New Arrivals
Inaugural Cullen Junior Research Fellow

The Big Picture
Corpus under canvas

The Corpus Papers
Using the past to predict the future

College Faces
Finalists in lockdown
On the subject of looking to the future, we are delighted to announce that the plans drawn up by architects Wright & Wright for the new Special Collections Centre and library improvements have been granted planning permission and listed building consent. Providing significant new space and facilities for the College at the same time as respecting the scale and intimacy of our site, the new building has been designed to sit sympathetically within the existing setting of Garden Quad, while providing a striking contemporary addition and improvement to the streetscape of Oriel Square. As the architects describe on pp. 10-11, ‘reconciliation and transformation’ have been the watchwords of this project. Corpus has always been about people as well as buildings, of course, and so it is with particular pleasure to report the progress that has been made in fundraising to endow the Andrew Glyn Fellowship in Economics, which may stand at two thirds of its target of £1m. It would be wonderful if we could reach our total in time for the planned celebrations next summer (pandemic permitting) of 100 years of PPE teaching at Oxford.

As the ‘Big Picture’ on pp. 8-9 reveals, life in College during the past few months has looked and felt different – notably in the decidedly un-Corpus phenomenon called social distancing – but the essentials of Michaelmas Term (Freshers’ week in October, Christmas trees in November) have still been present. As revealed in the interviews with some of our students who hold leadership positions in the College and University (pp. 14-16), ingenuity and adaptability have proved the watchwords in student social as well as academic life. More than anything, this term has reminded us all of the need to cleave to the things that matter and enjoy life to the full when we can: as Rhiannon Ogden-Jones, former JCR President, observes, ‘part of the beauty of living is learning how to adapt and finding the joy in that’. ‘Hopeful imaginings’, in the words of our current JCR Vice-President, Agya Akintan-Labun (p. 8), are what higher education ought to be about. It is a blessing to live, study and work in this place of value and purpose, and at the end of this peculiar year, we send our very best wishes for your own ‘hopeful imaginings’ for 2021.
Over the last few years I have been working on the story of the reception of the long two-book love story of Cupid (Amor or ‘Love’ in Latin) and Psyche (Soul in Greek) in European literature since the time of Shakespeare. Cupid and Psyche (C&P hereafter) forms the centrepiece of the Latin Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass by the second-century CE writer Apuleius, on whom I have written two previous volumes, one a general avowal in the author and another which looks at the literary texture of the Metamorphoses. This current research is aimed at a third book to complete the second series with a reception study, a joint enterprise with another Apuleian scholar, Regine May, Associate Professor at the University of Leeds (whom some may recall as a CCC DPhil).

Apuleius’ tale narrates how the beautiful princess Psyche gains the enmity of Venus but the love of Venus’ son Cupid, and how after a series of tribulations and adventures (involving jealous sisters, a husband of mysterious identity, a dramatic revelation scene, surreal speaking objects and animals, and an epic-style journey into the Underworld) Cupid and Psyche are united in happy marriage and Psyche becomes a goddess. This story has enjoyed an extraordinarily rich reception through the five centuries from the rediscovery of Apuleius’ novel in the Renaissance to the present day. Our project ranges across literary genres in English, French, German and Dutch, encompassing poetry and drama as well as prose fiction, with occasional glances at opera, film and the visual arts.

This is the first full scholarly study which takes up the key question of the story’s relationship to the development of the modern fairy-tale, which it obviously resembles in its fantastic elements and happy ending. The scholar Delve Fehling has argued persuasively that Apuleius’ novel generated some supposed folk-tale patterns rather than vice versa, as commonly held previously. The ‘Cinderella’ story has malevolent pair of older sisters and its beautiful, suffering and ultimately glorious married youngest sister derives from C&P, while the tale’s idea that a handsome husband could be a monster looks like the origin of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ (see further below). The consequences of reception for the reception history of Metamorphoses and its resulting key role in the history of the modern fairy-tale have never been followed up.

A major context for the study is the court of Louis XIV of France in the 1660s, then the cultural centre of Western Europe. The fabulist Jean de La Fontaine’s interesting 1669 adaptation of the story, presented as narrated in the gardens of the then-rising Versailles, was itself adapted for the stage by Molière and others with music by Lully. It also stimulated a controversy with one of the other Apuleian scholars, Regine May, Associate Professor at the University of Leeds (whom some may recall as a CCC DPhil). The scholar Delve Fehling has argued persuasively that Apuleius’ novel generated some supposed folk-tale patterns rather than vice versa, as commonly held previously.

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Neue Ära

Professor Alastair Buchan was the University’s Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Head of Brexit Strategy) between 2017 and 2019. He is the founding Director of Oxford in Berlin in Berlin.

As the UK heads towards the end of the transition period, having already formally left the European Union at the beginning of 2020, one can be forgiven for wondering what — economically, politically, socially — the next few years might bring for the country. We know what the last four years or so have brought: a country and its people embattled and embittered, with its outlook on how to deal with the current pandemic to name but one major preoccupation, generally following the fault lines of Brexit.

Universities in the UK have occasionally been criticised for not doing their best to get the message of the dangers of Brexit sufficiently into the public domain, or at least not getting them sufficiently well-comprehended. My view is that the debate over continued membership of the EU was so visceral, so steeped in the last century of European and British history, so bound up in our political divides and cultural battles, that there was little that British universities could have done to influence the outcome of the referendum.

Whether we could have or not, here in Oxford we have taken steps to ward off the worst implications for UK higher education of leaving the European Union. Nationally, much ink has flowed, and many miles have been traipsed, rehearsing those arguments of leaving or remaining. I was appointed as the University’s Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for Brexit Strategy in late 2016. While I discovered that there was little that Oxford individually, or UK universities collectively, could do to mitigate the worst policy failures of a government intent on taking us out of the EU, finding a way for Oxford to work inside and to effectively remain in Europe was absolutely essential. To do this, I founded ‘Oxford in Berlin’.

In 2018 a University subsidiary company was established, entitled Oxford in Berlin gGmbH. We have a centre and open lab space housed at the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin’s Natural History Museum, that now provides Oxford’s faculty, visitors and students with workspace when they are in town. Aside from our main relationship with the Berlin University Alliance, as our first four partners are now known, we have forging links with many research institutions within Berlin-Brandenburg. Our original partners have been successful in gaining additional research funding having been designated as a Centre of Excellence by the Federal government, with some of which they are establishing a virtual Oxford-Berlin Centre for Advanced Studies. Its first thematic research programmes will be focussing on Social Cohesion and Global Health, but programmes in other disciplinary areas will be identified over the coming years, as will be other funding mechanisms to encourage faculty and student mobility between Oxford and Berlin. We are working closely with colleagues at the Einstein Foundation, which will be supporting several major research initiatives and funded a new programme of Oxford-Berlin Exchange Professorships for the coming years.

So why Berlin, and why not other major cities or universities within the EU? It seemed to us that our partners in Berlin offered many advantages in terms of research excellence, comprehensive interdisciplinary scope, and a local administration that was willing and able to help us. Berlin has considerable convening power in science and research (just ask the Gates Foundation or the Wellcome Trust who have also created Berlin offices for their EU operations). And, of course, Berlin is at the heart of the European Union that the UK has just left. For decades, Corpus, as well as the wider University, has benefitted enormously from the presence of European staff and students, some of the very best of whom are from Germany. And while Oxford is being forced to leave Europe, we believe that through an entity like Oxford in Berlin we will not only keep our highly beneficial European academic and research links, but also restate Oxford’s identity as a leading European university for at least the next 900 years.

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For anyone intrigued by the process of deciding cases in a multicultural, multilingual environment, the CJEU is an extraordinary place to work. Problems arrive in any one of 24 languages of procedure, presented in a way that made perfect sense to the draftsman but that may seem weird to a lawyer trained in a completely different legal tradition who is trying to understand them via the medium of elaborate administrative French (French being the unofficial internal common working language). The solution has to be one that simultaneously ticks the academic boxes (intellectual rigour, coherence with the whole mosaic of existing case law) and is severely practical (capable of being applied by a tired local official or judge on a Friday afternoon in a small town somewhere in the EU). Sounds surreal? Yes, in a way it is — and also completely exciting and challenging and addictive. As an advocate general, you get to tackle everything that EU law can throw at you. You are the AG in all cases allocated to you (not just those that end up with Opinions), so you deal with one-eleventh of the total case load. You’re meant to make sure, with the reporting judge, that the case follows a sensible path through the Court, taking into account an appropriate amount of time and judicial resources. In the more difficult puzzlers, your task is to deliver a non-binding Opinion — publicly available on the internet together with the later judgment — that explains the issues (and the bear-traps), sets out and analyses the options and proposes (ideally, with compelling logic) which solution the Court should take and why. You cover every-thing from refugees to GMOs, from proposed EU — third country trade agreements to employment rights for Muslim women wearing the hijab.

Fourteen and a half years in what has always been my dream job is more luck than anyone has a right to expect out of a professional career. Although my service at the Court came to an end in rather dramatic circumstances on 10 September 2020, my abiding memory will be of the great privilege and honour of working there as an advocate general trying to contribute towards the forging of EU law.
Corpus under canvas

Covid-19

In order to provide socially distanced space for our students, at the beginning of this term, the Domestic Bursar Andy Rolfe arranged for marquees to be erected in the Main Quad, Gentlemen Commoners’ Quad and the Fellows’ Building garden. This picture shows the garden marquee being used for inductions during Freshers’ Week. In the evenings, it transforms into the student bar, with table service provided by college staff. JCR Vice-President Augy Allain-Labon says: “Although it doesn’t quite have the same atmosphere as the Beer Cellar (surely nothing else does?), the marquee buzzes with potential. I like the feeling of expansiveness in there, and something about the vastness of the space above you at once makes you feel safe from the dangers of the virus ‘out there’, and encourages hopeful imaginings about life post-pandemic. It’s a space for everyone to come together at a time when the value of community has never been more apparent.”
Architects Clare Wright and Kirsty Shankland explain how the project to extend and redevelop the Corpus Library respects the heritage of the site and buildings.

With works by Galileo, Erasmus and the Venerable Bede, among others, the library collections of Corpus Christi are among the finest of any Oxford college. Yet though its sixteenth-century Library is of national architectural and historical significance, it no longer meets the needs or expectations of students and staff at a modern, world-class university. Designed to meet these needs, and safeguard the College’s Special Collections, the remodelling project by Wright & Wright Architects, whose previous work includes libraries at Magdalen and Corpus, Cambridge as well as Lambeth Palace, extending and redeveloping the Library while respecting the heritage of the site and buildings.

As one of Oxford’s oldest and smallest colleges, Corpus Christi is characterised by a spirit of architectural and academic intimacy, “At Corpus, everything is on the small scale; that is what makes it so livable”, declared the architectural historian Niklaus Pevsner. Wright & Wright’s proposals carefully unpick, restore and augment the existing building fabric, while adding distinctive contemporary elements. Notably, a new ashlar stone facade on Oriel Square replaces the existing garage and flat originally designed in the 1950s. A large glazed opening alludes to the historic notion of the ‘library window’, acting as a new marker for the College, consolidating its civic presence and refreshing its relationship with the wider urban realm. A large glazed opening alludes to the historic notion of the ‘library window’, acting as a new marker for the College, consolidating its civic presence and refreshing its relationship with the wider urban realm.

The Design Team has worked to ensure that the scheme is designed with very effective passive energy solutions throughout. A small amount of mechanical intervention is required but the building will work very effectively with minimal mechanical and electrical services. The current design is the first building in Oxford, other than a café at Kellogg College, to meet Passivhaus standards.

The relocation of books currently stored in the lower rooms in the old Library will free up these areas for use as high-quality teaching spaces. They have the potential to become delightful historic rooms, with windows letting in light on both sides. Throughout the project, existing elements and conditions are a jumping-off point for reciprocity and transformation, the new emerging out of the old to generate assemblages created over time. We are delighted that the scheme has been positively received by the planners and Historic England and that planning permission and listed building consent were granted in November.
manifestation of the sun’s magnetic field, and that the number of spots on the sun varies over the course of each eleven year solar cycle. Each dark spot represents a patch of gas that has cooled down due to being pierced by the magnetic field. Energy released from the Sun’s magnetic field can trigger massive explosions, such as solar flares or coronal mass ejections. The particles take 3-5 days to reach the Earth, but can then induce geomagnetic storms, disrupting Earth-orbiting satellite systems and causing damage to power grids.

Understanding and predicting patterns of solar activity is therefore of vital importance in the modern world. In the Programme, Dr Hisashi Hayakawa of Nagoya University describes his work in improving the predictive modelling of future solar cycles. Historical evidence, such as the drawing from MS 157, helps scientists like Dr Hayakawa to better forecast how the sun might behave in the future. Previously, scientists had perceived an upward trend in the number of sunspots recorded. However, when the historical data recorded before 1700 had been taken into account, the sunspot number was revised, almost negating the upward trend.

The manuscript now known as MS 157 was given to Corpus in 1618 by Henry Parry (CCC 1607). The manuscript was compiled from earlier sources, and elaborated upon, at Worcester Cathedral Priory over a number of years terminating in 1140. Written in the hands of at least three scribes, including that of John of Worcester himself, it is a major source for the early medieval history of England. The description of the sunspots and the accompanying diagram appear in the entry for the year 1128.

Recent publications featuring reproductions of the sunspots description from MS 157 include:

Barrett, K. The sun: one thousand years of scientific imagery (Scala Arts & Heritage, 2018)
Brown, N. History and climate change: a Eurocentric perspective (Routledge, 2001)

The programme, Stars: a Matter of Life and Death, was broadcast on 12 July on BBC Four, and is available on iPlayer for another 3 months.
As soon as you step into college you are immediately aware that things are different

How did Covid impact the social side of Freshers’ Week?
Matt: Well it was very different from last year. Normally we have subject drinks with tutors. The tutors didn’t come this year, and with subject drinks and all other drinks events, seating was in socially distanced groups of six with one or two students from the years above. Instead of the ‘Big Night In’ down in the Beer Cellar, Syren (the Erotic Press) and the usual in the JCR with some ales and a webcam going through a pub quiz with all different households in front of us. As the week went on, we got more ambitious. Instead of a freshers’ formal we had a BBQ in the main garden marquee with live music followed by household Karaoke. Of course, the highlight of a normal Freshers’ Week is the ‘BCP’ on Saturday. This was on Zoom with live DJ set streamed from one of the smaller marquees, decked out with blue lights. We even did a pelican delivery service to make up for the bar closing at 10pm.

Faseeha: Our Freshers’ Week to be as inclusive and as a reverse to the #ShirtsVsSkins football fixture against Classicists having finished Mods and the nervous anticipation of finalists waiting to see where they would be spending their Easter vac. Maybe it was the dawn realisation that a ‘shirts vs skins’ football fixture against Brasenose that afternoon was probably not the wisest idea as the pandemic began to find its way into Oxford. By the next day it was clear that we would not be returning to Corpus for a long time and, for us finalists, perhaps never again as undergraduates.

As a final under lockdown, the days rolled by in a blur; the Easter vac soon passed and the prospect of a virtual Trinity term loomed ahead. Yet despite the obvious disappointment of missing out on pre-exam subitic breakfasts in hall and festivities in the Merton Street sun, the circumstances did provide many surprising upsides. I found myself wholly immersed in my studies, pouring over Plato’s Republic for afternoons on end whilst the pandemic dominated the world around me. Knowing that I would be leaving the world of Classics to start my finance career shortly after my last exam, I was fully aware that this was the time to truly relish my degrees. Under lockdown, I embraced my passion for Classics as all the uncertainty around me actually served to lift the pressure of finals. Revision sessions with Professors Harrison and Guthkenke were without doubt the highlight and the Corpus Classics community really did come together to find innovative ways to keep our studies engaging. Thesis submission day saw the customary photoshoot outside Exam Schools replaced by Zoom drinks, and by the end of June the virtual term was well established.

Now three months into my new role in investment banking, the days of undergraduate life at Oxford feel like a different world. While I have fortuitously been able to go into the office on most days, the now well-documented challenges of starting a career when working from home is the norm remain. The pandemic has reminded me that the importance of community cannot be overstated. Throughout the Easter vac and remote Trinity, the close collaboration of the JCR, MCR and SOG ensured that support was given to those most in need and the dedication of many meant that lots of traditions, JCR tea included, were carried out remotely. Oxford’s ‘small and friendly’ college has proven once again that its reputation is no mere stereotype.

How has Covid affected your studies?
Faseeha: I recently completed my transfer of status, the first major milestone for a DPhil student, and this involved an on-line viva. With that completed and the labs reopened, I now need to get on with experiments and generate data for my project. In terms of events, we will continue to organise a mixture of on-line and in-person socials.
Matt: I’ve got Classics Finals and an extended essay looming on the horizon so I’m going to be knocking down for the rest of the year. Covid has not affected me too much, it has just meant that I don’t have to get up early for lectures as they are all filmed and put on-line.

For its Michaelsmas Term reopening, Corpus has made some changes. What does it look like now?
Faseeha: As soon as you step into college you are immediately aware that things are different. To get to the Auditorium from the Lodge, I have to sanitise my hands, get my temperature checked, and use the one-way system. Everyone is socially distanced and masked. Both the MCR and JCR are closed.
Matt: The masks are weird, especially in tutorials. We can only take them off when we’re eating or drinking. The Beer Cellar has been replaced with a bar in the garden marquees. Hall, which has been take-away now, reopened as a restaurant where you book a table for your accommodation household. The Library has a fancy new looking system and a load of Perspex creating socially secure booths.

What do the JCR and MCR think of the ‘new normal’?
Matt: There was a certain amount of mixed feeling in the JCR. The government has kept pubs, restaurants and cafes open, allowing people from different households to mingle in a non-socially-distanced manner. Yet, it has brought in guidance which is strictly household orientated for college and university spaces; it doesn’t leave much wiggle room for inter-household socialising. We felt that the regulations were forcing us out of Oxford rather than keeping us in the safer space of Corpus. The College quickly took this feedback on board and worked on aspects of college life like the bar, JCR teas and the hall to provide us with spaces to socialise in Corpus. I think it has dealt with the pandemic rather well.

Faseeha: MCR members saw a lot of departmental changes over the summer. The College has followed a similar trajectory with sanitation, room capacities and one-way systems. Without the MCR, the graduate community became quite dispersed. Everything moved online: welfare teas, seminars, meetings, so we really appreciate being able to socialise to the maximum possible extent in the college and university spaces; it doesn’t feel like being in a three-inch portal. I hope I’ll get to Montreal after Christmas; in the same way I hope I’ll return to Corpus and get to say the goodbyes I never did. But if the pandemic has taught me anything it is that not every catastrophe in life can be planned and part of the beauty of living is learning how to adapt and finding the joy in that.
Did you know that we regularly send out College news and invitations to events by email? Please be sure to let us have your current email address if you want to keep in touch.

Fostering a caring community

Effie Amah-Tetteh

This year I have the honour and privilege of being the Vice President of the Oxford African and Caribbean Society. It comes with many challenges which are inextricably linked: the restriction on social gatherings with our community, our members feeling more isolated as we can no longer see each other as much as we were accustomed to, and freshers whom we won’t be able to meet properly for a considerable amount of time.

It’s difficult to keep the family vibes going when we’re limited to Facebook, WhatsApp and Zoom, but it’s also a chance to think more creatively and broadly about the needs and wants of all our society’s members.

With the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the world is questioning its explicit and unconscious race biases. In a university as prestigious as Oxford, we as a community have found ourselves questioning our identities in a state of quasi-lockdown, while the realities of systemic racism are debated, our struggles often forgotten or overlooked and our University absolving itself in many cases – like putting a statue above the welfare of its black students.

It’s very difficult to take up space here in a normal year, constantly feeling the need to prove something as a student, more so as a black student. This year, the welfare of black students is more important than ever. While the ACS is a diverse community, we all support each other through our societal hardships as well as the usual, crazy amount of work.

Within College, the Chaplain Judith Maltby, the MCR Diversities Officer Zeinab Ali and I put together a Black History Month film series to give fellow Corpuscles an opportunity to learn, unlearn and discuss. I’m proud to say this is not Corpus’s first step in unlearning and de-structuring systemic racism within our community; the black Corps have been in talks with the President; Jessica Fatoye and Tyrell Gabriel raised £850 with Students Support Black Lives Matter t-shirts (sold out but still in demand!); and our JCR President, Matt Carlton, has been proactive and supportive throughout.

To me, this and more is a testament to the ethos of our community and the wonderful human beings whom our college attracts.

What do I want to achieve in my year of Vice Presidency? This is difficult to sum into an amount or even a phrase, but ultimately my goal is to continue to foster the lively and loving environment of our community for every African and Caribbean student, to grow our social media presence and help as many prospective applicants of African and Caribbean descent as we can.

By the end of my year, I want each of our members to have at least one fond memory of our time here as a community, even if it is virtual. I want to lighten the weight of the world for our members, even if just for one Zoom call. I want everyone to be able to say that they were still able to feel a little bit of home.

The ultimate self-study guide

Tom Flatters, third-year materials scientist, is one of four Oxford undergraduates who helped to make self-study easier for students in Britain and beyond. During lockdown, they produced an e-book called Learn Better at Home. Drawing on scientific research and the anecdotal experience of its four authors, the e-book explained how students can find and harness motivation, get down to work, and work effectively. It was offered on a pay-as-you-want basis, with half of its proceeds going to GiveDirectly and the other half to The Life You Can Save, a non-profit body that advances the most cost-effective interventions against developing-world hardship. £1,000 has already been raised.