



ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Michaelmas Term 2020

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**'Crises spark innovation' – meet the new Master
One Fellow's battle with Covid-19
Staying positive during a pandemic**

WELCOMES, GOODBYES AND CONGRATULATIONS

New arrivals and weddings



Photo credit: CecCee Photography.

1 Anita Hazjer, Bedmaker, and Lajos Vad, Deputy Linen Room Supervisor, celebrated the arrival of son Botond Vad into their family on 11 November. **2** Dimka Slavova, Bedmaker, and husband Giovanni welcomed daughter Victoria into the world on 14 March. Victoria is pictured with Dimka and big sister Isabella. **3** David Brown's baby daughter Emily was born on 14 February. The Acting Deputy Head Gardener and his wife Jo are pictured with her. **4** Sarah Jane Waddelow, Finance Business Partner, married David Bainsfair in the College Chapel on 4 November. "Andrew Hammond and Stephen Stokes did an amazing job. I was worried it would seem empty with only our parents, children and Helen Murley and Tim Waters as our witnesses, but it felt really intimate."

Welcome to our new staff

Katie Oliphant – HR Coordinator
Katie Hannawin – Library Graduate Trainee
Kyle Cloughton – Apprentice Chef
Karen Miles – Health and Wellbeing Nurse
Greg Bannan – Lay Clerk
Alex Hopkins – Lay Clerk
Renata Kiss – Bedmaker
Damaris Piure – Bedmaker
Rachel Knighton – Bedmaker
Marcia da Silva – Bedmaker
Ruth Tricker – Properties Administrator (Hostels) – maternity cover
Karolina Oprzalkowska – Bedmaker

Goodbye to...

Davina Turner, Senior Bursar's Secretary, who retired on 31 October after 18 years at St John's.
Sharon Hall, Master's Lodge Housekeeper, who retires at the end of November after 17 years at St John's.
Adam Green, Head Gardener, who retires at Christmas after 35 years at St John's. Read our interview with him on page 14.

Congratulations to...

Lee Cundell, Carpenter, and **Mark Bell**, Porter, who reached 25 years of service at St John's in August, and **Richard Pauley**, Gyp, who reached 25 years of service in October.

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

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Eagle Eye

This newsletter is produced by:
The Communications Office,
St John's College

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Front cover: Heather Hancock pictured on the day she was admitted as the 45th Master of St John's College. Photo credit: Geoff Robinson.

Back cover: From left to right: Jo Matthews, a third-year medical student, and Emily Murdoch, a third-year English student, in their room in New Court surrounded by Boston Ivy. Photo credit: Geoff Robinson.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



The last edition of *Eagle Eye* was produced in the middle of a national lockdown, and as I am writing this, we have just entered a second lockdown – and hopefully nearing the end of it by the time you read this! Things are slightly different this time round; the College is open for business, the students are back in full force, and seminars and lectures are continuing with a blend of online and in-person teaching.

Life in College very much goes on, albeit under rather unusual circumstances. There have been Welcome Halls for new students and there was even a socially distant admission ceremony to welcome Heather Hancock, the College's new Master, to St John's. Heather, who started her new role on 1 October, talked to us about being curious, the key to achieving success, and what she thinks about suggestions that women should 'have it all'.

Professor Peter Johnstone contracted Covid-19 in March and it was touch and go whether he would survive the novel virus that has already caused the deaths of more than a million people

around the world. In a frank interview, the mathematician told us about where he thinks he picked up Covid-19, the months he spent in hospital, and his road to recovery.

Staying positive during a pandemic is challenging. I like to go for long walks in the countryside to blow away the cobwebs, and we spoke to students, staff and Fellows to find out what they are doing to keep their spirits up. Computer Services Manager Pete loves nothing more than taking a dip in the River Cam, no matter the temperature or weather. I think I'll stick to my strolls and leave the swimming to him.

Our Head Gardener is green by name and green by nature and we caught up with him before he retires from his role after 35 years. Adam Green shares his favourite memories of his three-and-a-half decades at St John's and tells us what he will miss most about College life – we don't think it will be removing the inappropriate snowmen built by students!

And finally we talk to Jack Glossop about why being a butler isn't all quite as it seems in *Downton Abbey*, and the tricks the College can play after dark...

We hope you enjoy *Eagle Eye* and that by the time you are reading the next issue the world will be in a much better place.

Stay safe,

Louise

**Editor and Web and Internal
Communications Officer**

NEWS ROUND-UP

Nobel Prize for Honorary Fellow

Professor Sir Roger Penrose, alumnus and Honorary Fellow of St John's, is one of three scientists to have been awarded the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physics for work on black holes.

Sir Roger shares the 114th Nobel Prize with Professor Reinhard Genzel and Professor Andrew Ghez after showing that the general theory of relativity leads to the formation of black holes. His fellow prize-winners discovered a supermassive black hole at the centre of our galaxy.

Nobel Prizes recognise and reward the discoveries that have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind, in the fields of physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, peace and economic sciences. The award is presented by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and is worth 10m Swedish kronor (£870,000), with half going to Sir Roger and the other half shared between Genzel and Ghez.

Sir Roger used ingenious mathematical methods in his proof in 1965 that black holes are a direct consequence of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity. A Title A Research Fellow at St John's from 1957 until 1960, Sir Roger has led an award-winning academic career and was elected as an Honorary Fellow at St John's in 1987. He is the sixth Nobel prize-winner in Physics from St John's and is currently Emeritus Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford.

Sir Roger also designed a mathematical tiling system, an example of which decorates the floor at the entrance to the Library at St John's.

Ceremony held in College Chapel to formally admit new Master



Heather Hancock being formally admitted as Master of St John's. She is shown flanked by Professor Tim Whitmarsh, who was Vice-Master for a year, and Dr Steve Edgley, President of the College. Photo credit: Geoff Robinson.

Heather Hancock was formally admitted as Master of St John's College on 1 October 2020.

A group of 30 Fellows attended a small Admission ceremony in the College Chapel. Due to Covid-19 regulations, Heather was not able to meet as many members of the College in person as she would have been able to do in normal times, so a video address to the community was recorded.

In it, she said how she wants the College to be renowned for being inclusive and for making it easier for young people of great academic potential to reach St John's regardless of their background, for them to know they belong here and for them to thrive. She also said the College community needs to continue to be resilient, understanding and kind as it weathers the Covid-19 pandemic.

She said: "Crises come and crises go and for more than 500 years, St John's has shown that it always comes through.

Coronavirus does not lessen my excitement or enthusiasm about our future. Crises create opportunity. They can make it easier to see a way ahead, and to demolish obstacles that perhaps ought to have come down some while ago.

"We can learn a lot about ourselves from how we respond to challenging times. I know that St John's will have a positive, confident, ambitious response – for ourselves, but much more importantly for the benefit of society and the planet. It will be my privilege as Master to guide the College into that happier, brighter and fulfilling future."

Heather is the 45th Master of the College and she is the first woman to hold the role. Her full video address can be viewed on the College's YouTube channel.

Read an interview with the Master on pages 8 and 9.

New Community Hub gets green light

A plan to transform the social space around the 17th century Second Court at St John's College has been given the go-ahead by Cambridge City Council.

The Community Hub Development in Second Court has been granted planning permission and Listed Building Consent. It will mean the existing Buttery dining room, built in the 1970s, will be demolished and replaced with new dining facilities, cafe, bar and an attractive outdoor patio area.

The Grade I-Listed gate piers to the rear of the Buttery will be moved to the west end of the patio, in line with Kitchen Lane and Kitchen Bridge. The decision follows extensive consultation with Historic England and planning officers at Cambridge City Council.

Helen Murley, Domestic Bursar, said: "The Community Hub will enhance

Second Court as the social centre of the College and encourage the opportunity for interdisciplinary interaction and engagement that is so much a feature of College life. We want it to be a hub for all members of the College community and I'm delighted that planning permission and Listed Building Consent has been granted.

"A lot of hard work, time and effort has been invested to get to this point and I'd like to thank everyone involved. Special thanks must go to Dr Frank Salmon and Tim Waters, Head of College Buildings."

The designs are now being finalised and building contractors will be appointed by spring 2021, so construction can begin next summer. This will ensure the development is ready to be used by the start of the 2022/23 academic year.



Artist's impression of the new-look patio area and the space where the current Buttery is located.

St John's academics are honoured

A number of St John's Fellows have been awarded prestigious Fellowships and memberships in recent months.

Classicist Professor Tim Whitmarsh, who was Vice-Master of St John's for a year from September 2019, was elected as a Fellow of the British Academy, and Professor Usha Goswami, a world-leader in literacy research, received the John Nisbet Fellowship from the British Educational Research Association.

Dr Joana Meier was awarded The Branco Weiss Fellowship – Society in Science for

outstanding work in evolutionary biology and Professor Uta Paszkowski and Professor Eske Willerslev were both awarded membership of the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO) in recognition of their remarkable scientific achievements: Professor Paszkowski in the life sciences and Professor Willerslev for his work in ancient genomics and environmental DNA.

Find out more on the News section of the College website.

Student writer's film released

A film written and directed by second-year Jasper Cresdee-Hyde has been released on Amazon Prime.

Jasper made the feature-length *Tales from the Apocalypse* starring a team of young actors during his 2018-2019 gap year, on a £1,000 budget. The Human, Social, and Political Sciences (HSPS) student at St John's juggled filmmaking with waiting tables to earn money during production of the supernatural comedy-drama of love, death and destiny at the end of the world. The film was finally released on Amazon Prime's self-distribution streaming service in August and has garnered five-star reviews.

Jasper took a gap year after leaving a film studies course in his first year and successfully applying to Cambridge. He said: "This isn't just a film about the end of this fictional world, it also marks the end of my life before. It is about endings and bringing things to a close. But I wanted to do it in a comedic way, celebratory of life."

Poet up for top prize

A book by Sasha Dugdale, St John's writer-in-residence, has been shortlisted for the most valuable prize in British poetry.

Sasha is one of 10 poets in the running for this year's £25,000 TS Eliot Prize for collections of poems that the judges said 'unsettled, captivated and compelled'. Her book, *Deformations*, was published in July and features poems themed around the creation and destruction of the cultural narrative. The winner will be named in January.

Brothers' PPE firm

Student brothers from St John's have founded a non-profit organisation offering high quality PPE at cost-price in the fight against Covid-19. Sixth-year medic Aman Mehan and brother Kavi, a third-year geography student, launched Cost Price PPE at home in Manchester during the first lockdown. The website can be found at costpriceppe.com

University Challenge team success

A team of students from St John's has reached the next round of the BBC's *University Challenge* after beating opponents from the Royal Academy of Music 220 to 40.

The winning team in the first round match, broadcast in September but filmed before the pandemic, featured Thomas Musgrove, team captain, Milena Malcharek, Rebecca Marrow and Sam Willis. The selection of team members was led by Dani Vijayakumar, St John's Economics student.

Medal for pioneering work in optics

St John's scientist Professor Mete Atatüre has been awarded a medal and prize from the Institute of Physics for his contribution to advancing the understanding of light.

Professor Atatüre has won the 2020 Thomas Young Medal and Prize for his pioneering contributions to quantum optical phenomena in semiconductors and diamond, creating 'exciting applications' in quantum technologies. Director of Studies in Physics and Astrophysics and in Mathematics for Natural Sciences at St John's, he receives a silver medal, certificate and £1,000 prize.

Royal Society award

Professor Zoubin Ghahramani has been given the Royal Society Milner Award and Lecture 2021 for his 'fundamental contributions to probabilistic machine learning'.

Professor of Information Engineering and a Fellow of St John's, he is University Liaison Director and Executive Board Member of the Alan Turing Institute, and a world leader in the field of machine learning and artificial intelligence. The Milner Award and Lecture is the premier European award for outstanding achievement in computer science.

'Cambridge is for you' says student co-founder of new access project



Josh Adeyemi being interviewed for BBC Look East.

An undergraduate at St John's has helped launch an initiative that aims to 'change the face of Cambridge University'.

Josh Adeyemi is a founding member of aim – a new student-led access project set up to inspire students from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds to apply to Cambridge. It covers topics from misconceptions of Cambridge, to imposter syndrome and whether students get judged for wearing a hijab.

Josh, who is in his second year studying Human, Social, and Political Sciences (HSPS), wants people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds to know there is a 'place for you' at Cambridge.

He explained: "There may not be a lot of students from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds at Cambridge, but we are here and we are doing our bit to change the image of the University as a place just for middle-class white students. We know what it is like applying to Cambridge as someone from an underrepresented ethnic background and we want to share our knowledge and experiences to open up this world to as many people as possible."

Josh is the BAME Officer on the St John's College JCR – the undergraduate student

council that acts as a voice for students at the College. He said: "My priority has always been to make sure that BAME members of the College feel included, welcome and valued. My ultimate hope would be to work with students to make St John's the most diverse and accessible College in Cambridge. I was keen to get involved with aim, which was the brainchild of a woman called Tsemaye, an Engineering student at St Catharine's College, as soon as I heard about it. During lockdown a big group of us worked to launch a website that collates the different experiences of students from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds in a way that is accessible to any prospective student."

The youngest of four, Josh was brought up by his single mother in London and did his GCSEs at state school before securing a full scholarship to study A-levels at Eton College. He said: "I don't want anyone to write themselves off because they think they don't look like a typical Cambridge student. At aim we want people from all walks of life to know Cambridge is for them."

Josh, who featured on BBC Look East this term to promote aim, added that its focus is to reach people via social media and its new website at aimcambridge.co.uk

New lockdown look for room where D-Day landings were planned

Army officials planned the D-Day landings in the Senior Combination Room at St John's College – now 76 years later the oak floor of the historic room has been returned to its 17th century roots.

The 93ft Senior Combination Room on the first floor of Second Court was a key location for planning the D-Day landings because its lengthy floor space was ideal for poring over maps.

The D-Day combat between Allied troops and German forces in Normandy was the largest seaborne invasion in history and resulted in the Allied liberation of Western Europe from Nazi Germany's control. The invasion required extensive planning, a key part of which happened in the Senior Combination Room.

The Grade I-Listed room, and the Small Combination Room next door to it, were once part of the Gallery of the original 17th century Master's Lodge. College archives suggest the Gallery's wooden floors were made of elm or oak, but it is thought they were replaced with softer pine boards during building works in the 1860s.

The pine floors have been showing their age in more modern times, with



Tim Waters, Head of College Buildings, in the historic Senior Combination Room after the installation of the new oak floor. Photo credit: Nordin Čatić.

a Heritage statement by Cambridge architects Freeland Rees Roberts noting the College and Fellows have been concerned about them since the 1930s. It added that oak boards 'would be more in keeping with the early 17th century plaster ceiling and panelling, and more durable and resistant to wear in future.'

The College decided to replace the pine with reclaimed oak boards and

obtained Listed Building Consent in 2017. Specialist carpenters began work replacing the boards in June this year, and the new floor was finally revealed in September.

Tim Waters, Head of College Buildings, said: "If it's looked after and maintained correctly there's no reason why it can't last a couple of centuries at least."

Pandemic service medal for Fellow and team

An 'exceptional' team of Cambridge engineers led by a St John's academic has been specially honoured for its service during the Covid-19 crisis.

Professor Duncan McFarlane, from the University Institute for Manufacturing (IfM), is the Covid response coordinator for a group of 37 colleagues and engineering students who together were awarded the Royal Academy of Engineering President's Special Award for Pandemic Service.

The team was commended for its rapid response. Early in the first Covid-19 lockdown, it used modelling tools originally designed to manage the efficiency of factories to help Addenbrooke's Hospital plan patient flow. Other vital work included helping to streamline logistics and developing a ventilator sharing system.

Professor McFarlane is Professor in Industrial Information Engineering at the Department of Engineering, Head of the Distributed Information and Automation Laboratory within the IfM, and a Fellow of St John's, and his group is one of 19 individuals and teams of engineers awarded silver medals for exceptional achievements during the pandemic.

Professor Sir Jim McDonald FREng FRSE, President of the Royal Academy of Engineering, said: "Engineering expertise and innovation has been central to the global fight to save lives and protect livelihoods."

During Michaelmas Term, Professor McFarlane has been spearheading the asymptomatic testing programme for University of Cambridge students.

Queen's Birthday Honours recipients

A Fellow of St John's has been recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Professor Stefan Reif, founder and lately Director of the University's Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit and a Fellow of St John's since 1988, was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his services to scholarship alongside Honorary Fellow Professor Sheena Radford, who was made an OBE for services to molecular biology research.

These members also received awards: Sir Donald Runnicles (1976, Knight Bachelor); Sir Graham Wrigley (1982, Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George), and Professor Keith Hawton (1962, Commander of the Order of the British Empire).

'I'm motivated by a belief that better never stops'

Starting a new job is challenging at the best of times, but starting a new job as Head of a Cambridge College during a pandemic is even more challenging. Heather Hancock, Master of St John's College, speaks to Jo Tynan about why we shouldn't be afraid of a crisis.

I was a very outdoorsy child and used to go out exploring for the day with my younger sister Amanda. We lived in a very small village in Lancashire, and there weren't many other children about. We would make dens, climb trees and come back home muddy when the streetlights came on.

I was the first person in my family to go to university and it was a big deal but there was always the expectation that Amanda and I would go. My parents came from backgrounds where there weren't the resources to go to university, although my father became a civil engineer through day release and evening classes. And my mother did an MA in the late nineties after my sister and I had both been to Cambridge.

I was the kind of pupil who revelled in exams, but my secondary school really wasn't a place where academic achievements were cool. Mr Matthews, the headmaster, suggested I studied medicine but I didn't want to be a doctor. But he put the idea of Cambridge into my head.

I've always had a passion for the way we use land, how people interact with land, how livelihoods are shaped by land and how we manage it – especially rural land. I wanted to do a degree that tackled the complexities understanding land in economic, environmental and societal terms. So I applied to Cambridge to study Land Economy and got a place at St John's.

The fact that I was at Cambridge and from a comprehensive school didn't really seem to matter to me or anyone else. I really wanted to do the degree and I really wanted to be here. I didn't think I had to ask anyone's permission to do either of those things. Amanda also came to St John's and we were the first sisters to study here.



Heather on the day she was admitted as the 45th Master of St John's College. Photo credit: Geoff Robinson.

By week three, like many freshers I thought I'd made a terrible mistake.

I was away from home for the first time, meeting people who had read books I'd never heard of, and been to places I'd never imagined visiting. Then someone on my staircase cooked pasta without putting any water in the pan. I thought 'well, perhaps I do know a thing or two other people don't know!' and after that it kind of balanced itself out.

I vividly remember being admitted as a scholar in the Combination Room at dusk.

We walked up the big staircase and into an atmospheric candlelit room with the fire lit, Harry Hinsley in his big chair – that memory has always stuck with me. Of course, I didn't think I would be back one day as Master of St John's, but also at that age I thought anything was possible – as should everyone who comes to Cambridge.



Heather in 1987 when she graduated with a First in Land Economy from St John's.

My career does look really varied – I've always been a curious person. My degree taught me how to harness different disciplines in approaching problems and I've definitely benefited from the transferable skills it embedded. At the heart of everything I have done has been a commitment to making things happen for the long term not the short term, and to improving people's lives.

I've always had at least one foot in the rural/environmental/food world.

But I've had lots of involvement in youth charity and in sport, including working on the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. It is quite unusual to have held senior positions in national, local and regional government, and to have had a global business career.

I can't really single out favourites. My time in Whitehall as Private Secretary to three Home Secretaries gave me a priceless insight into politics and catapulted me into the Senior Civil

Service before I was 30, but on the other hand running the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority brought my work much closer to people's daily lives and wellbeing. I've been very lucky as people have often come along with fascinating propositions that I have wanted to get involved in. And I've been willing to take the risk of making a change.

I'm motivated by a belief that better never stops.

I want to make it easier for people to succeed, for them to have fulfilling lives, and for our institutions to do the difficult things well, not just the easy wins. As an optimistic person, I do have a tendency to think 'how hard can it be?' when faced with a new demand – to which the answer can sometimes be 'harder than you think!'

Success in achieving a bold ambition lies in attention to detail.

It's easy to advocate for a better world, quite a lot harder to make it happen.

There was never any doubt in my mind that the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games would be a success.

I had 800 staff working on the Games: everything from crisis management to creating the opening ceremony company, managing volunteers and overseeing the delivery programme. There were so many challenges and tensions right up to the last minute. But there were some incredible people involved in delivering it.

I found myself in floods of tears during the opening ceremony – it was the culmination of eight years' work, a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

I met my husband Herbie through my sister – they read Land Economy at the same time.

When we wanted to have a family we moved from London back to Yorkshire. We have two sons, Harry and Archie. I've always been a working mother. I think they have been glad that I haven't been on their case around the clock!

I get cross when the media suggests mothers should aspire to 'having it all' (or fathers, for that matter).

It's lining people up to feel guilty or inadequate. Something has to give whether it is work, family life, friendships or interests. It's a personal choice about where you balance things out. Even though having children with Herbie has been my best ever move, I still really wanted to work. Everything was either work or family – I put personal friendships and social life on the backburner. Once you recognise there isn't a 'perfect' solution, the easier it is to feel OK about your choices and get on with enjoying the life you've made.

St John's is an exceptionally successful community.

I intend to champion and help drive forward the College's ambitions, making sure that we are modern and agile in tackling the issues that matter to us. John's will continue to offer leadership and confidence in the way we step beyond the pandemic.

I've dealt with a lot of crises during my career and I'm bringing that experience to my job as a Head of House during a pandemic.

We are still delivering excellent teaching and learning and enabling as much of the wider life of the College as we can – that's been the aim this term as we strive to keep everybody safe and well.

We've got academics in College who are helping to find the route out of this mess.

Crises spark innovation, new research and greater understanding. We are already on the path out of the pandemic.

I relax by gardening and I love cooking.

I can see the Bridge of Sighs out of my kitchen window now. Not a bad replacement for my limestone hills in Yorkshire!



Heather with her husband Mark, known as Herbie, and their youngest son Archie in the Master's Lodge on the day the family moved to Cambridge. Photo credit: Nordin Čatić.

How I stay positive in a pandemic

College members have found different ways to maintain or improve their wellbeing during the Covid crisis, from walking to wild swimming. Karen Clare finds out more.



Peter Halasovski, Computer Services Manager

"I love wild swimming because it's an excellent stress reliever, a way to reconnect with the real world. People are starting to catch on to the psychological benefits of regularly jumping into cold water and having a good scream. This is especially true during lockdown.

"If you're thinking of giving it a go, don't just jump in. Do find and follow the safety warnings, but don't let them put you off. Find a good spot, go with a friend, and you'll enjoy it a lot more if you don't wear a swimsuit!"



The Rev'd Andrew Hammond, College Chaplain

"I started keeping hens at the start of this term. Donatella is a Leghorn, while Coco and Niamh are both Speckled Skye Rocks, and they all now live happily in a specially made hen house in my garden at Merton Cottage.

"As a single person during the pandemic, it's nice to have other living creatures to be responsible for. The girls are definitely up for students coming to visit them. Just be in touch!"



Tom White, PhD student in Zoology and SBR Environment Officer

"I've had an allotment for a few years and I love the sense of relaxation and satisfaction you can get from tending to and seeing your plants grow, and tucking into some home-grown fruit and veg.

"Thanks to the wonderful group of people involved, the allotments at 1 Madingley Road have been a big success this year and a welcome distraction for many graduate students. It gives us a chance to get outside and clear our heads."



Dr Talitha Kearey, Research Fellow, Classics

"I bought an inflatable kayak in the first lockdown. I'd never kayaked before, but it seemed a good way to try something new and get out of the house for some socially-distanced exercise.

"It's been wonderful – I've paddled upstream to Grantchester, downstream to Waterbeach, and only capsized once! It's been a real lifesaver during a difficult summer."

Photo credit: Nordin Catlic

Photo credit: Nordin Catlic



Georgia Geekie, third-year undergraduate in Russian and Arabic

"I started sewing in June. I was in search of a creative hobby to beat the lockdown boredom which also stopped me from watching too much Netflix! So I bought two beginners' cross-stitch animal kits. I started to sew animal patches onto my jeans and tote bags, which was a really good introduction to sewing by hand.

"My latest projects have included face masks for my family, such as the pink one I'm wearing in the photo, and mini drawstring bags to give as gifts."



Shaun Mayes, Gardener

"We started carriage driving in the year 2000. We are lucky to live at the edge of the Fens where we can enjoy the countryside from the carriage as we trot along the country roads and byways accompanied by our dogs.

"Most birds and animals have little fear of the horse and carriage so we are privileged to observe wildlife at close quarters. This has been a comforting reminder during these last few months, that nature thrives in spite of the pandemic."



Hannah Dudley, Communications Officer

"In early April I started going for walks at 5.30am and in the evening as that was the only time I wasn't working or home-schooling, it gave me some much needed me-time and it's good for my mind and my body.

"I'm really enjoying it and I now go on one to three-hour walks about five times a week. I listen to podcasts and ring friends and family but also I love to sing while I'm out."



Isobel McIntyre, third-year undergraduate in Manufacturing Engineering and JCR Welfare Officer

"I started yoga during the first lockdown as I wanted something that would give me a break from work but also let me exercise without leaving the house too much. I knew a few friends who had started online yoga classes and were enjoying it so I thought I'd give it a go. Within a week I was addicted!

"The classes help me structure my day, and give me something to look forward to. They also allow me to stop thinking about work and everything going on in the world for an hour a day, which I find extremely important for my wellbeing."

Read longer versions of these stories on the College website joh.cam.ac.uk/staying-positive-in-a-pandemic

‘My tears are tears of joy because I cannot believe how lucky I am to have survived Covid-19’

For 45 years St John’s has been Professor Peter Johnstone’s home and he was a familiar sight in College – until March when he was hospitalised with Covid-19. For several weeks Peter was kept alive by a ventilator and the prognosis was bleak. He tells Jo Tynan about his brush with death during the coronavirus pandemic.



Photo credits: Nordin Caric.

Peter Johnstone starts our interview by telling me not to be embarrassed if he becomes tearful during our conversation. “They are not tears of sorrow, or shame. They are tears of joy because I cannot believe how lucky I am to have come through everything I did.”

We are in Peter’s set in E Staircase New Court surrounded by books and music

scores, our meeting was arranged to start after he had given a Zoom lecture to students. A large bundle of letters from well-wishers is on the seat of his piano and a portrait of mathematician James Joseph Sylvester looks down at us. Peter is known for his ground-breaking contributions to Topos Theory, his love of music and his devotion to teaching. He makes us both a strong cup of coffee

before he recounts the events of the last few months that none of us could have imagined at the start of the year.

The 71-year-old is a tenor with The Bach Choir, one of the world’s leading choruses, and on March 4 they travelled to America to sing with the Yale Schola Cantorum, from Yale University, and to give a series of joint concerts at major US

cities. Not long after they arrived in the US, the Yale authorities pulled the plug on the tour in response to the evolving coronavirus situation – but not before the choirs had rehearsed together. “It was a really positive experience singing with them. But we were suddenly left without the concert and without the tour.”

Peter flew back to the UK and travelled home to St John’s. For a while he felt ‘absolutely fine’ and carried on with his normal life, including going to London to rehearse with the choir again, but his health was slowly deteriorating. It was fellow academics and his bedder who raised the alarm when they felt he was not himself and needed urgent medical help. Peter was admitted to Addenbrooke’s Hospital on March 19 suffering from a cough, confusion, and breathing difficulties. His condition was so serious he was swiftly sedated and put on a ventilator.

He now believes he contracted Covid-19 in America. “The rehearsal room we used at Yale had been extensively used by a Yale faculty member who subsequently fell ill with Covid-19. A significant number of members of the Schola Cantorum as well as many members of The Bach Choir developed Covid symptoms so it seems highly likely we all picked up the virus in that room.”

‘I only remember being asked if I consented to having a tracheotomy and then I slipped into very vivid dreams, some included being looked after back home at John’s’

Peter can’t remember much apart from some strange dreams, but a diary from his medical team shows he suffered repeated seizures, worryingly low blood pressure, developed pneumonia and his temperature spiked dangerously over the first few weeks. This was all while a ventilator was breathing for him as his body fought the Covid-19 infection. Finally in May the medical team was able to successfully take him off the ventilator, a few earlier attempts were aborted when Peter’s condition worsened. But coming off the ventilator was only the first step on the long road to recovery. “I only remember being asked if I consented to having a tracheotomy and then I mostly slipped into what I now know to be very vivid dreams, some of which included being looked after back home at John’s. I was incredibly lucky that

there was space for me in Addenbrooke’s and the medical team were outstanding. I can see from my notes that they played music to me and I will always be grateful for their specialist care.

“It wasn’t until June that I was able to come out of intensive care, and I then spent six or seven weeks in rehabilitation in hospital. Mostly I was extremely bored! I didn’t have access to the internet or to the outside world and no visitors were allowed. But I did have a whole stack of letters to read between physiotherapy appointments. Eventually I got my laptop and then had a lot of emails to deal with and I could do *The Guardian* crossword online every day which helped keep me sane.”

Peter was born in London in 1948 to James Arthur and Dorothy Johnstone, both civil servants. Peter, an only child of only children, has never married and says ‘mathematics is the big love of my life’. He added: “I think anyone sensible would have quickly tired of my focus on mathematics, it is quite common in academic circles to not leave room for all the other things people get up to. I went to the May Ball once but that was enough for me!”

“Now my closest living relatives are second cousins and I’m particularly close to one called Ron who lives in Essex. He wasn’t allowed to visit me but he Skyped me every day when I was on the rehabilitation ward and did a tremendous amount to keep me in touch with the outside world.”

Peter arrived at St John’s as an undergraduate in 1966 and ‘never really left’. “St John’s is my family and my home, there is nowhere in the world that would have been better for me to do the mathematics I’ve done. I’ve not led a particularly healthy lifestyle but I’ve never smoked and I’ve never got involved in drugs. Although I do drink more alcohol than is good for me, and I’ve not taken as much exercise as I should. I was on medication for various things but nothing that was a particular risk factor for being susceptible to Covid.

“In hospital I knew that I was only going to start recovering if I could take some exercise but at first I wasn’t even allowed to go to the bathroom on my own, which was frustrating. I remember being jealous of a man on my recovery ward

who was allowed to go by himself! But I was too unsteady on my feet.”

There has been lots of news coverage of ‘Long Covid’ but Peter’s only ongoing side effect is the loss of sensation in three-and-a-half fingers on his right hand. “I’ve been told it could take up to 10 years before I get the feeling back. They are the fingers I use to hold a pen so it makes handwriting difficult but I’m learning to live with that.”

When he finally returned home to St John’s in August an alarm system was fitted in his set to alert the support team in case he needed help. He has been going on regular walks – including a 10-mile one in the days before we meet – and his singing voice is returning. “I was worried that I might have lost the top end of my range and although it isn’t as powerful, it is coming back which I’m so pleased about as music is my passion – after mathematics of course!”

‘I never married – mathematics is the big love of my life and anyone sensible would have quickly tired of my focus on it! St John’s is my family’

Peter’s ordeal and recovery is already being documented in a research paper so even in sickness he is contributing to academic knowledge.

“I wouldn’t wish what I went through on anyone and I am one of the lucky ones. I would encourage people to follow the rules but to live their lives – I don’t regret going on the tour and I will return to in-person choral rehearsals as soon as it is allowed again. I just feel so very lucky to be alive and I’m determined to make the most of the time I have got left.”



Professor Peter Johnstone walking through New Court near his set in E Staircase.

Green by name and green by nature: memories of a Head Gardener

Catching foxes and presenting lilies to the Queen – as Adam Green prepares to retire from St John's, he talks to Louise Hanzlik about his 35 years at St John's.



Adam and Brynn. Credit: Nordin Catić

It is the final few weeks of life as the Head Gardener for Adam Green, and inevitably his thoughts are turning to what he will miss the most when he retires. "It will be the people and being part of the College community. But I will visit everyone from time-to-time and to see how the trees I planted are doing! More than half of my lifetime has been spent at St John's and I feel like this is my garden – it is going to be hard to give it up."

Adam first joined the team in the mid-eighties, and after working his way up, he has spent 16 years as Head Gardener. "I've always loved being outdoors and working with nature." After a hip replacement two years ago, followed by an operation on his spine, the 62-year-old thinks now is the right time for him to step down. He says, "I need to value the health I have left while I can. I feel young in my head, but I can't always physically do what I used to and this is quite a demanding role."

Along with his team of seven staff, Adam looks after 22 acres of land, including manicured lawns, the grounds of Master's Lodge, wildflower meadows, and the gardens of the student properties. The team has recently finished planting thousands of bulbs so the College will bloom with tulips, daffodils, crocuses and muscari in the spring. There's also the

ongoing battle with ever growing piles of autumnal leaves...

He has many happy memories of his time at St John's and used to bring his two grown-up children into College when they were toddlers, and took them on rides on the mower. "In those days, health and safety wasn't so rigorous!" Being green-fingered runs in the family and his daughter Rosie now works as a gardener at St John's. She got married in the College Chapel five years ago. "That was one of the happiest days of my life," says Adam.

Building snowmen with his children in the Scholars' Garden was another popular family pastime, once Adam had checked the area for any more explicit creations made by mischievous students.

"Students were sometimes rather imaginative with their sculptures. Many were humorous, but some were inappropriate, and I reluctantly had to remove them in case they caused offence."

Student pranks led to another memorable occasion when Adam was tasked with getting to the top of the famous 'Wedding Cake' in New Court because a large inflatable banana had been attached to it. "I had to free climb the last bit – not something I would want to do now even if health and safety allowed!"

Other unusual sightings were usually of the furry kind, and wildlife spotting has always been a firm favourite. Adam has regularly seen deer, badgers, owls, foxes and peregrine falcons. He has also helped rescue his fair share – including coaxing out a scared fox who had run up the staircase in Second Court to the Old Library. And he has spotted the odd Royal too – meeting the Queen during the College's 500th birthday celebrations in 2011 was a particular highlight. He presented her with a pot of Martagon

lilies grown in the Fellows' Garden, to be planted on her estate at Sandringham.

Where Adam can be found, there is often a faithful dog by his side who earns his keep by chasing away the Canadian geese from The Backs. First there was Mr Rusty, then Jed joined him in 2013, and now there's Brynn. Jed died very recently after a short illness. "We loved him and the students loved him. His most important job was really to cheer up students who were missing their own pets."

It doesn't sound like Adam is planning to take it easy in retirement. He wants to do more volunteer work for the Woodland and the Wildlife Trusts, he is keen to be involved in rewilding projects in Scotland, and plans to look into how horticulture can be used in mental health schemes. "I'm sure I can keep myself busy!"

He might be hanging up his gardening gloves, but he is still thinking about the future of the College gardens he has loved for more than three decades. "I'd like there to be a woodland wildlife area and learning centre with pond dipping for children, and an orchard where the wildflower meadow is at Merton Court." Something tells me that when Adam retires at Christmas, it will only be in body, not mind.



Adam and Rosie, 1989.



10-minute interview

Jack Glossop, Deputy Fellows' Butler

How did you first get into 'butlery'?

I worked in pubs and bars before I moved into restaurants and then private service. I trained at the International Butler Academy in the Netherlands for three months in 2012. It was intense, we did 12-hour days, seven days a week. I got a job in China and worked as a palace manager for a Saudi Sheikh for a couple of years looking after his large house and staff.

You've worked at the College for four years – why St John's?

I was working as a house manager – the modern term for a butler – in Mayfair when I saw this job advertised, and I had to go for it. I was always under the impression that these opportunities never came up and always went internally as I'd heard that a job in a Cambridge College is a job for life.

Most people's image of a butler comes from period dramas – what does the role actually entail?

Six of us look after the catering and entertainment arrangements for the Fellows and Master, and we also look after the College's silverware. We operate mainly out of the beautiful Combination Room. Whenever the College is celebrating or doing something ceremonial, we are there. Most of the College community know us as the stern-looking gentlemen in dinner jackets who open the doors and ring the bell in the Hall.

Has the pandemic changed the way your team works?

We are wearing dinner suits along with masks – it's like *Downton Abbey* meets *Holby City*! The Combination Room can normally accommodate 60 people, but the Fellows are now staggered down the table diagonally, six feet apart. We can currently seat 18 at lunch, and a maximum of 12 in the evening. Quite a lot of Fellows come in to take food away; there is a one-way system through the room, a lot of sanitiser, and it feels very safe.

We've heard stories about ghostly encounters around the Combination Room/Fellows' Lobby – have you had any experiences yourself?

I had heard a lot about Cambridge ghosts before I came to St John's, but I didn't realise how seriously some people take it. Personally, I don't believe in the supernatural, but snuffing out the Combination Room's 52 candles when working late at night and finding yourself in the darkness can be eerie. The portrait of the Countess of Shrewsbury used to be hung on the western wall and her eyes follow you around intensely. I was quietly relieved when she was eventually taken down and placed in the Hall. The Fellows' Lobby, where the portraits of the old Masters hang, is usually the place that people find the most unsettling. A couple of former Night Porters were known to avoid it at all costs! Late one evening, I was locking up and heard a

tapping sound near the Chapel Court door. I saw that one of the coat hangers left for Fellows' gowns was rocking and hitting the wall. I thought someone had just come through the door and brushed past it, but it was still going 20 minutes later. I took a short video which was shared on the College's Facebook page where there was a lot of speculation about what could be causing it. I think it was cold air streaming down the brickwork behind it.

What do you do to relieve stress?

I cycle to work from Linton every day and at the weekends, I do about 160 miles a week. It's impossible to be stressed when you are cycling – it just disappears.

We hear you're also an editor of a local newspaper. Tell us about that.

I'd been volunteering on *The Linton News* for a while because I enjoy writing and used to do sub-editing, and I was asked earlier this year if I wanted to take on the role of editor. It faced the prospect of closure, so I decided to do it – plus the editor gets a new MacBook Pro! It's one of the most successful volunteer-run local papers in the country – we print 2,500 paper copies, have 85 people on the team, and we are oversubscribed for advertisers. I'm hoping to restructure it and make it more 'newsy' and less about milk bottle theft and missing cats. Last month we led with an investigation into a spate of mysterious wild rabbit deaths.

Tell us something that not many people might know about you.

When I was 20, I was the youngest pub landlord in Essex. In the past, I have been called 'Jack of all trades' because I've done quite a few different things and mastered none of them!



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