



JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP XL NETWORK NEWSLETTER



Photo by Bev Shadbat

This newsletter comes to you in strange times. Many of the usual matters that we would report on just have not happened. However, one major piece of news for the XL Network is that Malcolm Mclvor (1961), after 19 years of excellent service to the group and the College, has decided to retire as Chair. An article on page 4 of this issue marks this important occasion. I am pleased to report that Malcolm will remain a member of the committee so that his accumulated knowledge and wisdom is not lost to us. On a personal level, I would like to thank Malcolm for his support and interest, and record that it has been a pleasure to work with him on a range of matters in the time I have been on the committee.

I will be taking over from Malcolm in September and look forward to working with you all and the College. I will be looking to pass on the editor's role for the newsletter and would welcome expressions of interest! It is important that the committee regularly renews itself to ensure it can effectively carry out its role and be in touch with old members' interest. Therefore, if anyone would like to serve on the committee

please get in touch (E: mayjpeter@yahoo.co.uk). Even better if perhaps a couple of people would like to step forward together. The role is not onerous, and we only meet as a committee once or twice a year with the essential work being conducted by other means. Women volunteers would be particularly welcome so that the committee better represents the gender balance of its members. The Rules of Association of the Group were recently amended by a vote of 37-0 (one abstention). The new Rules are available on the website: jomg.org

To give an international slant on the pandemic and lockdown, this issue includes some thoughts from old members in Edinburgh, Vancouver, and New York on this unusual period in all our lives. In a linked way we have one of our number who has a predilection for travel in retirement who set out in early March on a very interesting trip driving the full length of the Carretera Astral. It was rather more interesting than he bargained for!

Peter May (1968)
mayjpeter@yahoo.co.uk

In this strange COVID-19 world, here is a collection of reflections on what it has seemed like from outside England.

The View from New York City

I was at school on 9 March when the news filtered down that school was closing at the end of that day because of the COVID-19 outbreak. I assumed it would resume normally on 30 March, after the spring break. But that didn't happen. My trip to Crickhowell in Powys had to be cancelled as the realities of COVID-19 began to sink in on both sides of the Atlantic. My school gave everyone a crash course in online learning; there was a massive exodus of the well-heeled residents of Manhattan desperate to leave the city as the virus exploded. In my apartment block of 21 units in Greenwich Village only 3 units remained occupied; all the rest had fled like latter day Daniel Defoes. New York City was the epicentre of the pandemic, but the country was ill-equipped to deal with its tentacles. The President was contemptuous of the gravity of the crisis, hospitals in New York were overwhelmed, refrigerated trucks appeared outside NorthWell hospital in the West Village to take the dead to the potter's field on Hart Island near the Bronx for burial. Most were African-American.

Then came George Floyd. Surely the outrage would be confined to Minneapolis. But Floyd's death reopened fissures in American society which have consumed Blacks and Whites since the first slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619; a quasi-religious Social Justice protest took up the torch of resistance, fuelled by an economic crisis unparalleled in intensity since the Great Depression. In New York City, the nights of 29 May and 1 June saw mass protests against police injustice, but also looting and pillaging on a devastating scale. On Greenwich Street where I lived, mobs armed with crowbars and sledgehammers attacked small businesses with seeming impunity. I met my neighbour the next morning: she was leaving the city, she said she was 'terrified'.

Slowly the virus began to abate in its intensity. But the protests did not, either here or in the UK. The virus had exposed deep-seated weaknesses in Western society whose ramifications are impossible to predict.

Gerry Protheroe (1969)

Lockdown in Vancouver

Disturbing news on coronavirus outbreaks and deaths was coming in from around the world, but there were very few cases in British Columbia prior to early March. Then everything changed rapidly, and we had full lockdown by 23 March. I had come home from a skiing trip in France on 1 March, but both daughters were in Mexico; one with husband and twin boys on their sailboat, and the other on holiday with her boyfriend. They all flew back on 21 March before Canada closed its borders.

Everyone seemed to adapt to the new regime with little fuss and we were guided by the calm, reasoned, and consistent messaging from the BC Provincial Health Officer, Dr Bonnie Henry. She was so good that her daily TV update was a must-watch event, with her main message of 'This is our time to be nice, to be calm and to be safe' becoming the accepted mantra.

On a practical level, everyone moved quickly into the new ways

of doing things. My office, an engineering consulting firm, made a seamless transition to 120 people working from home.

Socialising was out, but shops stayed open by limiting the number of customers at any time, and prodigious markings on the floor to define safe spaces. There were

no shortages of anything. Parks remained open by reminding everyone to keep their distance, with signs made up showing 2 metres as the distance from mouth to tail of a cougar – a sight probably scarier to young children than a virus! I walk at least five miles every day and had no trouble keeping that up. In the evenings, my wife and I settled down to marathon sessions of detective series on Netflix and Prime, and Zoom meetings became the first order of the day.

The overall approach seems to have worked very well with deaths in BC limited to a total of 186 (3.7 per 100,000) and those mainly in a limited number of care homes. Restrictions are gradually being eased, although it doesn't look like the border with the USA will open anytime soon. Most people think our government has got it right!

Jerry Haile (1969)

Notes from Edinburgh

A few years ago, after a lifetime in London, I moved to Edinburgh with my partner Gill and twins Callum and Rebecca at the end of their primary schooling. The educational system here is a little different from those in southern parts. The children were due to take their Nat(ional) 5s (GCSE equivalent) this year and their Highers (ASs) next year. As in the rest of the UK, their grades will now be awarded on their teachers' assessment of their coursework prior to lockdown. This may have disadvantaged my daughter since she didn't do very well in her prelims (mocks), but she had put in major efforts since then. So, in the absence of exams, they started their Higher courses a little earlier than normal, at the beginning of the summer term. The experience has been patchy with some subjects being better taught than others. Edinburgh Council, which controls the secondaries in the city, was able to centralise and coordinate online subject course development and teaching, which was helpful. Gill, who used to be a teacher of English, also dragged them through the Jekyll and Hyde set text and duality through the term. My efforts to teach my daughter French were less successful. Up went the hood! It has been socially hard for both, but they seem to have survived without too many mental scars.

The good news is that Scottish schools will be re-opening from 11 August, (school holidays run from the end of June to mid-August here) ceteris paribus without the need for social distancing. I won't expostulate on the UK government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our current UK Prime Minister seems to think that PPE was only for Oxford alumni! While the Scottish government made all the same initial mistakes in lockstep with the UK government, with an even



worse record on care home deaths, there has been overall proportionately a lower incidence of the disease and fewer deaths than in England, despite a more vulnerable population. This is partly because Scotland benefited from the imposition of lockdown at an earlier stage in the disease's curve, but also because the Scottish government have since April pursued a strategy first of containment and now of elimination, with some degree of success, making full school re-opening a realistic possibility. The alternative of a "blended" mix of online and onsite learning would be distinctly second best for both

academic and social reasons. Of course, it may all go pear-shaped, not least because of the difficulties of implementing different policies within the same landmass, but here's hoping.

Pete Cooper (1968)

Whilst considering the pandemic, for those that missed it in the College Record Bulletin, Emeritus Fellow Richard Moxon writes a weekly blog written for non-specialists on coronavirus. It strikes middle ground between esoteric science and over-simplified media articles. It can be found on MoxForum.co.uk. It is worth a read.

The Carretera Austral: A road to nowhere

The Carretera Austral in Chile's Patagonia region is described in travel books as one of the 'Great Drives of the World'. It is a 1,200 kilometre, mostly gravel, road that carves a circuitous track southward from Puerto Montt between the fjord-indented Pacific coastline and the Andean mountains, which creep closer to the ocean with every kilometre travelled. Construction was started by Augusto Pinochet in the 1980s, and by 2000 had reached the point at which it could progress no further since its route was blocked by the Southern Patagonia glacier at the wonderfully named Villa O'Higgins. The fact that it was a road to nowhere (sadly with plans to tarmac much of the route) made a journey for me and two friends an unmissable adventure. As a geographer and a teacher I've always had a fascination for remote places, and here was a road that offered muddy, pot-holed, twisting, steep and collapsing roads through landscapes of temperate rainforests, treeless subpolar steppes, volcanic mountains, and ice sheets. A contrast to many years of driving in Uganda's tropical grasslands and forests!

We set off in early March on a direct flight from London to Santiago. On arrival, not only did we have to pass through immigration and the statutory Customs check for agricultural produce, but now also a temperature check. Having collected our 4WD hire car and stocked up on food and fuel, we set off at 04.00 only to find our route was blocked by emergency vehicles putting out a major building fire. The timing on the first day was critical because the route comprises some sections of roads linked by three separate ferry journeys, each of which runs only once daily. As a geographer I'd purchased some excellent large-scale maps and, whilst the sat-nav told us we were driving in the Pacific Ocean (we weren't!), my map showed a winding road that connected a series of fishing jetties. Now this was an adventure – just as we'd all hoped!

The subsequent route took us through dense rainforests and active volcanic mountains, all the time twisting in all directions to find a route between surging rivers and screes, and



encroaching fjords, whilst avoiding (mostly!) landslips and damaged bridges. Jill and Liz are birders and so we stopped frequently to

A classic Patagonian landscape of mountains, fjords, lenticular clouds, and fishing villages.

check on the wildlife and that gave me chance to geologise and take photos.

After one week we found ourselves near Puerto Aysen, at the head of a fjord, giving access by water to the archipelago of islands and navigation channels that make up the coast of southern Chile. We took a five-hour trip on a catamaran to explore the impressive San Rafael glacier where it 'tumbles' into the headwaters of the fjord. This memorable trip was given more status by free drinks at the bar – almost exclusively Johnny Walker Red Label whisky – on the return trip, which gave the mostly Chilean passengers the opportunity to organise a noisy karaoke session of Chilean folk music and dancing. Unfortunately, I got a leg infection – nothing to do with glaciers or drinking – which I thought would be dealt with at the local A&E, but instead they decided to admit me to hospital for treatment, drips etc. It was novel for this remote hospital to have a foreign patient, and Google Translate proved incredibly helpful to me and the hospital staff. My hospitalisation proved to be an unforeseen bonus, since we hadn't driven as far south as planned when I received a phone call in my hospital bed telling me that Chile was about to close its borders and we needed to get out within 24 hours.

We missed the last direct flight and instead took a three-day trip through Argentina, Brazil (including a day in Sao Paulo), and Portugal to get back home.

A taste of what lay further south: rib-boat giving scale to the calving snout of the San Rafael glacier.



The flights were stress-free and my assisted passage in a wheelchair proved advantageous since we were the first to board. We arrived at Heathrow amazed to find no special checks, in contrast to the checks at other airports.

Sadly, curtailment meant we had completed only 10 days of a 28-day trip, which was also due to include a few days on Easter Island. My leg is fine now, and we're looking forward to resuming sometime our travels to nowhere. An adventure, but not quite as planned.

Chris Scrivener (1968)

Malcolm McIvor, Chair of the Old Members' Group (2001-2020)

I would like first of all, on behalf of all members, to thank Malcolm heartily for all he has done over the last 19 years as Chair. The group originated with Rodney Wright and a few rugby-playing friends in the mists of time, and until 2000 Rodney carried much of the burden himself. At that point he sought to pass this on, and by April 2001 a Jesus Old Members' Group (JOMG) committee was elected, with Julian Le Patourel as Secretary and George Reah as Treasurer (still in post!). Malcolm was elected Chair – a role he expected to hold no longer than 5 years! He had first joined the Old Members' Group in 1991, and it was his idea to hold an Old Members' Day which he has been organising every year since the 1990s.

Until 2011, as well as being a social group, the group also raised considerable funds for JOMG graduate and undergraduate bursaries. The bursaries continue, but the prime role is now a social one and a means of keeping old members in touch with the College. George has handled the finances, and various people the newsletter, secretarial and administrative matters, but much of the other work and initiatives have fallen to Malcolm. He has organised and supported social events, and also been heavily involved in major initiatives such as the recent XL Bursary – raising £100k – and events such as the plaque for the first Principal in St Mary's Priory Church, Abergavenny, as well as the SEREN project. He has been the key link with the Development Office and the Principal, which involves much unrecognised work behind the scenes.

All those who have worked with Malcolm have found it easy, and he is always encouraging and supportive of others in the matters they are pursuing. The College appreciates his contribution hugely and will be recognising this, as will the current committee. Malcolm has been a brilliant chair.

Dr Brittany Wellner James, College Fellow and Director of Development, confirmed her and the College's regard in saying, 'It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to Malcolm for all that he has accomplished as Chair of the XL Group. The XL Group laid the foundations of philanthropy at Jesus, and the support the group has collectively



Photo by John Cairns

shown over the years has been transformative for the College. The entire Jesus community owes a huge debt of gratitude to Malcolm and the XL committee for this important work, which has steered the course for further philanthropic contributions, volunteering, and engagement from so many of its old members. On a personal note, I came to College in 2017, and Malcolm was – and continues to be – a great source of wisdom, kindness, and encouragement. To the XL Group: let this good work not end with Malcolm's tenure, but continue to thrive under new leadership. I look forward to the next chapter for this group, and the College is grateful as ever for your support'.

As a measure of their regard JCR (Jesus Curry Recusants), otherwise known as The Curry Club, wish to recognise Malcolm's work and his steadfast support of the JCR meetings by making him Honorary President of the Group: an honour indeed. Well done Malcolm!

Peter May (1968)

The SEREN Network

Our support and enthusiasm for the SEREN ('Star') Welsh government programme was seeded by Clive Jenkins' jaunt to Abergavenny in July 2016. Now we are sponsoring an essay competition on space: 'Our Fragile Earth' with International Space Station Commander, Steve Swanson.

Donations to establish a proper plaque in memory of our first Principal, David Lewis, enabled us to go further and support SEREN, by offering additional prizes relating to the array of Oxbridge essay competitions for sixth formers. The accent was on prizes for those commended but not winning. Next came our involvement with the SEREN co-ordinators, including Stephen Parry-Jones, and the Jesus College Summer Schools. The Schools are a major initiative by the College, so ably organised by Matt Williams. Matt's tremendous work in Wales has borne fruit in these schools.

I went to see for myself and sat in on a team competition, which struck me as a recipe for disaster! So much for what I knew – it was terrific, and Matt had the last laugh! Out of the blue he called on me to present the prizes. I survived, but the important thing was that the co-ordinators were very impressed by our attendance and support.

As I write, mid-July, we are developing our role in the 'Our Fragile Earth' competition, which involves US astronaut Steve Swanson, and which will include a full day in College for the winner. The competition publicity includes the College logo to mark both our Group's and the College's endeavours to encourage young Welsh scholars. Updates on our website, jomg.org.

Malcolm McIvor (1961)