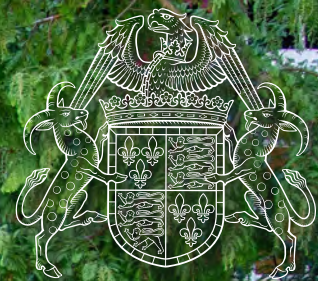




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ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Michaelmas Term 2019

Farewell, Chris: Master, mentor, friend
Aquila has landed
Long-distance dreams

Congratulations, welcomes and goodbyes

Wedding bells rang out for four members of staff who tied the knot this summer



Sarah Livermore (née Connolly), Finance Business Partner, married **Kelly Livermore** in St John's College Chapel on September 7.



Helen Woods (née Vahtrik), Property Administrator – Hostels, married **Alex Woods** in St John's College Chapel on August 31.



Kristina Frilles (née Vargova), Functions Assistant, married **Joel Frilles** in Slovakia on September 20.



Emma Manuel (née Dellar), College Nurse, married **Nigel Manuel**, known as 'Peds', in Las Vegas on August 30, followed by a blessing at Queens' College on September 6.

Welcome to our new staff

Ellie Capeling – Library Graduate Trainee

Louise Daly – Deputy Catering Manager

Simon Storey – Section Chef

Brendan Milton – Apprentice Chef
Diana Cadete – Alumni Relations Officer (Events)

Dafydd Sinden – Alumni Relations Assistant

Karen Morris – Academic Administrator

Gaia Lambert – Schools Liaison Officer

Jenny Hopkins – Student Services Officer

Louis Watkins – Lay Clerk and Choir Librarian

George Gibbon – Lay Clerk

Gopal Kambo – Lay Clerk

Oliver Morris – Lay Clerk

Jacek Szczepanski – Bedmaker

Nancy Cleaver – Bedmaker

Savita Modhavadiya – Bedmaker

Agnes Rizzoli-Popczyk – Accounts Assistant

Ornella Barzey – Finance Business Partner

Francesca Pocock – Maintenance Administrator

John Cox – Custodian

Sean Gladwell – Deputy Head Porter

And goodbye to...

Steve Beeby, Superintendent of Buildings, who retired in July;

Peter Jennings, Custodian, and **Tracy Deakin**, Archivist, who retired in September; and **Ian Crofts**, Deputy Head Porter, who retires at the end of December.

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

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stories became his number
one event.

Eagle Eye

This newsletter is produced by:
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Cover wrap image: *The fiery red
Boston Ivy in New Court and
gardener David Brown.*
Credit: Geoff Robinson

Note from the Editor



Michaelmas Term is always a short,
but busy, term at St John's. We
welcomed our new undergraduates
and graduates in October, we saw
the Boston Ivy covering the buildings
in New Court change colour from
green to red (and as usual, it made
the national press) – and it won't
be long before the Christmas tree is
standing in the Hall and the end-of-
term seasonal festivities begin.

Just before the start of Michaelmas
Term we had to say a very sad
goodbye to our beloved Master,
Professor Sir Christopher Dobson,
who died in September after being
diagnosed with cancer earlier this
year. It was plain to see by reading
the Books of Condolence just how
dear Chris was to the entire College
community, and how he positively
affected the lives of those he met. He
is greatly missed, but he will always
be remembered for being a great
Master, a fantastic scientist, and a
kind, thoughtful, and inspiring man.
Our tribute to Chris the person, as
well as Sir Christopher the Master, can
be found on pages 8-11.

We also feature Aquila, the first
female *a cappella* singing group in
College, and learn how and why
St John's came to set up an all-female
group after centuries of College
music being dominated by male
voices. We find out how female
students, staff and Fellows can join
the group (singing has a fantastic
impact on your mental wellbeing!)
and we let you know where and
when you can see Aquila perform
this term. And those of you who have
an eagle eye will spot me singing
with the group!

Deputy Head Gardener Mick Ranford
tells us about how he tackled the
196-mile Coast to Coast footpath
to celebrate his 65th birthday, after
admitting defeat when he tried
this walk two years ago. He was
determined not to let blisters get in
the way this time.

And Professor Patrick Boyde talks
to us about his role as the Fellow
Borderer, or Graduate Liaison Officer
– a role he invented to make people
feel included in College life. He tells
us about the types of events he
hosts for graduates, such as the
popular ghost stories, how he enjoys
meeting and chatting to students,
and how he'd go on forever in the
role if he could!

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Eagle
Eye*, and as ever, do let me know if
you have any story ideas that you'd
like to be covered in future editions.

Louise

**Editor and Web and Internal
Communications Officer**

News round-up

St John's author nominated for Irish Book of the Year award

From murder to beekeeping, discover how the Irish ate, drank, loved and lied in a book co-authored by a John's academic.

A History of Ireland in 100 Words has been nominated for 'best Irish-published book of the year' in the An Post Irish Book Awards 2019 – Ireland's major literary event. The book tells the history of Ireland by looking at the development and changing meaning of 100 medieval Irish words drawn from the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish Language*.

Written by Professor Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, a Fellow of St John's, Dr Sharon Arbuthnot and Professor Gregory Toner, of Queen's University Belfast, the book is divided into themes, including writing and literature; food and feasting; technology and science; mind and body.

Ancient story of revenge shortlisted for film award

The world's first ever film in Babylonian – a language that died out 2000 years ago – has been nominated for a top research prize.

Students led by Dr Martin Worthington, a Fellow at St John's, made the film based on a Babylonian folk tale from 700 BC. *The Poor Man of Nippur* has been shortlisted in the Research in Film Awards (RIFA).

Medic to go head-to-head with Oxford at Varsity Match

Fifth-year student Elisha Clark will clash with Oxford on the rugby pitch at Twickenham.

The fly-half for CURUFC will play in the Oxford Vs Cambridge Varsity Match on Thursday, December 12.

Elisha grew up in a 'rugby mad family' and played rugby league before she came to study at Cambridge. She captained the Tigers – the women's second rugby team – earlier this year which she described as the 'highlight of my rugby career so far'.

She trains for around 10 hours a week with her teammates. She said: "As a fifth year medical student it is difficult at times to balance work life and rugby, but not impossible. I see patients every day in the hospital or community and then dash straight to training after, then fit reading in around the two."

"Each year has been more competitive in fighting for a spot in the Varsity Match."



This year we have one of our strongest squads yet, so I feel very privileged to have been selected."

St John's coffee mornings raise more than £4000 for cancer charity

The annual Macmillan Coffee Morning at St John's raised £300 for the cancer charity.

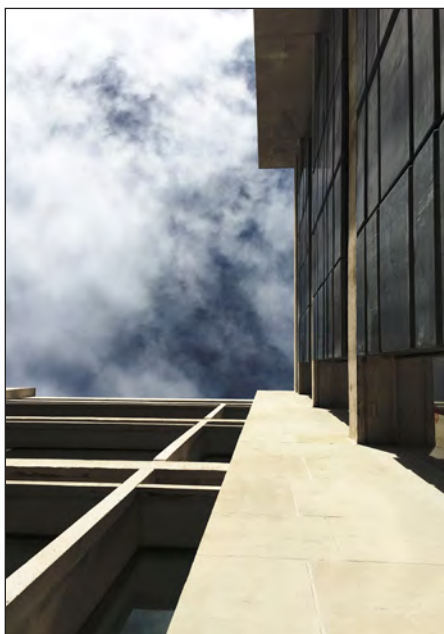
Macmillan Cancer Support provides physical, financial, and emotional support to people who have cancer to help them live life as fully as they can. Angela McKenzie, Secretary to the Head of Information Services and Systems, has organised the fundraiser at St John's for 16 years.

Her hard work and everyone's ability to eat cake for a good cause has raised £4415 in total for Macmillan. Angela is due to retire next year and she is



looking for someone to take over the organisation of the event. Anyone interested should contact A.R.McKenzie@joh.cam.ac.uk

Prizes awarded for Cripps student photography competition



A photograph by an Architecture student scooped the £400 top prize in a competition to find striking images of the Cripps building.

A number of images by Aleca Peh Haeger were shortlisted by the judges and the panel praised the winning photograph for "its play on perspective and tension". Benedetta Spadoro won the £250 second prize and Teresa Augustin won the £150 third prize.

The prize money was donated by alumnus Wilfried Becker. He said: "I have always felt that Cripps is an architectural gem, but being next to hidden behind architectural gems from earlier centuries, it does not always attract the appreciation it deserves."

Dragons' Den success for eco-friendly graduation gown business



Ruth Nicholls, Deborah Meaden and Oliver Adkins. Photo credit: Fay Summerfield

Two Cambridge entrepreneurs received a £60,000 investment when they pitched their business supplying graduation gowns made out of recycled bottles on the BBC television show *Dragons' Den*.

Ruth Nicholls, who graduated from St John's in 2013 with a law degree, co-founded Churchill Gowns with Oliver Adkins in 2018.

Churchill Gowns manufactures and sells graduation attire made from recycled plastic bottles to students, colleges and

universities across the UK.

The pair spent three minutes selling their idea and received offers from two of the five dragons. They accepted the investment offer from leisure and retail businesswoman Deborah Meaden in exchange for 22 per cent of the business.

Nicholls said: "It was probably one of the most nerve-wracking things I've ever done. Thankfully we've had practice pitching and we know our business inside out but we were still very nervous."

Neptune's champion

Astronomer John Couch Adams is the focus of this term's Library exhibition. Adams is best known for using mathematical calculation to discover the planet Neptune after his undergraduate studies in the 19th century at St John's. Through his letters, diaries, books and belongings, the exhibition offers a fascinating glimpse of the man behind the maths. The exhibition is open to all every week day until December 6.

Epic masterpiece brought to life

A performance of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid* will be hosted in the Palmerston Room on November 23. *The Song of Arms and a Man* narrates legendary hero Aeneas's struggle to fulfil his destiny as the founder of Rome, including his dramatic flight from Troy and his doomed love affair with Dido, Queen of Carthage. Selections from the original Latin text are interspersed with an English commentary, making the production suitable for all.

New Choir album *Magnificat* celebrates Evensong tradition

St John's College Choir's first album dedicated to the Evening Canticles reached number 3 in the Specialist Classical Music Charts. Canticles are texts which have been spoken or sung at Evensong for more than 1000 years, and which many different composers have set to music. Director of Music Andrew Nethsingha selected six of the best settings from the last 120 years to feature on *Magnificat*.

Catering Manager wins Outstanding Achievement Award for innovation

Bill Brogan was awarded the prestigious Outstanding Achievement Award at The University Caterers Association's annual prize-giving ceremony. Now in its third year, the awards were set up to help celebrate the dedication of members of the professional body and took place at a gala dinner. Brogan was one of three nominees for the Outstanding Achievement Award, and he won for his dedication to innovation and sustainability. He said: "It was very special to be presented with this top award."

Trainee primary school teacher turned Professor wins \$3.9 million Yidan education prize



The world's largest education prize awarded to someone who is 'creating a better world through education' has been won by Professor Usha Goswami.

Professor Goswami, a Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, a Director of the Centre for Neuroscience in Education and a

Fellow of St John's College, is an international leader in literacy research and has been named as Cambridge's first Yidan Prize Laureate. Professor Goswami's research has made great strides in understanding brain function which enabled educators to design different teaching techniques and tools to help children with dyslexia

and special needs to learn languages more effectively.

The Yidan Prize is the world's most generous prize in education research and education development. Each winner receives a gold medal and an award of US \$3.9 million, half of which is a cash prize while the other half forms a research project fund.

After studying Experimental Psychology and graduating from Oxford with the top First in her year, Professor Goswami trained as a teacher in London. During the training she realised that there was a significant research gap to inform teaching practice, and decided not to pursue a career as a teacher but to do a PhD instead.

She joined St John's College as a Fellow in 1990 and later founded the world's first Centre for Neuroscience in Education based at the University of Cambridge.

Professor Goswami will use the research award to begin a programme of research into oral language difficulties.

'Game-changing' research could solve evolution mysteries

An evolution revolution has begun after scientists extracted genetic information from a 1.7 million-year-old rhino tooth – the largest and oldest genetic data ever to be recorded.

Researchers led by Professor Eske Willerslev, a Fellow at St John's, identified an almost complete set of proteins in the dental enamel of the rhino. The genetic information

discovered is one million years older than the oldest DNA sequenced from a 700,000-year-old horse.

The findings, published in *Nature*, could solve some of the biggest mysteries of animal and human biology by allowing scientists to accurately reconstruct evolution from further back in time than ever before.



Diary of polar scientist on ill-fated Shackleton voyage donated to St John's

When explorer Ernest Shackleton's ship *Endurance* became trapped in ice in Antarctica and eventually sank in 1915, Sir James Mann Wordie was one of the crew that escaped in lifeboats to an uninhabited island.

Wordie, who was a student, Fellow

and eventually Master at St John's College, was recruited in 1914 as the geologist and chief of scientific staff for Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

Now a rare copy of Wordie's diary from the ill-fated expedition has been

presented to St John's by Alan Wordie, the explorer's grandson.

The diary includes 'meticulous' daily records of weather conditions and it is hoped the historical data will help inform climate change researchers today.

Freshers awarded £81,000 in pre-admissions prizes



A group of 15 new undergraduates at St John's College were awarded up to £8000 each on the day they arrived in Cambridge to begin their studies.

Prize winners were selected on the basis

of their academic track record, potential and broader financial need.

The exceptional new students were invited with their families to a special ceremony at St John's to mark their

achievements. A total of 13 different prizes were awarded by Dr Annis May Timpson, Director of Education & Senior Tutor, at the ceremony. She said: "These prizes would not be possible without the generosity of our alumni."

'Artificial leaf' successfully produces clean gas

An artificial leaf that mimics photosynthesis could be used to develop a sustainable alternative to petrol – according to new research led by St John's academic Professor Erwin Reisner.

Syngas, a widely used gas that is currently produced from fossil fuels, can instead be made by an 'artificial leaf' that uses only sunlight, carbon dioxide and water. The findings, published in the journal *Nature Materials*, set a new benchmark in the field of solar fuels and could eventually be used to develop a sustainable liquid fuel alternative to petrol.

Professor Reisner, who spent seven years working on the project, said: "You may not have heard of syngas itself but every day you consume products that were created using it. Being able to produce



it sustainably would be a critical step in closing the global carbon cycle and establishing a sustainable chemical and fuel industry."

St John's graduate acts in new BBC war drama

Jonah Hauer-King, actor and St John's alumnus, starred in BBC One's new epic war drama *World on Fire*.

Jonah, who graduated from St John's in 2017 with a First-Class Honours degree in Theology, played Harry Chase, one of the lead characters in the seven-part series. *World on Fire* is set during the first year of the Second World War and tells the story from both sides of the conflict.

Jonah's character, Harry Chase, is a young English translator in Warsaw who is caught up in negotiations with the Nazis, and is trying to smuggle his Polish lover out of the country while his girlfriend waits for him at home in Manchester.

Farewell, Chris: Master, mentor, friend

Professor Sir Christopher Dobson, Master of St John's College, died on Sunday, September 8 2019. Jo Tynan reflects on the life and legacy of this great – and good – man.



How Professor Sir Christopher Dobson arrived anywhere on time is a mystery. Whenever he walked through the courts of St John's he would stop to talk to everyone who crossed his path to ask about their day, their news, and their families. And somehow he always managed to address people by name.

Sir Christopher – known to some as 'Dobby' but to most of us simply as Chris – was part of the St John's community for 18 years so he had a lot of people to chat to. He was elected to a Fellowship in 2001 after moving to Cambridge from the University of Oxford.

An innovative and prolific chemist with more than 800 papers and review articles to his name, his prodigious scientific work significantly advanced global understanding of neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. He often compared the diseases to the Black Death and reassured people that, in time, a cure would be found for these 'modern-day plagues'. He said: "Fifty years ago, cancer was often untreatable, but nowadays there are many more ways to diagnose it and treat it effectively. I'm convinced the same will be true of neurodegenerative diseases."

Born in Germany in 1949, Chris was the youngest of the three children of Arthur Dobson and his wife Mabel. His parents were from Bradford, Yorkshire, and both had left school at 14.

His father joined the Army at the outbreak of the Second World War and was serving as an officer in post-war Germany when Chris was born. Other army postings led Chris to spend some of his childhood in Lagos, Nigeria, before the family returned to the UK where he was educated at Hereford Cathedral School and Abingdon School near the family home in Blewberry, Oxfordshire.



Sir Christopher, Lady Dobson, and their dog, Jimbo, at Graduation in June 2019

Chris claimed the reason he did well at school was that he was trying to avoid doing household chores. He said: "I discovered that when I went up to my room to do my homework, I could get out of doing the washing up. Nothing is worse than doing the washing up!"

He began his Chemistry degree at Keble College after a neighbour who worked as an academic at the University of Oxford recommended him for a place. It wasn't until he'd been studying there for six weeks that he received a letter from the University rejecting his formal application. He explained: "I stuck it in a drawer, never opened it again and nothing else happened."

He graduated with a First, followed his undergraduate degree with a DPhil at Merton College, and after several Research Fellowships headed to Harvard as Assistant Professor of Chemistry, with his wife and true love Mary Schove, now Dr Mary Dobson, a historian of medicine.

The pair met at a dinner at Oxford, Chris explained: "Mary was there with her then boyfriend. By the end of the evening, he was her ex-boyfriend! We went out for lunch, or maybe dinner, and then I decided that I wanted to marry her and spent the next few months persuading

her that it was not a completely crazy idea." The couple married in 1977 and went on to have two children, Richard and William.

Chris was an animal lover and earlier this year he fulfilled a dream of owning a dog when he and Mary re-homed a racing greyhound called Jimbo. Chris and Jimbo quickly became inseparable and Jimbo was the guest of honour at Evensong, the May Ball and Graduation.

"Chris was a remarkable person whose sharp wit, visionary leadership and generosity were widely admired. He was a true pioneer who inspired a whole generation of scientists."

Chris's plan to avoid the washing up paid off. In a life full of achievement he said co-founding the £50 million Cambridge Centre for Misfolding Diseases (CMD) in 2012 was a particular highlight. In 2018 he was knighted in recognition of his contributions to Science and Higher Education. This accolade crowned the many honorary degrees, fellowships and prizes he received – including the 2009 Royal Medal of the Royal Society, of which he had been a prominent Fellow since 1996.

Professor Tuomas Knowles, a Fellow of St John's and a co-director of the CMD, said: "Chris was a truly exceptional scholar whose work transformed the study of protein aggregation diseases. He was a remarkable person whose sharp wit, visionary leadership and generosity were widely admired. He was a true pioneer who inspired a whole generation of scientists."

Chris was elected as the 44th Master of St John's in 2007 and for 12 years he led the College with vision, compassion and dedication. During his time as Master he directed the Quincentenary celebrations as the College marked its 500th birthday, oversaw transformational refurbishment projects across the College estate, and introduced the groundbreaking St John's Studentships.

The highlight of his time as Master was spending time getting to know the community of students, staff, Fellows and alumni. He hosted everyone from Hollywood royalty to actual royalty – including welcoming the Duke of Cambridge into the Master's Lodge for three months while he studied Agricultural Management at Cambridge.

Chris said: "I didn't know what I was letting myself in for as Master which was



Richard Dobson, Sir Christopher, Lady Dobson and William Dobson

probably just as well! I spent a lot of time worrying that things would go wrong – that I was going to do something really stupid or there would be a major crisis. The thing I strived to do during my time as Master was to work to find a consensus, because a consensus is not delivering what people want, it's agreeing what people can live with."

"He was St John's own Dumbledore: endlessly warm, kind, and with a deep love for the College and its students."

His dedication to the students was evident when, in February this year, just hours after he was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer he presided over Halfway Hall – a celebratory dinner held for undergraduates at the midway point of their studies. He hadn't had a day off for 20 years, and he wasn't about to start now. His love for the students was mutual. After his death tributes flooded in to the College from around the world.

Cara Atkinson, who graduated from St John's in 2015, said: "We may have called him Dobby but he was St John's own Dumbledore: endlessly warm, kind, and with a deep love for the College and its students. I will always remember the

welcome he gave my year to the College and the speech in which he assured us that we belonged at St John's and that we would always be a part of it. I cannot imagine St John's without Chris, he will always be remembered by those lucky enough to know him."

Faidon Varesis, PhD student, said: "I can only describe his exquisite character with the following incident. I was working in July at the Library, as usual, picking a spot which overlooked the Master's Lodge. One of the joys was to see Chris, Mary and their sons walk with their dog, Jimbo, around the garden. This July afternoon, though, Chris was walking Jimbo alone. At one point, he stopped, kneeled down and gave Jimbo the most affectionate hug and kiss. This was Professor Sir Christopher Dobson; a man of immense academic calibre and true love for everyone at the College."

Aoife Hogan, who graduated in June, said: "Sir Christopher radiated everything it means to be a Johnian. His warmth was felt by us all. He changed our College for the better, and his spirit will endure through his legacy of research, compassion, and Johnian good humour."

Chris was always quick to express his thanks to members of staff and fondly joked how John O'Sullivan, the Fellows'

Butler who has worked at the College for 21 years, was actually in charge. He said: "John O'Sullivan really runs the College, as far as I'm concerned. He tells me what to do, in the nicest possible way, and I rely on him totally. I have been very lucky that the staff and the students and the Fellows have been very helpful and kind, and that's made a big difference to how things go."

In turn, John admired Chris's ability to make everyone in the room feel as special and as important as Chris himself was. John remembers: "When Sir Christopher joined the College as a Fellow in 2001, he quickly became very popular with my team as he was always so kind and appreciative. We were all delighted when he was chosen to be the Master. For the past 12 years it has been a privilege to work so closely with him, particularly behind the scenes. Many exciting events have taken place in the Master's Lodge and he and Mary always made time to make each guest and member of staff feel special and valued.

"At College Feasts he insisted that members of catering staff still on duty during his speech should gather in the Hall so he could allow everyone to show their appreciation for the service they had received. He also had the amazing



The Master with Anusha Ashok, President of the JCR, and Jessica Tearney-Pearce, the then SBR President, at a student welfare event



The Master being knighted by the Duke of Cambridge in November 2018

ability to remember names and details of all the College staff and made it obvious how much he cared by never being too busy to stop and chat."

Hundreds of messages of condolence were received from people near and far who had known and loved Chris – from Professor Stephen J Toope, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, to Dr Manmohan Singh, alumnus and former Prime Minister of India. Dr Singh wrote: "I learnt with profound sorrow of the death of Professor Sir Christopher Dobson. My family and I have very warm memories of interacting with Professor Dobson. His passing is a great loss to St John's College."

"He changed our College for the better, and his spirit will endure through his legacy of research, compassion, and Johnian good humour."

The loss to the global St John's community, the University of Cambridge as a whole, and the international academic network cannot be understated. But the loss to his beloved family is far greater. William Dobson explained: "Dad's

achievements are only a small part of who he was. He wasn't only a great scientist and a great Master, he was a great son, brother, brother-in-law, cousin, friend, mentor, colleague, husband, and a truly wonderful father to me and my brother Richard, and more recently to Jimbo.

"As someone who didn't inherit his scientific interests (or, perhaps more accurately, brain) and would routinely fall asleep when attending his lectures around the world, it is as a father that I will remember him best. A father who looked after two small children and a wife with meningitis while working a full-time job. A father who would work in taxis, trains, airports and planes so, when he came home, he could commit to his family fully. A father who taught himself to bowl so he could play cricket with me in the garden, a father who would always encourage me in (almost) everything I did.

"Richard recently rang Mum and described how much he always depended on Dad for advice, and said he now tries to imagine what Dad would have told him: 'Always be confident in your life choices and decisions. Follow your passions and fulfil your dreams. And remember how proud we are of you.'

"Throughout Dad's illness, he was as dignified as he was in health – never angry or scared or sad but with a resolute determination to carry on until all options were exhausted and, when they were, not to give up but to find a deep level of acceptance that his time had come.

"Just a year ago we were on our way to Dad's investiture at Buckingham Palace – perhaps he is the only person to be knighted by his former lodger! I didn't think I could feel so proud. Yet the pride I felt then pales in comparison to the pride I felt as I watched the way he dealt with this terrible illness for seven months. Now we are contemplating a life in which he is no longer here, I hope we all continue to make him proud.

"Until his death I didn't know that grief could run so deep, leaving an empty hole inside of me which I'm not sure anything will be able to fill. So, Dad, my BFG (best friend in the galaxy) – 'even if I lived to be one hundred and two, I'm just not sure I will ever get over you...!'"

Memorial services to honour the life of Professor Sir Christopher Dobson will take place on Friday, January 24 and Saturday, January 25 2020.

Aquila has landed

It may have taken 500 years for St John's to get a women's singing group, but the members of Aquila are determined to make up for lost time, Louise Hanzlik learns.



Aquila in front of the Bridge of Sighs. Photo credit: Nordin Ćatić

Music has a long and illustrious history at St John's. The Choir of St John's is beloved by fans around the world and has clocked up more than 90 recordings since it was founded in the 1670s. The Gentlemen of St John's have been wowing audiences for 40 years, and in 2013 St John's Voices, a mixed-voice choir for students, was established.

But it wasn't until Andrew Nethsingha, Director of Music at St John's, became Chair of the College Music Society in 2017 that Aquila was born. Aquila, which means 'eagle' in Latin, is the first ever all-female *a cappella*, or unaccompanied, singing group at St John's.

Andrew explained: "I wanted to create an all-female vocal ensemble to

complement the all-male Choir and the mixed-voice St John's Voices. We now have three wonderful choirs: one mixed, one female, one male. I also wanted to create a secular vocal ensemble for the College."

Now female staff, undergraduates, graduates, and Fellows at St John's have the chance to sing in a fun, relaxed environment – and reassuringly, no auditions are required.

"Hearing and watching the inaugural concert of Aquila in March 2018 was one of the most enjoyable, rewarding experiences of my 12 years as Director of Music – simply joyous!"

Andrew said: "I wanted to bring together all the different constituencies of the College community. There aren't many recreational activities in College which bring such a broad range of people together into one unit – it is a joy to see these singers loving their music-making together. The absence of auditions is another way of widening access – though you certainly wouldn't know that from listening!"

The creation of Aquila was made possible through support from the College Annual Fund – a fund which supports new and innovative projects every year. Any resident member can apply for funding of up to £25,000 for new initiatives that benefit St John's.



Once the financial backing was secured, in 2018 Andrew was able to approach Joanna Forbes L'Estrange, who he describes as 'one of the most talented, inspiring and experienced people in the world in this genre of music-making', to found and lead Aquila.

Joanna is the former Musical Director of the Grammy award-winning *a cappella* group The Swingle Singers, as well as being a composer. She has coached *a cappella* groups all over the world, and has also appeared as a judge on Sky One's *Sing: Ultimate A Cappella*.

She said: "A *cappella* singing is something that I'm passionate about, so when I was asked to start up the group I jumped at the chance to get involved. I have always loved coaching groups and I get a huge buzz from watching them improve week by week."

Aquila currently has 16 members, who sing a variety of styles of music including jazz, folk, gospel and pop in three or four parts. Joanna records demos of all the vocal lines so the singers can learn the songs entirely by ear and don't need to be able to read music.

Although the group mainly sings *a cappella* songs, they also sing some pieces with musical accompaniment – some of the pieces work well when sung with a jazz band, and others with piano. Much of Aquila's repertoire includes pieces that were written, performed or arranged by women, and the group often performs Joanna's own compositions. These have included 'We Will Remember Them', a moving piece written to mark Remembrance Day, 'Give Us Grace', a Jane Austen prayer set to music, and '21st-Century Woman', a gospel-style song

written and composed by Joanna that made history by being the first recording session of a song which was written, conducted, sung, played, engineered, produced, mixed and mastered entirely by women. This rousing piece celebrates the diverse roles women play in society, and encourages women to stand up and be counted as the fight for equality continues.

Joanna said: "Although I mostly conduct when we perform, I encourage the singers to listen to each other for entries and coming off, rather than just relying on my direction; for some of our songs, I stand at the side and let the group perform entirely by listening to each other."

"I feel proud to be a member of the College's first all-female vocal music group – well worth the 500-year wait."

Over the last two years, Aquila has performed in numerous venues within St John's – in the Chapel, in the Bar, at private College dinners and at the May Ball – as well as in concerts in the Old Divinity School, including one singing alongside the College's Jazz Band.

Being a member of the group has had a transformative effect on life at St John's for its members. One singer, third-year PhD student and marine ecologist Arlie McCarthy, explained: "Being part of Aquila has helped me find my place in the College. Rehearsals are a highlight of my week, transporting me away from my PhD research for one and a half hours a week. I've also become much more confident, not just with singing,

but also performing and presenting my academic work."

Joanna has seen first-hand the positive impact singing can have on people's mental wellbeing. She added: "One student told me she couldn't have got through her finals without Aquila, another said that being in the group had been a highlight of her time at Cambridge."

Aquila will be performing in two concerts at the end of Michaelmas Term. The group will be singing a few numbers with the Jazz Band in the Old Divinity School on December 3 at 7.30pm, with songs including 'Killing Me Softly' and 'Natural Woman'. And on December 5 they will give an informal lunchtime recital (1.10-1.50pm) in the New Music Room, showcasing much of their repertoire. At these informal performances guests can pop in and out on their lunch break and no pre-booking is required.

Andrew Nethsingha credits Aquila with being a highlight of his time as Director of Music at St John's. He said: "Hearing and watching the inaugural concert of Aquila in March 2018 was one of the most enjoyable, rewarding experiences of my 12 years as Director of Music – simply joyous. Aquila is now a central part of music-making in College; long may it continue!"

Sarah Dodsworth, Head of the Master's and President's Office, has worked at St John's for 18 years and is one of six members of staff who currently sing in Aquila. She joined Aquila at the first rehearsal and summed up the feelings of many members when she said: "Aquila is amazing! I feel proud to be a member of the College's first all-female vocal music group – well worth the 500-year wait."

■ Aquila rehearse at 5.15pm every Tuesday evening during term time in the New Music Room, so anyone interested in joining can drop in, or contact Sophie Kirk, College Music Administrator, on S.A.N.Kirk@joh.cam.ac.uk New members are always welcome.

■ For more information about Aquila, visit www.facebook.com/johnsaquila/

Long-distance dreams

Deputy Head Gardener Mick Ranford wanted to mark his 65th birthday by doing something special. Louise Hanzlik finds out why he didn't let the lack of a proper map, blisters, or getting on the wrong train stop him.



Mick close to Robin Hood's Bay

After 192 miles of strenuous walking, Mick Ranford could see the sea. As he gazed towards Robin Hood's Bay, he noticed a woman in the distance pointing a camera at him. Why the interest in him, a lone 64-year-old walker?

Mick had decided to celebrate his 65th birthday by tackling the famous Coast to Coast walk, from St Bees in Cumbria to Robin Hood's Bay on the North Yorkshire coast. Just two years earlier he attempted the walk, but blisters defeated him – and now he was back and more determined than ever. And the intrepid traveller didn't let getting on the wrong train and accidentally ending up in Scotland instead of Cumbria stop him – he backtracked and soon was ready to begin the walk.

Mick, who is planning to retire next year, is no stranger to long-distance walking, having walked the 96-mile West Highland Way from Glasgow to Fort William in 2007. But after acknowledging that now he is "not very fit", Mick's wife Denise told him this time "to be sensible" and not to go it alone. She found a

company that would plan his itinerary, arrange accommodation, and transport his luggage.

The stunning walk is one of the most popular long-distance footpaths in the UK, and passes through the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the Pennines, and the North Yorkshire Moors. It took Mick, who has worked at St John's for 30 years, 19 days (including four rest days). Each day he set off at 9am and walked an average of 12-13 miles before stopping at 4pm.

"Unfortunately on day one, I got blisters," Mick says. "My own fault – I didn't do enough training. I trained by walking five miles a day around Marshall's Airfield – but it's not quite the same terrain as the Lake District." He was given some advice from a fellow walker: use dollops of Vaseline so the boots slide rather than rub. "That did the trick!"

Accommodation was arranged for him in B&Bs and pubs, and he would occasionally meet others doing the walk. Mick joined a group nicknamed

the 'The Four Old Men of Hadleigh' for a while who were doing a charity walk for Hadleigh Dementia Action Alliance. "It's nice to meet random people and there's a lot of camaraderie. Some walkers want to get from A to B as fast as they can, but I like to take my time."

On several occasions Mick got lost and had to knock on doors to ask the way. "The company gave me a map, but I would recommend Ordnance Survey maps – I wish I'd had one!" He was given a GPS device by his son-in-law, but gave up on it after walking around in circles while following it in a Cumbrian village – so he went back to knocking on doors. "Everyone was so friendly; one old lady even offered to do my laundry for me."

Despite mainly glorious weather, the wind was so strong in the Lakes that people were getting blown over. "It was really difficult and challenging at times." How did he keep going through these challenges? "Once you've started, you just have to keep going. Plus, I'd paid for it!"

On July 3, the day before his 65th birthday, Mick finally reached Robin Hood's Bay. It was late afternoon, and as usual, he was taking his time, when he spotted a woman taking photos of him. As he got closer he realised it was Denise – she had come to see him fulfil his dream. Reunited, they walked down to the beach where Mick threw a stone he'd carried from the Irish Coast into the sea, in keeping with the custom. They then headed to the pub, joining his fellow walkers who'd arrived earlier, where they celebrated Mick's success and his birthday with a pint. "I made it – even though I'm always last!"

So will Mick stop walking now he's achieved his goal? "I might do the Pennine Journey next – 247 miles, from Settle to Hadrian's Wall. But I think I'll take an OS map course first!"



10-minute interview

With Professor Patrick Boyde

You've been known as 'Fellow Borderer' – aka Graduate Liaison Officer – for 16 years. Can you explain what this job is all about?

The first thing to say is that I invented the role and the title. A borderer is historically someone who moves from one state across the border into the next state. I see myself as someone who crosses over borders in order to stop them becoming barriers. It's so easy for people within a College to divide themselves by age, by faculty, by sporting interests, or whatever, and to create little pockets where they hardly meet each other. I'm good at breaking down the surface tension that keeps people apart. When the role was first set up we were talking only about the graduate community, but I try to reach out to all the people on the fringes of St John's.

Where did you get the idea for the role?

If you want to pin down a place where it started, it would be the Buttery. In the '90s I used to go in there and sit down at a table with people who looked as if they might talk to me if I talked to them. I met quite a few grads like that, and began to get the idea that there was room for someone to be a bit more proactive.

Eventually in 2002 the Council agreed to give me a nice big room as my base, some kind of title, and a modest entertainment allowance. In the beginning I made up the programme week by week, and gradually I saw what worked and what didn't.

What kind of events do you host?

Always something Johnian or something cultural. I never want it to be just a drinks party – I always want there to be something about the history of St John's, or some poetry, or a play, or a discussion, or a visit to a museum, or a walk around Cambridge. Always something with a speaker or a topic – something to talk about, to see, to learn, and to share.

What have been your event highlights over the years?

The first time I really hit gold was with the ghost stories. There wasn't a tradition of ghost stories in St John's; really the whole thing was set up to provide a context in which I could get John Crook [former Fellow and Professor of Ancient History] to read something. He was a brilliant reader. He came along to the very first one and read an M. R. James story, and he had everyone just sitting

there trembling. From that I really came to understand the power of the story read aloud, in candlelight, in December, in the Combination Room. In that setting all you've got to do is say "It was a dark and stormy night" and you're away, and the effect is astonishing.

The wine tasting in the Wordsworth Room is another sure-fire winner. I always ask an expert among the Fellows to choose the wines and to find some special angle. Once we had a 1943 French Bordeaux, and it was pretty poisonous, but the idea that you had a wine made in wartime, sitting in our College cellars, and still drinkable – that's the kind of thing that gets people excited.

What impact do you think the Borderer has on graduates' experience of St John's?

The people I help most are those who've come either from another UK university with no collegiate background or from abroad, who are here for a one-year course and who otherwise wouldn't get involved in the College so quickly. There are an awful lot of people in the wide world from whom I get nice messages, and who come back to visit, who really appreciate that there had been someone around to act as a 'catalyst' – to make interactions happen quicker than if you just stir things together and hope for the best.

We've heard a rumour that you might be giving up the role...

Well, although my role model is definitely Prince Philip, I can't go on forever, and I'd love my role to continue in some form – not necessarily the same way I do it, but something like it. So we've been thinking and looking around for some years, but we still haven't found a Fellow of the right age and temperament who'd be willing to give the time and energy it takes.

If you do step down, what will you miss most?

I would miss having a reason to talk to people. Because although I'm quite a chatty person, I was quite shy when I was young, and if I hadn't invented this job for myself, and given it a title, I would have felt the urge to go up to new people and say "Welcome to St John's", "Come and talk" and so on, but I probably wouldn't have persisted. Now I can always go up and say "I'm the Borderer, I hope you'll come to some of my events", and that's how I get to know them.



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