This has been a year of solid progress for the College. We continue to do well academically – which is, after all, the crucial benchmark for an educational institution – and remain well within the top half of colleges overall when it comes to Tripos results. We slipped a little in the Baxter Tables this year but, as everyone knows, the ranking can vary enormously depending on just a few unexpectedly good or disappointing performances since the margins are very narrow; having said that, I don’t actually set much store by the Tables. What is the most important thing by far is the difference we make to the lives of our students; the ‘value added’ to put it another way. And here, not only the tremendous work put in by Directors of Studies and supervisors, but also all the pastoral and tutorial back up from tutors, the Dean, the nurse and College counsellor, all help enormously when students face difficulties and help them to overcome them. There is a bit of a myth out there that students are spoon-fed or ‘nannied’ nowadays: I don’t think that’s true at all. But one of the outstanding features of a Cambridge education is its all-round strength – not just academic, not just social, but pastoral too.

The other way in which the College can help students get through their time in Cambridge is financial. Far and away the financial issue I am asked about most of all is student support. This has to work differently for undergraduates and graduates. For graduate students, colleges can make specific provision for studentships to be awarded to individuals – something particularly important in the UK, when sources of funding for graduate study are drying up. Currently we can make studentships available for part- or full-funding for around 10% of our graduate numbers, a figure that is respectably high in the University but still a long way short of where we’d like to be (and shockingly low in comparison with our US competitors), so graduate awards remain one of our top priorities for fundraising.

Things have to work differently at undergraduate level because there is a general agreement in the University that the richer colleges will not try to use their financial muscle to outbid the poorer colleges at admissions; individual support pre-admission is therefore highlighted via a University-wide bursary scheme, which is substantially supported by Trinity but which most colleges assist one way or another. So we can’t directly raise money for individual College awards in the way we can for graduates. But we can make funds available for students struggling financially once they’re here and it is a proud but realistic boast that no-one, once arrived, need drop out of Trinity Hall because they can’t afford to carry on. All the same, these ‘hardship’ funds make little difference to the huge debt students are now accumulating through the tuition fees; it would require another step-change in funding for us to make a significant dent in that situation. But it’s something we ought to be contemplating and, like other colleges, we’re actively searching for ways of doing that and of course for the practical support that could make it possible. This is, to me, an urgent matter. As things stand, the College already effectively subsidises each of our students out of our own resources (not counting the tuition fees) over £5,000 a year. But were we to stretch that subsidy to include the £9,000 per annum tuition (let alone maintenance), we would have to increase our endowment threefold. You see the scale of the challenge!

That perhaps leads on to the other material benefit we offer our students – accommodation. At Wychfield we have some of the best student accommodation in Cambridge and we’re adding to it with the new WYNG Gardens in Thompson’s Lane, which should be open for use this year and will replace the run-down ‘Clems’ with 72 really high-quality student rooms. It will be a relief to have WYNG Gardens open, not only because the absence of those rooms over the last two years
has put extra strain on our resources, but also because the works have cut off traffic from that part of central Cambridge. On a more personal note, those of you who’ve visited College recently will know that scaffolding coats the Master’s Lodge and the works have gone on all year; we all hope they will be brought to an end by the close of the year.

I’m conscious I’ve written about money and resources again. It really is a major part of my job – fundraising, that is, travelling on behalf of the College, stirring up support from alumni and others. But it’s only a means to an end, after all, and the key thing is the life of the College. There have been so many highlights from the past year that it seems wrong to pick out a few. But I have my own personal list – a number of really outstanding concerts by our Chapel Choir with Orpheus Britannicus and our Director of Music, Andrew Arthur; some glorious moments (to set against disappointments) in the Lent and May Bumps; getting to know our new colleagues on the Fellowship; remembering the late Dr David Moore on the tenth anniversary of his death; all those reunions; the Honorary Doctorate awarded on a day of glorious sunshine to Sir Nicholas Hytner (1974); and above all General Admission on another sunny day. And we have to record sad losses – including John Collier, who was mentor (well more than that) to a whole generation of Trinity Hall lawyers, and Fernando Szymczak (2014), one of our graduate students who sadly died in July. And then there are all the members of staff and of the Fellowship who have left us this year, to say nothing of the students. But that’s a reminder that the College renews itself every year – there’s much to look forward to as well. I do hope you enjoy this edition of the Review, and can come back sometime soon to see us.

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