

‘IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES’

The *Record* has two main functions: to keep Old Members in touch with ‘the state of the union’ here at Worcester and – as our title suggests – to provide an ongoing historical record of College life. The contributors to our tercentenary history, *Worcester: Portrait of an Oxford College* (copies still available!), could not have done their splendid work without reference to volume after volume of the *Record*. I have been thinking much about Worcester and history this year, through the highs and lows of what has been, to borrow Dickens’s phrase, the best of times and the worst of times.

A College is made by its people, and it is the losses that have been the worst of things. Early in the calendar year, I went down to Lewes in order to have lunch with Lord and Lady Briggs. I knew in my heart that it would probably be the last time that I would see Asa, and it was. But he was in fine mental fettle, the same fount of energy that he had always been in our meetings and telephone conversations throughout my first five years as Provost. As I left, he pressed into my hands his latest book, hot off the press: a debut collection of his poems. Not a bad end to a publishing career that spanned seven decades. A supreme ‘public intellectual’ before the term was invented, during his time as Provost he was also Chancellor of the Open University – and he managed to continue writing books on subjects ranging from his beloved Victorians through the history of the BBC to the story of Château Haut-Brion, the first and one of the greatest of clarets. Fittingly, at the beginning of October, representatives of the institutions to which he was so devoted – Worcester, the BBC, the University of Sussex and the OU – gathered in the lovely church of All Souls, Langham Place, beside the entrance to Broadcasting House, to celebrate his life and work.

This was also the year when we mourned the passing of James Campbell, from whom I learned so much about the history, both ancient and modern, of our College. The chapter on our predecessor-institution, Gloucester College, which he wrote for the tercentenary history, was a characteristic masterpiece of compression and clarity, scholarship and accessibility. And he was the first contributor to deliver, despite a number of illnesses during the time of writing. That

was typical, too. As for more modern times, I have happy memories of visits to his house in Witney where he would regale me with tales of old Governing Body battles lost and won, and of his pride in the great achievements of his generations of students, both those who have become distinguished historians themselves and those who have taken the memory of his legendary tutorials into the wider world.

Asa was in his nineties, James his eighties. The College's third great loss was the most grievous because it was so premature. David Bradshaw was a Fellow in English for over thirty years – effectively his entire working life – and he inspired tremendous devotion in his students, instilling in so many of them a passion for literary conversation and debate, and a lifelong love of the great writers of the modern era, such as Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot and Evelyn Waugh. This volume of the *Record* carries a moving tribute by his fellow tutor Edward Wilson. I never heard David say a bad word about anybody – a quality not universally shared in Oxford. His energy, his positive outlook and his love of every aspect of the College (especially the gardens and the activities on the sports field) were high on the list of reasons why I came to Worcester. It is a huge personal sadness that when he became ill he was on the brink of taking up the role of Vice-Provost, which he would have performed spectacularly well. We all miss him so much already.

There have been other, more routine departures. Worcester does everything so well that other Colleges have a tendency to poach from us. This year we lost our admirable Domestic Bursar, Tim Lightfoot, to Merton and our dedicated and supremely musical Chaplain, Jonathan Arnold, to Magdalen. Dean of Divinity in their great chapel is the perfect role for him, and we wish him all the very best there, but he will be a very hard act to follow, especially in the choral sphere. We also said goodbye to our quiet but brilliant Professor of Pure Mathematics, Roger Heath-Brown. A Fellow of the Royal Society, he is a man of exceptional distinction who will continue to do advanced mathematical things, incomprehensible to mere mortals, in his well-earned retirement.

Turning to the best of times. It has been another year of huge successes across the College. Sporting highlights have included Men's Hockey, in which we won both the League and Cuppers, and Netball, in which our women became Division One champions. The JCR and MCR Committees have overseen all sorts of good works, the Choir have

performed magnificently not only in Chapel but nationally and on tour internationally, and many individual students have done remarkable things – among which I must especially single out the achievement of Finalist Elizabeth Thompson, who won the inaugural Autosport Williams Engineer of the Future Award. A fiercely competitive new national competition, this sees an Engineering student from a UK university named as the rising star of Formula One engineering and supported with an accelerated career development programme at Williams, including live Grand Prix experience. Like so many of our talented graduands, Elizabeth is racing to a great future. In true Worcester fashion, her stellar academic performance did not stop her from also being captain of Ladies' Football and of College Darts.

I am not the person to say whether or not the Trinity Term promenade production of *Twelfth Night* in the Provost's Garden was a success: on that note, I am very happy to defer to our distinguished alumnus Peter Kosminsky (his review is to be found on p.66). But, without question, working on the show with my student director Georgia Figgis, an amazing Worcester production team, astonishingly gifted student actors cast from across the University, and the Lodgings' new puppy Coco Chanel, has been the single greatest pleasure of my first half-decade as Provost. It was very soon after I arrived in 2011 that I sat in the Rose Garden one day, looked at the row of immaculately clipped yew tree pillars, with a gravel path in front, and thought: this is the best setting anywhere in the world for Malvolio to walk along that path, find a letter and be watched from behind by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. To have realized that vision is a dream come true – and to have done so with such dedicated players and such a great crew was a truly uplifting experience. All my life I will remember the ending in which our Feste (who is, I am sure, an operatic star of the future), held in a single spotlight on the balustrade of the curved study steps, sang of how youth's a stuff will not endure, while the rest of the cast, gathered in an arc behind the silent audience, hummed the melody as the lonely Antonio, framed in another spotlight, gazed towards the Worcester Lake that stood in for the sea.

Peter Kosminsky was here because, hot on the heels of the television triumph of his *Wolf Hall*, we were installing him as an Honorary Fellow of his College. Beside him was Maria Djurkovic, whom we honoured

for her achievements as Oscar-nominated production designer of such beautifully realised films as *The Imitation Game*, *Mamma Mia!*, *The Hours*, *Billy Elliot* and *Sliding Doors*. Honorary Fellowships in thanks for munificent philanthropy were also bestowed on Mr Peter and Dr Gyongyver Kadas, who have most generously endowed a new Senior Research Fellowship in Geopolitics. And, because he was here, our longstanding Honorary Fellow and loyal College supporter Steve Isenberg took the opportunity to participate in the Latin Induction ceremony in Chapel. This was especially fitting in the year that we announced the endowment of the Isenberg Junior Research Fellowship in Twentieth-century English and American Fiction and Literary Journalism, a unique opportunity for a young scholar.

Another high point came at the end of a beautiful September when the College hosted the fiftieth anniversary celebration and conference of Resurgence, the organisation for ecology, sustainability and wellbeing, which is chaired by our Old Member James Sainsbury. The conference team sustained a huge logistical operation with aplomb, the chefs and catering staff pulled off a vegetarian triumph, winning plaudits from one of the speakers, a certain Mr Fearnley-Whittingstall, and we welcomed a hugely distinguished array of speakers, including in one day three Heads of Cambridge Colleges (a former Archbishop of Canterbury, a former Minister of Culture and a former Director of the National Trust), not to mention Caroline Lucas, co-leader of the Green Party; Michael Morpurgo, Children's Laureate, and Jonathon Porritt, former Director of Friends of the Earth, who said that he could not have imagined a better setting anywhere in Britain for such an event – not least, of course, due to the herbaceous border beside the medieval cottages, so beloved of James Campbell and David Bradshaw, glowing all through those four sunny days in such glorious autumnal colour.

Sir Jonathan Bate

Provost