



LMH

Lady Margaret Hall

LMH News

Issue 7 | 2024

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LMH would like to thank alumni and current College members who have contributed content for this issue of LMH News.



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We are always very pleased to hear your comments and feedback. Please get in touch with the Development Team on the telephone number below, or by emailing development@lmh.ox.ac.uk, to let us know what you think of this issue.

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From the Principal

This year, we have begun planning the celebrations to mark the 150th Anniversary of LMH's foundation in 2028-29 and a half-century of co-education in 2029. These landmarks provide an opportunity to reflect on what the College and its members have achieved since the first nine women walked through the doors of Old Old Hall in 1879, and together to chart an exciting course for the future.

Many of you will have heard me talk about what I see as the three central priorities of my role as Principal: championing and supporting our core academic mission of excellence in teaching, learning and research; attracting and admitting the most talented students regardless of background; and reinforcing the College's finances to provide security and flexibility for current and future generations.

I am delighted to report that, within a globally competitive landscape for higher education, we have hired seven new Fellows from across the world to join our academic community. The generosity of our alumni has also enabled us to add three new

Junior Research Fellows, early-career researchers who will be the academic leaders of the future. Broadening and strengthening our academic body is hugely beneficial for our students, who thrive within our open-minded, friendly and supportive community. I am particularly proud that this year we will be sending two of our final-year undergraduates on fully funded scholarships to the Ivy League. The transformative tutorial teaching our students receive during their time here helps them to flourish academically, personally and professionally.

The College was founded to open education and career opportunities to the previously excluded. We continue to focus on reducing barriers to an Oxford education, attracting the most talented minds regardless of background or disadvantage, and providing the support, resources and community so that they can flourish. LMH is distinctive – through our wellbeing and study skills support – in our dedication to equipping students to tackle academic and personal challenges.

I am delighted to share some highlights of the life of the College

with you in this issue of *LMH News*. However, we can always do more. The Governing Body and I are committed to securing the College's finances and providing financial flexibility for the future. I am delighted that this year we achieved a record high of philanthropic funds received, and our endowment exceeded £50m for the first time. Looking forward to 2029 and beyond, we are committed to building on this foundation and closing the financial gap between LMH and other Oxford colleges.

Thank you for your continued commitment and support of LMH. As Dorothy Horne (1912, History) said one hundred years ago, "We have all taken away from Oxford the same things of permanent value: not only the inspiration of what we have ourselves studied, but also the knowledge of how study can best be undertaken. We have read, and we have begun to learn how to read. We have not only gained a sense of personal freedom, but we have made the friendships of a lifetime."

Professor Stephen Blyth

LMH life

News highlights from around the College

Honorary Fellowships for Malala Yousafzai and A.E. Stallings

Two prominent alumnae, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai (2017, PPE) and Oxford Professor of Poetry A.E. (Alicia) Stallings (1991, MSt Literae Humaniores), have been awarded Honorary Fellowships by the College. These Fellowships are awarded to individuals with a connection to LMH or the wider University who have made outstanding contributions to their chosen field. Malala was recognised for her work advocating for girls' education through Malala Fund, and for her contribution to the work of the Oxford Pakistan Programme, based at LMH. Alicia Stallings was recognised for her election to the prestigious post of Oxford Professor of Poetry; past holders include Alice Oswald, Cecil Day-Lewis and Poet Laureate Simon Armitage.



Malala Yousafzai (left) and A.E. Stallings (right)



Chaucer: Here and Now

J.R.R. Tolkien Professor of English Literature and Language Marion Turner curated a major exhibition on Geoffrey Chaucer for the Bodleian, which was opened by Sir Ben Okri in December. 'Chaucer: Here and Now' explored Geoffrey Chaucer as audiences hadn't seen him before. Not as the "Father of English Literature", but as a dynamic, global author, whose works have been reworked and reinterpreted over time and around the world. To complement the exhibition, Professor Turner edited a wide-ranging collection of essays, also called *Chaucer: Here and Now*, building a picture of how varied adaptations of and responses to Chaucer's work have been, and how they have developed over time. Professor Turner delivered the annual online Wordsworth Lecture in March this year, exploring key themes from her exhibition. You can listen to a recording of the lecture on the LMH YouTube channel.

Finalists Awarded Top US Scholarships

Undergraduates Daniel Hoos and Charlie Jenner have been awarded prestigious scholarships to continue their studies at Ivy League universities in the US.

Daniel (2021, Economics and Management) has been awarded the highly competitive Michael von Clemm Fellowship and will spend a year as a Special Student at Harvard University. He plans to focus on business economics and public policy, and to explore courses on organisational behaviour.

Charlie (2021, Psychology and Philosophy) has been awarded a prestigious Thouron Award to support his postgraduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn). He plans to pursue a Master's degree in Bioethics, the multi-disciplinary study of moral and ethical questions related to human health and well-being, within UPenn's School of Medicine.



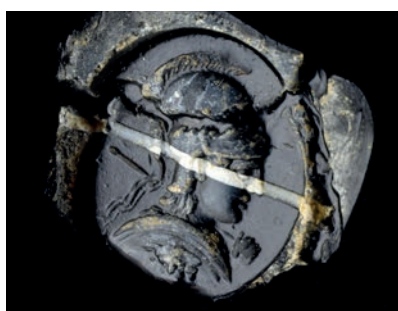
Daniel Hoos (top) and Charlie Jenner (bottom)

Celebrating the LMH Foundation Year

In June last year, we hosted a graduation celebration for the final two LMH Foundation Year students, Mai Kheir and Michael Greener. Attended by former Principal Alan Rusbridger, former members of the LMH Foundation Year team, and previous Foundation Year graduates, it was an opportunity to celebrate this trailblazing programme, marking it's the transition to the University-wide Astrophoria Foundation Year. Following its launch in 2016, the LMH Foundation Year supported 64 students, with 49 of those going on to matriculate at Oxford and many others going on to study at Russell Group universities. Our first two Astrophoria students arrived in Michaelmas term, joining a cohort of 22 Foundation Year students studying at ten Oxford colleges this academic year.



Mai Kheir and Michael Greener (centre front)



'Rediscovering Gems' at the British Museum

Dr Claudia Wagner, Senior Research Fellow in Classical Archaeology, curated the recent exhibition, 'Rediscovering Gems', for the British Museum. The exhibition provides insight into the timeless allure of classical gems, exploring their significance and uses in the ancient Mediterranean world and charting their enduring popularity throughout history.

Distinguished US Research Professorship for Mathematics Fellow

Professor Christina Goldschmidt has been appointed as a Vincent Della Pietra Professor by the Simons Laufer Mathematical Sciences Institute (SLMath) in Berkeley, California, for the Spring 2025 semester. SLMath hosts a number of distinguished research professorships for researchers who are making key contributions to their programmes. Professor Goldschmidt is one of the organisers of a semester-long SLMath research programme on the Probability and Statistics of Discrete Structures, a core topic across a wide range of scientific disciplines where mathematical ideas are used to model and understand real-world networks.



Professor Christine Gerrard is New Director of TORCH

Barbara Scott Fellow in English and former Interim Principal Professor Christine Gerrard has taken up a new position as Director of TORCH, the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities. TORCH is one of the world's leading centres for interdisciplinary Humanities research, fostering cross-disciplinary and outward-facing research collaborations between Oxford University's Humanities researchers and local, national and global partnerships. It is an exciting time for Professor Gerrard to take the reins, as TORCH will soon become part of Oxford's new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities.

Recognition of Distinction for Two Fellows

Two of our Fellows were awarded the title of full professor in the University of Oxford's 2023 Recognition of Distinction Awards, which recognise excellence in three core areas: teaching; research; and involvement in University or college administration or wider forms of public engagement. Tutorial Fellow in Medicine Vanessa Ferreira now holds the title of British Heart Foundation Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at the Radcliffe Department of Medicine. Gillian Peele Fellow in Politics Robin Harding received the title of Professor of Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR).

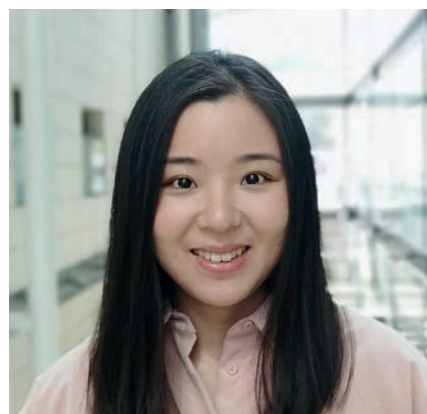


Vanessa Ferreira (top) and Robin Harding (above)



Dr Ben Higgins Wins Shakespeare's Globe Book Award

English Fellow Dr Ben Higgins was joint-winner of the 2023 Shakespeare's Globe Book Award for *Shakespeare's Syndicate: The First Folio, its Publishers, and the Early Modern Book Trade* (Oxford University Press, 2022). The judges commented that, "*Shakespeare's Syndicate* weaves an astonishing story of literary ambition and business acumen from the lives of the four stationers responsible for Shakespeare's collected works, and makes the bookish world of early modern London live again in the folio's anniversary year."



ERC Grant for Professor Yujia Qing

Chemistry Fellow Professor Yujia Qing received a major European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant as part of the Horizon Europe Programme, one of only four researchers in the University's Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) Division to have been awarded a Starting Grant last year. Professor Qing will use the Grant to support her work to establish a general method to identify individual protein variants containing different patterns of post-translational modifications — chemical groups added to proteins after they have been translated from RNA.



Edith Matthewson (left) and Silvia Dignum-Smith (above)

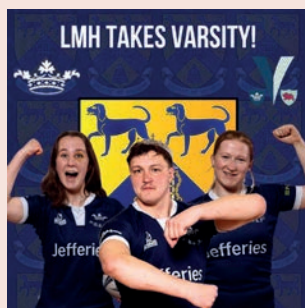
Undergraduate Prelims Prizes

Undergraduates Edith Matthewson and Silvia Dignum-Smith (both 2022, Modern Languages) received prizes from the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages for their outstanding Prelims performances last year. Edith was awarded the Mrs Claude Beddington Modern Languages Prize for the top Prelims performance in French in the 2022-23 academic year, along with the Marjorie, Countess of Warwick Prize for the best Prelims performance in French by a female candidate. Silvia was awarded the Cyril Jones Memorial Prize for the best Prelims performance in Spanish.



Student Sporting Success

Our sports teams have had a successful year, with our women's footballers and their Summertown Women's FC team (made up of members from St Hugh's and Trinity) making it to the Cuppers final, where they were beaten by a strong Hertble FC (Hertford and Keble) team. Three LMH students, Amber Wilkins (2020, MBiochem), George Close-Smith (2021, History) and Matt Cook (2023, MSt History) represented the University in the Varsity Rugby Matches in early March. Unfortunately, it wasn't Oxford's year, with both the Men's and Women's teams suffering defeat at the hands of Cambridge.



First Anne Hudson Scholar Arrives at LMH

The legacy of former Fellow and Honorary Fellow Professor Anne Hudson remains strong as we welcomed the first recipient of the Anne Hudson Scholarship to LMH this academic year. Graduate student Charlotte Ross's research will focus on the manuscripts of 15th century poet Thomas Hoccleve's longest and most famous work, *The Regiment of Princes*. Professor Hudson left a £2.6 million legacy to the English Faculty to endow scholarships for graduate students working on Middle English. The Anne Hudson Scholarship, based at LMH, and the Pamela Gradon Scholarship, based at St Hugh's College, are the first two doctoral scholarships to be awarded from this legacy.

Anne Hudson (top) and Charlotte Ross (bottom)



Xiaowen Dong




Varun Kanade


Two Fellows Awarded Turing Fellowships


Two of the three new Turing Fellows appointed from the University of Oxford by The Alan Turing Institute this year are LMH Fellows. Professor Xiaowen Dong, Fellow in Engineering and Professor Varun Kanade, Fellow in Computer Science, joined a cohort of 51 new Turing Fellows who will contribute towards growing the research capacity of The Alan Turing Institute. The Turing Fellowship Scheme seeks to develop the data science and AI ecosystem in the UK by supporting, retaining and developing the careers of the next generation of world-leading researchers.


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You can receive regular updates via email by signing up for our eNews. To sign up, you will need to update your communications preferences on your Oxford Alumni account, or you can fill out our opt-in form by scanning the QR code or going to: <https://bit.ly/LMH-eNews>.



Want to share your news?

We regularly publish news items on our website and via our social media channels. If you have news that you would like to share with the wider College community, please contact our Head of Communications, Katie Brown, on: communications@lmh.ox.ac.uk.

Spotlight on: new academic appointments

We are delighted to introduce the newest members of our Fellowship.



Dr Roxana Banu
Tutor and Fellow in Law

Dr Roxana Banu joined us from Queen Mary University London at the beginning of the academic year. Having completed her undergraduate studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, Dr Banu gained her LLM at New York's Fordham University before completing her PhD at the University of Toronto, where she was awarded the Alan Marks Medal for the best graduate thesis and the Strauss Fellowship in International Law. Her interests lie in private and public international law, legal history, and feminist theory. Her current research projects include an exploration of the history of private international law in the colonial context and the social history of interwar cross-border family maintenance conventions, as well as an account of the pervasiveness of questions of gender in the theoretical and methodological development of private international law.

Dr Joshua Bennett
Tutor and Fellow in History

Dr Joshua Bennett arrived at LMH in Michaelmas term from Lincoln College, Oxford, where he spent three years as Darby Fellow and Tutor in Modern History. He studied for his undergraduate and graduate degrees in History at Christ Church, Oxford, completing his DPhil in 2015. Dr Bennett's research focuses on modern European intellectual history, especially in Britain and Germany. He is particularly interested in the role which religious thought and scepticism have played in understandings of history and social science, and in liberal conceptions of 'progress', since approximately 1800. His current book project explores the rich relationship between secularism and progressive social thought in Europe and North America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Professor Monima Chadha
Tutor and Fellow in Indian Philosophy

Professor Monima Chadha, who joined us this Trinity term, completed her undergraduate studies at Delhi University before obtaining her PhD in Philosophy from Monash University in Australia, where she later became Professor of Philosophy. In 2022, Professor Chadha was awarded the inaugural Jack Karp Fellowship by the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University. Professor Chadha's main research interests are in Indian and Buddhist Philosophy. She holds a particular interest in the philosophy of mind in the classical Indian and contemporary western traditions. She draws on Abhidharma-Buddhist philosophy and contemporary cognitive science to provide an account of conscious experiences, in particular subjectivity and agency, without positing the existence of subjects and agents.



Professor Frank Griffel

Professor of the Study of the Abrahamic Religions

Professor Frank Griffel will join LMH in July from Yale University, where he holds the post of Louis M. Rabinowitz Professor of Religious Studies. Professor Griffel is an expert on intellectual history who works on Arabic philosophical and theological literature, both Islamic and Jewish. Holding a particular interest in the intersection between philosophy and theology, Professor Griffel's research has covered, among other things, the contribution that al-Ghazali made to the development of Islamic theology and the history of philosophy and contemporary Muslim thought. More recently, he has focused on the post-classical period, exploring how philosophical aporias are dealt with by different communities. Professor Griffel will be the third holder of this distinguished Chair at LMH, held before him by Professor Anna Sapir Abulafia and Professor Guy Stroumsa.



Professor Shelley McKeown Jones

Fellow and Tutor in Experimental Psychology

Professor Shelley McKeown Jones came to LMH in Hilary term from the University of Bristol. She gained her BSc and PhD in Social Psychology from the University of Ulster. A Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA), a Chartered Psychologist (CPsychol), and an Honorary Professor at the University of Bristol, Professor McKeown Jones's primary focus is on understanding and improving intergroup relations in conflict and divided societies. Inspired by her upbringing in Northern Ireland, Professor McKeown Jones's research is focused on promoting better intergroup relations, particularly for youth growing up in deeply divided societies. She uses a combination of survey, observational, behavioural, and experimental methods, addressing both basic and applied research questions.

Professor Michail Stamatakis

Tutor and Fellow in Chemistry

Professor Michail Stamatakis joined us from University College London (UCL) in Michaelmas term. He holds a Diploma in Chemical Engineering from the National Technical University of Athens, Greece and a PhD from Rice University, USA. He is a Fellow of both the Royal Society of Chemistry (FRSC) and the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). Professor Stamatakis's research focuses on heterogeneous catalysis, inspired by the urgent need for chemical technologies that promote a sustainable future for contemporary societies. Capturing the molecular-level processes underpinning catalysis can allow researchers to study reactions relevant to the conversion of alternative/renewable feedstocks into chemicals and fuels, and the management of (greenhouse) gas emissions towards mitigating pollution and climate change.



Dr Guy Westwood

Tutor and Fellow in Classics

Dr Guy Westwood has been involved in the teaching of Classics at LMH since 2019, joining first as a Departmental Lecturer before being appointed as Fellow and Tutor in Classics in 2023. Dr Westwood read Classics as an undergraduate at Balliol, going on to complete his MSt and DPhil at Merton, where he held the Leventis Research Fellowship in Ancient Greek between 2013 and 2017. Dr Westwood's research focuses on classical Greek and Roman rhetorical prose literature, especially the surviving political oratory of democratic Athens. His first book, *The Rhetoric of the Past in Demosthenes and Aeschines: Oratory, History, and Politics in Classical Athens* (Oxford: OUP, 2020) looked at how these two prominent fourth-century Athenian politicians deployed examples from, and ideas about, Athens's past to persuade mass citizen audiences in the city's lawcourts and political Assembly.



Welcoming our first female Chaplain

The Revd Dr Stephanie Burette, LMH's first female Chaplain, was originally an atheist before converting to Anglicanism while studying for her PhD in French Literature and the arts at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. Her discovery of her faith was due in no small part to a period spent as a visiting graduate student in Oxford, where she was introduced to the beauty of Choral Evensong. Stephanie went on to study Theology at Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School, where she was also a member of the Institute of Sacred Music.

Stephanie's current academic research explores the works of early twentieth-century British artists wrestling with theological questions in the midst of extreme situations, such as wars. Stephanie says, "This includes works of Stanley Spencer – needless to say that seeing some of his works around in College made me feel immediately at home."

Of her arrival at LMH in January, Stephanie said, "I am thrilled to have

joined a college which resonates with several of my passions: inclusivity, diversity, equity, a love for the arts, and a pioneering spirit. The very warm welcome I have received from everyone in College speaks volumes about the sense of community, how valued the Chaplain is, and the legacy of the Chapel within College."

Stephanie was licenced at a service on 19 January, which, she notes, "Almost coincides with the ninety-first anniversary of the dedication of the Chapel, which took place on 14 January 1933. This means that in 2033, we shall be celebrating the centenary of this superb architectural piece

designed by George Gilbert Scott."

Since she arrived, Stephanie has been working with and listening to a wide range of members within the College community: people of faith or not, Fellows, students, staff members, to get a sense of their interests, hopes and questions. In the immediate future, Stephanie is focused on defining the role of the Chapel in College, noting that, "While continuing the beautiful tradition of Choral Evensong, I will be exploring other ways of using our Chapel to foster imagination and a sense of wonder, while engaging hearts and intellects."

"I am thrilled to have joined a college which resonates with several of my passions: inclusivity, diversity, equity, a love for the arts, and a pioneering spirit."

A day in the life...

Undergraduate **Leyi Jiang** (2021, Mathematics) shares a typical Hilary term day.

I love quiet morning time, so I'm up at 6 am. I focus on problem sheets and listen to chill music while my brain works its magic. With the sky barely lit, I don't have to worry about phone notifications at this early hour.

By 8am I'm at Barry's Bootcamp, sweating it out on the tennis courts with friends and our humorous fitness coach, Barry. He makes us laugh while pushing us to our limits. The free breakfast that follows (arranged by the Wellbeing team) is what encourages me to work out in the cold every Thursday.

Mornings are for problem sets and research fuelled by filtered coffee with beans from local Oxford roasters. After diving deep into Topological Data Analysis (think math magic!), I meet my boyfriend in Gloucester Green for lunch.

Living in the abstract world of math, food and friends are my anchors to reality. I make a quick pit stop at the Student Union Book Swap before two hours of lectures and more work at the Mathematical Institute.

Dinner is delicious homemade Chinese food, followed by dance practice with the PhoenOx Chinese Dance Society in LMH (of which I'm the President!). I enjoy spending time with people who share my passion for traditional dance, and I can de-stress by taking my mind off work and focusing on my body's movement. We have performed on various occasions in Oxford to promote Chinese culture and celebrate cultural diversity.

After dance practice, I head back to my room to get some rest, ready for another early start tomorrow.

Share your News in the Brown Book

Do you have something to share with the wider alumni community?

It doesn't need to be a major achievement but we know you love to read each about other's updates, experiences, and travels. It might even be news of a new skill or hobby, or a new job... If you haven't sent an update to the *Brown Book* before, make this the year you do.

The deadline for sharing your news in this year's *Brown Book* is Sunday 30th June 2024.

Please send your news, together with your matriculation year, to the Development Team via email (development@lmh.ox.ac.uk) or post (Development Team, Lady Margaret Hall, Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6QA) and they will pass it on to our Alumni Editors.



A tale of two musicians

Undergraduates **Aris Sabetai** (2021, Music) and **Christopher Churcher** (2022, Music) talk about balancing academic work with their burgeoning musical careers, the College's new recording studio, and how the teaching they've received here has helped them grow as artists.

What made you decide that Music at Oxford was for you?

Aris: For me, the decision was always between studying music at a conservatoire or as a university degree. The crux of the decision for me was that conservatoires, essentially, specialise in developing the talents of instrumentalists. University does the same but for musicians, musical thinkers, and general humanities-informed artists. I wanted to develop as a wider-ranging musician whose horizons would be expanded and not confined.

Christopher: When considering music degrees, what drew me to Oxford was the innovative nature of the course — it seemed forward-thinking and challenging. I was also attracted by the musical environment of Oxford. I come from Birmingham; Oxford is tiny in comparison, but the sheer concentration of concerts in the city is pretty unparalleled. If you were so inclined, you could easily see a concert here every evening.

What were your first impressions of musical life at LMH?

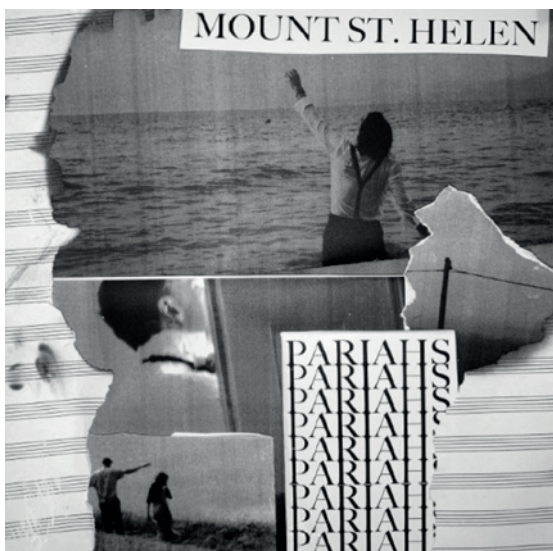
Christopher: When I arrived at LMH, my first impressions of the musical community were that it was small but inclusive and welcoming. In my first year, I sang with the LMH Chapel Choir which really helped me integrate. I was also struck by the abundance of beautiful spaces equipped with grand pianos! Among them, the Mary O'Brien room has become one of my favourite spots for composing.

Aris: The LMH music culture is humble, relaxed, and approachable. In contrast to other more traditional colleges, LMH's musical atmosphere not only opens the musical experience to everyone, but is also a fertile ground for introducing new ideas. I noticed when I arrived that the culture was (unsurprisingly for Oxford) quite choral-oriented and lacking in the more modern music-making departments. Since then, fellow musicians and I have re-vamped live music nights in the bar to include open mics, acoustic nights and DJ sets, and we've been inviting bands from different colleges and universities to play. Additionally, setting up the College's new recording studio in Kathleen Lea has helped to expand LMH's musical facilities and cater to wider sonic interests.

Do you feel like you are part of a community of LMH musicians?

Aris: Definitely. I have been overwhelmed by people's appetite to set up their own ensembles, put on their own concerts, gigs, charity events and help everyone out in the process.

Christopher: The musical community here may be relatively small, but it's extremely diverse. Despite our busy schedules, we do sometimes get to work together. Recently, I had the pleasure of working closely with Aris on a musical project: I wanted to transform an organ piece I composed last summer into an art film, and he collaborated with me



"I found that almost everything in tutorials has informed the way I compose, play and listen to music."

Aris Sabetai

Aris's band, Mount St. Helen, released their debut single, 'Pariahs', in 2023.

"Many of my tutorials are one-on-one, and engaging in discussions with leading experts in their respective fields is an enormous privilege."

Christopher Churcher

as a recording engineer and filmmaker, capturing the piece beautifully in the setting of Merton College Chapel.

You've both been composing and releasing music alongside your academic studies, how have you found that?

Christopher: Managing my busy composing diary and academic studies has presented its challenges, yet it's been immensely gratifying. Juggling a burgeoning freelance composing career alongside academic pursuits requires careful balancing, but it also helps me structure my time. Typically, I dedicate mornings to composing, and then shift to my academic commitments in the afternoons.

Aris: It gets busy at times, but an amazing feature of the music course is that you can tailor it to meet your interests. Because of this, the process of releasing music becomes less 'alongside' and more integrated into your academic studies, which is brilliant — it takes the academia out of its self-contained box and into real-life application. In this sense I can kill multiple birds with the same stone, to put it crassly!

Have you been making use of the College's new rehearsal and recording space?

Aris: Yes — although the official opening date is in Trinity term. I have been trialling the systems, seeing what works and what needs attention. Drum, guitar and bass recording all sound great in there, and the studio monitors have amazing sonic representation — listening to tracks full blast and feeling the sub-bass is a procrastination method of mine that I enjoy indulging in every time I'm in the control room!

Christopher: Although I have yet to explore the new Tower Studio space, I eagerly anticipate doing so in the upcoming term. I really commend Aris for spearheading the initiative and generating momentum for this facility. The space is an utterly fantastic addition for LMH.

If you had to pick a favourite experience at Oxford so far, what would it be?

Aris: Playing the LMH Ball in 2022 was a highlight, but personally it would be playing my original music with my band Mount St. Helen in the LMH bar to a big audience of friends. It was our first ever gig, and since then we have been asked to play festivals all around the area. I wouldn't have done it anywhere else.




Christopher: As well as composing, I work as a choral singer in Oxford, and am the manager of Oxford University Chorus. We collaborated with Oxford University Philharmonia last term on a performance of Mahler's Symphony No.2. The sheer scale of the ensemble — 120 voices strong — coupled with a huge orchestra created an absolutely extraordinary concert. I'll never forget it.

Has the tutorial system at Oxford helped your artistic development?

Aris: Absolutely. Although prospective students sometimes worry that the intensely academic side of the course might be far-removed from the experience of a practicing musician, I can confirm the opposite. I found that almost everything in tutorials has informed the way I compose, play and listen to music. It's usually the most seemingly left-of-field musicological theory or writing that finds its way into inspiring a lyric, a sound, or a performance idea. Going into the industry with this mindset proves itself time and time again to be a superpower, and I am forever indebted to my tutors for this.

Christopher: The tutorial system was one of the principal factors that drew me to Oxford. Many of my tutorials are one-on-one, and engaging in discussions with leading experts in their respective fields is an enormous privilege. Dr Jacob Kingsbury Downs, in particular, has been such an inspiring and encouraging tutor at LMH. The diversity of the Oxford music course has really encouraged me to embrace new ideas in my own musical pursuits, fostering a much more exploratory and open-minded approach in my own artistic development as a composer.

You can find out more about Aris's band, Mount St. Helen, on YouTube (@mountsthelen) or Instagram (@mount.st.helen). To explore Christopher's compositional work, visit his website: <https://www.christopherchurcher.com/>.



The new planting scheme will complement the architecture of our buildings

Our gardens: a vision for the future

As we approach the 150th Anniversary of LMH in 2028, plans are underway to celebrate not only the College's history but also our cherished green spaces. Find out more about our plans to revitalise the LMH gardens for future generations.

Nestled at the end of Norham Gardens, LMH's grounds have long formed a central part of the College's identity, offering solace and inspiration to students and alumni alike. The significance of our gardens cannot be overstated. For many, they are the very heart of the place, shaping fond memories and influencing decisions to choose LMH over other colleges in central Oxford. As we prepare to mark a significant milestone in our history, there is a collective vision to enhance and redefine the role of the gardens for generations to come.

At the centre of this vision lies a commitment to preserving the historical and botanical richness of the

gardens, while also championing vital sustainability and biodiversity goals. The aim is to transform the gardens into a vibrant, immersive space that reflects our academic excellence and pioneering spirit.

Under the guidance of Jenny Rose Carey Head Gardener Oakley Loudon, plans have been set in motion. Drawing upon the expertise of landscape architects Colvin and Moggridge, as well as acclaimed plant hunter and nurseryman Paul Barney, of Edulis Nurseries, the Garden team is embarking on an ambitious journey.

One of the key objectives is to realign the planting to complement the College's architecture, ensuring year-

round interest and visual harmony, highlighting our unique character. The team has already cleared overgrown borders in Wolfson Quad and around the Bar, and have worked to sharpen existing features such as topiaries and landscaped lawns. The goal is to ensure that our garden is considered among the very best of Oxford colleges.

But the transformation extends beyond mere aesthetics. Oakley has spearheaded an initiative to redefine the roles of the Garden team at LMH, recognising individual areas of expertise and empowering College Gardeners Kevin and Ngaio to contribute to the community's well-being. This includes projects such as



Above and above right: **The borders around the SCR terrace are being re-freshed**

Right: **The Garden team recently re-planted the area at the front of the College to improve seasonal interest**

Bottom right: **The sunken garden will be restored to its former glory**



the Vegetable Club, immersive sound baths, and bulb planting workshops, all aimed at fostering a deeper connection between our people and the nature that surrounds us.

Looking ahead, we see our gardens as more than just picturesque landscapes — they are dynamic places of reflection, creativity, and communal engagement. As we prepare to unveil the revitalised gardens in time for our 150th Anniversary, there is a palpable sense of excitement and anticipation among students, staff, and alumni.

In Oakley's words, "Our goal is to create a garden that not only reflects LMH's rich heritage but also inspires and nourishes all who encounter it. We want to build upon the essence that is already here, to steer it in a healthy way toward flourishing as its most expressive and charming character. We want our garden to be a bridge to experience, enjoyment, connection and education. A sense of place, readily available, to merge with the beauty of nature in all its forms, in the ways only a true garden can offer."

"The significance of our gardens cannot be overstated. For many, they are the very heart of the place, shaping fond memories and influencing decisions to choose LMH over other colleges in central Oxford."



Jenny Rose Carey Head Gardener **Oakley Loudon** tells us how he made the transition from touring musician to full-time horticulturalist.

Horticulture is within my very being, although my journey into gardening meandered. My father is a talented and well-respected arboriculturalist, and my mother has always gardened, including teaching people how to grow cut-flower gardens.

When I was younger, I was a touring and recording musician for many years. I have travelled a lot, including Nepal, and a trek up to the Annapurna base camp in the Nepalese Himalayas, followed by a journey to Lhasa through Tibet. I've explored Jordan, Morocco, the Western Sahara and, when living in Melbourne, the landscapes of Australia and Tasmania. California and Louisiana were also deeply inspiring. In between my travels, I worked for my father in arboriculture, mainly on larger scale planting contracts. I worked for a couple of years as a contractor for the Chelsea Flower Show, which really illuminated the depth and width of knowledge and community that horticulture offers as a profession.

Before joining LMH, I worked for a decade alongside a friend, and very talented gardener, in private gardens and estates around Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties. I have been extremely fortunate to spend time with many talented and generous arboriculturalists, horticulturalists, plantswomen and plantsmen. These people, combined with my unending curiosity, have expedited my learning and the progression of my abilities, and have fuelled my passion for plants and natural landscapes.

When I started at LMH early in 2018, I was attracted to the idea of looking after a single garden; immersing myself as the steward of one distinct place. The LMH gardens are made up of communities of plants, encircling our community, each bringing their own unique character and charm – I am totally enlivened by the work here. My plan is to build upon the essence of what is already here, to steer it in a healthy way and to enable it to flourish. We want to ensure that within LMH's natural spaces there are bountiful opportunities for enrichment, enjoyment and education.

Within the boundaries of the resources available, I hope that we can bring the gardens back to a vibrancy that is maintainable and manageable, so that we aren't chasing our tails trying to keep on top of things. It would be wonderful to grow engagement not just within the College, but with the wider horticultural community. We have big ambitions leading up to our 150th Anniversary in 2028, and the team and I are really excited by the idea of leaving our own legacy at LMH. It will all unfurl.

If you would like to learn more about the plans we have for the Gardens or make a gift in support of this exciting project, please contact Carrie Scott, Deputy Development Director: carrie.scott@lmh.ox.ac.uk; +44 (0)1865 274362.

Nurturing nature, nurturing change

When thinking about sustainability at LMH, we consider not just the green spaces that envelop our buildings, but our wide-ranging activities. How can we measure our community's impact on the environment, how far can we reduce it, and what action should we take?



Work to map LMH's environmental impact has led us to ask questions of ourselves: do we fully understand the biodiversity of our gardens? How can we invest in green technology to help us heat and power our buildings? Where do we source our food, and how much do we throw away? Can we create circular rather than wasteful linear processes, and are our suppliers asking themselves the same question? And how can we help our students gain experience and understanding of these issues?

We try to raise awareness within our community as we go about life at LMH, tracking our power usage and waste, taking part in initiatives such as Switch Up Your Lunch and the Carbon Cost of Food scheme, and sourcing products directly from local farmers. We take part in Green Impact, a programme run by the National Union of Students to support environmentally and socially sustainable practices. LMH achieved 'Beyond Gold' in 2022 and 2023 – one of only seven colleges and departments in Oxford to achieve the highest level.

Recently, we have upped our ambitions, completing a government-funded project to insulate and decarbonise Eleanor Lodge, and holding a Green Giving Day to raise funds for green initiatives. The £50,000 raised has enabled us to start upgrading the 70 windows in the Library, double glazing the original frames, improving the working environment and replacing gas

boilers with heat pumps. We have launched some paid Sustainability Internships to help the College to gain a better understanding of what needs to be done, while also providing opportunities for students to gain valuable experience.

During the University's Green Action week in February, we held a 24-hour 'bioblitz' biodiversity audit, with members of College recording observations of LMH's flora and fauna via the iNaturalist app. We are developing a more consolidated approach to data collection and interpretation, using a platform designed to calculate carbon emissions, access to which has been kindly given by a friend of the College. Using this software, student Sustainability Interns will contribute towards work on baselining and creating quantified recommendations for improving our carbon footprint.

Thanks to generous support from an alumnus, we will welcome an Ecologist to LMH this summer to provide a detailed Biodiversity Baseline Survey. We are excited to discover more about precisely which species are thriving in the rich natural habitats that surround us.

A donation form is enclosed should you wish to make a gift to support the College, including our broad range of sustainability initiatives.

Next Green Steps



- Upgrade all Library windows
- Improve the thermal efficiency of our buildings, and learn which techniques work best at LMH
- Measure biodiversity on our site and make plans to encourage it
- Understand how to move from traditional supply chains to more sustainable circular and regenerative resource use
- Provide opportunities for students to work with us on these projects



How you can help

Sponsor a window for £1,500 and help us complete our Library Window Upgrade Project to improve the thermal efficiency of this key College facility.

Please contact carrie.scott@lmh.ox.ac.uk if you would like to find out more and/or make a gift to name a window.

Celebrating the Oxford Pakistan Programme's annual Iqbal Lecture

Find out how the Oxford Pakistan Programme's (OPP) Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lecture, now in its third year, is putting LMH and Oxford on the map.

Back in 2022, the Oxford Pakistan Programme (OPP) team unveiled a new addition to their many initiatives and activities: the now-annual Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lecture. Named after one of the most eminent intellectual figures of the East, the lecture celebrates the intellectual legacy of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, a hugely influential thinker of the twentieth century.

Something that stood out to the OPP team was that Oxford, renowned for its plentiful array of public lectures, lacked events dedicated to major intellectual figures from the East. The Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lecture was conceived to bridge this gap by honouring the intellectual contributions of Iqbal, revered as the poet-philosopher of the East. His works in Urdu and Persian are considered to be amongst the finest expressions of Islamic literary and philosophical tradition in modern history, and his work covers an extensive array of themes such as Eastern mysticism, the interface between Islam and the West, self-determination, religious reform, and social justice.

Iqbal's seminal lectures, initially published by Oxford University Press under the title *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, remain a cornerstone reference in the field. An ardent believer in self-determination in the Indian sub-continent, his ideals laid the groundwork for the establishment of Pakistan, emphasising self-determination in the Indian subcontinent. Beyond his regional impact, Iqbal's intellectual ethos resonates globally, offering a platform for inter-religious dialogue and constructive engagement between Islam and the West.

Held annually in the Simpkins Lee Theatre, the Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lecture series has attracted leading figures in academia. The inaugural lecture in 2022 was delivered by Professor Wael Hallaq of Columbia University, a distinguished authority on Islamic law. Subsequent speakers have included Professor Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned development thinker and global leader in sustainable development, and Karen Armstrong, a bestselling author and commentator renowned for her insights on comparative religion.

The growing popularity of the Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lecture within Oxford's academic calendar is evidenced by its packed audiences and large online viewership; last year's lecture attracted over 100,000 views on YouTube. The OPP engages international audiences by live-streaming to over 40 universities across Pakistan, some of them situated in remote places – for example, in the mountainous north

(Gilgit-Baltistan) and in Baluchistan (the south-western province). In reaching such vast audiences, the OPP is championing an ambitious model of academic engagement and outreach that is putting LMH and Oxford on the map.

This outreach effort is made possible through the generous sponsorship of The Dadabhoy Foundation, a Karachi-based non-profit organisation committed to promoting education, culture, and scientific development in Pakistani society. The Foundation's support, under the guidance of Oxford alumnus Mr Abdul Ghani Dadabhoy, signifies the growing success of the OPP's work to foster academic engagement and outreach in Oxford and beyond.



Top left: Professor Jeffrey Sachs with Mr Abdulghani Dadabhoy at the 2023 lecture

Top right: Karen Armstrong

Above: This year's Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lecture with speaker Karen Armstrong

Alumni power: our Volunteer Network

We are fortunate to have a longstanding tradition of alumni and friends who volunteer to support LMH. Working alongside staff, our volunteers give their expertise, experience and time to advance College projects.

Alumni Volunteer Network

We have established an **Alumni Volunteer Network** under which project-specific activities support the Development Team and wider College community. Current projects include:

The Brown Book

Our much-loved annual publication continues to be produced by alumni for alumni, and the editorial team is responsible for gathering and proof-reading material. If you are interested in helping them, or in supporting the publication in other ways, please contact us.

Oral History Project

Launched in 2019, the Oral History Project is run by an alumni volunteer group who are recording interviews with members of our community to enrich the College's archives and feature in our anniversary celebrations (see p.58). If you would like to join the interviewing team or help with editing transcriptions (can be done remotely) please get in touch.

LMH Local

Alumni in several cities around the world have formed LMH Local groups, putting on events for other LMHers in their region. Events have been organised in Hong Kong, New York and Singapore, with additional events in Romania and London planned for 2024. If you would like to organise a get-together for alumni in your region, please get in touch.

Please contact development@lmh.ox.ac.uk to find out more about opportunities and keep an eye on our communications for further updates.

A History of Volunteering at LMH

Records of the first known alumni volunteers at LMH lie in a small volume with a dark brown cover dated 1892. The publication contained a report of a meeting in 1891 at which 'it was resolved to form an Association of Old Students to help keep up the feeling of comradeship among students after they had left the Hall'. This group became known as the **Lady Margaret Hall Association (LMHA)**.

We owe our tradition of alumni engagement at LMH to the hard work of several generations who formed and sustained an alumni community through the LMHA. After the establishment of the Development Office in 1997, the work of the LMHA dovetailed with the Office, focusing on complementary activities such as producing *The Brown Book* and assisting with events.

The Advisory Council was set up in 1995 to advise on strategic and fundraising matters. Major projects have included the relocation of the Law Library, the New Era Campaign, the Foundation Year and the revised welfare framework. Established by former Principal Sir Brian Fall, subsequent Principals have continued to seek the advice of alumni both through the formal structure of the Advisory Council and on an individual basis.

Having considered the evolving needs of the College and our desire to involve more alumni volunteers worldwide, we moved away from the two committee structures in summer 2023, and have adopted a more flexible framework, open to all, through the Alumni Volunteer Network.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who has served on the LMHA and Advisory Council or volunteered in other capacities. We look forward to continuing to work together with alumni to support LMH.

Careers and Networking

If you have career-building opportunities for current and graduating students, please send us details for our careers board, where we advertise internships, work experience and graduate work. This is an excellent chance to give back to the LMH community and have access to a pool of exceptional talent.

You can also join LMH Building Links — our LinkedIn group of over 1,800 members set up to help LMH

alumni and current students to network:
www.linkedin.com/groups/1211637

Between June 2028 and December 2029, LMH will celebrate its 150th Anniversary. As this important milestone comes into view, further volunteering opportunities will arise – please keep an eye out for updates.



Honorary Fellow **A.E. Stallings** (1991, MSt Literae Humaniores) was announced last summer as the new Oxford Professor of Poetry. She sat down with **Marion Turner**, J.R.R. Tolkien Professor of English Literature and Language and Chair of the University's English Faculty Board, to share her hopes for the role and her memories of making unsettling discoveries in the LMH library.

Top: **A.E. Stallings** delivering her inaugural lecture at Examination Schools

Marion: It was so wonderful to be at your inaugural lecture last term. At the dinner afterwards, here at LMH, you talked about the fact that you sat in the same place in the College library to write your inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry as you had sat a few decades ago when you were a student here.

Alicia: It was that kind of extraordinary feeling of being a time ghost or of maybe walking through the phantom of your younger self, and also that sense of the current reality being the less real of the two. I mean, the girl who was very anxious about that essay she was writing probably didn't imagine that she would eventually be Professor of Poetry. That would have struck her as highly implausible.

I have so many memories of being in that library. In fact, one of the poems from my first book, *Archaic Smile*, was written in that library. I was working on a tutorial about the second book of the *Aeneid* and I had total writer's block about it. It was very late at night. I was the only person in the library. It was extremely spooky and I ended up writing this poem instead, which I then had to bring to my tutorial because I had no essay.

Marion: Was the poem *Aeneid* inspired?

Alicia: It was. It was kind of what I would have covered in the essay, I think, but it came out in poem form. My tutor, Richard Jenkyns, was very nice about it. He asked me to read the poem aloud. He asked for a copy of the poem. And then he said, 'Go write your essay.'

Right: **Professor Marion Turner announcing A.E. Stallings as the next Oxford Professor of Poetry**

I also remember being in the library one night, it was dark and weird and spooky and I was by myself. I went down to the card catalogues and I needed a pencil. I opened up a drawer and it was full of random bones!

Marion: This is very dark academic Oxford, isn't it?!

Alicia: I think it was just some sort of Victorian collection of specimens, but it was vaguely alarming at the time. This process of writing the lecture was a more positive thing.

Marion: So you've come back to Oxford as Professor of Poetry, the second woman to hold the post, which is so appropriate for LMH. And I'm the first woman to hold the J.R.R. Tolkien Chair. When we were students, we didn't have so many role models of senior women.

Alicia: Yes, I think I had very few.

Marion: That has definitely changed quite a lot – and we should talk about the Professor of Poetry election, which we obviously saw from different sides. I was Chair of the Faculty Board and so was chairing the committee overseeing the election. It was a really interesting process.

We had external poets and academics on the committee. We had representatives from across the University. We had student representation. Anyone could self-nominate or be nominated by others, so it was a very open process and I think it was an exceptionally strong field. A lot of people said that.

Alicia: I've actually run for the post before, in 2015, and the process was very different. I think I had to have 50 nominators then, so it was a less inclusive process.

Marion: That was why the University made changes to it. It used to be the case that people needed a large number of nominators and the nominators all had to be Oxford alumni, so that did make it more of a 'who you know' kind of process, which is very different to what we're trying to do in the University as a whole. We tried to make it clear that people from all different backgrounds were welcome. And I think you're the first Professor of Poetry who's not from the UK or Ireland. I hope you found it a better process.

"I also remember being in the library one night, it was dark and weird and spooky and I was by myself. I went down to the card catalogues and I needed a pencil. I opened up a drawer and it was full of random bones!"



Alicia: This was much more straightforward, and I would have been happy for anyone to have won. Any of the people shortlisted could have done a very good job.

Marion: It does feel like the poetry world is very rich at the moment.

Alicia: I think so.

Marion: I mean metaphorically rich, not literally!

Alicia: No, it's never been literally rich – we always mean it metaphorically! But I think there is always more interest in poetry than the media seems to want to give it.

Marion: Absolutely. Our Professor of Poetry lectures here attract enormous attention. I hope you've been pleased with the reception.

Alicia: Oh gosh. The turnout for the inaugural lecture; we were just stunned.

Marion: And because they are public lectures, you get more variety in the kinds of people who come, because when most of us give lectures it's mostly to one faculty, but the Professor of Poetry lectures have a much broader reach.

Alicia: Yes, I was affiliated with Classics when I was a student here, but I remember going to Seamus Heaney's poetry lectures, and that was a wonderful thing to be at.

“There are a lot of people who are interested in poetry, in history, in literature. More people than maybe the government imagines.”

Marion: And of course people not connected to the University come to the lectures as well. We'll have to think about different venues you might want to speak in. Your predecessor gave her last lecture at the Natural History Museum.

Alicia: Oh that's wonderful, I didn't even know that was an option! I think that's one of the fun things about the position, which I believe to be unique, is that although there is a lecture a term and various other commitments, the Professor of Poetry role is largely what you make of it. Each new Professor can remake it.

Marion: Do you want to talk a bit about what you're trying to make of it, apart from the flagship lectures?

Alicia: I would like to be quite accessible. If there's someone who's writing poetry who wants to talk to me, I want to have an open door. I'm interested in certain kinds of crossover, with Classics and modern Greek. I'm interested in issues of migration, so I've been talking to lots of people about different ways to bridge disciplines.

And generally I think there is a kind of hunger for poetry not as an academic proposition, but more as a human connection. I'd love to do an event where people could come and recite their favourite poems by dead poets and just talk about them. I think there's a great untapped kind of community of readers and appreciators of poetry who might not be studying literature.

Marion: I know you've been meeting with some LMH students. Have they mainly been talking about their own poetry or different kinds of aspects of poetry?

Alicia: It was really nice that LMH students were the first to sign up, and the first to come in with their LMH jackets on and so forth. Again I had that weird kind of time feeling where you know, they're all very young and very earnest and you think, 'I could be that person'.

Marion: One of them might be Professor of Poetry one day!

Alicia: [laughing] A lot of people showed me poems and were not necessarily doing English. Some wanted to talk about papers they were working on or a favourite poem. But I like the idea of a poet having a public or outward-facing role: that old fashioned notion that part of your job is to connect with people.

Marion: I think that's true for academics as well, that part of our job should be to go beyond the academy. There's a place for very niche work that only a few people are interested in, but there's also a really important place for making your ideas more accessible and trying to reach diverse audiences in all senses. There are a lot of people who are interested in poetry, in history, in literature. More people than maybe the government imagines.

Alicia: I think so. You've had this wonderful Chaucer exhibition ['Chaucer: Here and Now' at the Bodleian Library, curated by Marion] that looks like it's been very popular. And I think again people maybe think from school that literature is not for them, then they realise Chaucer was immensely popular.

Marion: Yes, and he was saying things about subjects people are interested in, like travelling and diaspora and class and sex! Using these spaces that the University has to offer free exhibitions to showcase these extraordinary treasures — especially manuscripts and early books — and make them comprehensible to people is an incredible privilege.

Alicia: I think that's one of the things that is almost comforting about poetry too, when we look at it through time, that people hundreds or thousands of years ago were dealing with very similar types of problems, whether it's migration or famine or war. Great literature always speaks to the present, whatever the present is.

Marion: Would you say you have a plan for the next four years as Professor of Poetry?

Alicia: I guess what I would like to do is to allow people to get more involved in poetry. I like the idea of events where people get up and present a poem and recite a poem, more as a communal activity. I get the sense that people really want that.

Marion: I think Oxford terms are so busy, and we're making undergraduates cover a huge amount of information in a short time. And actually I could really see a place for events where people gather and everyone learns one stanza and they recite it together, and where people pause over one poem or one line or one verse and rejoice in something. That's a really lovely thing to do outside the frantic essay writing and assimilating masses of information. That seems like a really important thing to do.

Alicia: I think that's what's lacking generally in our lives. We're all looking at our screens and trying to do two or three things at once. One young man came in during my office hours and was concerned about not having time for poetry in his life. And I said, 'Are you walking a lot? Are you bicycling?' He said, 'Yes'. And I said, 'What about memorising some poems and you can recite them to yourself when you're bicycling or walking?' Most of the romantic poets composed while walking. There is space and time, if we carve it out.

We would like to thank Alicia and Marion for their time. For more information on the Professor of Poetry role and Alicia's upcoming lectures, visit www.english.ox.ac.uk/professor-of-poetry.



Windows into the lives of dementia patients

Inspired by her work with dementia patients at Vale House care home, **Georgia Crowther** (Arben, 2017, Bachelor of Fine Art) discusses the value of art therapy and shares her experience of turning residents' work into an exhibition.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, Georgia Crowther was working long shifts as a carer at Vale House, a specialist dementia care home in Oxfordshire. During her break times she would, "Dance with the residents. I'd read to them, we would put paper out and we'd all paint together." Eventually, the care home manager noticed that Georgia was spending all of her break times doing art projects with residents and asked if she would like to become Vale House's art coordinator.

Georgia describes the impact of art therapy at Vale House as transformational, noting that, "Even if the impact is immediate or short lasting for someone with short term memory problems, even if it only lasts for that moment, I believe there's a residual impact because you can feel it in the space. If there's been a project and then you leave and you go back, people are happy, and if there hasn't been anything, the room feels different."

When Georgia started her part-time Masters in Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths College, University of London, she decided to create an art project that would shine a light on

the lives of people with dementia. Inspiration for the project came from a care home resident named Josie who, while observing the room during a painting session, came out with the words: "There is no door, yet there are many windows."

"It's such a good metaphor for life itself, but specifically for the care home," Georgia reflects, "there's no door to go outside, to go into society, but there are lots of windows, literal windows to look out into the countryside. But also windows looking back at your life, the memories, which may be fragmented but can be triggered through art making or music."

Georgia received funding from the Arts Council England to exhibit 'There Is No Door, Yet There Are Many Windows' at Oxford's Ovada Gallery in July 2023. She worked with Vale House residents and their families to design personalised windows that reflected the memories and emotions of the creators. Some Vale House residents were able to go along to the opening night with their families, providing opportunities for loved ones to celebrate their family members and

to meet others who have been affected by dementia. The exhibition proved to be a powerful way of celebrating the richness of the lives lived by Vale House residents, looking at the whole person rather than just their symptoms.

Georgia is the current recipient of the Corrine Burton Scholarship at Goldsmiths, which will support her to spend the next several years working in palliative care, providing art therapy in a hospital that specialises in the care of cancer patients.



You can find out more about Georgia's work on her website: www.georgiacrowther.com.

A mother's fight

For **Joanna Lane** (1966, English), founding a charity wasn't in her life plan until the tragic suicide of her son Christopher led her on a path to provide a voice for those affected by post-traumatic hypopituitarism.

"Our charity has helped some people to get diagnosed and to feel better, and that is thrilling."



Joanna Lane with her son Christopher

Joanna recalls her time at LMH fondly: "It provided me with good friends and interesting experiences, and developed in me an ability to argue, which I would later find invaluable. However, it could in no way prepare me for what was to come."

Tragedy and understanding

15 years ago, Joanna and her husband John faced an unimaginable tragedy when their son, Christopher, took his own life at the age of 31. Joanna says, "I still cry in the night about him. I miss his kindness, his intelligence, his soft snorting laugh."

The course of Christopher's life had been altered, the family now know, by a childhood accident, from which they had been assured Christopher had suffered no major lasting effects. At the age of seven, a fall from a tree in an adventure playground resulted in a basal skull fracture. This incident left Christopher in an induced coma for a week, and he spent three weeks in hospital. Following his hospital stay, he picked up his childhood, albeit with a slightly lopsided face (which later corrected itself). Although Christopher seemed to have recovered well, looking back Joanna notes that, "Whilst he had been top of the class, Christopher began to slip academically and had coasted along, apparently lacking ambition, and I'd felt disappointed at the course his life had taken."

Christopher's life seemed to drift, but he appeared content enough. As Joanna puts it, "On the surface, he'd seemed fine, with good friends from his university conservation group. He was good at his job writing software, active, funny." However, buried within his personal correspondence, a crucial clue to Christopher's hidden struggles emerged. Joanna says, "When clearing

his belongings from his house, we found letters between him and a previous girlfriend about his personal life that provided us with a clue: that he'd never managed full sex and had depression." This led to a realisation for Christopher's family. Joanna recalls, "We began to understand that his dropping out of his degree and not taking promotions in subsequent jobs, never mind what was going on in his personal life, was clear evidence of depression."

Turning tragedy into advocacy

In the aftermath of Christopher's suicide, Joanna found herself adrift, grappling with disbelief. Her sister's proactive approach opened a window into the hidden aspects of Christopher's life. Joanna reveals, "My sister went into action, wanting to know more. She began exploring the internet to see if there could be a link between his symptoms and his childhood brain injury, and almost immediately found research establishing that damage to the pituitary gland, caused by head trauma (post-traumatic hypopituitarism), could make a person impotent and depressed."

The discovery of this link became a catalyst for Joanna. "I was desperate to make something good come from this catastrophe, and to do my best to stop it happening again," she says.

Joanna's advocacy took various forms, from heartfelt letters to government officials to collaborations with journalists like Lynne Wallis. "I wrote many emails, to the Secretary of State for Health, the Royal Colleges, to NICE (whose head injury guidelines should surely have included the information but didn't), to newspapers, to consultants, to head injury charities," Joanna says. Her relentless efforts gained momentum, reaching national platforms with features on programmes like Dr Mark Porter's *Inside Health* and an appearance on *Woman's Hour*.

Joanna threw herself into her campaign to raise awareness of post-traumatic hypopituitarism and its symptoms: "I spoke at conferences. Valerie Vaz MP created an early day motion for me highlighting the risk. My husband and I set up a website, and later established The Christopher Lane Trust. I wrote a book, *Mother of a Suicide*."

Despite the apparent progress in raising awareness, Joanna faced many bureaucratic hurdles. She reflects, "My correspondence with government organisations was frustrating; I was fobbed off at every turn. NICE were particularly difficult, promising to include the information in their next update and then, when the time grew near, suddenly deciding that it lay outside the scope of the guidance (though they did capitulate a decade later). The British Heart Foundation, too, refused to update their website with the information that heart disease could be caused by growth hormone deficiency (an aspect of pituitary damage), until pressure from their trustees made them give way."

Understanding post-traumatic hypopituitarism

Joanna unearthed critical information about post-traumatic hypopituitarism. She says, "From the consultants, and from the research, I was learning more. I learnt that post-traumatic hypopituitarism was not the rare thing I had imagined, but common, happening after a quarter of head injuries, and being a risk even after concussion."

She continues, "I learnt that its effects (depending on which hormones are affected) are not only depression and loss of libido, but heart attacks and osteoporosis, life-threatening adrenal crises, fatigue, infertility, obesity, and other lesser symptoms such as tinnitus and dysregulation of body temperature." These revelations provided insight into Christopher's

hidden struggle, and renewed Joanna's determination to make sure others don't have to suffer the same outcome.

Hope on the horizon

Joanna believes that a key barrier faced in the struggle to gain recognition for post-traumatic hypopituitarism was the cost of treatment, which involves regular doses of human growth hormone. In the 1980s, treatment of this kind would have cost upwards of £25,000 a year per person (£125,000 today). Joanna explains, "Now that synthetic growth hormone is available, the price has come down to around £1,000 a year per patient – still life-long, of course."

For Joanna, every person she helps to find an explanation for their often-ignored symptoms is a victory. She says, "Over the years I have come across people who were told for decades that they had chronic fatigue syndrome or ME, and have only fought through to correct diagnosis thanks to their own internet searching. Often these people have attempted suicide, some more than once. I found plentiful research demonstrating that after head injury, suicide is four times the norm. That, too, is something as parents we would have liked to have known."

Despite the uphill battle, The Christopher Lane Trust has made significant inroads. "Our charity has helped some people to get diagnosed and to feel better, and that is thrilling," Joanna says. The annual diagnosis figure has more than tripled (now up to 23,000), a testament to the impact of awareness initiatives.

Joanna is grateful to all those who have supported the work of The Christopher Lane Trust, noting, "Some of those helping me have been my old friends from my time at LMH. I value feeling part of this community, and I hope this article may resonate with others and that they will get in touch."

"I learnt that post-traumatic hypopituitarism was not the rare thing I had imagined, but common, happening after a quarter of head injuries, and being a risk even after concussion."

Find out more about The Christopher Lane Trust at: www.christopherlanetrust.org.uk. *Mother of a Suicide* by Joanna Lane is available now, published by Hachette.

Let's talk about access

Eleanor Chamings-Manley, Head of Access and Admissions Support, and Outreach Manager **Marrium Khan** (2010, English) talk about the evolution of LMH's access work, the expansion of digital outreach, and the challenges for the future.

What are you most looking forward to this year?

Eleanor: I'm particularly excited to further develop our work with teachers, who play such an important role in how we work with students to try and open up access, particularly for those from target groups who don't apply to selective universities like Oxford in the numbers they should. If you can get a teacher on board and supply them with the tools they need to support their students in applying, you're potentially affecting a whole generation. We're planning to run virtual information sessions for teachers, particularly those in our link regions of Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Bristol and Haringey. We'll use these to share key information about Oxford's application process, what we look for in students, and what they can do to best prepare their students to apply.

We also realise it's vital that we learn from teachers, so I want to spend time listening to and developing relationships with them, learning more about the challenges that they and their students face and better understanding how we can empower students to navigate the application process.

Marrium: Eleanor already mentioned key target groups, and one group I'm excited to do more work with is students from British Pakistani backgrounds, who have been identified as a group that don't apply to Oxford in the numbers that they should, bearing in mind how many

get three As at A Level. I'm especially excited about the opportunity to marry up my professional experience with my lived experience, which is a bit of an anomaly within the University as an outreach practitioner.

One particular way that I think we can have an impact is by working with the families, namely parents, of these students. They're such a distinct and often marginalised group of key gatekeepers, and I think we need to work harder to meet them where they are. To sum it up, and to speak quite frankly, if my parents hadn't allowed me to apply to Oxford and live away from home, I simply wouldn't have. And these challenges are still relevant today. So how do we navigate them in a way that is tactful and respectful? I don't think it is just one thing but rather a range of things. Perhaps it's offering information in native languages, where the parent or carer's first language isn't English, or maybe it's bringing in a trusted source of authority, such as an Islamic scholar, to advise.

What do you think are the biggest challenges you're facing?

Marrium: We find ourselves in this perfect storm of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, a surge in mental health issues among pupils, as well as the aftermath of the pandemic. As a University, what we say is that we want the best and brightest students, regardless of socio-



Eleanor Chamings-Manley (left) and Marrium Khan (right)

economic background, but how do we stay true to that when the attainment gap [the disparity in educational attainment between different socio-economic groups] is the widest it has been since 2011? In this day and age, what is a prospective applicant grappling with? I imagine it is questions like: 'is a degree really worth it?'; 'should I do an apprenticeship instead?'; 'can I even afford to attend an in-person Open Day?' When you combine this with the usual access barriers like Oxford stereotypes and a fear of fitting in, I think it makes for an even more complicated picture.

Eleanor: As well as growing our schools outreach programmes, and aiming to work in a more sustained way over a longer period of time with a group of students, we've also set ourselves the challenge of embedding really good evaluation into our outreach programmes. We want to be able to say with confidence that our programmes are achieving what they've set out to do, while also contributing to the evidence base of the best ways to do university outreach.

Universities carry out a lot of activities with the aim of widening access to higher education, but there's reasonably sparse academic evidence about how to have the biggest impact. How do we best challenge the societal inequalities that lead to very able students from less advantaged backgrounds not being able to, or not feeling able to, apply to our most selective universities? At LMH, not only do we want to run ambitious outreach programmes, but we also want to contribute to the evidence base of what works (and doesn't) to improve effectiveness. So we will be considering how we evaluate right from the outset of designing new outreach programmes, while also partnering with experts in impact evaluation.

How can LMH have the biggest impact?

Eleanor: Our core message is that as long as students have high academic potential and are passionate about their subject, there could potentially be a place for them at Oxford. We want to convey this message far and wide to prospective applicants from as many different backgrounds and experiences as possible. We know that we are best able to get that message out, particularly to those students not actively considering Oxford, when we collaborate with others who are already working with groups of students that we want to reach.

One organisation we're particularly excited to work with is Future Leaders UK, a leadership programme that empowers young people across London by giving them access to opportunities that they might not otherwise have. We're also planning to run an event next year with Muslim Women Connect. This will aim to support young Muslim women to navigate the societal and social barriers that they might face in accessing academically selective universities. And in another quite different partnership, we are being twinned with a primary school in Oxford, with the aim that by the time they leave the school, every pupil will have had an enrichment opportunity at the University.

Marrium: I think LMH can have the biggest impact through the work that we are doing digitally, from social media campaigns to virtual talks for schools and enhanced digital

content for Open Days. We're expanding our resource in this area with the recruitment of a Digital Content and Communications Officer, who will work closely with us both to generate engaging digital content to help us reach an even wider audience.

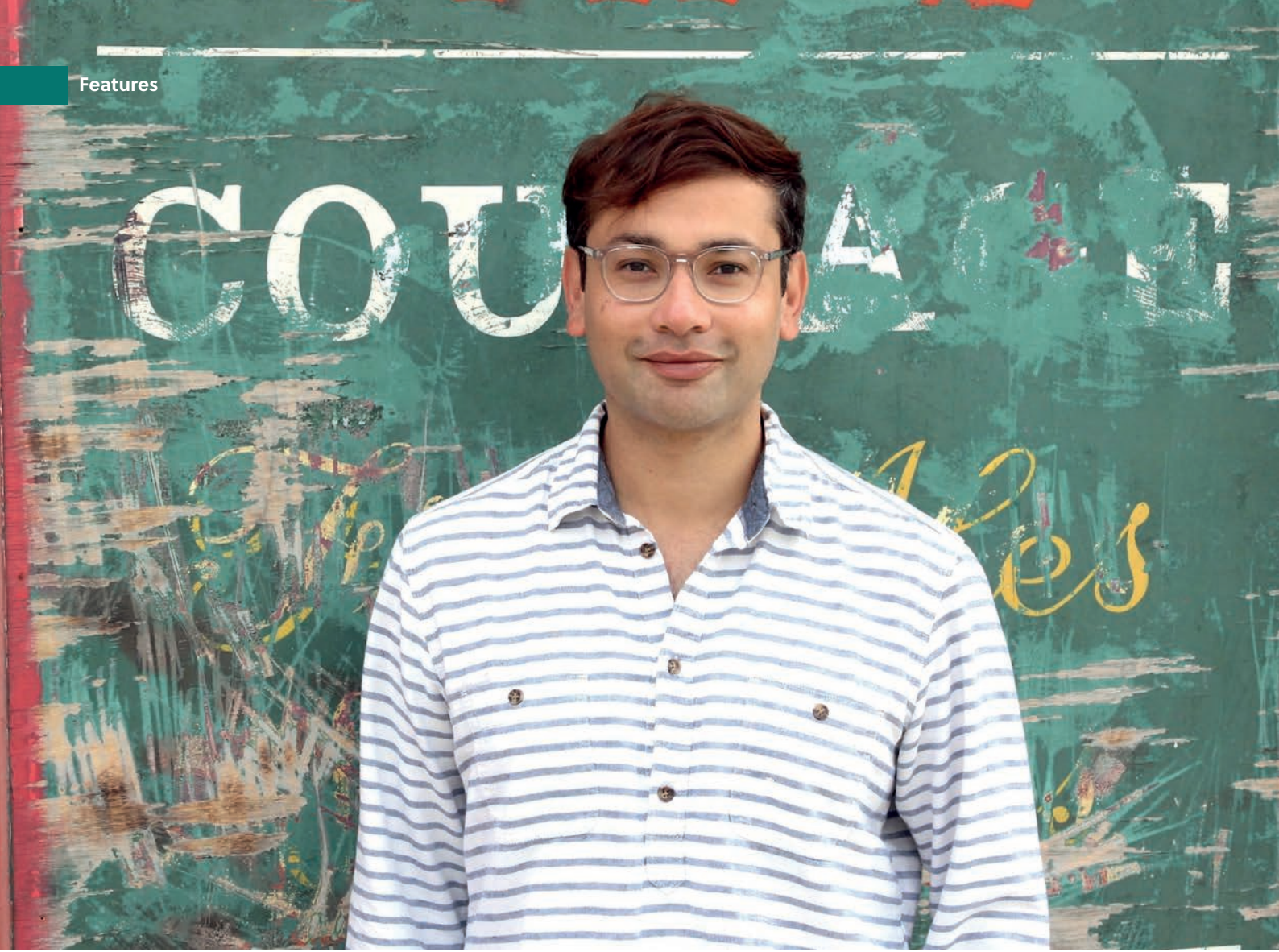
To further our understanding of the work already being done in this area, we recently conducted a survey of digital outreach across the University. The survey revealed that, despite a consensus that digital outreach is vitally important, many outreach practitioners in colleges are unable to make the most of this due to lack of resource, skills and knowledge. In the few instances that colleges have been able to commit significant time to delivering digital outreach there's a reported increase in applications, as well as in the diversity of applicants. We're keen to use digital outreach to raise our profile, continuing as a leader in finding ways to reach currently-underreached groups. We're also looking forward to sharing our expertise with colleagues, whilst acknowledging there is room for us to learn from others also engaging in this field.

What's your favourite thing about working in outreach at LMH?

Marrium: This might sound cliché, but it really is true — it is being and seeing the change. I've worked at LMH now for almost 9 years. My motivation for pursuing this role was my own experience of studying here from 2010 to 2013 as part of an under-represented group. To say that I was a minority at the time — visibly, culturally, religiously — is an understatement. It was so overwhelmingly unfathomable to me as someone who came from a melting-pot like Slough. And actually today, LMH is one of the most diverse colleges — it's a home to so many narratives. That's in no small part due to the work that we've done over the years, and it makes me really proud to be a part of this community that was founded to right a wrong and, I think, continues to try and do so. And I'm very excited to see what that looks like going forward.

Eleanor: I've been at LMH for almost a year now, having worked for another Oxford college in a similar role, and I'm so encouraged by the approach that LMH takes in supporting the wellbeing of staff, students and prospective students. With two professional Heads of Wellbeing and a full team including a nurse and two dedicated Study Skills lecturers, the College is able to provide pastoral, health and academic wellbeing support so our students can get on with enjoying everything that university has to offer.

LMH supports students from the point that they receive their offer of study, when we send out an offer-holder newsletter and invite them to a welcome event to help them while they're deciding whether to take up their offer and working hard towards their school qualifications. Solid wellbeing support throughout the whole student lifecycle is really important to opening Oxford up to a wider range of talented students. It would be a real shame to encourage lots of people to apply through our outreach activity and then not fully support them with the various and complex needs that all humans have when they move away to university. And I think LMH does a really good job of this.



An odyssey through modern India

In the rich tapestry of contemporary literature, **Santanu Bhattacharya** (2015, Master of Public Policy) stands out as a compelling storyteller. His debut novel, *One Small Voice*, has garnered significant critical acclaim for its nuanced portrayal of the complexity of the modern Indian millennial experience.

Santanu describes his novel as a “coming-of-age story of a young man in contemporary India.” It follows the life of Shubhankar ‘Shabby’ Trivedi, a young man growing up in the tumultuous backdrop of India in the early 1990s. Witnessing a horrific act of mob violence during communal riots at the tender age of ten, Shabby’s life takes a profound turn. Spanning three decades, *One Small Voice* explores the intricate dance between tradition and modernity, birth and chosen families, community and freedom.

Reflecting on the inspiration for his novel, Santanu says, “I started off writing short stories and essays. I guess I was dabbling with writing in different forms, and was trying to understand what drew me to telling stories, and how best to tell them.” The idea for *One Small Voice* struck him in 2012, and he knew immediately that it required the expansive breadth of a full-length book. He describes that time as a period of transition, not just on a personal level,

"I started off writing short stories and essays. I guess I was dabbling with writing in different forms, and was trying to understand what drew me to telling stories, and how best to tell them."

but for India as a country following two decades of economic liberalisation and technological growth and the rise of right-wing politics. *One Small Voice*, Santanu explains, "Was born out of the need to reflect that flux, not necessarily to find answers, because literature will never give neat answers to complex questions. But, in a way, the novel sought to record what we were feeling, what was happening to us and around us, and the historical and colonial context for some of those events."

Since its release in February 2023, *One Small Voice* has garnered many accolades, with *The Observer* naming it in a list of best debut novels of the year. Santanu reflects on the significance of this recognition, "It did wonders for my confidence, and of course, for the sales of the book." The subsequent months were filled with literary events, festivals, and interactions with readers and reviewers, offering Santanu a glimpse into the universal nature of human emotions. He notes that, "It was fascinating to see how a story set in India could resonate so much with readers from Britain, Colombia, Zimbabwe, Poland, Indonesia. It proved to me that our emotions are universal, and we're way more similar than we are different."

Santanu's passage into the literary world was not without its challenges. Coming from a background where pursuing the arts was considered a luxury, he explains, "I come from a family where everyone needs to work, money needs to be counted, bills need to be paid, budgets need to be adhered to." Despite these challenges, Santanu managed to complete *One Small Voice* on the sidelines of his full-time job, making his achievement all the more remarkable.

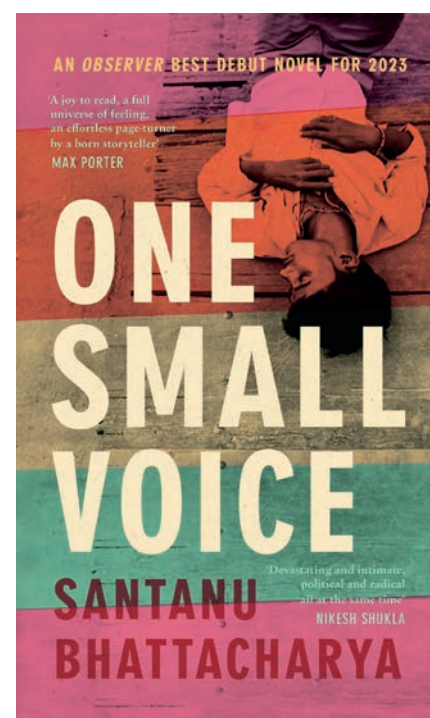
Reflecting on his time at LMH, Santanu acknowledges the impact it had on his writing journey. He had

written a rough draft of the novel before arriving in Oxford, but had put it away as, "I didn't think I had the skill to write something so complex." While he didn't do any writing during his one-year Master's program – the coursework kept him very busy – the experience provided a shift in perspective. "There was a lot of room to observe and think, and maybe the distance from India gave me a kind of objectivity. I spent hours strolling in the LMH gardens and sitting in the quad listening to someone practice their violin," Santanu recalls.

Oxford, with its centuries-old traditions and intellectual vigour, proved to be both a challenge and a source of inspiration. Arriving as a mature Master's student, Santanu grappled with the aspirational yet isolating nature of the University. The colonial connotations of certain ceremonies and the unfamiliar weather posed initial challenges, but Santanu found LMH, with its welcoming atmosphere and open ethos, a place of comfort. "LMH was so welcoming! It really felt like home in the sea of unknowns," he reflects.

As he navigated his way through Oxford's academic demands, Santanu's interactions with established authors during talks left an indelible mark. These encounters served as a constant reminder of his abandoned manuscript, eventually motivating him to revisit and complete the ambitious project that would become *One Small Voice*.

As Santanu looks to the future, he hints at further literary ventures to come. Describing writing as his passion, Santanu acknowledges that, "As demanding as it is, writing is also a really fulfilling process. It's like birthing words one by one to create a story that will have a life of its own."



***One Small Voice* is available now, published by Penguin Fig Tree. A review of Santanu's book was published in the 2023 edition of *The Brown Book* (p.124). His second novel, *Deviants*, will be published by Penguin Fig Tree in spring 2025.**

Being a bridge builder is what inspires me

A true polymath, **Gulamabbas Lakha** (2014, MPhil Islamic Studies and History) read economics and econometrics as an undergraduate before completing four masters degrees spanning theology, religion, Arabic, history, psychology and neuroscience. While serving as CEO of the investment firm he founded, he is also a DPhil candidate at Oxford's Department of Psychiatry. Gulamabbas explains how he is using his diverse experience to consider how faith-based practices can support treatments for mental health problems, particularly in Muslim and other faith communities.



"You could say optimism and hope are the building blocks of both spirituality and psychotherapy."

It was the death of his father, Gulamabbas says, that guided him towards the wide-ranging academic path he has followed ever since. "My father passed away in 2010, having been a pivotal figure not just in my personal development, but in my intellectual development. He was a barrister but had managed for many years to juggle this with his ministry in the Muslim community. He was a good example of how it was possible to balance a professional career and a ministry vocation."

His father had been due to deliver a sermon at their local mosque, and Gulamabbas was asked whether he would be willing to speak instead. "I felt completely underqualified," he admits. "The only thing I was qualified to do was economics. But I didn't want that one last obligation to go unfulfilled, so I said yes. And I basically narrated, almost verbatim, a previous sermon I had heard my father deliver. It was about the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, Lady Fatima, regarding a set of teachings on practical psychology and how to live with people who disagree with you."

Looking back, Gulamabbas sees this period both as a turning point in his professional life and as an early indicator of his ongoing fascination with the interaction between faith and mental health. Having focused on economics as an undergraduate, he had become a chartered financial analyst and gone on to set up an investment management company. But as Gulamabbas considered his father's legacy, his own ambitions, and his passion for pursuing academic research with practical applications – which emerged from two decades of business and community work – the draw of further study became irresistible.

As such – and in a move he is quick to say "would have been impossible without all kinds of support from my family" – he came to Oxford to study for a PGDip in Theology, together with a Masters in Islamic Studies from the Islamic College in London, followed by an MPhil here at LMH, focused on Islamic Studies and History.



Illustration of a Sūfī meditative spiritual concert (samā')

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ouseley Add. 24 (1552); fol. 119a

"My learning from both patients and clinicians has been that if NHS-approved interventions for depression, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness and behavioural activation were presented using Islamic concepts and practices, it would make them easier to access."

Reassessing the psalms

While at LMH, Gulamabbas began using early Arabic primary sources to investigate the reception given to *Al-Sahīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, one of the oldest Islamic prayer manuals. This included analysing commentaries that had not previously been studied in Western scholarship. Several reinforced Gulamabbas's own experiences of the text's psychological significance. "In my own personal journey," he says, "I had always been really struck by the power of psalms. They had helped me in periods of darkness, loneliness, fear and anxiety. As a young student I remember I had a CD of psalms that I would listen to and all the knotted-up emotions – uncertainty, self-doubt – would feel easier to process. I would finish feeling grounded and empowered."

"The psalmists had the ability, through their knowledge of theology and mastery of language, to present an array of mirrors at the right angle to shine a light on that which I couldn't or didn't want to see about myself," Gulamabbas reflects.

He continues, "What I discovered looking at the earliest reception history of this text was that 400 or 500 years ago, scholars were much more in touch with this same idea of practical psychology. I think in more recent years Islamic scholarship has become more juristic, but in the earlier era, scholars of Islamic law were also mystics and philosophers, what today we would call 'multi-disciplinary researchers', and were more willing to discuss psychological dimensions of religious texts."

Bolstered by his findings, Gulamabbas became increasingly interested in how faith-based concepts and practices can support mental health. He continued his studies with a Masters in Psychology, with a large neuroscience component. For his thesis he undertook a brain imaging study to compare EEG neural correlates [the association between a physical occurrence in the nervous system and a mental state or event] of a secular and Islamic mindfulness practice. Having reached a point where he felt confident combining what he calls the "theological and empirical" aspects of his studies, he began his DPhil in Psychiatry within the Neuroscience, Ethics and Society (NEUROSEC) team here in Oxford.

Breaking through stigma

One issue that has been at the forefront of Gulamabbas's thinking is how to overcome the stigma linked to mental illness, particularly in Muslim communities. Following religious training over a number of years, he was accredited as a *Shaykh* and has been lecturing on contemporary Islam at mosques across the UK and on Muslim TV channels over the last decade. "Sometimes from the pulpit," Gulamabbas says, "the stigmatising myth is presented that mental health challenges, whether anxiety, depression or other conditions, are somehow a manifestation of poor faith. There's an idea that if you had stronger faith, you would not be experiencing depression or anxiety, that if you trusted God more, you would not be anxious or depressed."

"I have always wanted to dispel that myth, because mental health challenges are a feature of human experience, just like physical health challenges. For instance, if someone walked into a mosque with a crutch, would your first instinct be to offer them a chair or kick the crutch away? Because what you're really doing by stigmatising mental health is adding a layer of guilt on top of the existing depression or

other condition. This leads me to think about how faith could and should instead play a role in supporting mental health.”

“If we look at the Qur’ān,” Gulamabbas adds, “there are examples of eminent prophets – Jacob, for example – who experienced various challenges. At one point, when Joseph was lost in the desert, the Qur’ān says Jacob’s eyes turned white with grief. And yet, Jacob speaks lucidly in that chapter about the importance of maintaining hope and optimism in the face of adversity, and not allowing negative experiences to sacrifice our optimism. I see links there with modern therapeutic interventions, such as mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy, enabling people experiencing depression and anxiety to perceive their experiences differently. You could say optimism and hope are the building blocks of both spirituality and psychotherapy.”

Creating a faith-based framework

Such thinking is at the heart of Gulamabbas’s current research focus – the development of what he has calls a Faith Informed Therapy framework. His DPhil takes a multi-disciplinary approach to investigating how religious concepts and practices can be harnessed for psychotherapeutic purposes among faith communities, focusing on depression within the UK Muslim population. His work is both conceptual and empirical, building a bridge between service providers and service users. The potential impact, Gulamabbas explains, is wide-ranging, with scope for improving accessibility to therapy among minority communities with high levels of mental illness. It could also enable clinicians from a range of backgrounds to provide more personalised mental health care at low cost.

The conceptual part of Gulamabbas’s thesis identifies ten psychotherapeutic techniques from NICE [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence] guidelines for treating depression – five relating to metacognition (or managing thinking patterns) and five related to building resilience (by focusing on concepts including gratitude and motivation). It maps these on to well-established concepts and practices in Islam, such as daily prayer, scripture, fasting, mindfulness and psalms.

Of his empirical research, Gulamabbas says, “My learning from both patients and clinicians has been that if NHS-approved interventions for depression, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness and behavioural activation, were presented using Islamic concepts and practices, it could make them easier to access, as the stigma associated with psychotherapy could diminish and there may be more trust in the whole process. Secondly, adherence to therapy could improve, as psychotherapeutic techniques could be linked to habits and practices that are already established.” The practical application of his work has already attracted attention from community groups as well as professional organisations, such as the World Psychiatric Association. More recently, the Department of Psychiatry at Oxford conferred on him a Race Equality Recognition Award in acknowledgement of the impact of his research.

Gulamabbas is keen to share what he has learned, serving as a tutor in Psychology of Religion and leading seminars on the Neuroscience of Religious Experience, alongside his supervision of medical students and postgraduates. He lectures on Christian-Muslim relations, co-founded the Oxford Interfaith Forum and has led Bodleian Library public workshops on psychotherapy in the Hebrew Old Testament and Arabic Islamic psalms.

Gulamabbas is clearly excited at the opportunities he is identifying to link therapy and faith, not least because it feels as though they mark the natural culmination of many years of study. “What inspires me about my work is building bridges,” he says. “But the challenge with building bridges is you need to understand the lay of the land on each side – patients and clinicians – so you need to speak the language that is spoken on each side, theological and scientific. Whilst being in a position to communicate with both groups is a privilege, it also brings considerable responsibility to create meaningful positive impact for both communities.”

You can find out more about Gulamabbas’s research on the Department of Psychiatry website: www.psych.ox.ac.uk/team/gulamabbas-lakha.



“The psalmists had the ability, through their knowledge of theology and mastery of language, to present an array of mirrors at the right angle to shine a light on that which I couldn’t or didn’t want to see about myself.”

Illustration of an Islamic psalm (Du’ā’ Makārim al-Akhlāq)

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Arab. e. 229, fol.56 (18th C.), al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyya

Study Skills Lecturers
Dr Edward Sutcliffe
(left) and Emma
Lalande (right)



Nurturing success through Academic Wellness

LMH has developed a reputation amongst Oxford colleges as the home of an innovative approach to student wellbeing. A key component of our holistic approach to nurturing student welfare is the dedicated Academic Wellness programme. Study Skills Lecturers **Dr Edward Sutcliffe** and **Emma Lalande** explain how their work helps guide students towards academic success and personal growth.

When LMH's Oxford Study Skills Centre, founded and led by Dr Margaret Coombe (1971, History and Modern Languages), launched in 2018 it was the first resource of its kind at the University. Fast forward six years and the College continues to lead the way in student support, recognising the inter-connectedness of academic, physical, mental and financial wellbeing to develop a holistic approach that looks at the bigger picture rather than a series of individual 'problems'.

Our study skills support has evolved into a comprehensive Academic Wellness programme, and we employ two Study Skills Lecturers who are available to advise students at all levels of study — Astrophoria Foundation Year students, undergraduates, visiting students, and postgraduates — without the need for a referral. Dr Edward Sutcliffe (who supports students across the Humanities and Social Sciences) and Emma Lalande (who focuses on Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences, and Medical Sciences) have a clear mission. Edward explains, "Our roles are focused on helping students to realise their full potential, academically and beyond, so that they can make the most of their time in Oxford and equip themselves for the future."

"This is an amazing resource to have and I am so glad to be at a college with easy access to study skills support. It has helped my academic work and my mental health."

Feedback from current student

A holistic approach to wellbeing

One of the hallmarks of our approach to Academic Wellness is the inclusion of study skills into the broader framework of student support services. "The study skills offer at LMH remains unique, and stands out for its holistic approach, which recognises and emphasises the close links between academic skills and wellbeing more generally. We are academics with experience of researching and teaching within our own disciplines, but we work as part of the College's Wellbeing team," Emma explains.

The integration of Academic Wellness within our broader support system reflects a commitment to addressing academic challenges while promoting overall student wellbeing. "A healthy relationship with study is an important aspect of student wellbeing in general. Academic difficulties can be symptomatic of other underlying problems, but they can also cause broader challenges," Edward says. He continues, "By developing a visible and prominent study skills offer within College, we aim to normalise the idea that it is ok to ask for help, and that support is available."

Study Skills tutorials allow students to access expert advice on issues such as time management and organisation, effective strategies for reading and note-taking, improving their standard of writing, revision techniques, exam preparation, and more. Sometimes, when a student accesses our Study Skills support, it becomes clear that their struggles go beyond the purely academic. There is a risk in these situations that a student could 'fall through the gaps', with nobody realising that they are struggling in multiple areas. However, because Academic Wellness operates within LMH's wider Wellbeing programme, there is a clear process. "We ensure that anything beyond a strictly academic problem is appropriately referred to our wonderful colleagues [the College's co-Heads of Wellbeing, Dr Nicole Jones and Lizzie Shine], so that students benefit from joined-up, wraparound support," Edward explains.

Empowering students

Providing a non-judgemental, confidential, and proactively supportive space for helping students develop academically and otherwise is at the heart of our Academic Wellness programme. As Emma puts it, "When we work with students, we aim not only to help them identify concrete actions that they can take, but also to empower them to take responsibility for their own development, so that they can become resilient and feel in control of their time, their work and their broader goals." It's all about encouraging a healthy mindset and healthy habits. "We believe," says Edward, "that long-term academic achievement is more attainable when students engage with balanced, fulfilling activities across all aspects of life, and take responsibility for their own self-improvement."



"I'm honestly not sure I'd be walking into my final ever exam tomorrow without the study skills support I've had. And [the Study Skills team are] so lovely which makes it much easier to ask for help."

Feedback from current student

Learning as a lifelong journey

A key aspect of Emma and Edward's work is fostering a 'growth mindset' among students, encouraging them to embrace challenges and see learning as a lifelong journey. "Study Skills support," Emma explains, "is sometimes perceived as a remedial service for students who are struggling. Whilst we work with students who have specific challenges or face difficult circumstances, we actually believe that all students can benefit from finding the time and space to reflect on their priorities, their academic progress, and the skills they need to succeed in Oxford and beyond."

Much of the work that Edward and Emma are doing will have benefits for students long after they graduate, as they go out into the world to forge a path for themselves. "We aim to enable students to discover their own solutions and optimise their learning by encouraging them to self-identify their strengths and challenges, incorporate small joys into their academic work, and actively take responsibility for their progress," Emma notes.

Making an impact

The impact of Academic Wellness extends far beyond academic achievement, permeating every aspect of student life. Edward emphasises, "It is difficult to generalise about the impact of this work, because all students differ. Indeed, one of the most valuable things that we offer is support that is flexible, tailored to individuals, and responsive to their needs."

Both Emma and Edward enjoy seeing students develop their skills and grow in confidence. "These are immensely satisfying roles which allow us to see students grow and develop," Emma reflects, "and it is fulfilling to work with students who go on to achieve. Study Skills is still fairly new to Oxford — friends, colleagues, and alumni often say that they would have benefitted had such specialised support been available to them as undergraduates."

Indeed, the response of our alumni community to the expansion of student support is a reflection of this sentiment: Academic Wellness has been secured for future generations by the generous support of alumni donors. By continuing to identify new ways to foster this nurturing and supportive environment, we hope to enable our students to take control of their futures, and to thrive both academically and personally.

Academic Wellness at a Glance



Two Study Skills Lecturers covering Humanities, Social Sciences, Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences, and Medical Sciences

In the last academic year:



Just under 200 hours of one-to-one student meetings



One-to-one support for 97 different LMH students



Over 40 hours of workshops, seminars, talks, and writing sessions



Working with students at all levels: Astrophoria Foundation Year, undergraduates, visiting students, and postgraduates



Meeting with an average of 50 students each term



The field study: what playing in a World Cup taught a scientist about life

TED speaker, behavioural scientist and trust researcher **Zara Brownless** (2013, Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics) founded and leads an award-winning behavioural science edutainment programme spanning Google and beyond. She recounts her experience of playing in the 2022 Lacrosse World Cup, and shares how the lessons she learned can be applied to all aspects of our lives.

field
/fi:ld/

noun

land used for athletic purposes, in particular for competition

adjective

research carried out in the natural environment, rather than in a laboratory

Lacrosse is the oldest known sport in North America and the world's fastest on two feet. Matches are 60 minutes with 10 players per team, each of whom employs an aluminium stick to catch, throw, and cradle a small rubber ball. I've played lacrosse for over 15 years across England, Scotland and Republic of Ireland. I've been a scientist for 10 years, ever since studying Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics at LMH; a degree I continue to use in my job analysing and designing products to build trust. You may have even used them – does Google Search ring a bell?

As a scientist I'm trained to identify patterns and insights. As a sportsperson I'm trained to run after a small rubber ball with an aluminium stick. So naturally when I ended up representing Ireland in the 2022 Lacrosse World Cup

I came away with some bumps, bruises, and lessons about life. Here are three.

Break it down

Lacrosse matches last 60 minutes, or about 3,600 seconds. As one of the world's fastest sports, a lot can happen in a single second of a 3,600 second lacrosse match, and many consider the game to span even farther than these seconds; sweeping back days, months, years, to the preparation it took to get *these* teams into *this* condition on *this* day. The origins of our own journeys are similarly contentious, but whatever you consider them to be there's no arguing that the goals we aspire to reach at the end can appear vast and intimidating when we imagine them stretched out before us in their entirety.

In 2019, when I started trialling for Ireland's national team (and coincidentally started working at Google), I asked myself what it would take to go from over 100 contenders to the 18-player roster. In 2021, when I made the roster, I asked myself what it would take to go from playing one match per fortnight in Ireland's 15°C drizzle, to one match per day for a *fortnight* in Maryland's 40°C humidity (otherwise known as the World Cup). In 2022, when I arrived at the World Cup, I asked myself what it would take to go from the 18-player roster onto a 10-player starting lineup. And when the first whistle blew in my first starting lineup, I asked myself what it would take to win a World Cup match.

In each case the answer was the same: break it down. Then break it down further, and further, until the steps don't seem vast or intimidating at all. You can't wake up in 2019 and ask yourself how to win a World Cup match in 2022. But you can ask which high-protein foods you'll buy at the supermarket tomorrow. If you'll stay late at training for extra drills tonight. How much you'll increase your run by today.

Less is more

The scientist in me knows that we're psychologically biased towards additive solutions and thus overlook subtractive ones – improving something not by adding to it, but taking away. Just like the sportsperson in me knows that, sometimes, to win the matches you could win, you need to lose the matches you can lose.

You never have infinite resources, but especially not when you're playing the fastest sport on two feet every day for a fortnight in 40°C. You have to learn where to conserve resources, even if it means letting yourself lose.

About halfway through our matches – having played New Zealand, Hong Kong, Austria and Spain – we were up against the highest ranked team we would play all tournament: Australia, 4th in the world. The day after, we played our closest rival: Scotland. In my opinion, by the end of the first



"The goals we aspire to reach at the end can appear vast and intimidating when we imagine them stretched out before us in their entirety."

quarter against Australia it was clear we wouldn't win, and if we hadn't played as if we were trying to – if we had better conserved our resources – then we wouldn't have lost by one goal to Scotland in the final 45 seconds.

Use alter egos

Face guarding is the defensive strategy whereby you mark a player extremely tightly and exclusively, positioned face to face (hence the name). The face guard's job is simple: don't let the player touch the ball. The job is focused, ruthless, and unyielding. As a defender, I love it.

Enter Hannah Nielsen. Nielsen was the highest ranked player in the highest ranked team we played. Nielsen had coached Division 1 lacrosse professionally for over a decade, competed for Australia in four World Cups (one of which she helped them win), and was named to the All-World Team three times (one of which was a week after our match). I myself had never coached lacrosse professionally, let alone Division 1, and by virtue of being in my first World Cup had never won one, let alone been named to an All-World Team. So despite my nature, I winced a little when I was named Nielsen's face guard for our match against Australia.

I consider myself a very confident, competent and competitive player – but it would take someone more than that to face guard one of the best in the world. I needed someone not just confident but a little cocky. Someone not just competent but ballsy. Someone not just competitive but cutthroat.

Enter Catie. Catie has been crossed by attackers one too many times and is itching to level the score. She grins feistily when they run her way and dares them to try and break through her. She loves the fight and fears no one. She's cocky, ballsy and cutthroat. Catie – one of my middle names – was my alter ego. She's who it would take to face guard Nielsen, so she's who I mentally and physically became leading up to Australia. I thought how Catie would think, stood how Catie would stand, grinned how Catie would grin.

Nielsen finished the 2022 World Cup with eight goals – but she never touched the ball in her match against Ireland.

"Clean water provision, food production and zero-carbon energy generation must be fully integrated within the WEF and sustainability nexuses."



Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink

Tutor and Fellow in Engineering **Professor Nick Hankins** considers how a famous poem relates to his work in the Laboratory for Sustainable Water Process Engineering, where he and his team are working on developing ways to reclaim clean water and other valuable resources.

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, an old sailor recalls the moment during a fateful voyage when he shoots dead an albatross with a crossbow, believing it to be an unlucky omen. No sooner does he perform this cruel act than his shipmates berate him, and soon the ship is becalmed of wind for weeks on end. Slowly the sailors begin to die of thirst, as revealed by these well-known lines:

*Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink*

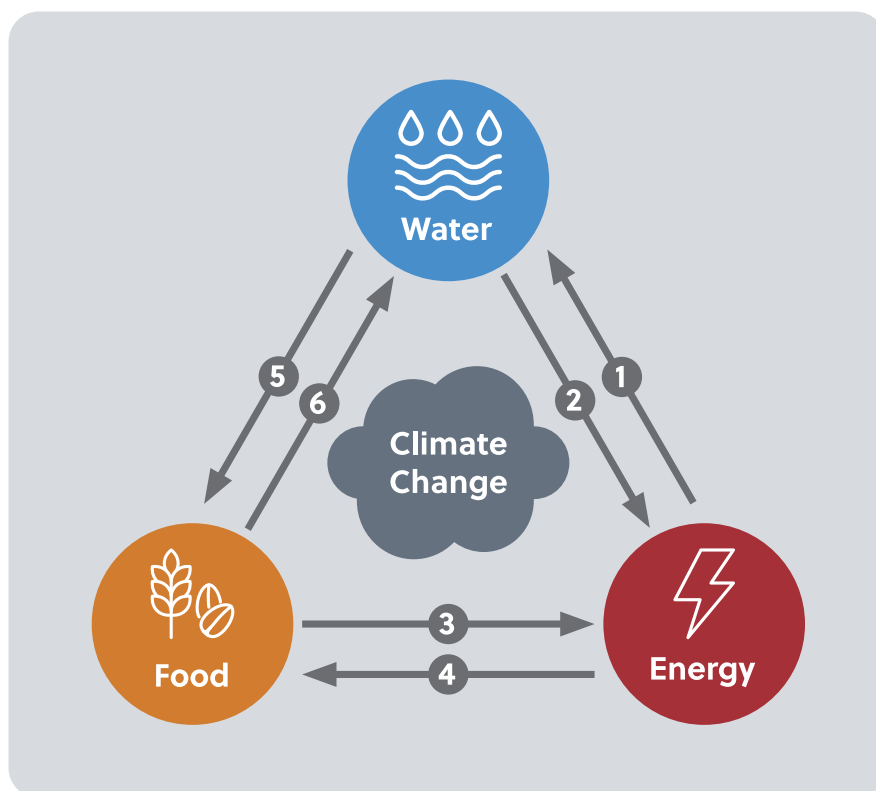
Coleridge may have received inspiration for this poem from his friend Wordsworth, or from his tutor who participated in the voyages of James Cook. To me, it is perfectly illustrative of how a thoughtless bad

act can have lasting repercussions. It touches on the interconnectivity between human beings, other living things, and the environment; themes that are especially relevant today when considering the concept of sustainability. These lines also hint that an infinite but apparently untappable resource – sea water, or the sun which shrinks the boards – might lie within our reach, if only we could be less thoughtless and more ingenious.

Figure 1: The Water-Energy-Food Nexus

But what is sustainability? A good working definition is given by the 1987 Brundtland Report: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The report concludes that international co-operation is needed to improve quality of life for the current global population, and that we must start to live within the carrying capacity of the planet to ensure a better world for future generations. As such, we can think of it as the nexus (or intersection) between environmental protection, economic and resource efficiency, and social equity. In short, our thinking must be less thoughtless!

We can take this idea a little bit further by considering the 'water-energy-food (WEF) nexus' (Figure 1). This is a concept which sees the supplies of fresh water, food and energy, our most fundamental resources, as inextricably linked. For example, in order to generate 1 Megawatt-hour of electricity using a combined natural gas-steam cycle or using nuclear power, enough for the average UK household for several months, we require up to 60,000 gallons of fresh water – one tenth of an Olympic swimming pool! At the same time, to generate a million gallons (or 17 Olympic pools) of fresh water from even relatively fresh sources such as rivers and lakes, we would consume 1.4 Megawatt-hours of electricity (the average UK household consumption for six months). This would jump to 16.5 Megawatt-hours – six years of



household consumption – when that source is sea water. The mariner had a point...and just as his ship was cursed by unfavourable weather, so climate change lurks like a monster in the midst of the tightly connected WEF nexus – the perfect storm.

Alternative vehicles offer us another example of resource interdependency. They produce lower carbon emissions, but producing their fuel guzzles much more water. A petrol vehicle consumes around 10 gallons of water to travel 100 miles, while a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle consumes 24 gallons, a hydrogen fuel-cell vehicle consumes 42 gallons, and an ethanol-powered vehicle in Brazil – requiring the cultivation of sugar cane, rather than other crops – consumes anywhere

from 100 to 6,000 gallons. And then again, 70% of the world's fresh water consumption, and a sizeable amount of energy use, is accounted for by agriculture.

So the point becomes obvious: clean water provision, food production and zero-carbon energy generation must be fully integrated within the WEF and sustainability nexuses. In a world where, according to the UN, half of the world's population lacks adequate water purification, it is this integration which lies at the heart of our work at the Laboratory for Sustainable Water Process Engineering.

When salts dissolve into rivers which ultimately feed the oceans, the dissolution is a spontaneous process. However, the opposite process (desalination) is not, in the same way that a dissolved sugar cube will (probably) never spontaneously reappear. It's an uphill battle! Nevertheless, the theoretical minimum energy required is much less than is actually consumed; the key is to use a process which is more efficient and is integrated within the nexuses I have mentioned, so that the resource, environmental and social benefits are maximised. Furthermore, the second law of thermodynamics tells us that we cannot utilise heat energy without

"The mariner had a point...And just as his ship was cursed by unfavourable weather, so climate change lurks like a monster in the midst of the tightly connected WEF nexus – the perfect storm."

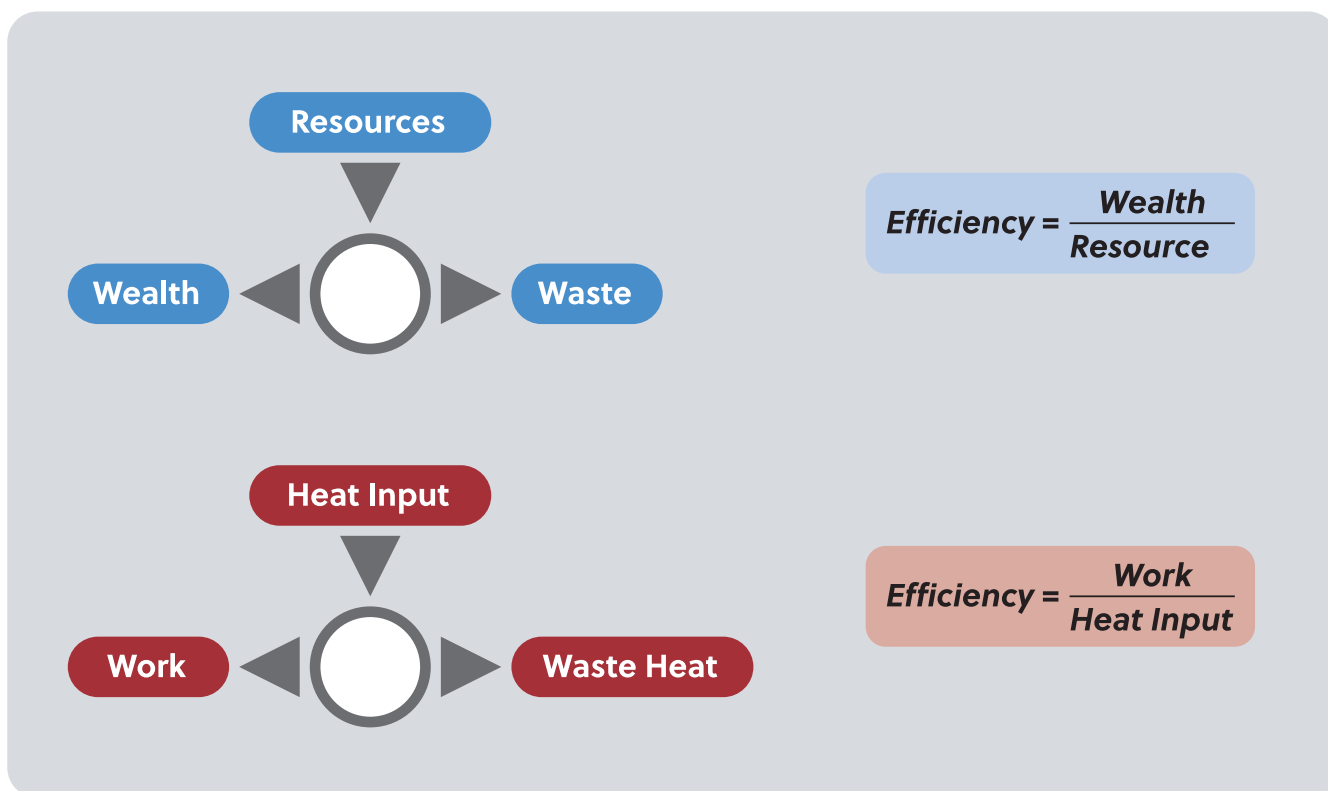


Figure 2: Illustration of the Second Law of Thermodynamics for Resource Recovery

creating waste heat. For example, when we exercise, we sweat. Much the same idea applies to resource utilisation; to create 'wealth', we create waste (Figure 2). A strong theme throughout our work in the circular economy is then to view that inevitable 'waste' as a resource opportunity.

Let me give an example. The production of conventional Portland cement, the ubiquitous building material based on calcium oxide, produces enormous amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) – about 0.9 tonnes per tonne, and around 8% of all global CO₂ emissions. We are developing a new process to produce potable water from sea water, using reverse osmosis (RO) – a type of pressurised filtration powered by renewable energy, such as solar power. Apart from salt (i.e. sodium chloride), seawater contains large quantities of magnesium ions. The main 'waste' product of RO is a concentrated brine, and we use this to make a novel, magnesium oxide-

based 'green' cement; the whole process operates with zero or even negative carbon emissions. In such a process, we create two resources in the WEF nexus without contributing to climate change. The RO process can be made yet more efficient by exploiting the natural osmotic energy of the concentrated brine 'waste' and extracting more fresh water from saline without consuming pressurisation energy, rather like a chemical sponge.

In another project, known as 'aqua mining', we have developed polymeric materials which are able to selectively recover valuable metallic resources, such as copper, silver and palladium, from aqueous effluents in the mining and refining industries. The winning of metal resources by mining and refining is extremely energy intensive and environmentally deleterious, but instead we recover and recycle both clean water and valuable resources directly from waste with a comparatively tiny amount of energy or environmental footprint.

In a development which integrates all three vertices of the WEF nexus, we are combining renewable energy-driven evaporation of saline water under vacuum (which occurs at a much lower temperature), with cooling (as a result of the evaporation of water), and humidification (via the resulting cool and humid air), to create fresh water and air conditioning, these being used to grow crops and create food storage spaces in hot, arid climates. This in turn avoids food wastage. The vacuum is created chemically by adsorption, in a similar way to the osmotic process mentioned earlier. The resulting WEF nexus stands alone; we have expelled the climate change monster!

Only a poetic genius like Coleridge could drink from the fountain of Castalia at Delphi, but nowadays we can at least hope to drink sustainably from that watery desert which so cursed his ancient mariner!

Find out more about the work of the University of Oxford's Laboratory for Sustainable Water Process Engineering at: <https://eng.ox.ac.uk/waterprocessengineering/>.

Honouring a lifetime's pursuit of peace

Suzelle Smith (Moss, 1975, MPhil Politics) explains how she and her siblings were inspired by the extraordinary experience of their parents to found our new Levin Junior Research Fellowship in Peace Studies.

My stepfather, Jerry Levin, was CNN Bureau Chief in Beirut in the early 1980s. He was dedicated to reporting the truth, no matter where the story led — including criticism of the US's unqualified support for Israel in its handling of Palestine and the bombing of civilian areas in Lebanon. Ironically, in 1984, young Hezbollah militants, trained by the Iranian military, took Jerry hostage, holding him in isolation in the Beqaa Valley, where they tortured him for a year. My mother, Sis Levin, refused to follow US government direction to remain silent, and openly worked with foreign governments (including Syria) and American peace activists, such as The Rev Jesse Jackson, to obtain Jerry's release as a gesture of peace. On Valentine's Day 1985, Jerry was permitted to escape from captivity and was reunited with our family.

My parents devoted the rest of their lives to understanding the causes of terrorism and war, and to advocating for and teaching non-violent conflict resolution. They spoke all over the world about their experiences, including at the Oxford and Cambridge Unions. A movie, *Held Hostage: The Sis and Jerry Levin Story*, based on my mother's book, *Beirut Diary*, was released in 1991.

My husband, Don Howarth, and I brought a lawsuit for my parents, under special US laws designed to compensate the victims of state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran. The federal court in Washington DC awarded \$30 million for the physical and emotional damages suffered by our parents at the hands of the terrorists, which they used in large part to support non-government institutions promoting peace initiatives and education.

After they died, my three sisters, my brother and I wanted to honor our parents in a way that would carry on their important work. LMH seemed the natural choice for establishing a research fellowship in peace studies — not only because I am an alumna of the College, but also because our parents had spent many warm and meaningful occasions dining and engaging with students and academics at LMH over several decades. They admired the College as a diverse and welcoming place of respectful discourse, and even of civil disagreement. We are so happy to have established the Levin Junior Research Fellowship in Peace Studies, and that the first recipient, Dr Melanie Sauter, has taken up her post.



Sis and Jerry on their wedding day in 1979 (top) and in the West Bank in 1989, while working as Peacekeepers.



Dr Melanie Sauter, Levin JRF in Peace Studies

Dr Sauter's research is focused on the micro-dynamics of political violence and the subsequent role of humanitarian organisations and peacekeepers in armed conflicts. Keen to make the most of her time here, Dr Sauter plans to work on her book manuscript, exploring the challenges of

humanitarian organisations signalling their neutrality during civil wars, stating: "I believe there is no more appropriate setting to write this manuscript than the alma mater of Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children, one of the largest humanitarian organisations in the world."

Building biodiversity

Did you know a law passed in 2024 means all new road and housebuilding projects in England now need to prove how they will benefit nature? **Rafi Cohen** (2007, Psychology, Philosophy and Physiology) explains how he's helping everyone from planners to ecologists measure impacts on biodiversity.

Rafi's career since LMH

2010-2012: Teacher, Teach First/ Westminster Academy

2012-2013: Founder, TalentED Education

2012-2016: Manger, Deloitte Audit/Transaction Services

2016-2021: Consultant, Boston Consulting Group

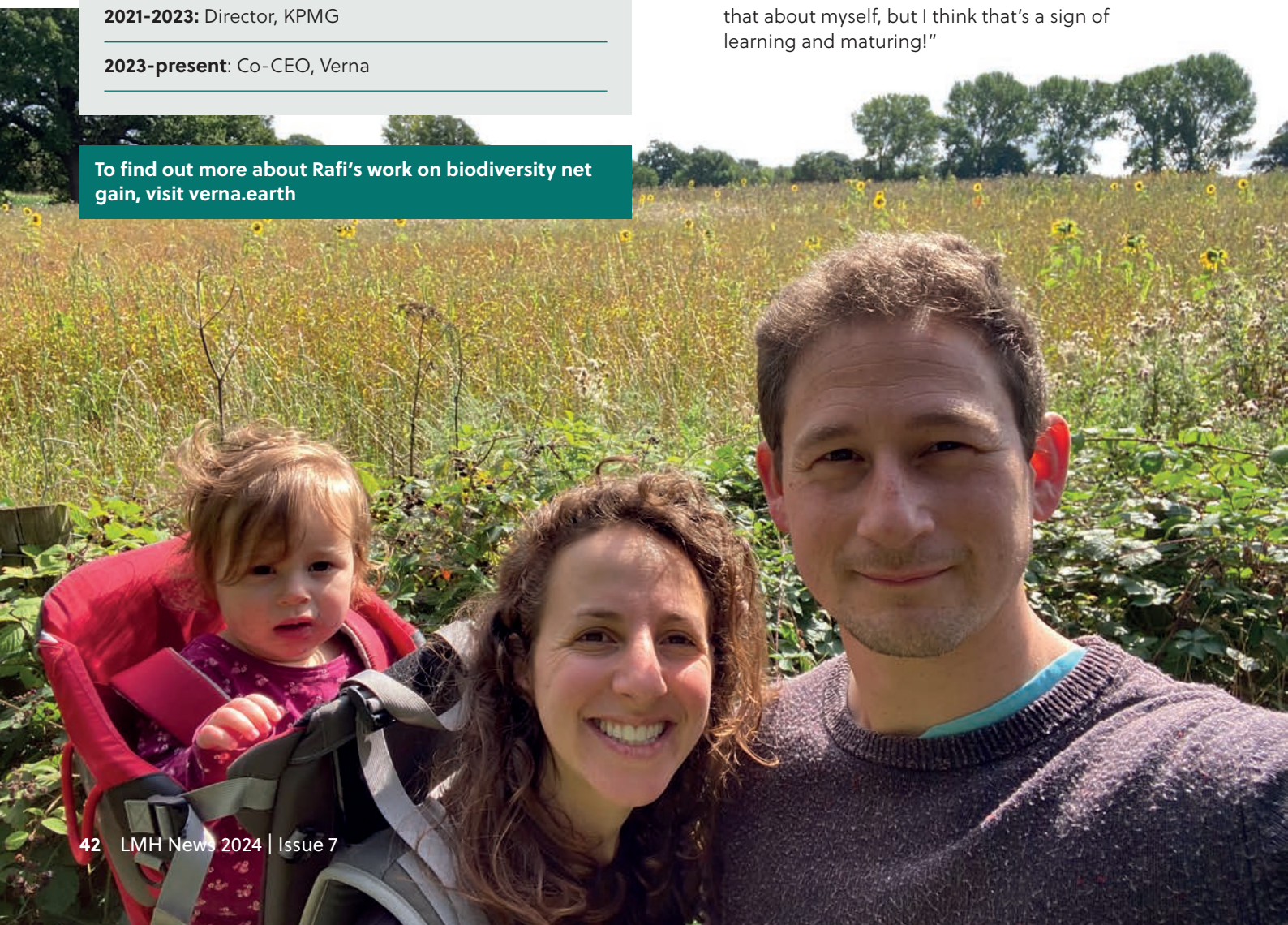
2021-2023: Director, KPMG

2023-present: Co-CEO, Verna

Ask any alumni for their memories of LMH and it rarely takes long for nature to be mentioned. Our grounds are a treasured part of College life, perhaps most of all in the spring. As this issue of *LMH News* went to print, beech, lime and birch trees were bursting into leaf behind the Old Halls, wildflowers were beginning to appear in Wolfson Quad, goldcrests were flitting among the branches of our blue cedar tree, and muntjac deer could regularly be spotted as the morning mists cleared over the Cherwell. As co-CEO of Verna, a software provider and environmental consultancy, alumnus Rafi Cohen has made it his mission to protect such scenes by helping to tackle the crisis facing the natural environment.

"When I think back to LMH, some of the first things I remember are the grounds and the gardens, though I could definitely have made more of them, maybe kept some chickens or something," chuckles Rafi, who now does keep chickens, having recently left London for rural Hertfordshire. "In a different life I would have loved to have been a farmer or worked on a wildlife reserve. It's taken me a while to realise that about myself, but I think that's a sign of learning and maturing!"

To find out more about Rafi's work on biodiversity net gain, visit verna.earth



“Our aim is to work with everyone in the value chain to implement biodiversity net gain and to help with the understanding of all kinds of other environmental considerations, including carbon emissions, water and air quality.”

Instead, Rafi is now tending the land in a different way. After a consultancy career that had increasingly focused on sustainability, he helped set up Verna and launch ground-breaking software to manage three words that are now on the minds of all local planning authorities: biodiversity net gain.

Building for a greener future

Put simply, biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to developing land that aims to leave the natural environment in a better state than it was before. Earlier this year, England passed a pioneering law that means all new road and housebuilding projects need to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity or habitat creation. So if developers cut down woodland to build housing, for example, 10% more woodland needs to be created – either on the site of the development or nearby. The scheme covers all natural habitats and includes a government-run biodiversity credit scheme developers can use if they are unable to meet their BNG commitments.

It's a necessarily ambitious approach because we know that wildlife populations and habitats are declining rapidly in the UK, as a result of everything from climate change to farming and unsustainable fishing.

Bringing BNG to life

So where do Rafi and his company Verna fit into this picture? The link is their software package, Mycelia, which helps planners and ecologists to assess, monitor and report on biodiversity net gain.

“Maybe the best way to explain it,” Rafi says, “is that core to all biodiversity net gain – which is a 30-year process – is a quite complicated Microsoft Excel calculator that gives a single source of truth on how to quantify biodiversity on any given site. It's extremely complex because measuring biodiversity is complex – much more challenging than monitoring carbon

or climate, for example, because you have thousands of different elements interacting with each other.

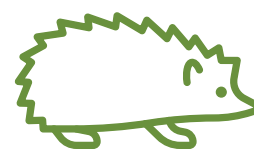
“Our role is to transfer all that biodiversity data into software that's easy to work with. We help with the management of that information, tracking it over 30 years, for all those different people who need to interact with it. And we assist with the reporting of it both locally and to central government. Our aim is to work with everyone in that value chain to implement BNG and to help with the understanding of all kinds of other environmental considerations, including carbon emissions, water and air quality.”

Unsurprisingly in this rapidly growing market, interest from developers and planning authorities has been immediate. Ecologists have been quick to get in touch too. “There's a structural shortage of ecologists,” Rafi says, “both in this country and across the world. There aren't enough of them at the moment, and the demands on them are increasing hugely. We can support them by focusing their attention on ecological risks and helping them manage huge amounts of data over very long periods of time.”

It's clear that Rafi is hugely motivated, having found a way to turn his love of nature into a business that can help turn England's ground-breaking biodiversity legislation into a greener future. “It's become really, really exciting, and I'm doing something which I'm passionate about,” he says.

“It's been a lot of hard work, but it doesn't feel stressful, because this is something I really care about, and because ultimately we're working to help improve biodiversity and the environment, which is something I believe we all have a responsibility to do. You only have to imagine what LMH would look like without its current biodiversity to see why this really matters.”

Since 1970:



UK species have declined on average by 19%



1 in 6

species are threatened with extinction in Great Britain



54%

of flowering plants have decreased in their distribution

Source: 2023 State of Nature report

Many fair blossoms make a fine tree

A urologist by trade, **Kössen Ho** (1995, DPhil Pharmacology) has long been fascinated by traditional Chinese art and craftsmanship, and with the idea that art endures long after human memories fade. His book, *Many Fair Blossoms Make a Fine Tree*, marks the culmination of a 30-year project to showcase the very best of traditional Chinese art.

At the intersection of craftsmanship and artistry, tradition and modernity, lies the story behind *Many Fair Blossoms Make a Fine Tree*. This meticulously produced trio of books is the culmination of Kössen Ho's passion for promoting and preserving Chinese art and craftsmanship, which he has pursued for the last 30 years alongside his successful career as a urologist. *Many Fair Blossoms Make a Fine Tree* showcases objects that Kössen has commissioned to celebrate the fine tradition of Chinese craftsmanship, demonstrating not only an enduring appreciation for these ancient arts, but also his desire to leave a lasting imprint on the world.

Reflecting on the genesis of his collection, Kössen points to his dual identity as a surgeon and an aficionado of traditional Chinese art.

"While minimally invasive instruments and surgeries might be my calling," he shares, "I have always felt inadequate when it comes to calligraphy and paintings, and neither do I possess any talent in chiselling and carving."

Kössen's venture into the world of art collection was sparked by the sobering realisation of the impermanence of his primary profession. Knowing that the memory of his surgical interventions would fade with time, he sought to create a parallel legacy — one rooted in the timeless beauty of traditional Chinese art.

Central to Kössen's mission was his collaboration with luminaries such as Wang Shixiang, a researcher of traditional Chinese culture, leading art collector, poet, and Chinese character calligrapher, whose influence left an indelible mark on his collection. Recounting his early days as a

collector, Kössen fondly remembers the support he received from Wang, whose expertise in Chinese cultural heritage was unparalleled. "In my early days as a collector, I was fortunate to be mentored by Wang Shixiang," he recalls. "Under his tutelage, I selected paintings, calligraphy, and literature to decorate the objects I commissioned."

From intricately carved furniture to delicate writing utensils and seals, each object showcased in *Many Fair Blossoms Make a Fine Tree* represents a fusion of craftsmanship and cultural heritage. Kössen's collection is a tribute to the scholar's study — a space dedicated to intellectual pursuit and aesthetic contemplation.

Each individual item in Kössen's collection has a unique story attached to it. For instance, the inspiration for item number seven — a bamboo cross-piece adorned with *liuqing* relief



Item seven in Kössen's collection: a bamboo cross-piece (1998) decorated with *liuqing* relief of fish among water weeds (Jin Zhang, 1884-1939). Inscription: Wang Shixiang; Carving: Fan Yaoqing.



of fish among water weeds (pictured) — came while Kössen was studying for his PhD in Oxford in the 1990s. He explains, “One of my favourite books during that period was *Zhuangzi*, an extraordinary collection of essays and tales from the end of the Warring States period. Eventually I came to the famous story of Master Zhuang and the fish, simple in language but full of meaning.”

Further research led Kössen to the work of Jin Zhang, also known as ‘the Lady Scholar Taotao’, who dedicated an entire book to the painting of the single theme of fish among aquatic plants. The book’s title, *Knowing Joy on the Weir Over the Hao*, references the famous river featured in Master Zhuang and the fish. In 1998, Kössen commissioned an exquisitely-crafted wrist rest, used by Chinese scholars when writing calligraphy, from acclaimed bamboo carver Fan Yaoqing. The design was based on part of a handscroll, *The Hundred Games of Fish Among Water Weeds*, painted by Jin Zhang. The wrist rest features an inscription by Wang Shixiang, Jin Zhang’s son. This object, and the story of its creation, is typical of the fusion of classical motifs with contemporary craftsmanship which can be seen throughout the collection, and of the meticulous care taken by Kössen in commissioning each piece.

Through his collaboration with artisans and scholars, Kössen’s vision has materialised over time into a tangible collection of masterpieces, each infused with layers of meaning

and history. One of the most poignant moments in Kössen’s journey was the creation of his maker’s mark, which came about through his collaboration with Wang Shixiang. “He wrote for me the four Chinese characters that I use as a maker’s mark,” Kössen recalls. “They translate as ‘an elegant creation of Kössen Ho.’” This personal inscription is included on each item in the collection, providing a clear sense of identity and provenance, but also serving as a reminder of the enduring legacy Kössen seeks to cultivate.

Many Fair Blossoms Make a Fine Tree invites readers into a world of timeless beauty and cultural richness, and prompts reflection on the nature of legacy and the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. Kössen’s collection is not merely a repository of artifacts, but a symbol of the power of art to forge connections across time and space.

In the words of Wang Xizhi, echoed by Kössen himself, “Just as we in the present turn our gaze to the past, so those yet to come will turn their gaze to the present.” Reflecting on what his own legacy may be, Kössen says, “I like to think that, someday, a collector or visitor to a museum may look at a piece of mine and notice the mark that Wang Shixiang wrote for me all those years ago. Perhaps they will read it and think to themselves, ‘Kössen Ho. Who was he, I wonder?’ What an honour that would be.”

Above: *The Hundred Games of Fish Among Water Weeds*, painted by Jin Zhang, which forms part of the collection of the Palace Museum.

Below: A book about Jin Zhang published by Han Mo Xuan.



A copy of *Many Fair Blossoms Make a Fine Tree*, kindly gifted to the College, can be found in the Library for all those who wish to view it.



From birding to the Bard

When actor **Samuel West** (1985, English) kindly agreed to meet with a College Fellow for *LMH News*, we knew he and **Dr Ben Higgins** would have plenty to discuss. Ben, our Tutorial Fellow in English Literature, recently won the Shakespeare's Globe Book Award for his book, *Shakespeare's Syndicate*, which explored the publication of the First Folio. Sam has been acting in and directing performances of Shakespeare since his time at LMH. We brought them together in a London café for a conversation that ranged from birdwatching to being heckled as Hamlet.

Ben: It's lovely to meet you, Sam, although in some ways I do feel that I already know you. You probably know that your picture is on the wall at LMH, on the main passage that leads into the dining hall where we all go every day. There's you on one side and a little bit further down is Nigella, and I would say that the two of you have perhaps the most distinctive portraits. And I'm afraid there has recently been a tradition of students pinching Nigella's portrait – before returning it, of course – and the word on the street is that yours could be next.

Samuel: Well, I'm very touched. We'd better make some sense then.

Ben: I suppose we better had! We will get to Shakespeare and LMH in a moment, but before we started recording you were saying that years ago you used to come to a café with your partner and update each other on the list of birds you had seen that day. It sounds as though that aspect of cataloguing, collecting and curating information is very important to twitchers, as of course it was when the First Folio was published.

Dr Ben Higgins (left) and Samuel West (right)

Samuel: Absolutely, although I should explain at this point that twitching and birding actually aren't the same thing. There's a sliding scale of geekiness. Twitching means going to actively search for a particular rarity. For instance recently there was a Northern Waterthrush spotted in Essex, which is a North Canadian breeder that usually winters in South America, and it had got lost and come east. It's the eighth recorded time one has been seen in Britain. I went three times and saw it on the third time. That's a twitch.

And the depressing thing is that I've only been birding seriously for coming on for 20 years, and my partner for a similar length of time, and we can both see declines in common birds. I'm now actually an ambassador for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and so I sort of shoot my mouth off whenever I can about the pleasure of nature. The declining numbers and the loss in habitat of birds and butterflies and fish and so on all require us to be invested in the natural world and to do whatever we can to protect it.

Ben: I couldn't agree more, and listening to you is making me think you should join forces with Jonathan Franzen, the American author who I know is also a big birder. But we must move the conversation on! I wanted to ask about your early experiences of LMH and of Shakespeare.

Samuel: Of course. Well, the first Shakespeare play I did was an Oxford University Drama Society production of *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Stephen Wall of Keble and co-directed by Rosie Alison, who is now a producer of films including *Paddington*. I played Florizel, and I remember my first review in *Daily Information*. It said: 'Samuel West has a nice voice but he has not yet the stage presence of his famous mother and father [actors Prunella Scales and Timothy West]'. I showed it to my mum and she said, 'Oh that's not fair. I mean, Daddy couldn't play Florizel and I'd be hopeless.'

Ben: [laughing] I read that you did a lot of acting while you were at Oxford?

Samuel: Well, yes. I remember actually going for an admissions interview at St Catherine's College, I think with Jonathan Wordsworth, and him saying he didn't like students who did plays, because when they had a week of plays they wouldn't do their essays.

"I think I was a useful member of the University. I was active politically. I was quite busy in the archery society. I did 17 plays..."

"The depressing thing is that I've been birding seriously for coming on for 20 years, and my partner for a similar length of time, and we can both see declines in common birds."

Ben: [smiling] Yes, that is quite common.

Samuel: And I remember thinking, yep, that's perfectly reasonable, makes sense. In that case I don't think I'll try for St Catz! So I ended up going for an interview at LMH. I have to say I can't remember who it was with – it wasn't Elizabeth MacKenzie, I would have remembered that – and I talked about the things I was studying, which were the Shakespearean tragedies, Thomas Hardy novels and Flann O'Brien, the Irish satirical writer, and it must have gone OK because I got in.

Ben: What kind of student were you?

Samuel: Well, I think I was a useful member of the University. I was active politically. I was quite busy in the archery society. I did, er, 17 plays.

Ben: 17 plays in your time at Oxford?! 17?! If I was your tutor that would have stressed me out.

Samuel: Well that includes some smaller parts, trips to the Edinburgh Festival and a trip to Kenya.

Ben: Hmm. That still feels like a busy cadence.

Samuel: Yes, it was, and I got a bad degree – I got a 2:2. I was never going to get a first, but I should probably have got a 2:1. But also Wimbledon won the FA Cup in my third year and I got dumped and had my heart broken just before my Finals.

Ben: That was a little inconsiderate.

Samuel: It was, but she did marry the guy she chucked me for and they are still together and very happy, so good luck to them! But I was at Wembley for that final and it was and remains one of the happiest days of my life. And before I went I remember thinking, 'It is much more important that Wimbledon win the FA Cup than I get a good degree'. And they did and I didn't, so everything worked out fine!

Ben: What do you remember about your English degree?

Samuel: The first person who comes to mind is Elizabeth Mackenzie, who died recently, aged 100. She was extraordinary. I mean, she knew Louis MacNiece! When she was talking about *Ulysses* and *The Wasteland*, you thought, 'These are works that hit you just after they came out'. Studying with Elizabeth was just a joy.

I always remember one thing she said to me. I had written about Shakespeare's Roman plays and then the next week written about the 'Problem' plays or something else, and she said: 'Yes, much better. You bored me last

"I remember thinking, 'It is much more important that Wimbledon win the FA Cup than I get a good degree'. And they did and I didn't, so everything worked out fine!"

week. Your essay on the Roman plays was boring'. And quite right too. I'd probably rehashed all my ideas from some half-digested criticism, and I loved being told not to bore people. That was really good.

Ben: You appreciated the level of candour.

Samuel: Exactly. Another thing I remember is, with [Emeritus Fellow] Helen Barr and others, studying Anglo-Saxon, which I was very bad at. But – and I'm sorry if this sounds old-fashioned, actually I'm not sorry because somebody has to say it – I think something about having to pay university fees has given students too much influence over what they study. There's something important about arriving at a university and the university saying: 'It doesn't matter if you don't want to study Anglo-Saxon. We've been here for 700 years and you need to know this stuff. And yes it's hard, but it's important'. I think learning that sense of putting yourself in the service of something bigger than yourself, that has been around for centuries, is very important.

And in fact that puts me in mind of 9/11, which might sound strange but I was playing Hamlet that night and running a Shakespeare schools' workshop during the day. Someone came in during the workshop and told us this terrible thing had happened, and none of us knew what to say. We talked about whether we should cancel, but eventually we thought we probably ought to carry on. Because we were working on something 400 years old and it seemed like something perhaps you could hang on to at times like that.

Ben: What was that evening's production like?

Samuel: Well, it gave an extra resonance to lines like: '... Fight for a plot/Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause./ Which is not tomb enough and continent/To hide the slain?' We had a moment of silence beforehand, which people said afterwards they were grateful for, and then we just did the play. It was very strange, but good.

Ben: [pulling a facsimile copy of Shakespeare's First Folio from his bag] I wanted to make sure we spoke about this.

Samuel: [grinning and pulling his own copy of Shakespeare's collected works from a bag] I brought mine too!

Ben: This is the version that was published recently for the 400th anniversary of the First Folio. While you have a flick through, can I ask what, if anything, the 400th anniversary meant to you?

Samuel: Well, I do actually think there is something amusing about the fetishisation of the First Folio. I mean, it cost £1 when it was published. There were 750

copies made, so it's not particularly rare. But a copy sold at Christie's in 2020 for \$10 million. That's 800,000 times the original price. I mean, what is going on?!

I suppose, to answer your question, what I love is that this book exists. If [First Folio editors] John Heminges and Henry Condell had got drunk on the way to the printers with the manuscript of this and left it on some beer-soaked bench, we wouldn't have 18 plays – including *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, plenty of very good ones. We'd head off to the Royal Jonson Company and life would be so much worse!

So clearly it is wonderful that the First Folio exists, but what's interesting about the fetishisation and the sales for millions of dollars is that Shakespeare, who is the preserve of the world, was a man of the people. His dad made gloves. Shakespeare was first and foremost a working man, and he writes small parts and working lives much better than Jane Austen, for example. In Jane Austen, the servants are almost completely silent. In Shakespeare, they have some of the best parts.

Ben: And that actually makes me think of one part of the First Folio that I think embodies a curious tension. One of the things the Romantic era gave us is this idea of the sole author, the literary genius working in their garret, inspired by a divine artistic fury. But we also know that many of these plays were collaborative endeavours, and early in the folio we have this page of collaborators – fellow actors – and so the book has that tension of being an emblem of unitary, monolithic literary authorship, and yet couldn't exist without this many-peopled cast. How does that feel to you as a practitioner?

Samuel: I think [the film] *Shakespeare in Love* portrays that quite well, actually. The idea that the best idea wins, on the stage. It makes me think of being directed by Steven Pimlott when we did *Richard II* at the RSC [in 2000]. There was a company of 14, and there wasn't a person on that stage who didn't have at least one idea that was used in the production. Steven was a late appointment and he said, 'I don't know how we're going to do this'. We ended up doing it just with eight chairs, a pile of earth and a coffin, and it was the best production I've ever been in. Best idea wins. And there have been productions I've directed lately

"It is wonderful that the First Folio exists, but what's interesting about the fetishisation of it and the sales for millions of dollars is that Shakespeare, who is the preserve of the world, was a man of the people."

when the company has almost taken over and said, 'No, we shouldn't do that'. I can't argue with collaboration like that.

Ben: Steven Pimlott was directing when you played Hamlet for a year at the RSC. What are your memories of that?

Samuel: I was obsessed with it. Nobody in the world in an English-language company was doing it for as long as I was. I have a bookshelf that is just books about *Hamlet*, most of which I've read – which is unusual for me, I usually buy books but then don't read them. But I had nothing else to do for a year. I couldn't talk about anything else for quite some time.

Ben: How much did your interpretation evolve?

Samuel: It got more confusing, which was good, I think. I sort of thought at the beginning that it was my job to make Hamlet clear. But it's not. It's not Hamlet's job to be clear; it's the director's job. If it was Hamlet's job to be clear, the play would lose its resonance.

And, right at the end of the run, something happened that made me think I had got the soliloquies right. Steven had a very straightforward idea about soliloquy, which is that there are two ways of doing it – talking to yourself and talking to the audience. And, paradoxically, talking to the audience turns out to be the more truthful way, because it embraces the idea that you're in a room with people who are listening to you, instead of pretending they're overhearing you talking to yourself in a voice loud enough

for them to be able to hear at the back.

So, if you ask the audience questions, you should be doing it as if those questions expect an answer. And, on my 129th performance out of 132, I said, "*Am I a coward?*" and somebody in the audience went, "Yes!"

The next line is, "*Who calls me villain?*" And again I heard the voice. "Me! Back row of the circle." Then it's me again: "*[Who] breaks my pate across? Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face? Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat, As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?*" And again I heard: "Me!"

I had thought if I asked the questions for long enough, someone would answer – and they did. It was incredible. I got heckled as Hamlet! I got off stage and the stage manager said: "Are you OK?" And I said: "Are you kidding? That's the best thing that's ever happened. I feel so alive!" I actually found out who was shouting out and wrote to him afterwards.

Ben: That really speaks to the connection you can create with an audience, doesn't it?

Samuel: It does, and it also speaks to the fact that people shouldn't have to sit in the dark and not say anything!

Ben: There is so much more we could discuss, Sam, but that feels like a positive sentiment on which to finish. Thank you so much for your time. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Samuel: Not at all. It's been a pleasure for me too.



Samuel West will join Professor Stephen Blyth and Dr Ben Higgins for a live 'In Conversation' event at our Alumni Garden Party on Saturday 22nd June. Find out more at: www.lmh.ox.ac.uk/events.

Using history to tackle misogyny in schools

In response to a tragic act of violence, teacher **Laura Aitken-Burt** (2010, Classical Archaeology and Ancient History) and her students embarked on a journey to explore the historical roots of misogyny, leading to the creation of the Athena Society – an initiative aimed at empowering students to confront gender inequality. Laura talks about the project and her goals for the future.



In the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, my students were shaken and wanted to understand the historical roots of how and why misogyny exists. As a teacher of classics, history and politics, I saw an opportunity to explore how present-day issues are often the remnants of long shadows from the past. Having just authored a series of new World History textbooks, where the unequal gender representation in the stories we tell became startlingly clear, I was keen to find a way to help kickstart conversations on gender equality in schools. And so, the Athena Society was born!

I provided a space where students take the lead, safe in the knowledge that a trusted adult is on hand to navigate them through sometimes difficult conversations. Young people are able to really listen to each other, thinking critically about the media content they consume whilst exploring the historical context behind modern political issues.

Gender equality is a difficult topic that teachers are having to tackle in classrooms with little guidance or support. We know from platforms like Everyone's Invited and the investigations of Rape Crisis UK that 90% of school age girls face sexual harassment by their peers. We also know that there has been a concerning rise in misogynistic content being pushed towards young men online. Students of all genders find it hard to talk about these issues with their peers for fear of being 'cancelled' on social media.

The Athena Society encourages students to go beyond the curriculum, uncovering stories of women in history displaying creativity and resistance despite the boundaries imposed upon them, and of men who have helped challenge stereotypes. Students feel empowered to ask questions about media content and work together to build a positive ethos within the school. By bringing historical context to popular culture, students learn to think critically about gender equality and how they can play an active role in affecting positive change.

Since I founded the Athena Society, membership has expanded to include other year groups within the school. We hosted a conference in February 2023, inviting local schools to collaborate and listen to guest speakers. We also launched @athenasocietyofficial on Instagram and set up a website, www.athenasocietyofficial.com, which includes merchandise with our student-designed logo. We are engaging with our local MP, taking part in focus groups in Parliament and raising matters of women's safety in the local area.

Our latest development is the creation of *The Athena Society Journal*, with articles submitted by students on topics they have researched – the only rule being that the stories must have an equal number of named male and female characters, unless a woman is the focus of the article. We hope that this resource will help schools across the country to start their own gender equality conversations and to collaborate with us on this hopeful project for the future.

Guiding young people to develop the tools to challenge stereotypes is, in my view, the key to continuing the fight for gender equality. As a passionate communicator of history, something that I can trace back to my time studying at LMH, I believe that equipping young people to engage with and think critically about our past, present and future can be a catalyst for change.

Alongside her work as a teacher, Laura Aitken-Burt is a published author, practising archaeologist, and historical consultant for broadcast and print media.

Laura's latest books, the *Knowing British and World History* series, published by Collins, and *Ancient Rome: The Definitive Visual History*, published by Dorling Kindersley, are available now.

How I became Her Excellency

Celebrating the release of her memoir, *Playing Britannia*, former Ambassador and Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, **Juliet Campbell** (Collings, 1954, PPE) tells us how rediscovering the letters she sent to her parents during her years in the Diplomatic Service helped bring her book to fruition.



A memoir should preferably have a unique selling point, and mine is that I was the first of Britain's women Ambassadors to write about my experiences, although I didn't know that at the start.

Going through my parents' house in Guernsey after they died, I came across a cache of my letters. There were hundreds, still in their envelopes and from three main periods – LMH in the 1950s, Bangkok and Vientiane in the 1960s and Jakarta in the 1980s. These were the times when my parents and I were on different continents, and letters were our only regular means of contact. As I read through them, the past jumped out at me, demanding my attention. But I was busy, so put them aside to deal with some day, somehow.

Thirty years later when my granddaughter Elizabeth had digitised the letters, I decided they were worth publishing. But there were huge gaps in the story: I didn't write when I was in Europe and saw my parents regularly, although I did keep an occasional diary, notably during a traumatic posting in London dealing with the EU in the early 70s. At home in Oxford during the pandemic, I settled down to cut the letters to manageable proportions and fill in the gaps from memory. Kind friends and relatives made useful suggestions, but it took a professional editor to tell me that I should turn the letters into narrative if my book was not to be largely in italics. So, I rewrote the whole thing.

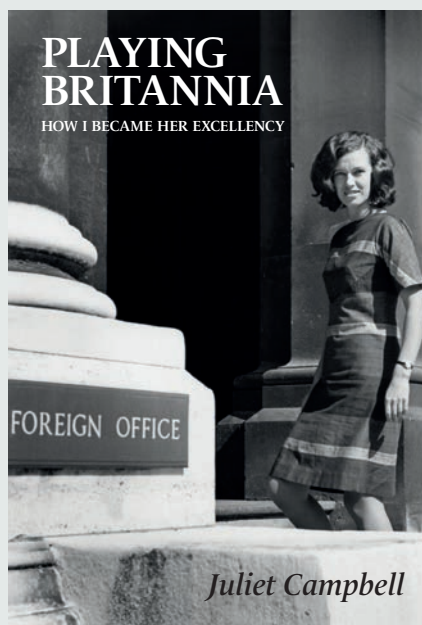
The book, I hope, captures the ups and downs of my life in the Service.

There are plenty of serious moments to reflect on, such as having to advise Ministers prior to Cabinet discussions, briefing journalists on issues of international concern and meeting top Chinese generals in the Great Hall of the People. But there are also moments of levity — from dealing with a troubled Mrs Thatcher worried about not wearing a hat, to being besieged in a medieval castle with the Queen and looping the loop in a jet! I hope that the book provides some insight into diplomatic life as Britain adapted to the new world order of the post-war era.

Playing Britannia has taken on a life of her own, since publication, bringing many letters from old friends.

The diplomats among them, and not only the women, say many of my experiences chime with theirs. But our times are now history. The Service we knew has changed enormously since that day in 1957 when I first walked through the imposing entrance of the Foreign Office, and women now occupy many of the senior Ambassadorial posts such as Washington, New York and Paris.

The proceeds from sales of *Playing Britannia* will go to Girton College, Cambridge, where I was Mistress for seven years. Girton gave a splendid launch party, as did LMH, who will get a copy of the unexpurgated Oxford letters, as well as my enduring gratitude.



Ahead of her full review for *The Brown Book* 2024, former Ambassador to Mexico and High Commissioner to South Africa, Dame Judith Macgregor (Brown, 1971, Modern History) writes:

"A vivid account of Juliet's extraordinary life as a pioneering female diplomat involved in some of the most important British Foreign Policy moments of the 20th century. Her accounts of these and appreciation of the countries in which she lived are fascinating and are accompanied throughout by a powerful humility, sense of humour and wonderful joie de vivre. An inspiration!"

From Oxford to the West End

Following the success of his latest production, *She Stoops to Conquer*, Orange Tree Theatre Artistic Director **Tom Littler** (2003, English) reflects on making his way from Oxford student theatre to the West End.

It's twenty years since I was first at LMH, erratically pursuing an English degree and considerably more doggedly pursuing a career in the theatre. Growing up in mid-Devon, I'd heard that Oxford could offer a route into the profession I so wanted to join. College didn't feature much in my university directing career except as a refuge from a student drama scene that took itself amazingly seriously (and encouraged me to do the same). My tutors — Nick Shrimpton, Helen Barr, Christine Gerrard — were wonderfully encouraging and patient, and it was only many years later that I realised the skills they taught me have enriched my directing ever since.

After graduation, I started out as an assistant to directors including Peter Hall and Trevor Nunn, and formed a small company, Primavera (a dreadfully pretentious name for a theatre company that I regretted almost immediately), with which I produced plays in tiny theatres above pubs. The highs were stratospheric, the lows very low indeed, and bit by bit I built a career.

There were hits — a production transferred to the West End when I was 24 — but there's no career ladder for a theatre director. Each success is no guarantee of the next, or even of getting a reply to frantic emails pleading for another gig. Directing theatre has given me wonderful adventures — work abroad, friendships with writers and actors of all ages and backgrounds, insight into worlds I knew nothing about. Occasionally there are glamorous moments. More often there is a much greater pleasure: camaraderie and collaboration.

I've been fortunate to return to LMH twice in a theatrical context. In 2014, I brought a London production of Terence Rattigan's *First Episode* to open the new Simpkins Lee Theatre, thanks to the support of Richard Buxton (1982, English). And in 2015, I directed *As You Like It* for Oxford-based company



Creation in the gardens, a production that marked the retirement of then-Principal Dame Frances Lannon.

In 2017, I took over as Artistic Director of Jermyn Street Theatre, a studio theatre in the West End. My tenure coincided with the pandemic — among the greatest crises that the theatre world has faced. We boxed clever, moving online, filming theatre in the empty building, maximising every new technology. But nothing can substitute for the rewards of a live audience.

In 2022 I became Artistic Director and Joint Chief Executive of the Orange Tree Theatre, a mid-scale theatre in Richmond, South-West London. Between our 20 staff, we produce around eight productions a year, plus a huge programme of work with local people, from youth theatres to evening classes. It's a special place, with the audience wrapped in-the-round around the stage. Without any Arts Council subsidy (that's another story) we rely on generous donors and full houses to pay the bills. We work in co-production with theatres across the UK, and this spring my production

of *The Circle* just toured nationally including — to my joy — a stint at the Oxford Playhouse, where I directed so much as a student.

Next up for me is a trio of Noel Coward plays, *Suite in Three Keys*, and a Christmas production of *Twelfth Night*, which I first directed at the Old Fire Station on George Street in 2004. Busy as I was with the important business of — as Malvolio might put it — achieving greatness, I tried hopelessly to get through a medieval literature tutorial with the ever-perceptive Helen Barr, who after a few fruitless minutes switched tack and gently, brilliantly and precisely deconstructed my production of *Twelfth Night* instead. Such encouragement and teaching is what all young people need, and no doubt there are undergraduates now at LMH drawing similar moments of inspiration.

You can find out more about the Orange Tree Theatre at:
www.orangetreetheatre.co.uk

5 minutes with...

Dr Grant Tapsell

We caught up with LMH alumnus, current Tutor and Fellow in History and Former Dean of Degrees **Dr Grant Tapsell** (1995, History) to find out how life at LMH has changed (or not) during his time here.

Tell us about your role as LMH's Dean of Degrees and how it came about

I was Dean of Degrees for a decade (2013-23) — a drop in the ocean compared to my predecessor, John Day, who held the post for more than 30 years! I volunteered to be Dean of Degrees, partly because I was the father of a very young child at the time, and so thought I'd be in Oxford for most of the summer vac when the bulk of ceremonies happen, and partly because it seemed like a nice opportunity to see my students graduate.

What is the experience of being Dean of Degrees like?

I underestimated just how pressurised ceremonies could be. Learning the choreography of these complex events, and mastering the Latin formulae — different combinations for every one — was initially quite stressful, but ultimately satisfying. It was always a pleasure to meet my students' families at graduation brunches or lunches, and getting to know Deans of Degrees at other colleges was usually enjoyable. I particularly relished a very elderly (nonagenarian) Dean of Degrees' obvious contempt for whoever was Vice-Chancellor at any given ceremony — it seemed to be a point of principle for him not to approach any closer than half-way down the main floor of the Sheldonian, ignoring the frantic waving of the person in the chair. Presenting a Nobel Prize laureate for her degree was very memorable.

How has life at LMH evolved since you were a student here?

The physical site has changed beyond what would have seemed possible when I was an undergraduate in the 1990s — the exceptional new buildings have transformed the 'feel' of LMH, especially at the front. Yet the

gardens remain blissfully untouched, and provide so much joy, even — or especially! — on stressful days.

What LMH memory stands out for you?

Can I be greedy and have three?! (A person, a period, and an event.) Being taught by Clive Holmes when I was an undergraduate was life-changing, inspiring me to do what I do now, and I have missed him deeply since his death in July 2022. In terms of a period of time, the Covid era of lockdowns knocked the stuffing out of College life. Not having students on site left the place feeling so lifeless — tumbleweed might as well have blown between the buildings. Getting back to 'normal' activity afterwards felt so wonderful, and reinforced a sense of what makes College life special: tutorials in person; lunching in Hall with colleagues; so many talks and concerts in the evenings. Thinking about specific events, both of the History subject reunions we organised in 2015 and 2022 were hugely enjoyable, bringing together people from very different generations. Hopefully another can be planned for c.2027-29.

What do you enjoy most about being a Tutor at LMH?

Being mocked by my students for the three years they are here, but getting nice cards from them as they leave and hearing about their later careers. It's a privilege always to be working with brilliant young people and to have some part in their intellectual development. Schools Dinners always feel quite emotional: saying 'good bye' to people who have become so intensely part of LMH for the brief span of their undergraduate years.

How do you feel about the future of History at LMH?

Optimistic (despite my broader innate pessimism about most things). We have always been one of the College's bigger subjects, and I am very conscious of the sense of 'succession' across time from tutor to tutor (I am the tenth History Fellow to be appointed; the third early modernist since Mary Coate's arrival in 1922; and the first male Fellow of the College to have been educated at LMH). We are very fortunate to have recently appointed a new Fellow, Joshua Bennett, who is passionate about College life and tutorial teaching, and also to be on the cusp of appointing a younger scholar to a six-year post in American History. The latter post is the result of very generous alumni, and other supporters, who have paid for this temporary Fellowship in memory of the wonderful Clive Holmes. Tutors and students are immensely grateful for this support.



Reflections on an LMH career

Following her retirement at the end of Michaelmas term, **Dr Fiona Spensley** reflects on 25 years at LMH, the many roles she took on, how the College has developed over time, and the biggest challenges for the future.

I joined LMH in 1998, on a one-year stipendiary lecturership contract to phase out Psychology. However, I failed to do that, and 25 years later I am delighted that the College has now expanded to two Psychology tutors! I became the College's first full-time Senior Tutor in 2007, combining responsibilities formerly managed by academic Fellows.

When I was elected as a Fellow in 2001, the Fellowship had a female majority, with turnover predominantly due to retirements after career-long service. Many were committed teachers, active in College administration, but with limited research output. Recruitment has become more international over time, and those appointed to Fellowships now are less

likely to have been educated at Oxford than their predecessors, reflecting the global academic talent pool. The recent emphasis on research achievements within departments has impacted the time academics can offer to the College, leading to a greater turnover as Fellows seek opportunities to advance their stellar research careers.

Over the years, I had the pleasure of selecting, teaching and supporting students of Psychology, joint schools and of Human Sciences. In the early days, I was notionally their 'Moral Tutor', but this was modified to 'Personal Tutor', reflecting a shift in the tutor-student relationship. The Director of Studies element of the role has changed with technology, and I was involved in developing the OxCORT online tutorial reporting system, which replaced paper tutorial reports and co-ordinated practice across all the colleges.

It has been a delight to see students develop over the key formative years of their lives. However, I have witnessed the increase in mental illness amongst students (both undergraduate and postgraduate), particularly anxiety and depression. I am glad that, as I leave LMH, we now have two co-Heads of Wellbeing, who are doing a wonderful and necessary job within a more holistic support system for students.

An Oxford degree should be challenging, and we should support students to embrace that

educational opportunity, rather than give in to the temptation to reduce the demands of the courses we offer.

During my final few years in College, I moved to supporting visiting students and graduates. In my experience, visiting students have been some of the most able undergraduates and most appreciative of the Oxford tutorial system, having sampled alternatives elsewhere.

Graduate numbers have increased, with the Clore Graduate Centre facilitating the MCR community to become one of the most close-knit in Oxford. The graduate community is international and diverse, although unfortunately not in terms of social background. I found it disappointing to see many excellent candidates withdrawing on financial grounds, or struggling financially once they were on course. Graduate scholarships play a vital role in ensuring that selection is purely on academic grounds, and I am happy to have been involved with the establishment of the Oxford Pakistan Programme, which has enabled some impressive students to join the College in the last couple of years.

As Vice-Principal, I ran the last Principalian Election (for my fifth Principal) and I am happy to be leaving the College in Stephen Blyth's good hands. He has made a strong start addressing the wellbeing and graduate funding issues which I see as current College priorities.

I have had an interesting career and am grateful to the Principals, staff and students I have worked with along the way.



From the Archives: LMH's lost garden

College Archivist **Oliver Mahony** explores the story of our lost pleasure garden, sacrificed to make way for the Eleanor Lodge building in the 1920s.

As the physical site of LMH has expanded over the decades, so pockets of land have been lost. Some of these, like the cottages and squash court which disappeared with the construction of the Pipe Partridge Building, survived well within living memory; other lost sites may now only be remembered through photographs, reminiscences and plans held in the archives.

One such lost site intrigues me. Whenever I have opened Dame Frances Lannon's excellent history of the College, I have paused at the large photograph of New Old Hall with its graceful walled garden, designed by Reginald Blomfield.

In commissioning Basil Champneys (1842-1935) as their first architect, no doubt the LMH council had at the forefront of their minds his extensive work at Newnham, Cambridge, started in 1874. His LMH extension, named New Old Hall and opened in 1881, was built in a typical 'Queen Anne' style; red brick, white painted woodwork, sash windows, gables and big chimneys.

LMH's first Principal Elizabeth Wordsworth (1840-1932) had strong ideals regarding the structure of a college for women. In 1894, she said

in an address that her ideal college was one "consisting of moderately sized groups of students, each of them small enough to have somewhat of a homelike character."¹

To fit in with the domestic feel, rooms would be found along corridors, moving away from the traditional Oxbridge 'staircase model'. The new extension and its garden, therefore, conformed with a domestic ideal; the garden was enclosed by walls and was similar in feel and layout to a small walled garden in a country house.

In her unpublished memoirs, LMH tutor in German Helena Deneke (1878-1973) fondly recalled the garden: "Between Old Hall and Wordsworth there was a wide gravel path, extending in a straight line from door to door. It was edged on both sides by perennial borders. We looked forward to the moment when clumps of dark red peonies and scarlet oriental poppies mocked the colours of the D.C.L. gown. Many tea-parties were given on the lawn nearest the road, where trees and flowing bushes hid the red-brick wall."²

Writing in 1996, Una-Katherine Yeo (LMH, 1918) also recalls the poplar trees bordering the Parks, and students running up the gravel path bordered

with flowerbeds to get into New Old Hall before the doors were locked at night.³

Yet as student numbers increased, so did the need for extra accommodation. In 1926, after a protracted construction, the Eleanor Lodge Building was finally opened, providing much needed student accommodation. Before the Lodge project began, Principal Lynda Grier had negotiated with St John's College with a view to purchasing the land around the existing site. These negotiations were successful and resulted in LMH owning an extended site including the playing field and the water meadow, land that would later be given over to landscaped gardens and further building projects.

Yet with the construction of Eleanor Lodge, we did lose something. As Deneke acknowledged with regret in her memoirs, it destroyed "our pleasure garden."

Walking across Wolfson Quad today, I can picture a long brick roadside wall where Eleanor Lodge stands today, the garden behind filled with the sound of students relaxing amongst the neat flowerbeds and freshly cut lawns or hurrying along the path to attend Miss Wordsworth's bible readings. LMH's lost garden.

¹ Margaret Birney Vickery: 'Building for Bluestockings: The Architecture and Social History of women's colleges in late Victorian England' [1999; p.88]

² Memoir: 'What I Remember' [Volume III: LMH Archives/LMHA/MPP 3/A1/3]

³ Reminiscence form [LMH Archives/ LMHA/REM/1/1]



2014 & 2015 MA Ceremony and Reunion Dinner (March 2024)



Eve Bennett speaking to 2023 leavers (May 2023)



LMH Local in NYC (November 2023)



Celebrating Elizabeth Mackenzie (November 2023)

Alumni events: a year in review

In the last year, our Development Office has hosted more than 40 events in College, in London and overseas, welcoming over 1,000 alumni and guests. Thank you for your support in making our events a success and a joy to deliver. We hope to see you again soon!



Alumni Garden Party (June 2023)



2014 & 2015 MA Ceremony and Reunion Dinner (March 2024)

Dates for your diary

If you would like to join us at a future event, take a look at the events listing on the back cover of this publication, or visit our website: www.lmh.ox.ac.uk/alumni/events.



J.R.R. Tolkien Professor Marion Turner speaking at the Online Wordsworth Lecture (March 2024)



Emmeline Armitage at the Shoreditch Treehouse (November 2023)



Malala Yousafzai 'In Conversation' (November 2023)



LMH in Singapore (March 2024)



From the Director of Development...

It's been a pleasure to watch this issue of *LMH News* come together, capturing the rich variety of remarkable achievements of our Fellows, students and alumni, and I've enjoyed meeting many alumni at our events over the last year, both here in the UK and overseas.

The team and I are excited to have begun making preparations for our 150th Anniversary celebrations in a few years' time. Our plans to commemorate this important milestone are taking shape, and the Principal and I are working with colleagues and alumni to shape our anniversary fundraising campaign in line with our priorities.

The next few years will offer plenty of opportunities to give back meaningfully, at whatever level you are able to. Together we can ensure that LMH continues to offer exceptional teaching and support for the leaders of tomorrow, as well as being a welcoming home for all of our community for generations to come. It is the members of LMH, past and present, who have shaped our identity and made the College the special place it was for you, and that it remains today. Our people and their stories will be central to our anniversary celebrations.

We have ambitious goals to increase our income, providing us with financial flexibility to meet the growing and developing needs of our College and its diverse community. We want to build our endowment significantly, to provide the financial stability LMH deserves to face the next 150 years. To those of you who support us, thank you for all you enable us to achieve. And for those interested in giving back, please do join us and your peers in our mission – I would like to assure you that your gift will have a significant impact.

Although we are one of the poorest Colleges in Oxford by size of endowment, we are certainly one of the most supportive, and I am extremely proud to be part of such a pioneering and welcoming community. I'm confident that, with your help and engagement, we will put LMH on a firm financial footing, allowing it to remain a beacon of opportunity, inspiration and leadership for the centuries to come.

The team and I look forward very much to working with you in celebration of our special college.

Please contact us at development@lmh.ox.ac.uk with any feedback or questions.

Building an Oral History of LMH

From its official inception in late 2019, our Oral History project has gained momentum, with a team of alumni volunteers now well on their way to collecting stories from 150 LMH voices in time for the celebration of the College's 150th Anniversary in 2028. Project lead **Nicky Bull** (Harper, 1972, Biochemistry) reflects on progress so far.

In 2017 Harriet Kemp (1979, Literae Humaniores), LMHA President between 2017 and 2023, heard about an incredible woman who, at the age of almost 103, had been volunteering for the NSPCC for over 50 years (she later became the oldest person, at 107, to be awarded an MBE for services to charity). Harriet discovered that Anne Baker was an LMH alumna (1934, PPE) and, wanting to hear about her time at the College, she arranged to meet Anne at home, together with then-Principal Alan Rusbridger. Their conversation was recorded and contained a wealth of detail about Anne's time at LMH in the 1930s, so plans then began to be made to build up a bank of audio recordings by talking to more alumni. In November 2019, after consultation with others from College, the concept was agreed and a project group was

"LMH clearly had a bit of a role in getting me there, without a shadow of a doubt."

Fiona Chesterton (1970, History)
talking of the BBC, where she was the only woman in an intake of eight trainees

established under the leadership of Cindy Bull (1979, Chemistry). A small team of volunteers started work and they completed almost 20 interviews, having adapted to recording online via Zoom during the Covid pandemic.

In 2023, with the dissolution of the LMHA and its activities now coming under the auspices of the Development Team, the Oral History project was

"Thank you ... to all involved in this important work of preserving the memories of our beloved College's life and the lives within it."

Kameel Premhid
(2013, MSc Education)

relaunched and I was invited to lead it with support from other alumni volunteers. Building on the great work done by Harriet and Cindy, and with the help of Deputy Development Director Carrie Scott, a new team of a dozen interviewers, plus a small team of transcribers, is now working towards amassing 150 recordings and interview transcripts from members of the LMH community – alumni, staff and Fellows – in time for the College's 150th Anniversary. There are now over 60 completed recordings lodged in the College archives, so we are making good progress toward the target and we have an evolving list of potential interviewees as we go forward.

I had no previous experience of a project like this, and although approaching each interview can on occasion tend to bring back memories – half a century on – of stepping into a tutorial, I am thoroughly enjoying the process. From the ladies now in their eighties or nineties who recall, with a mischievous smile, sneaking back into College after 'curfew', to the more recent graduates who acknowledge how significant their time at Oxford has proved to be for their subsequent careers, the stories being shared by our community are now being brought together as part of a valuable history.

Meeting fascinating people with such rich and varied life stories, but with all of whom there is that shared experience of time spent at LMH, is a real privilege and I am very grateful for the generosity with which alumni are sharing their time and hospitality with me and the other interviewers.

If you would like to be a part of this project, please contact the Development Team (development@lmh.ox.ac.uk).



Nicky Bull (left) speaks to Ruth Mastenbroek (right) (Walters, 1970, Chemistry)



LMH is for Life

**By giving to LMH today, you are contributing to tomorrow.
Be part of our continuing story: leaving a legacy costs nothing
today, but will make a huge difference to the next generation.**



"I'll be forever grateful for the opportunities I had at LMH and feel strongly that I need to give back. I donate monthly and have put the College in my Will because of the care and support I received during my time there: my tutors held my place during a re-mark of my A-levels and the College provided financial assistance when my mum was made redundant. LMH changed the course of my life and I'm driven to provide the same opportunities for others."

Emma Dickson (2007, History)

What will your legacy be?

Legacies have made LMH what it is today and will make it what it can be tomorrow. Including LMH in your Will is a life-affirming way to secure the future of the College and those we teach, for the long term. Your legacy will help our pioneering spirit live on, supporting and inspiring talented students from every background to share experiences that last a lifetime.

To find out more about leaving a legacy to LMH, please contact Carrie Scott at: carrie.scott@lmh.ox.ac.uk or by calling +44 (0)1865 611024.

Events Calendar 2024-25

Please find below our programme of events for the next year; additional events are being planned all the time and the most up-to-date list can be found on the website, along with more information and details on how to book (www.lmh.ox.ac.uk/alumni/events). You will be notified of events by email, so please ensure your details are up to date. All dates and times are correct at the time of printing.

May 2024

OPP Celebration Event (by invitation)

Thursday 30th May

Oxford Pakistan Programme celebration event.

June 2024

Principal's Summer Lunch

(by invitation)

Saturday 22nd June

Special lunch to thank our Wordsworth, Talbot and Principal's Circle donors, and our volunteers.

Alumni Garden Party

Saturday 22nd June

Our Garden Party is back again! Samuel West (1985 English) will be In Conversation with the Principal and English Fellow Dr Ben Higgins, discussing 'Shakespeare From my Perspective'. Join us for afternoon tea, jazz on the lawn, storytelling, face painting, exhibitions, garden games and more. Gardens open 2pm; ends 5pm.

September 2024

Pre-1950 to 1960 Reunion Lunch

Saturday 21st September

Reception and College update, reunion lunch and afternoon tea in the Gardens. From 11am to 5pm.

1964 - 60th Anniversary Reunion Lunch

Saturday 21st September

Reception and College update, anniversary reunion lunch and tea in the Gardens. From 11am to 5pm.

1974 - 50th Anniversary Reunion Dinner

Saturday 21st September

Tea in the gardens, College update, drinks reception, dinner in Hall and a 70&80s disco. B&B accommodation available. Gardens open from 2.30pm; ends 11.30pm.

Gaudy for 1980 to 1983

Saturday 21st September

Tea in the gardens, College update, drinks reception, dinner in Hall and a 70&80s disco. B&B accommodation available. Gardens open from 2.30pm; ends 11.30pm.

LMH Local in Romania

Tuesday 24th September

Hosted by an alumnus and British Ambassador, LMH alumni based in Romania are invited to join for a drinks reception to meet friends old and new. From 6pm to 7.30pm.

October 2024

Beaufort Circle Lunch (by invitation)

Saturday 19th October

Special lunch to thank legators of the College.

Book Launch and Celebration of Margery Ord

Saturday 19th October

Marking the publication of Margery Ord's Memoir, *Pathways: Reflections of a Female Scientist* (edited by Nicky Bull) and celebrating her life and contribution to LMH.

November 2024

Young/New Alumni Event

November (date tbc)

Music event based in London for young/new alumni.

December 2024

Alumni Winter Carols

Friday 6th December

Join us in the College Chapel or online for a Christmas Service and Carols.

February 2025

Founders and Benefactors Dinner

(by invitation)

Friday 7th February

College Feast to celebrate the foundation of the College and its benefactors.

London Alumni Winter Social

February (date tbc)

Informal London drinks to meet friends old and new.

March 2025

Wordsworth Lecture: Professor

Michael Broers on the Napoleon film

Sunday 9th March

Online event with Emeritus Fellow Professor Michael Broers – Director's Historical Consultant on Ridley Scott's *Napoleon*.

2016 MA and Reunion Dinner

Saturday 22nd March

MA Graduation Ceremony and Reunion Dinner for those who matriculated in 2016.

September 2025

1965 - 60th Anniversary Reunion Lunch

Saturday 20th September

Reception and College update, anniversary reunion lunch and tea in the Gardens. From 11am to 5pm.

1975 - 70th Anniversary Reunion Lunch

Saturday 20th September

Reception and College update, anniversary reunion lunch and tea in the Gardens. From 11am to 5pm.

Gaudy for 1984 to 1988

Saturday 20th September

Tea in the gardens, College update, drinks reception, dinner in Hall and an 80s disco. B&B accommodation available. Gardens open from 2.30pm; ends 11.30pm.

For more information and bookings, please contact us by telephone: +44 (0) 1865 274362 or by email: development@lmh.ox.ac.uk

