



Dear Hertford Community,

It is one of those glorious crisp autumnal days in Oxford today. From my office I can hear the gentle grind of the earth moving machines as we prepare for the next stage of the library renovation. The new cafe in OB Quad is looking brilliant, with plenty of John Donne to go with the caffeine and sugar. We are in those final few days of relative calm before we immerse ourselves in the new academic year, and another generation of students collect their keys from the lodge for the first time. I remember that day well, 30 years ago for me. Porters Pam and Judy left no doubt who ran the place. The first person I met was vegetarian, which in 1994 seemed incredibly exotic. I found my way to NB 5.4, unpacked my two books on the Saxons, suppressed the imposter syndrome, and sought the courage to start knocking on doors. Mercifully, the Freshers' Week haircut was still two days away. But everything had already changed.

I always feel for parents dropping off new students at this time, perhaps because my boys are getting closer to the moment where I go through that same rite of passage: the search for practical questions to fill final moments, that wonder at how much they've done and how fast it went, and that moment where you linger a little too long at the wheel before driving off. If any parent reading this on the noticeboard wants to drop in for some solidarity and tea, please feel welcome.



Of course, the college never takes summer off. Many thanks to the International Programmes team for a packed programme, and to the wider domestic teams for running Oxford's best hotel. I'm reliably informed by Simon Robinson that 12,000 Hertford breakfasts were served between July and September.

Meanwhile, the academics plunged into their research, from astrophysics to zoology, via bees, crusades, differential manifolds, dictionaries and diabetes, ethics and elephant vibrations, floods, fruit flies and French folk music, group theory and geomorphological drylands, Hume, inflammation, Japanese phonology, k-pop, law of trusts, metalloenzymes, meningitis, musical minimalism and migration in SE Asia 50 millennia ago, neural networks and number theory, Orwell, protocol and penguin sleep, Quixote and quantum, risk and rewilding, supply chains, swift and symmetry, Twelfth Night, urology and the universe, vaccines, worms, xenophobia, and Yeats.



Their work and that of our alumni and students continued to resonate far beyond Catte Street. To touch on just a few, congratulations to Emma Smith on [joining the RSC Board](#); Ciara Garcha on being named as a ['30 under 30' historian](#); the library interns for their [work in the archives](#), Honorary Fellow Richard Fisher [meeting Hollywood stars](#) at the Paris Olympics; Adam Fleming for hitting [1500 Newscast episodes](#); and Hoa for featuring in [this Radio 4 feature](#) on the Brilliant Club, as the first Oxford student from Bradford Academy. And congratulations to Dave Thomas on his forthcoming [World Atlas of Deserts and Drylands](#), a public facing science book focusing on the landscapes, ecology and people of deserts

It was also superb to welcome home many alumni, fellows, and emeriti for the 150th anniversary of the refounding. Do watch the [brilliant discussion](#) beforehand between Elif Shafak and Emma Smith. I also hugely enjoyed the Gaudies for 1980-1982 and 2004/5, full of nostalgia and camaraderie. Before Gaudies we all worry that everyone will have forgotten us, and some of us hope for that. We have reinstated the bar for post dinner drinks, which went down well.



Coming up this term, watch out for the speaker series to mark 50 years of women students at Hertford. On 31 October, we'll gather an all-female panel of fellows, students and alumnae writers to discuss [Hertford women and literature](#), before moving to [Hertford women and history](#) on 28 November. A recording of the 5@50 panel with alumna Jen Cownie, which took place last month as part of the Oxford Meeting Minds weekend, will be online soon. Alumna [Jasmine Brown](#) will speak at

Rhodes House 17 October, and Visiting Fellow [Schona Jolly](#) at Mansfield College 23 October.

We are also part of the new [Making a Difference Programme](#) to prepare students for careers in the non-profit sector. And we welcome new Heywood Fellow Lucy Smith, pioneering head Naheed Bardai and alum (and former Paymaster General) Jeremy Quin to share their experiences with that group on 8 November.

We are also very excited that our next Oxford Ministry for the Future event will feature Pulitzer prize winner Richard Powers and Hertford academics, at The Sheldonian. You can [sign up here](#).

We half masted our flag in September to mark the death of Honorary Fellow, Professor Sir David Goldberg. You can read more about his life [on our website](#).

The Middle East is of course on the minds of many of us. I stopped for a while by the Lebanese cedar in The Parks on my way in this morning. Throughout last year, we worked to create a space where students, academics, staff and alumni could learn, debate and discuss this devastating conflict. We will continue to do that, while supporting students from the region, and standing firm against islamophobia and antisemitism. Of course, the college does not have a formal position on the Middle East, but you can follow my personal views in the Financial Times and elsewhere.



It is one of the great privileges of this job that you get to see generations pass through and return, nurturing myths and legends of the place, making new ones. I

feel the responsibility of being part of a long line of Principal story bearers. I've also had the great privilege of reading a first draft of Christopher Tyerman's magisterial college history, due for release in the coming years.

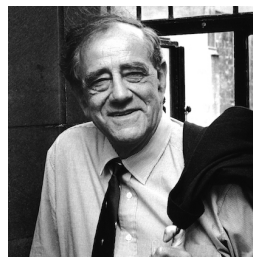
Hertford's refounding, 150 years ago, was in reaction to the admission of married clerics to Oxford - dangerous wokery. Christopher notes that the college was "set in a rich aspic of reaction and rejoicing in celibacy". These are both traditions which have - to greater or lesser extent - lapsed.

Then Principal Richard Michell wanted to refound the college to compete with the cheaper Keble. When the campaign to raise £500 faltered, he made up the shortfall himself, a terrible precedent. We relied on benefactors, chiefly Charlie Baring. He was, Christopher recounts, "a piece of work. He matched political ambition and financial acumen with diehard reactionary opinions, Christian zealotry and hair trigger bad temper...a misanthropic philanthropist, he terrorized employees, his irascibility sharpened by gout and sustained by adamantine self belief. His sociopathic tendencies and bullish idiosyncrasy produced the benefaction that refounded Hertford College". Donors can be reassured that this is not how we will describe you.

Perhaps 1874 is a reminder that Hertford has been able to change its principles as well as its Principals over time. Perhaps no more so than the arrival of women students in 1974. It is hard to comprehend that as late as 1973 Statute 1 read: 'a woman may not become a member of the college'. Some claimed that our accommodation was not good enough for women. Alumni could no doubt reassure them that it was equally bad for men *and* for women.

We can now look back with admiration at what those five decades of women achieved. We can celebrate early fellows such as Julia Briggs and Stephanie West, and our brilliant female fellows today. But I know from many of you who were part of this change that it was often too hard, and is still hard today.

With five decades of hindsight, the angry young fellows of that generation were a modern refounding moment for us. Alumni now burnish the legends of Julia, Roger van Noorden, Roy Stuart, Neil Tanner, Miles Vaughan Williams. And Keith Mclauchlan and Bill Macmillan, who both joined us for the 150th dinner.



Hertford doesn't take itself too seriously. But we are serious about what we do. This is a period of transformation. At its heart is defence of the teaching model that shaped so many of us. The alchemy of the tutorial. That moment when the light comes on and nothing is the same again.

This scholarship needs a home. Now, more than at any other moment since 1874, we need your help. Please pay it forward. Please back the [library campaign](#).

Meanwhile, we must continue to refound ourselves. What will our successors be toasting in 2074, or even 2174? What are the trees we are planting now under which our successors will sit? 50 years is nothing in the life of a college. And 2174 is 20-30 principals on, but maybe only six generations of fellows. Principals and principles come and go, but it is today's fellows who will become tomorrow's legends, and who carry forward this vital project. It is our alumni who will back them to do that. And it is our students who will show us why it matters.

I can't anticipate the world in 2174 any more than Michell could have imagined AI and climate change. We can only hold fast to who we are. A place where we pass on the best of the ideas we have inherited; that is not just observing the world but changing it; that is not protecting young people from that world, but preparing them for it. We are not just a pretty quad (not even that right now) – we are a hub for ideas. We are not just the portraits that tell the story of what we were – we are the glass ceiling breakers of the future who will show us who we can be. We are more than a building - we are a community. Thank you for your part in that story.

All best wishes,

Ben Fletcher



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