

THE MORNING AFTER

In January 2014 at the National Gallery in London we launched our celebrations of the College's Tercentenary. A sequence of great events – including the publication of our lovely book *Worcester: Portrait of an Oxford College* and a superb concert by the Chapel choir at St John's, Smith Square – came to a climax with the Tercentenary Dinner and then the unforgettable Tercentenary Ball. We also made a flying start to our ambitious Campaign to endow Worcester for the next three hundred years.

After all this, I was genuinely afraid that the academic session 2014–2015 would be a kind of hangover year in which we would all nurse sore heads and a feeling of anti-climax. But I am delighted to report that I could not have been more wrong. In the twelve months since I wrote my last introduction to the *Record*, the College has gone from strength to strength.

First and foremost, there was the news of the extraordinary performance of our wonderful students. Exit polls from the Trinity Term 2014 examination season suggested that we had done very well indeed across the board (though with special honours to our Engineering students). Then at the end of the summer, after the collation of all results, it was announced that we had achieved third place in the Norrington Table. Some months later, following a recount (a kind of academic Steward's Inquiry taking into account proctorial appeals and arcane recalibrations), we rose to the glory of being second. We were surpassed only by Merton, ahead even of St John's (whose students benefit from the perks of a financial endowment fifteen times greater than ours). And yet Worcester remains such a happy and relaxed place. We expect great things from our students, but endeavour not to put excessive pressure on them. When I see them revising in the glorious Old Library or looking over their notes on the lawn, in the orchard or by the lake, I sense that the beauty and harmony of our unique environment helps to keep them calm. How tremendous, then, that we reached our highest-ever academic standing without undue chivvy and in the very summer of the Tercentenary celebrations.

But we must not attach too much weight to Norrington rankings – judgement by league table is one of the besetting vices of the modern educational world. Besides, the spread of results between colleges is actually very narrow: our provisional 2015 ranking is eleventh, but a 1% improvement would make us sixth and a 1% reduction take us down

to seventeenth (and the college which was top last year was very nearly bottom this time!). One of our greatest benefactions this year was the permanent endowment by David and Cathy Loevner of the Tutorial Fellowship in Statistics, currently held by Dr Steinsaltz; it does not take his expertise to know that there is not a lot of statistical significance when a 1% change has such a marked effect. Across the university, regardless of college, we are blessed in having so many very clever and extremely hardworking students.

Industry and achievement on the academic side have not diminished our extra-curricular energies. Both Men's and Women's first Football XIs won their respective leagues, and the 2nd XI Men won Cuppers. The Men's Hockey team won the league and defeated the Cambridge league winners. The W2 boat won blades in Summer VIIIs. College members won Blues in an array of sports, including some of the less high-profile but most highly skilled ones such as Fencing and Archery. Another terrific year for musical performance culminated in an evening of madrigals and other choral numbers by the lake on a balmy night near the end of Trinity Term. This featured our several College choirs, including a new 'scratch' staff choir who performed magnificently despite the fact that several members had never sung in public before. Special thanks are due to our Director of Chapel Music Tom Allery, who has had a terrific first year in post.

Life at Worcester is full of surprises – which is one of the things that makes being Provost the best job in the world. In Michaelmas Term I looked out of my window to find a promenade production of Shakespeare's *Henry V* hurtling itself around the grounds. At the beginning of Hilary, Paula and I entertained the Fellows and their partners to a Twelfth Night supper in Hall, for which the after-dinner entertainment was provided by the renowned magician The Great Xa, who in his day job is Dr Alexander Sturgis, Director of the Ashmolean Museum and Fellow of the College. Then early in the summer vacation, we were sitting in the Rose Garden on a beautiful evening, only to hear the sublime sound of a semi-staged performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* wafting over from the Nuffield Lawn.

The Fellows of the College have as ever been working away, combining their teaching with their research. It's very important in these days of constrained government funding that the fruits of our academic labour should be savoured by the public, thus demonstrating the value of

education and learning to the nation and the world. For this reason, it is especially pleasing that among the most widely-reviewed and highly-praised books of this autumn's publishing season have been works by two of our Worcester historians, both of which will make excellent Christmas presents for all thoughtful readers: *Fighters in the Shadows* by Robert Gildea, Professor of Modern History, is a radical re-examination of the French Resistance which greatly complicates the received 'Gaullist' account, not least by emphasising the importance of women in the struggle against Nazism, while *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* by Peter Frankopan, Senior Research Fellow, is a work of immense range and panache.

Among this year's innovations has been the inauguration of what will become a regular series of 'in conversation' events in which we invite Old Members to hear a fellow Worcester graduate talk about their work in a particular walk of life, and then to ask questions and join them for a drink. The first such event, held in New York, featured our highest-profile Old Member: everybody has an opinion about Rupert Murdoch, but no one can doubt that he has had an impact upon the world, so it was fascinating to be given his own perspective on his time at Worcester, the development of his career, the transformation of the media over the last half century, and the challenges to traditional newspapers in the digital world. The second event, at the British Academy in London, was a conversation with Peter Kosminsky about his experience in directing the BBC television dramatisation of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*. This was full of illumination (not least on the subject of filming by candlelight) and is available in its entirety online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59ogCogZg0c&feature=youtu.be> (or you could just find it by googling something like 'Provost Kosminsky Wolf Hall'). We will continue to hold such events in London, New York and other cities, but once our new auditorium is complete in the Sultan Nazrin Shah Building – which is progressing daily and will be finished a year from now – we will also take the opportunity to bring speakers and audiences back to College.

The highest form of recognition that we offer to Old Members who have done great things in the world, or for the College, is election to an Honorary Fellowship. This year, maintaining the celebratory and expansive mood of the Tercentenary, we installed a bumper crop of new 'Hons'. Russell T. Davies OBE (English 1981) is Britain's most renowned and innovative television producer, the inventor of *Queer as Folk* and the

re-inventor of *Dr Who*. Sir Simon Donaldson FRS (D.Phil. Mathematics 1980), Professor at Imperial College and Stony Brook University, is one of the world's leading mathematicians of the topology of smooth (differentiable) four-dimensional manifolds (don't write to the Provost asking what they are); his work whilst a graduate student at Worcester won him an FRS, the Fields Medal and the Wallis Chair of Mathematics all before the age of thirty. Wing Commander Andy Green OBE (Mathematics 1980) is a British Royal Air Force fighter pilot and the World Land Speed Record holder; he was the first human being to break the sound barrier on land. Helen-Ann Hartley (D.Phil. Theology 1999), Bishop of Waikato, New Zealand, is the first female bishop to have trained for the priesthood in the Church of England. Sir Mark Jones (PPE 1969), former Director of the National Galleries of Scotland and then the V&A Museum, is now head of St Cross College; quite apart from his distinction as a curator and museum director, it is our tradition to award Honorary Fellowships to an Old Member who becomes Head of an Oxbridge House. David Loevner (Statistics 1976) has served the College loyally as chair of the trustees of the Sachs Scholarship which brings an outstanding Princeton graduate to Worcester each year; he also manages \$40 billion of assets with great integrity in his company Harding Loevner, and has donated £1 million to the Tercentenary Campaign. Rachel Portman OBE (Music 1979) is one of the world's leading film composers and was the first female composer to win an Oscar for Best Musical Score (for the film of Jane Austen's *Emma*). She was also nominated for Academy Awards for her scores for *The Cider House Rules* and *Chocolat*. Most recently, she wrote the score for *Belle* (by a nice coincidence, the tie-in book telling 'the true story behind the movie' was written by Lady Bate!).

On the subject of high achievement, we were also delighted that this summer Professor Sue Gillingham, our Tutorial Fellow in Theology, became a Doctor of Divinity, thus acceding to the most venerable of Oxford's higher degrees.

One of my own chief duties and pleasures is the leadership of our £100 million Campaign to secure and enhance the future of the College. We have made remarkable progress on this, thanks to magnificent gifts, pledges and intended legacies from our lead donors. This is not the place for a full report on the Campaign to date – that will appear elsewhere – but in looking back on the past year, I cannot resist recalling a few high points.

There was the opening of the new kitchens: thanks to the generosity of Sir Timothy Sainsbury and the Headley Trust, we have created a state of the art space for Head Chef Rob Dennis and his team to take Worcester food to an even higher level, whilst also responding with great architectural sensitivity to the materials and the feel of the very oldest quarter of the College. Then on the other side of the lake, there was the moment when I dug the first sod on the site of the Sultan Nazrin Shah Building overlooking the cricket pitch (Dr al-Akiti then took the spade to Kuala Lumpur to present to His Royal Highness). Nazrin's immense generosity to the College was further demonstrated by his hosting of a fabulous Tercentenary Dinner (with a very special cake) for Old Members from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan, and, some months later, by his gracious invitation for me to attend his enthronement as the thirty-fifth Sultan of Perak. The ceremonies lasted a full four days, mingling great formality and ancient tradition with moments of delightful informality and familial affection, including a karaoke rendering by the Sultan and the Provost of the number that was (allegedly?) the College Anthem when he was up in the late 1970s: Tom Jones's *Delilah*.

Barrie Wigmore in the United States and Ed Wray here in the UK are leading our Campaign with immense energy and great personal generosity. But the key to our success is the way in which so many people are contributing in all sorts of different ways. A significant endowment can only be built through the combination of individual and collective will. There was something symbolically appropriate this year about the manner in which we reached our target of unlocking two further 'match funded' endowed Fellowships – this is a scheme that assures the future of a Tutorial Fellowship in a particular subject by linking a new College endowment to a contribution from the University via the profits of Oxford University Press. One of the two came from great personal generosity: the Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones Fellowship in Modern Languages, endowed by the former head of L'Oreal in honour of Worcester's role in preparing a boy from Wallasey to become one of France's leading businessmen. The other came from the team effort of a large number of our Worcester lawyers: the College's senior Law post is now endowed in perpetuity as the Francis Reynolds Fellowship. Nothing could be more fitting than for us to honour Francis in this way.

In a College, every year has its entrances and its exits, arrivals and

departures of students, staff and Fellows. This year has seen the retirement of three of our most loyal and longstanding figures Professor Paul Ewart, our senior Fellow in Physics, Dr Stephen Williams, our Fellow and Tutor in Modern Philosophy, and Dr Joanna Parker, the College Librarian. (Appreciations of the first two of these will be found later in the *Record*.) Jo must be given special thanks for all the work she did on the College history and the Tercentenary exhibitions. We are delighted that she will maintain her connection with us by continuing to edit this *Record*.

So it has been another magnificent year for the College. From my perspective, it was marred only by the result of the annual cricket match between the Provost's XI and the JCR Leavers' XI. Whereas in 2014 yet one other Tercentenary high watermark was my personal role in a thrilling victory in the final over, summer 2015 was the year of defeat and the Provost's ignominious duck. Now that did bring a 'Morning After' sensation.

Sir Jonathan Bate

Provost

The Provost was awarded a knighthood in the New Year's Honours list for services to literary scholarship and higher education. His book, Ted Hughes: the Unauthorised Life, was published by Collins on 8 October.