

Dear Hertford Community,

When I last wrote, the college was surrounded by fake snow, courtesy of Warner Brothers. Today the sun is at last beginning to bounce off the Bodleian.

This term was meant to feel closer to normality. As I try to catch my breath midway through 8th Week, it has been anything but that. Like everyone, the college has had to rebuild a sense of community, with all of us adapting to this phase of the pandemic in different ways. The pace of Hilary Term is frenetic in normal times. And the international backdrop has added to the sense of uncertainty and anxiety. As I've just told staff (before a fiercely contested raffle), it is testimony to the sense of camaraderie and support at Hertford that the college is in such good shape as we stagger towards the break.

The term started against the backdrop of the Afghanistan crisis, and I was glad to welcome brilliant Afghan academics from across the university to Hertford last week. The term ends against the chilling backdrop of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the subject that has dominated discussions across the college over the last month. From my window I can see the placards and flags covering the fence outside the Radcliffe Camera and we have just had another marquee student debate on where the conflict leads. As a college, we have been keen to show our solidarity and – most importantly – practical support for Ukrainians. So, alongside [lighting the bridge](#), last week we sent a lorry full of essential supplies collected by staff, students and our friends at the Oxford Polish Association to refugees in Poland. Hertford is underwriting the costs of the transport and the operation has been led tirelessly by Ewa Gluza from the Bursary.



Tom & Ewa with the first lorry to leave for Poland and the bridge illuminated in Ukraine's blue and yellow

Meanwhile, college life is returning to a full tempo. I have just had a great weekend at Torpids, watching three Hertford Eights ensuring that the deer remains feared. The men's First Eight [bumped](#) LMH right in front of our boathouse, to huge celebrations. Our rowers have had very little time together on the river, given the lockdowns, so their performances were remarkable. The Boat Club's Torpids bake sale also raised a fantastic £676 for the DEC Ukraine appeal. Elsewhere on the river we launched the Terry Hughes boat with Maria and the family, and scattered [Derek Conran's ashes](#). We also toasted Derek at the Hertford Society's London dinner in February.



Pat Roche, Maria Hughes and members of the Boat Club christening the new eight

In other news, we've had the usual range of great speakers this term, from former SAS Commander Graham Lamb to whistle-blower and alum Athol Williams. Pancake Day saw a resumption of the traditional Hertford race though a slippery quad made this more perilous than usual, with two students only narrowly avoiding casualty in their pursuit of a place in history. Also in the marquee last week we celebrated Hertford's women, on [International Women's Day](#), with music, readings and cake. Up in the Octagon, the MCR have broken Simpkin's clawhold on the Animal Committee by purchasing a collection of jellyfish with appropriate names - 'Jimpkin' is thriving if aggressive, but 'Jom Fletcher' is rather spineless and flabby.

Congratulations to Dave Haxell on completing his tone-setting tenure as Lodge Manager (we'll still see him around in semi retirement), to alum Alex Preston for the brilliant reception of new novel Winchelsea (I recommend his appearance on [this podcast](#) on the history of smuggling), and to current graduate students Sara Rahim and Madeleine Wyburd for their appearances in parliament on Afghanistan and AI respectively. Congrats too to electrician Mo Ahmed for completing his apprenticeship with the college.



Dave Haxell hands the baton of Lodge Manager onto Derek Lear

As ever, there's more great content for you. Krishnan Guru-Murthy delivered this year's timely Geddes Lecture with St Edmund Hall on presenting facts in an age of disinformation ([available here](#)). For those interested in our collections, enjoy this [research paper](#) on the Margaret Cavendish books and their bindings in the library. And here is Emma Smith's [In Our Time](#) on Romeo & Juliet; Ciaran Martin on the [cyber angles to Russia/Ukraine](#); and a link to [a talk I gave at Mansfield College](#) on my new book.

We press on with our [Hertford 2030](#) plans. Governing Body has agreed a new Academic Strategy, led by Senior Tutor Claire Vallance, setting out how we will enhance our teaching and research. We will look next term at reducing finance as a barrier to study, and the next leap forward on access. We also agreed an ambitious set of more specific net zero priorities, including replacing our energy sources and changing catering. Thank you to alumni who have offered to help that work. Watch this space for updates on the library campaign and Porter Graduate Centre.



International Women's Day

A never-ending storybook

By JCR executive Eloise, Orlaith & Riya

By Hertford women in STEM

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For the next two weeks, second years will take part in our first 'Head, Hand and Hertford' course, developing skills for life, work and citizenship to complement their academic work. I'm greatly looking forward to the chance to work with them, and to welcoming a really interesting mixture of leaders, academics, entrepreneurs, glass ceiling breakers and activists to discuss everything from how to stay curious to how to make change happen.

Later this month we will be launching the [John Porter Diplomacy Centre](#). Among other initiatives it will look at how we support peacebuilding and conflict prevention, through research and practical action. We will also be announcing scholarship reminders for research in support of people displaced by conflict. World events are a reminder for why this is such an important area of work. I am looking forward to events coming up in April to celebrate John Donne's 450th birthday, in June to connect our research to global challenges, and further ahead to bring together students, staff and alumni for a weekend of Hertford camaraderie - watch this space.

Thank you once again to everyone for making this term special, and to our alumni and supporters for your solidarity. I was struck by MCR President Teresa Taylor's message to grad students recently:

"I call on all of us to embrace our community. It is here that we can find solace and support, that we can 'unpack' and make sense of the world that we can respectfully disagree and find understanding. The MCR is a vibrant part, filled with intelligent and kind people, and I have never been as grateful as I am now to be in your midst."

I feel that way about Hertford too.

All best wishes,
Tom