



## Editorial

### The Master, Professor Christopher Kelly

'Humans are by nature social animals ... anyone who cannot live as part of community, or is so self-sufficient as not to need to ... is either a beast or a god.' So rightly remarked Aristotle in his *Politics*, no doubt reflecting on the face-to-face society of Athens in the fourth century B.C. The challenge for any community is how to stay connected. Or better put: a community is only as strong as its connections. Amongst the many threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic is that it will weaken the ties that bind communities by forcing us to keep a not-so-social distance from our friends and colleagues.

The Corpus community is a special case. Its coherence and communality rely not so much on face-to-face encounters (though these are always enjoyable – the Beldam and MacCurdy dinners, the summer party), as on a shared experience in an institution that has been engaged in the same purpose of education, research, learning and religion for nearly seven hundred years. In the face of the necessary cancellation of all alumni events for the foreseeable future, there seemed no better moment to assert our shared identity as members of this community than by ensuring that news and information continued to flow to those who value their continuing connection with this College.

Hence this *Pelican in Brief*. This is the first of ten issues which will stretch, roughly every ten days or so, to the end of the Easter Term (so to the end of June). The core format will remain constant. Above all, I wanted to make sure that alumni were kept up-to-date with how the College is dealing with COVID-19 and its consequences for Fellows, staff and students. This also seemed the ideal moment to call on the Fellowship's expertise; so I have asked some of my colleagues to offer brief commentaries on the pandemic from the point of view of their own discipline. These promise to be fascinating in themselves, but also offer a serious counter-weight to the miasma of rumour and half-truth that always swirls around any crisis.

Each *Pelican in Brief* will introduce one of the more recent members of the Fellowship. It will also include reflections on the College's long history of confronting and overcoming crises. A number of forthcoming issues will offer a snap-shot from the extraordinary riches of the Parker Library. These reflections are reminders that this College and its community have faced – and survived – plagues stretching back to our very foundation in the mid fourteenth century.

I hope as you stay sheltered and safe that the Pelican in Brief will serve as an affirmation of a still thriving community of which you remain part – even if for the moment that community has to take on a virtual form. In this electronic version of the College, we can all remain social animals. Here, at least, there is no need to practise social distancing.

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## News from the College

### The Senior Tutor, Dr Marina Frasca-Spada

This is a difficult time for all of us, trying to reorganise our lives (our work, our modes of engagement with each other) around sudden new rules. For most of our students, the last few weeks have meant a brusque change of pace – from the typical term-time intensely socialised combination of intellectual work and the collegial daily life surrounded by your friends and peers, to the equally intense loneliness of social distance and self-isolation, and the uncertainty of the near future.

We – the Tutors and the tutorial/welfare staff – have worked hard to make sense quickly of the realities of this new situation, and have been helping our students to decide whether to stay in Cambridge or leave. We were clear from the start that we would respect every student's decision, and that we would be on their side whatever that decision might be. We made clear to all our students that, if they were to stay, they would be able to rely on a safe and secure environment in our College. We discussed all such matters personally with a large number, one by one, on the telephone or via Skype. And they know that we will do our best to alleviate any financial hardship that may result from these extraordinary circumstances. Of our five hundred or so students, undergraduates and postgraduates, at the moment around sixty remain in residence in the Old House and in Leckhampton, and our core teams are working hard to look after them.

The College now looks eerily quiet and empty; but New Court is more beautiful than ever, its golden stone gleaming in the clear sunshine of this early spring. Most of us are now working remotely from home. It was curious to see how quickly we have all adapted to spending time glued to our screens – as many hours as the geekiest of teenagers. And it is via email and other electronic media that Tutors and Directors of Studies remain in frequent contact with students, to offer them their support and to make sure they know we are still their College, and always here for them.

We already know that there will not be a residential term at the other end of this strange Easter vacation. The University has decided that most of our teaching will take place online, and we are now getting organised for that, experimenting with different conference platforms. Since it is clear that examinations in the usual format, with large numbers crowding into examination halls, will be impossible, the University Departments and Faculties are also working hard to identify alternative forms of assessment, also to be conducted remotely. Doing everything from a distance in this way for the next weeks and months also means that our finalists will not be able to have their Graduation Dinner and their General Admissions degree ceremony this June. But we are still their College, and in due course, once the emergency is over, we will be here, as we have been for nearly seven hundred years, to celebrate them and their achievements.





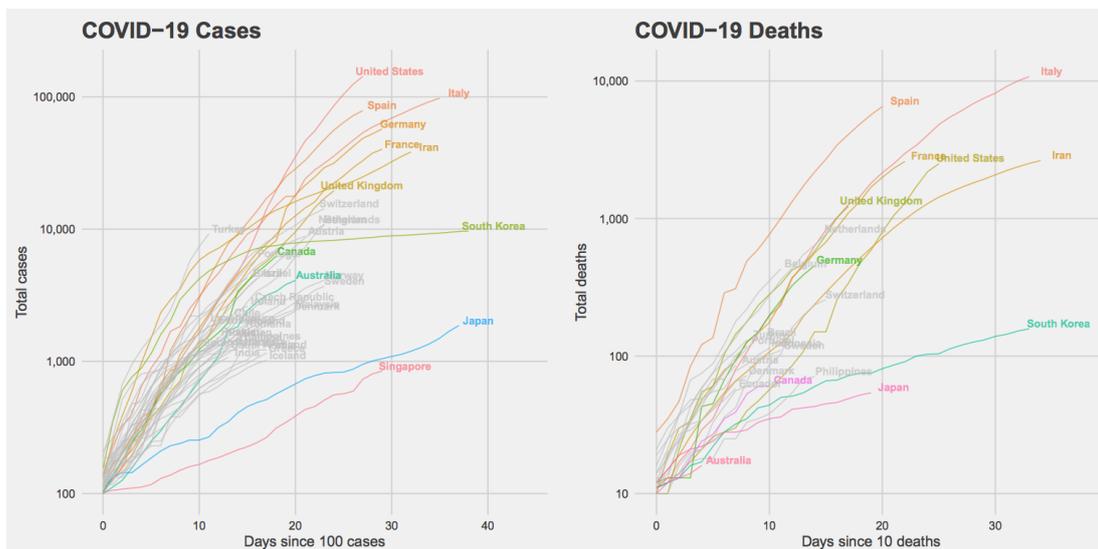
## Reflections from the Fellowship

**Dr Qingyuan Zhao, University Lecturer and Fellow in Statistics, models the impact of COVID-19 on populations.**

Ever since I left China for postgraduate studies in the US, I was always proud to introduce my hometown to everyone I met. But when I was admitted to Corpus Fellowship on 10 February this year, for the first time I didn't need to locate my hometown by indicating the distance from Beijing or Shanghai. Yes, I was born and raised in Wuhan, and I am writing about the coronavirus that has taken thousands of lives there, and is continuing to take more lives around the world.

I started to follow the news about this epidemic outbreak before it was called COVID-19, and even before we knew that the pathogen was a novel coronavirus. I have been through all the negative emotions – confusion, worry, distrust, shock, despair, anger – perhaps like everyone reading this newsletter, but just two months earlier. As an academic statistician, I decided that the best way I could help is by analysing the COVID-19 data myself.

I still vividly remember my dismay on 6 February, the day when I first found that the epidemic was doubling every two to four days in Wuhan before its lockdown. At the time, other studies published in the most authoritative medical journals estimated doubling at every six to seven days. By now it should be obvious that my estimate was much closer to the truth. The easiest way to observe this is from two graphs showing the cumulative COVID-19 cases (and deaths) in different countries since it passed 100 cases (and 10 deaths). It is clear that the total cases and deaths grew about a hundred times in the first twenty days in most countries. This rate is the same as doubling every three days.



Even for expert epidemiologists, it may seem surprising that the analysis I performed, using a mere fifty COVID-19 cases while others were using thousands, provided a more accurate answer. But to me this was obvious: what matters is data quality, not data quantity. A typical epidemiological study of COVID-19 used epidemic curves in regional outbreaks to fit a Susceptible-Infectious-Recovered (SIR) model, which is a system of differential equations. But most studies failed to recognise two distinct features of the current pandemic:

- In almost all countries, a large number of COVID-19 cases were unidentified due to a shortage of testing kits;
- The reproductive rate of COVID-19 is constantly changing because governments are dynamically adjusting their public health measures.

As a consequence, key assumptions of the SIR model are not satisfied. Because of this, most early analyses underestimated the epidemic growth of COVID-19. By contrast, I decided to focus on Wuhan-exported cases confirmed in a few countries that tested COVID-19 cases aggressively. The sample size is much smaller, but the data quality is also much better. Moreover, instead of applying a standard SIR model, I started from the first principles and built a bespoke statistical model. That is how I avoided the common mistakes that plague so many other studies.

So, I would like to share with the Corpus community the one lesson I learned about COVID-19: this is an extraordinary pandemic, so we must treat it seriously. In particular, instead of following the opinions of others, more than ever we need to think critically ourselves.

Link to the report of the COVID-19 analysis:

<http://www.statslab.cam.ac.uk/~qz280/papers/covid-2019-1.pdf>



**Dr Sam Zeitlin, Hong Kong Link Early-Career Research Fellow and College Lecturer in Politics, reflects on the impact of COVID-19 and the global uncertainty that results.**

The present situation is characterised, above all, by uncertainty—corporal, spatial, hygienic, but also political, financial and economic.

From China to Britain to the United States, persons and whole peoples have been confined to their homes. In many countries, from Iran to Japan to Spain, and not least, (writing on 25 March 2020) in Italy, the recorded numbers of infected and dead are sobering. The world over, thousands have lost their loved ones, their jobs, their life savings. In the United States, as following the tragedy of September 11 2001, primary elections have been postponed. In Britain and elsewhere, popular views of expertise have seemingly pivoted in an instant—from politicians (and publics) rejecting the rule of experts to popular leaders framed bodily by medical doctors, surgeons-general and public health officials.

In moments of uncertainty, such as the present, we are left with our sorrow for lost relatives, acquaintances and friends, as well as for people whom we did not know. In such moments, we are left with doubts and unease but also with our questions. When will there be a vaccine? How many will perish before we have one? When will we be able to leave our homes, to return to work, to rejoin our families and friends from whom we have been separated and socially distanced?

In politics, the current situation raises a question for democratic theory: is it possible for the people to assemble in a situation deemed to be an emergency? More broadly, to what extent is the present crisis a political one? To the extent that it is, are our present institutions equipped to handle it? Looking back to Aristotle's understanding of the human as a political animal in his *Politics*, is it possible to retain something of our "politicality" and with it, our humanity, when we are no longer interacting face-to-face with others?

In politics, to what extent are we to live by the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy? Are incumbent office-holders in some manner responsible for the events which occur on their watch or solely for their responses, foresighted or imprudent, to events as they arise? What would accountability amount to in the present situation? What in any case are the criteria for assessing accountability in crises and emergencies? Might the present crisis serve to restore a sense of common and shared purpose, or will it lead merely to greater and retrenched partisan and factional divisions?



In our uncertainty we can experience an unawaited gratitude. When life seems more tenuous or fragile, we may feel greater appreciation merely for being alive. Amidst uncertainty, sadness, questioning and sorrow, we can be grateful for our friends, our families, our teachers, our students and for many of the blessings which we so often overlook.

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## **New Fellows**

### **Dr Qingyuan Zhao, Fellow in Statistics**

Qingyuan was born and raised in Wuhan, which despite its current association with the coronavirus, is a beautiful city long known for its rivers, lakes and lively breakfast tradition. After high school, he went to the Special Class for the Gifted Young programme in the University of Science and Technology of China and majored in mathematics. He then went to Stanford University for postgraduate studies and obtained his PhD in Statistics in 2016. He spent three years in the Wharton School of The University of Pennsylvania as a postdoctoral fellow before joining the Statistical Laboratory in Cambridge as a University Lecturer.

Qingyuan's research interests lie primarily in drawing scientific conclusions about causal relationships using experimental and observational data, a fast-growing area known as "causal inference". He is also broadly interested in applying statistical methods in biomedical and social sciences. Outside academics, Qingyuan enjoys cycling and skiing, and he recently started to learn to play blues harmonica.

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## Observations from the Past

**Dr Philippa Hoskin, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Fellow Librarian, looks at how Matthew Parker dealt with unwanted guests in time of plague.**

Dealing with prisoners during outbreaks of epidemic disease has always posed a problem for governments. In 1563, as plague rampaged through London, the Privy Council turned to Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury and former Master of Corpus, to help them solve the problem of providing safe accommodation for high-status, political prisoners. On 15 September 1563, the Council wrote to the archbishop declaring that it had agreed to requests from Thomas Thirleby, former bishop of Ely, and his colleague John Boxall, to be removed from the Tower of London ‘for their better safeguard from the present infection of the plague’, and that they would become his charge. The letter is the beginning of the story of how Matthew Parker dealt with this less than welcome responsibility.

Thomas Thirleby had been imprisoned in the Tower since June 1560 after he refused to swear the Oath of Supremacy to Elizabeth I in 1559, which he followed up by preaching against the changes happening in the newly reformed Church of England. He could have remained in the Tower a very long time, but when plague began to decimate London, the Privy Council decided that Thirleby – with Boxall (who had been secretary of state to the Catholic Queen Mary I) – was best released into the care of Archbishop Parker. They acquainted Parker with the good news in writing – assuring him that Thirleby and Boxall could be placed ‘in such convenient lodging as your lordship shall think meet, having each of them one servant to attend upon them’ and that the two prisoners would pay for their own keep.

Unsurprisingly, Parker was reluctant to house Thirleby, Boxall and their servants in his own house at Lambeth – then outside the urban area – since, as Thirleby admitted in another letter, he had no idea how to avoid bringing the plague with them as they travelled through the most infected parts of the city.

In the end, Parker refused to admit these guests to his own household immediately, but allowed them to use his empty house at Bekesbourne near Canterbury, believing that a spell of quarantine in clean air was in order: ‘till such time as they were better blown with this fresh air for a fourteen days’.

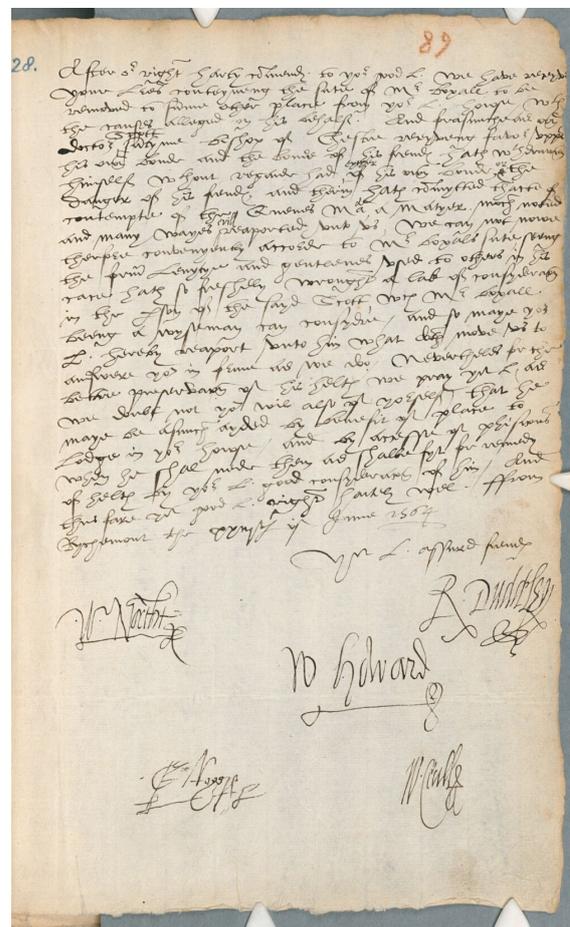


Image: Letter from the Privy Council to Matthew Parker, 15 September 1563, CCCC ms.114A, p. 87.

This particularly serious outbreak of Plague lasted until January 1564, by which time Parker was writing to his colleague the bishop of London about composing a form of thanksgiving to be read in churches. But, having seen the back of the Plague for the time being, Parker was not able to rid himself of his guests, who by this time were with him at Lambeth. He was to be a reluctant host to these adherents of the pre-Reformation church until Thirleby's death in 1570.

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## A view from the College Chapel

**The Revd Dr Andrew Davison, Dean of Chapel, Fellow in Theology and Starbridge (University) Lecturer in Theology and Natural Sciences meditates on the challenges of prayer during a pandemic.**

Chapel services usually pause over the vacation but, as Lent Term ended, the world faced a health crisis unlike anything any of us had seen, so the chaplain and I carried on praying there – duly distanced, of course – for the city and College, including old members, and for the country and world. Soon, that had to move from chapel. Frustrating though it may be, for most of us the great act of charity at the moment is to stay at home to save lives.

Our focus each day is to celebrate the Eucharist, and to pray the Litany. I've written elsewhere about the place of the Eucharist in these odd times (here, in [Church Times](#)). The Litany may be less familiar. It's the Church's most solemn outpouring of intercession, composed of petitions (thirty-four in all) with communal responses: for instance, 'From famine and disaster; from violence, murder and dying unprepared: Good Lord, deliver us.' The petitions start by praying for our own growth in goodness, then move on to ask for deliverance from danger, and the welfare of others, including the Queen and Parliament, judges, families, the sick, travellers, women in childbirth and even 'our enemies, persecutors and slanderers'. There's something appropriate about repetition, piling up prayers, in a situation like this. Carol Ann Duffy captures it from her own, I think more secular, perspective in her poem '[Prayer](#)'.



There are some Corpus connections to the Litany. It seems St Gregory the Great was an early advocate. (Gregory's Gospels, given to Augustine of Canterbury, are one of the most precious books in the Parker Library.)

The Litany is also associated with Rogation Sunday, as a prayer for crops, which is when two of the college's four Parker Sermons are delivered each year.

Some readers will be familiar with the [Prayerbook Litany](#) of 1662 (based on Thomas Cranmer's earliest venture into official English prayer writing and translation). We've been using the [contemporary English version](#) from Common Worship (2000), which I think is one of the most successful parts in the modern rite. Intriguingly, the thought of the Corpus clergy reciting the Litany provoked interest on social media. That emboldened me to ask whether the Church of England's 'Daily Prayer' app and [website](#) could be tweaked, to include a direct link to the Litany for the first time, and they were.

We are adapting to chapel life continued and coordinated online. Our first venture has been a daily live-streamed communal Litany. For that, and ongoing developments, see the [chapel webpage](#), or [@CorpusCamChapel](#) on Twitter.

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Pelican in Brief is available on our website and all issues can be found [here](#).

The next issue will be published on 9 April.

For further information, please visit our website [www.corpus.cam.ac.uk](http://www.corpus.cam.ac.uk) or contact

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