week, Michaelmas Term, 2018) I declared Danny Dorling a/the master practitioner in the ethnography of housing. On reading his *Oxford Housing and the Survivor Syndrome* (No. 405, Fifth Week, Hilary Term, 2019) I would like to add Professor Dorling echoes the satirical sting of Jonathan Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* (1704). Swift was briefly in residence at Hart Hall, precursor to Hertford, about which he would boast in older age. If it can be reasonably accepted that one of the intentions of the satirist is “to improve humanity by criticising its follies and foibles”, then *Oxford Housing and the Survivor Syndrome* is much more than good intention.

Danny Dorling recalls a meeting held at Mortimer Hall, Old Marston, requested by James Lawrie, Treasurer of Christ Church, and hosted by Old Marston Parish Council, where I was sitting a few rows in front of him and remember well his encounter with “the oily executive from the property company” who did indeed lie about “homes for your children” and dismissed Danny Dorling as someone who obviously knew nothing about housing or much else. Indeed the oily executive (the OH) was dismissive of all of us at the meeting, wrong demographic, selfish, ill-informed.

I had an earlier skirmish with the OE over projected numbers in what is now being called Land North of Bayswater Brook, and was told “it doesn’t matter how many houses are coming because housing numbers are whatever they are” and “we need tens of thousands of houses built around Oxford. That’s what we need in the future.” A few weeks ago inspector Paul Griffiths concluded his hearings on proposals for 4,400 dwellings around Begbroke, Yarnton, and Kidlington,

having already stated in November that he accepts as a general principal that the proposals could help meet Oxford’s “unmet housing need”. The numbers game here is mightily chimerical, based it seems on oracular pronouncements from the 2014 Strategic Housing Assessment (SHMA), which goes for 100,000 new homes to be built in Oxfordshire by the early 2030s, in 2017 central government settled on 60,000, and Helen Marshall of Oxford CPRE brings this down to 50,000.

The philosopher Michael Polanyi, long resident in North Oxford, in his analysis of the poison chicken oracle of the Zande of North Central Oxford, concluded that the Zande, as reported by Evans-Pritchard in the late 1920s, had no difficulty in dismissing evidence that the oracle didn’t work simply because such evidence could instantly be refuted (as contrary to Zande implicit belief). Polanyi described this as an example of “the principle of suppressed nucleation which prevents the germination of any alternative concepts on the basis of any evidence” (*Personal Knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 286-94).

So of course Professor Dorling had nothing which could persuade the OE that the OE was wrong, or, indeed, cause him to admit that he, the OE, was lying. As for Mr James Lawrie, Christ Church Treasurer, he was much dumbfounded by a request from Christ Church alumnus Dr Duncan Robertson for a statement from the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church on Ch Ch’s reasoning for building in the Green Belt and the Dean and Chapter’s policy on their stewardship of Christ Church Green Belt land. Mr Lawrie then said he needed time to reflect yet did go on to say, being “quite honest”, that he didn’t think the land in question was “a very significant part of the green belt”. Pure Swift, or even impure Swift, a moment among many in the foibles and follies of the great growth delusion (GGD). Happy days are not here again.

Meanwhile, do hope Professor Dorling will be able to “end my days in an apartment with a lift and no stairs that had been carefully built into one of the hillsides overlooking the city” (*ibid*) and thereby liberate his family house in New Marston for, well, of course a family! Fortunately this retirement is some way away.

Yours sincerely
BRUCE ROSS-SMITH
Headington

Language Library closure

Sir – With great concern Oxford UCU has learnt that there is a business plan proposed by the University Academic Administration Division to close the library at the Language Centre at the end of Trinity Term. According to this plan, the library’s collections would be dispersed among

other libraries at Oxford and the Bodleian Libraries book storage facility in Swindon, and the specialist library staff would be made redundant.

The Language Centre Library's collection has developed over 40 years in response to students' and staff needs, and now comprises materials (books, audio-visual materials and online resources) in 200 languages – making it the language learning library with the widest range of languages on offer in the UK.

In addition to providing textbooks and other materials for Language Centre courses, the library offers resources for, and specialist advice on, independent language learning, functions as a hub for informal teaching and 1-2-1 language exchange, and hosts facilities like the Tutors, Translators and Proof-readers database.

We strongly believe that the provision of the Language Centre Library is a vital part in the language-learning process, and that if the plan to close the library goes through, this would deprive anyone at Oxford with an interest in languages of a priceless resource. Not only would a unique library collection be dismantled, but also the expertise and advice of dedicated, professional staff would be greatly missed.

Not least, we are concerned about the message the University is sending about the importance of language learning: at a time when the teaching and learning of foreign languages is at an all-time low in British schools, can the University really be seen to be following this trend?

We are calling on the University to engage in full consultation with all stakeholders, including the Language Centre and the wider Oxford University students and staff, before any decision is taken about the future of the Language Centre Library.

Yours sincerely
SVENJA KUNZE

Oxford UCU Co-Vice-President

Sir –I write to express my deep concern at proposals for the closure of the Language Centre Library. I think that it is a dreadful decision and one that threatens to destroy a collection of national importance embedded in and very much part of the Language Centre.

It will also have a knock-on effect on other libraries in Oxford—including the Taylorian.

Finally at a time when take-up of Modern Languages is at an all-time low in some parts of the UK it sends out a terrible message from Oxford University about the importance of languages. I think that my colleagues will almost certainly share this view.

Yours sincerely
NICK HEARN
Taylor Institution Library

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