Highlights:

Meet the Geographers

Behind the headlines: Access and outreach at Trinity Hall

Five minutes with a Fellow
Thirty Pieces of Silver (Minus One)

Dr Eden was Master of Trinity Hall from 1626 to 1645. He was renowned for saving the College silver from confiscation by Cromwell as he was a Parliamentarian rather than a Royalist. Eden bequeathed an Arras hanging of a Roman conquest to the College, which later went missing. Last year, the College commissioned Cornelia Parker OBE to create a tapestry to replace it.

She chose 30 objects from Trinity Hall’s silver collection to be protagonists in a tapestry for the Dining Hall. The objects have been gifted to the College over the centuries by its former Masters and Fellows, the oldest being the Founders’ Cup from 1100. The silverware is often used on High Table and for the various feasts over the College year.

The tapestry is based on an 1844 early photograph Silver on Three Shelves by pioneer of photography Fox Talbot. Inventor of the photographic negative, Fox Talbot was a Fellow of Trinity College. He would have almost certainly dined in the Dining Hall, which houses the finished piece.

Parker arranged the silverware on four shelves in her studio and photographed them. The resulting image of the silver was made into a negative and then transposed as a pattern for a tapestry. With the aid of Factum Arte in Madrid, it was woven on a Jacquard loom in Flanders, using silk, wool and silver thread. One of the 18th-century objects from the collection was sacrificed for the project. It was no longer used and of unknown origin so was considered dispensable. It was melted down and drawn into fine wire, which was woven into the tapestry and then digitally removed from the finished image, remaining part of the composition as a shadow.

Dr Alex Marr
Fellow and Picture Steward

With grateful thanks to Honorary Fellow Nigel Thomas for his donation.

The tapestry hanging in the gallery of the Dining Hall. (l-r) The Master, Nigel Thomas, Cornelia Parker and Dr Alex Marr

About Front Court
Front Court keeps members and friends up-to-date with College and alumni news.

Front Court is produced twice a year. If you have any suggestions or articles for the next issue (Autumn 2018), please contact the Editors.

All our publications are available as PDF files from our website: www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/alumni/publications

Editors
Kathryn Greaves and Dr Rachelle Stretch

The Alumni & Development Office
Trinity Hall, Cambridge CB2 1TJ
Tel: +44 (0)1223 332562
Fax: +44 (0)1223 765157
Email: publications@trinhall.cam.ac.uk
www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk

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Front Cover: View from the top of Mount Laki, Iceland, out onto the Laki fissures formed during the 1783 eruption.
Photograph provided by Emily Harbach (2014)

You can follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr @TrinityHallCamb
Years ago, when I worked in university management (before I was ordained), I had a boss whose mantra was, “Don’t bring me problems – bring me solutions”.

At the time I used to think that was profoundly unhelpful – if I could see the solution, I wouldn’t need to raise the problem in the first place, after all. But with the benefit of age and hindsight, I can see what she meant. It’s no good identifying and raising problems, if all you do is stop at that point and throw your hands up in despair. However difficult, you have to start the hard work of working out what to do to move forward. That’s another way of saying the old nostrum that where there are challenges, there are always opportunities.

This curious double-speak has been much on my mind recently, because we are suddenly pitched into a new world of uncertainty about the future of student funding. Both main political parties seem to be contemplating reducing or even abolishing the tuition fee loans established by the Coalition government back in 2010. And that throws up an enormous potential challenge for universities in trying to peer into the future and work out what higher education funding will look like. Any reduction in upfront tuition fees will have serious consequences for universities’ finances, unless offset in some other way. I’m not convinced it will happen, but such is the uncertainty in our national politics at the moment, that nothing can be ruled out altogether.

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The College, under the Bursar’s hand, has marshalled its investments magnificently in recent years. But investments – as the small print always reminds us – can fall as well as rise, and what the endowment yields for us is a steady stream of income to supplement the tuition fees (which cover less than half of the cost of educating students at Cambridge) and to augment the resources we can make available to them. So we can’t simply pat ourselves on the back and assume we can see off any financial threat. On the contrary – and as you would expect me to say – the College has to strive with every sinew to continue to improve its financial position, and to enhance what we can offer our students by way of material and educational support.

So the opportunities – I hope – come on the back of the challenge and threat. Here are some of the things we have been able to commit ourselves to doing, through the generosity of others. We are establishing a fully-funded College teaching position in Law in memory of the late John Collier. We are about to embark on an exciting project to build a music practice and recital space, in memory of the late Dennis Avery (1980). We have established a fund to bring graduate students from Africa to study in Cambridge, with the support of the Philomathia Foundation. We are going to extend the range of bursaries and support funds we can make available to students across a range of subjects. And there is, I hope, much more to come. Good ideas are always welcome, but so of course is your support, financially and otherwise. What holds all these initiatives together, in the end, is the College’s ongoing commitment to provide the very best education we possibly can for our students into the future.
“Eventually, when everyone has said everything that could be said on the topic (often several times over) the great day arrived and we all gathered for a vote. One of the Law Fellows got up to explain that, in his opinion, whatever decision we came to, the laws of England and the nature of our Statutes meant that we could not refuse to admit any women who applied with the correct credentials. This was felt to be interesting but irrelevant, and we proceeded to a secret ballot. The voting slips were gathered for counting and we waited, gossiping quietly, for the result. Eventually the scrutineers returned and announced that the straw vote had been carried by one vote more than the two thirds majority required. Later it transpired that one of the junior Fellows, overwhelmed by the occasion, had placed his vote in his jacket pocket, so the margin should have been one vote greater.”

Professor Tom Körner, Emeritus Fellow

Professor Körner’s account of the vote to admit women is not only amusing, it is historically important. For reasons he explains, there is no formal record of the Governing Body’s deliberations, only an exceedingly obscure minute of the actual vote. The First Women is intended to entertain, but also has a serious purpose. It is a miscellany of evidence from an important time in the College’s existence; voices caught before their testimony disappears for ever. Interviews with some of the first female students, staff and Fellows reveal a range of experiences. What emerges is the warm welcome given to the newcomers. A few were intimidated, but most were exhilarated. Soon women were involved in every aspect of College life. They distinguished themselves academically, in sport and in drama. They soon held key positions at both junior and senior level. The few who had prophesied doom were quickly proved wrong. In fact, as the memoirs make plain, women made very little difference to the ethos of the place. Not that everything was perfect. A JCR survey in 1996, reveals that some students felt uncomfortable with the macho attitudes found in aspects of academic life. Current concern with issues surrounding harassment show that there are problems which endure and are not confined to Cambridge. More broadly, the collection includes the late Colin Austin’s Eden Oration, a tour de force of scholarly wit which deserves a wider audience than those gathered in the Chapel for the annual reading of Dr Eden’s will. The first Eden Oration given by a woman about pioneering women is also included. Altogether different, but a fine opening for the collection is the poem Hermeneutics, specially commissioned from Katrina Porteous (1979) to mark a very special anniversary.

Dr Sandra Raban
Emeritus Fellow and editor of The First Women

The First Women can be bought from the Porters’ Lodge on Central Site or by visiting our online shop at www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk
www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/th40
Where are you off to? High walls crooked around you, 
Porters, polishers, stirrers of pots, the unseen 
Choreography of the household; behind you

    Spike-rush, feathery reed, 
    Dragonfly, mosquito-cloud – Fen 
Clay, clunch and oolite, at its root, a faint scent of the sea. 
Wake up, says the moon,

Looming crescent over cupola and weather-vane, 
Sediments of ancient limestone – 
Desolate, implacable – It’s me,

Unmaking, remaking myself in an endless circle, 
Suspended above your incomprehensible puzzle 
Like judgement, or mercy.

A poem for THwomen40 by Katrina Porteous (1979). 
Written for ‘pavement poetry’ in Front Court in collaboration with 
the Poetry School for their 20th anniversary.
WHY DID YOU PICK THIS TOPIC?

I read about the spirit culture surrounding the perception of the risk of eruption of Mt Merapi in Java, Indonesia. A local resident is deemed to be the spiritual guardian of the volcano and offers flowers and food to the spirits, determining when the volcano is angry or calm and when to evacuate. When the eruption began in 2010, an evacuation plan was attempted but many people in the guardian’s village did not leave their homes because he advised against it. Over two dozen villagers perished as a result. I was interested to see if stories and beliefs shaped scientific practices and knowledge of volcanoes closer to home in Europe.

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT TO FIND OUT? WERE THERE OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES TO INDONESIA?

My initial reading suggested that Icelandic culture surrounding volcanoes is much more subtle and nuanced than the Merapi example. There are five main legends across the country that relate to the volcanoes, but with some regional variations. It seems that there was an active attempt to quash mythical beliefs to improve the perception of Iceland as a nation as it tried to connect to Europe.

WHAT FIELDWORK DID YOU UNDERTAKE?

I went to Iceland for two weeks and interviewed a range of people to understand their perceptions. I spent one week in Reykjavik visiting the volcano museums and culture houses and met with people from the University – including a Professor of Folklore. I also met with a former politician who had sat on national emergency boards and now offers volcano tours. I also met people involved in civil protection. During the second week, I travelled to the south and was able to visit Katla, the Laki fissures and see the site of the ‘Fire Mass’, well known in the world of Icelandic volcanology.

DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY DIFFICULTIES CONDUCTING YOUR RESEARCH?

It was difficult setting up interview times with volcanologists as researchers at the university spend the summer doing fieldwork so are away for long stretches of time! It’s also hard to get scientists who are conditioned to a certain way of thinking, to consider how society and culture may shape the knowledge they produce.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

The interviews demonstrated how legends and stories have contributed to the development of scientific knowledge and understandings of Iceland’s volcanoes, but also how these myths can cloud people’s perception of the volcanic hazard.
Talking to volcanologists, I began to see the importance of the ‘Fire Mass’; when Laki erupted in 1783, a priest, Jón Steingrímsson, remained with his parishioners as the lava began to approach the village and prayed during the sermon. As the congregation left, they discovered the lava had changed its course. Steingrímsson helped contribute to scientific knowledge as he gave one of the first descriptions of Pele’s hair (a form of lava). A lot of the experts about him are volcanologists as they have had to read so much of his work.

THERE WAS A SIMILAR SITUATION WITH MY RESEARCH AREA FOR MY DISSERTATION IN LANZAROTE. ARE THERE OTHER EXAMPLES IN ICELAND?

There was a 16th-century prophecy about Katla, which stated that if the glacial outburst flood reached a certain place on the coast called Medalland, which it did, then Katla would not experience a major eruption again and the volcanism would move out to sea. Since then there have been eruptions at the islands of Surtsey and Heimaey, but no violent eruption within the last 100 years – this is the longest period that Katla has gone without erupting since records began.

HOW HAVE LEGENDS AFFECTED THE VIEWS OF THE GENERAL POPULATION TOWARDS THE VOLCANOES?

There is a national myth regarding Katla. It is about a witch who hid in the volcano after drowning a shepherd boy after he stole her magical trousers to make him run fast to find a missing sheep. Instead of saying the volcano is erupting they say, “Barði will be appearing soon” in reference to the boy appearing at the bottom of the barrel where she drowned him before jumping into the volcano. This has had an impact on how scientists talk to locals about the risk of eruption and managing the hazard. Monitoring of Katla has increased since the nearby eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010. It is important that the local population and visitors are aware of the risk of the eruption and jökulhlaup (glacial flood).

FOR ME, THE STRENGTH OF GEOGRAPHY IS COMBINING AN UNDERSTANDING OF PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE LANDSCAPE WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW A POPULATION AFFECTS IT AND IS AFFECTED BY IT. EMILY’S RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THIS PERFECTLY: LOOKING AT SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT VOLCANOES BUT HIGHLIGHTING HOW OTHER FACTORS MAY IMPACT A POPULATION’S AWARENESS OF A NATURAL HAZARD AND HOW CULTURE CAN AFFECT DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE AND THEREFORE RISK MANAGEMENT.

Dr Rachelle Stretch, Development Director and Fellow-Commoner

WAS THERE ANYTHING THAT SURPRISED YOU IN YOUR INTERVIEWS?

It was interesting to hear that volcanologists do not ridicule predictions made by the three known prophets in Reykjavik about the timing of eruptions. Reykjavik is still an active area but as there is no cultural memory of eruptions, the risk is perhaps not always at the forefront of the population’s minds.

For me, the strength of Geography is combining an understanding of physical aspects of the landscape with an understanding of how a population affects it and is affected by it. Emily’s research demonstrates this perfectly: looking at scientific knowledge about volcanoes but highlighting how other factors may impact a population’s awareness of a natural hazard and how culture can affect disseminating knowledge and therefore risk management.

Dr Rachelle Stretch, Development Director and Fellow-Commoner

“Geography is a really exciting and, I feel, somewhat misunderstood subject; over the last three years I’ve gained a completely different perspective on the world around me as I’ve been continuously encouraged to critique and challenge ideas that are often accepted as given. My work in Iceland is a good example of this, as it challenges the notion of ‘universal’, ‘objective’ scientific knowledge and aims to show the intimate and sometimes surprising ties that knowledge has with people, places and cultures.” Emily Harbach (2014)
ONE OF THE EXCITING MOMENTS IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR AS THE EXTERNAL GEOGRAPHY DIRECTOR OF STUDIES AT TRINITY HALL IS THE MEETING WITH SECOND YEARS, PROBABLY IN MID MICHAELMAS TERM, WHEN WE DISCUSS THEIR PLANS FOR THEIR DISSERTATION.

As the autumn sun sets and we sit with a cup of tea overlooking the Cam, the small size of the cohort allows us to really dissect in some depth the plausibility of these fledgling schemes. The diversity of the ideas is always a source of inspiration: those who are captured by the human geographic work on culture or society, sitting alongside those who are intrigued by environmental processes and change. This combination of the natural and the social sciences is often presented as the unique selling point of Geography, and perhaps why it is a discipline so well-placed to intervene in debates concerning climate change, conservation and environmental hazards. But this position on the interface between different academic perspectives is often found in a single piece of dissertation work: Emily Harbach’s (2014) study of the role of Icelandic Sagas in communicating volcanic risk is a vivid case in point. Perhaps this is a reflection of the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of Geography, it always sits at the intersection of approaches, advocating the significance of space and place in our understanding of the world.

In 2019, the Department of Geography will celebrate the centenary of the Geographical Tripos at Cambridge, a moment to reflect on the vibrant and global alumni community, many of whom herald from Trinity Hall. But it is not only a time to look back. Four years on, we are due to move into a new building on the New Museums Site in the centre of Cambridge. It will be a chance to expand as a scholarly community and, reflecting its interdisciplinarity, strengthen ties to the cognate departments of Zoology, Conservation, Earth Science, Political and International Studies and Anthropology.
Ben Peart

For me, Geography has a unique situation as a discipline as it examines our world from the viewpoint of both natural science and social science; the interactions between the physical and human world give geographers an informed and holistic outlook on policy and current affairs.

Currently at Trinity Hall, I am reading for my dissertation. This will focus on ideas of citizenship and identity in the Welsh settlements of Patagonia, specifically in the Andean towns of Esquel and Trevelin, which I am planning on visiting this summer. The first Welsh settlement in Patagonia was established in 1865, as a ‘Welsh speaking utopia’ out of the sphere of influence of the English language and imperialism. A complex relationship between the Welsh, Argentines and indigenous tribes developed with the Welsh promoting their own culture at the expense of indigenous cultures; it is interesting that the Welsh are a subject and agent of European colonialism. I will explore the relationships between the Argentinians and the Welsh community today, and how this has changed over time. The 150th celebration in 2015 of the founding of the first settlement created a revival of interest in Wales in the region. The spaces that citizenship and identity are performed in Welsh Patagonia are also interesting; ‘Welshness’ is often performed in the public spaces of chapel and school. I am planning on using innovative participatory methods focusing on space and the mapping of this space to obtain data.

The upcoming Easter fieldtrip to Copenhagen (as part of the Geography Tripos) facilitates further research into identity and citizenship, specifically in an urban area and in the context of the cultural renaissance of Denmark. I don’t think there are many other Cambridge courses that encourage travel and primary ‘in-the-field’ original research at undergraduate level to the same extent as Geography. Geography really does let you see and read the world!

Ben Peart (2016)
Undergraduate

Charlotte Brinkley

Coming into University as very much a physical geographer, I’m surprised that I’ve now found my biggest interests in urban and cultural geography. The broad range of subjects taught during the first year was brilliant for introducing me to new areas of study – some of which I never thought would have been classed as geographical.

I really have had the scope to study almost anything that interests me within each topic, from glacier dynamics to sexual citizenship in 19th-century Victorian Britain. This flexibility has got to be one of the best things about studying Geography at Trinity Hall.

Another highlight I’m sure, will be the dissertation. I’m planning to explore how images of fashion and cosmetics within the city shape ideas about ‘beauty’, and its consumption. Part of this will (hopefully) entail volunteering at New York Fashion Week. Having always been interested in the power of visual culture in shaping society, I feel extremely lucky that I am able to research this further as part of my degree.

I am hoping that I will be able to apply the theory I have learnt from studying urban and cultural geography into practice. At this stage in my degree, I am unsure how exactly I will do this. Until I really have to decide about future careers, I think I’ll try and spend as much time as possible exploring different cities, and finding a way to exercise my interests.

Charlotte Brinkley (2016)
Undergraduate
Isabel Gammie

Geography is a fascinating subject given the breadth of the field. The Cambridge Tripos appealed because, unlike courses elsewhere, we were encouraged from the outset to maintain an interest in both the human and physical spheres. It was inevitable, however, that a specific area would become particularly engaging; for me, this was international development.

Following graduation, I joined the British Council’s Language Assistant programme in Santiago, Chile. Little did I know that a 12-month placement would lead to almost four years working in one of the world’s most geographically-diverse countries. It was this experience, paired with the Spanish language skills gained, that enabled me to step into the Third Sector on my return to the UK.

Over the past seven years, I have worked with four International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) in positions focused on project design, implementation and monitoring. These roles have required me to build on the foundations established during my undergraduate studies, developing specialist knowledge not only in relation to country contexts as diverse as Somaliland, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh and Peru, but also concerning the challenges experienced by specific groups, including street children and persons with disabilities.

In my current role as Programme Officer at Sense International, I work on a broad portfolio of projects serving young people with deafblindness in three continents. As in previous positions, it is the opportunity to form cross-cultural partnerships that I value most. Whilst day-to-day coordination is achieved at a distance, nowhere is collaboration better than in the field. The chance to work alongside programme staff, meet with project participants, and experience the issues confronted first-hand, always encourages me to deepen my understanding, challenge common assumptions, and reflect on wider practice.

IT IS CERTAINLY AN INSPIRATION AND A PRIVILEGE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH INDIVIDUALS SO PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR CAUSE AND COMMITTED TO INSTIGATING CHANGE.

Geography is alive in everything that surrounds us. It is satisfying to see the relevance of the subject in my working life, and to witness how many of the exciting initiatives underway within the sector continue to shape the very concepts that underpinned my studies.

Isabel Gammie (2004)
Programme Officer at Sense International
Craig Jeffrey

I was an undergraduate at Trinity Hall between 1992 and 1995 and a PhD student between 1995 and 1999. I loved it. It was the most colourful college in Cambridge. The friendliness was infectious, spreading out from the Master Sir John Lyons to suffuse everything that the College did.

College life was a whirl. I remember pacing around the giant copper beech tree trying to remember dates for my historical geography exams, performing The Tempest in people’s individual rooms with the superb director and fellow student Chris Goode, and running around the courts waking up students at 6.30am so that we wouldn’t arrive at the boathouse one person short of a crew.

I was the College’s only geographer. Aside from the crayons regularly placed in my pigeonhole (thanks everyone), I think this was an advantage. I tended to get the best tutors for each subject, and I also avoided some of the competitiveness that can come with undergraduate academic life.

It seems strange to think that my little brother, Alex, is now Director of Studies in Geography at Trinity Hall. In some type of time travel experiment he would now be teaching me.

Trinity Hall has been the platform for so much since I left Cambridge. My PhD focused on social change in Uttar Pradesh, India. Before I finished my PhD, I got a job as a University Lecturer in Geography at Edinburgh University, where I met my wife, Jane. After stints in Seattle and Oxford, Jane and I moved to Melbourne with our two children. We now work at the University of Melbourne.

I’m really glad that Alex is teaching at Trinity Hall. We both love the College – Alex used to visit me from school – and I cannot imagine a better teacher or ambassador for Geography and geographers. No more crayons in pigeon holes!

Professor Craig Jeffrey (1992)
Director of the Australia India Institute

Craig Jeffrey has just published Modern India: A Very Short Introduction with Oxford University Press.
MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Remembering John Collier

Many will remember the late John Collier 1933–2016, former Law Fellow at Trinity Hall and Vice-Master. He was one of a small number of Cambridge law dons who have left an indelible impression on the legal profession in this country. He was elected as a Fellow in 1966 and retired in 2001. During that time he taught over a thousand law students at Trinity Hall and many hundreds at other Colleges.

After JC retired, we began fundraising to establish the John Collier Law Fellowship in his honour. We are pleased to say that we have now raised sufficient funds to endow a position as College Teaching Officer in Law. We expect the new post holder to join us in October this year and we will bring further details in the autumn edition of Front Court.

However, we do not intend to rest on our laurels and at the suggestion of alumnus Jonathan D Klein (1979, Law), we are keen to raise funds to support students to further honour JC. The fund would specifically be for undergraduates who are in need of financial assistance. A permanent fund of £150,000 will be endowed in JC’s name to provide grants for those suffering unexpected financial hardship and contribute towards a bursary that supports undergraduates from the lowest income families with termly maintenance costs. Such student support funds help ensure that no student has to leave College for financial reasons and no talented student will be prevented from attending because of financial hardship – a cause which was also dear to John.

Jonathan Klein has kindly volunteered to provide £50,000 as a match in order to motivate others to contribute £100,000 collectively.

Jonathan explained the influence JC had upon him during his time at College:

“John Collier is more responsible than most for the fortunate position in which I find myself today. This is not due to his undoubted excellence in teaching me (he rated me as one of his least good students). JC has been a role model to me in terms of care, thoughtfulness, consideration and ‘being there’ when it was most needed as a source of advice, wisdom and support. I know that this was not due to any special attributes of mine – perish the thought – as he behaved in this way with thousands of others, both when at Cambridge and since. I am confident that those who also benefitted from knowing him will join me in making sure we reach our target.”

Each year, around 45 undergraduates at Trinity Hall receive a bursary because they have a low family income and need help with covering maintenance costs. A former student who received a bursary explains how significant it was:

“I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE BURSARY WHICH HAS GIVEN ME SECURITY AND PEACE OF MIND DURING MY UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES. LIVING AND STUDYING IN ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD HAS BEEN THE BEST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE. THIS BURSARY HAS ENABLED ME TO CONCENTRATE ON ACHIEVING MY FULL POTENTIAL IN MY SUBJECT, WITHOUT THE DAY-TO-DAY WORRY OF PAYING RENT OR HOW I COULD AFFORD TO FEED MYSELF.”

If you would like to make a donation to the JC Fund for student support please see: alumni.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/JCstudentsupport
Access and outreach at Trinity Hall

Our greatest asset is our student body. At Trinity Hall we do all that we can to support our students, offering encouragement throughout their time with us and taking enormous pride in their achievements.

This investment begins even before a student joins the College as we undertake outreach work to give prospective undergraduates the confidence to apply and each year administer an admissions process that is hugely time-consuming, but absolutely rigorous and scrupulously fair. This work reaches into every corner of the University, and you would be hard-pressed to find another issue that occupies quite so many people, from senior academics through to the student body itself.

As the Admissions team at Trinity Hall, we find ourselves on the front line (and occasionally in the firing line) as we work to ensure that the student body remains intellectually capable and academically ambitious, whilst reflecting the demographics of UK society as a whole. Cambridge (and Oxford) admissions is of course a perennial news story, as hardly a month goes by without a press report scrutinising aspects of our selection process or the results of it. Behind these headlines is a recognition of the incredible academic opportunities we present to our undergraduates and a feeling that these opportunities should be available to talented students regardless of background. Of course, we passionately share these sentiments, but how do we increase the proportion of students from traditionally-underrepresented groups whilst maintaining the highest academic standards?

The answer, of course, is to engage prospective students with outreach activities and in this issue of Front Court, we look at some of the major areas in which we focus this work to ensure that we are attracting UK applicants with the highest academic potential that reflect our diverse society, whilst our Admissions Officer, Vicky Mills, explains the thorough process by which each application is assessed.

Women in STEM

In the 40 years since female undergraduates were first admitted to Trinity Hall, we have made great progress in increasing the representation of women in our student body, such that in the last two admissions rounds 51% of our offers were made to female applicants. A closer look at the figures, however, reveals that we still have some way to go in increasing the proportion of female students in certain subjects. In October 2017, only 33% of our new intake of science students were women, compared with 58% of those taking arts and humanities courses. These figures reflect the proportion of applications that we received from female students for these subjects, suggesting that disparities arise during secondary school as young women are more likely to gravitate away from science subjects. Revealingly, in the UK women make up less than 40% of those students taking Mathematics at A Level and less than 30% of those taking Further Mathematics, Physics or Computer Science. It can be difficult for a single college to fight against pervasive attitudes that are likely to become ingrained even very early in a young person’s life. Through our annual Maths Open Day (in collaboration with the Faculty of Mathematics) and initiatives such as our forthcoming Women in
STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) residential event (to be held in August 2018 in collaboration with Gonville and Caius), we aim to introduce talented young women to some of our outstanding female scientists, providing them with role models and demonstrating that a science degree at Cambridge is something well and truly open to them.

Maintained Sector
To achieve national coverage, each Cambridge College is allocated several UK Local Authorities in which to focus their outreach work. As part of the ‘College Area Links Scheme’, Trinity Hall works closely with schools and colleges in Bath and North East Somerset (BaNES), Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire. This scheme enables us to form supportive relationships with state schools, to understand their contexts and challenges and provide bespoke support where suitable. We interact with many state schools in these areas through three large, collaborative outreach projects: HE+ Somerset, HE+ Bristol and BaNES Oxbridge. We bring together groups of highly able sixth-form students from state schools and colleges right across these regions for events that include academic enrichment activities with Trinity Hall academics and PhD students, as well as advice about applying to top universities. Combined, these projects help us to reach 29 schools and colleges, and over 300 talented students each year. Additionally, we have hosted visits from 32 state schools at Trinity Hall and visited 14 more to deliver talks about university since January 2017.

Whilst many of our events aim to increase the progression of state school students to University, rather than Trinity Hall specifically, we were delighted that in 2017, 74% of Trinity Hall’s UK resident student intake came from state schools and colleges. Across the University of Cambridge, around 63% of 2017’s intake was from the state-sector. There is still progress to be made, but the situation is complex: further change is dependent on many different factors, including collaborative and sustained outreach activity across the UK and an increase in the number of state-educated students achieving the typical attainment levels (A*AA or A*A*A) required for entry to Cambridge.

BME Students
This year has seen increased focus on the number and proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) students at Cambridge. Applicants’ ethnicity is not revealed to colleges until after the admissions process is complete, so the data for this year are not yet available. However, of the UK-domiciled students who applied to Trinity Hall in 2016, and excluding the small proportion for whom ethnicity data are not available, BME students comprised 22% of applicants and 20% of the people whom we ultimately admitted. (For comparison, in the 2011 UK census, only about 13% of the population were of minority ethnic status). However, a more detailed breakdown reveals disparity between ethnic groups. In particular, each year the college typically receives fewer than 10 applications from black British students, and their success rate is lower than that of British Asian, British Chinese, or white applicants – a pattern which is mirrored across the university. In part, these data reflect broader inequalities and educational challenges faced by these students, but Trinity Hall has a renewed determination to assist University-wide efforts to foster aspiration and attainment among these groups. Earlier this year, we worked with other colleges to host the ‘parents and guardians’ session of a Year 11 BME Students Conference, and in future we aim to support the University’s partnership with Target Oxbridge – a free programme that supports the intellectual and social development of prospective applicants who are black or of mixed race.

Progress through Collaboration
At Trinity Hall and the University of Cambridge, we aim to admit students of the highest academic potential, regardless of background. Whilst our outreach work often focuses on traditionally-underrepresented groups, we would hope to receive an application from any student who is likely to meet our entrance requirements and all students are assessed on the same criteria, taking educational context into account. Whilst our outreach work has enabled us to make great progress in some areas, there is clearly still work to be done. We have outlined some of our greatest challenges in this article and the initiatives we are putting in place to make headway in these areas. In our experience, collaboration is key to any successful outreach strategy, whether this is with teachers and schools, with colleagues elsewhere in the University or even with other universities. Through working with others, we hope that Trinity Hall can play its part in helping to address nationwide issues of educational or aspirational disparity, and that our highly-talented student body can increasingly grow to reflect the composition of UK society.

Helena Blair [Schools Liaison Officer and Admissions Assistant]

Dr Andrew Murray [Admissions Tutor for Sciences]

Dr William Skylark [Admissions Tutor for Arts and Humanities]
I am now in my 14th admissions round at Trinity Hall, and each one feels as exciting as the last. Every year I look forward with anticipation to the first applications arriving. Each new application to Trinity Hall (of which there are about 500 each year on average) represents an individual with so much potential, embarking on their journey toward university education and an experience that will shape their young adult years.

The Collegiate system allows us to give personal attention to each one – by the end of the admissions round an individual application may have been pored over by an Admissions Tutor, four interviewers and, if pooled, a number of other academics as well.

The principle aim of the University and Colleges is to offer admission to students of the highest intellectual potential, irrespective of social, racial, religious and financial considerations. In order to judge intellectual potential fairly, we work hard to ensure that an applicant’s educational background is taken into account. For example, those applicants whose education may have been seriously disrupted or disadvantaged through health, disability, difficulties with schooling, or challenging personal or family circumstances are invited to submit, via their school, an ‘Extenuating Circumstances Form’. This ensures that we are made aware of any disadvantage and can assess an applicant’s previous examination performance in that context. Similarly, each UK application is supplemented by data on school background and performance relative to the national average, and by nationally available data on socio-economic factors and progression to higher education according to geographical area. All of these factors are taken into account when assessing the relative academic performance of an individual applicant.

Every year, the standard of applications is very high and a range of factors is taken into consideration when identifying candidates who appear to have the best academic potential in their chosen subject. In addition to educational background, we look at achieved/predicted grades in school exams, UCAS personal statements, school references and, should the application progress to this stage, performance at interview. For some subjects, usually in the arts and humanities, we require candidates to submit a couple of pieces of work they have done at school. This gives us a useful snapshot of their writing style and critical ability. In most subjects, we are now also piloting new admissions assessments, which are designed to gather more consistent data on candidates’ academic performance relevant to the gathered field. These written assessments are taken either at school in November or on the same day as an interview.

In the current admissions round, 85% of our applicants were invited to be interviewed. The Admissions Office arranged a total of 778 admissions interviews at Trinity Hall, which took place over a period of nine days in December, and involved 77 different interviewers. We also had 36 of our current undergraduates on hand, who were recruited to show interview candidates to the correct location in College. Our undergraduates are a great asset, as they spend time chatting to nervous candidates and putting them at their ease. They remember their own interviews and are always keen to show the same friendliness that they themselves received from undergraduates on their interview day.

One of the peculiarities of the Collegiate admissions system is that there may be statistical fluctuations each year in the numbers of candidates applying for particular courses at particular Colleges. To ensure that applicants are not disadvantaged by this, there are moderation processes across the Colleges, such as the intercollegiate Winter Pool. Subject moderation such as this is designed to ensure that the best applicants have an equal chance of getting a place at Cambridge. This year, Trinity Hall ‘pooled’ 119 candidates, 35 of whom ended up with an offer at one of the Cambridge Colleges. We also made offers to 23 candidates who had originally applied to a different College.

At the end of the recent Admissions round, Trinity Hall made offers to 132 applicants. The majority of these offers were conditional, and we hope that as many of our offer holders as possible will be successful in their final school exams this summer.

Throughout the admissions process, we aim to communicate helpfully and clearly to each and every applicant. One important aspect of communication is the feedback we provide to unsuccessful candidates and their schools. As I write this, the Admissions Tutors have just finished writing individual letters of feedback to 177 applicants who requested it.

Personally, I am always encouraged to hear from unsuccessful candidates that their experience of the admissions process was a positive one. This year, one such candidate wrote, “Even though I was unsuccessful, I very much enjoyed my stay at the College and the day(s) I spent there will be of great value to me for years to come.”

Vicky Mills
Admissions Officer
NEWS IN BRIEF

Professor Stephen Hawking
08/01/1942 – 14/03/2018

Stephen came to Trinity Hall as a graduate student in 1962, receiving his PhD in 1966. He was already marked out for his brilliance and creativity, and his time in the College proved to be highly significant for the development of his research interests, if it was also a time of great personal difficulty, following his diagnosis with motor neurone disease.

Stephen was a close personal friend of Trinity Hall alumnus Dennis Avery (1980) and his wife Sally Tsui Wong-Avery. Dennis and Sally’s support for Stephen, and the University of Cambridge, led to the foundation of the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology, and the Stephen Hawking Professorship in Cosmology was established due to a generous gift from the Avery-Tsui Foundation. He was elected Honorary Fellow of Trinity Hall in 1984 and last attended a function in the College in October 2015, when he opened the Stephen Hawking Room.

Read the full tribute at www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/news/stephenhawking

e-Luminate lights up the Cam

We were delighted to partner with e-Luminate Cambridge and BDP on a light installation next to the Jerwood Library at the beginning of February.

The interactive installation consisted of 15 LED lights shining from the terrace onto the river. Participants tweeted @restore2history with #female, #male or #nonbinary to change the light effect.

Alumnus and BDP lighting director Mark Ridler (1983) said, “I’m really excited for BDP to support e-Luminate again this year and particularly as we have had an opportunity to create a piece in my alma mater. It’s a great festival that show cases the power and beauty of light, its transformative effect, and the blend of science and art inherent in the installations.”

On 12 February, Director of Music Andrew Arthur gave an organ recital in the chapel as part of the sold-out Trail of Light event.

YOUR NEW THA PRESIDENT

IN SEPTEMBER 2017, COLIN HAYES (1962) RETIRED AS PRESIDENT OF THE THA (TRINITY HALL ASSOCIATION) AFTER THREE YEARS IN THE ROLE.

His successor, Roger McKinlay (1979), read Engineering and has spent his career working as an engineer in aerospace and defence. Roger served as THA Vice-President for three years and will continue to organise an exciting programme of events around the UK to bring alumni together. www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/tha

Roger McKinlay
Time for a refresh

If you have visited the College website recently, you will have noticed it looks a little different.

It maintains much the same feel and structure as the previous version but in a more modern, refreshed skin. We have reformatted our Events and Supporters pages to make it easier and more enjoyable for you to browse, find information and book. We hope you like the new site and if you have any feedback that you would like to share with us, please email Kathryn on webmaster@trinhall.cam.ac.uk

www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk

New members of the Fellowship

AT THE ADMISSION OF FELLOWS AND SCHOLARS ON 10 OCTOBER 2017, WE WELCOMED 11 NEW FELLOWS TO TRINITY HALL.

RESEARCH FELLOWS

Dr Guillermo Burgos Barragan is a Research Fellow in Molecular Biology. His research focuses on the origins of the DNA mutations that cause cancer, particularly mutation that stems from our own metabolism. You can read more about Guillermo and his research on page 19.

Dr Nicola Kozicharov is the Schulman Research Fellow in History of Art. She is a specialist in 19th- and 20th-century European and Russian art. Nicola has co-edited the book Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives (Open Book Publishers, Nov 2017) with Trinity Hall alumna Dr Louise Hardiman (2008).

HONORARY FELLOWS

The Rt Hon Lord Justice (David) Bean (1972) read Law at Trinity Hall. In 2004, he was appointed a High Court judge (Queen’s Bench Division) and was promoted to the Court of Appeal in 2014. He was appointed Chairman of the Law Commission of England and Wales for a three-year term in August 2015.

Andrew Marr (1977) read English at Trinity Hall and began his career in journalism at The Scotsman in 1981. Since then he has worked at The Independent, The Economist, The Observer, Express and the BBC. Andrew has worked on multiple documentary series, published 12 books and hosted The Andrew Marr Show since 2005.

Staff Fellows: Dr Koen Jochmans (Economics), Dr Ron Reid-Edwards (Mathematics), Dr Gonçalo Bernardes (Chemistry), Dr Daniel Tyler (English)
Fellow-Commoners: Professor James Ritter (Pharmacology), Mr Jai Chitnavis (Medicine), Dr Aled Davies (HSPS)
May found the Trinity Hall Association at Trinity House in a magnificent room looking out over the Tower of London for our 2017 London Event. Just under 100 members met for drinks, canapés and good fellowship.

On Saturday 1 July 2017, our then President, Colin Hayes (1962), was present in the Hall at the unveiling of a portrait commissioned as part of THwomen40, the commemoration of the first 40 years of women at Trinity Hall. In view of the importance of the admission of women to the Association, it had been decided to make a contribution of £5,000 towards the cost of the portrait – a cheque was presented to the Master at the Trinity House event.

At the AGM, held in College on Saturday 23 September, Colin Hayes stood down as President and Roger McKinlay (1979) was elected in his place. Emily Floeck (2007) and Anne Wolff (1979) were elected to the Committee.

The AGM was followed by a truly superb dinner – wonderful food accompanied by some terrific wines, great service and excellent company. At the dinner, Roger paid tribute to our outgoing president before presenting him with an engraved silver tun, a joint gift from the Master and Fellows and the members of the Association to mark, with grateful thanks, his service to both the College and the Association over a number of years.

On Saturday 11 November, some 60 members gathered at Penshurst Place in Kent, the ancestral home of the Sidney family (of Sir Philip fame) and of Philip Sidney (2009). We gathered for drinks around a roaring fire in the splendidly medieval Baron’s Court where Philip regaled us with tales from the history of Penshurst Place before we sat down to dinner in the Sunderland Room.

In March this year, we returned to Portsmouth for a dinner at the wonderful Mary Rose Museum and saw the Mary Rose in her final setting following the drying out process. After dinner, we enjoyed a fascinating talk from alumnus Chris Dobbs (1976) who was one of the divers on the wreck. On Monday 25 June we will be back at the Long Room at the Lord’s Cricket Ground for a drinks reception – another return visit by popular demand. We are also planning an autumn event in Yorkshire – more news of that later.

The 2018 AGM and Cambridge Dinner will be held Saturday 22 September. This year plans are afoot to grow this annual event to include an afternoon conference on the theme of social entrepreneurship at Trinity Hall.

Two people will be retiring from the THA Committee this year, in addition to an outstanding vacancy, and so we will be looking for possible candidates, preferably from those who matriculated this century and particularly if they are year reps. If you are interested or want to know more drop an email to tha@trinhall.cam.ac.uk.

Dr Chris Angus (1967)
THA Secretary

UPCOMING EVENTS
25 JUNE
THA London event: Drinks reception at Lord’s Cricket Ground
22 SEPTEMBER
THA AGM and Cambridge Dinner at Trinity Hall
Five minutes with a Fellow

I was 12 the day I decided to dedicate my life to cancer research. My father died of brain cancer and my greatest ambition was to do something about it. This led me to the world of biology and science, which captivated me and convinced me further that this is what I wanted to do in the future.

Thus in 2012, after completing a BSc in Biology in Seville (Spain), I came to Cambridge to investigate the molecular biology of cancer. Since then, I have worked in the lab of Dr KJ Patel, at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, where I completed my PhD last year.

My research focuses on the origins of the DNA mutations that cause cancer. Environmental sources of mutations, such as cigarette smoke or sunlight are widely recognized. However, it is far less appreciated that a substantial source of mutation stems from our own metabolism. The processes that convert food and drink into building blocks also generate molecules that damage our DNA and cause mutations. One of these molecules is formaldehyde, a widely used preservative and known carcinogen. Work I did during my PhD helped to unveil that formaldehyde is produced within us at sufficient amounts to pose a significant threat to our DNA. For this reason, our cells possess two lines of defense against this molecule. Firstly, formaldehyde can be detoxified. And secondly, DNA damage caused by formaldehyde can be fixed by a DNA repair system.

Later on I discovered that, surprisingly, a proportion of our endogenous formaldehyde is derived from a vitamin: folate or vitamin B9. This vitamin is an essential nutrient that we need to make the building blocks of life, such as DNA. Furthermore, I found that formaldehyde detoxification converts this toxin into a benign molecule that is used to make DNA and amino acids. In other words, formaldehyde is recycled and converted into something useful. Therefore, both folate and formaldehyde appear to have two faces: a good side, because they are used to make molecules that cells need to live and grow, and a bad side, because formaldehyde can damage DNA.

These findings suggest that we might be able to control the levels of endogenous formaldehyde to some extent by controlling our diet. This might help to reduce the occurrence of DNA mutations, especially in people with Fanconi anemia, a disease caused by genetic defects in the DNA repair system that protects against formaldehyde. The same defects are found in some types of cancer, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2 breast cancers, suggesting a potential therapeutic strategy by which these cancers might be selectively killed by folate.

Currently, I am working to address these questions, and I am enormously grateful to Trinity Hall for supporting me in this endeavor. In addition to the financial support, my Research Fellowship has provided me with a unique environment to grow as a scientist and as a person. My experience during my first seven months in Trinity Hall has been great, full of nice interactions with Fellows, postdocs, staff members and students, usually accompanied by excellent food and superb wine. I look forward to what is yet to come!

Dr Guillermo Burgos Barragan
Research Fellow in Molecular Biology
Events 2018

17 May
THwomen40 Lecture

16 June
Last day of May Bumps

25 June
THA London event: Drinks reception at Lord’s Cricket Ground

7 July
50th Anniversary (1968)

13 July
60th Anniversary lunch (1958)

14 July
Alumni Summer Party
10th Anniversary dinner (2008)

July
West Coast, USA [tbc]

7 September
Retirement dinner for Boatman Martin Fordham

8 September
Reunion for 1999 and 2000 undergraduates

15 September
25th Anniversary dinner (1993)

20 September
Hong Kong Annual Dinner [tbc]

21–23 September
University Alumni Festival

22 September
THA AGM and Cambridge Dinner

YOU ARE INVITED TO

The Alumni Summer Party
Saturday 14 July 2018
Trinity Hall, Wychfield

Crazy Golf | Last Man Standing | Kinnerz Multi-Sports
Widdershin Puppet Show | Puppet Making Workshop | Arts and Crafts
Face Painting | Garden Tour | Watercolour Workshop
Meet the Fellows | BBQ and Bar

The Alumni Summer Party is open to all alumni and you are invited to bring members of your family with you. We have organised a range of activities to suit all ages so whether you come alone or are joined by family, there will be something for everyone.

To book online visit: www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/alumni/events

Martin Fordham’s Retirement Dinner

This year marks the retirement of Martin Fordham, THBC Boatman, after 46 years of service. THBC members will receive an invitation to his retirement dinner taking place on Friday 7 September 2018.

EVENT CONTACT

For further information visit www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/events or contact us on: alumnioffice@trinhall.cam.ac.uk or +44 (0)1223 332550.
For University events go to www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/events.

Information correct at time of going to press.