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Welcome

Welcome to this Michaelmas edition of the Pelican and to a new academic year. Just before we went to press the Fellowship elected Professor Oliver Rackham OBE FBA as its new Master until October 2008, whilst a search is carried out for a longer-term Master. Oliver Rackham is a botanist of world renown and has been at Corpus since 1958 when he came up as an undergraduate to read Natural Sciences. His many books on the countryside and flora and fauna of different countries and regions, including the Mediterranean, have earned him a following around the world.

Old Members may be aware that the College has been through some difficult times recently. However, we are extremely fortunate that we have been supported by our excellent staff and invigorated by our superb students whose academic results, incidentally, brought the College to 7th in the University in the Baxter tables. We are also grateful to Professor Paul Mullers and his wife Any for their hard work during his time as Acting Master over the summer. Our building and improvement works continue apace and fund raising for many projects goes on successfully. Research and teaching go from strength to strength. Throughout, we have been unfailingly supported by our Old Members and we are immensely grateful for their loyalty and generosity.

A number of new Fellows have joined us this term. Our new Senior Tutor, Dr Marina Frasca-Spada came from St. Catharine’s College where she was Graduate Tutor. Marina is already firmly integrated into Corpus life and no doubt many of you will enjoy meeting her in the coming months. The Rev James Buxton was chaplain at King’s College, London at Guy’s and St Thomas’s Hospital and successor of Southwark Cathedral – read about him on page 15.

This issue also includes articles on, amongst other things, recent research that has caught the headlines. Keith Seffen, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Engineering has conducted research that challenges the conspiracy theories on the collapse of the Twin Towers. Craig Mackay, Reader in the Institute of Astronomy, led the team that developed a technique for photographing stars and nebulae from a ground telescope which has produced the sharpest images ever seen, surpassing even those from the Hubble space telescope.

The Boat Club held the second Old Members’ Day in August (see page 17) which included a full day on the river and dinner in the evening. This very enjoyable and popular occasion has helped the club to achieve their fundraising target for a new and badly needed men’s eight.

We also highlight a 4 day visit from 14-year-old London school students on the African and Caribbean Diversity scheme. This scheme was set up in 1990 by a group of black professionals to encourage black students to aim high and achieve their full potential. The visit was judged a great success by all who attended, including the parents of the students. See pages 12 & 13 for the story.

The Winchester Troper, by far the earliest surviving manuscript of English polyphonic music, was taken from the Parker Library by Dr de Hamel to Winchester Cathedral, where the choir sang from the original manuscript for the first time in 1000 years. It was a moving occasion for the congregation and in particular for the 30 or so Old Members who joined us.

Elizabeth Winter
Marina Frasca-Spada, Corpus's new Senior Tutor (and the first woman ever to hold this post at the College), was born and educated in Rome. She read philosophy as an undergraduate and came to Cambridge in 1988 on a NATO-funded grant to do research on Hume's writings. She instantly fell in love with the place though, as she puts it; ‘my English was so poor I had no social life whatsoever. I literally didn’t speak to people for days because my communication skills were so bad.' When she returned home she determined to come back to Cambridge as soon as possible and did everything she could to improve her English, including reading the entire works of Agatha Christie.

At the age of 32, after a period of teaching, she did return, on a British Academy grant this time, to do her PhD in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science under Peter Lipton (now Professor and Head of Department). It was later published under the title "Space and the Self in Hume’s "Treatise". Her English must have improved considerably because she was appointed a Junior Research Fellow at Newnham in her third year. She also married Nick Jardine, Professor of History and Philosophy of Science, whose special interest is early modern cosmology.

Marina is well versed in college life and the peculiar ways of the collegiate system. She has been Director of Studies in Philosophy for a number of colleges, most recently St. Catherine's where she was a Fellow and Graduate Tutor. Her main research interests are early modern metaphysics and theories of human nature and the teaching and reception of natural and moral philosophies in 18th century Britain.

Marina says she was attracted to Corpus for three particular reasons – its small size, its history and tradition and the beauty of the place. ‘One of the things that makes Corpus special for me is that you can get to know everyone. It doesn’t overwhelm you with its size. This is a great College; it has everything going for it – lovely people, fantastic students, great academic record and beautiful ancient buildings.'

Marina hopes to be able to continue her research interests in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science and the editorship of two history and philosophy journals. ‘I will have to see how things go. Being Senior Tutor is the most exciting thing I have ever done and I am looking forward to my first year and working with the students immensely.'
A Year in the Life of the Admissions Office
by Janet Rogers, Admissions Administrator

The prime function of Admissions is, simply that, to administer the Admissions process which begins in October, runs through December with the interviews and concludes with the A Level results in August. In between we host and run various events, school visits, Open Days all with the aim of widening participation, raising aspirations and providing information on what being a student at Cambridge is really like. Added to this are the numerous requests for prospectuses, email and telephone enquiries, calls from prospective students and anxious parents.

Like the Tutorial Office the work we do in Admissions has a fairly regular cycle of ongoing events and activities. So here is a year in the life of the Admissions Office.

August/September - the End and the Beginning

The end of the annual Admissions cycle is marked by the handing over to the Tutorial Office of the files of the successful applicants who have made it through interviews, offers, A Level exams and are actually going to take up their places on 1 October. It’s also the time to get stocked up with copier paper in an array of colours for the mammoth photocopying session in November and lots of envelopes.

Although the closing date for application to Cambridge is 15 October, those applicants applying for Organ Scholarships or Choral Awards have to submit theirs by the beginning of September. Accommodation has to be booked for them, meal tickets issued and for the Organ Scholars subject interviews organised.

In the middle of this is our last Open Day of the year. The September Open Day is usually smaller than the ones in July but often produces many applicants. Rooms for Director of Studies’ meetings need to be found, accommodation booked, and lunch and tours of the College organised.
Michaelmas Term

Applicants for Cambridge have to complete a Cambridge Application Form (CAF) as well as applying online through UCAS. At this point they can choose their College or send in an ‘open’ application to the University’s Admissions Office. The closing date is earlier as well (15 October) but the applications will have been arriving in steadily in the two weeks before. Each application is input onto the database, acknowledged and further information and some more forms sent out for completion and return by specified dates. This is a race against time as the University’s Admissions Office needs our totals for each subject in order to allocate the ‘open’ applications. Decisions are made on whom to call for interview.

Directors of Studies are given the total numbers for their subjects and interview dates agreed. Then the timetable for each subject is set up taking into account such variables as length of interview, number of interviews per day, any tests that have to be sat, comfort breaks for the interviewers and how far the applicant is travelling. Interviewers may have to be found for some subjects. A College Fellow’s room may be too small or at the top of Old Court and an alternative room has to be found.

Each applicant has two interviews at Corpus, some will have a second college interview. All the application papers have to be copied in sets of four and distributed to the interviewers. The Admissions Office soon looks like a paper mine with piles of papers waiting to be collected or to be taken over to the Porters’ Lodge. Many of these papers will be returned to be shredded after Christmas. Interviews always take place in December and in 2006 over 500 interviews were carried out in Corpus alone. Tests for some subjects have to be organized, rooms and invigilators found. Interview letters and College maps are sent out together with a form asking if an applicant needs accommodation and meals.

As soon as the replies are all in Catering, Conference and Housekeeping are given the numbers. Interview Information Folders are prepared for the Porters’ Lodge and the Welcome Desk. Current undergraduates are recruited to help. They play an important role during interviews as they run the Welcome Desk in the JCR, help applicants find their interview rooms and generally make them as welcome as possible. Some of the applicants have even reported on how much they enjoyed coming for interviews.

By the end of December decisions have to be made about who gets an offer, who will be rejected and who will be placed in the Winter Pool. The Winter Pool gives other colleges an opportunity to take up applicants who are good but unfortunately weren’t made an offer by their first preference college. All the decision letters are printed off and signed ready to be posted on 2 January. The applicant’s school also receives a copy.

In parallel to this, November brings interviews for the Schoolteacher Fellow for the next academic year. At the same time the Lent Term Schoolteacher Fellow needs to be written to and his/her details circulated.

Early in the term rooms for the events in July will have been booked and the initial consultation with Conference/Catering held.

At last – Christmas! A chance to recharge after an extremely exhausting term.
Lent Term

The Winter Pool takes place in the first week of January. Before breaking up for Christmas the pool applicants’ files have to be prepared in a specific way and then delivered to the college hosting the Pool. Applicants that Corpus takes from the Pool may have to be interviewed, tested and accommodated. Requests for feedback from unsuccessful applicants start arriving. Several bags of shredding are filled.

The Lent term is a busy time for visits and events in College with Corpus playing host to several University Admissions Office events carried out as part of their widening participation initiatives. In February 2007 we hosted two Year 10 Challenge Days and one for Further Education college students. We provided meals and accommodation for participants in the CUSU Shadowing Scheme.

In March there was an ‘Experience Cambridge Day’ and a Cambridge Taster Day. These events are part of a new initiative working with Sixth Form and Further Education Colleges around the UK. The Taster Day was particularly successful and was highly praised in an article in the Education Guardian in April.

There were also a number of visits from small school groups and individuals. Lunch is usually provided and I will try to find some current undergraduates to give a tour and accompany them into lunch. In common with many other colleges, Corpus is linked with a particular geographical area and in our case it is Northern Ireland. Dr Melanie Taylor makes several visits a year giving talks and visiting schools. Two of the main events we organise are the Taster Day held this March at Cookstown High School and the Northern Ireland Summer School, held at Corpus in July. Flights and accommodation have to be booked, transport organised to and from airports both here and in Northern Ireland. Up to 300 students from across Northern Ireland attended the Taster Event in Cookstown. This year there will be 60 students and teachers coming over for the Summer School.

Easter Term

The first Open Day of the year is Saturday 5 May and is for Mathematics only. Students come to Corpus for the morning and have lunch, then in the afternoon they attend a series of talks organised by the Faculty. Planning for the Northern Ireland Summer School is ongoing. The students and teachers have a packed programme of activities, including for the first time a ‘Formal Hall’ for the students.

The Open Days on July 5 and 6 are held to coincide with the University’s own Open Days. Corpus runs a formal Open Day in the morning from 10.00am to 1.00pm. These Open Days are always over-subscribed. Open Days provide an opportunity for prospective students to experience the academic and social aspects of Cambridge. Again rooms have to be found for Director of Studies’ meetings and lunch for 150 visitors organised. In the afternoon there is an informal Open Day with tours by undergraduates. Dr Taylor and I take up our posts by the Corpus Arch to answer visitors’ questions. The visitors may have been to the University’s or another college Open Day. With several thousand visitors in Cambridge for the Open Days this can be a stamina testing two days! However it is made worthwhile by the number of applicants who came to our own Open Day and who also dropped by in the afternoon. School groups will still be visiting before they break up towards the end of July.
Time to take a holiday!

This is an excellent time to start preparations for October and the interviews. Any photocopying that can be carried out in advance is done, ordering up of resources (paper, envelopes, plastic wallets, printer labels), tidying of cupboards, bagging up the previous year’s application forms ready for shredding.

August/September

Results Sunday is the day that UCAS sends all the A Level results to UK universities. The results are administered by the Cambridge Admissions Office and lists for each college printed off. Monday brings satisfaction and disappointment as inevitably some applicants will not achieve the grades required by their offer. The applicants get their results on Thursday and our decision letters have to be ready to post on Wednesday. Dr Taylor may have some tough decisions to make. Files have to be prepared for the Summer Pool. The end of the annual Admissions cycle is marked by the handing over to... (sense of déjà vu).
What Goes On In Tutorial?

by Jan Leaver, Tutorial Administrator

As with most jobs in Corpus, our workload reflects the cycle of the academic year. In essence we are here to ensure that the undergraduates’ lives run smoothly by providing a ‘cradle to grave’ service. From Matriculation to Graduation the two of us will be organising events, collating information, passing on messages, cajoling, encouraging, congratulating and commiserating. Liaising with other departments in the College and with the University’s central administration is an important part of our work. We like to get to know all the students individually and hope that they feel able to come to us for help and advice about matters large and small. To this end we have an ‘open door’ policy. Students, Fellows and staff all know that they can drop in at any time. I’ve lost count of the number of occasions when someone has said “I’m sure this isn’t your job, but I thought you’d know…”. There was even a rumour going around the JCR that I was an undergraduate at Corpus myself, though I never did discover what I read! Student wellbeing has become such a significant aspect of our work that I, along with Charlie Evans (the second member of the office, currently on maternity leave), Janet Rogers (Admissions) and Iwona Krasodomska-Jones (Butler Librarian), have all completed a course in basic counselling and listening skills. I find this one of the most rewarding parts of my role.

There is no such thing as a typical day in the life of the tutorial office, so we need to be adept at juggling tasks, prioritising and dropping everything at a moment’s notice when something unexpected crops up. Annual milestones such as Matriculation and Graduation have many different facets (ceremonies, dinners, photographs etc) and need painstaking organisation if they are to go smoothly. Dealing with student accommodation takes up large chunks of time. We help the JCR with the practicalities of the room ballot, making sure the right people’s names are included in the draw, that there are exactly the correct number of rooms and that we’ve settled on a good set of prize rooms. We collate the dates on which students will be going down and coming up again, so that housekeeping, porters and the conference office can also operate efficiently. There always seems to be another dinner, lunch or garden party to organise, but at least we are also sometimes on the guest list! Tutorials and meetings with Directors of Studies must be arranged and rooms booked for supervisions. We assist Professor Haslam, wearing his Finance Tutor’s hat, with Newton Trust Bursary administration and with sorting out cases of student hardship. Dr Barrie Heet, our Schools Liaison Officer, visits state schools all over the country, encouraging pupils to apply to Cambridge in general and Corpus in particular. Guess which office coordinates all of that? Two sets of examinations have to be organised. The first is the dreaded Lent Collections, the freshers’ initiation into the rigours of a Cambridge exam. They are, of course, intended only as a diagnostic aid, to make sure everyone is on track. Extra help can be arranged for those that need it. Richard Burns, our preceptor in study skills, is on hand every Friday to give one-to-one sessions. Another diary for us to manage!

The most stressful period of the year is undoubtedly the Easter Term with its heavy load of Tripos examinations.
Students sit around 1,200 papers in a hectic six-week period. Although most students take their exams centrally, there are always some who have special reasons to sit them in College. We must make sure that all the necessary permissions have been obtained, that rooms and invigilators are booked, that the Head Porter knows when he must go to the Old Schools to fetch or return a package of materials, and that the Duty Tutor rota is arranged. At this time there are often emergencies to deal with too. A student might be ill or overwhelmed by anxiety, which could even lead to a panic attack. Then the student might need to be fetched from the exam hall to finish the paper in the seclusion of the Parker Room. Results must be collated and sent daily to our consultant statistician, who compiles the annual results book. That forms the basis for the award of prizes and scholarships.

All too soon, the year has come full circle and it’s graduation time again. That’s when all the hard work, the inevitable stress, and the long hours of overtime seem worth it. We all feel so proud as another set of graduates leave for the Senate House, wearing their BA, MSci or MEng hoods for the first time. How do those hoods stay so neatly across the shoulders? Jan can be relied on to have a pocket full of safety pins! That’s what it’s really about – getting the small things right as well as the large ones.

Jan Leaver has been Tutorial Administrator for six years, and came to Corpus with around twenty-five years’ experience of working with young people, both as a teacher and as an administrator.

Admissions STATISTICS

Over 1000 letters are sent out acknowledging applications, telling applicants they are not going to be interviewed, giving other applicants their interview timetable, rejection letters, offer letters and pool letters. Included are up to 4 pieces of extra information per letter.

Over 500 interviews take place in Corpus.

Over 4000 photocopies are made in producing copies of the applicants’ papers for interviewers.

Over 1000 requests for a College prospectus are met during the year.

Over 300 Open Day Bookings received and met.

Many, many emails with all manner of query/request are answered.
Talented black pupils find out more about life at Cambridge

by Alexandra Buxton, Communications Officer, Cambridge University

A group of 14-year-olds from inner London schools spent a week at Corpus on an intensive summer school run by African and Caribbean Diversity, a scheme set up by a group of black professionals in 1990.

The 35 youngsters took part in a challenging programme of activities that started with exercises in the park at the crack of dawn, whatever the weather, and ended each night with film reviews. The schedule, which mixed academic and group discussion sessions, was designed to raise the aspirations of black students.

ACDiversity, which is based in London and sponsored by leading businesses and organisations, creates and implements programmes for the economic and educational development of the African and Caribbean communities. With a database of 800 professionals who share its vision, it is the largest organisation of its kind in Europe.

“We began as a group that focused on the career progression of black people, especially in the business arena, moving on to work with schools and young people in the mid 1990s. We saw that we needed to make an impact early on in people’s lives,'” said Brenda King, Chief Executive of ACDiversity.

Since 2003 ACDiversity has run a two-year mentoring scheme for talented black pupils. Participants come from schools all over London – including those which struggle to motivate pupils to aim high. "We need to focus our efforts in year 9..."
when pupils are just embarking on their GCSEs,’
said Ms King.

As part of the programme, pupils take part in an
intensive summer school in study and life skills. This
has been shown to be effective in enhancing
attainment and encouraging them to aim high,
according to Ms King. ‘By working individually and in
small groups, pupils begin to believe that they can do
it,’ she said.

Many ACDiversity participants have gone on to
gain places at leading universities.

This summer was the first time that a Cambridge
college was chosen as a venue for the programme;
past summer schools have been held at Oxford.

Ms King said: ‘Staying somewhere like Corpus
Christi helps young people to believe in themselves
and to feel at ease in the environment of a top
university. The aim of the whole programme is to
encourage our youngsters to think ‘Yes, I can do it’,

Four days into the course, pupils’ parents and siblings were
invited to Cambridge to see their sons and daughters make
presentations and to have dinner with them. ‘We see the
presentations and dinner as an extremely valuable part of
the programme,’ said Brenda King.

Corpus Christi Admissions Tutor, Dr Melanie Taylor was invited to
welcome the families. In her address, she emphasised that
Cambridge was accessible to all with the required academic
ability. ‘Cambridge is making huge efforts to attract applicants
from groups currently under-represented. As a top university, we
are selective in terms of looking for the brightest students, but we
want those students to come from a wide range of backgrounds.’

Like many of the parents, Anne Nwakeze, who had come to have
dinner with her son, had never been to Cambridge before. She
said that her son, Nonso, who is 14 and a pupil at Claremont
School in Harrow, had been particularly looking forward to
sessions on black history and finance.

She said: ‘After experiencing life at Corpus Christi for a week a lot
of young people, and their parents, will be asking: ‘What can I do
to get to Cambridge?’"
James Buxton –
the new Chaplain at Corpus

I've just moved from Southwark Diocese, where I held two positions: Chaplain of King's College, London at Guy's Campus (the focus of King's College's work in medicine, dentistry and biomedical and health sciences), and Succentor of Southwark Cathedral. These two jobs, both of them busy, both of them in very thriving institutions, fitted together really well, though there was usually too much to do. I enjoyed the monastic rhythms, and the splendid life of prayer and worship of the Cathedral; also the buzz of the university campus, with its extraordinarily stimulating mix of students and staff. After doing six years out of a five year job it was about time to move on, when I spotted the ad for Corpus in the Church Times, and the rest is (rather recent) history!

I was born (in 1964) and brought up in Cambridge, until I was nine, when my family moved to Grantchester, a place which has ancient connections with Corpus. I was educated at the village school, and then King's School Ely. I had several happy years in Newcastle where I read Religious Studies, two jobs with Oxfam in London, and various spells abroad: I spent a year teaching refugees in western Sudan after school, and more recently (1993-95), two years running a project for refugees and migrant workers in Istanbul, a city that I regard as my second home. I was captivated by the Christian faith during this time, as a result of the marvellous ministry of the Anglican chaplaincy there. The experience led to training for the priesthood at Westcott House in Cambridge, and then a four year curacy in Portsmouth. That in a roundabout way is my life story, though I have missed out long and fascinating journeys in South America, the Middle East and elsewhere.

I'm looking forward very much to getting involved in life at Corpus. It's a great privilege to be invited to join a college with a history that combines so richly the academic and spiritual quests, with the adventure of community life. The Chaplain's role is to be available to everyone - students, Fellows and staff; people of no faith and of any faith. This availability to others no matter what - and especially in times of worry, sickness or anxiety, should be a mark of all Christian ministry I think, but it is especially important in chaplaincy. The bedrock for all this work is the pattern of prayer and worship that takes place in the College Chapel, day by day. I'm very excited about this, having already begun to get to know the Chapel Wardens, those involved in our wonderful College Choir, the Assistant Chaplain Yazeed Said, and many others who care about Corpus, and love the Chapel and its life.
Boatclub secures a new VIII
by Emily Pollock, Captain of Boats

Saturday 18 August saw this year’s gathering of Corpus oarsmen past and present. We spent an enjoyable day at the boathouse, piecing together some of the Club’s history between outings on the Cam.

At morning coffee we agreed on the likelihood of rain, but only a few drops fell throughout the rest of the day, and as two V1Is set off for their first paddle (for several years in many cases), we enjoyed a glimmer of sun. After a well-deserved barbecue lunch, we mixed the two crews to create some competition, and they left for more paddling and a race. The winners were toasted at dinner, along with the losers, the Queen, the College and of course the Boat Club. For post-dinner drinks, we revived yet more memories with a visit to Corpus’ own pub, the Eagle.

We were delighted to be able to announce we have secured the new men’s VIII for which we have been fundraising in just over a year which is a fantastic surprise. This is due to the incredible generosity of Old Members and a recent sponsorship agreement with Barclays Capital. I would like to thank all of you, who made such generous donations to our 1st VIII appeal. The boat will arrive shortly and will be ready for preparations for the Fairbairn’s Cup. BarCap are to cover half the cost for the chance to name the boat, and have their logo displayed on this year’s kit. The agreement comes after several years in search of corporate sponsorship, and I thank the committee for their hard work in bringing it about.

With a new rowing year on the way, we are set to recruit the best of the Corpus freshers and continue our upward struggle through the Bumps charts. After such a warm response from our alumni, we are looking forward to keeping in touch and making the summer event a tradition.

With best wishes from all at CCCBC
The Winchester Troper,

pays a return visit to Winchester Cathedral

Over 45 Old Members, their guests and staff enjoyed tea and cakes at Winchester Cathedral on Saturday 29 September as Dr Christopher de Hamel, the Donnelley Fellow Librarian took the Winchester Troper (MS 473) to the Cathedral where the Cathedral choir sung a full Michaelmas Mass from the manuscript itself. One of the choir members was a former Corpus Organ Scholar, Philip White-Jones (m.2000) now assistant organist at the Cathedral. To our knowledge, the volume has not been to Winchester since the sixteenth century, and it has not been sung, in its original setting, for a thousand years.

The Winchester Troper is by far the earliest surviving manuscript of English polyphonic music and one of the oldest records of European music of any kind. It is a small book, beautifully written and decorated on parchment with 198 leaves, 164mm by 95 mm. It included the Anglo-Saxon musical settings for the Mass, with tropes, sequences, organa and the other texts. It was written at Old Minster, the predecessor of the present Cathedral in Winchester, probably for Wulfstan, cantor and first biographer of St Aethelwold. The manuscript was written around the year 1000 after Aethelwold’s death in 984 but probably before the death of Bishop Cenwulf in 1006. The Winchester Troper was acquired by Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504-1575) and was brought to Corpus Christi College in 1574.
India Trip

by Matthew Jarvis and Josh Hardie

'India' was a strange and multi-faceted idea in my mind before I actually went there, thanks to College travel grants in September 2007. Now in retrospect, that idea has hardly been altered at all. It has simply been brought to life, exaggerated, extended ad absurdum, denied yet fulfilled, as elusive as it is ineluctable, as mysterious as it is downright obvious. I hope to show what I mean as this narrative unfolds. There were five of us, all friends from Corpus and going into 3rd year. Sam Galson (Classics), Josh Hardie (History), Matthew Jarvis (History), Gareth Peat (Maths) and Jim Whittick (Art History).

My first impression upon arrival at Delhi airport was the sheer heat and humidity, despite it being midnight. The taxi to the hostel in the Tibetan colony to the north, along the busy bumpy streets (yes, busy at 1am, with taxis, rickshaws, cycles, people and stray dogs), added to this impression. We settled on a price with the taxi driver, and immediately that haggling plus the heat took me back to some of my childhood years in the Levant.

Delhi was my first taste of India, and I don’t believe Mahatma Gandhi was entirely right when he said that it wasn’t the ‘real India’. Gandhi’s rural India is one aspect of the idea of ‘India’, but so is Delhi, and far more so in light of rapid development and globalisation since Gandhi’s time. Delhi is all open distance, with long auto-rickshaw rides from the hostel to the centre; it is noise and heat, with its crowds and automobiles; it is a variety of smells, simultaneously fragrant and stinking; it is both the vivid colours of saris and the insipid sandy stone and dust; it is both a sweet taste (jalebi) and a sour one (curd). We took the metro to Connaught Place, there to be besieged by touts and vendors, but we hurried on to book our train tickets to Agra from one of the three apparently identical “Official Government-approved Ticket Reservation Offices.” Ticket reservations in hand, we moved on to Humayun’s Tomb, to marvel at the beautiful Mughal architecture. The heat was virtually unbearable, but armed with plenty of water and my stereotypical English tourist’s hat, we visited Nehru’s house at Teen Murti Bhawan, an expansive, expensive property with a lawn to rival New Court and a vast number of rooms filled with displays of photographs, diary entries, letters, press cuttings, bookshelves filled with European works and typically English furnishings. The historical material was fascinating to consume, but most striking was the pervasiveness of English characteristics, from the architecture right down to the sound of Nehru’s voice as it was played out in one room. It was all very different from the Delhi I had first witnessed – that of the cramped streets and the busy Tibetan colony. And though the British Raj seems so thoroughly buried in time and subsumed by the rolling mass of millions of independent Indians, the English trait is subliminally persistent. The widespread use of the English language, the successful (see below) adoption of cricket as a national sport, the giant sprawling rail network of reliably late trains, and perhaps even the aspirations of many Indians to visit or live in England, all point to this persistence.

From Delhi we took the sleeper train to Agra, the old Mughal capital and today India’s number one tourist destination. The train journey itself was an experience to note; the infinite distance, covering miles of beautiful green flora and knots of fly-by villages, turned the carriage into a ‘place’ of its own, becoming yet another aspect of ‘India’. Indians would
engage us in conversation—would discuss our countries, perhaps even politics or religion. Sometimes the cosmopolitan spirit would win through and an empathetic bond would be made; more often it would make me only too aware of the barriers of politics, culture, religion or language that divide not just Indians from Britons, but also Indians from other Indians. For instance, one man, a Hindu, expressed his dislike of all (Indian) Muslims in no uncertain terms. Another told me of the numberless languages and dialects sprinkled across the subcontinent, and the difficulties of communication without proper education.

We all agreed Agra was worth visiting just for the sunset colours dancing across the white marble of the Taj Mahal. Built by Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his late wife, the full resonance of the poet Rabindranath Tagore’s epigram rings home: “a teardrop on the face of eternity”. Agra Fort, in red stone and commanding an impressive view across the city and River Yamuna, was similar to the Taj in architectural style, in imperial grandeur (used by the British as well as the Mughals), and in its having been preserved thanks to the intervention of British colonial officers. This preservation of an ancient heritage was one rare aspect of colonial rule for which perhaps we can actually be thankful. Afterwards, dinner at a restaurant called ‘Zorba the Buddha’, promising to “scale new heights of vegetarian delights” and “a sublime blend of the aesthetic and Epicurean”, was a refreshing though hardly sobering end to a quite surreal expedition.

Orchha, in rural Madhya Pradesh, was our next destination. Literally meaning ‘Hidden Place’, this old capital of the Bundelas is adorned with spectacular Hindu temples and a palace built for Emperor Jehangir in the early seventeenth century, for which we found an excellent, humorous guide to contextualise the monuments and explain the mythological wall-paintings. Nevertheless, it was easy to recall V. S. Naipaul’s description of India as “a land of ruins”, where great capitals are abandoned, new ones built, and the ruins never change. We proceeded to Khajuraho, a tourist village famed for its Buddhist and Jain temples with erotic human sculptures; these were built by the Chandela dynasty and constitute one of the country’s greatest attractions, and rightly so, considering their immense scope, fine detail and remarkable rendering of the human form. We arrived at a bad time just as the main tourist season was about to begin, which meant all the tents and wallahs swarmed in upon us without other victims as a distraction. We were kindly welcomed and entertained by some (I developed a liking for cha), but embattled by others who merely wished to sell their crafts. Not only in terms of personal affability, but also in their opinions and conversation did we see a great spectrum of agreeable and disagreeable people. Otherwise perfectly reasonable people had shockingly Islamophobic ideas. Luckily, my overriding memory of Khajuraho was befriending a young student, called Ram Prakash, whose English is not very good because his family cannot afford the tuition costs. We exchanged addresses and are now keeping in touch by letter.

Varanasi, the holy Hindu city and pilgrimage site astride the Ganges, was very refreshing after Khajuraho. Yes, it was extremely polluted from all the vehicles, and yes, it was teeming with thousands of people with strong political convictions, but some of it was very new. Our arrival coincided with a rally by the Hindu communalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which effectively doubled the time it should have taken to get to our guest house on the riverbank, above a burning ghat. We were surprised to find that even our guest house flew the BJP flag from its rooftop. The following day we took a rowing boat at dawn to watch the sunrise over this sacred place, while the early-morning bathers began their rituals. But the blurred boundary between Hindu ‘religious’ ritual and what I more usually refer to as ‘culture’ was as elusive here as anywhere else. We did not envy their position; for the water was freezing; and I abstained from bathing not as a religious sceptic but to eschew the septic water (thirty sewers are continually discharging into the river, yet
engage us in conversation—we’d discuss our countries, perhaps even politics or religion. Sometimes the cosmopolitan spirit would win through and an empathetic bond would be made; more often it would make me only too aware of the barriers of politics, culture, religion or language that divide not just Indians from Britons, but also Indians from other Indians. For instance, one man, a Hindu, expressed his dislike of all (Indian) Muslims in no uncertain terms. Another told me of the numberless languages and dialects sprinkled across the subcontinent, and the difficulties of communication without proper education.

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each day some 60,000 people take a dip). Varanasi was otherwise fascinating with its labyrinth of alleyways, temples, internet cafes, silk emporia, houses, and many hidden surprises. One such surprise was a classical Indian concert in the ‘Music Ashram’, at which we were entertained variously by sitar, flute and voice, with tabla accompaniment.

For me, there was a personal interest in Indian flutes and flute-playing: after all this is the land of the legendary Krishna! Fortunately, the following morning I was able to have a four-hour flute lesson with the professional, and bought a selection of Indian flutes to take home.

We headed south-west on another sleeper train, and soon our final destination was fast approaching: Bombay! From the ‘Gateway to India’ (built for the visit of King George V in 1911) to the older Victorian structures of the Raj (such as Mumbai CST as an echo of St Pancras’ station), the confident British legacy maintains a powerful visible presence. Mumbai is a cosmopolitan and diverse city which seems to draw deep from both Indian and Western heritage. Sir Mark Tully comments that there is a certain class of Mumbaikar wishing to draw a firm line under the uniquely Indian aspects of the city and start afresh with Western values, ideas and opportunities. But the past always seems to cut through somehow. Of course, the modern, globalised, commercialised and wealthy classes in Mumbai share much in common now with the West. But ‘the West’ is often quite a specific filtered sample of American or British culture or philosophy, and while India has undergone a technological revolution that keeps it largely apace with developments in the West, this does not easily override Indian concerns, Indian language, Indian religion or Indian politics. Perhaps the strangest thing of the whole trip occurred when my four fellow travellers were talent-spotted while out shopping to act as extras in a Bollywood film! They had to play typical upper-class Englishmen in formal attire for a promenade scene. They tell me the experience was simply surreal, and it sits uneasily in the middle of the Indian-Western dynamic.

We took the opportunity of seeing some Bollywood at the cinema, too. The film itself was simply absurd — a ridiculous blend of extremely typecast characters and a plot that over-dramatised every single event and seemed to assume all Westerners have large mansions and private jets. This sort of ‘myth of the West’ comes out even in ordinary conversation with many Indians, whose first question is ‘Where are you from?’ or more simply, ‘Which country?’ followed by this affirmative reaction to our response: ‘England! Very good country! Cricket, you know cricket?...very good...I tintoo...very good.’ So perhaps it was strangely apposite that despite all this praise for England and cricket, it was the Indian team which won the final of the International Twenty20 just the day before we flew home. But of course we all joined in the jubilation on the streets.

On the grand scale, the abiding image of India might be one of a rapidly advancing nation, increasing its cultural and diplomatic links with both West and East, capitalising on its resources (both natural and human), as it sets its path to becoming a world superpower. But this progress is simultaneously set back by the tragic inequalities and divisions that beset Indian society and undermine national unity. In this 60th year of Indian independence, they are still hotly debating just what unites India, be it history, politics, religion, culture, wealth, or...what?

This is why I’m even more sceptical of asserting an impersonal idea of ‘India’ than I was of bathing in the Ganges. Sometimes in the Cambridge ‘bubble’ it can be easy to forget that the past and present issues being discussed have a direct relevance to millions of people; and travelling to India has certainly rekindled my enthusiasm for the country. An empathetic encounter with the people of India involves seeing oneself in ‘India’ and leaves a lasting impression of common humanity. So the lesson for me, more than the heat and humidity, was human humility.
The Heavens Come Closer

Lucky imaging brings clarity

On Mount Palomar in Southern California a team of astronomers from Cambridge and the California Institute of Technology, led by Dr Craig Mackay, has developed a technique that takes pictures from a camera based on the ground of stars and nebulae that are twice as sharp as those produced by the Hubble Space Telescope.

Dr Craig Mackay, of the Institute of Astronomy at Cambridge and Fellow of Corpus commented ‘these are the sharpest images ever taken either from the ground or from space and yet we are essentially using ‘Blue Peter’ technology.’

The technique is called ‘Lucky Imaging’. The camera works by recording the images produced by an adaptive optics front-end at high speed (20 frames a second or more). The sharpest ones are then selected by computer software and these are combined to create pictures that beat Hubble for clarity. ‘We call the technique ‘Lucky Imaging’ explained Craig, ‘because it depends on the chance fluctuations in the atmosphere sorting themselves out.’

The telescope on Mount Palomar used by the teams from Cambridge and Caltech is a 200 inch (5.1m) telescope. Like most ground-based telescopes, the images it produces are normally 10 times less detailed than those produced by the Hubble Space Telescope. Their adaptive optic system works well in the infrared but up to now gives images in the visible that are still markedly poorer than Hubble images. Using the Lucky Camera the pictures are the sharpest ever produced.

The results are so exciting to astronomers, explained Craig, because they open up the possibility of further improvements on even larger telescopes such as the 8.2m Very Large Telescope (VLT) of the European Southern Observatory in Chile or the 10m Keck telescopes on the top of Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The Lucky Imaging techniques have already enabled the discovery of many multiple star systems which are too close together and too faint to find with any standard telescope. The pictures of the globular star cluster M13, for example, which is at a distance of 25,000 light years, are able to find stars as little as one light day apart. The nearest star to earth is over three light years away. ‘It is a remarkable achievement by anyone’s standards’.

Profile

Dr Craig Mackay is a Reader in Image Science at the Institute of Astronomy, University of Cambridge. Originally educated in Scotland, he did his first degree in physics at the University of Edinburgh and then came to Cambridge to do a PhD in radio astronomy under Professor Sir Martin Ryle, FRSE, the Nobel Prize winner. Since then he has been increasingly interested in the use of modern detectors and computers for astronomical and other applications. He has worked on a variety of visible and infrared detector systems including one of the main instruments on the Hubble Space Telescope. He is now developing visible light systems to deliver much higher resolution images on large ground-based telescopes.

Dr Mackay has also been involved in the creation of a number of high tech companies in the Cambridge area principally involved in using imaging technologies developed for astronomy in a variety of other applications including life sciences and medical screening and diagnosis systems.
Pictured above: Craig Mackay. Images A and B below show the effects before and after of the Lucky Imaging technique.
Twin Towers conspiracy theory challenged

Intrigued by the reports of a conspiracy theory behind the collapse of the Twin Towers six years ago, Keith Seffen, Senior Lecturer in the Structures Group in the Department of Engineering and Corpus Fellow (see Pelican Michaelmas 2006), decided to look for a scientific explanation for how the buildings disintegrated so quickly.

“I thought immediately that there had to be a rational explanation for why collapse happened as it did, one which draws on engineering principles,” he explained.

After perusing the literature, he discovered that many studies focused on the phase just before the collapse settled in.

“These studies show that the combination of fire and impact damage severely impaired these parts of the building close to where the aircraft hit to hold the weight of the building above,” he said. “It was clear that the top parts of the buildings were bound to fall down, but it was not clear why the undamaged building should have offered little resistance to these falling parts.”
Keith decided to calculate the residual capacity of the undamaged building to resist the weight of the floors above under collapse conditions. He then developed a dynamic model of the collapse sequence, simulating the successive squashing, or ‘pan-caking’ effect of each successive floor crushing the one beneath based on the residual capacity already identified. This analytical process is well known from other studies of progressive collapse but is usually seen in structures like undersea pipelines, rather than buildings.

Keith was then able to predict that the residual capacity of both buildings was limited. Once collapse had started, it took only 10 seconds for the building to go down – ‘hardly longer than the free-falling of a coin dropped from the top of the tower,’ he adds.

What this shows is that the collapse was actually ‘a very ordinary thing to happen’ and that, contrary to the conspiracy theories, no other contribution, such as explosive charges, was needed to cause the rapid destruction of the buildings.

‘In all senses, the collapse sequence was quite ordinary and natural. It is widely acknowledged that the impacts on September 11 were extraordinary, which led to consequences well in excess of the design capacity for the buildings.’
In August 1977 I started working in the College Office which today is known as the Finance Office. I did not expect at the time that I would still be here some 30 years later and still in the same office. There have been other long serving staff from the accounts department including Ken Simpkin and John Bamford who have since retired. However, I still work with Stephen Symonds who has been here even longer than me.

From the beginning I have been involved in student billing. It is probably in this capacity that most people who have been at the College in the last 30 years will have come into contact with me. My first job was to prepare and send out kitchen and Buttery statements to keep students informed of how much they were spending on meals and bar purchases. These days students use their University cards to pay for catering charges, but 30 years ago much of the record keeping was by hand.

The single biggest change over the period has undoubtedly been the introduction of computers which have made many tasks much easier. It would be difficult to do the job without them today.

The challenge as always is to keep up to date with changes made to student finances, of which over the years there have been many. I think it is only right that I should acknowledge the help of so many staff at the College past and present who have made my job one that I still enjoy today.