

and friendliest colleges through the challenging years that everyone in higher education is about to face. My top priority will be the preservation of Oxford's distinctive tutorial system, while ensuring that access to the College is available to students of high potential, whatever their background. To achieve that goal we will need the support of all the College's Old Members and friends, as we plan a campaign of renewal leading up to Worcester's tercentenary in 2014.'

FROM THE LODGINGS WINDOWS

I sit seeking inspiration from the brown hills of western Sicily, for as usual I am writing *from* the Lodgings Windows not *through* them. I tell myself that these annual reflections are improved by the distance from the Lodgings at which I write them. But thoughts are hard to control on holiday. The lower slopes are covered in vineyards and olive groves, dotted with ruined farmhouses with such beautiful views that it is hard to resist fantasising about converting one into the perfect holiday villa. Meantime the counterpart of the ruined farmhouses, the industrial-scale farm at the bottom of the valley, growing melons and tomatoes in great polythene-covered tunnels, despatching and receiving tractors, trailers and mechanised attachments up to 10.30 at night, the heart of a revived *latifundia* system, provokes thoughts on the nature of change. How can we progress and yet conserve?

Last year I characterised 2008-9 as the Year of Procrastination, of Bated Breath, when many matters were put on hold because of the financial crisis, the impending General Election, or the Browne review of university finances. As if in riposte to my musings about 'the thief of time', Oxford University Press published in April a volume with that very title. Of course as a practising procrastinator I have not acquired the volume yet. But according to the reviewer in *Times Higher Education* the basic issue is: why do we irrationally refuse to make decisions essential to our long-term welfare? If the review has captured a multi-disciplinary discussion accurately I was wrong to charge last year with procrastination. The Year of Bated Breath was better; and now we know what happened we can confidently label 2008-9 the Year of the

Sensible Pause. 2009-10 has been, by contrast, the Year of Anticipation, of preparing for change.

During the year the Governing Body made two elections to carry the College on through the next decade and beyond. In January it appointed Andrew Jardine as Estates Bursar. When Colonel David King left in 1999, it was decided that Worcester should adopt the practice of most colleges and split the Bursar's job into two components. But at the time there was insufficient business to justify two full-time posts, and the Governing Body, always economical in administration, asked me to undertake the Estates Bursar role part-time. Over the past decade, partly though not wholly because of the big expansion in accommodation, the building of which has largely occupied my energies as Estates Bursar, the demands on the Bursars have greatly increased. Further, colleges are required to cope with increasing amounts of external legislation on matters like employment and transparency of operations, which, like all small businesses, they find burdensome. Some wealthier colleges have recently employed HR Managers: for us the appointment of a full-time Estates Bursar permits a re-organisation of duties between the Academic Administrator and the two Bursars. Andrew Jardine brings relevant experience from the Army, from the City, and as a Chartered Surveyor: the fabric and finances of the College are in safe hands for the future.

The other major decision the Governing Body has made this year has been to elect Professor Jonathan Bate to the Provostship following my own retirement, in accordance with the Statutes, on 31 July 2011. Professor Bate did his undergraduate and graduate work at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and it so happened that when the announcement of his appointment was imminent I was hosting a visit to the College from the St Catharine's College Society. This was their first official visit, and having done little enough to earn my title as an Honorary Fellow of that college I felt I should act as tour guide. It was a very enjoyable day, and it would have been fitting to be able to announce to the group at lunch that my successor was to be a distinguished scholar from amongst the St. Catharine's alumni; but the news was embargoed at the time. Mind you it could then have been much more difficult to deflect a couple of the more enthusiastic members, who asked to fly the St Catharine's flag from the Worcester

College flagpole to mark their visit. (They were persuaded to drape it over the Provost's Study steps for a group photograph instead.)

What was clear to me that Saturday, however, was that St Catharine's Old Members are very like Worcester Old Members, sociable, proud of their college, and generous in their appreciation. Jonathan Bate should have no difficulty in taking my place at Worcester College Society events and I hope he has as long and happy a time as Provost as I have enjoyed.

Whilst emphasising new developments in 2009-10 I ought also to report on some matters carried over from 2008-9, the Year of Bated Breath, or of the Sensible Pause. First, the sale of Ruskin College's Walton Street site to Exeter was completed in March, and Ruskin aims to have moved, in order to consolidate all its operations on its Headington site, by 2012. I have little doubt that in fifty years or so the Governing Body will be regretting that we should have been so foolish as to be out-bid, much as I regret that the opportunity to acquire Ruskin was apparently passed over by Sir John Masterman fifty years back. But at present it seems that it would have been a hugely expensive purchase, devastatingly so when interest rates rise. It is not as if the College does not have enough land to build on for the next century or so: the trick will be to site such buildings so that they do not destroy the great beauty of the gardens and grounds - the balance between progress and conservation to which I referred earlier.

And of course there must be some limit to the overall size of a college. In recent years undergraduate numbers throughout the University have stabilised, and the growth has been in graduate students. Their growth, in turn, has been prompted by two factors: the admirable vibrancy of Oxford research, particularly in the medical sciences, and the (somewhat less admirable, though understandable) growth of 'taught Masters' courses, most of whose fees are set in a competitive market, and accrue to the sponsoring faculty or department.

At present the further growth of graduate students is severely constrained by the determination of the City Council's planners that no more than 3,000 Oxford University students should be housed 'in the open market'. Irritatingly arbitrary though this policy is, it cannot be allowed to constrain the growth of the University's research and

thus its international standing. There is, for example, space for considerable expansion on two sites where the University already provides graduate housing, in Rose Hill/Iffley and off the Botley Road. But more University-provided housing for graduates would run contrary to the policy of the past two decades, namely to promote the better integration of graduates and graduate studies within colleges. Accordingly, colleges have spent millions of pounds constructing graduate accommodation which, because it cannot be let to summer schools or conferences in vacations, contributes little to their net revenues. At the same time the University's own policies have actually worked in the opposite direction, the great expansion of taught Masters degrees in the Humanities and, especially, the Social Sciences focusing on faculty-based seminars rather than, as was once the case for the BCL, college-based tutorials and classes.

For undergraduates, colleges are the focus of their academic and social life; it is this integration, made possible by endowment, on-going benefactions, and fees, which differentiates colleges from the halls of residence elsewhere. But if a graduate student is housed by the University down the Iffley Road, and spends his or her day in the labs in Parks Road, in the Social Studies centres in Manor Road, or in the planned Humanities Faculty buildings on the old Radcliffe Infirmary site, what role does the college play?

On a rough estimate about a third of colleges have the space, though not necessarily the resources, to build substantial amounts of graduate accommodation on, or very close to, their main college site. Even after losing the Ruskin College site to Exeter, we at Worcester could, with care, add perhaps another eighty rooms (though the City Planners, who created part of the problem with their 3000 ceiling, are not always prepared to contribute to its solution.) If the other dozen colleges on my list could contribute as many as Worcester (again, I am speaking only of the physical space, and disregarding the finances) they could provide for the current rate of expansion of graduates in the University as a whole for about a decade. After that either the City Council is persuaded to change its mind, or graduate expansion has to take place with increased housing only on University-owned, remote, sites. Or undergraduate numbers have to be reduced.

This latter course seems increasingly unlikely. As I reported last

year, one of the matters put on hold during 2008-9 was the review of student tuition fees, entrusted to Lord Browne, his report cunningly requested for the autumn of 2010, *after* the General Election, just as the Dearing Report was postponed until after the 1997 election. In each case these were 'true' procrastinations, following the definition of the OUP volume – the government irrationally refusing to make decisions essential to long-term welfare. Through the conflicting leaks and counter-leaks within the coalition (which leads one to wonder why ministers set up committees to give wise consideration to difficult issues and then blurt out their own ill-considered solutions; and even more to marvel that convenors with the standing of Lord Browne put up with it), it seems clear that some kind of increase in resources per undergraduate will be recommended. At the same time, the Research Councils have recently made it clear that they will not pay additional college fees for the graduate students they support at Oxford.

So, if undergraduates come with *more* resources (leave aside whether funded by a graduate tax, an enhanced loan, or whatever ingenious system can be devised which the Coalition Government can get through Parliament) and for graduate students college fees have to be met out of research support grants, or have to be self-funded, it is unlikely, at the college level that undergraduate numbers will be planned to fall. Hence if the City Council's 3000 constraint continues to bind, more graduate housing will need to be provided by the University.

And beyond that.....? Will all graduates continue to have to be members of colleges, or will it be an option, in return for a fee? Would the better-endowed colleges then subsidise graduates from their endowments, giving Oxford at least three classes of graduates: those without any college attachment; those with a college attachment for which they themselves pay a fee; and those at colleges which charge low or even no fees? Such developments would be very divisive, and it is not difficult to imagine that in the longer-term the group without a college attachment would predominate.

College fees for graduate students, like those for undergraduates, comprise two basic elements: a contribution to the overhead costs of maintaining the College physically and administratively, and a contribution to academic costs. But whereas for undergraduates this

latter contribution is easy to justify, for graduates, who are nowadays unlikely to be taught or supervised directly by an academic based in their own college, the audit trail is more complex. A graduate student at St Matthew's College is supervised by a Fellow of St Mark's; a graduate of St Mark's is supervised by a Fellow of St Luke's; two graduates at St Luke's attend Masters degree classes taught by a Fellow of St James'; three graduate students from St James' are in a small research seminar led by a Fellow of St Matthew's. In each case the Fellows are paid part of their total emoluments by their own College, and the figures broadly work out.

By now regular readers will be grumbling, 'Yet again he's going on about money'. Naturally – and I want to say why this is such a recurring theme in these pieces a little later. But for the moment let us return to the challenge of colleges of an increasing number of graduate students. I have suggested that housing, preferably on or very close to the main College site, is a key to integration. Other strategies might be for colleges to concentrate their graduate students somewhat, so that intra-college seminars can occur, and some graduate students can gain vital experience in teaching: this happens in a few subjects in Worcester now, and some richer colleges have further institutionalised the idea by having college-based research centres or themes, attracting post-doctoral students and established visiting scholars, too.

Three or four major reports have considered the further integration of graduates into the Collegiate University over the last twenty years. Little consideration, however, has been given to another very important group – post-doctoral researchers, upon whose skills much of the University's research reputation depends. At Worcester we have tried to respond by greatly expanding the number of Junior Research Fellowships, and providing a route whereby, after their two or three years as JRFs, outstanding young scholars can continue their association. But we are all too aware, if only from the quality of those who apply for these competitions, in the Sciences and Humanities in alternate years, that we are scratching at the surface.

To my mind the greatest problem Oxford University faces is indeed one of how to progress and yet conserve. If Oxford is to remain a collegiate university in any meaningful sense, the colleges must evolve to be inclusive of and relevant to all, to undergraduates, graduates,

post-doctoral researchers, and established academics alike. How large a college can be whilst still retaining that humane scale which evokes college loyalty in its present and former members (the correct designation Old Members making the point that membership is life-long) I do not know: colleges have proved remarkably adaptable over the centuries. In the mid-1950s Provost Masterman had been struggling to keep total numbers to 250, but at his retirement in 1961 they had risen to about 300. Now, the College is more than twice that size, but I hope that 'J.C.' would still approve of it: certainly we get both more Firsts and more Blues, proportionately, than in his day, and, increasingly often, men and women achieve both – the kind of all-round talent he admired and himself embodied.

Last year I praised an outstanding generation of undergraduates, over 30% of whom got Firsts. In the past I have strongly criticized the Norrington Table because of the arbitrary weights it assigns to classes of degree, because it does not allow for the different distributions of these classes within different subjects, and because someone in any college who gets a First (which is heavily weighted in the table) may well have received much of their teaching outside their own college. So this year I am caught - for our proportion of Firsts rose further, and the College's performance took it to eighth place in the Norrington Table, our highest position for over twenty years. Since quite small changes – less than one per cent – can change a college's Norrington Table position by four or five places, it is perhaps more meaningful to look at longer term trends. So whilst warmest congratulations are due to this year's finalists, it is especially pleasing to note the steady improvement over the last five years.

In 2003 the Governing Body committed itself to housing all its undergraduates for the whole of their courses, whether these were three, or increasingly four, years long, principally at the urging of the Tutor for Admissions, who felt that it would improve and widen the College's attraction for applicants. This the building programme has certainly done; but traditionalists may find reassurance in the frequency with which the beauty of the gardens and the proximity of the sports field are also mentioned when undergraduates are asked why they applied here. For all our recent academic success we remain a balanced and caring community, suffused with the good sense and

tolerance which I like to think we imbibe from our remote Benedictine founders – a kind of spell they have cast over the site.

If only the Black Monks had also left us a legacy of endowment; if only, as it seems the Benedictines originally intended, the staunchly independent monasteries and abbeys which sent their members to study here had established a corporate body – St Benedict's College it would probably have been called. This institution could itself have received the resources which the individual houses expended here, could have husbanded them, and would not have lost them at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, because those resources would have belonged to a college, not to separate religious organisations.

Still, we must turn what they did leave us – a site of great beauty – into a kind of endowment, by using our bedrooms intensively during vacations for conferences and summer schools. We lack only a large lecture theatre and associated seminar rooms in order fully to exploit our advantages, and these are currently being planned.

Of course, if the Browne Committee were to recommend a truly major increase in undergraduate tuition fees, say to the level charged by leading independent schools (which, when you think about it, are good comparators: they, too, are, mostly, charities; their staff are no better qualified, nor more worthy of good salaries; their buildings are no more in need of restoration and renovation) then our ability to weather the coming reductions in public expenditure would be hugely enhanced. But even if Browne were to recommend such a change, it is highly unlikely that any government, and certainly not a coalition, one of whose partners is against tuition fees at all, would enact it. So British universities will, I fear, remain uniquely under the kinds of control which produced such third rate results in the nationalised enterprises of the post-war era. Their 'output' in terms of student numbers is tightly controlled – universities are penalised both if they exceed and if they fall below their 'contract range'. Their government grants, both for current and for capital expenditure, are too low. And the prices they can charge – for tuition fees or for research – are strictly limited. Mediocrity is bound to follow. Yet all the time politicians pay lip-service to 'the knowledge-based economy' and the competitive importance of a 'highly-skilled labour force' (no-one even thinks to mention the importance of education for its own sake).

In an important article in *The Times* recently (15th August) Professor Alison Wolf wondered whether the dominance of Oxbridge in the current leadership of all three main British political parties distorts policy towards higher education in general because ‘the distinctiveness of Oxbridge means that our elite have little feeling for how contemporary British universities operate.’ ‘The key players, she argued, ‘don’t know, in their bones, that current state funding levels do not and cannot provide the education they enjoyed.’ Oxbridge’s resources ‘have protected, so far, the individualised practices of a bespoke or cottage industry. The rest of us have moved into mass production.’ Even at King’s College, London, where Dr Wolf is Professor of Public Sector Management, her experience is of central on-line admissions processes; of modular degrees, each course assessed, more or less as soon as it is finished, by the academic teaching it; of modules dropped or re-adopted, as staff leave, are hired, or are bought out on research grants; of unpopular degrees ‘folded into an ever-greater selection of joint offerings’ wherein cross-departmental options ‘promise enticing economies of scale’. She concluded:

The middle-aged were educated in a different system; at Oxbridge, our future rulers still are. There, full-time students take final examinations set centrally, not by the people who teach them. They learn in tiny groups, and receive weekly personalised feedback on non-assessed work: by far the best way to learn, and something that has pretty much vanished elsewhere. And they are selected through intensive scrutiny of their work, and face-to-face interviews.

It is splendid and expensive. But students at Oxford and Cambridge pay exactly the same fees as in Newcastle or Plymouth. They do not see how different these universities are, or that the Oxbridge system is highly precarious, maintained by enormous cross subsidies, endowments, and rich alumni.

On current form Oxbridge dominance looks set to endure, or indeed increase. It might not, of course, if costs force both universities to slash quality. And it might not, conversely, if we made it possible and attractive for some other universities to promote intensive teaching. But our current politics, combining fiscal pressures with a protected Oxbridge elite, is bad news for the quality of undergraduate education.

There are many points here which deserve lengthy examination. First, why was the vast expansion of higher education pursued when it was clear from the outset that what Professor Wolf deftly calls the ‘different system’ in which ‘the middle-aged’ were educated could not be afforded? Secondly, why could high-quality mass higher education not be afforded – in other words why are universities an easier target for public sector cuts than schools or hospitals? Maybe it is because voters have an implicit time-frame for what economists call public goods, wanting to see them concentrated on the basic education of the young and the care of the elderly or unfortunate. If so, why is there also such resistance to charging economic fees? Maybe that is because of a very strong egalitarian instinct. In which case why do politicians promote national and international comparisons, priding themselves on British universities’ attractiveness to full fee-paying overseas students?

Again, if one were to follow Professor Wolf, and ‘make it possible for *some* other universities [my emphasis] to promote intensive teaching’, how many? which? Perhaps Professor Wolf has in mind a ‘tiered’ university structure, as in California, with the University of California system including places like Berkeley and UCLA, the State university system, and vibrant community colleges? But all the evidence is that we seem, in Britain, unwilling to accept that different institutions can each be very good at doing different jobs in different ways: witness the taunting of the Vice-Chancellors of Oxford and Oxford Brookes by a Select Committee a couple of years back.

Public policy towards higher education is indeed a terrible mess, and I am very much afraid we cannot expect any joy of it, whatever the Browne Committee concludes. But in one respect Professor Wolf is herself in danger of holding out-of-date views: it is certainly not the case that present undergraduates at Worcester are unaware of how different and precarious their experience is. Social networking sites keep them in close touch with school friends at other universities. They know why their room charges have to rise, why they have to vacate their rooms promptly at the end of term; and teams of them are trained to ask Old Members for their contribution, through telethons. This year, again, our students performed wonderfully, and Old Members responded magnificently, pledging nearly 10% more than last year’s £250,000. For these difficult times these are superb achievements.

Incidentally, they go against another of Professor Wolf's descriptions, that of Oxford being sustained by 'rich alumni'. We do indeed have some rich alumni, who have been most generous to us. But we are also conscious of how many who give to telethons and other appeals are not rich, and give what they can precisely to sustain the quality of education they enjoyed and want to see available to the next generation, despite government policy. *Pace* Professor Wolf, we do know both how special and how precarious our position is; we know we have to show that we deserve Old Members' support; and I am confident that we are meeting this challenge.

That is the message I shall be taking to Old Members round the world next year as I seek to hand on the best possible situation to my successor. The Lodgings windows will, at times, be very far away, and I will have to write my last column as I go, for by the time of my annual holiday I shall be out of office. Moreover, I suspect that after twenty years my view through the Lodgings Windows will be misty. But on those long flights I must get around to reading that book on procrastination.

R.G.S.

The Provost's year has taken him from exotic locations like Kendal (where he spoke at the AGM of the Westmorland Branch of the Oxford University Society, of which he continued to act as Treasurer), the Nuffield Sports and Social Club in Cowley (where he was delighted to be present to see the Worcester Gardens Team take the Gold Medal, once he had discovered that his Google map was unaware that BMW had built a new Mini production line across its suggested route) and St Paul's, Knightsbridge (for the concert given by the Chapel Choirs of Worcester and St Catharine's College, Cambridge), to more mundane places like Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Boston and Washington for alumni events. Fortuitously the American timetable meant that the volcanic ash cloud did not affect his scheduled flight home, but did prevent Dr Gillingham from joining him for the University alumni events in New York: he will long remember being woken in San Francisco with the message that his wife could not fly out 'because of the volcano at Heathrow'.

He remained a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, chairing the Trustees of the Higher Studies Fund and the Curators of the University Parks, and convening the electors for the Pearson Professorship of Educational Assessment. Notable

economist visitors to the Lodgings were Dr Haruhiko Kuroda (1969) President of the Asian Development Bank, Dr Noer Hassan Wirajuda (1975) former Indonesian Foreign Minister, and HRH Raja Dr Nazrin Shah (1976) Crown Prince of Perak, Malaysia.

SCR NEWS AND ACTIVITIES

ADMINISTRATIVE

Andrew Jardine joined the College at Easter as Estates Bursar. His last position was as Manager of the Berkeley and Spetchley Estates, which include Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire. He was educated at Charterhouse, held a short-service Commission in the Army for four years and then worked in financial services in a number of roles in London and New York. In 1993, his career took a change of direction; he embarked on a B.Sc. in Rural Land Management at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester/University of Reading, obtaining a first class, and qualified as a Chartered Surveyor. He subsequently managed a number of estates in Southern England.

Jane Gover, the Academic Registrar and Tutor for Admissions, was elected to a Fellowship.

ART

Christopher Brown is to be congratulated on the re-opening of the Ashmolean Museum in August to great acclaim. The design by Rick Mather Architects has been shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling prize 2010; the winner will be announced on 2 October.

BIOCHEMISTRY

Mark Howarth organised the first Worcester Science Expo in June in the Linbury Room, to provide a new opportunity for interaction between all the scientists associated with the College. Participants could submit posters or artifacts or just come along to find out about the work of other Worcester scientists. There was a good turn-out from JRFs and graduate students, while a number of Fellows also presented their research. Most people presented posters, but there were also