



# JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP NEWSletter

## XL NETWORK

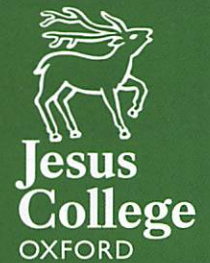


Photo by Antionette Cowling

### How old do I have to be?

When I was growing up, my parents, who like most of the wartime generation were addicted to tea, insisted that I wasn't allowed to drink it until I was five. This rankled at the time and I couldn't wait to turn five. On my fifth birthday, I savoured my first cup of finest Assam and have drunk it regularly every day since. My mornings can't start without a decent cup of Rosie Lee.

Our lives are full of those turn-key moments before which we're denied but after which we're indulged: driving license, cigarettes, alcohol, sex, bank account, vote, job, credit card, shotgun certificate (shotgun?!), marriage ... pension. Tumble down that latter scale and you'll become aware of the pitfalls of superannuation: you could be a magistrate at 18 but not after 74. Bishops should remove their mitres at 70 and car hire companies may turn up their noses at you after your three score years and ten.

Don't be fooled: Methuselah is a concept (or a very large bottle of bubbly) not a biography.

So, *revenons à nos moutons*, as the French say: how old do you have to be to get involved with the XL Group? To which the answer is: any age you like (okay, maybe not five, but 95 is fine. It's called XL (that's 40 in Latin, but never mind, nobody speaks Latin now, not even the Latins) in order to round up all of you who matriculated 40 or more years ago. So, if your life is lacking two excellent cultural events per year, a couple of first-class dinners and some stimulating conversation with top people from highly diverse walks of life, you owe it to yourself to get involved. Your alma mater (sorry, Latin again) has just celebrated 450 years of existence – and you've been a child of it for a not insignificant number of those years. Take part. Read on!

Andy Simpson, editor (1970, History)

**Fab Four**  
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**By Jupiter!**  
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**Play it again, Frantz**  
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**The play's the thing**  
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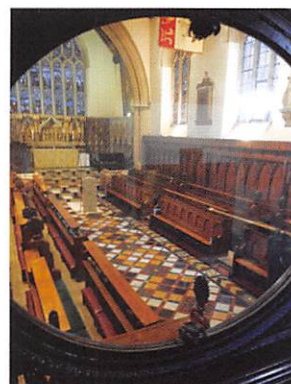
**Fresh blood**  
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### Clean up your act of worship

The discourse in the last newsletter on the College chapel stirred my memories. The chapel had indeed been carpeted for many years until about 1970 when the Caroline Society (the Jesus drama society, often allied with friends from other colleges) undertook to perform a play (the African tale *Ode Oak Oracle*, I think) in the College chapel. As an experiment, we rolled back the carpet and the glory of extravagant Victorian tiling was revealed. This may have influenced the authorities to make the change permanent. Whatever one thinks of Victorian taste in so many of our places of worship, the Jesus College chapel floor is undoubtedly better than the carpet was.

And there was a revelation: the chapel cleaners were storing their cleaning materials under the altar, hidden by the frontal cloth. Their emergence into the open stirred the clear philosophical conclusion that cleanliness is indeed next to godliness.

Crispian Strachan (1968, Law)





## A bun for the elephant



XL members have been privileged in the past to hear presentations by some of the remarkable Jesus College graduate researchers who benefit from the Association's support. This year, we enjoyed the luxury of illustrated talks by no fewer than four post-grads, on the morning after the All Alumni dinner.

Jason Chess commenced the session with a highly enlightening exegesis of the independent development of early Welsh manuscripts, demonstrating his point with illustrations of the prayer tablets discovered in the Roman drainage outfall of Bath cistern and similarity of the letter 'r' through hundreds of years.

Immunologist Quang Nguyen led us, with the assistance of detailed charts, through his research into achieving immune protection in

conditions like HIV without sacrificing autoimmune response.

J. Heather Vedovato dos Santos illustrated her talk on the genetics of craniosynostosis (closure of that hole in the top of the skull) with some poignant pictures of young victims of the condition.

And Yao Yao showed us how she was using highly complex mathematics to advise on the construction of 'soft' robots, driven by air or liquid. She passed round a small, compressed air-powered device, not unlike an elephant's trunk, capable of lifting fresh buns into a box (wouldn't you have loved one of those, Christopher Robin?).

All in all, a highly diverse and thought-provoking morning, with lively question and answer sessions after each talk.

## Bursary bonus

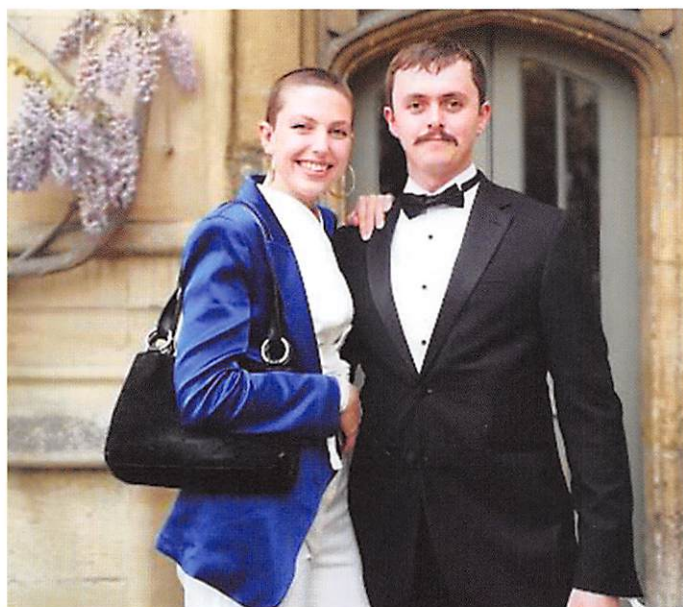
Now in my final year at Jesus completing my MPhys, I couldn't be more grateful for the support of the bursary throughout my degree. The final year of Physics includes a research project for which I'm investigating WTS-2 b, a hot Jupiter that orbits very close to its host star – so close that it was thought that we might be able to measure the decay of its orbit within 10 years.

I set out to measure this in autumn and quickly threw up an interesting result: the planet now looks 60% larger than it did in 2014! Having spent the rest of the year reading, running simulations, and asking for help, we're now considering the possibility that the planet has an escaping atmosphere. I hope my thesis could form the basis for a proposal to investigate this planet and further inform our understanding of extraterrestrial atmospheres and in turn our own.

It's bittersweet to be finishing my degree and leaving Jesus. I am really excited to start working, balancing applications with my studies, but studying here has been incredible and I will miss it so much. The bursary has played a huge part in how much I have been able to enjoy my time here.

Finding I was eligible for the bursary and that I could accept the amazing opportunity of studying for an Oxford degree without financial worries was truly life changing. I hope many more students can benefit as I have.

*Andrew Fletcher (2019, Physics)*



*Andrew Fletcher with girlfriend Esme Zivkovic.*



## Rosemary Brown, South London amanuensis to the spirits of Schubert and Chopin

My mother Rosemary Brown (1916-2001) shot to world fame at the end of the 1960s with her claim to be the earthly amanuensis to spirits of classical composers from Bach to Stravinsky. She wrote some 240 complete compositions, the original manuscripts of which are in the British Library, mostly piano miniatures but including also a 'Brahms' string quartet and 'Schubert' sonata movements.

Rosemary was born during the Great War as her father, Frank Dickeson, formerly a roller-skating instructor at Earls Court arena, was conscripted. She grew up in a Victorian Balham house which she later inherited jointly with my Uncle Andy, and where I grew up too. Spiritualism, already popularised by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, flourished during and after the War as despairing relatives of war dead sought contact with loved ones in séances across the land. Her childhood vision of Liszt, described in her autobiography *Unfinished Symphonies*, may not have been met with the incredulity we would expect now.

She was academically the most gifted of three children, attending Rosa Bassett Grammar School in Streatham, whose founder-headmistress pioneered the progressive Dalton Plan. Rosemary achieved matriculation standard in the School Certificate in 1934. Her formal education then ceased. She was an avid reader of H.G. Wells and G.B. Shaw, a fierce supporter of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, and loathed Stanley Baldwin. She wanted to be a ballet dancer, and pursued amateur creative dancing, but financial reality dictated a working life (until marriage in 1952) in the Post Office. She was a teleprinter operator through the War, possibly assigned to handling S.O.E. messages, as somehow she was known to Maurice Buckmaster. She caught Polio in 1942, but made an excellent recovery.

She had some piano lessons in the 1930s, on a jangling Victorian salon piano in the house, then bought a better one in 1947 to take more piano lessons, achieving a proficient amateur standard, able to play some Bach and Chopin preludes and pieces like Liszt's *Liebestraum*. In 1971 she was given a Knight piano, fresh from Harrods' piano department, which she kept until her death.

She married in 1952, and my sister and I were born in 1953 and 1956. There was no time for piano-playing as a housewife-mother. In her 'annus horribilis' 1961, both her mother and husband died.



Tom Brown.

She became a dinner lady to supplement a meagre widow's pension. In 1964 she fractured two ribs in a fall in the school kitchen and while off work sat at her piano again. She said this was when Liszt reappeared and told her of her mission to take dictation of new compositions from classical composers, to provide evidence of life after death.

After playing these compositions to spiritualist-minded friends for several years, and gaining the attention of 'New Age' thinker Sir George Trevelyan, she appeared on BBC *Women's Hour* in 1968. Then in April 1969 a report on the



BBC London TV news led to a sensation. At the end of the 'Swinging 60s' of psychedelia, transcendental meditation, Hatha Yoga, and the Beatles with the Maharishi, the public was ready for a South London widow who went to Sainsbury's with Beethoven. Numerous TV programmes round the world, a Philips LP recording, and the accolade of invitations to the Jonny Carson and David Frost shows in New York ensued.

She was sincere in her belief that the musical compositions she wrote down were the works of dead composers. They were not consciously faked. Some of the pieces are good enough to have attracted the attention of serious musicians of the time, including Richard Rodney Bennett, Alan Hovhaness, Leonard Bernstein, Professor Ian Parrott (University of Wales), David Cairns, John Lill, and Hepzibah Menuhin. More recent commentary by psychologists in England and Germany has focused on the issue of repressed talent and agency in women. Was she actually a musician of huge natural talent who, innately sensing the exclusion of female voices in classical composers, presented it under recognised historic male identities?

She never put me or my sister under any pressure to follow any path or belief in life, and I arrived in Oxford fully under my own steam in 1975 to study Modern Languages. During Hilary Term 1977 she came to Oxford with pianist Howard Shelley, who had just recorded a LP of her music for German label Intercord, to give a talk and recital, organised by the Jesus-St Anne's Music Society – Bill Hibbert was at the time President and I was Treasurer, anticipating my future career as a banker!

The measure of her impact in life was that not just the *Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Daily Telegraph* published lengthy obituaries, but also the *New York Times* ('Rosemary Brown, a Friend of Dead Composers, Dies at 85') and *The Economist* which, in a whole-page tribute, drew a comparison with Jeanne d'Arc!

The stream of compositions continued into the late 1980s but, as advancing years and increasing bouts of poor health slowed Rosemary down and made concentration more difficult, the last completed manuscripts were from 1991. She was by character a modest and private person, and was ambivalent about the publicity which she had brought on herself. She left a number of works, including a 'Liszt' *Grübelei*, 'Schubert' *Moment Musical*, and 'Rachmaninov' *Lyric* which sound indistinguishable from their life works. It will remain a mystery from where they came.

Tom Brown (1975, *Modern Languages*)



## Cymbeline



Twenty-one Jesus Old Members Group (JOMG) members and their partners visited Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 and 24 May, expertly led by George Reah, who has done valiant service as the JOMG Treasurer for many years.

The visit began with a suitably convivial lunch at Zizzi's on Sheep Street, where George had secured the top floor.

From there, we moved on to Holy Trinity Church to enjoy a guided tour by George's friend Bridget Sorel-Cameron, who was most informative about the building and its contents. The earliest extant part of the building dates from 1210, later parts from the 13th century, and the church was rebuilt in the 1480s.

It contains impressive Victorian stained-glass windows and a highly ornate wooden organ case, the organ itself now being situated above the arch leading to the choir stalls. Of special interest is the 'weeping chancel' which, when viewed from the centre aisle of the nave, gives the impression that the church 'bends' somewhat to the left.

Also on display was a King James Bible completed in 1611 – the 46th year of Shakespeare's life. He is intimately bound to the church, having become a lay rector after his retirement as a playwright; two of his children, Hamnet and Judith, are buried in the churchyard.

The gravestones of Shakespeare himself, Anne Hathaway, and their elder daughter Susanna are situated near the altar, but unimpressive, marked only by relatively new notices showing their location.

Facsimiles of the Registers of Baptisms and Burials from the years in which Shakespeare was born (1564) and died (1616) show that in earlier years the register was kept in Latin, but by the time of his death it was in English.

In the evening the group went to a performance of *Cymbeline* at the renowned RSC theatre on the Stratford riverside – the swansong for Gregory Doran, RSC director for the past 30 years. He pulled out all the stops for his final production. This is the penultimate play of Shakespeare's sole authorship, prior to *The Tempest*, after which he collaborated with John Fletcher on four further dramas. It is not easy to summarise the plot, and the play is not considered one of Shakespeare's finest but, to give some idea of its complexity, there are 30 named living parts, five apparitions, as well as Lords, Ladies, Messengers and Musicians, and Roman and British soldiers.

Having read the play in advance, I was enraptured by the production, and full of admiration for the way a difficult text could be made comprehensible by the performances of professional actors. Their skill was supplemented by brilliant staging, and outstanding lighting and sound effects, complemented by live musicians. Nevertheless, I was surprised that the director did not cut certain passages which I thought unnecessary, and the denouement, usually so concise in Shakespeare's plays, was unnecessarily protracted, even if amusing.

But that is not to detract from a thoroughly enjoyable evening, and a fitting end to a memorable day.

David Bartlett (1963, PPE)

*The next XL Group outing will be cultural/historical visit to Chatham and Rochester, Kent on 3-4 October.*

## Introducing Nel Cotterill

Your XL leadership is constantly on the lookout for potential new members, both of the association and of the committee. This year we are happy to announce the addition of two new female representatives and Nel Cotterill introduces herself here.

Originally reading Engineering Science (1980-1984), I was 'down and out' for one year with glandular fever then post-viral syndrome. Forty years on (!), gratefully recovered, I empathise with long COVID sufferers.

As a chartered engineer specialised in electronics hardware, I designed 'bleeding edge' defence and commercial communications solutions. From microscopic to global, my projects included bespoke microprocessor internal layouts, secure tactical data links, and high-reliability multinational networks.

After establishing a European centre of excellence in technical training and distributor support, I relocated to California for sales, marketing, and corporate strategy roles in technology companies.

I recently earned my Executive MBA from Henley Business School, amid endearing family responsibilities and enduring duties for the College of St George. Whether on mundane countryside walks or inside magnificent St George's Chapel, I find awesome spaces in which to ponder the challenges of climate change mitigation and reflect on other enigmas of life.

Helen (Nel) Cotterill  
(1980, Engineering Science)



## XL Group Committee

**Andy Simpson** (1970, History) – XL Network Newsletter Editor. Welcomes any prospective contribution to this publication. In particular, I'm on the lookout for short articles detailing how anyone who studied at Jesus College has found their time there relevant in their later life.

**Peter May** (1968, PPE) – Committee Chair. Peter is the main link with the College on matters affecting the Network and liaises regularly with the Development Office. He also organises Old Members' Day.

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

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

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

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

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

**Helen 'Nel' Cotterill** (1980, Engineering Science). A big welcome to Nel and Sian (below) as our first female committee members, hopefully to be soon joined by more as the 40 (XL) entry point rolls onwards into the College's mixed era.

**Sian Griffiths** (1978, English). Delighted to welcome another new committee member; Sian is Education Editor of the *Sunday Times*.

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

[chair@jomg.org](mailto:chair@jomg.org) forwards to Peter  
[contact@jomg.org](mailto:contact@jomg.org) forwards to Richard  
[events@jomg.org](mailto:events@jomg.org) forwards to George (changes according to event lead)  
[membership@jomg.org](mailto:membership@jomg.org) forwards to Richard  
[newsletter@jomg.org](mailto:newsletter@jomg.org) forwards to Andy  
[secretary@jomg.org](mailto:secretary@jomg.org) forwards to Paul  
[treasurer@jomg.org](mailto:treasurer@jomg.org) forwards to George  
[webmaster@jomg.org](mailto:webmaster@jomg.org) forwards to Norman  
[abuse@jomg.org](mailto:abuse@jomg.org) forwards to Richard (part of an in-built safety net)

*Julian le Patourel* (1960, English) died on 21 July after a long battle with cancer. Secretary to the XL Group for more than 10 years, he made a great contribution through his energy and wise counsel. His good company will be sorely missed by all his family and friends.