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FOREWORD

As the first female Master of Balliol, I feel honoured to count myself among the daughters of Dervorguilla. This exhibition, to mark 40 years since women students first matriculated at the College in 1979, traces a very much longer history of women’s influence and agency, which has shaped the College we know today.

It doesn’t seem to be stretching the facts too far to say that for all practical purposes, Balliol was founded by a woman. It was John de Balliol whose punishment for his rebellion in County Durham was to endow a hostel for poor scholars in Oxford in 1263. But it was Dervorguilla who set us up as a going concern, drafting our first statutes in 1282 and contributing her personal wealth in order to put our finances on a stable footing.

Women continued to provide transformative support to the College over the following centuries. Lady Elizabeth Periam donated land in Buckinghamshire in the 1620s to support a Fellow and two Scholars. In 1867, Hannah Brackenbury, believing herself to be a lineal descendant of John de Balliol, funded the Waterhouse rebuilding of the front quadrangle and the Scholarships in her name. And on the turn of the 21st century, the generosity of Dame Stephanie Shirley enabled us to create the Historic Collections Centre at St Cross and the ground-breaking Oxford Internet Institute.

Like so many anniversaries, the 40th anniversary of women students arriving at Balliol has a long pre-history. In 1873, A M A H Rogers was almost awarded an Exhibition by the College, having got the best marks in the Oxford Local Examinations. But when it emerged that the ‘A’ stood for Annie, the College decided to give her a gift of books instead. In 1967 women graduate students arrived at Holywell Manor; though they were matriculated students of St Anne’s. In 1971, Governing Body first voted for the admission of women students, but amidst concerns across the University about the potential impact on the women’s colleges, opted as a first step to make our Fellowships open to women. Thus the warmly-remembered linguist Carol Clark became the first female Fellow of any of the traditional men’s colleges.

In this exhibition, you will meet an extraordinary cast of female characters. These include the Morier women, through their correspondence about Europe and Asia; Jowett’s famous group of ‘Women who are my friends’ including Florence Nightingale and reformer Mary Augusta Ward; and Masters’ wives and their children, including A L Smith’s wife Mary and their five daughters. Female staff also feature, including Annie Bradbury, appointed in 1939 as our first female Domestic Bursar, and Martha Knight, Benjamin Jowett’s housekeeper, whose concern for her employer’s privacy accounts for the gaps we find in his papers today.

So the 40th anniversary is a moment to reflect, both on a long history of women at Balliol and how we can build on their extraordinary achievements for the future. To adapt our College toast for this occasion, ‘Floreant Filiae Dervorguillae’: May the Daughters of Dervorguilla continue to Flourish!

Dame Helen Ghosh
Master of Balliol College

INTRODUCTION

In 1979, 40 years ago, the first female students were admitted to Balliol College, but women have been fundamental in shaping the College since its foundation in the 13th century by Dervorguilla, Lady of Galloway. Benefactors, academics, educationalists, reformers, wives, writers, staff, sisters, friends: this exhibition delves into Balliol’s historic collections to examine the sometimes hidden but extensive influence of women on the College’s intellectual and social life through seven and a half centuries, as well as celebrating the achievements of its alumnae since 1979.

Some of the names that appear on the following pages may be familiar: the female figures of the College have long been a part of its identity and traditions, lending their names and stories to the College’s publications, societies, appeals, dinners; its legends and language. Others’ stories, however, are coming to the fore for the first time. Indeed, Balliol’s historic relationship with women resists generalisation, characterised as it is by nuance, debate and change.

This exhibition presents just a few stories out of the many.
DERVORGUILLA OF GALLOWAY, LADY OF BALLIOL

Tradition has it that John de Balliol founded Balliol College around 1263 as penance for insulting the Bishop of Durham. After his death, his widow, Dervorguilla of Galloway, took the reins as patroness, making her husband’s endowment permanent. Dervorguilla was a powerful woman, wealthier than her husband, and whose lineage was the basis of her son’s claim to the throne of Scotland. She saw herself as Balliol’s joint founder, a status which has echoed down the centuries in art and architecture, and is still found in the College’s coat of arms today. Embraced as an icon of Balliol, she and her romantic story have inspired poetry and legends (the masonry in the Fellow’s Garden is not her tomb, for example), and she has lent her name to societies, scholarships, funding appeals and even a crater on Venus.

Balliol College’s Statutes today bear little resemblance to Dervorguilla’s original neat parchment document with its near-perfect seal impression. Her Statutes take the form of a letter addressed to her agents directing them to supervise the College. In them she sets out rules for the daily life and work of scholars, enabling them to hold property collectively and appoint their own Master, thus giving the informal academic society established by her husband a corporate identity and a measure of self-government.

The Statutes were issued from Buittle Castle in Galloway, south-west Scotland, not far from Dervorguilla’s other foundation, Sweetheart Abbey, where she was buried with her husband’s embalmed heart. Her seal inspired later portraits, and its devices still feature in Balliol College’s arms today.

Dervorguilla’s Statutes with close-up of the front of her seal.
CHANGING FACE OF THE FOUNDRRESS

No contemporary portrait of Dervorguilla exists. The small portrait now hanging in the College Hall was painted centuries later, based on her seal. In her right hand she holds the arms of the Balliols. Her left hand ought to bear her own arms: what actually appears was probably meant to be the royal arms of Scotland. To her sides are the arms of the Earldoms of Huntingdon and Chester, to which she was heiress.

Dervorguilla’s image was invoked again in the 19th century on an ornate volume containing A W N Pugin’s plans for rebuilding the College. On the title page, Dervorguilla and John are imagined as equal partners, praying on either side of their foundation. Here, as elsewhere, the symbolism of Dervorguilla and of St Catherine, Balliol’s patron saint, have been combined.

In a 20th-century mural which forms part of a series located in Staircase II Room V, Dervorguilla is represented presenting her Statutes to her agent. Elsewhere in the room, she is depicted at prayer, inspired by St Catherine to consolidate her husband’s foundation. The mural’s artist and his wife, Anne Marie Huth Jackson, both had family connections with Balliol. In the mural St Catherine is based on Anne herself, and Dervorguilla on the artist’s sister, Margaret.

The foundress has lent her name to College societies, student publications, and a major fundraising appeal; recently she has been associated with ‘celebrating and promoting women in academia’. The Lady Dervorguilla seminars are organised by the Middle Common Room (MCR) Women’s Officer and aim to promote widespread engagement with the research of leading female scholars.
ST CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA, PATRON SAINT

It is doubtful whether a real St Catherine, 4th-century virgin and martyr, ever existed. According to legend she was a young princess who confounded the scholars of Emperor Maximinus with her eloquent defence of Christianity, converting many whilst imprisoned. The wheel upon which she was to be martyred miraculously burst into pieces, but she was eventually beheaded.

Dervorguilla was devoted to her cult, and drew inspiration from it when setting Balliol College on a surer footing with her Statutes. The saint thus became the College’s patron – fittingly, as she has always been associated with female education. Depictions of Catherine and her iconography, a crown and book, along with the instruments of her martyrdom, a spiked wheel and sword, appear throughout the College. For many centuries, there was even an inn called the Catherine Wheel in the south-west corner of the campus.

CATHERINE IN THE COLLEGE

The College Chapel has a window dedicated to St Catherine dating from the 16th century which portrays the removal of Catherine’s body by angels to Mount Sinai, where the Monastery of the Transfiguration still houses her shrine.

Balliol has celebrated St Catherine’s Day with a special dinner for centuries. The College accounts hint at the extravagance of the occasion. In 1549 peacock even featured on the menu. An invitation and order of proceedings from 1938 give us a glimpse into the ceremony involved: a well-known Balliol figure would always be invited to speak and that year it was Harold Nicolson (Balliol 1904), the diplomat and husband of Vita Sackville-West.

The College Archives even contain a reliquary of silver (or steel and brass) with a glass top, sealed with red wax.
underneath, holding a tiny bone fragment. Its label, mounted on brass gauze, reads ‘S. Catherine V.M.’ (Virgin and Martyr). Accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Augustine, Abbot of Achelensis in 1882, it was bought on eBay in 2006, a testament to St Catherine’s enduring resonance for the College.

FEMALE AUTHORITY: THE COLLEGE’S EARLY SEALS

In centuries past, seals performed a similar function to signatures today: they authenticated a record and expressed the ‘brand’ of the bearer. In this context, it is interesting to note that all three of Balliol’s medieval and Tudor seals incorporated female figures: Dervorguilla, St Catherine and the Virgin Mary. Dervorguilla gave Balliol its own seal around the time she issued her statutes, depicting herself and John physically supporting the College between them. In 1588, when the College decided to solicit a new charter from Queen Elizabeth I, it also designed a new seal, whose imagery retained St Catherine with her wheel and sword, but did away with the Virgin and Child imagery of the old common seal. During the reigns of Elizabeth and her half-sister Queen Mary I before her, women’s ability to rule a country was the subject of debate. It is tempting to wonder if St Catherine, whose legend has her besting 50 scholars in theological debate, was felt to be a flattering tribute to the Queen.

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**BENEFACTORS: ‘TO WHOM THIS HOUSE IS A LIVING MEMORIAL’**

Balliol in its early years may have been a strict community of male scholars, but that did not prevent women from providing funds for scholars and Fellows to study, as well as buildings for them to live in. Benefactions also had a spiritual purpose in pre-Reformation England: inclusion on the Benefactors’ Roll ensured prayers for the soul after death. Thus, some of the earliest appearances of women in Balliol’s historical record are in lists of benefactors such as the *Rotulus Benefactorum*, transcribed in 1568 in the earliest extant register of the College. On it, the Lady Dervorguilla is number two on the list, and before long we find other women’s names such as Ela, Countess of Warwick (number eight: Dominae Elae Longespey), who contributed to the erection of the first permanent College Chapel around 1325.

**LADY ELIZABETH PERIAM**

One benefactor to go down in Balliol lore is Lady Elizabeth Periam, who endowed the College with property in her will of 1618. In order to promote learning and religion, her endowment supported a Fellow and two Scholars in the College and provided funds for their accommodation. She

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lived to approve the first appointments herself. Legend has it that the lodgings she endowed, somewhere near the site of the present Junior Common Room, were adjacent to the latrines, giving rise to the euphemism ‘visiting Lady Periam’. The phrase was still in use in 1984, when it was listed in the Dictionary of Euphemisms.

Lady Periam’s indenture, copied in a 1627 version of the 1507 College Statutes, shows the Scholars receiving an allowance of £4 a year each, and the Fellow ‘commons, diet, stipends, fines upon leases, dividends and allowances as other Fellows shall or do enjoy’.

**HANNAH BRACKENBURY**

The College buildings have been through many configurations in their 750-year history. The iconic neo-Gothic buildings that you step into immediately from Broad Street today were completed in 1867, and designed by Alfred Waterhouse, who also created the Natural History Museum in London and Manchester Town Hall. The sections comprising staircases I–VII, the Porters’ Lodge, and a lecture room (which now houses the Bursary) were known as the Brackenbury Buildings after the benefactress who made their construction possible.

Hannah Brackenbury was a generous donor who chose to establish Balliol scholarships in Law, History and Natural Sciences because of her supposed connection with the founder’s family, and because she wished to preserve the Brackenbury name. Her scholarships continue to be awarded today. Her crest is one of several heraldic allusions to the Brackenbury family placed around the College in recognition of her gift. The motto, ‘Oncques Sans Reculer Jamais’, is archaic French and means approximately ‘Never ever give up’.

**BENEFACTORS TODAY**

Benefactions continue to be important today, and facilitate enhancements to the work and environment of the College. The transformation of St Cross Church into the Historic Collections Centre was made possible by donors including principal benefactor Dame Stephanie Shirley (Foundation Fellow), as was the creation of the Oxford Internet Institute. In her portrait by Saied Dai (which hangs in Balliol’s Hall), one of the items she holds is a tablet showing the sundial on the church. We owe another sundial to benefaction: the sculpture in the Garden Quad was commissioned to celebrate the 30th anniversary of female students at Balliol in 2009, and was gifted by alumnae of the College. The Benefactor’s Board in the Library Passage bears the names of women – alumnae, friends, parents, partners - who have given transformative gifts and guidance to Balliol in recent times and there are many more not listed whose generous and passionate support of the College is both vital and valued.
WOMEN WHO ARE MY FRIENDS: THE LADIES IN THE LODGINGS

For the first three or so centuries of Balliol’s existence, women were rarely permitted inside the College’s precincts. Undergraduates and Fellows were expected to enter holy orders, and thus remain celibate. The 1542 Visitation (or inspection) allowed for only the Master to dine with a noblewoman in his chambers, chaperoned by two Fellows. Following the Reformation it became common for Masters to be married, and for women (and children) to become part of the Balliol community, a development which elicited mixed reactions.

In the centuries that followed, despite some murmurings of dissent, the Masters’ female friends and relatives influenced both the day-to-day operations of the College, and the development of political and social reform, including women’s education.

In 2018, Balliol elected its first female Master, Dame Helen Ghosh.

WORKING FROM HOME: MARY LILLY

A 16th-century copy of Balliol’s Statutes contains a surprising addition inside the front cover: the signatures of three children of Edmund Lilly, Balliol Master 1580–1610. Lilly was probably the first Master to lodge in College with his family. We don’t know a great deal about Mary Lilly, except that she and her children are mentioned alongside her husband in a lease of 1597, and her brother Thomas was also a Fellow of Balliol (1588).²

‘THIS PRESENT LADY’: MARY SAVAGE AND HER SISTERS

Mary, wife of Henry Savage (Master 1651–1672), seems to have made more of an impression. Henry married Mary Sandys, the sister of a pupil, sometime after becoming Master. She and her female relatives formed friendships with Balliol men. They also became embroiled in the scandals of the day.

Henry, who had been appointed Master by the Parliamentary Visitors during the Commonwealth, presided over a period of financial insecurity. Resulting tensions boiled over into infighting, and Mary was accused of encouraging misappropriation of funds and selling College positions, such as that of the Cook, William Smith, whose appointment in 1671 is shown in the Latin Register of College minutes.³

Around this time, the Bishop of Lincoln, the College Visitor, launched a full investigation into the College’s affairs. While Henry denied that money had been exchanged for jobs, the responses of the Senior and Junior Bursars directly contradicted him. The Visitor found the Bursars more convincing, and Henry was ordered to repay the £20 he had received from the cook.⁴

Even after the investigation ended, Thomas Good (Master 1672–1678), one of the Savages’ principal detractors (and Henry’s successor as Master), wrote surreptitiously to the Bishop, alleging that Mary still ran the show as far as
elections of College officers were concerned. He wished that Masters in future be barred from marrying, and that ‘this present Lady . . . might never come within the college gates any more . . .’

The Savages’ friend, Nicholas Crouch (Fellow 1640) kept assiduous records of his book purchases. One of the most expensive was a copy of Caussins’ *Holy Court* ‘for the Lady Mill’ bought from Mr Bowman for over £1 (about £150 in today’s money). Given the timing, it is likely that Crouch bought this gift on the occasion of Mary’s sister Margaret’s wedding to Sir John Mill, in August 1660. From Crouch’s diary, we also learn that he accompanied Mary and Margaret to London the very day that Henry Savage took out a licence for his sister-in-law to marry Sir John.

Nicholas Crouch’s diary is notable for the brevity of its entries, but it nonetheless charts his friendships with Mary Savage and her family for 20 years in intimate detail, from Mary’s marriage to Henry in 1654, to Henry’s death in 1672. We read, for example, that Crouch accompanied Mary and her sister Jane to the Sandys family home at Mottisfont in September 1656. Jane married Balliol Fellow John Harris (Fellow 1631) around this time, but Harris did not resign his Fellowship (as he ought to have done when marrying) until October 1657. From 1663 until 1675 Harris was Steward of Balliol, which perhaps lends credence to suspicions that members of Mary Savage’s circle were given preferment for College positions. Five years later, Crouch writes that he was present at, and possibly assisted with, the birth of Jane and John’s daughter Elizabeth.

Another entry relates to Margaret, Lady Mill, recipient of the pricey book. In June 1670, Crouch records that she dined with him in his chambers. One of the more pointed questions of the Visitation of the same year relates to women frequenting Fellows’ chambers ‘to create a scandal’, and one wonders if Crouch’s dinnertime chat with Lady Mill inspired gossip which led the investigation in this direction.

Luckily, the responses to the question reassured the Visitor that ladies accepted invitations to dine with Fellows only out of politeness, and that in any event such an invitation had not happened lately.
‘SPEAKING TO THE SPARROW ON MY BALCONY’:
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
AND MANY OTHERS

Benjamin Jowett (Master 1870–1893) believed that it was ‘important to provide a means of giving the best education to the best intelligences in every class of society’⁵. This belief extended to women, although not to their admission to Oxford. An energetic networker, Jowett had many friendships which gave him wide social influence.

Female friendships shaped Jowett’s intellectual and social landscape, beginning in childhood with his sister Emily, who shared his enjoyment of reading, and continuing with visits from and correspondence with a raft of women interested in discussing ideas. His visitors’ book 1882–1893 records calls from novelist, philanthropist and political lobbyist Mary Augusta Ward; political hostess and diarist Margot Tennant; and academic hostess Caroline Jebb – to name but a few.⁷

For many years, Jowett kept a series of small notebooks in which to record stray thoughts. The reason why he devoted a page to a list of ‘Women who are my friends’ is a mystery, but the initials represent such powerhouses as Charlotte Green and his very close confidante of many years, Florence Nightingale.

Florence Nightingale and Benjamin Jowett first met by letter in 1860 when Nightingale’s secretary, Arthur Hugh Clough (Balliol 1846), asked Jowett to comment on some of her writings. They corresponded for two years before Nightingale invited Jowett to come to London. In their correspondence they found consolation for their respective frustrations with institutions, Nightingale’s with the War Office and Jowett’s with Balliol.

In these early days of their relationship Jowett even proposed to Nightingale but he was turned down; she was already married to her work in army health reform and ‘mother’ to the British soldier. The source for this story is the memoir of Cornelia Sorabji, the first woman to study law at Oxford, and India’s first female barrister. She was mentored by Jowett, who introduced her to Nightingale.⁸

On 10 November 1891, Nightingale wrote to Jowett whilst he was recovering from serious illness. In this letter, she teases him about his inability to rest as a good convalescent should. She assures him she is not writing ‘in the “I told you so line”’ but ‘speaking to the sparrow on my balcony’. She also mentions two other women who got him through his bout of ill-health: Charlotte Green, whose advice she urges him to attend to, and his housekeeper, Martha Knight, to whom she sends her love. By the time this letter was written, Nightingale and Jowett had had a long and intimate correspondence on topics as diverse as religion, promising students, international affairs, Poor Law reform, and their own families, health, and personal feelings. Although most of Nightingale’s letters were destroyed, their friendship is memorialised by the 700 surviving letters from Jowett’s side of the correspondence in Balliol’s historic collections.
‘ONE OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF BALLIOL’: MARY FLORENCE SMITH

When she died in 1946 an obituary in The Times hailed Mary Florence Smith, née Baird, as ‘a great Victorian matron’ and ‘one of the institutions of Balliol’.1 Reading her entertaining biography of her husband, Arthur Lionel Smith (Master 1916–1924), you begin to appreciate why. The Smiths’ lives were so intertwined that the biography of A L is also both Mary’s autobiography and a collective biography of their friends and family.

From a young age, Mary felt that her talents lay with children. As well as bringing up nine of her own, she started an Infant Welfare Centre in Oxford, for which she sometimes

organised tea parties, occasions when Balliol’s playing fields swapped muddied undergraduates for a host of mothers and their children.

Early in their marriage, her husband warned her not to ‘become a mere mother’. Mary proved there is no such thing, managing the finances of a large household, organising holidays and social engagements, keeping discipline, taking on secretarial work for her husband, acting as his confidante and advisor, and reading to him each evening. She didn’t shy away from challenging situations, for example, when A L was Proctor, in charge of order for the University, she entered the ‘bad houses’ of St Ebbe’s to bring out prostitutes who had been caught with students, hoping that the women’s apprehension would lead them to better circumstances.

This photograph of Mary and seven of her children was taken at the King’s Mound, a big house on the Mansfield Road edge of Balliol’s playing fields, which the then Master, Benjamin Jowett, had built for the Smiths and their extended family.

A L Smith’s devotion to tutoring saw him invite his students to dinner. Mary recalls keeping a ‘manuscript book’ to keep on top of ‘recipes and menus, aiming at elegant economy but carefully graduated according to the status of the guest’. A surviving fragment details undergraduate meals.

The Smiths also accommodated three or four live-in pupils at a time. These were boys whom Benjamin Jowett ‘planted out’ with them in order to prepare them for university. As well as accommodating them, at times Mary had to play disciplinarian: ‘if any reproving had to be done, or money matters gone into, it always fell to my share’. This might explain why her memory of the ending to her husband’s entry in the satirical Masque of Balliol broadsheet (‘And I know his temper varies/And is not so good as Mary’s’) differs from that recorded in surviving sheets annotated by students (‘But is not so bad as Mary’s’).
Mary excuses the digressions in her biographical writing, explaining that her life had been ‘mostly digressional’, but none of her memories seem irrelevant; they all fit together, like the many facets of her life, to make a magnificent achievement.

In her diary, the Smiths’ youngest daughter, Rosalind, describes a walk with her father, detailing the plans they made for a summer holiday and the gossip they covered: ‘While walking we talked about the people who were to come to Bamborough, and about M going to the Balliol ball, also about the installation of the new Master.’ Mary also describes A L’s habitual Sunday walks with his children:

‘He would go off with a trail of children, and the dog following, and it was the opportunity for wonderful story-telling . . . father and children could meet, as it were, on equal terms, and needless to say they were nearly always late for tea’.

A L enjoyed the intrusion of his five daughters and two sons into his life. He worked with the door to his study open for the company of their noise, had tickling fights with them before bedtime, and roped them into all sorts of sports. He tutored his daughters and they remembered him as an inspiring teacher as well as a fun father, which led them to support him in later life. Miriam and Margaret chaperoned him on a trip to America to lecture and see his mother for the second time in his adult life – surely an emotional meeting. Rosalind helped him to annotate and publish his lectures on ‘Church and State in the Middle Ages’.

All five daughters married in St Cross Church, which now holds Balliol’s historic collections, and many of the family are buried in Holywell Cemetery next door. Accordingly Mary dubs the Church a ‘Mecca towards which our pilgrim thoughts will always turn’, but for A L, his frequent journeys to the homes of his three married daughters who lived in Oxford were also a pilgrimage: a destination at which he could unburden himself of his troubles.
COLLECTION SHAPERS: CREATORS, MAINTAINERS, DESTROYERS

Whilst the headline names of many of Balliol’s historic collections are those of men, the contents are often formed and shaped by women. From genesis to nemesis these collections have come to be through female intervention. Some are called into existence by women: one prominent materfamilias’s need for news from her offspring initiated the fascinating Morier archive, for example.

Women were often key in preserving letters and documents, and in recognising their importance and donating them. One remarkable instance sees a document plucked from total obscurity and returned across the Atlantic to take its place amongst the correspondence of the Mallet family.

If women are creators and preservers, they can also be redactors, left with the unenviable instruction to destroy papers, the execution of which making them vulnerable to the unkind judgements of later, often male, biographers frustrated by the gaps created. In this sense Benjamin Jowett’s housekeeper, Martha Knight, and Graham Greene’s secretary, Josephine Reid, have had a very real impact on the shape of their employers’ legacies.

I DREAMED ALL NIGHT OF LETTERS: THREE CREATIVE GENERATIONS OF THE MORIER FAMILY

‘J’ai revé toute la nuit aux lettres de Smyrna’ (I dreamed all night of letters from Smyrna), writes Clara Morier to her merchant husband, away on business. Born Clara Van Lennep, she married Isaac Morier who was working as a clerk for her father, the Dutch consul in Smyrna, modern-day Turkey. This letter was written the year the family moved to England, while Isaac continued to work abroad. Clara wrote regularly to her husband and, latterly, to her four sons, Jack, James, David and William, during their travels as traders, diplomats and servicemen. They wrote back to their mother and three sisters, describing their adventures. Clara’s insistent and sometimes anxious calls for news across a continent are the kernel around which the remarkable collection of Morier family papers formed, spanning five generations and recording minute social detail and huge political events for posterity.

A generation later, Anna Morier, née Jones, writes home from Paris, where she is witnessing the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. She travelled to France when her husband, David, Clara’s son, was called there on diplomatic business. One letter mentions the planned removal of the allied troops to mark France’s return to the European stage four years after losing the Battle of Waterloo. This huge event is sandwiched between criticism of recent reads and news of her baby’s teething.

The letter is also fascinating for the account it gives of Anna as a contemporary female reader: she has read Jane Austen’s novels, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, ‘the former pretty, the latter stupid enough’; Mandeville by William Godwin, ‘a well described but disgusting picture of a black and wicked heart’; Rob Roy by Walter Scott, ‘interesting and if you do not object to the Scotticisms would I think amuse you’; Horace Walpole’s collection of travels in Greece, ‘very thick and very dry’; and John MacLeod’s ‘simple but interesting account of the loss of the Alceste … which I beg you will get’. She also mentions ‘Lord Byron’s last ridiculous poem of Beppo’.

Letter from Clara Morier to Isaac Morier; 26 November 1787
Anna and David Morier had four daughters and a son. The family papers include their drawings, notes and stories, including an album of humorous drawings that Anne Elizabeth Morier, ‘Leila’, gave to her sister Emily Cecilia Morier. In one cartoon, two ladies take tea. One says, ‘Have you seen Crabbe’s Tales?’, referring to the poet George Crabbe’s Posthumous Tales (1834). The other replies, ‘I did not know crabs had tails!’ Given their mother’s letter about her reading habits, it is tempting to speculate that the cartoon characters were based on family or friends. Sadly both sisters died in 1839 when they were 18 and 15 years old respectively.

Their brother, Robert Burnet David Morier (Balliol 1845), provides the link between Balliol and the Morier family, but it was his granddaughter, the Honorable Mrs F H Cunnack, who kept the collection safe and presented it to the College.

Exhibited: Letter from Clara Morier to Isaac Morier, 26 November 1787 [Morier Family Papers, B1. 1. 14]; Letter from Anna Morier to her mother, 6 April 1818 [Morier Family Papers, G1. 1. 25]; Cartoon from an album of ‘funny drawings given by Leila to Cecilia’ [Morier Family Papers, N9. 2]
WHAT BRANCHES GROW: FRAGMENTS FROM AMERICA


‘Under the cover of a torn tarp, shadowing a warm winter desert sun, I came across a small, brown leather-bound book lying hidden in a plastic crate of car parts.’

This is how Frances Merivale’s commonplace book first revealed itself to Nicola Freegard, a script-writer originally from London, who purchased it at a local sale of antique car parts for $5. The first thing to strike any reader is the inscription on the front leaf: ‘Fanny Merivale began this Book Septr. 1799’ and it was this that set Freegard off on a trail that would lead her to Balliol.

Commonplace books, a genre persisting from the 16th century until the 20th, were intellectual scrapbooks, varying greatly according to their writer’s interests, and often incorporating passages from other authors. Frances Merivale’s interest was evidently poetry. Her commonplace book consists almost entirely of verse, reproducing works by the romantic authors of the day: Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, and pre-eminently Burns.

But it’s not all works by men. Merivale copied lines by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, the romantic pioneer and political radical abandoned to obscurity by her former admirers Wordsworth and Coleridge; Felicia Hemans, whose work became so ubiquitous in classrooms that almost everyone knows the opening line of her Casablanca (‘The boy stood on the burning deck’); and Margaret Holford, writer of verse epics. More obscurely there are verses exchanged between Miss Savery and Miss Hole, neither of whom seems to have left a mark elsewhere in the literary record.

Freegard’s research led her to Balliol’s historic collections, where she discovered that Merivale was part of a Devon-based family of a Unitarian bent; that her brother was a lawyer, literary scholar and poet (some of his verses appear in her book) who was a friend of Byron; that she married John Lewis Mallet, who had fled from execution in France with his father after criticising the Revolution; and that she was the mother of a dynasty of distinguished diplomats, one of whom, Louis Mallet du Pan (Balliol 1883), provides the Balliol link. The family’s papers are at Balliol and these were what furnished Freegard with much of this background. She subsequently offered the volume to the College, so that it could reconnect with the contexts from which it came and help illuminate them.

How this small book, which preserves insights into the reading life of a woman from a literary family in the early 19th century made its way to the deserts of America remains a mystery, but its return to Britain demonstrates one woman’s concern to restore the voices of those who have gone before so that they can reach out into the future.
’IT TROUBLED ME THAT THEY SHOULD STILL EXIST’: LEGACIES OF REDACTION

“The world is full of Martha Knights; old men nearing death are putty in their hands.’” This is the censorious judgement of Geoffrey Faber, biographer of Benjamin Jowett (Master 1870–1893), on the woman responsible for the destruction of most of Jowett’s personal correspondence. The woman in question tells it differently, seeing herself as helpfully confidential rather than maliciously manipulative.

Martha Knight was housekeeper and, when needed, amanuensis to Jowett. Her ‘little written account of some of my recollections of the dear Master, & of my life with him at Balliol’ explains how she came to be responsible for the redaction that later so frustrated the biographer. Tasked with sorting correspondence, she noticed ‘many very private letters, written in the deepest confidence to the Master, by his friends, in times of great sorrow, & it troubled me that they should still exist’. She took the matter up with her employer and, agreeing, he gave instructions in his will for the correspondence to be destroyed.

Benjamin Jowett’s papers still include over 600 letters addressed to him but, as he was a prolific correspondent, this can represent only a tiny fraction of those he received. Martha Knight’s delicacy ensured that private matters remained within the close circle for whom they were intended.

In 2015, Balliol acquired papers collected by Josephine Reid during her work as secretary to the novelist Graham Greene (Balliol 1922). Reid was employed in the world of government intelligence and diplomacy before starting to work for Greene in 1958. In 1975 she retired from the secretarial side of her work but continued to type his literary manuscripts until the year after his death.

Heeding the ‘secret’ in ‘secretary’, Reid refused to talk to biographers about her employer. This response to the director of an Arena documentary on Graham Greene is typical of her blunt discretion: ‘I am not prepared to talk to you about Mr Greene or have anything to do with your project’.

Her suspicion of biographers was shared by Greene’s partner in later life, Yvonne Cloetta. In a letter of December 1994, she wrote to Reid: ‘Reading all the horrors written on
Graham, last summer; I thought of you. We felt the same, I am sure. But Graham is too high, out of reach of all these minus so-called biographers & critics. Thanks to Reid’s reticence she receives only a scant footnote in Greene’s official biography, but the collection now at Balliol tells a different story of her involvement in his life and legacy.

As Greene travelled extensively, he recorded his letters, literary works and instructions to Reid on to Dictabelts – plastic belts that could be folded flat for posting. Reid listened back to the belts and transcribed them in full, later composing fair copies of the letters to post. She used black and red ink in her transcriptions: black for text to be used verbatim, red for notes. A page dated 24 October 1987 exemplifies this system, with a further layer of editing where Reid supplies in pencil the name that Greene has forgotten.

Dating to after Reid’s official retirement, these pages show her standing in for Greene’s current secretary, his sister, Elisabeth Dennys. The page dated 25 October 1987 consists of notes for Dennys with more informal asides such as the half-amused, half-exasperated exclamation, ‘Graham seems to be writing longer and longer letters’.

Reid’s loyalty extended to the Dictabelt recordings. Greene asked her to destroy them and she did. His nephew, Nicholas Dennys, recalls how on a visit to Reid, she shared with him a recording of Greene reading his play Yes and No. As a rare books and manuscripts dealer, Dennys offered to find the recording a place where it could be preserved for posterity. He admiringly remembers the outcome of his offer:

‘It says much about Josephine’s own integrity and respect for his wishes that I knew within a few seconds, though she courteously said she would think about it, that this last belt would now begin its journey to the dustbin.’

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Exhibited: Typescript copy of recollections of Benjamin Jowett written by Martha Knight for Lady Airlie, 12 January 1895 [Jowett Papers. I. E20. 13]; Black and white print of Josephine Reid, c1950, photographer unknown [The Cherry Record Collection of Josephine Reid’s Papers and Books Relating to Graham Greene. GGJR 11. 12]; Letter from Josephine Reid to Donald Sturrock. 3 October 1992 [The Cherry Record Collection of Josephine Reid’s Papers and Books Relating to Graham Greene. GGJR 01/03]; Examples of Josephine Reid’s transcripts from Graham Greene’s Dictabelt recordings, 24 and 25 October 1987 [The Cherry Record Collection of Josephine Reid’s Papers and Books Relating to Graham Greene. GGJR 03/29 and GGJR 03/25]
‘AUNCIENT WOEMEN OF GOOD REPORT’: SERVANTS AND STAFF

Up until at least 1542 not even laundresses were permitted to enter Balliol’s halls. Instead they dropped off clean linen in the Porters’ Lodge. In the next century, however, female servants make frequent appearances in the Bursars’ records, with the proviso that only ‘auncient weomen . . . of good report’ should be engaged for domestic help.

When Thomas Wyatt, the Under-Butler, fell ill in 1706, his wife, Jane, performed his duties until their son formally took over on Thomas Senior’s death. Jane reappears in the College records as an ‘underservant’ from 1715 until her retirement (or death) in 1738. At this point, she presented a gift to the Master and Fellows: a silver piece inscribed: ‘COLL: BALL: D.D. Jana Wyatt hujus Collegii Famula 1738’ [Balliol College. Jane Wyatt, Servant of this College, gave this gift 1738].

It is unsurprising that Jane felt a strong connection with the College community at a time when family ‘dynasties’ served over two or more generations. The Fellows evidently appreciated the gift: it seems to have been so well-used that it had become unserviceable by 1792, when it was converted into the wine funnel we see today. Jane was not the only servant to number among the College’s benefactors. Mag. Price, a ‘bedmaker’, gave a zegadine (two-eared cup) worth £5 in 1640. More recently, Fellows have made their own donations to the College’s silver collection, with gifts including a hedgehog from Kate McLoughlin (Junior Research Fellow in English 2005) and a scallop shell butter dish, donated by Judy Longworth (Fellow 2010-2014 and Development Director 1997–1999, 2010–2014).
By the 19th century, women were still employed mainly as domestic servants. A volume in the College Archives from that time consists almost entirely of wage accounts for laundresses, arranged under the names of individual women. Shown here is the account for Mrs E Thompson for the third quarter of 1873–1874. The long list down the left side is of the names of the students who paid the laundresses’ wages through battels (fees paid by students for board and lodging). Mrs Thomson initialled the balance she received each week.

After the First World War, the College developed along more bureaucratic lines, with officials taking on administrative tasks previously undertaken by the Master and Fellows. Annie Bradbury was appointed Domestic Bursar in 1939. The College minutes record a preference for a woman, and indeed she was selected from a shortlist of four women. She attended College Meetings from 1941, albeit without a vote, but she was never made a Fellow and was even served lunch separately, in the Massey Room. Nevertheless, by all accounts she was a formidable presence who can lay claim to being regarded as the first female member of Balliol College.

Women’s presence at Balliol has grown since Annie Bradbury’s day. The College now employs women at all professional levels. A photograph taken on International Women’s Day 2019 features many of today’s female staff alongside students and Fellows.
In the second half of the 19th century, Balliol was the setting for a circle of women and men eager to expand the reach of higher education. Benjamin Jowett (Master 1870–1893) was the linchpin of the movement to attract able men of limited means to the University of Oxford and to bring higher education into the provinces. His efforts attracted like-minded reformers to the College who worked with their female counterparts—wives, friends and family—to help found the Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women (AEW) in 1878, which was instrumental in establishing the halls that would become the first women’s colleges.

Change was hard fought, and advances came in fits and starts: women could study at Oxford from the 1870s but they would have to wait until 1920 to be granted degrees. After that it would take another 59 years for them to matriculate at Balliol. Masters A L Smith (1916–1924) and A D Lindsay (1924–1949) were sympathetic to the cause but, like Benjamin Jowett before them, they directed their reformist energies towards improving opportunities for the working class. It would be under Christopher Hill (Master 1965–1978) that the College would finally make up its mind to admit women students.

‘A PRESENT OF BOOKS TO MISS ROGERS’

In the mid-19th century Oxford and Cambridge established exams in local centres throughout the country to help raise standards in education. The precursors to the state exams that exist today, these offered a way into higher education for a more diverse group of students. The Oxford Local Exams began in 1858 and were open to girls c1870.

The first higher education lectures for women had taken place in the north of England in 1868. They were organised by Josephine Butler and Anne Jemima Clough, sister of Arthur Hugh Clough (Balliol 1846), who became the first principal of Newnham Hall in Cambridge in 1871. More than 500 women attended the first set of lectures, confirming an appetite and need for higher education among women.

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scholarship, although there was no way she could take it up. Balliol swiftly retracted its offer and provided her with a present of books instead, recorded in the College Meeting minutes for 11 October 1873.

Loss of the scholarship did nothing to deter Rogers’ ambitions. She gained first-class honours in the separate degree-level exams for women over 18, which had been introduced by the University in 1875. When the first Oxford halls for women opened in 1879, she became the first female Fellow in the University at the age of 23. At that time she was the only woman in Oxford who could claim to have a University-level education, although she would have to wait 41 years to receive her degree.

THE PIONEERS

When University reform in the mid-19th century lifted the ban on Fellows marrying, the wives who joined the Balliol community brought with them a shared interest in women’s higher education. Among them were Charlotte Byron Green and Mary Augusta Ward. Charlotte Green had been introduced to her husband, the tutor Thomas Hill Green (Fellow 1861), through her brother J A Symonds (Balliol 1858). Mary Ward was married to a Brasenose Fellow but she knew Balliol through her uncle, Matthew Arnold (Balliol 1841), and was attracted to the College’s liberal outlook. She was a scholar of Spanish history, a best-selling author, and the first woman to examine men at Oxford as Taylorian Scholarship Examiner in 1882.

Charlotte Green and Mary Ward had benefited from recent improvements in women’s education and sought to extend the same opportunities to others. They established lectures for women in Oxford in 1873, an initiative which led to the founding of the Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women, in which both were highly active.

The memorial speech for Charlotte Green was given by Balliol Master A D Lindsay, a fitting send-off for a woman whose long life had been so intertwined with the College. She was celebrated for her buoyant spirit and her selfless commitment to working with the poor, but for a generation of young Balliol men it was for her knitting that she would be remembered. Mixed lectures were introduced at Oxford from 1881 and Green acted as chaperone at these. Ernest Barker (Balliol 1893) reminisced that women hardly entered the lives of undergraduates at all, but he remembered the chaperones, in particular the ‘one with clicking needles, which flew as the lecturer talked, better than the students whom they guarded’.17

After her husband’s early death in 1881, Green was left bereft. The Master, Benjamin Jowett, pleaded with her to remain in Oxford, ‘where you are so beloved’.18 She stayed and retrained as a nurse at the Radcliffe Infirmary. Few of her own writings remain in Balliol’s historic collections, but her hand can be seen throughout the papers of the Master for whom she acted as amanuensis towards the end of his life.

The story of an Oxford clergyman who renounces the Anglican Church and dedicates himself to a more rationalist religion, Robert Elsmere might seem an unlikely bestseller; yet it made Mary Augusta Ward, who published as Mrs Humphry Ward, one of the most famous authors of her era. Her exploration of the religious controversies of the time gripped the public imagination.

The novel drew on the experiences of Ward’s Oxford circle and includes loosely fictionalised versions of Balliol members, including Benjamin Jowett and Matthew Arnold. Elsmere’s mentor Professor Grey was based on Thomas Hill Green. Through her book, Mary Augusta Ward helped

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Exhibited: English Register of College Meeting minutes, 1794–1875, 11 October 1873 [Balliol Archives, Government. C.]
to popularise T H Green’s philosophy, which emphasised a useful life dedicated to the social good over adherence to religious dogma.

The ideas expressed in the novel were shared by many educational reformists and influenced how women’s education developed. When the first women’s hall, Lady Margaret Hall, opened as an Anglican institution in 1879, it spurred the liberals in the AEW to action and Somerville was established as the first non-denominational hall a few months later.

Exhibited: In memoriam for Charlotte Byron Green, given by Balliol Master A D Lindsay, 13 October 1929 [Correspondence Collection, In Memoriam for Mrs T H Green]; Extract from Mrs Humphry Ward’s draft introduction to 1909 edition of Robert Elsmere [Arnold Papers, Mrs Humphry Ward, I. B. 1 folio 6]
EXTENDING THE UNIVERSITY: THE AEW

The same year that the AEW was founded to bring women to Oxford, the University Extension Scheme was established to take higher education to a diverse audience in towns across England. The first lectures were held in Birmingham in 1878 and from the beginning women were in the majority. In 1887 it was suggested that extension students from the different centres across the country should attend an intensive summer meeting in Oxford. The first was at Balliol and it was so successful that the following year nearly a thousand students attended.

In 1884 the AEW committee drew up a petition requesting that women be allowed to sit some of the men’s exams at Oxford. It was signed by 122 graduates and sent to the Hebdomadal Council, the University’s executive body, then headed by Benjamin Jowett who had become Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University in 1882.

The Council approved the proposal and from there it passed to Convocation, the University’s legislative body, where it was carried by 464 to 321 votes. Writing later, Annie Rogers remembered the debate over the exams as ‘the first of five important fights over the relation of women to the University, … and like the others it was conducted with some humour, and in spite of considerable provocation, with very little quarrelling.’

Women had finally attained the right to be examined but they still could not matriculate or receive degrees. When that battle was won in 1920, the new statute allowed women who had previously taken exams to matriculate as members of the University and receive their degree retrospectively.
‘AN IMPOSSIBLE THING TO MANAGE’: RESISTANCE

Women had been allowed to attend formal science lectures at Balliol since 1884, albeit in limited numbers and accompanied by a chaperone. Individual lecturers were allowed a bit of leeway, however. For example, in response to a request from Lady Margaret Hall students to attend laboratory practicals, Sir John Conroy (Fellow 1890) regretfully refused on the grounds that the lab was too small, conveying to Mrs Johnson (Secretary of the Association for the Education of Women) his fear that women moving around too freely would cause low-key chaos.

Exhibited: Letter from Sir John Conroy to Mrs Johnson (Secretary, AEW), 1893

[Conroy Papers. Letter Book II, folio 160]
The merits (or otherwise) of co-education had been debated in Oxford for the best part of two decades before women first matriculated at Balliol. As elsewhere, Balliol members stood on both sides of the debate. David Lindsay Keir (Master 1949–1965) used his farewell letter to thank his colleagues for their patience when ‘recently and—very regretfully—I have had to dissent from the proposal for a mixed graduate foundation jointly with a women’s College’ (the Balliol–St Anne’s Graduate Institution).

Half a decade later, another voice from the Senior Common Room, that of Oswyn Murray (Fellow 1968–2004, Emeritus Fellow 2004), wrote a paper when the College was debating the merits of joining the first wave of co-educational institutions. The Master, Christopher Hill, was keen that Balliol should be amongst these pioneers. Murray suggested another approach to bring conservatives onside: change should come more gradually. To better meet the needs of female undergraduates, he argued that more senior women needed to be in place on Balliol’s Governing Body, and thus Fellowships ought to be opened up to women first. On 6 December 1971, a matter of weeks later, the College minutes mark the resolution, along with a commitment to admit women undergraduates ‘at a later date’. This was another eight years coming, and unfortunately Hill had resigned as Master the year before the first female students arrived.

In 1973 Carol Clark (Fellow 1973–2004 and Emeritus Fellow 2004–2015) was the first woman to be elected a Fellow of any of the traditional men’s colleges. She was also the first to teach Modern Languages, specialising in Renaissance French literature and 19th-century French poetry. Her first book, *The Web of Metaphor: Studies in the Imagery of Montaigne’s ‘Essais’* was published in 1978. Since then, the output of Balliol’s female Fellows has been prodigious, making fundamental contributions in research and teaching in a vast range of academic fields. On the following page are images and brief descriptions of some of Balliol’s past and present female Fellows and their work.
BALLIOL’S FEMALE FELLOWS

DR PENELOPE BULLOCH is an Emeritus Fellow. She was Deputy Librarian of Balliol 1977–1980 and Librarian and Fellow 1980–2010. A Classicist, Dr Bulloch was also the College’s first female Librarian. During her tenure, she served as Honorary Secretary and then President of the Oxford Bibliographical Society (1996–1999), Chair of the Committee of Oxford College Librarians (1987–2001), Curator of the Bodleian Library, and University of Oxford Assessor 1995–1996, among many other offices. Photo credit: Joseph Raz.

PROFESSOR EDITH ELKIND is Research Fellow in Computational Game Theory. Her research interests include algorithmic game theory, computational social choice and foundations of multi-agent systems. She is co-author of ‘Properties of Multiwinner Voting Rules’ and ‘Justified Representation in Approval-based Committee Voting’, both in Social Choice and Welfare, 2017. She is pictured in the Balliol Senior Common Room.

DAME FRANCES KIRWAN is an Emeritus Fellow and Savilian Professor of Geometry. She was the first woman to be elected to any of the historic Oxford chairs in Mathematics. Her research lies in the area of Algebraic Geometry (mostly over the field of complex numbers) and its links with other parts of Geometry, especially Symplectic (and Hyperkähler) Geometry. She is particularly interested in classification problems in Algebraic Geometry and the construction and study of moduli spaces. Her publications include An Introduction to Intersection Homology Theory with Jonathan Woolf (2006) and Complex Algebraic Curves (1992). She is a Fellow of the Royal Society, serving on its Council 2012–2015, and she chaired the UK Mathematics Trust 2010–2016. She is pictured from her time teaching as Tutorial Fellow in Mathematics at Balliol (1986–2017).

DR HELEN GITTOS is Associate Professor, Colyer-Fergusson Fellow and Tutor in Early Medieval History. She is pictured leading a Balliol Historians’ field trip to Islip Church. She is particularly interested in the history of the church and its rituals in the Middle Ages. Her first book was Liturgy, Architecture and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England (2013) and she has co-edited two collections of essays on the topic. She is currently writing a book on English in the liturgy before the Reformation.

PROFESSOR GILLIAN MORRIS-KAY is an Emeritus Fellow. She was awarded her Fellowship in Anatomy at Balliol in 1976, becoming the College’s first female Science Fellow. She was appointed University Lecturer at the Department of Human Anatomy and Genetics in 1976, and Professor of Developmental Anatomy from 1996–2004. She was Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Anatomy. She is seen here in a photograph taken on joining the Senior Common Room at Balliol in 1976 (photo credit: Ramsey and Muspratt).
PROFESSOR SOPHIE MARNETTE (centre) is pictured with her colleagues, PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI (left) and DR DIANA BERRUEZO- SÁNCHEZ (right), with whom she takes great joy in organising a thriving and international Modern Language teaching team at Balliol and in supervising undergraduate and graduate students in French, Italian, Spanish and German.

PROFESSOR MARNETTE is Professor of Medieval French Studies and has been the Dervorguilla Fellow and Tutor in French at Balliol since October 2004. Her involvement in the Balliol community includes posts as Tutor for Undergraduate Admissions (2010–2014), and long-standing membership of the Balliol Interdisciplinary Institute and the Balliol Nursery Committee. She also serves the University as Junior Proctor (2019–2020). Her research offers a linguistic and philological approach to literary issues such as the origins and evolution of medieval literary genres, the expression of narrative voice and point of view, the relationship between history and fiction, and for her most recent project the study of female characters’ speech in medieval French narratives.

PROFESSOR LOMBARDI is Professor of Italian Literature, Paget Toynbee Lecturer in Italian Medieval Studies, Fellow and Tutor in Italian. She teaches Italian Medieval Poetry and Dante, and her research concentrates on theories of language in the Middle Ages (with focus on syntax); medieval concepts of love and desire; medieval poetics; Dante; medieval ideas of the book; and early modern intertextuality (with focus on the epic chivalric poem).

DR BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ is Career Development Fellow in Modern Languages. She specialises in Spanish prose fiction and drama of the Golden Age (16th and 17th centuries) and the influence of the Italian novella. Her next monograph aims to uncover unheard poetry sung by 16th- and 17th-century enslaved Black Africans in Spain, as well as to interrogate – and reverse – enslaved Black Africans’ invisibility in the Iberian Peninsula.

DR ALEKSANDRA RESTIFO is Asoke Kumar Sarkar Fellow in Classical Indology at Balliol College and an Associate Member of the Oriental Institute. Her research lies at the intersection of literature, aesthetics, and Jain lay and mendicant culture. She is pictured here at the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison, Wisconsin, on 12 October 2018.

DR NICOLA TROTT is Senior Tutor and Academic Registrar, and Tutor for Graduates. As Senior Tutor, Dr Trott has responsibility for academic planning and is in overall charge of academic administration. She is also the Disability Lead. She specialises in 18th- and 19th-century English literature, focusing on British Romantic and Victorian period writing, from the Gothic to George Eliot.

and in her portrait by artist Alan Mynall from 2018 (photo credit: Stuart Bebb).
STUDYING AT BALLIOL: 
THE ROAD TO 1979

After the Second World War, the College Rules still stated that any women present in College were required to leave by the commencement of dinner. Times were changing, though. By the 1950s members could invite their female guests to stay for dinner until 10.30pm. By the 1960s, women were allowed for another half an hour, although by then the rules were routinely being broken.

While the mid-century Junior Common Room (JCR) was enthusiastic about allowing women into College as guests, some members were not as convinced about having them join their cohort. The Academic Society was founded at the height of debate over co-education as an egalitarian alternative to more exclusive Balliol clubs. Its chief aims, according to its 1976 constitution, were to ‘drink good drink, to eat good food, and to push back the frontiers of human understanding’. If taken at face value, the declaration that if the Society ‘should be forced by circumstances beyond its control to admit women as members, it shall disband forthwith’ suggests that it was at pains to maintain male-only membership. In reality, this was written tongue-in-cheek, gently mocking the resistance to co-education expressed by some of the student body. In fact, one of the Society’s earliest guests was a woman who attended dinners under the pseudonym Mr Jack Brown. In 1979 the Society quickly changed its constitution to admit female members.

Whatever the reservations in the JCR, from the 1960s the governing bodies of many of the colleges in the University were seriously considering the possibility of co-education. By 1971, a group of colleges had formed a working group to discuss admitting women, and, in 1974, these were the first to become co-educational. As we have seen, Balliol had been holding its own discussions on the subject but decided not to join the first wave. However, the succeeding College

Meeting minutes and resolutions passed at Consilium show incremental progress in removing obstacles, both statutory and practical, to the inclusion of women.

A sticking point was an undertaking Balliol had made to the University not to admit women without its approval. One of the University’s apprehensions was that the women’s colleges would be adversely affected. After the 1974 wave of co-education these worries proved to be unfounded. In 1977 this evidence, together with the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, meant that the University no longer sought to control the colleges, and Balliol was released from its assurances to the University that it would not admit women as Junior Members in a debate in Congregation on 8 March 1977.

In 1978 Balliol invited applications from women as well as men for entry in Michaelmas Term 1979. That first year 31 female undergraduates and 9 female graduates were admitted. The first to take up residence was Elena Ceva, who read History and Modern Languages.

HOLYWELL MANOR

The introduction of female students had been so long on the horizon that it caused no great tremors when it actually happened, and in the Balliol College Annual Record 1980, Anthony Kenny (Master 1978–1989) wrote: ‘the presence of women has already come to seem so natural and such a matter of course’. Perhaps this was partly to do with the fact that female graduates had been around Balliol since 1967 as part of the joint Graduate Institution with St Anne’s College at Holywell Manor.

Holywell Manor (which is just next door to St Cross Church) had long been just another College building, but in the 1960s it was decided that it should have singular status as a graduate institution to meet the graduate community’s particular needs more closely. To do so, one of the women’s colleges, St Anne’s, was approached as a partner in a co-educational arrangement, because ‘men and women graduates are now ready for co-education in a way in which boys and girls straight from school are not’. The centre provided accommodation, as well as teaching facilities and social events. The arrangement prospered and lasted until 1984, whereupon Holywell became the centre for Balliol’s graduate membership alone. Thus, in its life as a graduate centre, Holywell Manor has always been a co-educational institution.
1979 AND BEYOND

The years after 1979 saw one milestone after another for women as members of Balliol. Female students won national and international prizes in subjects from International Criminal Justice to Mechanics & Materials Engineering. In sport women in the Balliol Boat Club prospered, entering two teams in Eights week in their first year. Balliol women’s Eights went Head of the River in 2010 and 2011.

In 1981, the first female JCR president, Catherine Roe (Balliol 1980), was elected, as announced by the student paper, Dervorguila. Roe was a trailblazer in more ways than one: she was also the first female Pathfinder, joining a programme that allows eight Balliol students a year to travel in North America to pursue projects, explore, and experience the continent, staying with Balliol alumni.

The matriculation photographs and JCR yearbooks from recent years are representative of the contemporary Balliol undergraduate body in all its diversity. Today the intake of all students is roughly 40 per cent women. Balliol is committed to continuing to improve the gender balance at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. In the 2018–2019 admissions cycle, Balliol made a majority of its offers for undergraduate places to female students for the first time. The College recognises the need to continue to make progress, with initiatives like the Dervorguilla Scholarships, which offer up to three female graduate scholars admission to Oxford University and a place at Balliol to read for postgraduate degrees in fields underrepresented by women.
Catherine The Great?

Amidst a bewildering jungle of close and complex results from Saturday's elections, including the extraordinary victory of Justin Mayall by 0.01 of a vote, the overwhelming triumph for Catherine Roe, Balliol's next JCR President, stands out as the clearest decision of all. There could be no better beginning to a potentially challenging year than to have the confidence of the JCR behind the winning candidate by a majority greater than even her most enthusiastic supporters expected.

Whatever one's opinions on the quality of the presidencies of Charlie Leadbeater or Paul Bailey, neither could claim to have enjoyed the united support of the JCR - all too often factionalists can be heard muttering of the "antagonistic and remote dictatorship of the left" under Charlie, or the "drunken and right-wing rule by committee" under Paul. With a majority four times greater than in either of the last two years, however, Catherine is neither figurehead nor bete noire for 'left', 'right', or any particular clique from our multi-cliqued college; a substantial personal and political cross-section elected her, and we may look forward to an almost unprecedented degree of JCR unanimity behind a widely popular president.

The challenges facing the new president will fall into two categories - dealing with the JCR and dealing with the SCR. For the first we must, in order to fulfil widely-held high expectations, be a swift and obvious success in the following areas:

1) Authoritative leadership on JCR committee and EC'!A', to show that she can obtain the positive and united backing of the other junior members elected without dominating or being dominated.
2) Fair but unshakable control of General Meetings, achieving more interesting and better attended G.M.s by the promised wider publicity, firmer discipline and encouragement of the silent majority to speak.
3) Efficient and forward-looking management of facilities, which, though the responsibility of other committee members, is always seen to be under the supervision of the president.

As for the SCR, all junior members will be looking to Catherine to win:

a) SCR support in the face of government attacks on student finance, in particular the honouring of their commitment to a price freeze.
b) SCR commitment to the principle of increased Junior representation in all areas of college government, and some concrete gains in this field.

These are considerable tasks, and it is vital not only that Catherine shows dedication and resolve in tackling them, not only that the whole JCR gives its active support to her, but also that the elected committee proves itself energetic and united, casting aside those old divisions that are already beginning to appear ("anything she does I don't like I'll just declare ultra-vires" - Jon Scherer, treasurer-elect).

Perhaps the aspect of the election of Catherine Roe most significant for the long term is that she will be the first female president of Balliol JCR. Now those many women who have felt intimidated by the severe imbalance in male to female ratios in college can feel cause to hope that many of the real and induced barriers in JCR politics at least have been weakened by this result. The ugly face of Balliol sexism may be far from extinct (already opposition has been voiced by those who reject the equal participation of women in their repulsive male-dominated society), but Catherine's election forms part of a powerful trend of change begun by the long overdue admission of women in 1979.

So what can we expect, then, from the next three terms of a new presidency? There is little room or need for fundamental change in the JCR executive structures; there is at present little financial scope for fundamental improvements in the general student position; there is little need or wish for a combative attitude to the college. We can expect a maintained financial position, an increase in realistic efficiency in JCR services, a determined stand for increased representation, a JCR better informed about the work of its officers, and more constructive and less intimidating General Meetings. Best of all, however, we can look forward to a more united JCR free from destructive factionalism, giving overwhelming support to a personally strong, positive, and popular president.
ILLUMINATING THE FUTURE: PUBLICATIONS BY BALLIOL ALUMNAs

While it would be impossible to distil the achievements of the 2,000 women and more who have now studied at Balliol, the Library’s collection of works by alums is one source, forming a record of the intellectual footprint of the College, which contains many items given by female creators. Even so their contributions span the widest array, so any attempt at a representative selection will inevitably seem terribly partial.

Notable in the collection are prolific contributions in politics and economics: whether globalisation in The Globalizers by Ngaire Woods (Balliol 1987), balancing economic needs with ecological impacts in Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth (1990), or attitudes to nuclear armament in India’s Nuclear Debate by Priyanjali Malik (1999). Balliol boasts many distinguished women lawyers, as evidenced by publications from Rose-Marie Belle Antoine’s (1994) Commonwealth and Caribbean Law and Legal Systems to Laura Hoyano’s (1990) Child Abuse Law and Policy Across Boundaries. Much writing on socio-political issues has been informed by the post-colonial world in which we live: see Leela Gandhi’s (1986) alternative history of democracy, The Common Cause, or Sarah Longair’s (1998) enquiry into the links between the colonial mission and museums, Cracks in the Dome.

Leela Gandhi is also a published poet, and poetry apparently courses through the veins of Balliol alumnae, from the first national poet of Wales, Gwyneth Lewis (1985) to Carmen Bugan (2000) whose work deals with life under totalitarianism in Romania, most recently in Releasing the Porcelain Birds. Fictional creations includes Meena Van Praag’s (1997) Cambridge-based magical realism, and writing for younger readers, including Harriet Goodwin’s (1988) stories of supernatural adventure. Amongst dramatic output are Charlotte Jones’ (1986) tale of three households impacted by a power cut, The Dark, and Elizabeth Kuti’s (1987) Fishskin Trousers, which uses folklore to explore the lives of three temporally disparate characters united by the location of Orford Ness. Amongst those alumnae who criticise literature, one particular focus is audience reception of television and film productions, for instance Philippa Sheppard (1990) writing on Shakespearean screen adaptations in Devouring Time, and Claire Monk (1983) on Heritage Film Audiences, as well as contributing commentary to the recent Blu-ray re-release of Maurice.
In relation to the classics, Eleanor Dickey (1989) writes on *Learning Latin the Ancient Way*, Charlotte Higgins (1990) imagines journeys through Roman Britain in *Under Another Sky*, and Emily Wilson (1990) has completed the first translation of *The Odyssey* by a woman. Higgins has also projected the Minoan world forward through history in a cultural appreciation of mazes, *Red Thread*. Other popular historical works by alumnae include much of Suzannah Lipscomb’s (2004) output, such as *A Visitor’s Companion to Tudor England*.

In the biological sciences elephants loom large: Lucy King (2005) seeks to preserve them by working with African farmers in the *Elephants and Bees* project, while Beth Shapiro’s (1999) *How to Clone a Mammoth* looks at the science of resurrecting those species that have already wandered off to the great tundra in the sky. In the physical sciences, Mireia Crispin-Ortuzar’s (2011) *High Jet Multiplicity Physics at the LHC* describes the search for fundamental particles.


Beyond these samples from the traditional avenues of publishing, the intellectual output of Balliol alumnae includes rafts of films, broadcasts and social media. There are documentaries by film-makers from Balliol such as Jasmine Dellal (1986) and Vanessa Engle (1981). There are the radio series and podcasts of the economist Stephanie Flanders (1987) and the anthropologist Farrah Jarral (2000). There are artworks by Emily Carrington Freeman (2013) and Shirin Homann (1990). There are blogposts, musical recordings and theatrical performances. All of which begs the question: how will the Library map and archive the flourishing corpus of Balliol’s alumnae in the future? We look forward to facing the challenge over the next 40 years.
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Sundial sculpture, by David and Sophie Harber, 2009, commissioned to celebrate the 30th anniversary of female students at Balliol. Photo ©Stuart Bebb

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Depiction of Dervorguilla from the Fremantle murals in Staircase II Room V by Christopher Fremantle (Balliol 1925), 1933.