



JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP XL NETWORK NEWSLETTER

January 2021



The strange times I alluded to in my last editorial continue. We have had none of the usual Old Members' activities since the first lockdown in March, but the recent news on vaccines offers the real prospect of a resumption from perhaps the middle of 2021. Possible events and activities are outlined later in this issue, which include Curry Club by Zoom, Old Members' Day, a trip to the British Library, and a visit to a Sussex vineyard.

Malcolm McIvor was able to squeeze in a tour of the Northgate development before lockdown and we have his personal reflections, along with a letter from New York by one US

alumnus giving a personal perspective on the last few turbulent months in the politics of the USA.

The committee is still keen to recruit new members. We have switched to committee meetings by Zoom which means that where a member lives is no longer an issue. The meetings are termly, so three times a year. If you are interested or just want to know more, please do get in touch with me (E: mayjpeter@yahoo.co.uk). It is not an onerous role but does give the chance to influence the future direction of the XL Network.

Peter May (1968)

The XL Network welcomes alumni who are celebrating 40 years or more since matriculation

Fourth Quad – the redevelopment of Northgate

An 'it might be interesting' tour of the Northgate, aka Fourth Quad, building site had turned into an exciting experience within ten minutes. Genuinely, this came as a surprise to me.

Having been re-shod, (Stanley boots made in China), plastic specs, (which immediately steamed up with my mask), protective helmet big enough for an elephant and crashed twice by me into scaffolding, and gloves with cut outs for photographic fingers, we set forth. We were Deputy Director of Development Georgie Plunkett – Brittany didn't dare (joking of course – she has been around many times), Andrea, with handbag carefully stowed in the site's secure office, site manager Alec Carr, and me.

Dismissing calls from Alec of 'are you all right on ladders?', 'the water's not that deep!', 'it's only a 30 foot drop', we set off from Base Camp to exhortations of 'you'll need to use your imagination!'.

The space is really big. Scaffolding lined our route as we passed the people building our next Quad. They all seemed cheerful, courteous, and the whole site had a good feel. No mess, everything shipshape, and Alec so informative. There are 70 people on site now, but this will rise to 150 when fitting out gets underway. There are four women on site – I'm barred from using the word 'ladies' – with three more on the design team.



We learned that the stone facing will come from Lincolnshire, the pre-cast concrete stairs from Ireland – no spare shovels leaning against the walls – and I managed to get a rare picture of Andrea, fully clothed, standing in what will be a bathroom with the pre-assembled bathroom standing next to her (pictures by appointment on the dark web...). The student rooms are only at the boarding stage, but it was easy to see that they will be light and quite spacious, all with en-suite facilities.



From various vantage points we could see across the College, up and down Cornmarket – the development stops at WH Smith – and down Market Street. I am pleased to report that Brown's is still going strong in the Covered Market but, for a loo, the café at the Bod is recommended.

The strongest sense of location is from the Quad on the second floor. This will be great and is not fully apparent from the pics. Beyond the Digital Hub, there are classrooms, student bedrooms, Fellows' apartments and spaces for public exhibitions including, I am told, the impressive Tower Gallery – although currently still tricky to imagine. The basement will be leased by the NHS, a facility much needed in central Oxford, and I can see it being used whole-heartedly by both Town and Gown. At street level, onto Cornmarket there will be shopping. I wonder who will be there – old fogies will remember Woolworths, which was on the direct line between College and the Bodleian as one student tried to explain to his tutor, 'Essay, sir?'.

You will think this development is great when it is complete, and Georgie tells me that you can make your mark with a few bob to name a student bedroom. "Kilroy was here" will not suffice.

Malcolm McIvor (1963)

Tour the Northgate development

During October, the College was fortunate to have been granted behind-the-scenes access to tour the new Northgate building site, witnessing first-hand the incredible progress that has been made since the project began in late 2019. We want to share this experience with as many alumni and friends as possible, including the XL Network.

We invite you now to register your interest for a private tour of the site in early 2021, as soon as it is safe to visit. It is an interesting opportunity to showcase the building during an exciting phase of its construction and a great way to begin our 450th anniversary celebrations.

Please email Georgina Plunkett, Deputy Director of Development, if you are interested in taking a Northgate tour in the New Year. E: georgina.plunkett@jesus.ox.ac.uk



A Letter from New York City, 30 November 2020

On 29 October I made my way to the St Anthony of Padua Church on Sullivan Street in Manhattan (pictured below), which was my assigned early voting site, to cast my vote in the presidential election. It was an auspicious moment since the last time I had voted was in the British general election of 1997. I was subsequently disenfranchised by the rule that British citizens living abroad for more than 15 years were no longer allowed to vote. In 2019 I had become a citizen of the United States and so, having been disbarred in the United Kingdom, I was eager to exercise my rights as an American, especially as this election was a referendum on the Trump presidency on a par in its significance with the 1860 election, which ushered in the Civil War.



The days after Tuesday 3 November in New York were of course tense and harrowing, especially as New Yorkers gazed back at the election of 2016. But on Saturday 7 November there was wholesale rejoicing throughout Manhattan when the result was finally called. Champagne corks were popping, cars were honking, people were running out of their buildings, pots banging. Wordsworth quickly came to mind. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive" and liberation was "very heaven".

Euphoria had set in. Relatives emailed offering congratulations that my vote had helped "impeach and remove the sick child in the White House, who was playing emperor". But other relatives said nothing. They were covert Trumpers. And who could blame them? Americans were sick of the "Woke" culture, which had turned their schools and universities into a laughing stock; they had been blessed with a strong economy under Trump and, despite being labelled as a racist, the President had gone out of his way to fund historically black colleges. Republicans had done well on election night, especially in the House of Representatives, because of these concerns and policies. I began to shudder at the prospect of Thanksgiving, a family gathering in November that, after the opening Manhattan cocktails, might trigger within the home the partisan divisions tearing America apart outside it. But in the background lurked COVID-19 washing across New York in a second – or was it a third – great wave, rendering even Thanksgiving a sad shadow of its former self. There was to be no great family gathering.

As the reality of 3 November began to sink in, the President struck out in all directions, unilaterally declaring "victory" in the election, claiming concerns of fraud and mail-in ballots. His legal team launched lawsuits in the battleground states contesting the verdict called by the "fake news" media. Anyone who had the temerity to suggest the election result was above suspicion was purged. There was to be no question of concession to a "loser" as "stupid" as Biden.

I began to feel more and more uneasy as the transition process or the lack of it began to evolve. Was the President thinking of a last ditch stand in the Supreme Court where he thought the new justices owed him fealty and vassalage? Was there a danger of a "mad dog" attack on Iranian nuclear sites, despite the reservations of his advisors? Nixon's final days in the White House were hardly reassuring. Would Trump's base of 73 million voters concur with the President's verdict that the election was rigged? There was a very real parallel here with the 'stab in the back theory' that did so much to undermine German democracy in the decade after the First World War. Trump believed he did not lose the election; he was stabbed in the back by fraud and corruption at home in Washington; or if one accepts QAnon theory in a recent Newsweek article "... by a "deep state" consisting of "satanic Democrats and Hollywood 'elites' who control child sex trafficking rings and sometimes literally eat babies!". What effect would these conspiracy theories have on the political fortunes of a Biden administration?

But I also thought of a brighter side. An encouraging feature of the crisis was the patience and trust in the institutions of America exhibited by the American people as a whole. The transition, despite the Machiavellian machinations of the Trump loyalists, did not see the violent altercations between right and left, which paralysed German democracy in the interwar period. Moreover, not all Republicans rallied to the President's side. There were honourable exceptions, notably Mitt Romney, the Senators Ben Sasse and Lamar Alexander, as well as Cindy McCain, whose husband John was outrageously vilified by the President for allowing himself to be captured in the Vietnam War; a conflict Trump judiciously avoided serving in, due apparently to a bone spur!



The last four years have been turbulent indeed for both the United Kingdom and the United States. It would be hard in view of the divisions and partisan conflict present in both countries to predict where we go from here. But at least this November when I went to vote in the church on Sullivan and Houston, I finally had a say in it.

Gerald Protheroe (1970)

SEREN Update

COVID meant that the College Summer School became an essay competition for which we sponsored the prizes. There was a further essay competition, 'This Fragile Earth', following interviews and conversations with US astronaut Steve Swanson, designed to inspire students. The Welsh government supported the project handsomely, and we contributed funds, which provided a prize for the winner

to include a visit to College. The visit has been delayed and has been extended to the nine finalists in 2021. We are contributing towards transport costs and will provide two books (chosen by each finalist) from the 'Short Introduction to ...' series. We trust you agree this is a good use of £1000 of our funds.

Awards

There are two new Clarendon/Old Members' Awards and the recipients are:

Rowland Imperial who comes from National University of Singapore, and **Joseph McManus** from University of Bristol.

There are four continuing holders of the Clarendon/Old Members' Awards:

Benedict Campbell, **Rebecca Kelly**, **Lois Henderson** and **Jamie Shenk**.

There are three new Old Members' Exhibitioners:

Callum Martin (Chemistry), **Flavius Vlasiu** (Computer Science) and **Caitlyn Eddy** (Geography).

There are two continuing Old Members' Exhibitioners:

Lucy McBride (History) and **Nosha Alai-South** (Modern Languages).

Future Events

Inevitably it is difficult to be sure when 'normal service' will resume! We hope that perhaps by June it may be possible to have events that are actual rather than virtual. Various events such as the All-Alumni Dinner have been cancelled, however, the plans we tentatively have are as follows:

Jesus College Curry Club will hold a trial run Zoom Curry Club in mid December with a limited number of attendees to test the water. If successful, it is hoped that this can take place every six weeks or so until we can convene again in the wine bar and the Indian Restaurant in Fleet Street.

Old Members' Visit to the British Library – Originally scheduled for May to view the Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots exhibition and Q&A afterwards with Sue Doran and Paulina Kewes, who are contributing to the exhibition. However, due to COVID this has now been postponed until November (probably 17th). This will be an excellent trip and well worth the wait.

Old Members' Day will hopefully be on Saturday 26 June.

The tentative plan is for this to be based on a session around the College's history in the 60s and 70s (linking to the 450th Anniversary) and maybe later, with a chance to share memories. There will be other arrangements similar to previous years to complement this. The following day is Charter Day and the College has significant plans tied to the 450th anniversary for the day. Some may well care to make a weekend of it!

Chichester and a vineyard trip was originally planned for 2020 and will now be scheduled for the late summer in 2021. It will include a tour of Chichester cathedral and a visit to a nearby vineyard.

