This September, the College entertained over three hundred Members to a Reunion Weekend, and although as they say ‘it’s not for me to say’, it would seem from the many letters and messages I have received to have been a highly successful affair. The weather was perfect. Sunny autumnal September days just like I remember from my own first days at University. Combined with a programme which seemed to have a slot for every interest led to a wonderful Fitzwilliam feel, a feeling I know that many of you will remember. A real Fitzwilliam ethos, being part of something worthwhile, with a true knowledge of its status and a clear view of where it wants to be. Of course, there will always be those slightly sad moments. I remember just before the formal dinner a couple of years ago wandering into the Dining Hall to check arrangements and discovering an elderly member with tears in his eyes standing alone and looking rather vulnerable. ‘Are you all right?’ I asked. ‘Yes’, he replied, ‘but you know I haven’t been back to Cambridge since I graduated in 1952 and suddenly I felt overcome with it all.’ I commiserated with him and we eventually had quite a chuckle about certain sleeping arrangements all those years ago (if you must know, of how we had both apparently slept in – yes in – our duffle coats to keep warm). He went on to say that there seemed to be no other Member present that he remembered. But, as we moved into the Screens out of the Dining Hall, another elderly gentleman came along and said to my companion, ‘It’s Sebastian, isn’t it?’ What a moment! Having not met for close on fifty years, the joy my two new friends found in their reunion and reminiscences was enough to bring tears to my eyes! That moment encapsulated so much about the true meaning of a Reunion Weekend. Despite the major and difficult obstacles their generation had to surmount, they had found great value in their Fitzwilliam experiences.

I suppose for so many of us those first few days up provide us with indelible memories of our student life. The beauty of the place, the undeniable excitement of our first lecture, the food(!), the joy of College and so many new companions – the pure thrill and excitement of just being there. It seems to me that these feelings remain undiminished. One of my favourite College events must be the Matriculation Dinner. To gaze around at the sea of bright, enthusiastic young faces is truly a highlight – and that’s only the Fellows! Seriously, the zest for life and learning remains undiminished and is certainly a zest to be encouraged and supported in the very fullest sense. Of course, each generation brings its own problems. For this generation it must be University fees. I shall not comment further about this problem except to say that to my mind no young person having gained entrance should have their zest diminished by the fear of insurmountable financial burden.

I began with a nostalgic moment. I strongly believe in the value of these moments, when we can truly contemplate and reflect on the things that shaped the way we are. A time to be thankful for all the pleasant and wonderful experiences Cambridge brought to us – except of course when we were late with our essay, played the radio too loudly or stayed out late!

In closing may I wish a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all – I hope to see you in 2004.

The Master’s message
Where’s the money coming from?

To build both Gatehouse Court, and the Theatre/Auditorium, a lot of money is needed. The total cost for both buildings is £8,200,000 – and a College the size and age of Fitzwilliam does not have funds like that tucked under a mattress!

Even so, Fitzwilliam has managed to raise around £6,970,000.

A big part of this has come from within the College itself. Over £4.8 million has been saved over the years by the College, thanks largely to those who have served in the College, and managed its finances.

The remainder of the funds however, have come entirely from gifts from both Fitzwilliam Members, and other very generous benefactors of the College. Members like John Stanley, Godfrey Kelly, and all those listed to the left have generously stepped into the breach, and done their bit to help ensure the future of Fitzwilliam College is a secure, impressive and proud one.

All the World’s a stage ...

There are still several theatre rows and seats still available for sponsorship. Acting as a sponsor of the Theatre is a marvellous way of showing support for your College, as it is a venue for the Arts, Sports, Music, Lectures and debates. It is also a lovely way to leave a permanent momento of your time at Fitzwilliam on display for future generations.

If you would like to sponsor a row or a seat, please turn to the centre pages for further information.

A Purple Mystery Solved

The author of Purple Parodies – Keeping a Ten, which featured in the last edition of Optima was recently revealed to the Development Office, by the son of the writer himself! Mr Humphrey Burton, who himself attended Fitzwilliam (1951, Music & History), kindly wrote to confirm: “Born in 1898, my father (Harry M Burton) was an undergraduate in the twenties, later a supervisor of English studies at Fitzwilliam Hall ... I believe my father was a leading light in the FHADS, the college amateur dramatic society. He always spoke most fondly of his years at Fitzbilly”. Is the Burton family unique in the College, having sent three generations to Fitzwilliam? “My brother Rodney and I were up in the early 1950’s [Rodney Burton, 1956, MML]. My son, Lukas Burton, matriculated in 1990”. So Harry wrote not only poetry, but the Burton family into the history books – quite an achievement!
Bursar’s Report

In the last Optima, I wrote about the topping-out of Gatehouse Court, the taking-down of the highest crane in Cambridge and the excitement of new student rooms approaching completion. Since then, we have moved into the Gatehouse and the excitement has turned to the Theatre, which we will occupy next spring. As I write, the court between the two new buildings has been turfed and bulbs planted under the great copper beech, which is its focal point.

Our new main entrance is a source of pride and a reflection of how far Fitzwilliam has come over the years. That has been a team effort, not only by the designers and builders, but by a host of generous members and benefactors and – not least by the Fellowship, which took a leap of faith, in the knowledge that it still lacked more than £1,000,000! I am glad to say that we are now down to a six-figure shortfall – just.

Elsewhere in this edition there are initial reactions by students lucky enough to be in the Gatehouse and I am delighted that they are favourable. Last term, there were two lobbies among the student body: those wanting work to stop for their revision for finals and those who wanted to be sure that their rooms for this term would be ready. We did all but stop work, but we did just make it, as those who first occupied Gatehouse at the Reunion will know. Moving in was a military operation; the offices were the pathfinders over a weekend in mid-September, Reunion guests the next weekend, students (as ever the main assault) with two fellows on the third and finally the porters (into the new Lodge) and the archives (into the basement) on the second weekend of October, consolidating the occupation. The old offices are now being converted to rooms for graduate students and teaching rooms for fellows. Work goes on.

Next the Theatre. We are planning for an Official Opening, to which all who have contributed in so many ways will be invited. So that we can be at our best, this is likely to be in May Week and it will be one to remember.

Reflections of a Gatehouse Court inhabitant – the first week

For many of us who have lived in College, the experience of entirely new facilities in rooms of residence is a foreign one! Optima took the chance to go behind the scenes during the first week of residence in Gatehouse Court, to get a taste of what it’s really like...

Everything is new. For someone used to the battered furniture and thinned carpets of student rooms, this comes as a shock (especially when I open my bathroom door and everything gleams). I check out the view from my window: large leafy tree, the Grove, Theatre building site. Ah well, two out of three...

As always in October in Cambridge, the weather develops a distinct chill. Normally during the early morning scramble to get ready for the day, it’s a mad rush to don as many warm clothes as possible before creeping up the hall to the bathroom. Today however, I realise that there’s nothing better than waking up on a cold day and realising you have a heated towel rail.

But GC is not without its teething problems. The fire alarm goes off in the morning because of steam from the showers, in the afternoon because of steam from the showers, and in the evening because someone burns the toast. At least now we have the exit routes off pat.

I like the fact the Porters’ Lodge has moved to the other side of college with me. It’s bigger, and brighter. I like the fact I can go downstairs at any time of the day and pick up my mail, or drop off an essay. It feels like a real entrance to the College now – comparable with any other in Cambridge.

Soon enough, I wake up one morning and remember that Fresher’s Week is over, lectures have started, and I’ve got Finals this year. Then I remember the heated towel rail.

Suddenly, life seems a bit better.

Mike Hallsworth (2001)

Above: The huge stone carving is affixed to the wall

The crest and the Bursar pose for the camera

SOME CRESTIONS ANSWERED

The Crest was carved by Eric Marland, a local stonemason, and the material used was Portland Limestone. It took 3½ weeks to carve, and weighs approximately ¾ of a ton.

Thanks to the help of College Archivist, Dr Thompson, the lower part of the crest was easy once it had been determined which diamonds stood proud, and which were sunk, but the carving of the lions and the ermine spots on the upper part of the crest was a considerable challenge. As all stonemason’s know, there’s no room for error!
Sarah Rainsford
(1992, MML)

Sarah Rainsford studied Russian at Fitzwilliam and worked hard to travel to the former USSR. Now she reports back to us what she – and Russia – have been doing since.

When you were at Fitz, you travelled St Petersburg. What kind of impact did that have on your understanding of Russian language and culture?

I remember I was hugely grateful to get the travel award from Fitzwilliam as flights to Russia don’t come cheaply. I have always believed there was no substitute for total immersion in a language and culture so I took every available opportunity to travel to Russia, and it certainly paid off.

How did your trips to Russia as a student lead to your job as a BBC Correspondent?

My main aim was to absorb the language and the life of Russia, but fortunately for me my approach seemed to work. I moved from Bloomberg TV to the BBC Russian Service in 1998. From there I went on to become a producer for News Gathering in Moscow, and this summer I was appointed BBC Moscow reporter.

How do you use your Russian in the role of BBC Correspondent?

Russian is not obligatory for my job but I couldn’t imagine functioning fully without it. The bureau is mainly bilingual, so I use Russian for everything from conducting interviews, through attending press conferences, to negotiating with the traffic police on the way to work. Knowing Russian gives me a much deeper feel for the place than I could ever have without it. I would hate to rely on a translator, however good.

What are some of the most memorable stories you have covered?

I arrived in Moscow the day the Kursk sank. I was a producer at the time and I had to get the ground running to ensure the report we filed was the best it could be. I don’t think I have stopped since.

One of the best aspects of my job is the travel – describing the impact of world events as they happen. I was in Minsk on September 11th: a couple of days later I found myself in Northern Afghanistan. This spring, as Saddam’s statue was falling, I was on my way into Baghdad. They were frightening times, occasionally, but it was all fantastic experience.

Closer to home, I have chased internet brides in Yalta and hair-traders in Donetsk; I've looked for tigers in Ussurisk and met Cossacks in Novocherkassk. In October I was off to cover the presidential elections in Chechnya.

What do you think are the most important factors when reporting on current events in Russia?

It always amazes me how many people at home still associate Russia with cabbages and queues. My task is to go beyond the stereotypes and the headlines and try to explain how life here is changing.

Getting Russia onto the agenda is harder these days. Stable Putin does not attract attention nearly as well as Yeltsin and his antics. Our job is to persuade editors that Russia matters: to point to the problems beneath the surface, and the positive changes too.

What type of format is the reporting that you do?

Almost all BBC reporters are multi-medial. That means I do most of my reports for television, radio and online: live reports via satellite from the spot, crafted television and radio packages and text versions for the web. We work to dozens of outlets and the demands can be huge. Technology these days is amazing, so if necessary we can do all our work from a tent in the desert (Afghanistan), or from a moving ship (Murmansk).

What kind of ‘local knowledge’ have you gained from living in Russia, beyond the reach of the average tourist?

For me one of the best things about journalism is the unique insight it gives into lives and places; it gives you the perfect excuse to poke your nose into other peoples’ worlds. So I’ve been inside hospitals and on helicopters; to Chernobyl and Chelyabinsk. I’ve met Liam Neeson and Lukashenko. And I’ve enjoyed every minute of it. So much so, I’ve just signed another 2-year contract with the Beeb. It feels a long way from running to ensure the report we filed was the best it could be. I don’t think I have stopped since.

If you, like Sarah, believe in the value of study trips abroad for Linguists, please turn to the centre pages for information on the MML (Travel) Fund.

MML 2003 DONORS

The following Members have been extremely generous in giving to the new MML Fund. We are now approaching 20% of our goal, and their continued support of Linguists at Fitzwilliam is genuinely appreciated.

Robin G Bellis (1957)
Andrew P Burrows (1976)
Rodney M Burton (1956)
Michael G Butler (1954)
Albert A Cartwright (1946)
John D Chriep (1956)
Michael C Dickins (1954)
Rodney G Edrich (1977)
Peter G French (1955)
Candida S Hall (1989)
Isabella A Harrington (1981)
Selwyn D Image (1959)
John F Ireland (1957)
Simon A Jackson (1975)
John A Latham (1975)
Robert D Lethbridge (1973)
William R Macmillan (1946)
Geoffrey D Morris (1962)
Andrew L Paddock (1965)
Geoffrey Powell (1958)
Susan C Pritchard (1993)
Anthony C Rogers (1964)
Nigel G Sheffield (1975)
John A Stanley (1956)
Jeffrey J Stevens (1970)
Christopher N Strong (1975)
Simon R Trevor (1977)
Richard J Vincent (1969)
Anna C Walker
Geoffrey J Walker (1955)
Dennis J Powell Weaver (1932)
Nicholas J White (1986)
Christopher T Wood (1977)
Missiles and scary teddies

Professor Nigel Slater has been working on some rather unusual research lately. He is perhaps the first Fitzwilliam Fellow to turn a teddy into an incredible hulk. In fact he’s perhaps the first person ever!

My interest in putting nature’s designs to work through molecular mimicry was accidental and began through intellectual curiosity about a class of natural proteins that change shape in response to their environment. We all know how rapidly we can succumb to a bout of flu – this derives in part from the speed with which influenza viruses can infect cells and replicate themselves, thus spreading the infection. To do this the flu virus has evolved specific proteins on its surface that sense their environment and penetrate the cell by changing their shape to mimic that cell’s appearance. As a scientific challenge my research group set out to design a material that would also be able to mimic nearby cells and which would carry a payload into them. Working from initially very crude designs, we have made a variety of protein-like molecules that change their shape in response to a specific environmental trigger such as acidity, temperature, air, light or upon exposure to a metabolite such as glucose. We have shown that the materials can be triggered to penetrate lipid membranes, just like viruses can. In other words, to act as ‘molecular missiles’. We have also shown their ability to carry small drug-like molecules into cancer cells with high efficiency. Seeking to transfer the technology into a useful healthcare product, we obtained funding from the University of Cambridge Challenge Fund to establish a spin-out company, Vivamer Ltd, in April of this year. Vivamer is now demonstrating that common cancer drugs attached to these ‘molecular missiles’ can kill cancer cells very effectively and evade their acquired tolerance mechanisms.

Chance discussions with scientists from a consumer products company revealed a wide range of intriguing product uses for these smart mimetic molecules. They pointed out that the design of complex chemical products, that carry out a precise function reliably and on demand, is a challenge that few appreciate. Consumers expect medicines to act rapidly to cure specific symptoms without side-effects, foods that require little preparation yet taste delicious and detergents that remove a range of different soils whilst imparting fragrance and softness. A common feature of all these products is the need to deliver diverse molecular agents to a point of use where they can be triggered into action by some environmental stimulus.

Challenged by these observations, we have found that adaptations to our ‘molecular missile’ can enable the triggered release of active agents in consumer products providing convenience, safety and a better product all-round. Potential applications that have already been demonstrated include the inclusion of these molecules within responsive micro-particles, for triggered release under precise conditions of use. The release of food flavourings and aromas in response to heat for example, “mussel protein” molecules for air triggered surgical adhesives and ultra-fast swelling materials for smart clothing applications. However, we are still looking for a use for a teddy bear that grows to over five times its size in less than ten seconds! Answers on a postcard please ...

If you would like to help keep imaginative and enthusiastic Fellows such as Prof. Slater at Fitzwilliam, please turn to the centre pages for more information on giving to ‘Teaching and Research Fellowships’.
Member Profile: Colin Roberts (1956)

The story of a Computer man, ‘Railway Magnate’, (golf handicap about 15), from South Africa.

How did your studies in Classics lead to your career in industry?
They didn’t directly. Most graduates go out into the world and do all sorts of interesting things. I was attracted to Classics for the same reasons that I was attracted to the IT industry where I spent most of my career. Formalised structures and logic, and the scope to do creative things within that.

My time at college, studying Classics and English, is still regarded with total disbelief by my golf partners. “What on earth did you think you were doing, studying that useless stuff instead of ‘engineering/science/biology?’”. Partly of course it was because I was good at it, but also partly because I got a State Scholarship to help me pay for it.

And your time at college?
Would you believe – the study side is a bit hazy? I mean, I must have gone to lectures, and done tutorials, else I wouldn’t have passed, would I? We were all aware that the application for full college status was being pushed hard. But cramming into hall for dinner, stopping your bicycle from disappearing, remembering where you last dropped your gown, hockey practice, friends and coffeeing and bridge. These are the things which now, are still clear.

But your most memorable activities?
That must be FHADS – the Fitzwilliam House Amateur Dramatic Society. Bill Folkes, myself and several others wrote, composed, directed, acted and sang in several musical revues productions. This was about the same time as Peter Cooke, Jonathan Miller, Bamber Gascoigne, Derek Jacobi. We were the ‘B movie’ version (though we did manage one appearance at the Arts Theatre!)

After graduating, you started work with BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation). What attracted you to that?
Well, my first job was going to be either the BBC or BOAC. Faced with a choice between an Assistant Stage Manager, permanently buried in the bowels of Portman Street and a Trainee Station Officer, I decided to ‘see the world’. We were in effect management trainees for the airline. Over the years the title has changed, but the principle remained – take suitable graduates, teach them all the important things about the airline business. Mix this with crash courses in various aspects of general management, and some of them will rise to top management positions. I got to be a Manager in the Information Systems Division, after several years of running various airport ‘outposts of the empire’.

I ran BOAC’s ground activities in Bombay, Abadan, Nairobi and other airports, where planes came through only at early hours of the morning. India, the Middle East, Africa – exotic places, exciting cities, bustling, vibrant and strange for me. Those memories are still vivid.

So what attracted you to computers and Information Technology?
Logic. Puzzles. Crosswords. Jigsaws. And unambiguous communication. It combines the intellectual challenge of putting something very complex together that works, that does something useful and the human challenge of making what you’ve created intuitively satisfying for the end user to use. Avoiding for example the approach of asking the computer to ‘START’ when you want it to stop!

Was that about the time that you left for South Africa?
I joined ICL South Africa selling mainframes to big South Africa companies, when it needed Computer Project Managers. We settled in Kivonia, a few kilometres from the farm house where Nelson Mandela and colleagues were arrested. Ours was an old farmhouse on one and a half acres at the back gate of the kids’ school, where we lived contentedly for the next 30 years. Information Technology is a bit like accounting – you can join companies in very different industries because most of your skills are transferable. This is especially true of Project Management. Get the system designed and implemented – you don’t have to be an expert programmer. You just need good communications skills.

From there, I’ve now turned my attention to an enterprise that takes me back to the time when I listened to trains going past the window of my bedroom, above the platform of the station where my father was the Station Master. I’m now Managing Director of a small private railway company that has taken over 87 kms. of rail line close to Johannesburg and Pretoria, and is all set to launch a tourist railway next to our newest World Heritage Site, the Cradle of Humankind.

What’s it called?
DamRail – you can read all about us at www.damrail.co.za. South Africa needs more jobs, black empowerment, skills transfer, and small businesses. Well, we’re doing all those things. Oh, and we’d like more tourists too. When you’re next in our beautiful country, make time in your planning to take a train trip across the dam, and take in one of our ‘Heritage Train’ experiences. You might even get the MD as the train driver.

PS – If you were in the bar after the Reunion Dinner last year [2002], and enjoyed the impromptu Barber Shop Quartet, that was also me.

The ‘State Scholarship’ that Colin refers to now no longer exists. We had over 40 students reported last year as suffering financial hardship, and any assistance you give will make a tremendous difference to their time at College. Please turn to the centre pages for more information on the Student Hardship Fund.
When I applied to Fitzwilliam, I didn’t know it to be any different from any other college. Now that I’m here, I can see how a blind choice to study here was the best one for me. The intake level means that there’s always someone to sit with at lectures. It also means that you have a much closer relationship with your Director of Studies or supervisors from college – invaluable when it all becomes a little too much and you want some advice on what to do! The supply of Law Books is one thing I’d like to see changed when I come back in a decade (as I most certainly will). More space and more textbooks would be welcome, especially in exam term when the Squire is overflowing with revising students and an up-to-date textbook a rarity! At the end of the day, it’s the people at Fitz who make it a pleasure to study here. The fellows are well known and respected in their own fields and the range of students, both national and international, means that you get to know a lot more and you get to hear a broader range of opinions than you might otherwise. I know that when I graduate, I’ll find it extremely hard to leave because of the attachment I have to Fitz, but my experience here will have been richer for it.
As summer turns to autumn, and the Michaelmas daisies adorn the College gardens, so a new academic year begins. Last month we welcomed fresh faced youngsters to their new home – just a few weeks ago before that, friends returned home for the Reunion Weekend. In true Fitz fashion all the College events were very well attended. Two of the past teams won their matches at Oxford Road and once again Fitz had more crews in the University Regatta than any other College – and we won two events! Thank you to everyone who sent letters and cards – it’s wonderful to hear that you had such a great time. Here’s to another special Reunion Weekend in 2004.

Medics & Vets Reunion
In the new year, we will be sending out invitations to all Medical and Veterinary Science graduates for a Reunion Dinner. Undergraduate Medical Society students will also be attending. We regret that we will not be able to offer accommodation in College – there is plenty of choice nearby though.

Fitzwilliam Society London Dinner
In response to comments from Members and after much discussion, it has been decided to hold the next London Dinner on a Thursday. It will still be held at Tallow Chancellors Hall. Rebuilt in 1672 after the Great Fire, the Hall is an impressive building and boasts an original Tudor style Court Room. If you live or work in London, look out for your invitation in the spring.

Engineers Reunion
Next summer, we will be holding a Reunion Dinner for Engineering graduates (all disciplines). The event will begin with a Drinks Reception followed by dinner in the Hall. We will be offering a limited number of College rooms on a first come, first served basis.

Australasian Get-Together
The Master is travelling to Australia & New Zealand next year (20 March – 11 April) and we are hoping to organise a few receptions for Members while he is there. If you live in Australasia, look out for your invitation. We would really appreciate your comments (by post, fax or e-mail) on whether you would attend and what sort of event you would prefer (ie drinks party, lunch, dinner etc).

Anniversary Celebrations
In 1979, female undergraduates were admitted to Fitz for the first time. To mark the 25th anniversary of this occasion, we are organising a Garden Party/Family Day for next summer. There will be activities throughout the day to entertain the young and not so young. There are plans for a circus workshop, children’s story teller, giant chess game, music/theatre and much more. We would especially like to welcome women who matriculated in Fitz. We have a whole range of memorabilia from Berol pens and key rings to Parker pen sets and framed prints. As the weather turns chilly, wrap up warm with a College scarf and woollen hat. Christmas cards with watercolour scenes of Fitz are on sale too – set of 5 for £6.

All items of memorabilia are listed on the Development area of the web site http://www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/

Questionnaires
A big thank you to all who have returned the questionnaires that we sent with the last edition of Optima. If you have misplaced yours, please contact us for another copy. It really is vital that we receive them so that our database records are correct and up-to-date. Only then can we make sure you receive relevant mailings and invitations to events.

Celebrate in style at Fitz
As well as boasting an extensive range of conference facilities, Fitz can also cater for weddings, birthdays and other occasions. If you would like more information, please contact the Conference Office on 01223 332040, e-mail conference.office@fitz.cam.ac.uk or visit the website at http://www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/conference

Your News
We are keen to hear from Members who are interested in contributing to the next Journal. We’d love to receive your memories of Fitz, an account of what you have been doing recently, or some photographs/artwork. Submissions should be received by December 31st.

All that remains for me to do is to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Emma Camps
events@fitz.cam.ac.uk

2004 Dates for your Diary
29th February Quartet Concert
5th March Orchestral Concert
16th April Medical/Veterinary Science Reunion Dinner
23rd April Fitz & Friends Concert
25th April Quartet Concert
6th May London Dinner
19th June Garden Party/Family Day
19th June Past v Present Cricket Match
25th June Engineering Reunion Dinner
24th – 26th Sept Alumni Reunion Weekend

Until 21st December 2003 – The Decipherment of Linear B and the Ventris-Chadwick Correspondence in the Cypriot Gallery, Fitzwilliam Museum. Organised by the Mycenaean Epigraphy Group, Faculty of Classics, Cambridge, including Fitz’s own Dr Lisa Bendall. Admission free.

For any musical performance, please telephone the Porters’ Lodge on 01223 332000.