

Gazette Supplement



Encaenia 2020

Congregation

24 June

1 Conferment of Honorary Degrees

The annual Encaenia celebrations, due to take place on Wednesday, 24 June, were cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who were due to receive honorary degrees in 2020 (see *Gazette* No 5266, 13 February 2020, p248) will instead be honoured in June 2021.

2 Encaenia

Encaenia also commemorates the benefactors of the University through the Creweian Oration. The text of this year's Oration by the Public Orator, although not delivered live in the Sheldonian, is given below:

Harum memoria et recordatio in maximis nostris gravissimis curis iucunda sane fuit. In this 351st year of the Sheldonian Theatre, and something like that of the Creweian Oration itself, ceremonies have been mothballed, the orator unable to stand above those strange *fasces* in the Proctor's Box to pose the risky request: *Honoratissime Domine Cancellarie, licetne Anglice loqui?* Always a tense moment, this, at which a more conservative Chancellor could one day decide, and require his orator, to inflict a long Latin lesson on those assembled, as was once customary. Hence the precaution of introductory Latin words borrowed (and feminised) from Cicero, for we have also been deprived of the company of our eight distinguished *honorandae* – happily we plan to welcome them properly in 2021 – who were to help us celebrate another Sheldonian anniversary, this hundredth year since women first collected degrees in that fine building.

'To recall their memory', says the transitioned Latin, 'in the midst of the great anxieties of the present has been a pleasant relief'; while gender this year is noticed in many other arenas, not least the international and epidemiological. As a joint male-female-authored article in

the *Guardian* delicately put it, 'Plenty of countries with male leaders have also done well. But few with female leaders have done badly.'

So, while we modestly celebrate, and ponder, our place in the world and our chequered history, this year saw no celebratory fanfare by a gifted Oxford composer, no display of Oxford's distinguished choral achievements in the musical interludes *ut nos delectarent*, no Latin eulogies on our guests or proud public recognition of our own student prize-winners, or celebrations of our sporting achievements (instead we praise the sure-footed and effective strategy off pitch of a Manchester United striker), no Encaenia lunch or garden party, and no communal singing of the national anthem and much-needed reminder of the words of verse 2. No, experts have told us that singing involves breathing in and out, and that brings danger. But some hymning of our friends and benefactors is to be done nevertheless, this being a primary purpose of the Creweian, and I promise to 'do my best'.

Meanwhile monuments and artefacts keep us in mind of human history. Our museums have kept faith and 'virtual' contact with us, while inside them civilisations reside in steadfast and exemplary coexistence, subject to occasional new arrivals and therewith to enhancement of their deeply pluralist communities. This year the Sarikhanis, a family we know well and greatly esteem as patrons of the Ashmolean, have through a significant donation made possible a re-display of the Ancient Near East Art collection. Using a 'research-led approach' (what else?) the museum now plans, in its own words, to make the collection more accessible and relevant to a broader audience.

Three years ago we welcomed the Ashmolean's acquisition, through a

vigorous campaign and donations from local people, visitors and friends of the museum, of an 1810 oil painting by Turner which had been there only on loan for many years. 'One of the most beautiful streets in Europe', said the Ashmolean, with justifiable pride. There were naturally no buses in this most serene of townscapes, no bars to traffic, for there was no traffic, not even bicycles. But Turner did add, 'for colour' we were told, some gowned members of the University offset by townspeople and clergy. It was hardly imaginable that anything comparable would ever be observable these two hundred and more years later, at least during waking daylight hours, but for weeks on end we have experienced an unearthly, to most of us unsettling, serenity in that same street – hardly a don or clergyman or townspeople in sight, and certainly no gowns. The photographer's delight, maybe – camera in hand one morning in April I met the then outgoing Senior Proctor, also camera in hand – but in the end surely too much of a good thing, and whatever of Cecil Rhodes's actions and achievements may be lauded or deplored, we must acknowledge his function in 're-enlivening the High Street', and his ongoing obligation to focus our minds on improving both our knowledge of history and our record of equal opportunities for all. That will be a legacy 'more enduring than bronze', one that 'will not wholly die'.

This must be the moment, then, to thank Mother Nature respectfully for the lives and achievements of so many of our friends and colleagues who passed away over the last twelve months. I call to mind John Gardner, Sir Michael Howard, Stephen Cretney and Myles Burnyeat, former Fellows of All Souls; Wilfred Beckerman, Jasper Griffin and Stefano Zachetti of Balliol; Sir Roger Scruton of Blackfriars; Peter Sinclair and Sir Fergus Millar of Brasenose; Peter Warner of Exeter;

Sir John Houghton of Jesus; Keble's former Warden George Richardson and Fellows Steve Rayner, Jim Griffin and Bryan Magee; Cathy Oakes, Fellow of Kellogg; Margery Ord of Lady Margaret Hall; Linacre's Rom Harré, Fellow, and Peter Savill, Emeritus Fellow; Lincoln's former Rector Sir Eric Anderson and Fellows Elman Poole, Kenneth Sowards-Shaw, Audrey Tucker and Sir Rex Richards, sometime our Vice-Chancellor; Sir Jack Baldwin of Magdalen; Peter Dickens of New College; Vernon Butt and John Platt of Pembroke; Brian McGuinness and Michael Gautrey of The Queen's College; St Antony's Fellows Derek Hopwood and Anthony Nicholls; from St Catherine's Nelson French, Sir James Gowans and Michael Shotton; Lesley Forbes of St Cross; Margaret Rayner of St Hilda's; Donald Russell of St John's; Patrick Fitzgerald and Canon Trevor Williams of Trinity; University College's Brian Loughman and Roy Park; Wadham's Richard Sharpe; Nick Allen and Philip Lewis of Wolfson; and Norman Stone of Worcester. The list is distinguished but sadly long, and yet there will be omissions of names that have not come to my attention, but I thank our Heads of Houses for their warm commendations of the names I do have. *Non omnes moriuntur*. I owe my own special words of affection in remembering Donald Russell, one of the world's leading classical scholars, whose kindly humanity and honest criticism were invaluable to me and others in our composing of Latin orations. Even in my quite senior years I felt a schoolboy's pride when he told me he had found no errors – 'and believe me, I was looking for them!' – and then of course proceeded to make 'one or two tentative suggestions...'

We have been to an unusual degree 'at the mercy of the sky's caprices', as Camus describes the embattled population of Oran, and flora and fauna have flourished over this strange period of uneasy calm. Not so long ago we were able to confer a Master of Arts degree on the retiring, but still highly active, curator of our parks and gardens. With his and his successors' stewardship, Mother Nature, apparently so uneven in Her dealings with mankind this year, has chosen to smile on our environment, while we left it more alone, as if almost to exclude us from her earthly paradise.

As Orator I was asked a little while ago to help name, or at least Latinise, a new baby, that is to say what we thought for a time was to be called Parks College. It was a fine opportunity to signal the way, both alongside and towards, 'paradise' (this being the beautiful ancient word for a 'park') among all the other things that have excited

much debate and comment around the University; let it stand on record that for a brief time we had an embryonic *Collegium in Via Paradisi*.

Names are often impermanent, but there are continuities, and life goes on. The baby is Reuben (רֵאוּבֵן), 'Behold, a boy', and the college is now, consequent upon the magnificent core endowment from the Reuben Family and Foundation, to be so named, no doubt in a happy alliance of Latin and Hebrew. Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Environmental Change and Cellular Life will be the beneficiaries, not to mention graduate scholars and new colleagues in the college's fellowship, new close neighbours – nay, even cohabitant partners – to the Radcliffe Science Library. We needed good news, and here, says the Vice-Chancellor, is a 'powerful vote of confidence in the power of research to solve societal problems, and above all, a powerful vote of confidence in the future'.

Lest we be too diffident in registering this vote, we may log in and hear the inaugural lecture of our new Alfred Landecker Professor of Values and Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government. And as an overture, listen to the Head of that School remind us of its stated mission. 'What the school has been built to do', she says, 'is quite simply to improve government, which of course is not simple at all. What we're seeking to do is to find, to educate, to support a new and better kind of leadership in politics around the world... and at the same time to engage people in a world where young and old seem to want to scream at each other more than to sit and listen, and to engage people in actually working with people that they disagree with, to work on making government work better and making our society work better, at what for many people is a pretty difficult moment.'

In the words of Professor Wolff, for whose arrival with us we may thank the Alfred Landecker Foundation and its endowment of both the chair and an extended programme of research, 'There never has been a more urgent time to understand the persecution of minorities and articulate and reaffirm the values underlying open, liberal, democracy.' That was a memorial day some months ago, 27 January, but the 'time' is ever more with us. The professor drew material from the 1930s to encourage some reflection on what we are doing with the 2020s, or rather perhaps what the 2020s are doing to us. At times of uncertainty and anxiety it is important to see some of the calls for 'strong leadership' for what they are, and to

remember that in the past the democratic process has been an available, and then by and by a dispensable, path towards dictatorship and oppression.

It was a danger my father, himself a refugee from tyranny, wanted me to be particularly aware of during his later days, and my earlier days, in England, a country which he had seen as a political haven, perhaps even a paradise, when he first came here in 1935. He was a biophysicist, and he impressed on his students (and his sons) the importance of those scientists who applied the most rigorous methods of mathematics and physics in the fields of biology and medicine. I naturally take great personal interest and pleasure in noting the establishment of a new chair in this subject, namely the Alexander Mosley Professorship endowed by the Trust of that name, already a generous friend to the University distinguished by gifts including support of the Physics Clarendon Laboratory and of St Peter's College and Lady Margaret Hall.

One of our honorands, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, came to England with her family in somewhat similar conditions, and has written much to warn us of the kinds of things we heard about in that Blavatnik School lecture. We may hope that by the time we receive her in Oxford next June we will have seen more clearly that Hell is only one of our possible destinations, at the end of a path not taken. The former senator has shown herself one among eloquent recent authorities on 'special places' there, and she will note with pleasure that we have strengthened our interest in women's studies; through the imagination and generous gifts of friends and donors, among whom I must mention particularly Ms Ann Drake, we are to have an endowed senior post, the Hillary Rodham Clinton Chair in Women's History, to secure the study of women's history and encourage more young scholars to pursue doctorates in related subjects.

There are several advantages in switching from Latin to English. Students of Latin composition – I know this so well – are sometimes in difficulty when they search for a Latin word to translate 'proud' that carries no collateral suggestion of arrogance or vainglory. We have felt perhaps more cautious English emotions, but I think some justified pride, this year as Oxford scientists and other experts were heard far and wide in struggling, and gaining some signal success, against formidable foes. Teaching and lecturing was, if I may put it in British English, not entirely unsuccessful, and more effective than many of us had foreseen; but

much of our 'lockdown' was that of long-serving, tireless investigation and industry in our studies and laboratories, while many of those high achievers somehow also found the time to keep us informed and briefed, sometimes even encouraged with a little optimism. It is, as always, pleasant to remind ourselves and others how many of our colleagues have been honoured nationally and internationally; six current Oxford academics are among this year's new Fellows of the Royal Society, seven of the British Academy, and Professor (now Sir) Peter Donnelly, a former Rhodes Scholar who has been a pioneer in bringing statistical methods to genetic science, is among those recognised in the Queen's New Year and Birthday Honours lists.

Expertise is, it seems, back on the agenda. I suppose as a University we are entitled to say we can never have enough of it. Socrates, if I correctly understand him through his most gifted student, was suspicious of democracy largely because he felt expertise took second place to mob rule which might easily result in those clamours for dictatorship alluded to above. In our own republic of letters we should respect both our tested due process and the use of evidence and argument. And where human frailty might let us down we look forward to ever more productive collaboration between man and machine. What, then, is not to be praised in a munificent donation from Amazon Web Services to support research projects in the Oxford Robotics Institute, the Cyber Physical Systems Group and the Human Centred Computing Group? A particular further beneficiary will be the new Lighthouse Doctoral Scholarship Programme, which will provide funding to 25 students applying for doctoral training in 'autonomous intelligent machines and systems' and in the human-machine collaboration.

Those of us with more literary interests will appreciate the value and quality of metaphors, and it is comforting to think of knocking a virus on the head (whichever end of a sphere that may be, but the metaphorist is a clever chap) and coming out of hibernation in July, in keeping with those capricious British skies. But great crises need expertly guided action. Our leaders select, and of course follow, scientific advice, Delphic though this may sometimes appear when presented to us of the governed classes through the words of the governors. The application of 'world-leading' measures and devices can be called both 'essential' and 'icing on the cake', depending who asks what and when. I grant it is true that icing is essential to some cakes.

But we need further precision, and that is what our scientists will always aim for, greatly assisted by those who effectively trust their research and are in a position to support it. We remain wary of claiming international preeminence in any field, even when league tables might lend us some heartwarming statistics. Looking beyond the University, some of this year's statistics have been less heartwarming. But we have in Oxford a fine cross-disciplinary Centre for Device-Mediated Immuno-Therapies, bringing together researchers in electrical and mechanical engineering, chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacology and clinical medicine and surgery. We thank Mr Donald Porteous for generously helping this important collaborative work in our Institute of Biomedical Engineering; his donation will be specifically directed at work in oncology drug delivery.

We move on, in what appears to be a transition from fossil fuels and perhaps outmoded economies. Global problems, and some global leaders, focus our minds on what is now rather generally called 'sustainable development'. In Oxford we are to host and support five more postgraduate scholars each year from member countries of the Islamic Development Bank. I commend for attention two pages on the internet - first, the list (www.isdb.org/isdb-member-countries) of these 57 countries, with helpful further information on the state of their populations and economies, and secondly our Development Office's announcement, with statesmanly documentary photograph, of the deal being signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the President of the IDB. The graduate scholars will be studying 'science, technology and innovation' to the betterment, let us hope, of both their own countries and ours.

'If people struggle to recognise what is true and what isn't, the only people to benefit are liars, crooks, and tyrants. If you have no agreed facts to work on, then nothing in a good society works.' These salutary words come from the chairman of our Reuters Institute steering group. But 'facts', for all the brandishing of statistics and more or less expert opinions, have been elusive over these last months. Last week the Institute hosted a lecture on public sector broadcasting and trust in dangerous times. I believe an hour can be profitably, if uncomfortably (and therefore all the more profitably), spent in listening to this examination of how far journalism in our countries helped or hindered us through this phase of a crisis. Further than this, here was a self-critical confession that journalism could have mobilised itself more effectively,

for instance allowing us to hear more from specialists in science and medicine and less from political editors who lacked relevant knowledge and critical strategies. The lecture is well in tune, I think, with the aims of the Thomson Reuters Foundation's latest of many thoughtful and effective Oxford interventions, namely a large grant to the Reuters Institute to explore and promote the future of journalism through debate, engagement and research.

A Balliol alumnus, himself a former journalist and less of a scientist, is on record, as I have previously remarked, for sometimes favouring the Greek over the Roman side of his educational heritage. He has, somewhat inauspiciously, invoked the Greek leader Pericles and that paragon's eloquent leadership in the midst of great anxieties. I wonder if what he had in mind was the funeral oration delivered by the Athenian a little while before the outbreak of an epidemic plague (and Pericles' own decidedly final downfall). In the translation by one of our eminent Wadham-trained classicists, we read: 'Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else.' A pleasant fantasy, but verging on the hybriatic; I rather think it may be the other way round. Still, there was a time when our leader saw himself more as the Roman Cincinnatus *redux*. We'll spare a thought for the legends of early Rome. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, we remember, was recalled from obscurity at a moment of crisis to don once more the senatorial toga and step into the breach as dictator. We remember also that the same Cincinnatus showed unique and fabulous discernment in relinquishing power at the right moment.

'The word politics, sir,' said Samuel Pickwick to Count Smorltork, 'comprises, in itself, a difficult study of no inconsiderable magnitude.' We rejoice in the complexity of words and their meanings. Some of my colleagues have recently enriched the everyday Oxford lexicon with the formerly underused 'ventriloquise'. Their observation was a reproof, but statues themselves might on some occasions be useful speaking authorities. Some years ago a new Fellow of All Souls had, at the anxious moment of his formal admission, inadvertently declared that he would obey the college statutes, rather than statues. A promise is a promise, but my late friend Martin West, true to his problem-solving talents, had the idea of fitting the statue with a tape recording of the college statutes, and then all would be well.

Some have written in praise of forgetting, but I prefer to think we start well by remembering. When offering the sad but (healthily) proud *In Memoriam* for our departed colleagues I am normally unable to go through the extraordinary list of our recently departed Honorary Fellows. It is not that I am unaware of their number, or of their eminence and their outstanding contributions to, and outside, our University. I have read their obituaries, and have stood in awe. This year I call one to mind who died in March at the age of 95, namely Professor Eldred Jones, graduate and Honorary Fellow of Corpus Christi College, later principal and pro-vice-chancellor of Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the oldest university institution in sub-Saharan Africa. Please read the moving short obituary notice on the Corpus website. His 'life under

two flags' may be studied in a 2012 book by James Currey, but I can recommend a primary source, *Othello's Countrymen* (OUP, 1963), at the end of which Jones concludes that 'by the oblique route of a study of the use made of Africa by Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, the triumphant genius of Shakespeare can once more be demonstrated.'

'Be prepared!' said Peter Piot of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in a 2018 lecture (please listen to it) on the subject of pandemics. I recognise the idea, and its expression, as a former boy scout, admittedly a rather bolshy one though I remember standing to attention and thinking we meant what we said every Friday night, in one part of the 'law', that a scout 'is a friend to all, and a brother to every

other Scout, no matter to what country, class or creed the other may belong.' I believe the 'law' has since changed to something more inclusive, and I see with interest that some veterans have moved in to stand guard by their founder's statue in Poole. 'Prepared for what?' Baden-Powell was once asked. 'Why, for any old thing,' he replied. As has been so clear this year, we have many friends and supporters, we have fine colleagues, and we have students of excellent calibre to help us face, and engage with, whatever old thing may come, but let us also learn, *pace* Pericles, from our neighbours. We know who they are. And may all 'special advisers' know, whether or not they recall their ancient history, that *imperare sibi maximum imperium est* (Seneca: 'the greatest power of ruling consists in controlling oneself').