

JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP XL NETWORK NEWSLETTER



Shadows in Turl Street by Bev Shadbolt.

It has indeed been a strange 18 months or so! The various lockdown regulations have meant that Old Members' events have been extremely limited and of course the same has been true for the College too. The Curry Club has kept going on Zoom and later in July or early August will meet again in Fleet Street in person, although the Zoom version will continue for the more distant members who cannot make it to London. Sadly, the Old Members' Day scheduled for July 26th had to be postponed until September 4th, but it was pleasing to see that almost everyone who had signed up for the first date could make the re-scheduled one. We do hope to start to be active again in the late summer and autumn, and some of our plans are outlined later in this newsletter.

One of the good things to have come out of this hiatus has been that the College introduced *In the Loop* which has been a real success in advertising, amongst other things, some of the excellent online events which I know many of you have appreciated. If you are not signed up to *In the Loop* you really should do so. (See www.jesus.ox.ac.uk/alumni-friends/information/communications/).

Many of you will have known Peter Silverman (1962, Chemistry), a strong supporter of this group who, with his wife Homi, came to many Old Members' events. I am sad to inform you that Peter has died after a long stay in hospital following a car accident. Among the things Peter will be remembered for are the brain teasers and puzzles he provided. Our thoughts are with Homi. Sadly, Richard Evans (1971, Chemistry), another of our members, has died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack. Our thoughts are with his wife Susan too.

This is my last newsletter and inevitably rather muted! As I am now the Chair of the Group, I have passed on the editorial role to Andy Simpson, a new committee member but already very well known to many of you. I wish him well and thank all the people who have contributed articles in the last five years – they have been varied, interesting and stimulating.

Peter May (1968, PPE)
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It was something we had been told could happen, but most of us somehow imagined it would not! The pandemic restrictions have changed all our lives for a period and, I suspect for many, in some ways that are permanent.

I just wanted to reflect on how this time has impacted on me. Before retirement I was a long-time headteacher in large secondary schools. Whilst in my personal life I largely lived in an affluent, pretty privileged bubble of like-minded people, in my working life I was constantly reminded that the lives of many of the students for whom I was responsible were very different and much tougher. Eleven years of retirement means all that had melted away, but the last year has brought into focus how tough it has been for many. My final salary, pension and burgeoning bank account (because we didn't do much!), and my comfortable large house and garden meant lockdown was dull but easy. Pity the poor single parent with three school-aged children in a high-rise with no garden, on furlough or worse. I hope I do continue to remember my privileged life as normality returns, to not take it for granted and to be genuinely more charitable in all its senses in the future.

My daughter is a registrar in a London hospital and spent a year in lockdown in intensive care COVID-19 wards. Hannah is a resilient, able person and the most cheerful person I know! But the months in intensive care have taken their toll. As she says, death is what doctors are used to but not on this industrial scale. The thing that got to her was dealing with the loved ones of those who had died or were about to die when those close could not be with them or had not seen them sometimes for weeks. To speak to them on the phone was heart rending and never got easier the more you did it. To be doing this on many days, sometimes twice, was tough. Clapping on Thursdays was one thing but the lack of recognition in a 1% pay offer was quite another. I - and we as a society - do need to really value those that work in sectors so crucial to our own welfare and that of our families and friends.

I suppose I really am a grumpy old man, but this time has made me reflect on public leadership here and around the world. When loyalty is prized above all, and little account is

Knaresborough in the Dales. Photo by Deborah Tiffany

taken of competence or integrity, it is easy to despair. This is not a problem limited to the UK but seems a growing problem worldwide: the world of soundbites, half-truths, and in some cases downright lies seems much more evident in public life here and abroad. Some places have been beacons, often where female leadership is prominent - New Zealand and Kerala in India are a couple of examples - during COVID times.

However, what of the positives? I suppose the spectacular success of the creation of effective vaccines gives hope that, when mankind puts its mind to it and devotes sufficient resources, apparently the insurmountable can be conquered. This holds real hope for other huge issues facing us such as climate change. There might be a new attitude to working lives that takes rather more account of individual circumstances/ need without endangering productivity. I suspect the drift back to offices will happen, but office hours might well be shorter and on fewer days supplemented by home working.

Personally, I and my partner walk an hour almost every day and I am lighter and healthier for it (despite the increase in alcohol consumption). As normality starts to return, the pleasure of restaurants, drinks with friends, a return to culture (*La Bohème* at Covent Garden last week was stunning), as well as returning to exhibitions and the like are so welcome. The occasional escapes to West Wales, the Yorkshire Dales, and the south coast remind one how lovely our countryside is. I do need to relish all of these more in the future. I suppose my overwhelming feeling about the last 18 months is this is time, at my age, I did not want to lose. I now feel a need to make the most of life NOW as one can never be sure of what is ahead. Don't put off things you want to do, but do them now.

So, the yen to travel again is still there, despite the trepidation about the environmental effects of these flights! The list includes Costa Rica and the birds, New York (I have never been), South Island NZ, NW coast of Australia, and animals in Africa. I can but dream.

Peter May (1968, PPE)

Two Himalayan Heights

It's August '72 and my new wife Jane and I are drowsily clattering along in an overcrowded carriage of a dilapidated steam train somewhere between Amritsar and Jammu. It's the second long summer vacation of my three Jesus College years and we're almost at the far point of what seems now an incredibly brave, or even foolhardy, overland trip along the so-called 'hippy trail' to India and back. You could do that then.

Inevitably, we fall into conversation with one of our fellow passengers, who turns out to be an English tutor at Delhi University. He's keen to talk English literature ('Yes, of course, we study Shakespeare. No, not Chaucer: Chaucer is MA') and produces a poetry set book. In discussing the contents, we come across Cecil Spring Rice's poem *I Vow To Thee My Country* and are surprised to hear that, although he knows it well as a poem, our interlocutor hasn't heard it sung to Gustav Holst's sweepingly suitable setting of his *Jupiter* tune. We sing it to him there and then. He's entranced and promises thereafter to present it to his students as a hymn.



1972: Breakfast at Chandanwari.

It's October 2018 and my wife Maggie and I are sipping hot tea in Keventers in Darjeeling, recovering from a roundabout four-hour trip cramped into one of the tiny carriages of the much-lauded 'toy train' up from Kurseong. As we lean back in comfort, the gentle strains of faintly familiar piano playing come drifting through the restaurant. It takes a few moments to realise it, but then – yes, it's unmistakable: he's playing the tunes from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

Clearly, much has changed. Darjeeling has grown. A population of about 20,000 when Maggie's father was born here; up to double that by the time my father was here in World War II. Now 600,000 and counting (though still using the same water system devised in 1910). There's a permanent jeep jam in the centre of town, and diesel fumes hang heavy in the air. But the toy train still pants and shrieks its way around the bends and through the streets. And the magnetic magnificent mountain, Kanchenjunga, still towers over the scene.

Those 'Midnight's Children' who were 25 – the age of their new country – in 1972 are 72 now. Back in '72, we had hitched clean across Europe before taking to buses across Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and trains in India. British Government rules restricted the amount of money you could take out of the country, so we lived on £1 each a day. We carried a total of £120 in traveller's cheques for our three month expedition: India and back, both directions overland. Prior to this trip, we had visited only France.

The risks must have been enormous, but we set off undaunted. Some idea can be judged from the recent 'based on a true story' TV series *The Serpent*, accurate in many respects (with the possible exception of the fact that in those days very few young women wore bras).

At Amritsar, after a night's hospitality in the Golden Temple, we chose the ascent to Kashmir rather than descend to the plains of teeming tourists around Delhi.

Leaving the train at Jammu and counting out the last of our outward shillings, we took the beautiful though alarmingly precipitous road to Srinagar. At every bend were quaint signs warning of the horrors of dangerous driving, and object lessons to the same effect: wrecks of crashed lorries and buses on the slopes below.

After a delightful stay on a chintz-furnished houseboat on Lake Dal (motto: 'Good Food – And Rice Pudding') we set off trekking from Pahalgam, walking by way of Chandanwari and Sheshnag, up to the holy cave of Sri Amarnath (don't go there now, there's a queue to get in!), then over the pass (4,118 metres) to Sonamarg. This route is so high that, having walked it with no climbing involved, we qualified on my return to College for a mountaineering grant.

One can go higher as we saw in November 2018. Maggie and I stood at Phalut, close to the India-Nepal border at a height of 3,636m, from where we could see four of the five highest mountains in the world: Everest, Kanchenjunga, Lhotsi, and Makalu. This was the high point of a nine-day trek, eating local food, sleeping in simple huts or tents all along a wonderful landscape. Overnight in Phalut the temperature dropped to minus 5.



2018: The world's highest peaks from Phalut.

But this trip wasn't your £120 job. We spent four days at the wonderfully serene (and expensive) Glenburn Tea Estate and finished up with a calming tour of Tibetan monasteries in Sikkim. And we travelled there and back by 'plane.

Back in '72, India held an exotic magical attraction. But our fathers had served there, we still read Kipling, it was very much associated with Empire and British identity. And you could get there cheaply. Many went to find it: some went to find themselves.

These days (pre-Covid), the flights are relatively cheap even if the facilities when you get there are now more expensive. For many students now in the UK, the Indian sub-continent is home, rather than holiday. But for my generation it remains a distinguished destination – and the Himalayas a haven of achievement.

Andy Simpson (1970, History)

450th Anniversary Celebration at University Church, 27th June

It was good to see that at least part of the 450th Anniversary celebrations did take place in person at University Church. Over 100 attended and it was a good occasion with the choir

and organist performing very well, especially with so little opportunity to practice. Malcolm McIvor smuggled Brian Buchan as his partner, which means questions will be asked!

Future Events

We hope that, starting with Old Members' Day on September 4th, the Group will come back to life. The trip to Chichester Cathedral and the nearby vineyard is on for late September – delayed because of the rescheduled Old Members' Day. We hope the trip to the British Library for the Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots Exhibition is still on for November 17th, which

includes a Q&A session with Sue Doran and Pauline Kewes, both contributors to the exhibition. Details will be made available by email in due course and will be available on the Group's website: jomg.org.

For the always-keen members of the Curry Club, that will have re-started in Fleet Street in early August.

Committee Details



Andy Simpson (1970, History) is a new member (and incoming XL Group newsletter Editor) and describes himself thus:

I'm very happy to be joining the distinguished and long-serving members of the XL committee, though I appreciate that no amount of fresh feeling can change the fact that I too am still old, white and male, if not, as yet, dead - and certainly no poet. I have three daughters, none of whom has followed my career choice: one is in market research, one a ballet teacher, and the other a barrister. After a Modern History degree at Jesus, I spent a brief time in shoe manufacturing before achieving my ambition and spending the rest of my working career in journalism. In this, I like to think that I began at the very top, leading a local newspaper chain in its spirited rear-guard retreat in the face of the insidious advance of the 'free sheets', and progressed to the bottom as an editorial executive of the *Daily Mail*. I spent the majority of my career as Readers' Letters editor, a job in which I was told I could put things in the *Daily Mail* which wouldn't appear anywhere else in the paper. I took this to heart and ran with many a cause which failed to feature, not only on any other of the *Daily Mail's* pages but also in any other news outlet. In this spirit, I shall welcome each and every contribution to these pages - and will be in particular on the lookout for items which wouldn't tend to appear anywhere else in print - particularly not on Twitter.



Peter May (1968, PPE) – Chair, who has a finger in most pies. Peter is the main link with the College on matters affecting the group and liaises regularly with the Development Office. He also organises Old Members' Day.



Richard Cosier (1968, Physics) runs all things to do with membership and data, and shares part of the website responsibility.



George Reah (1962, Mathematics) – Treasurer, advises on budgets and pricing for JOMG events, as well as Group income and expenditure, and those relating to donations managed by the Group's outreach support.



Malcolm McIvor (1961, Mathematics) the recently-retired Chair who has a wealth of knowledge about the Group and describes himself as 'an enthusiast without portfolio'.



Paul Seward (1968, Mathematics) – Secretary. Paul is responsible for the administrative aspects of the work of the Group, checking the detail and ensuring rules and the constitution are followed.



Norman Wright (1969, PPE) organises the website and runs the estimable JCR (the Curry Club).

Many roles are shared, including events organisation. The useful emails for the Group are as follows:

chair@jomg.org forwards to Peter

contact@jomg.org forwards to Richard

events@jomg.org forwards to George (changes according to event lead)

membership@jomg.org forwards to Richard

newsletter@jomg.org forwards to Andy

secretary@jomg.org forwards to Paul

treasurer@jomg.org forwards to George

webmaster@jomg.org forwards to Norman

abuse@jomg.org forwards to Richard (part of an inbuilt safety net)