



ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Lent Term 2019

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International Women's Day
Special Edition

Welcome

to our recent new staff!



► **IMAGE CREDITS: St John's College**

- 1 George Reynolds**
Student Services Officer (maternity cover)
- 2 Emilio Ruiz Diaz**
General Kitchen Assistant
- 3 Nicola Wilkinson**
Pastry Chef
- 4 Ryan Millard**
Plumbing and Heating Engineer
- 5 Andy Ison**
General Labourer
- 6 Zoltan Zadova**
Vegetable Chef
- 7 Jason Barker**
Bar Manager
- 8 Karson Kung**
Gender Equality Research Associate
- 9 Sonja Rajcic-Jocic**
Deputy Linen Room Supervisor
- 10 Matthew Lord**
Chef de Partie
- 11 James Proctor**
Choir Marketing & Communications Officer
- 12 Kristina Vargova**
Functions Assistant

A crowd of well-wishers, past and present, gathered in Hall to wish Sandra Rodgers well as she embarked on her next phase of life.

Sandra, Deputy Linen Room Supervisor in the Housekeeping department, retired in December after 28 years at St John's.

For more news from the Housekeeping department, turn to Page 12 to read our interview with Louise Offley, Bedmaker, who is the longest serving member of staff in Housekeeping.



Welcome to *Eagle Eye*,
the newsletter for staff,
Fellows and students of
St John's College

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Eagle Eye

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Cover image: The female members of the JCR in New Court. Credit: St John's College

Note from the Editor

Welcome to the Lent Term 2019 edition of *Eagle Eye*!

This issue was published to mark International Women's Day on 8th March, and in it we celebrate the women of St John's: our housekeeping staff, our female students – undergraduates and graduates of the JCR and SBR student unions – and our researchers and Fellows. St John's was a male College until the 1980s when the first female students were first admitted, but women have played a large part in the past 500 years at St John's and have helped to shape it into what it is today.

The Communications Department is an all-female team on an all-female floor in Chapel Court – the first time in the College's history now that we have the first female Domestic Bursar and the first female Director of Education and Senior Tutor. Me, Jo and Hazel have very much enjoyed exploring the different lives of the women of St John's when



putting together this issue. We would like to give special thanks to Fiona, Kathryn, and Tracy in the Library and Archives for providing us with much of our historical information and checking our facts.

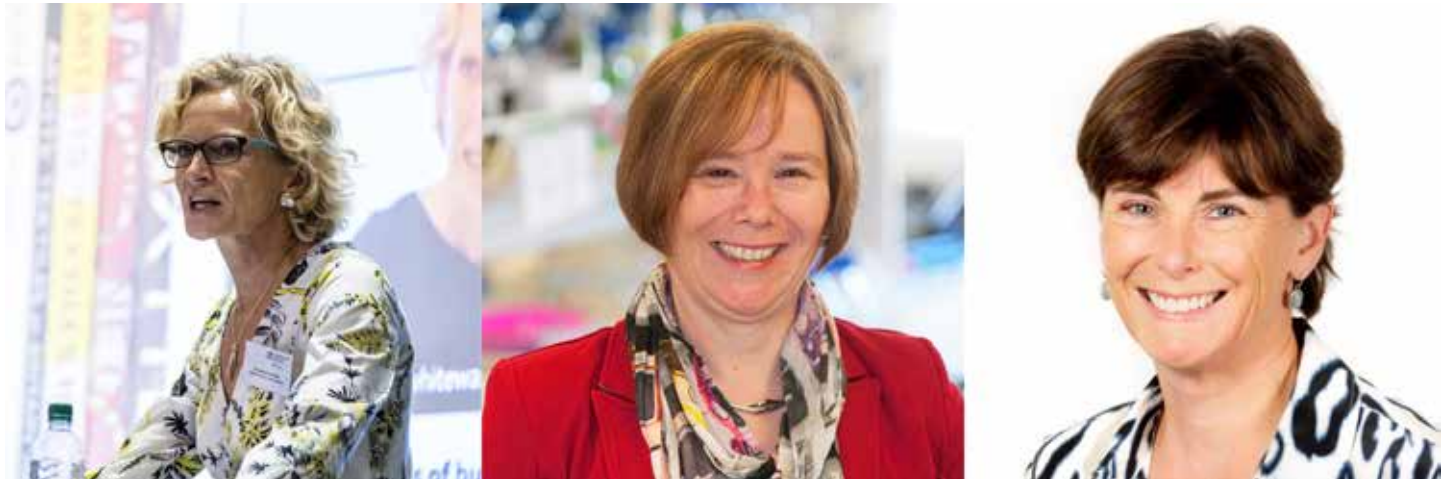
Do let me know if there are any stories you would like us to cover in future editions – you can contact me on the email address below.

We hope you enjoy reading about the women of St John's!

Best wishes,
Louise

Editor of *Eagle Eye*, and Web and Internal Communications Officer
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News and Awards



Olympic athlete, leading biochemist and The Duke of Cambridge elected as Honorary Fellows

Five distinguished people have been named as Honorary Fellows of St John's College in recognition of their exceptional contributions in their respective fields.

World champion rower Annamarie Phelps, businessman Mark Coombs, chair of the Food Standards Agency Heather Hancock, Biochemist Sheena Radford and The Duke of Cambridge have all been announced as Honorary Fellows.

Professor Sir Christopher Dobson, Master of St John's, said: "All five of our new Honorary Fellows are outstanding leaders in their different walks of life and they all share a commitment to promoting solutions to some of the major challenges that face the world – from sustainable agriculture to equality and physical and mental health.

"Their outstanding contributions to society resonate strongly with the ethos of St John's, and I'm sure their achievements will inspire our students as they themselves look forward to their future careers."



A secret history of women homeworkers

From pulling fur out of rabbit skins to stitching lampshades and being social media influencers - Dr Helen McCarthy co-created an exhibition about the history of women working from home. Dr McCarthy, a Fellow of St John's, worked with photographer Leonora Saunders to explore the different meanings of home based work for women in Britain from the early nineteenth century to the modern day.

Today, more than four million people in the UK work from home. Women are still more likely than men to juggle caring commitments with paid employment. These kinds of jobs often give greater autonomy and flexibility for workers. But working at home has a more complicated and precarious history for women. Over the past two centuries women's "natural" preference for jobs which fit with domestic responsibilities has been widely assumed but it was often the only choice in a labour market dominated by gender segregation, unequal pay and limited childcare provision.

Each image in the exhibition, which was on display at Leeds University, reimagines the life of a woman who laboured for pay in her own home, from the Victorian seamstress and Edwardian chainmaker, to the postwar childminder and late twentieth century entrepreneur.



Forgotten moment in fashion history brought back to life

The recreation of a Renaissance headdress reveals how European men once harnessed the seductive power of ostrich feathers.

From burlesque dancers to catwalk models and Hollywood stars, ostrich feathers have helped countless women steal the limelight. But this wasn't always the case. In the sixteenth century, it was Europe's men who wielded the sensual plume to increase their fame and fortune.

Ulinka Rublack, Professor of Early Modern European History at St John's College, and Jenny Tiramani, Principal of London's School of Historical Dress, led the ambitious project to investigate how a lavish headdress worn by Matthäus Schwarz, a 24-year-old German fashionista, in 1521, was made. Professor Rublack also looked at what role it played in advancing Schwarz's ambitions during a period of dramatic cultural and economic change in Europe.

The completed masterpiece measures more than a metre in width and 45 cm in height. It comprises a split-rim bonnet made of felt, satin and velvet; and



the feather headdress itself, which sits on a light-weight wire frame.

Thirty-two long ostrich feathers, sewn together to form sixteen magnificent plumes, cover this structure, complete with gold spangles which were individually stitched with metal thread onto every spine.

Recreating every element of this luxurious edifice occupied five highly-skilled British milliners, felters, costume-makers and their assistants for weeks.

Placentas adapt when women have poor diets or low oxygen during pregnancy



Cambridge researchers have discovered the placenta regulates how much oxygen and nutrients it transports to babies during challenging pregnancies in a study using mice to model conditions in the womb.

The placenta is the least understood human organ and it is notoriously difficult to study in pregnant women. But its ability to function properly is vital as it impacts on pregnancy outcomes and the lifelong health of mother and child.

Dr Amanda N Sferruzzi-Perri, a Research Associate at St John's College and the lead author of the new study, hopes the findings could lead to tests to determine whether the placenta is functioning properly.

Geologist's Association announce St John's student as winner of £1000 thesis award

Graduate student Caroline Soderman has won the 2019 Curry MSc Prize for her 'outstanding' work on the origins of Iceland's volcanic hotspot.

She is the first student from the University of Cambridge to win the prize since its launch in 2009.

The national competition is run by the Geologist's Association for postgraduate students studying Earth Sciences or a related subject who have produced a dissertation or thesis of 'outstanding quality'.

The award will be presented to Soderman along with a cheque for £1000 at the Geological Society of London in May.



► IMAGE CREDITS: Honorary Fellows, from left to right: Annamarie Phelps, Sheena Radford and Heather Hancock; Women homeworkers: Edwardian chainmaker. Credit: Leonora Saunders. Dr Helen McCarthy. Credit: Jonathan Ring; Renaissance headdress: Jenny Tiramani (left) and Ulinka Rublack (right) with the recreated headdress. Credit: Graham Copekoga; Placental mitochondria: Credit: 3d_man via Shutterstock. Geologist Association Prize: Caroline Soderman, at the back, on a field trip with her supervisor. Credit: Caroline Soderman.

From black armbands to withheld wages

Women may not have come to study at St John's until the 1980s, but as Hazel Lawrence finds out, they have played a crucial role in our history.



St John's would not exist if it wasn't for women. One of them you will already be familiar with – Lady Margaret Beaufort. The financial legacy of the mother of King Henry VII enabled the foundation of St John's in 1511. Our Boathouse bears her name and her portrait takes centre-stage in Hall. Other women like Mary Cavendish, the Countess of Shrewsbury, are less well known but her influence on College is unmissable, particularly if you're standing in Second Court which her donations funded in the early 1600s.

The earliest records we have of women's presence at the College show that by 1528 they were at St John's as laundresses. By 1631 St John's also had female cleaners and bedmakers.

One of these cleaners, referred to as 'Goodwife Scot', was so good at her job that she was known for her "extraordinary worke in sweeping & brushing". While the presence of female staff in St John's wasn't as controversial as female students would later prove to be, there were still some significant obstacles they had to face.

Letters from Sir Robert Forsyth Scott, the then Master, in 1908 reveal that he didn't want to entrust women with their pay. He explained: "I have never thought and do not think now that it is wise to hand over, what for these women are, very large sums." There were also fears that the presence of young women around College would be disruptive for male students. So until the twentieth century it was written into the College Statutes that all bedmakers had to be married and past childbearing age.

The battle for gender equality in the

Cambridge University education system was – and still is – long and difficult. Cambridge was the last university in the United Kingdom to allow women to take full degrees which it finally did in 1948 – nearly 70 years after the University of London became the first English University to grant women degrees in 1880. It was only in the 1970s that the previously all-male Colleges began to admit women, starting with Churchill and followed by Clare and King’s in 1972. The first female Fellows and students didn’t arrive at St John’s until 1981.

“Is a pretty girl less pleasing to us because she can understand us when we speak something better than nonsense?”

Students debated the pros and cons of women’s degrees in *The Eagle* as

early as the 1860s. Concerns over how education would affect women’s femininity were common, but one Johnian robustly replied, “Is a pretty girl less pleasing to us because she can understand us when we speak something better than nonsense? Can she not be a friend to us as well as a plaything? Is all this fair to her?”

The debate goes quiet in *The Eagle* after this exchange (at least for a few decades) but the issue had most definitely not gone away. Academics and campaigners had begun to work to give women higher education. In 1870 a small group of academics, including several Fellows from St John’s, had started providing lectures to women in Cambridge. These quickly became so popular they needed accommodation for the women who came, and by 1872 some women were living in Merton Hall, the building next to what we now call the School of Pythagoras. They lived here until 1875 when Newnham College was formally established on land lent to them by St John’s, in

part thanks to Anna Bateson, the wife of William Henry Bateson, Master of St John’s from 1857-1881. Anna was a campaigner for the rights and education of women, and her work and influence not only contributed towards the foundation of Newnham but she also founded the Cambridge Women’s Suffrage Association with fellow suffragist Millicent Fawcett. Anna died in 1918 – before some women were given the vote in December of the same year. A room at Newnham College has been named after her to commemorate her contribution to women’s education.

“We hope to have established that co-education is both a feasible and a desirable system on which to run an educational institution.”

Even when women were eventually awarded Cambridge degrees in 1947, they could only join the all-women Colleges, which limited their numbers.

By the 1960s students at St John’s organised a co-education survey and 289 men responded. The results published in *The Eagle* showed that 95 per cent of the responders said they would like to see more women undergraduates in Cambridge and 63 per cent wanted St John’s to become co-educational. The editor concluded: “If nothing else, we hope to have established that co-education is both a feasible and a desirable system on which to run an educational institution, and look forward to witnessing its introduction later this century.”

Despite the support for change from the student body it wasn’t until 1980 that the Fellows were able to secure a two-thirds majority to change the College Statutes. The vote was close – 57 to 28 – but it was enough. It had been decided that women were going to matriculate at St John’s.

And matriculate they did. In October 1981 the first female Fellow, Dr Kathleen Wheeler, arrived along with nine research students, and 43 female



undergraduates arrived a year later. They threw themselves into College life, starting the women's rowing club as well as a dining society called the Robins. There were some challenges though: famously the Head Porter 'Big Bob' Fuller flew the College flag at half-mast and wore a black armband on the day women entered the College.

"The message has gone in intellectually but the weight of culture still pushes the genders apart."



Professor Jane Heal, College Supervisor in Philosophy, joined St John's shortly after the first few years of female students in 1986. Was she apprehensive about joining the overwhelmingly male environment? She said: "No. I think many of my contemporaries were, but I'd been in academic life for nearly twenty years at that point." Professor Heal studied her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at New Hall (now Murray Edwards College) and was appointed a lectureship at Newcastle University where she stayed for ten years. "When I was an undergraduate here I think the ratio at the faculty was something like seven men to every woman. At Newcastle I was one of only two women in a department of seven or eight. So I was used to having more male colleagues than female before I arrived at John's."

In 1999 she became the first ever female President of College. Professor Heal says her memories of College members at the time was of them being "extremely supportive". She particularly remembers

the late Professor John Crook coaching her in how to pronounce the Latin grace used at Formal Halls.

She still thinks that St John's has an atmosphere of friendliness and moral support in its community, though she acknowledges that women still have ground to cover to gain equality in the wider world. She explained: "We've had a couple of centuries of pushing for women's rights and we've changed a lot of negative attitudes, but there's still work to be done, undoubtedly. The message has gone in intellectually but the weight of culture, to say nothing of commercial activities, still pushes the genders apart. We haven't got it right yet."

St John's now has its first female Director of Education and Senior Tutor, Dr Annis May Timpson and its first female Domestic Bursar, Helen Murley, but there is yet to be a female Master or Senior Bursar. It seems a woman's work is not yet done...



► IMAGE CREDITS: The perceived scandalous consequence of employing young female bedders published in *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam* in 1824; Anna Bateson in 1875; Professor Jane Heal in her room in Third Court. Credit: St John's College; The 'Robins' Dining Society, pictured in 1985. Credit: Lafayette.

Women of the JCR

When Sharon Chen Cooper, the first female undergraduate student to be admitted to St John's, arrived in 1982 the flag was flying at half-mast and the Head Porter was wearing a black armband. Jo Tynan meets the female members of the Junior Combination Room (JCR) committee to find out how life has changed.



Trekking across the courts in search of a toilet is thankfully a thing of the past for female undergraduates at St John's, but with male students still (just) outnumbering women, Anusha Ashok, the new Co-President of the JCR, is determined to make a difference.

The second year Maths student only decided to run for the role of leading the JCR Committee a week before the elections, and together with Ollie Barnard, a second year engineer, the pair were elected as Co-Presidents with a resounding majority of student votes.

Anusha explained: "I love St John's and the people in it, but there are things that annoyed me about the view that people held of St John's and I want that to change. I also want undergrads to

become more engaged with student issues at St John's and University wide issues.

"I particularly feel an added responsibility as a woman of colour to bring issues up that won't affect many of the people in a room but can affect a minority of people."

"Ollie is a really good friend of mine and we realised we had similar ideas, ethos and vision so we thought it would be redundant to run against each other so we decided to stand as a pair. We also thought we could get more done together.

"We both want the College to feel less insular, more diverse and representative. St John's really is a diverse place and we want to showcase that to the rest of Cambridge. And by diverse I mean that in every possible way – race, background, gender."

The JCR is the student body with an elected committee that organise events and welfare initiatives and represent student voices in College meetings with academics and senior leaders. Anusha is the ninth woman to be elected to lead the JCR since Katharine Newby Grant (née Joy) was the first female voted in as President in 1996 – a statistic that is not lost on the other female members of the committee.

Dani Vijayakumar, a second year Economics student and Academic

Affairs and Careers Officer on the JCR, added: "We haven't had a female JCR President for six or seven years, so having Anusha representing our interests is really important. We had got to the point where we would just assume the next President would be male.

"It is so shocking to us now that women were only admitted in the early 1980s,

us want to be at the forefront to spark change."

Is there an added pressure for Anusha as a woman in the role as President?

Anusha replied: "Standing out in a room of academics can initially be really intimidating but it can also highlight how important it is for your voice to



but knowing how male-dominated St John's has been in the past is actually really motivating because it gives us the drive to make our mark. Boys are used to being surrounded by people they can look up to and aspire to be and having strong female representation on the JCR Committee really has an impact on the wider community – it makes

be heard. I particularly feel an added responsibility as a woman of colour to bring issues up that won't affect many of the people in a room but can affect a minority of people in College."

"Knowing how male-dominated St John's has been in the past is motivating because it gives us the drive to make our mark."

Anusha would like unconscious bias training to be introduced at St John's to help improve the student experience. Unconscious bias training explores how people can sometimes act on snap judgments based on the other person's race, sex or background without any conscious intention.

"In this role I can get those issues heard and instigate something tangible that can make a difference to make sure no one feels marginalised – I feel I am able to bring a fresh new perspective to meetings. College is a lot more collaborative than I was expecting and the College Officers listen a lot to our experiences – it has been really positive so far."



Discovering how receptive the College has been to the viewpoints of the JCR and the willingness to explore solutions is something the group of women JCR officers all praised.

Emma Li, Secretary of the JCR, attends weekly meetings with Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) and noticed that JCR members from other Colleges report that Fellows can be reluctant to work with students and listen to their concerns and ideas.

She said: "They are often at war over issues that are important to them, fortunately we don't have anything like that at St John's – quite the opposite." Anusha has regular meetings with Professor Sir Christopher Dobson, the Master of St John's, and with Dr Annis



things. It was really inspirational; not everyone knows what they want to do next.”

The group of women all applied directly to St John’s for a variety of reasons ranging from being encouraged by a Johnian Maths teacher who recommended Cambridge to Anusha, to taking part in a Sutton Trust Summer School residential for Leia Henderson. Leia is the JCR Access Officer and works to make John’s accessible for everyone, regardless of background.



“I love St John’s and the people in it, but there are things about the view people hold of the College that I want to change.”

St John’s has recently made it compulsory for new undergraduates to attend annual workshops run by the Good Lad Initiative. The workshops are designed to challenge participants to think about the ways gender inequality exists in their lives and communities and to show men that they can be part of instigating positive change. The women feel ‘lad culture’ still exists at Cambridge and Anusha, as one of just 17 per cent of women in her year in the Faculty of Mathematics, spends her days as an undergraduate being in a minority.

She said: “We can’t pretend this issue doesn’t exist and we are working to change that culture. Because our sports teams have traditionally performed very well, there is a perception that life at John’s is centred around them, so having more events that aren’t based on sporting success is one thing we plan to do. Changing the photos in the bar so they aren’t just of male sports teams is another. We want to have an open conversation about any concerns people have.”

May Timpson, Director of Education and Senior Tutor, in her role as Co-President and attends College Council committee meetings. She said: “The Master is amazing and genuinely cares about us and our welfare. He is always telling us that ‘you are the College’. We had a two hour meeting with him the other day and he has told us his door is always open if we need him, which means a lot to us.”

Nina Newhouse, Vice President of the JCR and a Geographer, agreed: “He gave a speech in Hall recently and talked about the portraits on the walls and told us how the people featured were just like us once and not sure what they were going to achieve in life. He told us that we are all the future, and that we would go on to do amazing

Female focused events are already run every week by the St John’s Feminist Society, which aims to ‘create a friendly and supportive safe space where people feel comfortable to speak and listen to each other’. And Nina is organising a Formal Hall at St John’s specifically to mark International Women’s Day.

As it is now 2019, Porters, of course, don’t wear black armbands every time they see a woman, the number of female undergraduates now stands at 253 rather than the 43 who matriculated in 1982, and if these women Johnians are indeed the future as the Master predicts, then the legacy of female at St John’s is only going to get even stronger.



Please note, some members of the JCR committee may have changed since this article was written.

► IMAGE CREDITS:

All images credited to St John’s College, Cambridge.
 Dani Vijayakumar, Academic Affairs and Careers Officer, in the centre, with the other female members of the JCR committee;
 Amara and Anusha in the College Bar;
 Anusha Ashok, newly elected Co-President of the JCR;
 From left to right: Nina Newhouse, Vice President, with Amara Mulliner, Welfare Officer;
 Dani talking about her JCR role;
 From left: Emma Li, Secretary, with Nina Newhouse, Vice President.

Keeping it clean: Behind the scenes with Housekeeping at St John's

From vacuuming around students in bed to cleaning Fellows' rooms – Louise Offley, the longest serving member of the Housekeeping department, has seen it all. She tells Louise Hanzlik about her three decades at St John's, and how climbing the stairs doesn't get any easier.



With the mirror polished, the bathroom gleaming, the washing up done, the surfaces dusted, and the carpet vacuumed, Louise steps back and looks around at her work – she has finished with this guest room. This is her patch, taking care of the Fellows' rooms, offices, guest rooms, and some student rooms, in I and H New Court. Now it's time to move off site to clean the two hostels that she looks after in Richmond Terrace and Park Parade.

Louise Offley has been a bedmaker at St John's for 35 years, making her the longest serving member of the Housekeeping department. There must be something about this department and how it holds onto its established staff – Belinda Peat, Senior Linen Room Supervisor, has been working here for 30 years, and Sandra Rogers, the Deputy Linen Room Supervisor, was here for 28 years before she retired in December.

There are 55 members of staff in the Housekeeping department, and the team is predominantly made up of women; 40 are female. The department consists of bedmakers, or bedders – seven of which are male – supervisors, administrators, and gyys, or handymen. Louise started working part time at St John's in 1984 when she was in her 20s – she applied as her friend worked here



– and she was tasked with cleaning student rooms daily and changing the bedding once a week. “Making the beds was much harder back then as they had sheets and blankets; everything was much heavier and there was a lot of static. It became easier when they changed the bedding to duvets, when the College started to regularly host conferences in the early 90s.”

“We have a mixture of nationalities, representing 14 different countries – most of the team are British, but we have staff from as far afield as Fiji and Mexico.”

“Hoovers were also so much harder to use then, they were upright and very heavy – they would suck up people’s socks! Now the hoovers we use are much better and a lot lighter – they changed them a few years after I started. The hardest part for me though is climbing the stairs – they don’t get any easier!”

The cleaning schedule has changed since Louise cleaned students’ rooms back in the 80s. Students no longer have their beds made for them – this changed in the mid-90s, and now only residential Fellows, conference guests, and single Visiting Scholars have their beds made. Student rooms are now cleaned once a week for 30 minutes rather than daily, due to the increase in the number of rooms. But some

students don’t always want their room cleaned when the bedder arrives.

“Sometimes students would ask me to come back another time. It was a bit more flexible back then to change our schedule as there were fewer people to look after. But now we don’t really have time to rearrange; we are much busier and have more rooms to clean and less time. So I either tell them I will miss that week – or I just Hoover around them if they’re still in bed!”

Louise always enjoys interacting with the students when she cleans their rooms; she knows their names, learns where they are from, and they in turn see her as a familiar face that they can talk to if they want to.

Since 2015, Louise has mainly been



working in Fellows’ rooms in New Court. She works six hours a day, five days a week, and every day she cleans around 14 rooms – a mixture of residential Fellows’ rooms, offices, and a guest room. Her favourite is Dr Howard Hughes’s room in New Court, which has a great view over the Backs. “Sometimes the Fellows are in their rooms when I go to clean them, and if they are, they like to have a chat with me and are always friendly.”

Louise cleans each residential Fellow’s room for 20 minutes a day, and that includes dusting, vacuuming, washing up, and changing the bedding once a week. “Rooms with single beds are easy to do, but the double beds are harder work.”

“Johnians who used to live here come back for dinners and want to see their old rooms. I recognise many of them – they are really friendly and they like to catch up.”

Joanne Smith, Superintendent of Housekeeping, tells me: “Louise is a solid and reliable member of the team, and it’s wonderful that she has been at St John’s for 35 years. When I started in 2014, the department had 490 years of combined service! We have a mixture of nationalities here, representing 14 different countries – most of the team are British, but we have staff from as far afield as Fiji and Mexico.”

Joanne has a housekeeping and hospitality background – she previously worked at The George in Stamford, Fitzwilliam College and St Catharine’s College. Just before she came to St John’s the department had a name change – it was previously called Lady Superintendent’s. “It was changed as it was felt that the name was old fashioned and didn’t represent the department.” But what about the name ‘bedmaker’ – was this not considered antiquated and irrelevant for staff who don’t actually make beds as their main task? “Staff actually voted on this, and were asked if they wanted to be known as ‘housekeeping staff’ instead, but they opted to keep the name bedmaker; they wanted to keep the College tradition.”

The team structure has changed since Joanne started at St John’s. One team used to clean the external hostels and the other would clean inside the College, and both teams worked completely separately; this created a divide in the department. Now, both teams are amalgamated. “This has really helped with morale and created a great team spirit, and now everyone is working towards the same end goal,” Joanne says.

Every so often the department has a shake up and members of staff are moved around to work in different

areas. “We do a complete shift around every couple of years,” explains Joanne. “It gives everyone variety, and they learn how to work in different areas. Not everyone is happy, but mostly people are pleased to take on different challenges and have a change of scenery!”

“The hardest part for me is climbing the stairs – they don’t get any easier!”

Louise’s schedule works out well for her, and she finds it easy to plan her day around the rooms she cleans in New Court. Even though the staff work alone in different locations – either in the main areas of Forecourt, New Court, Cripps, or at the external hostels – Louise explains that they all come together for regular meetings, and they always have a tea break every morning, so she doesn’t feel cut off from the other 54 staff members. “I think I have just about met everyone in the department now!” she laughs.

Conference time is a busy time of year for Housekeeping. Conferences run from June to September, and the College “is like a hotel then!” Joanne tells us. There are B&B guests, school visits, conferences, and Johnian dinners.

“There’s a lot more work to do – it’s a massive operation in the summer, and we move up a gear. We also have to do a deep clean of the properties during this period. We work a lot of weekends – sometimes we work for four or five weeks without having the weekend off. We have great B&B feedback though, and the guests often comment on the cleanliness of the rooms.”

Louise enjoys working during conference time. Although it’s busy, she sees different faces every day – and sometimes old familiar faces too. “Johnians who used to live here come back for dinners and want to see their old rooms. I recognise many of them – they are really friendly and they like to catch up.”

So is Louise planning on staying at St John’s for a few more years to come, or does she fancy a change after working here for more than half of her life? “St John’s feels like home. I’ve never thought of leaving. It’s a lovely place to work – my 35 years have flown by. I reckon I’ll be here until I retire.”

► IMAGE CREDITS: St John’s College
Louise Offley hard at work in the Fellows’ rooms;
Joanne Smith, Superintendent of Housekeeping;
The Housekeeping department.



10-Minute Interview

With Jessica Tearney-Pearce, SBR President

How long have you been the SBR President?

I was elected as President in March 2018, but I've been on the SBR Committee since March 2017, when I was first Secretary, and then vice-President.

Why did you decide to apply for this position, and how does the process work?

Being a member of the SBR is how I made my best friends at College; it provided purpose and a home outside of work. I joined the committee initially because I wanted to give back to that community. After a year serving, it just seemed natural to run for President, so that I could work with the committee and College to improve aspects of the graduate experience at St John's, as well as to coordinate the annual programme of events the SBR organises.

What does your role as SBR President entail?

As President, I chair meetings of the SBR committee and, with them, represent SBR members on College- and University-level committees. I collaborate closely with the SBR committee, and in liaison with departments in College, to organise a wide variety of regular events that encourage socialising and promote and support students' wellbeing.

When do elections take place – and when will a new President take over?

The SBR holds elections twice a year, with the presidential election at the end of Lent term. Candidates nominate themselves and SBR members are invited to vote in elections. The new President will take over after Lent Term, in late March 2019.

So you are nearly at the end of your run then! What have been the biggest challenges and highlights so far?

That's a tough question. There have been so many, and the challenges have also been highlights, or at least have resulted in them.

Personally, it's been nice to be invited to occasions which allow me to interact with the Master and Fellows, and also with alumni, donors, staff and other contributors to the College. These provide a perspective of College which students rarely get, and definitely have helped me to fulfil my role as SBR president more effectively.

Among many other things, I'm delighted that we're leading on a College gardening project, which is both an environmental and a welfare scheme – enabling students to learn to grow their own flowers and food, but also to be outside with space away from the library and labs.

On the environment theme, the committee and I are working with the College to assess and improve the standard of graduate housing, whilst concurrently encouraging the introduction of sustainability policies. In the last 18 months, the SBR has initiated and continues to run a regular series of LGBTQ+ dinner swaps with other Colleges' MCRs, and we're discussing with College the promotion and maintenance of gender equality. We're so lucky at St John's to have a community of graduate students which is very diverse in all respects. We work hard to ensure that the SBR both retains this diversity and always remains a safe space for all of its members.

The events in our annual schedule including the summer garden party, freshers' orientation programme, celebrations of Halloween and New Year, and, my personal favourite, our mid-summer formal dinner have become bigger and better than ever, thanks to the very dedicated work of the SBR Committee.



And, we now communicate and work much more closely with the JCR committee. We organise many more joint JCR/SBR events, including weekly bar quizzes and initiatives to promote student wellbeing. Not only does this allow us to pool resources, it also connects these groups who have much more in common than in difference, but which historically have been quite separate. At the moment, we're planning together a series of fun activities (including a ceilidh and visiting puppies) to coincide with University Mental Health Awareness day.

Tell us about your studies at St John's

I'm studying for a PhD in History, specifically a project examining ritual, worship, and devotion at sea in the medieval Mediterranean. I'm interested in the practicalities of devotion in maritime contexts, the evolution and absorption of cult sites from older traditions, and also the interactions and borrowings between and among adherents of different religions.

Why did you choose to study at St Johns?

I wanted a traditional College experience, but also to belong somewhere which looks forwards and outwards, and where I could have a both good opportunities and an active social environment. With those criteria, John's was the obvious choice. As a student, and especially as the President of the SBR, I'm proud to be a member of a College which actively listens to and takes account of students' perspectives on matters pertaining to them. This empathetic relationship is much more conducive to productivity and happiness than the potential adversarial alternative. We're expected to work very hard here, but also are allowed the space to have fun, and these mutually reinforce each other.



► IMAGE CREDITS: Jessica Tearney-Pearce. Jessica Tearney-Pearce; SBR members in 'The Great Gatsby'-inspired costumes for a dinner at Homerton College.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN AT ST JOHN'S

1980

Fellows vote to **change College Statutes** and admit women as students and Fellows

1982

The first 42 women **undergraduates** matriculate at College

1985

The first female **undergraduate students** graduate

1998

Katharine Joy becomes the first female President of the JCR

2011

Reverend Elizabeth Adekunle is the College's first female Chaplain

2017

Annis May Timpson becomes the first female Director of Education and Senior Tutor of St John's

1511

St John's is founded by **Lady Margaret Beaufort**

1528

Earliest records show that women were working in College as **laundresses**

1870

Fellows from St John's join other academics to start **providing lectures to women** in Cambridge

1981

The first woman Fellow, **Dr Kathleen Wheeler**, and nine female research students arrive at St John's

1983

Mary Short becomes first female President of the SBR

1986

Dr Naomi Segal becomes the first female Tutor at St John's

1999

Professor Jane Heal becomes the first woman President of College

2012

The first female Honorary Fellows are elected - **Jennifer Egan** and **Professor Jane Stapleton**

2018

Helen Murley becomes the College's first female Domestic Bursar