



JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP NEWSletter XL NETWORK



**A Welsh
First – Fake
or Fact?**

page **2**

**Not Just
Wallpaper**

page **3**

**Power to
the Pedal**

page **3**

Old & New

page **4**

**Chair's
Comments**

page **4**

**XL Group
Committee**

page **4**

'It's our College, Jim, but not as we knew it'

Those of us who got used to belonging to a discrete 'gem' of a college – tucked away on the Turl, with unexceptional sides facing Ship and Market Streets – will have to press the reset button. We're going to have to get used to our College boasting a prominent frontage on Cornmarket Street and one whole side of Market Street, as well as striding to a more prominent position amid the university hierarchy.

Casual visitors to the university city are often baffled by the lack of any obvious identification of the various colleges they pass. Our College has broken rank with a large 'Jesus College' script set in stone by the new Market Street entrance.

The layout and architecture of Fourth Quad and other new additions (though not fully in use as I write this) are a triumphant fusion of old and new. These things

aren't always easy to achieve (as anyone who's visited the Gothic cathedral in the middle of the Mezquita in Córdoba will bear witness), but the walk-through now from the vernacular asymmetry of First Quad to the beautiful encompassing whole of the Second, then the dingy narrows of the Third (with its passing tribute to Seventies Mannerism at the far end), to climb the stairs and arrive in the elevated Fourth Quad is a wonderful ascent from comfortable history to a 21st century, 'Le Corbusier, eat your heart out', environment.

How it will feel on a wet Wednesday in November, I don't know, but at this point the future of our College looks nothing but bright.

Andy Simpson, Editor (1970, History)

A Welsh First – Fake or Fact?

Amid an entertaining speech to the All Alumni Dinner, novelist Owen Sheers repeated the bold claim that Wales has the oldest still extant higher educational institution in the Western world. True or false? Clive Jenkins examines the evidence – and delivers a surprising verdict.

Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major), Illtud's 6th century monastery, is well attested. Its supposed predecessor, however, Cŵr or Bangor Tewdws ('choir' or 'college' of Theodosius), founded in 395, is a total fabrication, invented by antiquarian Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams 1747-1826) to boost the heritage of his native Bro Morgannwg. Lacking any proof, he simply made it up.

Unnecessarily: the truth is impressive enough. Still under Rome in the 390s, Classics and Christianity were being taught in Siluria. Illtud himself must have been well educated somewhere. The timing of his monastery, about 490, and its location were no accident. The Bristol Channel was then Y Môr Hafren, the Severn Sea, with fertile villa-rich coastlands, focused on the Romano-British cultural centre at Bath. Protected from the Anglo-Saxon advance, much Roman heritage survived there.

The curriculum reflected the context. Well-versed in the Scriptures, geometry, rhetoric, grammar and arithmetic, Illtud's college imitated the Gallic rhetorical schools where the liberal arts partnered Scripture. His probable pupil Gildas's wide command of Latin and the Bible indicates the standard Illtud set, whether Gildas was a student there or not.

St Samson (485-565) surely was. His nearly contemporary 'Life', from around 600, has the earliest mention of Illtud. Written centuries later, the 'Lives' of other 6th-century A-listers (St David, Paulinus Aurelian, King Maelgwn Gwynedd and Gildas) simply assume that they attended their century's A-list college.

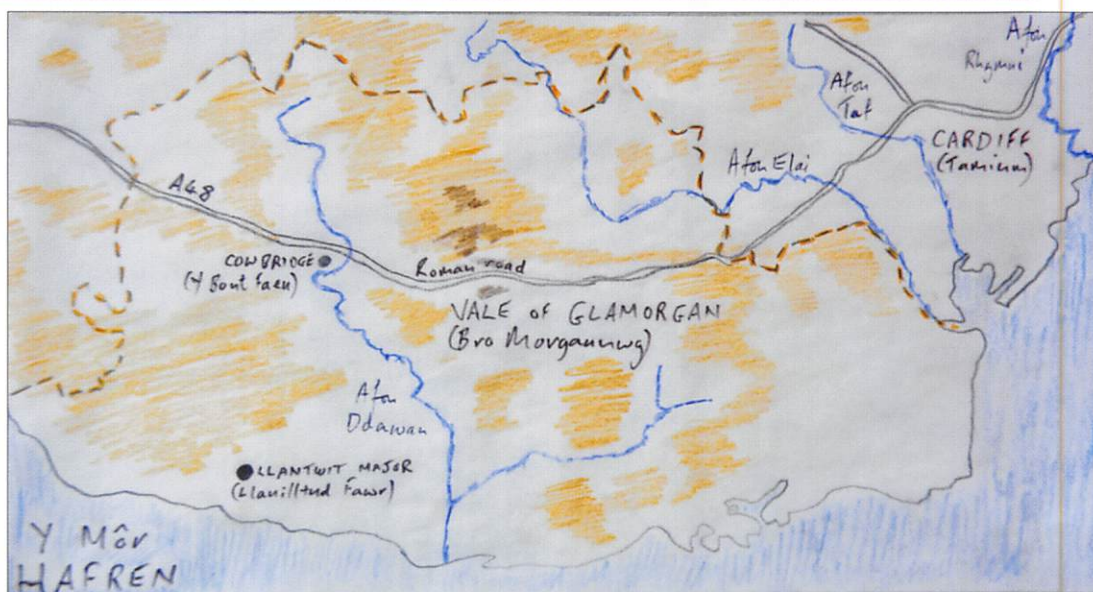
Manual Work

Illtud's 'Life' dates from the 12th century and no material traces remain of his wood and wattle monastery to fill the gap in the documentation. This exemplifies the unpretentious character of the enterprise. Full of humility and good works, Illtud required disciplined manual work: the youthful Gildas and Samson are said to have hoed and warded off birds from the crops.

The rugged living and curriculum were good preparation for the perilous Celtic practice of 'exile for the sake of Christ' – the missionary activity for which Llanilltud became famous.

This monastery was not a proto-university, it was a missionary training college. Patchily implanted among the British, Christianity needed strengthening. At the Battle of Mons Badonicus, between 482 and 518, the British halted the Anglo-Saxon advance, preserving extensive territories for missionary efforts. Prominent among these was Brittany, which has 24 dedications and place names commemorating Illtud and where Samson died as Bishop of Dol.

Brythonic (proto-Welsh) prevailed unbroken across western Britain apart from the Dalriada of the Scoti. The British 5th century conversion of Ireland had been a huge success. The enthusiastic new church helped invigorate the British church when it might have assumed a siege mentality.



But Llanilltud's importance declined in the 7th century. The renewed Anglo-Saxon onslaught after 600 eventually broke the Brythonic-speaking regions into three. The Welsh Church objected to the Papacy putting the whole of Britain under Canterbury and its specific customs marginalised it further until 750 when it began to accept Roman forms. The English – largely pagan through the 6th century – were converted in the 7th, with the British taking little part, through hatred of the conqueror, while the Irish, with no such grievance, played a major role.

The result was the much bigger Anglo-Saxon Church, loyal to Rome. Meanwhile Llanilltud became an established institution of the Kingdom of Morgannwg, with 9th and 10th century royal burials and a collegiate structure of abbots and canons, wealthier and secular in spirit. In the 10th century it was sacked by Vikings, Anglo-Saxons and the Welsh of Deheubarth, damaging its spiritual and intellectual life. Then, in 1093/4, the Normans conquered Morgannwg, destroying all ancient local institutions with special characteristics. The lands of Illtud's monastery and school were assigned to the abbey of Tewkesbury. What was left was reduced to a parish church.

Forgeries

So Iolo forged an afterlife for it. According to him, Cowbridge School, endowed by the Stradlings in 1608-1609, was the post-Reformation transfer of Illtud's college to a central Vale site, rendering it not only the oldest educational establishment in the Western World but a hallowed survival of Celtic Christianity.

So the roll call of Llanilltud includes St David, St Samson, Gildas, King Maelgwn Gwynedd, Sir Leoline Jenkins, Alun Lewis, Sir Anthony Hopkins, and me. And Jesus College owned it for more than 200 years!

In the 19th century, this idea was keenly embraced by the school's supporters. It even survived Prof G. J. Williams's exposure in 1919-21 of Iolo's wholesale lies. Some still maintain that Iolo need not have stooped to forgery – his continuity theory was right. This depends on the tradition that Tewkesbury Abbey kept a college (chapter) which maintained the school at Llanilltud until the Dissolution.

But the Norman destruction makes this improbable and any such institution seems likely to have been noted in some way over the 440 years of the increasingly well-documented High Middle Ages. So it seems I must relinquish the prospect of a school reunion in heaven at which I get to meet St David.

Clive Jenkins (1966, *History*).

Not Just Wallpaper – William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow



William Morris by George Frederic Watts, oil on canvas, 1870. National Portrait Gallery.

What a little-known gem this is! On an inauspicious day, Friday 13 May, a merry band of old members assembled at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow.

It was a lovely, warm, sunny spring day which showed off the Lloyd Park through which we strolled to arrive at the gallery to best effect. The park was originally part of the Georgian Mansion in which the gallery was housed. The house was the one in which Morris lived in his early years and the gardens helped him develop his love of nature and some of the plants therein are ones that so typically appear in his later designs.

The young man who was our designated museum guide was excellent – articulate, knowledgeable, and amusing. As always with Old Members' groups there were plenty of questions en route through the gallery. By the end, we had had a picture painted that was altogether more complex and interesting than the one we had at the outset, of William Morris's career, aspirations, personal life, artistic collaborators, political adventures, business ventures, writings, and designs.

The museum is well curated and of a size that one can look at in depth without being overwhelmed. Morris was a genuine polymath and whilst today he is remembered for his designs, in his own time he was much better known for his writing, both poems and novels. His personal wealth enabled him to express himself in a range of ways and also enabled his radical politics. Most of all he yearned for a world where ordinary people could afford his expensive designs that in the

world of his time only the rich could afford.

Lunch in the museum café was followed by an intriguing lecture by Andy Simpson – one of our own members – on Jane Morris, William's wife. What a fascinating woman! An archetypal Pre-Raphaelite beauty 'discovered' by Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, she became a model for the group when they, including Morris, were working on the Arthurian murals in the Oxford Union. Morris fell in love (but not she with him) and became engaged. She was a poorly educated daughter of poor, possibly illiterate parents, but with Morris's support, thrived. She transformed herself, learned French and Italian, became an accomplished pianist, read widely, developed strong views, and became a skilled embroiderer. Not surprisingly, Jane and William produced two very talented daughters. We had fascinating insights into the loves and affairs in the group, especially of the love triangle including Rossetti.

As is the custom after the lecture, we repaired to the pub to round off an excellent convivial day.

Peter May (1968, PPE).



Proserpine, 1874; Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Photo © Tate, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rossetti-proserpine-n05064 CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

Power to the Pedal

When I was eight I got my first bike, and it opened up the world to me near our home on the outskirts of Leeds. When I was eighteen, in the autumn of 1970 at Oxford, another bike opened up the world for me, and provided a different freedom to complement the intellectual freedom I was busily exploring.



Pete with today's electric effort.

The bike was an old, red, three-speed that my friend Fred Croft gave me. His parents brought it up from London in the boot of their car, and unloaded it in Ship Street. I painted a Jesus number on the mudguard, and put it in the bike shed: a mysterious, locked, high-walled enclosure that contained bikes both living and dead. I joined the hundreds of cyclists making our various ways to lectures, tutorials, concerts, pubs, plays, social gatherings and sport. It was normal,

casual, unfussy. Remember where you left your bike, cycle somewhere, lean your bike against a wall, go in... I cycled frequently to the Jesus sports ground for rugby training and games: warming up on the way there, feeling knackered on the way back.

When three of us moved into a flat in north Oxford, we biked to College and back. A special challenge was to cycle through the chicane-like barriers on Dragon Lane with a bag of shopping hanging off each side of the handlebars. Memories of riding home late, the worse for wear; falling off...

I took for granted such easy transport to a treasure trove of facilities, experiences, and friendships, all concentrated in easy reach. In my ignorance, I assumed it would be like that everywhere. Not so!

Nowadays, a red bike still provides me with the freedom to explore; I cycle amongst the hills of Yorkshire where I live. This bike, though, is new. And it comes with an electric motor...



Buzz on a Seventies cycle tour.

Pete ('Buzz') Armstrong (1970, English).

Old & New – Old Members' Day at College, 25 June 2022

My first attendance at an Old Members' event was a timely reminder of what a privilege it is to be associated with such a formidable institution as our College.

Around 55 Old Members and guests met in the Ship Street Centre for coffee (and some reflections on the previous night's Gaudy for those lucky enough to have attended) before settling down for three contrasting but equally riveting talks.

The Principal not only brought us up to date with recent developments and achievements, but provided an insight into the way in which the Covid pandemic had affected many aspects of college life. Who would ever have thought that age-old traditions such as those of Freshers' Week would need re-establishing after a cohort of new students were denied the experience through the restrictions of the pandemic?

Dr Simon Townley, senior editor of the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire, confessed to having missed out on the possibility of becoming an Old Member of College on the toss of a coin, as a wise schoolmaster thought it best if two of his pupils didn't compete against each other for places in the same college. So, Simon went to Oriel – and I came to Jesus. 45 minutes or so was hardly sufficient to even scratch the surface of the six volumes Simon has edited, but a dip into the history of Henley-on-Thames and Ascot-under-Wychwood illustrated some of the wealth of information available in the published volumes.



Committee member George Reah greets Dr Simon Townley.

From history, Prof Paul Riley whisked us into the mind-boggling world of developing regenerative therapies to treat disease. With a clarity that made leading-edge research accessible to even a former historian turned accountant, Paul took us on a totally absorbing journey through research into understanding how a foetus develops into a functioning human being and how such knowledge might be used to develop treatments for when something goes wrong. And he even showed us what one of his favourite 'toys' could tell us about what was going on in individual cells.

So to lunch in Hall via the essential pre-lunch drinks, and the much anticipated tour of the (very nearly) finished Fourth Quad. Amazing graduate accommodation, all with ensuite facilities, is about as far away from my first room in the old Ship Street annexe as Prof Riley's world was from that of Dr Townley. The views from the upper meeting rooms were well worth the challenge of the stairs (lift yet to be commissioned!), and the new quad feels like a modern addition worthy of the first and second quads – especially on the glorious summer's day that had emerged while we enjoyed lunch.

A lovely occasion to catch up with old friends – and make some new ones, with whom to share memories of our time at Jesus.

John Chadwick (1977, Modern History)

The Wisdom of Thomas Edward

One autumn evening, Thomas Edward and his chums were engaged in animated discussion as to whether a person could 'disappear' in the crowded City of Oxford for a significant period of time. The general opinion was that this was not possible and a bet was laid to this effect.

The next day, Thomas Edward availed himself of a college punt, a naphthalene lamp, a lump hammer, and sufficient food for three days and 'disappeared' into the labyrinth of water tunnels under the ancient city.



By paying out a coil of string, he placed himself directly below his friend's house. Once in position, he used the hammer to thump three times, heavily, on the boards above his head. He did this for three consecutive days.

His friends, meanwhile, preoccupied with vainly searching the city for their missing colleague, remarked only in passing on the thumps they heard.

After three days, emerging to claim his prize, Thomas Edward remarked: 'So we see how, despite searching high and low, a seeker may be standing on the truth.'

Chair's Comments

As life has come back to something like normality it is time to look ahead. The majority of our active members are men, and we as a committee are keen to ensure that over time more women become involved so that our participating membership genuinely reflects the balance amongst members as a whole. A good starting point would be to recruit women to the committee to help us add to our activities and to widen involvement. If anyone is interested in exploring the possibility of joining the committee, please contact me at mayjpeter@yahoo.co.uk. It would be even better if two or more women were prepared to consider joining us together.

Peter May, Chair, JOMG (1968, PPE)

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.

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) the recently-retired Chair who has a wealth of knowledge about the Network and describes himself as 'an enthusiast without portfolio'.

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 Network 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)