



Dear Hertford Community,

Spring has come to Oxford, setting the golden limestone aglow and the magnolias into flamboyant flower. Even the Great Hole of OB Quad is looking less muddy as the sunbeams reach down into its depths and the walls and floors are sealed with concrete. I couldn't have asked for a more auspicious start to my Principalship, thanks to the foresight of Interim Principal Pat Roche suggesting that I take over at the start of the Easter vac. I also have him and several predecessor Principals to thank for kind advice and careful preparations, making my beginnings at Hertford as easy as possible. In my first weeks, I have been meeting staff, fellows and alumni, and it's immediately apparent what a special place Hertford is. As some alumni said at the recent Gaudy for those who matriculated in 1977–79, 'We like to hear why we should continue to be proud of our college.' So, here are five things that have made me proud of Hertford so far.



1) Hertford has committed staff, and is committed to them in return

Like everyone coming to Hertford, some of the first people I met were the porters. Several of our porters have worked at other colleges – and all of them said that Hertford was special: a truly supportive community. We have several families within our college staff, where siblings or parents and children both work at Hertford, and we minimise using agency staff, instead supporting people through their careers. Each year, young people from local schools come to join college teams for work experience, and we take on apprentices, with the latest success story being Josh Abraham, who is about to complete his Level 4 diploma in Professional Accounting. The level of dedication that staff have to the students is beyond anything I remember from when I was a student – such as library books quietly being delivered to students' doors when they are ill or facing a crisis, and EFL teachers returning to the UK from all over the globe every year for over 20 years to teach on our International Programmes.

2) Hertford students are brilliant

As I write, term is only just starting, so I have yet to meet many of our current students – and yet as soon as I was appointed, I started to get very thoughtful welcome cards from several of them. One of my first opportunities to be vicariously proud was watching the Varsity Boat Race, with Hertford rower Felix Crabtree at bow, giving Cambridge a good race, shortly after Hertford's men's crew recorded the third fastest time at TorpHeads. Two Hertford players, Lucy McBride and Lilla Berry, helped Oxford secure a resounding victory in the Varsity Rugby at the end of February. I know we have other brilliant sportspeople, scholars, musicians, creative minds and community champions amongst our current students, and I can't wait to meet everyone.

3) Hertford fellows and lecturers are creative and dedicated

Rather like reliving my undergraduate tutorial experience, I have been having one-to-one meetings with all the current fellows and many college lecturers to understand how teaching works in college, how they balance departmental and college responsibilities, and what they think Hertford can do better. What has been wonderful to hear is the enthusiasm and imagination for how Hertford can continue to be a trailblazer within Oxford. I look forward to many of these ideas coming to fruition, ensuring we give the very best to our students, our researchers, our local community and society.

4) Hertford alumni really care about the college and its students

On the first weekend after I joined Hertford, we hosted a reunion for Maths graduates; the following weekend was a Gaudy, and the week after that a group of alumni who meet up every ten years dropped by to say hello. I heard a range of fantastic life experiences and stories of fun times at Hertford in the past ('Do you remember the time that we...?') There were also a lot of alumni volunteering to mentor, and offering help and financial support for our current students. So many alumni were grateful for the opportunities Hertford had made available to them, and recognised that the current generation of young people face high costs and much less government support. It was immediately clear to me what a strong community Hertford is – comprising many generations, each feeling equally attached to college.

5) Hertford's facilities are undergoing a huge upgrade

In my first week, I went to visit most of Hertford's student accommodation, to see rooms unrenovated, rooms undergoing renovation, and the spot where the new graduate blocks at Winchester Road will soon be built. All our undergraduates receive the offer of a college room throughout their course, and I'd love the same to be true for our graduate students. The cost of living, particularly in Oxford, makes it important that we support all students to be able to live and eat affordably and healthily whilst they study. Our in-house carpenters and workmen are just finishing refurbishment of some of the student rooms overlooking the Sheldonian, and I don't think many people in Oxford (possibly in the UK) can have such stunning rooms!



Refurbished room in NB1



One of the views from NB1

Extremely generous donations from alumni will now help refurbishment of the boathouse and put the Boat Club on a firm financial footing, and I am keen that our beautiful chapel, with its crystal-clear acoustic, is put to good use as often as possible. Alongside the new library, Hertford can, I think, boast that it provides students at all levels with a very good learning environment all round.

All of this, though, is brought together with a greater purpose: to have a positive effect on the societies and the globe that we share. Students, staff and fellows are supported at Hertford so that they, in turn, can support others. We have staff who help organise community events and who do work in conservation. We have fellows and lecturers who advise governments and central banks, who organise global-level events, and who are working clinicians. We have students who care passionately about the world, and go off into all walks of life to make a difference.

It's made possible by the mutual support that the Hertford community gives each other. That's not to say that everything is perfect. I am listening to how everyone thinks we can, and need, to do better. We must also ensure we can weather all the coming storms in the current international and political context. But in my first weeks my overwhelming impression has been of what a precious gem Hertford is, and how much we all have to be proud of.

Alexandra Freeman, Principal