The New Library and IT Centre  •  Summer at Fitzwilliam  •  Members’ News
Master’s message

Welcome to this new-look Optima! Its equally new editor, Alison Carter, would be delighted to have your reactions as well as creative suggestions for future issues. It is designed, in every sense, to give you a sense of a dynamic Cambridge college which goes from strength to strength. Students both present and past are represented in its pages. Their activities range from the memory-evoking familiar to the ways in which a Fitzwilliam education is only the platform for enriching contributions to the wider world beyond it. We also hope that readers will be interested to learn something about the current generation of Fellows and their academic work. Their research and intellectual endeavours inform their teaching, and we are determined that individually-focused teaching should remain central to what we do here. A snap-shot of a multi-dimensional collegiate experience would not be complete, however, without news of sporting success, both within Cambridge and in the public arena (or, in this issue, around a circuit). We work and play, whether musically or otherwise, in a very competitive context (it was ever thus, alumni never fail to recall). The pictures alone speak of the intensity and blur of a Cambridge term. We hope that succeeding issues of Optima will keep you very much in touch with Fitzwilliam and its future, and that you will keep in touch with us.

Professor Robert Lethbridge
Master

150th Anniversary Campaign Launch

Two hundred members of Fitzwilliam and their guests heard Professor Alison Richard, Vice-Chancellor of the University, Lord Lamont (Economics 1961) and David Starkey (History 1964) speak warmly about Fitzwilliam at a Reception on Saturday 27 September to mark the launch. These are challenging times, but the College takes the long view.

The ten-year campaign, Sustaining Excellence, aims to raise £20 million – both to complete the new Library & IT Centre and to increase our endowment so that the income remains sufficient to maintain and develop our vision for the future.

Both Norman Lamont and David Starkey are members of our Campaign Council – a small group of alumni who have been working behind the scenes to help get us off to a good start. I’m delighted to say that we launch with gifts and legacies totalling £2.25 million.

At the reunion dinner, members were given 1GB memory sticks (generously presented by the outgoing President of the Fitzwilliam Society, Dinesh Dharmija (Law 1971) through www.deltaresort.com) containing a visual tour of the College and a brochure about the campaign.

If you would like to know more please have a look at the website www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/alumni and go to the ‘150th Anniversary’ page or the ‘New Library’ page. Please contact the Development Office for more information.

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Please feel free to contact me with news, contributions and ideas for the next issue.

Copy deadline: 30 November
Publication: 5 March

Listening to you

A one-minute communications questionnaire was included in the last Journal, designed to help us get a better understanding of what members want from College publications. A big thank-you to those of you who spotted it, and then took the time to complete it.

What did you tell us? Generally, those that responded (and it was not a huge number – about 160 in all) seemed happy with the College’s publications: “always delighted to hear news from Fitzwilliam, thank you very much”. 52% said they read
The Library & IT Centre will provide an integrated centre for learning for all members of Fitzwilliam, with 100% more reader spaces, 50% more computer spaces and 60,000 volumes on open access. Wired and wireless IT network connections provide flexibility now and for the future.

Designed by Edward Cullinan, RIBA Gold Medal winner in 2008, the building will exceed the latest building-regulation requirements for energy consumption and insulation levels, and will be an exciting and environmentally-sensitive addition to the award-winning buildings on our site.

The main reading rooms are on three floors, with reader spaces around the perimeters to maximise the use of daylight and the views over the College gardens. The stair-tower takes readers between the floors, provides study alcoves at half-landing levels, and culminates in the “nest” level where readers can enjoy even wider views across Cambridge. Two flexible study spaces, with projection facilities, can accommodate groups of up to 25, and the south tower also has semi-circular spaces for small-group study.

If you would like more information please contact development@fitz.cam.ac.uk

Building work has started!
Follow progress as it happens by going to www.fitz.cam.ac.uk and clicking on ‘News’ or ‘New Library’.
There is a considerable momentum on green issues within the College generally, including the student body, staff and Fellows. There is real potential to make substantial improvements in areas such as energy efficiency, water use and conservation, sustainable building, sourcing of food and other supplies, and waste management (including recycling).

The College has created an environmental committee, with representatives from Fellows, College staff, undergraduates and postgraduates. This reports to the Governing Body, and has a mandate to advance environmental issues in College.

In May, the Governing Body adopted the College Environmental Policy. The next step is to create an implementable environmental action plan, with monitorable targets. In addition, the JMA and MCR Green Officers intend to launch a major awareness campaign, to help students be more aware of the ways in which they can practically reduce their own ecological footprint.

Also in May, the Master signed the Cambridge Climate Change Charter on behalf of the College, which commits Fitzwilliam to developing action plans to address the issues of climate change. Again, the next steps are to detail an action plan, and to start monitoring achievements.

A Fairtrade working group has also been set up, to help the College move towards achieving Fairtrade status – this will include internal catering, as well as provision for conferences.

It would be good to hear from alumni and other readers of Optima if they feel they are able to contribute to our efforts in these areas.

For information, and a point of contact on green matters, please approach Dr Bhaskar Vira, Fellow, Environmental Officer, by email at bv101@cam.ac.uk

Green space is for members to share environmental news and views.

The name ‘Judas’ has long been thought of as synonymous with ‘traitor’. But a newly-discovered ancient text of the Gospel of Judas offers a picture of Judas Iscariot radically different from the Church’s traditional understanding of him and maintains that, far from being the infamous betrayer, Judas was actually Jesus’ trusted friend and the recipient of secret revelation. Simon Gathercole’s new book includes a translation of the ancient Coptic text of the Gospel of Judas and a running commentary. The book covers the action-packed story of the discovery of the codex, cuts through the hype that accompanied its publication, and offers new translations of the ancient evidence about Judas Iscariot and the Gospel attributed to him.

The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity
Dr Simon Gathercole, Fellow, Lecturer in New Testament.
Oxford University Press
November 2007
978-0-19-922584-2 | £16.99

Chaplaincy Appeal

As a result of the appeal in the Autumn 2007 issue of Optima, the College has now been able to proceed with the appointment of a Chaplain. Grateful thanks are due to all members of Fitzwilliam who made this such a high priority, and also to Dr Elizabeth Harris, a well-wisher, who made a most generous gift to the College.

Fitzwilliam welcomes The Reverend Dr Tiffany Conlin, who served the parish of Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, as Assistant Curate, prior to her appointment at Fitzwilliam. She undertook ministerial training at Westcott House in Cambridge, and has a doctorate in Theological Hermeneutics from King’s College, University of London.

The Reverend Jutta Brueck is now Priest in Charge at St James’s Church, Wulfstan Way, Cambridge, and we all wish her well in her new role.
That was then, this is now

Members turn up, sometimes out of the blue, from far way or long ago, to reconnect with Fitzwilliam. This is your space.

Fifty-nine years ago, even before I arrived in Cambridge from far-away New Zealand, I felt a deep sense of gratitude to Fitzwilliam for its policy of endeavouring to find places for overseas applicants. I came up in 1949 to read mathematics and, given the post-war pressure on available places, it is very likely that without acceptance from Fitzwilliam I would have been unable to come to Cambridge. Then my career probably would have been different, and possibly less fulfilling.

When I arrived I found in Fitzwilliam House, as it was then, a powerful feeling of college identity, despite its austere accommodation in Trumpington Street. I shared nearly three wonderful years of study, sport and social occasions with a group of men with whom I found I had much in common. We were determined to compete strongly with better-endowed colleges and we had our successes. My love of mathematics was greatly reinforced by the stimulating lectures and by the invaluable one-on-two supervision sessions.

On graduation I was appointed to the mathematics department of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, where I remained for thirty-five satisfying years. My research was with control systems, initially for space navigation.

I have been retired now for twenty years, and throughout that time I have helped to prepare the New Zealand team for the annual International Mathematical Olympiad. As part of this, I hold regular tutorials for the twenty or so local high-school students who are keen to study mathematics beyond their school curriculum. This has been a most enjoyable retirement activity.

Earlier this year my wife and I were able to visit Fitzwilliam for the first time on its new site. On entering the grounds we felt an immediate sense of tranquillity, of informality, and of welcome. The buildings are most attractive, and very functional. This should provide a fine environment in which to study.

We arrived at a very busy time, the Friday of the May Bumps, but Fitzwilliam maintained its reputation for friendliness in the very warm welcome that we received from the Master and several other members of the staff. This was a most satisfying conclusion to our overseas trip.

Robert Long (Mathematics 1949)

Neighbourly in Nebraska, nervous in New York, friendly in Fitzwilliam?

The personalities of people in the US differ according to the state they live in, according to a new study led by Dr Jason Rentfrow, Fellow of Fitzwilliam and University Lecturer in the Department of Social and Developmental Psychology.

Combinations of five basic dimensions—extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to new ideas and experiences—account for all personalities. The new research involved collecting data from individuals (representative of the US population in education, income and other measures) using an online personality survey.

“We used the results from more than half a million online surveys to create a ‘personality map’ of the United States, and found striking wider geographical trends, such as a national ‘stress belt’ dividing the more anxious and impulsive eastern US from the comparatively relaxed west,” said Dr Rentfrow.

The research has received a great deal of coverage in the run up to the elections. A Newsweek article “The Geography of Personality” commented: “In the last three presidential elections, states high in openness and low in conscientiousness gave the Democrat a bigger winning margin than did states low in openness and high in conscientiousness, even after controlling for income, education and race.”

But there is also good evidence that the customs and institutions that arise from the dominant personality of a place can shape the personalities of people who are not that way to begin with. “Where new ideas and diversity are valued, it can influence how people there feel and behave, altering their natural dispositions.” Perhaps there’s scope for a study on college personality?

It was in the autumn of 1991, after what had seemed an interminable exile, that I returned to the North of England. During the previous twenty-three years I had lived in Cambridge, Oxford, and the Surrey towns of Dorking and Redhill: I had many pleasant memories and made many good friends in all of them. But for one who has loved walking all his life, one crucial question for judging the place where he lives must be: what is the local walking like?

Yes, truly there was something missing! As the years passed I came to understand more and more deeply the true merits of my Lancashire home ground. Although in each place I settled I found enough routes to keep my limbs exercised, those outings were pale imitations of what walking can be. The genuine hills, swift streams, vantage points – and, curiously, the bright and breezy days to enjoy them – lay elsewhere. Long before those twenty-three years were up, and my hand was forced by career developments, I knew it was high time to be heading homewards.

It is a natural human failing to exaggerate the beauties of one’s own local countryside: there are too many long-held and personal associations to make an objective assessment. Of course, given the choice, I would sooner be at Hollow Stones admiring Mickledore and Scafell Crag, or scrambling along Aonach Eagach or Cuillin Ridge. But those are special treats to be savoured occasionally. Week by week, there is so much to enjoy, readily accessible, in the Ribble and Hodder Valleys, South Pennines, Pendle country and the Forest of Bowland.

Most of the walks described, including those already familiar from childhood, were re-trodden in 1992/3 with the embryonic idea of this book in mind. This book is first and foremost a celebration of walking in those areas, and a thanksgiving for the many and varied delights they have to offer.

Andrew Stachulski
(Natural Sciences 1968)

Do you have a favourite walk – and what makes it special? Please write about your own ‘home ground’ for the next issue.

Favourite walk

Walk 19: Deep in the Forest
Slaidburn, Burn Fell, Dunsop Fell, Whitendale, Salter Fell, Croasdale Quarry, Croasdale House, Slaidburn
13 miles
Maps: OS Landranger 103; OS Explorer 41 (Forest of Bowland)
Career in Caricature

After a career in management education Alan Mumford (History 1956) followed his passion and took to writing about political cartoons.

History and politics were the main themes for me at Cambridge – I was Chairman of the University Labour Club during the Suez War, and marched and chaired a huge protest meeting held at the Union Society. It was extremely rowdy. At the end of the meeting I was met by one of the Proctors and accompanying Bulldogs, and was apprehensive: were they going to charge me with some offence? In fact they accompanied me along King’s Parade – they had heard some rowing club hearties from Magdalene planning to acquaint me with the delights of swimming in the Cam.

My career centred on the development of managers, and I wrote a number of books in this field. When I had a heart attack in 1999, a friend suggested I should replace some of my management development work by writing a book about political cartoons – I had been collecting originals and books for years. I enjoy most going through hundreds of cartoons and making a selection, and reading history and politics in order to provide the proper context. Although this is relatively unstressful, I still have problems of deadlines, of getting responses to letters, of losing an important reference point for a cartoon.

I am sometimes asked “who is your favourite cartoonist” or “what is your favourite cartoon?” There are two reasons for avoiding these questions – the first is that I have a very poor visual memory, and the second is that many political cartoonists have a very thin skin and react to even implied criticism of their work.

The two chapters in this current book I most enjoyed producing were one in which I present the different cartoon representations of six Conservative Prime Ministers and another in which I secured the views of a dozen or so Conservative Politicians about cartoons and their impact. The most comprehensive answer to my questions on this, recorded in the book, were given by Kenneth Clarke, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Cambridge man.

Tory Blues: A cartoon history of the Conservative Party
Alan Mumford
Hardback £19.99
First class postage and packing £4.00
Only available from: The Political Cartoon Society, 32 Store Street, London WC1E 7BS
Tel: 020 7580 1114
Email: info@politicalcartoon.co.uk

Also by Alan Mumford:

There is an exhibition at The Political Cartoon Society to coincide with the launch of this book: 21 October 2008 to 17 January 2009.

www.politicalcartoon.co.uk
Gemma Hardaker: I read SPS, then completed a PGCE in primary teaching, I'm now a primary school teacher living and working in Cambridge, and looking forward to repining Fitz next year to complete an MEd.

Jane Clarkson: I'm just about to go into my third year of teaching at the Perse Boys, Cambridge. Mainly teaching Geography but I am also now Head of PSHE, a lower-school tutor and a games coach. It's a great job at a brilliant school and it's good to be able to use my degree every day.

Charlotte Collins: I took French and Italian. I have since been working in London in a legal publishing company but have realised I've had enough of the city so I've taken the plunge into secondary-school teaching. I start this September as a trainee and will be teaching French, Italian and also Spanish.

Rosie Hodgson: Since graduating in law from Fitzwilliam in June 2007 I have completed the Bar Vocational Course back in London and start a pupillage this October as a criminal barrister. I had a great day at the bumps picnic which culminated as usual in the traditional swim in the Cam.

Kelvin Donald (Engineering): Since leaving Fitz in 2007 I have moved to London and started work as a Management Consultant. I am definitely missing life at Fitz but am enjoying the challenge of something new. I had an excellent day at sunny Billy field and hope to return next year.

Marc Kofler: I'm now working for Citigroup in London as a stockbroker in the European Oil and Gas sector. Saturday afternoon was excellent - Billy field during bumps is a great place to catch up with Fitz alumni.

Lauren Cadwallader: I read Archaeology and Anthropology, and have been dividing my time between working in Commercial Archaeology across Britain and working on Research digs abroad (Egypt, Peru and Tanzania).

Jaume Vilar: I'm an IT Contractor specialising in financial services living in Amersham but I still keep up with Fitz rowing. I'm on the Billygoats committee and have been to OXier Holt every year bar one since it started. I try to row at least once a year!

Natasha Grist (Geography 1993) is Research Fellow in Climate Change and Development at the Overseas Development Institute in London. In April, she had been in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, running a workshop on the future of development in the light of climate change as part of her work with Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. “Burkina Faso is going to be hard hit by climate change, and there is a huge challenge to raise awareness and funding as well as to get effective action on this. The workshop was co-sponsored by Christian Aid, and involved government ministries, international agencies and international and national NGOs – it was the first time so many agencies had been involved. Recent reports citing climate change as a major security risk by 2030 have sharpened the focus of environmental research and its wider human implications.”

On 28 September this year, Fitzwilliam students Matthew Andrew (2007), Donald Evans (2006), Peter Herrick (2005), Michael Parrott (2006) and Jessica Temple (2007) had a go. “The blade on the old bar wall offered a great deal of inspiration for the idea, and we were eager to replicate their success, though in a slightly shorter time if possible!” said Peter Herrick.

“We got across to France from Dover in about three and a half hours, despite some challenging conditions close to the end and one incident where we had to avoid being run down by a super-freighter. Ted Bates came down to push us off, which was great. This time makes us the fastest crew from a university ever (including beating the most recent effort in 2005 from LMBC).”

They were sponsored by Brown Shipley, and raised over £2000 for the Motor Neurone Disease Association. None of the crew had rowed before coming to Fitzwilliam.
The poet John Clare was born into the final decade of the eighteenth century, at a time when the urgent claims of revolution and conservative patriotism were inspiring, on each side, empty slogans and weighty polemical volumes. Yet he was also born into “a gloomy village in Northamptonshire, on the edge of the Lincolnshire fens” – into a world with a small circumference, where to go beyond the horizon was to go out of his knowledge. And what knowledge that was – a landscape of a few miles around the village of Helpston in which Clare lived, walked, loved and worked, and which he knew with a breathtaking intimacy. He was familiar, at walking pace, with every bump and turn in a path; his body carried a physical memory of that terrain, as we might cherish every sweeping curve of a highway, and re-experience them on each visit as a kind of sweet haunting. He watched the flowering of individual plants, day by day, hour by hour, and the building of birds’ nests, as we might notice the progress of a construction site and raise an eyebrow at the introduction of new materials or the length of the working day.

From yon black clump of wheat that grows
More rank and higher than the rest,
A lark — I marked her as she rose —
At early morning left her nest.
Her eggs were four of dusky hue,
Blotched brown as is the very ground,
With tinges of a purply hue
The larger ends encircling round.

Behind a clod how snug the nest
Is in a horse’s footing fixed!
Of twitch and stubbles roughly dressed,
With roots and horsehair intermixed.
The wheat surrounds it like a bower,
And like to thatch each bowing blade
Throws off the frequent falling shower
— And here’s an egg this morning laid!

Much of Clare’s own labour was intense – the back-breaking monotony of threshing, which had nearly crippled his father, or the distant, poorly paid and dangerous lime-burning to which he turned after the late enclosure of his village. But at other times, especially in his youth, he spent long hours in the fields, tending cows or scaring crows; and, constrained as he was to his place, his ideas seem to have turned in two quite distinctive ways – towards an intensely precise, joyful yet measured observation of the world around him, and towards an increasingly compelling imagination of the possibilities of other lands, other times, other communities.

At their most powerful these two outlooks converge in Clare’s striking ecological poetics, as he hints in his description of the birds or flowers or people before him at the long histories of human, animal, botanical and geological activity which have made them so.
Found, at the bottom of a dyke made in the roman bank, some pootys of varied colors, and the large garden ones of a russet color, with a great many others of the meadow sort which we called ‘badgers’ when I was a school boy, found nowhere now but in wet places; there is a great many too of a water species now extinct. The dyke is four foot deep and the soil is full of these shells. Have they not lay here ever since the Romans made the bank, and does the water sorts not imply that the fields was all fen and under water or wet and uncultivated at that time? I think it does. I never walk on this bank but the legions of the roman army pass by my fancies with their mysteries of nearly 2000 years hanging like a mist around them.

This is Clare as archaeologist, systematic ecologist, psychogeographer. While acutely aware of the vulnerability of the land, and particularly angry and unsettled by changes brought about by enclosure during his early years, he also, paradoxically, recognised and validated the many uses of the land, the diverse activities of humans and other species to which it bore witness. It was while working at a lime kiln that Clare became most pressingly aware of the deep history in his native soil, in a territory so often patronisingly dismissed as uncivilised. He found the spot where they dug the kiln “full of foundations and human bones” – in fact the village appeared to be built on the site of a large town. Clare called it “a place of other days”.

In later years that same sensibility wrapped itself up into an intense nostalgia:

Summer pleasures they are gone like to visions every one
And the cloudy days of autumn and of winter cometh on.
I tried to call them back but unbidden they are gone,
Far away from heart and eye and for ever far away;
Dear heart. And can it be that such raptures meet decay?
I thought them all eternal when by Langley bush I lay;
I thought them joys eternal when I used to shout and play
On its bank at “clink and bandy”, “chock” and “taw” and ducking stone,
Where silence sitteth now on the wild heath as her own,
Like a ruin of the past all alone.

My interest in John Clare has deeply enriched my enjoyment of this peculiar area on the edge of the Fens where I too grew up. I have worked in recent years to establish an educational, environmental and cultural centre at his birthplace, which will open its doors in July 2009. Clare had to scrape together his education when he could be spared from field labour, but would confound the expectation of his teacher by returning much improved after months of absence. Resisting the division of knowledge, he became passionately knowledgeable about botany, ornithology, archaeology and popular ballads, and later taught both literacy and mathematics to the children of neighbours. His is a truly inspirational story, of a determined accession to the cultural ranks from a position of severe disadvantage, and of a passionate and knowledgeable engagement with nature, in all its beauty and complexity.

Dr Paul Chirico is Senior Tutor and College Lecturer in English. His talk, “Location, Evocation, Inspiration: John Clare, his poetry and his birthplace” was given at the College Reunion Weekend in September 2008.

John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader
Paul Chirico
2007 Palgrave Macmillan

Optima Reader Offer:
Order “John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader” online from www.palgrave.com and receive a 20% discount. £36.00*, plus postage and packing (RP £45.00). Enter WOPTIMA2008a in the promo box at the checkout.
*Offer valid until 31st December 2008, excluding trade or library customers and not available in the US, Canada or Australia.
Blazing a trail in the world of motorsport

Oliver Turvey (Engineering 2005) is a leading Formula 3 driver, and has also been awarded the first Cambridge Full Blue for Motorsport. Optima finds out how he combined a hectic racing schedule with student life.

Just catching this energetic and industrious young man was tricky – one week he was in intensive training, then taking exams, then driving at Brands Hatch, then competing in Belgium. For most Formula 3 drivers racing is a full-time job in itself.

“Fitzwilliam and the University have both been incredibly supportive this year,” said Oliver. His tutor, Richard Ansorge, filled in the details. “Oliver actually had two exams on the Friday of a race meeting. By explaining the really exceptional circumstances, I was able to persuade the University Board of Examinations to allow Oliver to take these exams one day early. It is actually very rare for the University to allow this. It also meant that I had to come with Oliver to the race meeting to make sure he wasn’t passing on details of the exam questions to anyone... In practice this gave me a wonderful chance to experience the thrills of F3 racing!”

Life for Oliver has been hectic since he started kart racing competitively twelve years ago – aged eight. His father hadn’t produced good marks at school, and he feels the discipline of racing kept him focused academically. Oliver says he might not have applied to Cambridge at all if it hadn’t been for meeting a former Cambridge engineering student at a motorsports event. “He encouraged me to apply here and I decided that even though I knew I wanted to drive professionally, I would still need a way to keep involved in motorsport if the driving didn’t work out. So coming to Cambridge was my back-up plan!”

At the end of 2006 he won the...
After winning a Young Scientist Award, Vijay Kanuru (2007) explains his research in catalysis.

Catalysts are materials which speed up chemical reactions without being consumed, but some of the mechanisms involved are still not thoroughly understood. Improvements in catalysis will require not only the design of potential catalysts but also an understanding of the mechanisms at subatomic and molecular levels. I work on trying to reveal the relationship between catalytic performance and catalyst size, structure and composition.

The Carbon-Carbon coupling reaction (the major study in my PhD) is an important strategy in synthetic organic chemistry, yet the fundamental mechanism remains highly controversial. The key issue is whether the catalysis occurs heterogeneously at the surface of transition-metal nano-particles (Pd, Rh, Au...) or whether it occurs homogeneously, induced by transition-metal complexes in a solution derived from the metal nano-particles. Most authors take the latter view. Very recently, we have achieved two substantial advances. Using single-crystal studies under ultra-high vacuum conditions, we showed that the reaction is actually heterogeneous, and not homogeneous. It’s for this break-through demonstration that I was given the Young Scientist Award by the Council of the International Association of Catalysis Societies (IACS).

Vijay Kanuru is a Gates Cambridge Scholar, studying for a PhD in the Surface Science and Catalysis Research Group led by Professor Richard Lambert. He was brought up in Gottipadu, a village in Andhra Pradesh, India, where his family are farmers. He studied in Guntur and Pune before coming to Fitzwilliam.

Oliver with his tutor, Dr Richard Ansorge.
Man loves tree

When Handel’s Xerxes was first performed at the King’s Theatre, Haymarket, in 1738, the programme notes said: “Some imbecilities, and the temerity of Xerxes (such as his being deeply enamour’d with a plane tree, and the building a bridge over the Hellespont to unite Asia to Europe) are the basis of the story; the rest is fiction.” Fergus Macleod (Music 2005) talks about conducting Xerxes, his first opera, and Fitzwilliam Chamber Opera’s debut production.

Working on your first major opera would be a hair-raising prospect at the best of times, but conducting Handel’s Xerxes for Fitzwilliam Chamber Opera’s debut production – which Director of Music, Michael Downes, made the success it was – in our own Auditorium was an amazing experience. Being able to take it to the newly-refurbished and wonderfully authentic Theatre Royal at Bury St Edmunds in April this year made it all the more special.

The plentiful rehearsal time (an all-too-uncommon luxury in Cambridge), allowed me to work in depth with the singers on interpretation, and also to learn from them – especially about technique. Everyone seemed to learn an enormous amount from each other, and from Sally Bradshaw, a professional opera singer and vocal coach.

Being able to work for the entire time with Francis Knights (now our new Director of Music) allowed me also to gather invaluable knowledge about the harpsichord, recitative and performance styles and their respective places in a Handel opera.

If I had to choose one highlight of the project, it was the luxury of working with the Fitzwilliam String Quartet. They are all hugely experienced and excellent musicians, but also specialists in Baroque repertoire. Rehearsing with such skilled professionals can be a daunting experience, but the Fitzwilliam String Quartet enabled a relationship that ensured that the constructive criticism they gave (and at times it flowed freely!) could only benefit me in a positive way. It is this type of environment which allows people to really learn and grow as musicians.

It is only too easy to glitz things up in retrospect – but although my first experience of conducting an opera could have been different, I am pretty certain it couldn’t have been any better.

Fergus Macleod studied with Pierre Boulez in August at the Lucerne Festival and is making his professional debut with the Tokyo Philharmonic in January 2009.
Mezzo-soprano Ruth Taylor, in the title role, standing in for a castrato.

King Xerxes falls in love with Romilda, who already loves another – much to the chagrin of her scheming sister, Atalanta. Xerxes also seems to have forgotten his betrothal to a foreign princess – who may well not be as far away as he imagines... The opening aria, “Ombra mai fu”, is a love song sung by Xerxes to a plane tree – his “platano amato” and “vegetabile cara ed amabile”.

**CAST**

Xerxes: Ruth Taylor
Arsamenes: Ben Williamson
Amastris: Isabella Gage
Atalanta: Lotte Johnson (History of Art 2005)

Chorus of Soldiers, Sailors, Townspeople and Handmaidens:

Soprano: Rosie Cook (English 2007), Teresa Pells, Jo Harries, Georgia de Grey.
Alto: Zina Flint (English 2007), Iona McIntosh (Geography 2005), Melissa Coulton, Catriona Smith.
Tenor: Richard Benwell (History 2001).
Bass: Alex West (Maths 2005), Ken Eames.

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**Music News**

**New Director of Music**

Francis Knights studied music at London, Oxford and Nottingham Universities and has worked at the Royal Northern College of Music, Somerville College, Oxford, and King’s College, London. As well as being a busy performer and recitalist, he is also an active writer, researcher and journal editor. Former Director of Music Michael Downes is now Director of Music at the University of St Andrews – we wish him well in his new role.

**Fitzwilliam Chamber Opera – future projects**

We have other exciting projects planned for 2008–9, including a collaboration with Cambridge University Baroque Ensemble on a fully-staged run of Monteverdi’s famous “Orfeo” (1607) at the ADC Theatre in January 2009, and an ingenious new chamber opera of biographical and dramatic vignettes by student composers telling the story of Cambridge through the lives of some of the women who played such a part in the university’s history over the past five centuries. Our underlying aim is to give young singers, instrumentalists, and those interested in the direction and production of opera the rare opportunity to gain experience of this extraordinary art-form under the close guidance of leading professionals.

**Cambridge Vaughan Williams Festival**

This year sees the 50th Anniversary of the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), one of the giants of 20th century music. Educated at Cambridge, he made his mark in many areas of British musical life, and his unique legacy is commemorated in a weekend of concerts, lectures and a film at Fitzwilliam College. Performers include the Fitzwilliam Quartet, the College Chapel Choir, violinist Rupert Luck and baritone Howard Wong. The project was devised by Michael Downes and Howard Wong.

The festival begins with a song recital on the evening of Friday 31 October and ends with a choral concert in the chapel on the Sunday afternoon, 2 November. All are warmly invited to attend. Full details of the programme and tickets can be found on the website www.rvwfest.org.uk

**Contact**

If you would like to join the Friends of Fitzwilliam Chamber Opera and support our expanding range of activities, please contact Francis Knights on fk240@cam.ac.uk www.francisknights.co.uk
**Crazy Ideas (No 1)**

**I’m going to Kenya... by bike... and leaving on the 20th September!**

It’s a sponsored 6000-mile rally, and we’re hoping to raise £60,000 – enough to build a primary school for 700 children in Kenya with the charity Harambee Schools Kenya (HSK), which supports education for poor local communities. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is the patron of it which hopefully goes to show just what a good cause it is!

See www.downrightkenya.org for more info on the expedition and/or ask me as many questions as you like. I’ll try and answer them although if it’s about which countries we’ll be travelling through, it’s probably best to look at the route map on the website as my geography is rather poor – although improving by the day.

We are also hoping to speak at as many schools en route as possible to promote the rally. If anyone has links with any schools on our route – or would be happy just to be an in-country contact that would be brilliant! My own sponsorship page is www.justgiving.com/xina if you are interested in making a donation.

I’d better go and pack (oh, and maybe buy a bike!).

Xina Moss (Mathematics 2002) has been Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer at the University of Cambridge Admissions Office for the last three years.

**Migration – Lent Term Arrol Adam Lectures**

When we think of migration, it is usually either people or birds that spring to mind; but of course many other things – jobs, ideas, languages, diseases – migrate too. This year’s series of Arrol Adam Lectures will explore these various kinds of migration. Why do they happen? What effects do they have? How can they be encouraged or prevented? The lectures will be on Thursdays at 6pm during the Lent Term. Confirmed speakers include Sir David King, Julie Spence and Martin Ruhs. For up-to-date information check the Events section of the College website.

These lectures, set up as the result of a bequest by the widow of Arrol Adam (Maths 1905), are free and open to all members of the College as well as to the general public, on a first-come-first-served basis.

**Fitzwilliam on Facebook**

The official “Fitzwilliam College Alumni” Facebook group is a thriving community of Fitzwilliam Members from all generations. Members benefit from up-to-the-minute news and event information, discussion boards and exclusive access to an array of images, resulting in a truly interactive experience and an innovative way of staying in touch. Furthermore, the College is embracing online video hosting technology and you can now visit Fitzwilliam from your desktop via a virtual College tour on our YouTube and Viddler channels.

Facebook: register at www.facebook.com
Search for “Fitzwilliam College Alumni” and request to join

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/FitzwilliamCollege
Viddler: www.viddler.com/Fitzwilliam/videos

**Sports Personality of the Year**

Sir Bobby Charlton presenting Kirstin Taylor (Classics 2005), Women’s Captain 2006–2007, with her Sports Personality of the Year Prize at the Graduation Dinner in June.

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