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THIS time last year *Oxford Magazine* addressed the prospects of the imminent Copenhagen conference on the climate and the state of play as regards Oxford's possible contributions to averting or mitigating climate change. The recently published analysis of key aspects of how events in Copenhagen were conveyed to the public, prepared by James Painter of the Reuters Institute, raises fascinating and fundamental issues. The study looks at the role of the media, and the portrayal of the scientific evidence, at the conference. Its main conclusions are outlined in this issue of the *Magazine*.

Extraordinarily, of the 88 international universities represented at Copenhagen Oxford University sent the 4th greatest number of delegates (85) out of the 1677 academics attending: it came top if Scandinavian universities are excluded. East Anglia sent 15, Cambridge 19. This indicates the scale of the resources of the Oxford climate change research community. Sadly, however, the situation in Oxford we noted last year seems no better. There are four distinct, major, well-funded units engaged in this area in Oxford (Environmental Change Institute, Smith Institute, Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division, Martin School) but there has been a conspicuous lack of overall leadership and coordination. Most unusually for University departments each of these four units has its own "press" or "public relations" officer; the way the subject is presented to the media and to the public is clearly recognised as being an intrinsic element of their work. This is another indication of how distinctive climate change is as a subject in the University. But one is perhaps justified in wondering whether Oxford is really pulling its weight as effectively as it might. As for keeping our own house in order, the University has slipped in the "Green League" among UK universities from 27th in 2007 to 50th in 2008 and 89th in 2010.

Whither Climate Change?

It hardly needs saying that the media carry the heavy responsibility of mediating public knowledge, understanding and attitudes regarding the threat of climate change. As often tends to be the case, the Reuters report homes in on the disconnect between journalists and scientists; each fraternity implicitly blames the other for the existing confusions in policies on climate change. Is it possible to move the focus in a more constructive direction?

As a threat facing humanity, climate change combines several uniquely challenging features: it requires anticipation of the future; to some degree it is

already irreversible; it requires a form of (scientific) thinking about uncertainty and the nature of evidence that the public - and (usually arts-trained) media editors - find difficult; it cannot be "proved" by any one event or any amount of data; it points to a disaster on a scale we all find impossible to fully comprehend. The scientific evidence for climate change is already in place: we do not need more and more detailed science, but what we do now need is the mechanism for getting the message across in a way that the public can understand and accept.

This is a matter primarily for the media. Scientists are not necessarily the best people to argue the case: trusted and well-known commentators are what is required (and if they are also "celebs", that's all to the good). We know that the print media are under severe pressure in terms of financial, timing and space constraints; circulations are falling. Web publishing is unlikely to change the inherent limitations of printed news media. Moreover, the internet is increasingly inseparable from the blogosphere, a medium always at risk of contamination by instant viral dissemination of rumour and gossip - often malevolent. What is needed is a source that can be trusted and has been filtered and edited in the traditional manner.

The broadcast media share many of the problems of the

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...and much more

print media, but the BBC is special. As Matt Prescott argues here, the BBC—always struggling with some ideal of impartiality—has recently followed programming policies that are defensive and conformist. As we know, this still includes fairly regular allocation of equal air-time to climate-sceptics alongside those trying to put the climate change case. On the other hand the BBC does sometimes openly adopt a campaigning stance, as in *Make Poverty History*, *Children in Need* and *Comic Relief*. The BBC too often fulfills its remit for impartiality by merely presenting two opposed points of view (as in party political broadcasting): it thereby escapes and avoids the far more difficult job of arriving at a considered middle way and a consensus. And yet, eventually, policy decisions on controversial issues have inevitably to be arrived at: coverage of the BNP is, for example, strictly limited.

The origins of the BBC's timidity are easy to spot. Ever since the BBC was created governments have objected to aspects of broadcast material; in the background there has been the veiled sanction of greater regulation and a reduced licence-fee. The irony is that politicians need the BBC as much as the BBC needs the politicians' tacit blessing.

But when it comes to climate change the BBC surely ought to be taking a clear and strong line - here are some reasons;

- Climate change is entirely unique as a public policy issue; we are talking about the future of humanity after all.
- The BBC has a social responsibility (to a degree quite distinct from other media) because it is directly sup-

ported by public funding through the licence-fee; it has the status of a Public Service Broadcaster.

- Sooner or later (as it's legally-enshrined target of an 80% cut in carbon emissions by 2050 falls behind) government will need the BBC in particular to turn public opinion.

With its vast resources and its potential to research and identify a carefully considered but clear consensual viewpoint on climate change, the BBC is the best option we have for engaging public trust. BBC editors are key. The huge respect with which the BBC is held internationally owes everything to their judgement and skill. They cannot be expected to become mini-climate-scientists. But, if the editors recognise the need to compensate for their *inevitable* lack of scientific expertise, it may well be enough that they come to appreciate the overwhelming weight and consistency of the evidence by, for example, establishing ongoing, person-to-person, relations with a suitable selection of climate-scientists.

Why doesn't Oxford lay on a series of intensive meetings between relevant BBC editors and local academics? The resulting changes in attitude are likely to be considerable - the basic message about climate change is, after all, simple—and BBC broadcasting policy might then be able to reflect the seriousness of the situation.

T.J.H.

Geoffrey Hill

from a Work in Progress

II

As to flip furious from White Russians
 To Auden's 'Fascist' airman—swipe for luck
 To a Johnny Depp character; sessions
 With some once glamorous sad churl of rock:
 Impossible that beguile paradigm—
 Triumph turned contest of ingratitude.
 Pride without latitude
 Trading stigma.
 A covert self-hatred
 Self-accoutred
 Discredited to death.
 Well vouched-for tribunes bidding worth
 At a pound of flesh for gilt-faced silver;
 Menenius, with a mite too clever
 Diplomatic élan;
 As by design
 Spare my anatomy
 The jests of Antium;
 Flog me an antidote
 To bitter phlegm
 That will not bring the heart up through the throat.

GEOFFREY HILL

Geoffrey Hill is the Oxford Professor of Poetry, starting this term.

I Saw You Again

The snow pours down, sometimes
 floating but always in a rush, yellow
 because of the street lights and otherwise
 a forcing shade of itself, impassive,
 commanding the air with odd flakes escaping.

The whitened rooftops are still
 against the pale grey sky. It is night.
 They are making snowballs in the street.
 All the cars are covered. Smooth and fat
 with snow, you cannot see their windows.

This night, I'll make a call from a region
 of darkness and frozen water. I'll call Elsa
 and, if she remembers me, I'll go to her
 with the huskies pulling our old toboggan.

ALAN DUNNETT

Alan Dunnnett read English at Trinity College, Oxford before going to drama school. His poems have been widely published. He is now Course Director, MA Screen, at Drama Centre London within Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design.

Reporting Climate Change at Copenhagen and beyond

JAMES PAINTER

The following text is the executive summary extracted from "Summoned by Science. Reporting Climate Change at Copenhagen and Beyond", published this month by Oxford's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The Summary is followed by a second section taken from pp70-72 of the Report - ed.

CLIMATE change is a notoriously difficult subject for journalists to report on, for editors to maintain interest in, and for audiences to grasp. The science is complex and incremental, its worst effects are (probably) a long way off, and the topic is now fraught with controversy. Like many slow-burn but hugely urgent issues of the twenty-first century, part of the journalistic challenge remains that of conveying the importance of the science to audiences around the world - in short, 'to make the significant interesting'.

News editors tend to be drawn to events, rather than to slow processes. This was exemplified by the UN's Copenhagen summit on climate change in December 2009. The summit was marked by history, not because it ended in an ambitious and binding deal to curb greenhouse gas emissions but because of the huge number of journalists, delegates, NGOs and scientists present. It is very doubtful that any single event outside of the Olympics or the World Cup has ever attracted so many politicians, journalists, scientists and academics to attend it together.

Around 4,000 journalists from 119 countries were at the summit. 85% of them came from the developed world. But a significant numbers also came from the developing world. Nearly 600 journalists from the main negotiating bloc representing the interests of the world's 130 poorest countries - the G-77 plus China - registered to cover the event. China and Brazil were two of the countries most represented by their media, with more than one hundred journalists each.

Historically, the media in most developing countries have not given much priority to climate change, although the amount of coverage has slowly increased in recent years. This is despite the fact that many of these countries are considered the most vulnerable to the impacts of global warming. So Copenhagen represented a rich opportunity for developing-country journalists to change the historic deficit.

With so many journalists present from so many countries, it is hardly surprising that the media coverage of Copenhagen was massive. Most journalists reported extensively on the drama and minutiae of the negotiations. But in the balance between capturing the drama of Copenhagen and explaining the essential background to the science, understandably - but perhaps regrettably - the science was under-reported.

Our analysis of more than 400 articles published in two print media in 12 countries across the world shows that the articles written principally about the science of climate change represented less than 10% of all the arti-

cles surveyed. Nearly 80% of the articles mentioned the science in less than 10% of their column space.

Much of the science reporting that there was in the Western press was driven by coverage of the hacked emails from the University of East Anglia in the UK or what the media dubbed 'Climategate'. Climate change sceptics were barely quoted in the articles surveyed, but when they were, it was only in the Western press. This follows a general pattern of a very little airtime or print coverage given to sceptics in the media of the developing world.

When the science was reported, it was representatives of international and national bodies (including governments) who were by far the most quoted. Around 2,000 members of delegations from 250 universities were present at Copenhagen, including 280 professors. But scientists from universities represented only 12% of those quoted on the science, compared to 11% for NGPs.

Part of the explanation for this is that NGOs and governments had far more communication officers or media relations personnel at Copenhagen than universities. For example, Greenpeace alone had more media people there than all the universities put together (20 compared to 12). The IPCC has just one paid media officer. Greenpeace had a larger total delegation than that of the UK.

Given that the science of climate change was hardly reported when the peg and the opportunity were self-evident, getting the science into print or onto the airwaves will remain even more of a challenge, demanding a re-invigorated debate about new, interesting and engaging ways to do it. For climate scientists, the issues of how best to engage with the media and public more effectively has also become more urgent because of signs (in the West) of a temporary decline in public confidence in climate science caused partly by 'Climategate' and other publicised errors about the science.

Despite this recent questioning of the robustness of climate science, our survey of more than 50 environment journalists and climate scientists around the world (but with bias towards the UK) suggests that the relationship between the communities is not as bad as many fear. Nearly two-thirds of respondents described the relationship with the other as 'good' or 'very good' (although some would see this as evidence of too 'cosy' a relationship).

The scientists surveyed would like to see the following as the top three priorities to improve the relationship in the coming months: more training for general journalists, more journalists specialising in climate science and a 'less adversarial framing' of climate science (i.e. less space given to sceptics).

The journalists would like to see more reports by climate scientists on topical issues, more availability by scientists to speak to the media, and more scientists who are prepared to debate with climate sceptics. Just behind, in fourth, came more media training for scientists.

As part of the contribution to the debate about the future of climate science reporting, we drew on the surveys and interviews with scientists, journalists and other specialists to come up with eight suggestions or issues to consider for the future. We have chosen three to highlight:

- More of the ‘empirical’ angle ‘what are people experiencing and what are they doing about it?’ could replace the ubiquitous reporting (in the Western press) of the adversarial ‘Is it happening or not? Are humans to blame? Will the disaster come or not?’ Some of the money spent by editors on sending journalists to summits like Copenhagen could be redirected to more investigations of local vulnerabilities and impacts, particularly for journalists in developing countries, and more on what cities, communities and individuals are doing all round the world to switch to low-carbon living.
- However bad the experience of climate scientists at the hands of parts of the media, more of them need to engage or re-engage with journalists in part to explain where there is scientific consensus and where there is not. More training will help, and the Science Media Centre in London is often praised as a model for future. But there is also a strong case for more dedicated climate change press officers at universities and research centres. The IPCC for its part urgently needs not just a new communications strategy but more resources for press work than the one media officer they currently employ.
- It is a truism that the media landscape in which both journalists and scientists work has been permanently revolutionised by the role of the internet, and particularly the blogosphere. More use of social media will be crucial for engagement, participation and trust rather than top-down information. New media offer excellent opportunities for frontline citizen journalism and video reporting, more dialogue with sceptics and the public, and data collection and sharing.

* * *

....climate scientists were clearly prompted by the UEA emails and the IPCC errors to re-examine how they should communicate their science. Websites, particularly in the USA, buzz with the debate.¹⁴¹ More openness, more transparency, more explanation of risk and uncertainty, more debating with serious sceptics online or off, and even the employment of public relations companies have all been strongly advocated. There seems to be a consensus too there should be more of a different engagement with the public, either directly or through the media. It was remarkable how in the early months of 2010 many prominent scientists, particularly in the UK and the USA, publicly stressed the need to communicate more or better with the media and public in the future. (See the quotes in Box 6.1.)

However, there has been less debate about the details of the way this engagement might take place. Traditional or innovative forms? Top-down or participatory? New media or old? Less news but more features, soap operas and drama? All scientists or the best communicators? This last question has prompted a re-examination of the degree to which climate scientists around the world are themselves an obstacle to better coverage in the media:

Box 6.1: The Engagement Imperative

Lord Nick Stern, author the Stern Report: *‘I do think communication is fundamental. I think that scientists and social scientists are not trained generally in the communication of policy, particularly about the management of risk which is about the most difficult thing to communicate on that there is. And so we have to get better at it, and we have to think about how to get better at it. We are dependant on the media, and on responsible, thoughtful, reporting of the issues. Reflection, analysis in the newspapers, on the TV, and on the net is very important. We have to help the media do what it does better and that is quite a hard thing to do because the pressures now are on shock, horror and speed... You have to get people to think quietly and ponder and that’s a difficult thing to do’.* (LSE, 10 March 2010)

Professor Bob Watson, chief scientific advisor to Defra (UK): *‘We need the media desperately to be the mediator [between us and the public]. As scientists we must communicate better, and say what we know as well as what we don’t know’.* (SMC event, London, 31 March 2010)

Lord Martin Rees, president of the Royal Society (UK): *‘There’s less demarcation between experts and laypersons. Campaigners and bloggers enrich the debate. But professionals have special obligations to engage.’* (First Reith Lecture, 1 June 2010)

Sir David King, former chief scientific adviser to the UK government: *‘The scientific community are now battered and standing back, saying who’s going to put their head above the parapet? We’ve got to have a nucleus of people that can communicate. I do think we need to be nurturing spokespeople for the media from within the scientific community.’* (Author interview, June 2010)

Sir John Houghton, former chair of the IPCC: *‘We are losing that war [public relations with the sceptics] because we’re not good at PR. Your average scientist is not a good PR person because he wants to get on with his science.’* (BBC Wales, 12 February 2010)

Professor Ralph Cicerone, president of the National Academy of Sciences, USA: *‘We are not doing a very good job of translating what we are doing.’* (February 2010)

Professor Jane Lubchenco, director of NOAA, USA: *‘Scientists have seriously underestimated the importance of explaining what we know about climate in a way people can understand.’* (March 2010)

to what extent they are willing to engage with the media and to respond adequately to the increased demand on their time; and do they have the skill base and necessary media training to communicate well? At the very least a ‘good climate science performer’, particularly on broadcast media, needs (a) to know the relevant area of climate science well, (b) to be able to communicate it well and succinctly, and (c) have a thick enough skin to ward off the inevitable personal attacks from climate sceptics once they stick their heads above the parapet. Many scientists are unsurprisingly wary of jeopardising their careers or the respect from their key peer group (usually other scientists), by being seen to say something unwise or simplistic or by having their views misrepresented. For many, it is an area they would much prefer not to enter.

However, the greatest challenge for climate reporters and scientists alike remains how to make climate science a sustained part of the editorial agenda. In common with

other important, complex and slow-burn issues, it has proved difficult to convey its importance and engage the interest of editors and a wider audience in a media age often dominated by news about celebrities, crime, and sport - in short, the challenge is to 'make the significant interesting'. This is made all the more difficult by the newsroom cuts in many privately owned Western media, the decline in resources for overseas reporting and long-format reporting, and the reduction in specialist science reporters in some countries.

It is even more of a challenge for the popular or tabloid media. As we saw in Chapter 4, tabloid coverage of climate change is of considerably lower volume than that of the broadsheet press. It would probably also be true of the Millennium Development Goals, nuclear weaponry, peak oil, the threats to biodiversity, and many other urgent challenges of the twenty-first century (although climate change and nuclear proliferation are probably the two with the most potentially disastrous consequences). There is a real danger that well-trained and knowledgeable journalists working for *The Economist*, the *FT* and the *Guardian* continue to speak to a small and elite audience, at least in global terms. But the audience for complex subjects does not have to remain small.

For example, the most read newspaper in the UK, the *Sun*, has shown with its first ever appointment of an environment editor, Ben Jackson, in March 2009 that it is possible to reach a regular and wider readership on climate change and the environment. Jackson gives the example of a *Sun* driver who spoke to him recently about the Medieval Warm Period - 'something that would not have happened six months ago'.¹⁴² He says it has been difficult to get climate science stories in the paper in 2010 as there are no political developments to anticipate like Copenhagen in 2009. But as he managed to do on-the-spot reporting about deforestation in Acre in the Amazon, several sto-

ries about the changing climate affecting wildlife and biodiversity, and features on what private enterprise is doing such as the new generation of electric cars. '*Sun* readers are interested in developments that affect their lives', he says.¹⁴³

Space does not allow here a fuller discussion of the much-debated broader issue for climate scientists or advocates of how best to communicate science, whether it is through popular or elite media. Suffice to say that books like Professor Mike Hulme's *Why we Disagree about Climate Change* have done a very useful job of clearly outlining the dilemmas. For example, Professor Hulme rightly draws attention to the limitations of what is known as the 'deficit model' of science communication.¹⁴⁴ In essence, this is the idea that, if only climate scientists could communicate better by shouting louder or in a different way, the public and the media would somehow 'get science' and combat the problem. He points out the advantages of shifting from a 'deficit' to a 'dialogue' model and the importance of 'cultural circuits' through which information about climate change is processed.

These are important debates. However, it is clear that mainstream media and their interaction with climate scientists will remain part of the mix that shapes public opinion and understanding.

¹⁴¹ Some of the best discussions can be found at the Observatory published by the Columbia Journalism Review (http://www.cjr.org/the_observatory/), the Yale Forum on Climate Change and the Media (<http://www.yaleclimatemediaforum.org>) and the blog <http://climateprogress.org>.

¹⁴² Ben Jackson speaking at the RISJ/ECI public event in Oxford, 26 Feb. 2010. Climate sceptics stress the significance of the Medieval Warm Period because it cannot have been caused by GHGs.

¹⁴³ Author interview, Sept. 2010

¹⁴⁴ Mike Hulme, *Why we Disagree about Climate Change* (2009), ch.7.

Sagacities

The navel of the universe,
the pillar of the world,
Buddhist and Hindu,
lie north of Himalayan passes
on the sacred Kailas mountain -
its faces gold, crystal, ruby, blue.
One circuit brings forgiveness
for a lifetime full of sinning.
It is said you may see there
the footprints of the Buddha.

Halfway across the world,
in Southern Africa,
the bearded vulture flies so high
above the Dragon Mountains
it can see into the future.

ROY DAVIDS

Roy Davids was formerly Head of Books, Manuscripts and Marketing at Sotherby's, and independently a manuscript dealer. His book Provenance: Collectors, Dealers and Scholars in the Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain and America will be published in 2011.

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Gazette

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Climate Science and Impartiality

MATT PRESCOTT

In this article I would like to address the need for more diverse and specialist voices to be added to the public discussion of climate change, and for the BBC to take the lead by improving its own ability to assess science, impartially, in ways that will benefit society.

Cancun

On 29 November 2010 the United Nations Climate Change Conference will open in Cancun, Mexico. This conference is important because the available science indicates that humanity would be wise to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere, if it wants to keep the Earth's climate as stable as possible. Yet the most likely outcome of this meeting is that the atmospheric concentrations of these gases will continue to be allowed to rise; and another opportunity to minimize the risks associated with human-induced climate change will be missed.

The Science of Climate Change

Thanks to modern science we know that greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, trap heat in the atmosphere. The atmospheric concentrations of these greenhouse gases are increasing, due to the burning of fossil fuels, industrial processes and tropical deforestation. The extra energy being trapped in the atmosphere is making more extreme and erratic weather events possible. Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, global average temperatures have increased by 0.7°C. As a result, the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change has been able to document that climate change is already happening; with extreme floods, storms, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires increasing in intensity and frequency in many different regions of the world. It remains difficult to judge the rate at which future climate change will occur or exactly where and when extreme events will strike. Fundamentally, however, the available evidence indicates that human activities have altered the composition of the atmosphere, increased the energy stored within the atmosphere and thereby made more energy available to drive the climate system and weather patterns.

The Scientific Method

All of this is known because successive generations of scientists have skeptically interrogated hypotheses, carried out experiments, analyzed empirical data and then rejected or accepted hypotheses based on the evidence. The collective peer-review process has also provided the independent expert scrutiny required to make it difficult for individuals to ignore inconvenient evidence, and easy for scientists to consider alternative explanations for their observations, before their work is published.

The Public Debate

However, none of this methodical effort to refine understanding seems to matter in the public debate of climate change. To a truly bewildering extent, the aspects of science that are known, uncertain, unknown and unknowable have been merged and confused with the policy options that are associated with who should do what and when. Something has gone seriously wrong in the public discussion of climate change, and we urgently need individuals and organizations to do everything they can to enhance the scientific literacy of societies all over the world.

Mind The Gap

At the last UN climate conference in Copenhagen, world leaders pledged to limit future warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels; yet they did not create the mechanisms, provide the funds or generate the political momentum required to deliver reduced greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, the latest reports indicate that, on the basis of present trends, the world is on average heading for approximately 4°C of warming by 2100.

Who will provide leadership?

Elected politicians clearly have the strongest mandate to act for the common good, but they also need to remain popular in order to remain electable. Newspapers have large audiences but also possess partisan views, short attention spans and preferences for novelty and sensation. Scientists rarely have direct access to large audiences and tend to have an attachment to technical assumptions, writing styles and specialist interests, which the public struggles to understand.

The Role of the BBC

Perhaps alone in the world, the BBC has the independence, audience, trust and ability to explain what the body of climate science tells us. As a licence fee-funded institution, the BBC has been freed from many of the commercial and political constraints imposed on the majority of newspapers and broadcasters. It also has a special duty to improve the literacy of its audiences, and to do so impartially.

Planet Relief

During 2006 and 2007, I spent 18 months co-ordinating a climate change project for BBC Comedy, which was provisionally called "Planet Relief". This awareness-raising project was due to involve a national experiment in which a prime time audience would have been invited to help save energy, and reduce carbon emissions, by switch-

ing off electrical items which did not need to be on. The National Grid had agreed to provide live results and the entire project was developed within the BBC, in accordance with its own editorial guidelines. The use of comedy would have allowed us to reach new audiences with factual information, and to poke fun at some of the issues surrounding climate change, in just the same way that Comic Relief has helped mainstream audiences to consider poverty in new ways.

However the project was suddenly cancelled, just as it was about to go into production. In part, this seemed to happen because senior executives had started to voice concerns that it was “absolutely not the BBC’s job to save the planet”*.

To me this glib comment, and the mindset behind it, was particularly revealing. It hinted at an acknowledgement that the planet was in trouble, and might need saving, but that key staff, especially within BBC News, didn’t want to get involved and were more comfortable with looking away from where the science was pointing.

Impartiality

In the BBC’s 2007 report entitled “*From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21st Century*” it was stated that impartiality involves a mixture of accuracy, balance, context, distance, evenhandedness, fairness, objectivity, open-mindedness, rigour, self-awareness, transparency and truth. Using all of these concepts to define impartiality obviously has a number of advantages. In particular, it creates the space required for innovative and creative programmes to develop and provides the intellectual leeway required for a wide diversity of views to be aired and shared via live television, radio and the internet. However, the juggling of so many different concepts also risks making judgements so complicated that they become muddled, inconsistently applied and partial - in ways that might not always be acknowledged.

Religion and Campaigns

For example, the BBC has no difficulty broadcasting many more Christian programs than it does for other religions or with running charitable campaigns, such as Comic Relief and Children in Need, which tackle poverty and child neglect. These programmes are popular and have become BBC traditions that serve particular audiences brilliantly well. The question therefore remains why the BBC is able to see campaigning against child abuse and poverty as being in the common good, but not treat efforts to address climate change, that are based on scientific evidence, in the same way.

Breaking News!

The problem is partly that the BBC provides programmes that cover a wide variety of genres and styles; all of which must remain impartial. Some bits of the BBC were enthusiastic about Planet Relief at first. However, in addition to making science, comedy and music programmes the BBC also makes news programmes, and this created a tension. It was the people in News who said that it would undermine their ability to investigate whether there was another

side to the argument if we campaigned. BBC News does not particularly say that about children’s services when a different bit of the BBC mounts Children in Need or when Comic Relief suggests that we try to help Africa. However, I would contend that it is the News interpretation of impartiality that constrains the BBC in relation to climate science and whether it is a good idea to try to draw attention to what seems to be happening.

This matters because the news-based interpretation of impartiality tends to revolve around reacting to events, breaking news, personalities and scandals; and to downplay what is known and robust, based on long-term observations, averages and trends at larger scales. It is also of note that when the BBC abandoned Planet Relief it said that it was going to tackle the issue of climate change through serious factual programmes, which I have yet to see on prime time BBC One.

Senior Staff

I have come to the conclusion that a central problem for the BBC is that very few of the most senior editors, executives and producers throughout the BBC, have any scientific training. This means that many of the senior staff expected to guarantee impartiality may actually struggle to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the great mass of climate science. They may also find it difficult to explain what is known and end up occupying a scientifically shallow comfort zone, which emphasizes the areas that are novel, exciting or unknown. Because the politics of climate change are a lot more amenable to different opinions, the traditional interpretations of political impartiality all too frequently end up being applied to factual science.

Scientifically Impartial

If the BBC is to remain true to its aspirations for holistic impartiality, especially in relation to climate change, I would like to ask it to look afresh at its definition of impartiality, its editorial guidelines and the composition of its staff. In particular, it needs to equip itself with scientifically trained staff and/or to give all senior decision makers access to the trusted experts who can help them to make fully informed editorial decisions whenever they need guidance. The BBC also needs to make better use of external expertise available from the UK’s top universities and great institutions, such as the University of Oxford and Royal Society. These resources are world class, but underutilized at present. Last but not least, the BBC needs to be braver in the scientific debates and campaigns that it seeks to organize and to host.

We are lucky that the BBC exists and seeks to be impartial. However, I would like to see it find the courage needed to better assimilate scientific knowledge into its present form of impartiality. The uncertainty and gaps in our knowledge that exist must be faced head on, but the BBC also needs to play its part, more fully, in equipping audiences to wrestle with the choices that the science indicates we all need to deal with, if we want a stable climate. The BBC should never lose site of the scientific facts, but it also should not hide from them.

* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6979596.stm>

Updating Sustainability around the University

PHILIP PIKE

THE threat of climate change due to global warming is a very real driver for many of the University's environmental sustainability initiatives. Building energy related CO₂ emissions in 2009-10 were up 3.8% to 80,200t and the majority of this increase can be attributed to the opening of new science laboratories. 40-50% of buildings reduced their gas or electricity consumption so progress is being made. University utility costs were down by 30% to £11m driven by reductions in wholesale energy prices.

In 2011 the University will launch its Carbon Management Strategy. This is a requirement of HEFCE and will map a way forward to meet a 31% reduction in carbon emission levels by 2020 from 2005-6 levels. This is quite a challenge as the targets make no allowance for the increasing size of the estate, which has grown by 10% over the last ten years and many of the new buildings are highly serviced laboratories. This bold statement will require significant funding. Work is underway to produce similar water and waste management strategies.

The University continues to invest in energy saving opportunities using repairs and maintenance funds, energy saving grants and Salix loan funds. Over the summer the Estates Directorate installed new, efficient boilers in the Examination Schools, Sherrington Building and the Computing Laboratory. A new chiller in the Rothermere American Institute is providing significant savings. The University's largest energy user, the Henry Wellcome Building for Genomic Medicine has had energy efficient fans and heat recovery systems installed in the air handling units which should save over 400t CO₂ annually. On a smaller scale LED lighting is now proving reliable so it is being used in the University Central Offices, Biochemistry and the Computing Laboratory. Departments continue to explore avenues to reduce their own energy use by specifying energy efficient fridges and freezers or implementing software to turn computers off over night (Mathematics are saving 23% of electricity use in Dartington House by switching all their computers off out of hours).

All the University's new buildings are designed to meet the latest building regulations and the City Council's planning requirements for 20% renewable energy generation. Hence the new Earth Sciences building is heated and cooled by ground source heat pumps and the Pathology building has a combined heat and power (CHP) unit to meet the loads of the data centre. Rainwater harvesting systems in both these buildings will provide rainwater for toilet flushing. In the less highly serviced buildings such as the new Mathematical Institute on the ROQ site, natural ventilation will be implemented where possible for office spaces.

The University Science Area is a part of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and has to report on annual CO₂ emissions relating to gas consumption. The annual trend

is downwards reflecting investment in new boilers and controls.

As of April 2010 the University and Colleges are part of the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) although they have chosen to register separately. The CRC participants will have to report on annual carbon emissions and then purchase and surrender the equivalent number of carbon allowances. A change in the rules following the Government's Spending Review means that instead of the majority of the carbon allowance payment being recycled back to each institution all of the payment will be retained by Government. This additional tax will add about 8% on to energy costs.

A colleague reports to the editor;

"I went to a course at the University yesterday. I noticed they were using the traditional temperature control method of having radiators full on underneath open windows. I spoke to the organiser and pointed this out. They said they knew it wasn't ideal but that apparently the temperature of the radiators was set centrally and so it was the only way of cooling the room down. So, I showed them the thermostatic radiator valve and explained how it worked and suggested using it instead. They repeated their belief that central settings meant this couldn't really work – although they did know about TRVs from home. I then suggested that unless the valve was a fake, it really should work to control temperature, and how much sense would it make for there to be a fake? Their response was 'well how much sense does anything at this University make?'"

This October Oxford University signed up to the Low Carbon Oxford Charter with other large organisations in the city which have committed themselves to working together to create a low carbon, sustainable Oxford. The University is also a signatory to the ISCN-GULF Sustainable Campus Charter.

The University Estates Directorate and Environmental Change Institute have been collaborating on an innovative piece of research to gather data on overnight usage in four of the most energy-intensive 24-hour research buildings, then identify and implement measures to reduce carbon emissions and energy costs. The 14-month 'Midnight Oil' project has been funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, with a view to disseminating the findings to the whole HE sector. The project is very timely: labs typically account for a high proportion of the energy consumption of a research-led university (Oxford's 50 labs account for 76%, and the four buildings under study for 16%). Two recent MSc graduates, Dana Cartwright and Jennifer Wilson, have been working with Dr Sarah Darby of the ECI on the first phase of the project. They have assessed occupancy of the buildings around the clock, including three all-night observation sessions, and carried out interviews and

surveys with building managers and users. It has been a valuable exercise in unpacking the factors that contribute to environmental impact, from the original building designs to the daily routines of researchers. The second phase, a technical study, begins in January 2011 and will be followed by implementation of recommendations and monitoring of the outcomes. While the project is still at an early stage, the ECI researchers see a clear lesson for future specification of University buildings, here and elsewhere: the long-term implications of operating a 24-hour building and the merits of different arrangements for flexible working need to be addressed thoroughly at the design stage.

One must not forget the activities in many of the colleges to reduce their carbon emissions, reduce waste and improve recycling. Indications are that waste recycling rates are increasing and the Sustainability Team's "Virtual Swapshop" is redirecting many articles away from landfill. Cycling to work is proving more popular than ever and many departments have found that video-conferencing saves money as well as cutting travel related carbon emissions.

This article attempts to provide a snapshot of environmental sustainable activities within the University and much more information can be found on the website: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/estates/environment/>

A Browne Study

ROBIN BRIGGS

THE Browne Report has predictably brought higher education funding into the forefront of British politics, arousing passionate feelings that will certainly be around for a long time to come, even if Parliament approves a modified version of Browne's key proposals before the end of this year. It was also predictable that press and public attention would focus overwhelmingly on the questions that most concern students and their families. How painful will the much higher rates of contribution be, and what effects will they have on participation rates across different sections of the population?

These are very real issues, but other aspects of the report are just as alarming and deserve more attention than they have received. It must also be said that the Russell Group universities are in no position to make a principled stand against higher fees, having made a submission to the Review calling for the fee cap to be lifted. As often happens it is hard to know how seriously that *démarche* was considered within the universities that comprise the Group; since everyone could see which way the wind was blowing it probably seemed no more than elementary *realpolitik*, even to those who looked back nostalgically to distant times when higher education was seen as a public good. The government clearly believes the funding issue has been decided in broad terms, unless there is a major parliamentary rebellion. Nor, one suspects, should students count on general popular support, even if they can rein in the disastrous fringe of violent demonstrators. So although many of us think this approach is a very bad choice, which will not even save money on any reasonable timescale, we are probably stuck with it.

It should also be said that if we must have such a system, most of the detailed changes proposed, in relation to repayments, part-time study, and the like, are improvements on the present scheme.¹ This is the only area in which this dismally flimsy document gives signs of any serious or analytical thinking. Far the most extended discussion is that on the respective merits of a loan system and a graduate tax, as if the committee members thought their main task was to arbitrate between David Willetts and Vince Cable. In every other respect this must be one of the most pathetically inadequate reports on a major

public issue ever produced. It only runs to sixty pages, and many of them are taken up by bullet points and repetitions of the simplistic mantras to which everything is reduced. Issues are never considered in any detail, while not one of the basic assumptions behind the proposals is ever challenged. As an intellectual performance this is simply derisory, as if to emphasize that this is a blatantly ideological document, whose recommendations were predetermined by the composition of the committee. As numerous commentators have observed, the report sees higher education in crudely utilitarian terms, a sausage machine producing the skilled labour vital for the national economy. One might well suppose that once a few small reserves for medicine and technology have been fenced off, Browne and his accomplices would be happy to see all other students take vocational courses or attend business school.

The students and academics who have taken to the streets have rightly linked the Browne proposals to the broader question of the overall funding and management of higher education. They can see that the apparently relentless process of commodification is gathering pace, with grave threats to the key values of the academy, while when read carefully the report actually recommends further reductions in per capita funding. The gospel according to Browne tells us that the sector is going to be leaner and fitter, with weaklings going to the wall; somehow this further diminution of already inadequate resources will translate into a revolutionary improvement in the student experience. What we have here is a notably pernicious version of the 'black box' or 'magic bullet' approach so beloved of politicians and administrators. A clever change in the funding arrangements will allegedly install 'drivers' that generate ideal outcomes, as institutions adjust themselves to the pressures of the market. When the results are disastrously bad, that will be identified as a minor design fault, to be righted by tightening a few regulatory screws here and there. Further failure will no doubt be blamed on the perversity and restrictive practices of those benighted liberal softies who have sought refuge in the ivory towers of academe. This is a classic example of pure market ideology, crudely ap-

plied in a wholly inappropriate context. As such it is part of that general trend to revert back from the communal to the individual that makes European observers so uneasy about the whole 'Anglo-Saxon' approach to social, economic, and educational policy.

In practice even the Browne committee pulled up short of carrying their proposals through to their logical conclusion. A completely unfettered market driven by student choice might leave us short of doctors, so here and elsewhere choice must be managed. Much more seriously, universities cannot be allowed to set their own fees outside a fairly narrow band, which means that at this level the whole market principle is undermined. No attention is paid to the lessons of the previous move to impose tuition fees, when it became crystal clear that status and reputation were so bound up with fee levels that barely any institutions would willingly adopt a low fee policy. There is no recognition that universities have massive investments in buildings, laboratories, books, and above all skilled people, which cannot simply be switched to meet the vagaries of student choice, the elixir which is supposed to reinvigorate the whole system. The committee, by construing its terms of reference narrowly to suit itself, has given no consideration at all to the overall balance of university funding, where a major problem has long been recognized by all sensible people. For both prestige and financial reasons the various forms of research assessment have produced massive distortions, with teaching severely downgraded, the academic world swamped by mediocre publications, and the peer review system collapsing under the pressure of pointless applications for research funding. This juggernaut is hardly going to be stopped, or even slowed down, by the crumbs that Browne will throw to teaching.

The grand sweep of this panoramic vision seems to have left no room at all for an attempt to judge the detailed impact of the proposals at the institutional level. The report makes no more than a barely perceptible mention of the huge diversity of the higher education sector, and assumes that the market remedy will work everywhere, except (or perhaps especially) where the truly sick are mercifully eliminated. Nor does the committee seem to have thought about some kind of compromise, with tuition fees being increased but a reduced central funding element being retained to improve strategic policy-making and smooth fluctuations. Where mundane considerations do briefly come into view the solutions hardly inspire confidence. Perhaps school leavers will not be quite up to speed, if they are to exercise their miraculous powers as rational choice agents. So let's compel the schools to give them all 'individualized career advice', and install a perfectly trained and certified adviser in every school to guide them further. Some of us thought that schools already tried quite hard in these respects; can we really suppose that this heavy-handed intervention will fill a void and change the world? These 18-year-olds also need information on which to base their choice, so they are to be swamped with documentation about university courses, including the likely financial rewards after graduation. The grotesque unreality of the whole scheme may have escaped the lordly view of a business tycoon, but one might have hoped that some committee members would have raised serious questions.

There is, of course, an important literature about choice and the paradoxes it throws up, especially in

complex modern societies. The key notion of the hidden hand (very marginal to the thought of Adam Smith himself) is widely questioned and has never been proved. Even those who believe the market operates well at the level of consumer goods might wonder about young people making career choices, who are confronted by truly vertiginous problems. Many of these involve guesses about future performance and long-term outcomes that are exceptionally difficult, as anyone who has ever tried to advise a child will know. Then how on earth are the consumers to be protected against the advertising – for that is what it already is – put out by universities? These are almost without exception decent institutions whose management and staff aspire to be excellent, so there is no deliberate deceit when they gild the lily a little and present aspirations as if they were realities. Nor is it remotely plausible that surveys and tables will reliably expose these half-truths; there is indeed already plenty of evidence for how these can be manipulated. Yet again the report suggests a blind faith in management tools whose inadequacy is obvious from the start.

For a startling example of the way once sensible people can be swept away with the group one need only turn to the *Times Higher Education* of 11 November. Here David Eastwood continues his role as the chief apologist for the report. He denounces critics as timid conservatives, implying that they cannot have read the report – presumably he thinks that anyone who did read it would fall down and worship at the new managerial altar, overwhelmed by the sagacity of the committee. In an amazing passage he envisages perfectly informed student choice driving up standards all round:

'The greatest prize of all is a redefined relationship between students and institutions of higher education. Students will enter as discriminating and informed applicants and will study as expectant and committed learners in high-quality and highly motivating environments. Teachers will be reanimated because fee-dependent institutions will never again undervalue the great calling and art of university teaching, and quality assurance will become embedded within, rather than retrospectively imposed on, courses of study.'

These sound like the words of a visionary, intoxicated by the (alleged) transforming power of the market. How this astonishing transformation of human nature and institutional deficiencies is to be accomplished by the imposition of a deeply unpopular fee system, coupled with a cut in real resources, one can only wonder. Eastwood has also made the reasonable sounding case that the vast expansion in student numbers renders the bill for teaching too big for the state to bear; he makes no attempt to answer the more realistic question why most future students should be liable for the *full* cost of teaching.

In time-honoured fashion Browne presented his plans as an organic whole, which the government should not modify in detail. In equally traditional fashion the government has already done just that, rejecting the bizarre proposal for a tax on fees above the baseline, which is certainly sensible. What is more worrying is the suggestion, probably to appease the LibDems, that higher fees should be accompanied by some unspecified requirements on access and other 'public interest' issues. Where Browne did at least pretend to reduce the regulatory pressures, politics are all too liable to intervene and impose

damaging forms of window-dressing all over again. Another concern lies with the proposals for changes in the regulatory structure of higher education laid out in the report. Browne would turn the present array of quangos into just two conglomerates; this is bluntly advocated with no attempt whatsoever to discuss the pros and cons of the present system or evaluate its performance. The idea that there might be some reasons for a division of powers has plainly either never occurred to the committee, or been dismissed as old hat. One can only hope that the government will be cautious here too, and at the least undertake some consultation. If the committee used its terms of reference to take an excessively narrow view on funding, here it might be thought to have gone beyond them, and to have done so with no evidentiary basis at all.

* * *

So while I shall not be demonstrating myself, I believe that the protesters (who cannot be accused of mere self-interest, since they will not pay the new fees) are right to see the Browne report as a dangerous and misguided document. It encapsulates a philistine vision of higher education which, if applied systematically, would destroy one of the jewels in the national crown. World-class universities must take as their first objective the pursuit of truth across the whole spectrum of knowledge; in their educational role this means subjecting students to rigorous and structured courses, which will train them to think independently. This central point appears to have been a closed book to the Browne committee, which thinks the way to improvement is to empower not even current students, but school leavers who have yet to acquire any direct knowledge at all of what universities are about. Of course such empowerment is a mirage, because individual choices will remain as random as ever, while student culture will retain its ancient anarchic style. I'm rather glad about that, because Eastwood's vision of happy dedicated toilers sounds more dystopian than utopian to me. Meanwhile we should all be worrying, because along with the vacuous concept of the knowledge economy, current trends threaten us with a higher education system enslaved to the alleged needs of business. If the system ends up producing generations of technically competent individuals with no ability to challenge authority then even the business world will suffer.

Where does this leave Oxford? David Willetts has already tacitly admitted that elite universities will have a strong claim for a higher level of fees, so if £9,000 is the top rate we have little choice but to charge that. The social origins of the student body, about which Nick Clegg claims to feel so angry, will presumably help us to balance this with a generous bursary scheme, preferably considerably better than anything we do now. Many students will see this as a craven surrender, but we are

very largely the prisoners of government policy; living in a democracy carries duties as well as privileges. We have to raise fees by at least the amount to replace the lost teaching grant to avoid bankrupting the university, and in so far as we are all trustees of a major charity it is arguable that we are legally obliged to do so. In fact Oxford undergraduates will still be heavily subsidized, because even at these fee levels there will be a very large contribution from college endowments. None the less there are many reasons to doubt the equity and wisdom of imposing such levels of debt on students, particularly those at less prestigious institutions. The policy is certainly politically inept, the more so when implemented by ministers whose backgrounds must make it difficult for them to imagine what this burden will represent for the less privileged. Young families struggling with housing and living costs are not likely to enjoy the thought that repayments kick in at income levels above £21,000. Is it not much too facile to claim that this very modest level of prosperity is the payoff for attending university, when most professions now regard a degree as a prerequisite? Mass higher education has the paradoxical effect of diminishing its economic benefit to the individual while enhancing pressures to unload the cost on him or her, and the committee has predictably chosen to ignore this awkward but obvious problem. In order to make its sums add up – although many doubt that this is more than a mirage anyway – it has ended up with something dangerously close to another regressive tax.

In the likely outcome some version of Browne will be imposed on us. If prospective students were really the rational choice superstars portrayed by the committee then we might hope that our access profile would change fairly sharply; Oxford is hardly likely to fail on any table, however primitive, claiming to show the financial rewards for its graduates. Since that outcome is highly unlikely, we will continue to be blamed for student choices we have so little power to influence, and for the failings of the state schools; we can only hope that ministers will continue to practice a degree of useful hypocrisy here, such as their own personal histories might induce. In the immediate we must hope that the University, in concert with others, can stand out against any damaging changes in the regulatory framework; here the Browne recommendations must be exposed as the jejune improvisations they plainly are. Above all we need to avoid panic; we must stick to our own tried and tested vision of academic values, teach serious subjects in a proper fashion across our whole traditional range, and keep the flag flying until the shallow ideological fixations exemplified by Browne find their rightful place in the dustbin of history.

¹ Improvements, but not necessarily the best choice for running a loans scheme. The much more balanced and sophisticated plan advanced by Professor Neil Shepherd is just one of the possible alternatives that are ignored here.

The next issue of Oxford Magazine will appear in noughth week

The right fee?

WILLIAM JAMES

APART from those on the neoconservative fringe, for whom the acceptance of taxpayers' money by universities is wrong in principle, most of us deplore the radical cut in HEFCE funding for undergraduate education, and the transfer of the financial burden to the students. It is hard to see how the move can fail to deter many able students of modest means, and it sends the signal that a university education, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, offers a purely private benefit, rather than enriching society as a whole. For those of us with late teenage children, the development is particularly unwelcome. Nevertheless, the political landscape has shifted decisively, and it seems futile to fight against the principle, at least for the time being. As a collegiate university, how do we figure out the appropriate fee to charge, and how do we make the case to our prospective students and their relatives that this represents good value?

The cost of an Oxford education is high, and it's clear that this must be so, given our complex structures and traditions. Just how high is it? Could we reduce its cost while maintaining or enhancing its educational quality? Could we offset its costs to students by using or raising our endowment income? Do its costs provide educational benefits that justify them? We claim that the true cost of an undergraduate education in Oxford is approximately £16,000 per year. In calculating a reasonable fee, we can omit the costs of laboratories and clinics (as HEFCE will still pay the Band A and B premiums), £6,200 is the cost of faculties, departments, collections and administration as determined by the TRAC(T) analysis¹, and £8,800 is the estimated cost of the college component. Both components could, and perhaps should, be scrutinized to look for potential cost savings, and perhaps the greater uncertainty and variability of the latter figure gives greater scope for value engineering². These costs are far above the £9,000 upper limit proposed for student fees, and in any case it is likely that a fee under the new regime of approximately £7,200 would leave us no worse off than under the old regime. The gap between our costs and the student fee income is closed by a number of sources of income, including dividends from our wholly owned subsidiary, OUP (£68m last year), and college endowment income (£88m per year). If we can "manage" on a fee of £7,200, should we reduce costs so we can manage on £6,000 per year, and thereby avoid the most intrusive government interference, or should we market ourselves as a high-fee university that offers a premium product?

How can we assess the value of the education we are offering to students? We know that Oxford graduates are very good; in objective terms, they have high employment rates, high average salaries, and so on. But to what extent is this quality of output a reflection of the education they receive in Oxford, and how much the result of high quality inputs? We know from extensive research in the US, for example, that most of the variation in educational outcome at graduation is explained by the SAT score of students on admission to college, and Oxford students have exceptionally high school-leaving grades. The good news is that the key characteristics of an idealized Oxford undergraduate education – particularly those expensive features that distinguish it from a more standard university education – map surprisingly well to the "process variables" that have been

found elsewhere to be predictive of high educational "gain" by students while at university.

Graham Gibb's recent report for the Higher Education Academy is a good place to start if one wants to read into this field³. As he reports, *smaller classes* are associated with higher educational gain, possibly because they encourage greater discussion and the exploration of ideas. Clearly the small classes that are common in Oxford and particularly the very small tutorial groups align well with this ideal. Second, the *more hours* a student devotes to learning, the greater the educational gain. A particularly beneficial regime is one in which a relatively small number of formal contact hours provoke a large number of hours of private study. While the UK HE sector as a whole lags far behind the international norms of undergraduate study hours, we know that Oxford bucks the trend, with some of the highest levels of private study in any university. Third, more direct student *contact with academic staff*, particularly if it persists over time, is associated with good outcomes, and is of course characteristic of the tutor-student interaction. Fourth, frequent, good quality *feedback* on a student's academic performance is a strong predictor of educational gain. Although in national surveys, Oxford students tend to report that they get low levels of feedback, in fact the weekly written comments on their tutorial work and the discussion it generally provokes must form a sector-beating level of feedback, to which we should perhaps draw more attention.

We have to be rather cautious in how much we trumpet the notion that our students benefit from contact with world-leading researchers for, plausible though the connection is, there is ample evidence from elsewhere that this does not of itself lead to improved educational gains, sometimes the reverse. Where the "research-teaching nexus" can be shown to be educationally beneficial, however, is when the student is an active participant in the research endeavour, or undertakes research-like learning tasks. Undergraduate research projects, whether in the library, in silico or in a laboratory, are a feature of many of our courses, and need to be nurtured if we are to be taken seriously when promoting ourselves as a research-led university. With these caveats, the characteristics of the Oxford tutorial system should be promoted in terms that both the educational world and our prospective customers outside the Ring Road can understand, as they comprise demonstrably valuable educational features. The corollary, of course, is that we must be quite certain that the practice meets the ideal, for paying customers could come to care about such things.

¹ HEFCE's "transparent approach to costing", for which data are annually collected and audited

² Of this, about £1,600 seems to correspond to the direct salary costs of college academics, if one assumes that all students get 12 paired tutorials per term from a tenured academic (about 50% higher than the norm suggested by the Franks Report but in line with subsequent recommendations), and the employment costs to the college of an hour of teaching are reflected in the "higher buy-out rate per annualized hour for a standard 12-hour CUF stint". This is given in the latest register of payments at £2,141. In simple-minded terms, then the academic employment cost to the college per student should be (£2141 × 1.5/2 = £1606).

³ Gibb, G (2010). *The Dimensions of Quality*. Higher Education Academy. ISBN 978-1-907207-24-2

Sustainability and the USS Pension

SUSAN COOPER

By the time this article is published, Oxford's Congregation will have voted on whether there will be a local ballot allowing us to express preference for either the EPF (representing employers) proposals or those made by the UCU (representing employees). What we really need is to convince them both to return to the negotiating table and engage in some more creative and clearer thinking.

It is in everyone's interest to have a sustainable pension scheme. What is not clear from the arguments presented is how to achieve that. We are told that one of the main pressures comes from increasing longevity, but usually without how much it has increased. In fact "has increased" isn't the point, but "is increasing", as it is a continuing process. Data for the general UK population on the remaining life expectancy for those who reach age 65 are shown as solid diamonds in the plot. The average rate of increase for men and women in the last 10 years is roughly 0.2 year per year.¹ For simplicity let's assume that everyone retires at 65 and currently the average person lives for another 20 years. We'll ignore inflation and assume the pension fund's investments don't earn anything (or equivalently that the two go at the same rate). Then the cost of paying pensions increases by $0.2/20 = 1\%$ per year due to the longevity increase. Every year. No single change, like that from final salary to CARE or from RPI to CPI, can keep up with this – they can only provide a temporary fix.

The only way to make a pension scheme sustainable in the face of a steady increase in longevity is to steadily change the scheme. One way would be to decrease the average pension by 1% per year. It wouldn't be fair to decrease that of pensioners because they have no other source of funds. The rate at which current employees accrue pension rights, the current $1/80^{\text{th}}$, could be decreased by 1% a year, but then every generation would have a poorer pension and/or would need to take time from their academic pursuits to learn about investment strategies and make their own other provision. The only sensible recourse is to adjust the normal retirement age

as longevity increases so the ratio of years in work and years in retirement stays about the same.²

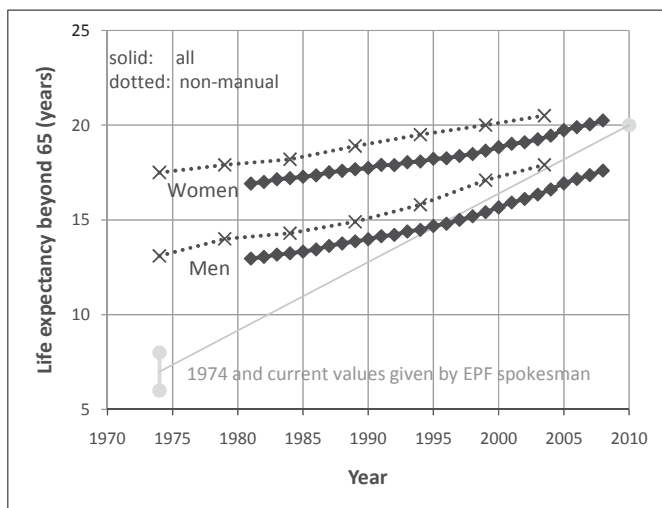
This approach is in accord with a sensible expectation of a pension and of retirement. Many years ago, people retired because they were unable to work any more, and a pension was to provide for them in their last few feeble years.³ As longevity improved, retirement started to be a period in which the average person could relax and enjoy things for a while before ill health set in. We can't expect that enjoyable period to continue to lengthen without penalty. If the penalty is not to be a reduced pension, we need to work longer.

The proposals tie the USS normal retirement age to the UK State Pension Age, so if the government increases that appropriately, this aspect will automatically be covered, and further changes to the pension plan are not needed.⁴

The other proposed changes are not to compensate for increased longevity but to allow a change to a more conservative investment strategy with lower investment returns in exchange for less risk and volatility. This has been made explicit in some supplementary information just posted on the USS web site⁵ and is much more likely to be the real motivation than the implausible increase in longevity cited by an EPF spokesman and shown by the grey points in the plot above.³ For example, changing from RPI to CPI for indexing pensions in payment saves on average 0.7% per year cumulative over the 20 years we have assumed as the average retirement period, giving a total savings of about 7%.⁶ Changing from final salary to CARE if both increase with RPI would decrease the pension by about 20% for a typical academic career path, giving another 20% savings.⁷ Yet USS is proposing additional and *completely unacceptable* reductions, using capped CPI for CARE and even more stringent capping at 2.5% for deferred pensions.

The change in investment strategy now becomes the central issue, as the harmful changes are based on USS's perceived need for such a change. The necessity of a change in investment strategy has been questioned by an actuarial opinion provided to the UCU.⁸ A company pension fund needs to reckon with the possibility that the company goes out of business in the near or medium-term future, but even if some universities go under due to the coming cuts, they are more likely to merge with others than disappear altogether. As a result, USS can afford to take a longer-term view and benefit from investments with a reasonable degree of risk. So this questionable policy needs to be weighed against the severity of the reduction in benefits.

The change of RPI to CPI for pensions in payment (i.e. for people after they retire) is probably a tolerable one. The main difference between RPI and CPI is that the latter excludes mortgage costs. Most of our pensions aren't large enough to support a mortgage during retirement in any case so we had better arrange our affairs to be able to pay ours off with our lump sum at the latest. However capping is not acceptable and the full CPI should be used. Otherwise the purchasing power of the pension is



not reliable during the period of retirement when people have no other recourse. Furthermore, it would probably be preferable to leave the USS inflation rate tied to that for “official pensions” rather than making CPI explicit, so as to accommodate further refinements in the government’s inflation calculations.

CARE initially appeared to me to be fairer than final salary, but I learned the dangers of it from the calculations Stephen Cowley and I performed for our article in the last issue of this magazine.⁷ It *might* be acceptable if full RPI were used for the revaluation *and* if we could rely on the pension fund not to back off from that *and* if the accrual rate were about 1/65th so the average pension was the same as in the current 1/80th final-salary scheme. But even then it is less transparent that final salary and there is significant danger of people assuming they will get more than they actually will and failing to plan properly, unless USS’s annual reporting to individuals of their pension status were considerably improved.⁹

A simpler way to avoid the “high flyers” problem would be to keep final-salary for “normal” salaries, say within the range of the agreed national pay scale, and put any higher salary component into something else, perhaps defined contribution and perhaps even with a lower employer contribution, say equal to the employee’s. This would keep the simplicity and transparency of final-salary for those on the basic salary scale and give them a safe pension at a reasonable level. Those with considerably higher earnings might well see it as an advantage to be able to choose how to invest their defined contribution component, but still have the safety net of their basic final salary pension. The pension fund would be relieved of carrying the investment risk for final-salary pensions on these higher salaries, the number of which seems to be growing rapidly according to our annual financial reports. “Normal” earners would be relieved of subsidising the pensions of those who get promoted at the end of their careers.

The pension fund would still have the risk of salary increases being higher than expected, but it is hard to believe this is a significant risk when averaged over a reasonable length of time. The 2006-2008 period was unusual with a multi-year pay settlement with the last increment tied to the inflation index, which happened to jump up just then, plus the change to the new national pay scales which gave many people an extra increase. The employers will have learned a lesson from that and the downturn in the economy is also doing its part to give us a regression to the mean.

Not changing basic salaries to CARE also has the advantage of avoiding a non-transparent benefits cut. If further savings were really required, it would be more honest to make it as an explicit and obvious cut, e.g. by reducing the 1/80 accrual rate. This numerical cut would require a reasonable argument to justify it quantitatively as well as qualitatively, which I see as an advantage. It could also be done for everyone, avoiding the problems of a two-tier scheme.

Cost sharing is a good thing in that it aligns incentives of employer and employee, but only if both costs and savings are shared. The USS pamphlet says “future cost increases and decreases (from above the base level) would be shared ... in the ratio 35:65”, with the base level defined as 16% employer plus 7.5% employee. I see no need for the phrase in parenthesis unless savings

below the base level are not to be shared, which is patently unfair. It is also unclear what is to happen for new members in CARE who will initially contribute 6.5% – will any increase first fall only on them until they reach the 7.5% base level?

Normal Retirement Age: The actuarial adjustments are calculated relative to the normal retiring age so when it moves up to say 68, anyone retiring earlier will get a pension that is adjusted downwards. Many older Oxford academics (and all at Cambridge) are in the anomalous position of having a contractual retirement age of 67 when the normal pension age of USS is 65. They can continue to accumulate years above the nominal 40 and when retiring at 67 receive an actuarial increase to their pensions; as a result they can get significantly more than 50% of final salary. If the requirement to retire at a specific age is removed, this financial benefit will only add to the temptation for people to stay on longer. The actuarial increase is only fair but it is not clear that accumulating more than 40 years of final-salary pension is needed; like salaries above the normal range, this would be a candidate for putting into a separate defined contribution pot.

The current policy of allowing people to retire at 60 without actuarial reduction and having other members in effect subsidise the cost is neither logical nor fair. However there is sense in allowing it if the employer both agrees and makes an extra payment to cover the cost. This would allow employers to have programmes like our current OMIS to encourage people to leave early at times when the employer feels a need to reduce staff numbers and wants to avoid compulsory redundancies. It might also make sense to keep the current requirement that the employer pay for enhanced pension benefit for people made redundant late in their career, at a time when it is difficult to start a new career. However a sharp threshold at 55 cannot be a good idea – it could induce employers to make people redundant at 54 in order to avoid the payment.¹⁰

New information has been provided by USS recently but it is not an improvement. The first is the USS Members’ Annual Report booklet which we received on about 17 November. It contains a loose insert “The proposed new changes to USS at a glance” which starts off with the statement “There is good news in that existing USS members would retain final salary benefits.” Is this not tacit admission that CARE for new members is “bad news”? I find abhorrent the attempt to guide existing members along the path of not caring about new members – the future of our profession.

The booklet itself comforts us with the news that the USS pension fund is doing well, “reversing much of the fall in value experienced in the previous year” (p.2), but leaves us puzzled at why drastic reductions to benefits are being proposed at the same time. We are further told that “the five-year returns now exceed both the Retail Price Index (RPI) and average earnings”, raising in the reader’s mind the question of why we should move to CARE indexed with capped CPI, but not answering it.

Worse, pp.8-9 discuss the change from RPI to CPI but give (only) 5 years of recent values that are not clearly labelled as either RPI or CPI but are indeed RPI, with *no* corresponding values of CPI to demonstrate the effect of the change. Terms like “misleading” and “false advertising” come to mind.

The second packet of information is the USS response,

dated 17 November, to a request from the trade unions.¹¹ Without seeing the questions it is impossible to know how well they have been answered, but there certainly appear to be omissions. The savings from changing the normal retirement age to 65 (1.3%) and changing indexation of pensions in payment and in deferment from RPI to CPI (1.4%) and further to capped CPI (0.7%) are tabulated but not the savings of moving to CARE. They assumed RPI to be 3.3% and CPI 0.5% lower, which is 2.8% and above the 2.5% cap for deferred pensions, so we see that the *plan* is to eat away at deferred pensions. We are told again that “The life expectancy of an individual retiring today is *many years* longer than it was when the scheme was set up in 1974” (my italics) but it is left at *many*, with no number given.

On 27 November I learned of a third packet of information, posted on the USS consultation web site after the deadline for this article, so I have only been able to make partial use of it.⁵

USS should have provided real information at the beginning of the consultation if it wanted members to be able to respond in a meaningful way. At the mid-point of the consultation period we had yet to see a useful worked example¹² from them, as recommended by the DWP Guidance.¹³ *They should take their responsibilities seriously and start the consultation again.*

Unfortunately we cannot count on them to do so. Members of Congregation would do well to take advantage of both the opportunities available to them: to vote in the local ballot and to send in an individual response to the USS consultation on <http://www.ussconsultation.co.uk/> by 22 December. Since preparing an individual response can take considerable time, some suggestions will be provided on <http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/users/scooper/USS/> for busy colleagues to use as a starting point, and comments are welcome on the ‘blog’ linked to that site.

¹ An overview of the Office of National Statistics (ONS) data is on <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/population/deaths/life-expectancies/index.html>. Since I am by no means attempting a precise calculation of pension costs but only seeking to show the underlying causes of an increase, I have chosen to use the form closest to the raw data and free of assumptions. These are the ‘interim life’ tables from the above web site for the general UK population. The solid lines in the plot shows the men’s and women’s data separately.

For USS costs, one needs data relevant to the USS population, for which various things like the mix of men and women and social class are important. I don’t know the mix of men and women (which may even be changing with time). An ONS report (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/Life_Expect_Social_class_1972-05/life_expect_social_class.pdf) gives data by social class. I have plotted (dotted lines) those for people in non-manual occupations; the values are higher but within errors (not plotted) the rate of change is the same.

Since a pension *fund* (unlike public pensions) collects funds *now* from current employees and invests them to pay for their pensions when they retire in the *future* (rather than having current contributions from employees pay current pensioners), it needs to calculate its *current* required contribution rate based on assumptions about what

life expectancies will be in the *future*. Those assumptions are based on current interim life statistics and how they have changed recently, plus guesses about the further future. A more realistic calculation of pension costs needs to include future increases.

Various other longevity plots are provided on <http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/users/scooper/USS/>.

² Investment returns and other actuarial issues might change this slightly so the ratio needn’t stay exactly the same. The accrual rate also needs to change so the typical annual pension stays at 50% of final salary rather than increasing because of the increased average years worked. In an entirely simple model, the total amount the average person pays in during his working career needs to equal the total pension he will receive during his retirement years. For simplicity assume the salary is constant at s , the contribution rate is a constant c , the years worked is w , the accrual rate is a , and the years in retirement is r . Then the total paid in is scw , the annual pension received is swa and the total pension received is $swar$. The initial values of these are indicated with a subscript 0 (except for s and c which are assumed to stay constant). To keep the annual pension constant as w and r increase, $swa = sw_0a_0$, we need $a = a_0w_0/w$. That means that if the average years worked increases from 40 to 50, the accrual rate changes from 1/80th to 1/100th. To make the total paid in equal the total received, $scw = swar = sw_0a_0r$, we need $r/w = c/(w_0a_0)$ which is a constant.

³ This was long before 1974 when USS started. In the 23 November *Guardian*, an EPF spokesman said that in 1974 an academic would expect to live 6 to 8 years after retiring. Although the main ONS data shown in the plot don’t go back to 1974, there would have had to be a dramatic change between 1974 and 1981 to accommodate his values, which are shown there in grey, along with a straight line connecting their average to his current value of 20 years.

⁴ At the 2008 valuation of USS, the national Default Retirement Age was still set at 65, effectively preventing the pension age from increasing as needed. Thus the employers’ contribution rate needed to be increased from 14% to 16% to cover the increased longevity and better estimates of its future increases.

⁵ See 10. in Supplementary Information in the Q&A section of <http://www.ussconsultation.co.uk/>. I doubt this was posted before 27 Nov. because notification was given to Oxford Council members only on that date (the information is answers to questions put to USS by Oxford).

⁶ After n years the cumulative effect of a constant RPI is $(1+RPI)^n$ and similarly for CPI, so the savings for the n^{th} year’s pension is $[(1+RPI)^n - (1+CPI)^n]$ times the initial pension. The expression in [] can be approximated as $n^*(RPI-CPI)$. The average savings over the n years is approximately half of that. Over the last 21 years the average RPI-CPI was 0.7%; CPI was not calculated for earlier years.

⁷ Susan Cooper and Stephen Cowley, “What do the USS pension changes mean?”, *Oxford Magazine*, No. 305 5th week MT2010, on <http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/users/scooper/USS/>.

⁸ <http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/s/f/ucu0411.pdf>

⁹ People who are not making Additional Voluntary Contributions may not see the problems with the current reporting, but I am and find it quite hard to decipher, as do the people in our pensions office.

¹⁰ The current threshold does appear to be sharp at 55, see <http://www.uss.co.uk/Factsheet%20List/Factsheet%2009%20v6.0.pdf>.

¹¹ Posted on <http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/users/scooper/USS/USS-TUs.pdf>.

¹² Three years of CARE as given in the original consultation paper is by no means sufficient to indicate its effect on a typical career. The Supplementary Information referred to in 5. includes some worked examples of CPI, but not of CARE.

¹³ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/occ-personal-pens-schemes-regs06.pdf>

Reforming USS – the case for change

PETER THOMPSON

The following text has been submitted to Oxford Magazine by the 'Employers Pensions Forum' - ed

The Employers Pensions Forum (EPF) was established by GuildHE, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) and Universities UK in 2007 as a broad based forum for HEIs to discuss current and longer term pensions issues and to develop a strategy that will enable the sector to continue to offer staff access to high quality pensions schemes as an important part of the total remuneration package. The EPF recognises that pensions are a crucial part of an attractive recruitment and employment package but the costs continue to rise significantly. The current USS consultation follows more than two years of discussions and negotiations between the employers and UCU to secure the future of the USS. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and their colleges, are some of the 370 participating institutions in USS where the consultation is being conducted, enabling 150,000 active and prospective members to comment. The 'What do the USS pension changes mean?' piece, *Oxford Magazine* (Fifth Week, Michaelmas Term 2010) by Susan Cooper and Stephen Cowley was brought to the EPF's attention because it raised points that required further comment for readers. Peter Thompson, BSc, FIA, an actuary with 30 years' pensions experience, has been working with EPF as an independent advisor for the past two years of USS research, negotiations, proposals and consultations. In 2007 Peter wrote 'Pension provision in the higher education sector: initial report' available at <http://www.employerspensionsforum.co.uk/en/publications/>. He is a director of the independent trustee company BESTrustees plc, and has been much involved with the National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF), as member of Council and Chair. EPF felt that Peter was an individual best suited to cover just some of the issues raised by Professor Cooper and Dr Cowley.

* * *

AMIDST the welter of ill-informed and politically-motivated comment about the proposed changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), it was rather refreshing to read the well-written and carefully-researched article in *Oxford Magazine*, No. 305, (Fifth Week, Michaelmas Term 2010) by Susan Cooper and Stephen Cowley. Some of the points made in that article do, I feel, merit further comment and this article has been written in an attempt to provide that.

The authors correctly identify *risk* as the key factor behind the proposed changes to USS. At present, the employers take all the risks underlying USS: investment, longevity, inflation and pay growth risks all land on the employers' doorstep if the experience is less favourable than expected. Worse still, the employers' contributions to USS are not in their control; rather, they are set by the USS Trustee, which must ensure that the scheme is able to meet its liabilities. The employer cannot ultimately refuse to pay the contribution rate set by the Trustee (unless the Trustee can be shown to be acting unreasonably).

This situation may have been all well and good back in the 1970s, when USS was set up, but the main risks underlying the scheme have become increasingly evident during the last decade. There have been significant increases in longevity and this is expected to continue. Pay growth in the sector has greatly exceeded the scheme actuary's estimates and as a result USS has faced additional costs of £1.35 billion. USS's investment performance has reflected the fact that global equity markets have been marking time for more than a

decade. The need for the sector's employers to contain these increasing cost pressures has been underlined by the uncertainties about the future funding of the sector following the recent spending review announcement.

To these significant pressures on the scheme must be added the external pressures for reform. There is a growing political consensus that today's students, or their parents, or the taxpayer, should no longer have to pay for academics to be able to retire at 60 on an index-linked final salary pension.

To be fair to Cooper and Cowley, they do not seem to be arguing that a final salary scheme should be retained for academics. Virtually all the private sector has moved away from final salary provision, and it seems very likely that the Hutton review will lead to the public sector going the same way. Rather, the authors suggest that the present proposals should be modified in various ways, mostly involving risk being moved back towards the employers.

I found it particularly interesting, though, that the authors, in referring to Hutton's first report, say that "career average is arguably a fairer scheme as you get what you pay for". The type of pension scheme design which meets the "you get what you pay for" criterion most closely is, of course, a pure money purchase scheme, in which each member's pension is derived exactly from his/her own contributions, plus those of the employer, plus investment return. All other types of scheme involve some sort of cross-subsidy, whether from early leavers to long stayers, plodders to high flyers, or any one of several other possibilities. However, money purchase provision also involves a very big risk transfer from the employers to the employees – certainly far greater than the relatively modest proposals under consideration at the moment.

The authors focus very heavily on the impact of inflation on members' benefits, including inventing the idea of reversing time to give more dramatic examples. The discussion of inflation is, however, worthy of further consideration.

First, the switch from RPI to CPI was instigated by Government. The motivation for this change has been extensively covered elsewhere and there is no need for me to comment on it here. However, it is worth noting that the change which will affect pension increases under USS does not need any legislative amendment, and it is generally assumed that the official pension increase order which will be issued in December 2010 will reflect September's CPI (which was 3.1%) rather than RPI (which was 4.6%). Changing the USS rule which links pension increases to changes in 'official pensions' would require the agreement of the USS Joint Negotiating Committee. It is not accurate to say, as the authors do, that "the Trustees have chosen historically to mirror official pensions" – they were simply following scheme rules as agreed in the past.

There has been much discussion in academic and pensions circles of the differences between CPI and RPI, their sources and their persistence. It is clear that the most persistent difference, which consistently comes out at about 0.5% per annum, arises from the different construction of the CPI (geometric rather than arithmetic, for those interested in such things). A much more detailed statistical explanation can be found at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/New_inflation_target_031210.pdf.

Second, the authors correctly identify that in periods of high inflation, pensions with limited increases will lose value compared to those without limits. There is at present no consistent view on the likely course of future inflation in the UK, with some commentators forecasting deflation (in which case pensions would actually gain in value by virtue of not being reduced when inflation is negative), whereas others predict high inflation. I have no idea which is more likely. It is worth noting, however, that the proposed changes to USS Rules will include a provision that the Trustee will be able to grant higher increases, on a discretionary basis, subject to the prevailing rate of inflation and the availability of funds. So if, as postulated by Cooper and Cowley, USS's investments do outpace inflation, it is to be hoped that it will prove possible to grant increases in excess of the guaranteed level.

The authors also claim that "the CARE scheme being advocated is a very poor deal" and in support of their argument put forward the single example of the unusually generous scheme offered in the Civil Service (which offers a retiree with 40 years' service a pension of nearly 100% of career average revalued salary). I can assure them that most employees in the private sector would be very happy to be offered a CARE scheme along the lines of that proposed in the HE sector; it will be interesting to see whether the unfunded "nuvos" scheme in the Civil Service survives the Hutton review intact.

Finally, we need to consider the investment issues underlying the proposed changes to USS. For many years, USS has had a policy of investing the vast majority of its assets in "return-seeking" investments, predominantly equities. There is no secret that equities have proved a very disappointing

investment over the last decade, and USS has been affected by this as much as any other scheme – indeed, more so given the very high proportion of its assets held in equities. Pension schemes now have to mark their assets and liabilities to market, so declines in equity values are of real concern to the HE employers in view of their responsibility to meet the balance of cost of the scheme. It will be apparent that, at the present time, if the employers were to be asked to contribute an extra (say) 5% of salaries to meet a deficit in USS, that would necessarily have a real impact on universities' teaching and research activities.

The funding level of 91% reported by USS in March 2010 is undoubtedly a substantial improvement on the disastrously low level of 75% achieved in March 2009 (almost exactly the bottom of the equity bear market), but what these figures serve to illustrate most graphically is the huge volatility which the present investment strategy entails. Regrettably, although equity markets have improved since March 2010, bond yields have sunk to very low levels meaning that the funding position is probably much the same now as it was in March – that is, a deficit of about £3bn on a basis which assumes favourable future investment returns.

All in all, the cocktail of risks which the sector faces as a result of the operation of USS was becoming so worrying that the employers felt that the situation could not be allowed to persist any longer. It is of sufficient magnitude to threaten the viability of some institutions and Governing Bodies, charged with ultimate responsibility for the finances of institutions, were demanding change. The currently proposed changes are the least which can be accepted if the risks to the sector are to be kept within reasonable bounds.

Blue Plaque for first Oxford Playhouse

EDA FORBES

An Oxfordshire Blue Plaque commemorating the first Oxford Playhouse was unveiled at 12 Woodstock Road, now Oxford University Language Centre, on 14th October 2010. The building had been erected as a Big Game Museum in 1906 but provided an auditorium for Oxford's first repertory theatre from 1923 to 1938 when funds were raised for the purpose-built theatre at Beaumont Street. Celebrated actors such as John Gielgud and Flora Robson trod the boards at Woodstock Road in their youth.

Miss Priscilla Tolkien unveiled the plaque and shared the following early memories:

"I am delighted to be here today for the unveiling of the Plaque in memory of the Old Playhouse and to stand again in this building which I first entered seventy years ago when I saw my first pantomime here. This was Dick Whittington with a young actress, Yvonne Rorie, as the very black and delightful cat with whom I fell in love.

My memories then go forward a few years to 1937 and 1938 to a kind of Arts Festival called The Oxford Summer Diversions held in the middle of the University Long Vacation and directed by Judith Masefield, daughter of the then Poet Laureate, John Masefield, and by Nevill Coghill, then Tutor in English at Exeter College. He already had an established reputation as a theatre director and in particular for his productions of Shakespeare. I have vivid images of what I was strongly connected to personally. The mother of two school friends, Frances Frazer, was a talented actress and took the leading role in a late mediaeval play, Gammer Gurton's Needle. I remember scarcely anything about

the play but I do remember that she was a loud voiced, domineering figure and not at all like the charming kindly lady who with her family was friendly with our family. This was an eye-opener: she was Gammer Gurton, something of a harridan but also Mrs Frazer, and at that time I was not sure how this could be.

More dramatic still was seeing my father, J.R.R. Tolkien, playing Geoffrey Chaucer and dressed up in costume representing the figure of Chaucer in the Ellesmere MS. The first year he recited The Nun's Priest's Tale from The Canterbury Tales and the second year The Reeve's Tale, both possibly slightly shortened but it was still a considerable feat of memory to learn several hundred lines of Middle English and act them convincingly. I was proud and fascinated, I think, to see him dressed up and performing but I remember feeling affronted when my then best friend at school, after we had watched an amateur ballet company with a young man rather heavy on his feet, turned round and asked if this young man was my father! I don't think I gave her a very friendly answer. I had no doubt thrown my weight about at school about my family connections with the Festival.

Sadly, the Summer Diversions ended with the outbreak of war in September 1939 and were never resumed, but the wonderful new Playhouse opened in 1938 and that is part of the story we have heard from Michelle Dickson (the present Director of Oxford Playhouse).

It is a great privilege and pleasure now to be reminded of how much I owe to the Playhouse through so many years of its history and mine.

Thank you again for inviting me."



CHRISTMAS COMPETITION 2010



You are invited to send to *Oxford Magazine* a Letter along the lines of the following example offered by a colleague (and no more than 400 words long). The Letter should be addressed to a Vice-Chancellor and it should offer him or her advice or congratulations, as appropriate.

Two entries (as judged the most meritorious by a panel of Oxford sceptics) will be published in *Oxford Magazine*. Book credits will be awarded by OUP as prizes. Please send entries, by January 3rd, to tim.horder@dpag.ox.ac.uk

from: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Reputation Management)
to: Chief Executive, Oxford Universities WCC

Dear Fred,

You asked me—now that I have reached the ever-advancing minimum retirement age of 85—to jot down a few thoughts on the benign changes that have marked my long tenure of office. I will try to identify only the key moments in that bright story.

I am tempted to choose for pride of place that golden moment when the number of administrators in our outfit exceeded, for the very first time, the number of (so called) academics. But I suppose a more prudent choice would be the publication of the Browne Review, just thirty years ago. That event served our purposes beautifully, for at no point did it address the question of what a university is for: it was wisely praised for being “reader friendly”, contrasting favourably with the ponderous arguments of the justly forgotten Robbins Report. The Review made no presumptuous claims to be permanent or principled, and so inaugurated two decades of such Reviews, each followed by Government tinkering. We were blessed with, in rapid succession, the Greene, Blacke, Greye and Pinke Reviews—finally culminating in the Rainowe Review of Reviews, which helpfully concluded that the whole series should be aborted and we could at last be left alone to do what we please. And what pleased us in Oxford (not of course that our academic cousins were ever asked) was that a world-class research-rich university should be developed—free from political interference, uncluttered by sloppy ideals, handsomely endowed, focused on success, and now sitting proudly at the very top of the Shanghai II League Table.

A plausible rival for “most significant moment” must however be the federation (the world “merger” was studiously avoided) of our two local universities in one world class conglomerate (WCC). Multiple advantages flowed from this coup. The teaching of undergraduates anywhere within 1 mile, 5 furlongs and 24 rods—see how we do keep to some charming old habits—of Carfax has long been formally prohibited, so that all this activity now takes place in Headington. This has freed the historic university, as it is still sometimes quaintly called, to redeploy much of its space. The plans for the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter could be sensitively modified (and only just in time!) to allow for the elimination of all redundant provision for the humanities and the devotion of the freed space to more relevant purposes. The Wellcome Medical School (which finally achieved its independence only last year) is ac-

knowledged as the second best in the world—for research at least, although local patients might mistakenly prefer a more nuanced judgment—and shares much of its glitter with its old parent down the hill. The resources for recreational subjects, like history and philosophy, have been quietly decanted to the Charles Clarke Memorial Centre in Swindon.

It has not, of course, all been plain sailing: the so-called *Revolt of the Academic Serfs* was a troublesome embarrassment for you personally, when you were pro-VC (Branding). The occupation of the Sheldonian in 2022 by disgruntled post-docs and so-called College Lecturers gave us all a few sleepless nights. Their leaders had recently “exposed” the scandal (although everyone here was well aware if it) of the underpayment and overworking of such people, who had by then shouldered virtually all the teaching “load” of College Fellows who themselves—justifiably and inevitably—needed to find time to burnish our world class reputation for research. That was indeed a bad moment, but the merger which I have already praised, together with the elimination of all face-to-face tutorial teaching, has neatly disposed of the problem.

The use of our iconic buildings has thrown up many a tricky problem, but the Working Party on the Re-engineering of Space has already achieved spectacular results. Most of the Colleges have, of course, become attractive dormitories for graduate students. Fellowships in them have been carefully preserved as honorific ornaments, and at my own College we shall next week thoroughly enjoy the annual occasion when we all dress up in gowns—hired from the Radcliffe Camera Regalia Hire Centre—and play a recording of our Latin grace. It is truly wonderful that we can still do this once a year, and so honour our deep traditions. Some parts of the estate are now more specialised. In the Turl Heritage Complex one College has become a media centre, attracting a steady stream of customers to daily high-tec simulations of Morse and Hogwarts, while another has significantly reduced traffic problems by becoming a permanent and highly profitable film set. The third seems likely soon to find a niche as a hotel, as there is a persisting shortage of such accommodation in the city. The future of Christ Church is now being carefully reviewed by the Royal Commission on Multicultural Sensitivity. All Souls is awkward—but no more so than it always was.

These are indeed dramatic developments, without which this place would undoubtedly have become a backwater redolent with nostalgia. As a consequence we have been able to set aside once and for all those awkward issues of access and equity, which wasted so much of our valuable time as we battled with the Regulators in the years after Browne, and before the death of the old Liberal Democratic party. You will remember the trouble we had in selling off the University Access Train, bought as a bargain from King William V and then appropriately based at Swindon, which for years trundled up and down the country searching for bright—and sometimes disadvantaged—young people to lure to Oxford and help us meet those oppressive quotas. What a very long time ago all that now seems. Just think that if you and your whole Stanford team—as world-class baseball players of course—had not secured an exemption from that short lived immigration cap we might have missed the fun.

With all good wishes for the festive season.

Adolphus Spynne

A Note from Seattle and Victoria, B.C.

MARY ANN CAWS

LOTS of rain, more mist in Victoria, British Columbia, oddly bracing. Some things are always here, like ultra-old colonial proper beyond belief Empress Hotel, known for its Bengal Lounge (“turn right at the elephant” serves as direction) and its afternoon tea service. (The ultimate irony of discussing anything postcolonial in such a colonial setting is gorgeously obvious.)

People come to Victoria often for the Gardens which are everywhere: the famed Butchart Gardens, just outside the city, the Crystal Gardens, just across from the bus station, and the Undersea Gardens, at the port. Right across from the Empress Hotel, the Royal British Columbia Museum is about as spacious and informative as any historical museum could possibly be. Hall after hall displays treasures from the First Nation peoples, the tribes and totems and ways of living. Every time it seems to me still more impressive, still larger, with its dioramas and dark places. Outside is a traditional longhouse, with a skyscraper of a totem pole and a face looking out onto the road. When the surrealists came over to North America during World War II (“Surrealism in Exile,” as in Martica Sawin’s book on the topic), some of them went up to the West Coast of Canada and explored the territories of the Salish, Saanich, and other tribes. The artist heroine of Victoria (and the reason I first came to Victoria and Vancouver) is Emily Carr, a superb painter of First Nation tribal art and the great forests and lakes of the Pacific Northwest. Her writing, both quirky and brilliant, is a discovery to make if one hasn’t already come across it, and her life with her various animals: her pet rat, her monkey she kept with her at all times, and various other creatures, is – to put it very mildly – unusual. At an advanced age, she set forth in a sort of van called ‘The Elephant’, to set up her easel and create. In front of the Empress, she remains in bronze, monkey and all, and one should salute her as one passes.

Lots of happening things happened here this November, in conjunction with the annual conference of the Modernist Studies Association. One evening, in a small theatre space called “Open Space Gallery,” a genius actress also a scholar participant in the meetings (author of *Archaeology and Modernism*), Sasha Colby performed as H.D. in an extract of a full theatre piece about H.D., in which she played all the roles: H.D. young with Ezra Pound, H.D. later, with Freud, H.D. elderly, cramped over. It was an electric performance, and moving to tears. There was also probably the first performance of a play by Mina Loy, ‘The Pamperers’, discovered in a 1920 issue of *The Dial*, and then reprinted in 1996 in the *Performing Arts Journal*. Other evenings, there were salons at Emily Carr’s house, one discussing her work and another, that of Joyce.

Victoria is full of places to have oysters from Fanny Bay, which are, in my view, best consumed just like that, although they are often offered fried and dusted with Panko (those Japanese bread crumbs for fish) and even in an Oyster Burger. There is always the rightly-named ‘The Oyster’, and there is, even better, my favorite place

for hanging out, Bartholomew’s, serving local beer from Granville Island, off Vancouver, and all sorts of lightly-priced fresh foods, spinach salad being a superb choice. It features dim lighting and a general laid-back manner, as does the Wharfside Seafood Grill, with a view right on the harbour and prices right up there with the view. Ships in the harbour, and at night, the Parliament Building lit up in profile, lights on the trees, the whole kit and caboodle.

Walking is just as delightful in Dickensian Victoria. Fort Street is bordered with gas lamps, in clusters of three, and a very (seriously) old world feeling. I arrived there this time on Remembrance Day, and the place around the Parliament Building was packed with sober-faced persons, all red-flower wearing (poppies, like Flanders Field? I couldn’t tell), complete with prayers and songs and canon fire from the water. I felt very pagan, making my way to the Queen Victoria Hotel, where my stay was included in a Victoria Clipper package, a return voyage between Victoria and Seattle.

When you go back to Seattle, from wherever you are, you find such a relaxed place, with a mindset totally unlike that of New York. Even the Seattle Art Museum (I love the initials SAM, makes you feel at home) is a joy – now at the moment, it has a Picasso show, made from the holdings of the Picasso Museum in Paris, being remodelled. When I was sitting at my very, very favorite restaurant in Seattle, at Pike’s Market (“turn left at the pig,” whose hoof prints are all over the sidewalk), called ‘Matt’s in the Market’, on the very top floor, I heard the story. I always sit at the bar, above which is a large sign: *Counter Intelligence*, one of those places you don’t have to take a book or paper to read. You can just sit and be happy. So I was sitting and being happy in the sunbeam streaming through the large interestingly-shaped windows. Having steamed clams in a broth with chives and leeks was a total joy. A waiter rushed over with hot bread to dunk up the bottom of the bowl in, and a glass of the local brew (Pike’s, of course), and the proprietor told me the Picasso-Seattle story. The exhibition is truly magnificent, with some of the very best pieces displayed, and an instructive audioguide with comments on the paintings by Chuck Close, Pepe Carmel, and Anne Baldessari from the Picasso Museum in Paris.

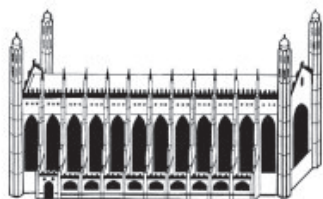
I exuded my joy at re-being here in Seattle and here at Matt’s and told him I was coming back to lecture on the Picasso exhibition next month, etc., and he told me about his favorite place in New York: ‘Mary’s Fish Camp’ in the West Village, and then he said: “You know why we got the Picasso?” “Nope,” I said, all ears; “Well, the director of the museum flew over to the Picasso Museum and said we’d love to have a Picasso exhibit. And so we do.” Picasso always gets people talking – when MOMA in New York was being remodeled, the joke was they had a very few “Picasso-free” rooms. When I mention that to my friends, they never even giggle.

So, in Seattle, you can walk and walk along Elliot’s Bay, for ages, visit the very large Aquarium, or sample

some of the extraordinarily-complicated dishes here and there, at the Dahlia Lounge (appetizers with this on that) or the Purple Café (here, all sorts of local cheese, all served with very long and very crisp homemade crackers and fig jam, perhaps with a glass of Washington State Riesling they recommend, and here you can look up at the immensely high stair full of bottles reaching up several floors).

To return to Seattle, as I hope often to do, is, what with Pike's Place Market and the free bus along the road by the Bay and the walkability of the place, if you don't mind ups and downs, and – well, everything. Seattle is truly lovable. Lest it be thought that I *only* care about

eating and drinking, let me point out that you have only to find somewhere to sit and stare at Elliott Bay to be convinced how lovable is this city. Groups of young people on the streetcorners seem unthreatening, the bookstore owners seem truly involved in what you might like to read or see, the less expensive hotels are delighted to have you, while the more expensive ones (like the Kimpton Chain) love to offer you all sorts of wines to cheer up your evening. At the Hotel Monaco, a quirky red-oriented place, you are offered a goldfish in a bowl to keep you company, in case you miss your pet. Very endearing, like all of Seattle.



Notes from Cambridge

A 50-member Grace has been initiated by the Regent House in Cambridge to match the Resolution of Congregation debated on 30 November. The match is close; the terms are almost exactly the same, Cambridge having taken over the wording used in Oxford before the amendment was proposed. In both universities there has been huge concern not only over the proposed changes to the terms of the USS but also over the lack of information made available to members of the pension scheme to enable them to respond to the 'consultation'. But the simultaneous use of the parallel constitutional 'levers' in the two universities which enable their academic democracies to intervene directly in events is probably a first. The *Guardian* presented this as a colourful story on 23 November.¹

Readers of the *Magazine* may be interested to know something of the background to events in Cambridge and to compare the working of the two constitutions in the 'emergency action' of initiation of legislation by their respective sovereign bodies.

Cambridge has a 'University Governance' forum which began as a Newsgroup at the time of Cambridge's 'governance-change' proposals a few years before Oxford's own recent governance battles began. The forum and its predecessor are open to everyone with a cam.ac.ID, including students and administrators. The postings now number 1167 'topics', some with many comments; by agreement, all items and all comments have been preserved in the record from the beginning.

The forum has been alive with discussion of the USS proposals since the middle of October. Contributors have painstakingly teased out the unclarity and uncertainties, matters on which the information given for the purposes of the consultation is plainly inadequate. It is also being asked whether there is any need for the changes at all, if it is any longer true that the fund is underfunded, now that the stock market has risen. Cambridge is not short of competent mathematicians and they have been doing their sums, some jointly with Oxford, as readers of the *Magazine* were able to see in the article by Susan Cooper and Stephen Cowley in the last issue.

In Cambridge a member of the Council tabled a paper in October proposing that a Working Group should be set up to consider whether members of the scheme should be provided with fuller information, illustrations and examples.² This was agreed and³ the Council came to the view that something should be done to ensure that Cambridge carried out, and was seen to carry out, an exemplary consultation. Cambridge wrote to USS expressing its regret that more information had not been provided.

What can be done to take the consultation by the scruff of its neck and cause a radical reconsideration of the proposals? In each university a legislative proposal initiated by the academic community has now come before its Council. Oxford has in place machinery not ideally designed for the purpose 'work' by generating a Debate, that is, by arranging for the Council formally to oppose the Resolution.

In Cambridge the mechanism is different. Cambridge's legislative acts are 'Graces' by which the Regent House permits the University's domestic legislation to be changed. Normally a recommendation approved by the Council is published in the *Reporter* along with a *Report* explaining its purpose. This automatically triggers a Discussion of the Senate at the next opportunity, which is normally very soon, in term-time the next Tuesday but one. (In Cambridge Discussions all members of the University may speak, including graduates and students; they are not confined to the Regent House and they retain their old name of Discussions of the Senate, which is the equivalent of Convocation.)

Very occasionally, the Regent House itself initiates a legislative proposal. Statute A, VIII,7 provides that 'Any fifty members of the Regent House may initiate a Grace for submission to the Regent House.' However, the Grace must pass muster with the Council before it is put to the Regent House for approval. 'No Grace shall be submitted to the Regent House or the Senate except with the authorization of the Council' (A,VIII,6).

It may be remembered that the last 50-member Grace initiated in Cambridge—the one about the Lift in the Combination Room - had a rocky ride. The Council stated that it would not allow the Grace to be submitted.

That itself required a *Report* to the University, and the resulting Discussion went down in the record as a blistering attack on this attempt to ignore the wishes of the University's sovereign body ('plain abuse of power'; 'underlying rot'; 'pusillanimous Council'; 'insolent Administrative Service').⁴

Professor Anthony Edwards took the opportunity at that Discussion to remind members of the Regent House how the principle that the Regent House could initiate legislation had come to be built into the constitution in the course of the 'Wass reforms' of the early 1990s, Cambridge's counterpart to the 'North reforms' in Oxford:

*'Statute A, VIII was contained in the Third Report of the Statutes and Ordinances Revision Syndicate in 1993, where its purpose was clearly set out..... The Syndicate was required to draft an Oxford-style procedure for allowing 50 or more members of the Regent House to initiate a Grace, which would, of course, only happen if the Regent House, as governing body, wished for a vote on a Grace that the Council was not prepared to submit itself.'*⁵

It was considered constitutionally smoother at the time for these Graces to go forward through the Council and with its approval, 'with the understanding that this was for convenience only and not an invitation for the Council to withhold the Grace'. The checks and balances were so arranged that were the Council to do so, 'the ultimate decision' remained 'firmly in the hands of the Regent House. That is, if the Council wants to withhold submission it has to get the approval of the Regent House by way of a *Report* giving an acceptable reason.'⁶

The 50-member Grace about the USS consultation was worded in direct imitation of the Oxford Resolution (in its unamended form) and was put up on the forum to invite signatures.⁷ About 150 were obtained in short order. Cambridge Council considered this 'USS' Grace at its meeting of 22 November. The *Reporter* of 24 November carries a Notice. The Council does not submit the Grace for approval by the Regent House, but proposes to go ahead and implement what it requests.⁸ This arrangement is constitutionally untidy, since there are really only two options open to the Council, to publish a *Report* explaining why it is *not* willing to allow the Grace to go forward, or to publish the Grace and wait to see if signatures are collected for a Non Placet. Ironically, given the frequency of Discussions of the Senate in Cambridge, there will be no Discussion to compare with the Oxford Debate, since there is as yet no *Report* to Discuss. Eventually, the Council recognises, it will have to report to the University about this Grace. 'To comply with the terms of Statute A, VIII, the Council intends to report formally in due course'. Then there will be a Discussion. 'But in the meantime the consultative voting by affected persons can be taking place'.

In both universities a pragmatic and constructive response to the use of the constitutional lever available to the academic community seems to have achieved the desired result, but in neither has the mechanism been ideally adequate for the purpose. Cambridge's method does not allow the putting down of a last-minute amendment like the one in Oxford designed to go beyond the original motion and seek to force USS itself to respond. Neither, as it has been handled, does it provide an opportunity for public on-the-record Discussion at this crucial stage. But Oxford has had to adopt a pseudo-confrontational response in order to generate that Debate. There may be constitutional lessons to be learned. But a little creakiness scarcely seems to matter when the two sovereign bodies can once again so gloriously demonstrate the importance of academic governance. In no other universities can pensioners future and present make their will so decisively felt.

G.R. EVANS

¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/nov/23/oxbrid-ge-pensions-academics-protest-united>.

² <http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/sjc1/Pensions/Council.pdf>.

³ <http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/sjc1/Pensions/Review-10-10-25.pdf>.

⁴ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2009-10/weekly/6187/section8.shtml>.

⁵ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2009-10/weekly/6187/section8.shtml>.

⁶ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2009-10/weekly/6187/section8.shtml>.

⁷ *I am writing to you now to ask you to consider signing a request for a Grace to be put to the Regent House which, if approved, will:*

** publish to all affected employees the alternative proposals for changes to USS put forward by the EPF and by UCU, together with supporting arguments for each;*

** conduct a consultative ballot on those alternative proposals;*

** publish the result of the ballot to scheme members within the University; send the ballot result to USS as the principal local response to the statutory consultation exercise; and*

** ensure all members of USS are able to engage in the process and that their comments are fully reflected in the institution's response to USS and that they are published locally.*

The University of Oxford UCU has organised a Resolution to Congregation (the Oxford equivalent of a Grace to the Regent House) to which this one is almost identical.

⁸ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2010-11/weekly/6204/section1.shtml#heading2-5>

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

In response to UCU

Sir — In replying to Denis Noble's open letter Sally Hunt, General Secretary of UCU, claims that "UCU does not endorse an academic boycott of Israel" (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 305). As Ms Hunt knows, more than one Annual Congress of the union has demanded such an academic boycott; the reason why it is not in place is that a group of members has pointed out to the National Executive that it would be illegal for UCU to ask its members to impose it.

We see that Ms Hunt has made no attempt to rebut the conclusion of Denis's letter, which explained why he has resigned from the union that he joined nearly 50 years ago. He wrote (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 305) that he doesn't wish to belong to a union that has no objection to anti-semitic views being expressed in public by the national official of a fraternal trade union organisation. We share his view.

Yours sincerely
MICHAEL YUDKIN
Kellogg College

DAVID SMITH
Lady Margaret Hall

USS: Unanswered Questions

Sir — The Trustees of the USS have now explained their proposals to their *members*. These leave many questions unanswered. Among them are:

1. In what regard are USS pensions 'official' pensions? Neither I, nor my colleagues at Oxford University are, or have been, in state employment.
2. If USS pensions are not official pensions, USS is not *bound* to calculate pensions in accordance with the CPI rather than the RPI. To imply otherwise is disingenuous.
3. The effect of the proposed CAPS is to reduce the real income of pensioners by capping their monetary income. It is probable that asset values and dividends will keep pace with inflation. The document circulated for consultation evades this issue.
4. The examples given do not refer to the proposed caps. If this is because they are not likely to affect members, then they would be unnecessary.
5. The USS consultative document does not identify possible outcomes for members under a *range* of plausible scenarios. This is disingenuous.
6. The 'consultation' is not a consultation. It does not identify alternatives for members to consider.

TO THE EDITOR

7. The USS decision is based on the judgement of the 'independent Trustee'. The reasons for this judgement have not been provided. Do we assume that they simply follow the employers' recommendations?

8. Will the USS publish all responses to its consultation, and the specific ways in which it has taken account of them in modifying its own proposals?

Yours sincerely
GAVIN WILLIAMS
Retired Member, USS

Sir — The headline of your lead article, 'Cutting pensions affects us all' takes no account of the many people in this university who labour for years on the edges of the university and even secure honorary positions and who receive no pension apart from the State pension.

Cutting pensions affects those who receive pensions. What affects every one of us is the quality of scholarship in Oxford, and above all the ability of the poor as well as the rich to receive an education from those dedicated to their service. Higher pensions will mean higher, more crippling fees.

Our outlook as civilised and educated people should be far more altruistic and vocational. I am sure that the outlook of many of us is concerned with matters other than 'our rights', but let us proceed publicly in a dignified manner that places the interests of students, those entrusted to our care, before those of donnish self-interest,

Yours sincerely
MARTIN HENIG
Wolfson College

Sir — May I supplement the admirably comprehensive and penetrating Cooper/Cowley article on USS pension changes (Fifth Week pp.8-12) by ventilating one further grievance against USS current policy?

Some of us supplemented our pensions a decade or so ago by making additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) via the University with Prudential. USS rules require us at age 75 to spend them on an annuity. This denies us the freedom that pensioners outside USS enjoy under the Finance

Act (2004) to transfer their AVC fund into other pension arrangements such as a self-invested personal pension or SIPP. In 2006 changes in pension law enhanced such flexibility still further for the general public, and most insurance firms subsequently made the necessary adjustment.

In June 2010 USS introduced a transitional measure postponing the annuity-purchase requirement from age 75 to age 77, but why was the requirement not abolished? Is it simply administrative inertia? Or is it lack of demand from the pensioners? If the latter, justice should surely prevail over lack of demand. If the USS will not act, isn't it time for us to agitate? Our numbers may be small and continuously dwindling, but democracy has the priceless virtue of empowering moral over physical force.

Yours sincerely
BRIAN HARRISON
Corpus Christi College

Bodleian Finances

Sir — Bryan Ward-Perkins writes about spending money at the Bodleian over the next four years (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 305). Some years ago he was studying in very early Spring in the Upper Reading Room in his shirt sleeves and the late Philip Jones told him to put his jacket back on; 'It's people like you who make them think they can turn the heat off.'

Yours sincerely
BERNARD RICHARDS
Brasenose College

Enlightenment

Sir — To answer Allan Chapman's letter fully would take a long article. May I at least point out, in defence of a once more misrepresented Michael Foot (which was the reason for my earlier letter) that nowhere in his debate with Richard Southern does Foot present a 'roseate vision' of a post-Christian secular world. There was no 'Achilles heel' for Southern to 'pounce on'. It is a vulgar cliché about Enlightenment writers and their successors that they have a naive belief in the reality of progress; they are simply committed to trying to achieve what many centuries of Christianity failed to achieve and frequently obstructed.

That there have been great reforming Christians is a truism, but so is the fact that they were commonly at odds with the institutional church, as witness (to follow up Dr Chapman's reference to the anti-slavery campaign) William Wilberforce's text 'A practical view of the prevailing religious System...contrasted with real Christianity' — a leaf straight from the book of German Enlightenment thinkers like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing or Kant.

Reformers often being non-conformists, they were at least touched by the principle of thinking for yourself, which was Kant's plain and fundamental definition of Enlightenment. It was also of course the Church's definition of heresy. The much vaunted Christian concern for 'the innate worth of every individual human being' was always conditional on every individual's conforming to prescribed beliefs, right down – caricaturally – to those grotesque scenes George Orwell observed (to follow up Dr Chapman's reference to the Salvation Army) where resentful London down-and-outs were made to sit through a religious service in order to get the handout of bread and margarine.

Individual freedom could only become a universal human right when all dogmatic constraint was removed. Any ideas from Christian sources still needed secularising. That was what the eighteenth century largely achieved (it continued and continues to be a struggle) against the previous norm of intolerance, whose internecine consequences make up much of the history of Christianity. It

will not do to single out the Inquisition as if it were a historically isolated atrocity, and then trivialise it as comparatively 'a Friendly Society'. As Gibbon pointed out, the Christian victims of persecution by the Romans were greatly outnumbered by the Christian victims of other Christians. Tolerance was only ever the demand of sects still weak enough to be persecuted by their unloving neighbours. Christianity, in the judgement of its most recent – sympathetic – historian, has been the most intolerant of religions.

So there has been tyranny on Christian principles (the extermination of the Cathars, the massacre of Huguenots, Cromwell's slaughter of Catholics in Ireland, Calvin's burning of a dissenter) but none on Enlightenment principles. Eighteenth-century 'enlightened despotism' (Frederick the Great, Catherine the Great) is the worst it gets, and even there the label is already a contradiction in terms. The French revolutionary Terror was not acting out enlightened principles, at best random strands of Rousseau; its debates were anything but rational. To link the tyrannies of the twentieth century

with enlightened secularism is just another self-evidently simplistic cliché, which Southern too used in the debate with Foot. Many other factors make the tyrant. Hitler, incidentally, had a cosy concordat with the Vatican and enjoyed powerful support from the Protestant church, its members reorganised under the title 'Deutsche Christen'. 'No other people in the world', they felt able to assert, 'has a statesman who is so serious about Christianity'; Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Confessing Church and Germany's Jehovah's Witnesses were brave minorities. Whether Stalin was preschooled to political dogmatism in the religious seminar of his youth is an intriguing question.

Dr Chapman thinks he may suffer from 'naïve sociological blindness'. It certainly involves him in not seeing where our full human rights, social tolerance, freedom of thought and speech, and impartial justice really come from.

Yours sincerely

JIM REED

The Queen's College

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but can be started at any time.*

REVIEWS

Bloody Bodley!

The Bodleian Murders & other Oxford stories, 2010, OxPens, £7.95 pbk.



WHAT is it about libraries, and the Bodleian in particular, that impels so many authors to choose them as settings for crimes and criminals? Among the writers choosing to commit fictional

murder to paper in Oxford, those using the Bodleian as background for their skulduggery range from 'Michael Innes' (Christ Church don J.L.M. Stewart) to Hazel Holt, from a juvenile Robert Robinson to Veronica Stallwood. On TV, episodes of 'Morse' and 'Lewis' routinely involve flying visits to the Old Bodleian, from whose upper storey, in one particularly unlikely scenario, shots are fired at the encaenia procession, the weapon then being concealed among the books, unseen by the library staff (but discovered, of course, by the eagle eyed detectives).

Radmila May, one of the contributors to this new selection of work by the Oxford Writers, has written elsewhere¹ about Oxford's position as the murder capital of the world's literature, citing W. H. Auden's view that for its greatest impact, fictional murder should be seen to take place in 'the Great Good Place': where better, therefore, than a library, and of all libraries, where better than Bodley? Disappointingly, perhaps, May's current story, 'The Night of the Newts', is set not in Bodley, but in that other stand-by of the crime novelist, the snow-bound country house, in this instance named 'Botley Old Hall' somewhere on the outskirts of Oxford.

Out of the fifteen stories in this collection only a minority deal with murder and other crimes. The one that provides the title for this collection is by Linora Lawrence, who herself worked at the Bodleian but seems to have a jaundiced view of her former colleagues; had Dr. Sarah Thomas suspected beforehand that Bodley's senior staff members were inclined to treat their colleagues in the lethally cavalier fashion that Lawrence so airily depicts, she would surely have given Bodley a wide berth? But the most ingenious fatality in the collection, entitled 'Perfectly Marvellous View' is narrated by Rosie Orr, who has previously contributed to an anthology of love poetry but whose far from cuddly heroine here suggests what looks like a frighteningly plausible way to dispose of a faithless spouse.

All the stories, whether concerned with crime or not, have Oxford settings, not necessarily university ones; most take place in the present day. Among the exceptions, Mary Cavanagh's 'Stunner from Holywell' takes the reader on the trail of a somewhat dubious art find back to the time of Rossetti,

Morris and the Union Society building's murals, while 'Burning Words' centres on a book from Archbishop Latimer's library which escapes the fire that consumed its owner; the author, Jane Stemp, is now a rare books librarian for the Royal Naval Medical Service.

Among non-violent themes, that of love – requited, unrequited, unrecognised or misconceived – predominates, and aspects of Oxford working life are also well represented. Any reader who has served on a committee of any sort may nod knowingly while reading 'Festival of International Art and Scholarly Culture Oxford' (the acronym from its initials hint at the outcome of the committee's work). The author, Jane Gordon-Cumming, shares at least a name with one of this reviewer's more memorable former Whitehall colleagues and may perhaps write from experience.

The quality of these stories, like the subject matter, varies. Some authors are rather better than others at constructing dialogue that 'sounds right' off the page. But for a quick read between lectures, between meetings (even *during* if the meeting follows the pattern described by Ms Gordon-Cumming) or maybe between 'bus-stops, this collection is worth dipping into. Any profits from it are being shared with Oxford Homeless Pathways (formerly the Oxford Night Shelter).

CHRIS SLADEN

¹ 'Murder Most Oxford', *Contemporary Review* (2000) Vol. 277, No.1617.

This Term at the Playhouse

*Punk rock; Romeo & Juliet; A Streetcar named Desire**, Oxford Playhouse



THERE is nothing punk about the young offspring of Stockport's middle-class in their fee-paying grammar school. There is no rock, either, with the exception of the rib-rattling blasts that awaken us to the beginning of each new scene. Could it be that the title of Simon Stephens's play stands merely

as a teaser? 'I have and still have a continuing faith in the young people of England', he writes, mainly on the basis of his four terms teaching in a school in Dagenham. 'My work in Dagenham made a huge impact on my imagination', he adds, although not to the extent that he considers the other parts of the United Kingdom, or indeed the country's diversity: our contemporary ethnic mix is not evoked, even when his characters make condescending remarks about less favoured elements of Stockport society.

Punk rock is set in a gloomy library (designed by Paul Willis), its shelves reaching up to the ceiling, the books seemingly inaccessible. The furniture consists of a few formica-topped tables with matching chairs, for the most part upside down on the tables: an inhospitable place, you might think, for a group of pupils to congregate. What do they have in common? An anxiety about examinations, of course, along with the onslaught of adolescence, but little other than that. Rather than a group, this collection of young people gives the impression of being a series of stereotypes.

As you might expect, we have a newcomer to provide a starting point: Lilly Cahill (Laura Pyper), not only Irish in origin but also from down south (her father was a don at Cambridge). Three reasons, in other words, for her to be of some interest to the others. There is a fourth: sex. William Carlisle (Rupert Simonian) has his eye on her, but she in fact appears to have a little something going with Nicholas Chatman (Nicholas Banks), the boy who is keen on the gym and has the muscles to prove it. Does Nicholas know that she goes in for self-harm? We are not told, although William is quick to notice the scars on her arms and gets a demonstration of her capacity for burning herself with a cigarette lighter. He is not uncomplicated himself, as the climax to the play demonstrates more dramatically than you might expect. Already, on his first meeting with Lilly, he reveals his mythomania to her in his description of his family background.

In a sense, he is the focal point of the play from beginning to end, the other characters almost always behind him, both physically and in terms of the action. Rupert Simonian plays him excellently and, like the other actors, succeeds in appearing to be the age of his character (mid to late teens). They all contribute to giving value to a play that is seriously flawed. Two in particular, stereotypes though they may be, stand out, mainly because their specific characteristics are the most striking. Bennett (Edward Franklin) is the bully, delighting in his destructive behaviour and, what is more, being allowed to get away with it by his passive class-mates. His main victim is Chadwick, convincingly filling his role as the form swot (the anorak he always wears makes sure we understand that). Although he submits to Bennett's treatment

of him, he ends up by demonstrating that, apart from his commitment to maths, he has other things going on in his mind. He is given a barn-storming speech about the way in which the world is heading to disaster. It is very much a set piece, but serves to silence those around him by shaking them out of the ease with which they accept the petty nature of their preoccupations.

Truth to tell, the tendency to give characters set pieces is one of the flaws of the play. They do not compensate for the absence of any reason for this particular group to congregate in the library. They are not linked by any discernable sense of common interests or of friendship any more than they engage in exchanges that might indicate other forms of cohesion. Even more important, none of them gives any indication that they anticipate the shocking end to the play.

As a conclusion, the *coup de théâtre* to which we are witness undoubtedly brings things to a close with a bang – or rather it should do if were not for the superfluous scene that the author has tacked on. One suspects that it may be there for pedagogical reasons. Why? Because the programme directs us to a website designed to help us ‘to engage directly with the production’ and providing resources that should ‘allow teachers to support pre and post show lessons around *Punk Rock*’. It must be added that the largely school-age audience seemed to be caught up in what they saw and heard on the stage. There was no whooping and shouting at the end of the show; instead, the silence in the auditorium was striking, and the applause restrained. Something about the situation of the present-day adolescent struck a chord with the young audience.

* * *

Not so at the first night of *Romeo & Juliet*, directed by Marcus Romer and Katie Posner. Once more, the vast majority of the audience was youngsters of secondary school age – mostly, for some reason, young girls. This time, however, they spent the whole of the play whispering and struggling with the wrappers of their sweets. As a distraction, it came pretty high on a scale from 1 to 10. At the interval, one teacher broke up a particular group and redistributed them to other seats; it made no discernable difference.

As for the play, it was something of a boiled-down version. Montague and Lady Montague, for example, were cut, and that meant that the reconciliation scene between the Montague and Capulet parents at the end of the play had to go as well. In addition, the build-up to the discovery of the dead ‘star-crossed lovers’ was much truncated, with the result that Juliet had to kill herself with unseemly haste. Part of the reason for wielding the blue pencil was no doubt that there were only eight actors, covering eleven parts. And they were not the only economies made. The actress who played Lady Capulet (Mary Rose) delivered the prologue as well as the epilogue, and provided a voice for the invisible Mantuan poison-vending apothecary.

Generally, the doubling is fully justified in these cost-cutting (but ‘fair’?) times: once Tybalt (Richard James-Neale) and Mercutio

(Chris Lindon) have been despatched, the actors are free to take on the parts of Friar Lawrence and Paris respectively. And Louisa Eyo, is marvellous as a bustling black Nurse (even though much of her back-chatting text has gone) and the Prince, despite the fact that she is kitted up (designer Chloe Lamford) in a costume that suggests less the Prince than someone high up in the below-stairs hierarchy.

There is more of the punk about this production than was evident in *Punk rock*, the young men in skinny jeans, Juliet with her Doc Martens and her denim knickers under a flimsy summer dress. It can lead to minor inconsistencies, such as Benvolio responding to the thumb-biting episode (old-fashioned) by giving the representatives of the Capulet gang the finger (part of today’s repertory) as he beats a retreat. It might actually have been a good idea to develop the punk image; as it is, much of the text that makes up the magic of the play has disappeared and is not compensated for by what remains. In the banter between Benvolio and Mercutio, for example, the words seem not to be enough to convey what is being said. This applies in particular to all phallic and other sexual suggestions, systematically mimed as well as spoken. One must admit that it succeeded in getting the attention of the young girls, who tittered in delight at all these naughty gestures. Why allow good text to do its job when you have gross vulgarity to hand? That applies not only to the young men. Juliet, pining for Romeo, invites night to ‘Take him and cut him out in little stars’ in a speech with a strong emotional charge; it is undermined, however, by her illustrating it with a small bundle of flowers, separating them the one from the other as she delivers the line. Farewell poetry!

To be fair to Rachel Spicer, we should recognise that, since her Juliet is her first professional role, there is a good chance that much of what she does and says is influenced by the directors, and perhaps also by the dramaturg, Juliet Forster, in her manipulation of the text. It may well be that the work of Sandy Nuttgens, as composer, has something to do with it, too. The music (seemingly made up for the most part of a few bars on a loop) that accompanies the play from beginning to end is a distraction that contributes to the weakening of the text. Granted, we live in a world in which nothing seems to be complete without background music – as though Shakespeare did not provide all the music that anyone could wish for, even if, by and large, the cast gives the impression of not being at ease with their text. It would have been no bad idea to have someone training them in delivering the verse as a convincing means of spoken communication.

The production, in other words, is a disappointment. An exception is Chloe Lamford’s design. She has provided a setting consisting of steel structures accommodating both acting space and horizontal struts that play their part, for example, when wall-climbing is required. A rectangular space upstage, surrounded by strip lighting, provides a frame for Juliet’s balcony, her bedroom and the tomb in which the final scene is played. It

contrasts with the opening, when we see a stage surrounded with flowers and with a large heart-shaped arrangement at its centre. In the opening scene, the youth of Verona quickly kicks all that aside: an introduction to their yobbishness and a summary of all that is to follow.

* * *

The problem of speaking lines in a style that does not come naturally arises once more in the student production of Tennessee Williams’s *A streetcar named Desire*. To imitate an American accent is always a challenge; to do it with the addition of a Southern drawl makes it much more difficult. That the opening scene, involving Eunice Hubbel (Alice Pearse) and another woman chatting at the bottom of the iron staircase leading up to the Hubbel apartment should be incomprehensible is of little importance: they are simply two women gossiping. It matters, however, when the central character, Blanche (Ruby Thomas), appears. Her drawl leads to her eliding many of the consonants, with the result that what we often hear is a stream of sound seemingly made up almost entirely of vowels – and that does not go far in communicating to those of us in the audience what she is saying. To single out Ruby Thomas is not to criticise her for her acting – far from it – but merely to draw attention to the language problem. Others suffer from it as well but to a lesser degree. Her sister, Stella (Hannah Roberts), is generally comprehensible, as are those in the two main male roles: Henry Faber as the bachelor Mitch, and James Corrigan* in the crucial character of Stella’s husband, Stanley Kowalski.

There are some minor details of the play that could have been omitted with little loss. The bustle of life in New Orleans is represented by no more than a young man crossing the front of the stage two or three times attempting to sell his wares; the short scene between Blanche and the Young Collector (Frankie Parkam) is not integrated into the action; similarly, the old woman with her mournful lament, “*flores para los muertos*”, is not shown in relation to what is going on in the Kowalski apartment. Their absence would not have detracted from the drama (melodrama?) that really draws our attention.

What matters is the quality of the acting in the main characters. Hannah Roberts’s Stella never suggests that she regrets having come down in the social scale or that she is the victim of a brutal husband. Far from being devalued and put-upon, she makes it clear that she has made a choice and that she knows how to live with the ups and downs of her life with Stan. As a husband, he is portrayed by James Corrigan in terms of violent outbursts – without a doubt. But his attachment to Stella is as real as hers to him. It is partly a physical attachment, as they successfully demonstrate both by their acts and by their dialogue.

Stan is also honest and therefore a match for Blanche and her attempts at manipulation. Perhaps he sees through her straight away. Would a person who has always lived the good life as a Southern belle insist on it

as she does? Discretion in that respect is absent, and for good reason. Her psychological instability means that she has an interest in hiding her situation both to herself and to those around her: a fantasy world, fuelled by alcohol, is a shield from the truth that Stan duly discovers and discloses. The revelation of the reality of her situation coincides with her tipping into the state that in due course leads to her being taken away by A Strange Man (Rhys Devan) and A Strange Woman (Lucy Fyffe). Even here, she clings on to the illusion that she has made so much effort to maintain. The final scene, in which she takes the arm of the Strange Man, is charged with pathos to a degree not fully conveyed on this occasion, even though it is the conclusion to a gradual decline that Ruby Thomas fully succeeds in communicating.

* * *

The reason for bringing these three plays together was that they seemed to be held together by the theme of youth. *Punk rock* is peopled by adolescents; *Romeo & Juliet*, too (Juliet herself heading towards her fourteenth birthday), and puts before us a violent gang culture of a type not unknown today. The direct comparison is less easy to make in the case of *A streetcar named Desire*, except that it is played by actors only just out of adolescence themselves: the cast are all, bar one, undergraduates. The theme of youth, however, fails to lead to any clever conclusion. Even so, the three plays complement each other in ways other than those expected (hoped for?) at the outset, and that in itself must be positive.

KEITH GORE

* The drawing at the head of this review was produced for *Oxford Magazine* by Michael Gabriel, Oxford Playhouse artist in residence: it shows James Corrigan as he appeared recently in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Michael will have an exhibition of *new sketches from live theatre on view at the Playhouse from 27 November to 31 January: <http://www.oxfordplayhouse.com>*

Liedership

The 9th Oxford Lieder Festival: Holywell Music Room and elsewhere, 15 to 30 October 2010.



THE ninth Oxford Lieder Festival opened on the afternoon of Friday 15 October with the now customary Schools' Project Concert, this year held in the Ashmolean Museum and developed as a young peoples' response to items in the collections there. This was followed by Celebratory Partsongs by Brahms and Schumann performed by a chorus in Broad Street. These were two of the events additional to the straight performance of lieder in recital which help to make the Oxford Lieder Festival

such a notable event in the musical life of the nation. Others were a 'Bring and Sing' session and 'Singing for All' and composition workshops for amateurs, an account of music on the web as well as the usual masterclasses. This year there was a masterclass given by baritone Stephen Loges as well as the three-day Master Course followed by a concert, this year led by Ian Partridge, Patron of the Friends of Oxford Lieder.

The first recital was, fittingly, given by baritone Wolfgang Holzmaier with pianist Julius Drake. This was Holzmaier's third visit to the Festival, the first having been in 2007 when at extremely short notice he replaced Olaf Bär in an unforgettable performance of *Dichterliebe*. Last year he appeared again, with Andreas Haefliger in an equally memorable interpretation of *Winterreise*. This year he sang Schumann, settings of Heine followed by the *Kerner Lieder*. In an enlightening pre-concert talk Richard Stokes explained the complex sources of Heine's inspiration and Schumann's response to his poems. The programme included some of the four songs omitted from the original twenty of *Dichterliebe*. Holzmaier's performance begins with the first notes of the piano introduction and involves his whole being. With his gestures he communicates the sentiments of the song so completely that the role of even such a fine partner as the pianist Julius Drake was reduced to that of accompanist. (I note I wrote almost the opposite of their 2007 *Dichterliebe* which was a perfect partnership!) To some, Holzmaier's platform manner is a distraction if not an irritant; to me, now, it seems to be an integral part of his performance which places him in the forefront of today's lieder singers.

We remember Katarina Karnéus as a worthy winner of the 1995 Cardiff Singer of the World. (Was it that long ago?) She subsequently appeared in Oxford with WNO in Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* in 2000, when I noted 'charming rather than profound'. Since then, with her now established place on the international operatic stage and in concert, she has gained in profundity without loss of charm. Her programme at the Lieder Festival contained songs by the Norwegian Grieg, the Swede Ture Rangström and the Finn Sibelius, each receiving intense and sympathetic advocacy. Another good pre-concert talk, by Richard Wigmore, put them in context. In previous festivals we have become convinced of Grieg's genius as a song composer, his German songs standing comparison with the greatest in the repertoire. This impression was reinforced by Karnéus' programme of settings in Norwegian of Ibsen and the short Op 67 cycle of *Haugtussa* by Arne Garborg. Rangström has a high reputation in Sweden, not least for his settings of Swedish poets. Inevitably these have limited appeal outside Scandinavia. Karnéus' manner is a complete contrast to Holzmaier: quite static to begin with, in later songs she conveyed the mood perfectly with the minimum of gesture, unfortunately disturbed by raucous singing from outside during her last song.

Currently considered the greatest of all song cycles, Schubert's *Winterreise* has received several memorable performances

at the Oxford Lieder Festival. In 2004 we heard Mark Padmore with Julius Drake. In 2006 James Gilchrist again with Drake and in 2009, Holzmaier with Haefliger gave totally contrasted but equally valid impressive interpretations while in 2008 Florian Boesch with Andrew West gave a wildly eccentric performance, to me a total misjudgement of the Traveller's psyche. This year it was performed at short notice by tenor Daniel Norman with the Festival's Artistic Director Sholto Kynoch. Norman first came to our attention in 2007 when he caused a sensation in *die Schöne Müllerin*, replacing Gilchrist at the last moment, meeting pianist Anna Tilbrook a few hours before the concert; we have since heard him several times in Oxford, notably in Britten's *Five Canticles* last year. Maybe my expectations were too high, but this *Winterreise* was rather disappointing. Individual songs were sung with moving intensity – *der Lindenbaum*, *die Post* and particularly the final *der Leiermann* – but missing was the overall sense of progression through a winter landscape so apparent in Holzmaier's interpretation last year. It got off on the wrong foot, so to speak, by setting much too fast a tempo for the opening *Gute Nacht*, given that the piano is supposed throughout to represent the footsteps of the reluctant Traveller growing ever more weary and isolated, as pointed out in a perceptive pre-concert talk by Natasha Loges.

The following evening we heard Schubert's *Schwanengesang* sung by a young baritone Nicholas Merryweather, replacing Benedict Nelson at short notice. Despite the short notice, he formed an ideal partnership with the pianist Gary Matthewman in a performance well deserving the ovation it received, drawing part of the audience to its feet.

The third Schubert cycle, *die Schöne Müllerin* was performed on this occasion by the young German tenor Tilman Lichdi with Roger Vignolles. The recital was introduced by Ian Partridge who took us through the songs, reminding us of the salient features, the ambiguity of the contacts between the hero and the miller's daughter, the importance of the brook and the sudden change of mood with the arrival of the hunter. Opinions were strongly divided about this interpretation. Many found it very moving. It started off with great promise with singer and piano in close accord, pacing the first few songs with good judgement. But this did not last. My immediate reaction at the end was 'too fast and too loud' to which my neighbour added 'too out of tune'. To me the performance did not add any insights. I felt that, on this occasion, Vignolles, at several places in the more excited passages appeared to be forcing the pace rather than following the singer's lead. He also has a habit, which I have noticed on previous occasions, of holding down the sustaining pedal at the end of a song while he turns the page. I would not mention this were it not that the audience is enjoined on every page of the programme: ... *turn pages only after the song and accompaniment are completely finished*.

Now regular features are the 'Lunch with Schumann' recitals given by students

from our Music Colleges. This year there were four of which I was able to attend two. The first was given by a sensational young tenor Stuart Jackson, the winner earlier this year of Oxford Lieder's own Scholarship. The pianist was an equally talented Jocelyn Freeman; playing with great character and precision, she formed a perfect partner. The programme was an intelligent selection of twenty settings of various poets, some well-known, others less so, based around a progression from light to dark in mood. Jackson is of imposing presence; his first notes revealed a fine *heldentenor* quality of voice so that an immediate reaction was 'Siegfried' but that was adapted to a sensitive interpretation of the romantic lieder, sung with perfect diction. He should have a great future, possibly as a Wagnerian. The second recital was given by soprano Laura Sheenin (another late substitute) and tenor Joshua Friend with pianist Yasmin Rowe from the Royal Northern College of Music performing both solos and duets, in another well-chosen programme, concluding with a spicy Robert Burns adaptation of a Lovers' Serenade. Both voices, not yet fully formed, showed great promise, both *en primeur* (to use my favourite ænological analogy). Yasmin Rowe, an exceptionally accomplished and natural lieder player provided superb support.

A concert by regular visitors *The Prince Consort* included two world premiers, by Stephen Hough and by Ned Rorem (featured in last year's programme). Both were well-received.

The end of the first week of the Festival was marked by the initiation of an ambitious enterprise by Oxford Lieder - the first complete recording of the songs of Hugo Wolf. In two concerts, all fifty-three of the *Mörike Lieder* were recorded, performed by Lieder Festival favourites Sophie Daneman, Anna Grevelius, James Gilchrist and Stephan Loges with Sholto Kynoch, to a silent and enraptured audience (not a cough to be heard). Our appreciation was enhanced by enlightening pre-concert talks, by Natasha Loges on Wolf's attitude to Mörike and the importance of the words and by John Warren on the poet's life with a run-through of the texts heard the second evening. The performance was wonderful, not least for the way it was held together by the indefatigable pianist, each postlude being played with subtle character to summarise the song. Each singer brought their own individual personality to bear: perhaps most impressively Loges, whose development we have followed since the earliest Festivals, as the only native German-speaker but Gilchrist with his wonderfully expressive enunciation (though becoming slightly mannered in gesture), Grevelius with her pure clear tones and serene personality and the lighter-voiced Daneman, at her ebullient best in the humorous songs, all contributed to an outstanding musical experience. At the beginning of the second evening a charming young soprano Raphaella Papadakis was given 'fifteen minutes of fame' and held her own in three early Mörike songs.

The second week provided some light

relief after the intense concentration required in the first. It opened with yet another fine singer, mezzo Catharine Hopper, here accompanied by Kynoch and the Doric String Quartet. The Doric were 'quartet in residence' who played Schumann in three afternoon concerts. Here they played Schubert's *Rosamunde* Quartet. They produce a wonderfully mellow sound with perfect balance. The remaining programme was of works for voice with various instrumental accompaniments by Chausson, Saint-Saens, Brahms and Respighi. The following evening we were entertained by the delightful soprano sisters Mary and Sophie Bevan in a programme of solos and duets, the first half devoted to Mendelssohn, Brahms and Schumann, the second to French songs by Saint-Saens, Debussy, Gounod and Fauré. It was good to hear some Fauré, the supreme *mélodiste*, sadly neglected by Oxford Lieder. A highlight was the appropriate choice of Brahms' setting of Mörike's *Die Schwestern* about two sisters, inseparable until a young man appears on the scene. The audience was able to form its own view as to which sister had won!

The concert given by the Master Course participants took place the following evening, each of the eight duos presenting a short programme. Widely ranged in career development and experience, all gave worthy performances but outstanding, judged as a duo were the post-graduates mezzo Mae Heydorn and Varvara Doletskaya in Liszt and Rachmaninov. Also worthy of mention for a concluding encore of Grieg's *Killingdans* from Op.67 are Lore Binon and Cecily Lock, rivalling Karnéus and Drake.

Spanish mezzo Clara Mouriz first came to our attention at the 2008 Oxford Chamber Music Festival for her 'beautiful authentic sound equally powerful and clear over the whole of her extended range'. Her voice has now developed into one of the most beautiful I have ever heard, equally clear from an assured *fortissimo* to a divine *pianissimo* and incorporating an old-fashioned contralto lower register, every word distinct and with a charming platform manner. She entranced the audience with early Schubert settings of Metastasio, Berlioz' *Les Nuits d'Été*, some Spanish songs and finishing with a spectacular *coloratura* cantata *Giovanna d'Arco* by Rossini, brilliantly supported by pianist Joseph Middleton.

Unable to attend the last two days, Mouriz was for me a fitting climax to a wonderful Festival of which the other memorable highlights were Holzmair and Drake, the Mörike Lieder and for Oxford Lieder's own 'find' Stuart Jackson. Particular congratulations to Administrator Laura Ashby, not least for ensuring that the programmes accounted for last minute alterations (with only two detected errors). As usual Oxford owes an enormous debt of gratitude to Artistic Director, pianist Sholto Kynoch, for bringing to the Lieder Festival so many talented musicians into such a well-balanced programme.

I have to register one disappointment. The organisers chose to hire a full sized 'D' model Steinway piano rather than using the HMR model 'C' whose tone makes it so ideal for

the acoustics and intimate atmosphere of the Holywell Music Room for the accompaniment of lieder and in chamber music. Of course, for solo piano the fuller resonance of the lower notes is essential which is why the acoustics are not really suited for piano recitals - but that is another matter. It did not help that on this occasion the attentions of the tuner failed to remove an occasional unpleasant 'twang'. It is to be hoped this matter will be reconsidered on future occasions though I can understand the performers' preference for the fuller possibilities of the 'D'.

PETER SCHOFIELD

Readers will remember with affection the late Tom Braun's sparkling contributions to the *Oxford Magazine*, not least in both setting and then contributing to our annual Christmas competition. Tom, who died in 2008 following a horrific road accident, was an classicist who combined remarkable breadth of learning with a great talent for fun and games. Throughout his life he entertained his wide circle of friends with a stream of poems and parodies, public speeches and intimate letters. In response to popular demand, Tim Heald (Balliol 1962-1965) and Tom's brother Christopher have now produced *Tomfoolery*, an anthology of Tom's occasional writings. It includes quite a few of his *Oxford Magazine* pieces, but also much else going back to the Balliol Rhymes and poems for the Arnold and Brakenbury Society of his undergraduate days. This eclectic treasure trove contains unusual Oxford insights into life as a Merton don, how Bodley's Librarian really operates and arcana such as the Norrington Table. But it also scans much wider horizons with irreverent views of history and literature from the Old Testament to Tarzan, wry comments on politics, sensitive translations of poetry and plenty of puns. Above all it is full of civilised fun and warm humanity. An ideal Christmas present.

Tomfoolery: Occasional Writings by Thomas Braun (1935-2008), edited by Christopher Braun and Tim Heald is published by Antony Rowe Publishing, ISBN 978-1-90-757108-4, price £17.00. Expected publication date: 1 December 2010. Copies may conveniently be ordered direct from the publisher at CPIBookDelivery (<http://www.cpibookdelivery.com/book/9781907571084/Tomfoolery>), p&p within the UK £2.95 plus 70p for each additional book. Copies will also be available from Amazon.co.uk or any good bookshop. Any profits will go to the Thomas Braun Classical World Travel Fund established by Merton College, Oxford.

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