

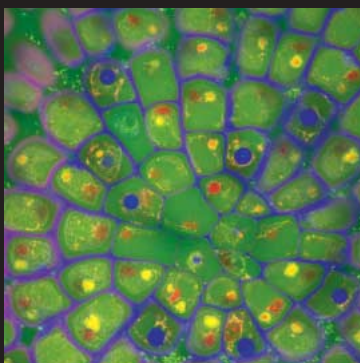
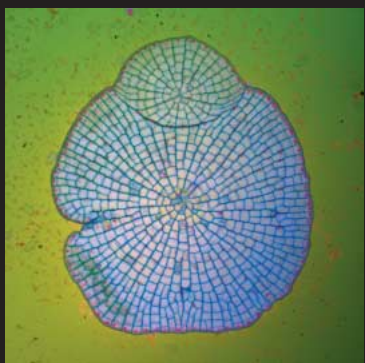
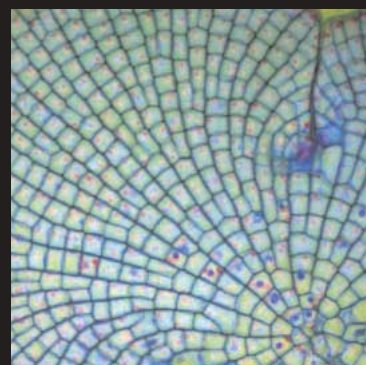
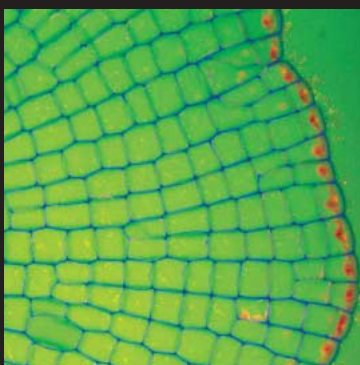
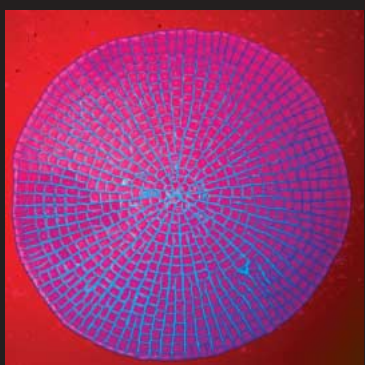
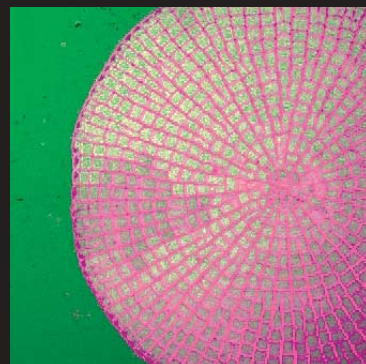
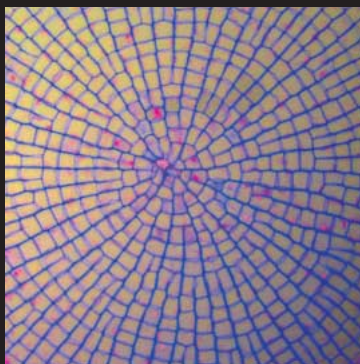
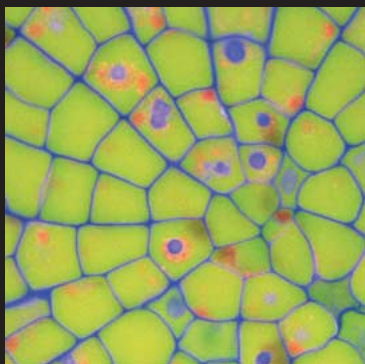
IN THIS ISSUE

Rock 'n' rolling for Britain

Learning at London Zoo

Plankton and poetry

New perspectives on an old king



Dow@Cam is a magazine, which is published bi-annually by the Downing College Development Office.

Editorial Team

Editor in Chief:

Professor Barry Everitt

Publication Co-ordinator:

Miss Helen Limbrick

Writer:

Ms Debbie Pullinger

Contributors:

Mr Tariq Sadiq

Mr Steve Romans

Mr Benjamin Davis

Dr Jim Haseloff,

Department of Plant Sciences

Dr Russell L Chapman,

Scripps Institution of Oceanography

Editorial Board:

Professor Bill Adams

Professor Barry Everitt

Mr Tariq Sadiq

Dr Martin Mays

Ms Jane Perks

Ms Debbie Pullinger

Professor Graham Virgo

Dr Paul Millett

Photographers:

Mr Richard Stibbs

Mr Dennis Gilbert

Mr Warwick Sweeney

Design and printing:

Cambridge University Press.

www.cambridgeprinting.org

Address:

Development Office

Downing College

Cambridge CB2 1DQ

Tel: 01223 334850

Email: hjl26@cam.ac.uk

Website www.dow.cam.ac.uk

Dow@Cam is intended to give an informative, light-hearted view of College related events and people.

Front cover images:

Confocal laser scanning micrographs obtained by Dr Jim Haseloff from a collection of plant and algal specimens held at the Department of Plant Sciences.



The Master's Voice

As we prepare ourselves for a new academic year and the arrival of a new group of students, we do so on the back of a year which saw great academic and, indeed, all-round success at Downing. The College was ranked third in the Tomkins Table that compares examination results among Cambridge Colleges, and whilst this public ranking is gratifying, more important is that it confirmed what we had felt within the College, namely that our students seemed increasingly to be thriving in the environment that we have been working hard to provide for them.

We have been aware for some time of the apparently widening gap between the school and university systems. The rather rigid forms of assessment in schools are making the transition to university increasingly challenging – even for the high-achieving students who come to places like Downing. Many science students, for example, experience something of a shock when they face the challenge of writing essays rather than providing short answers to structured questions. We have put a lot of effort into addressing these challenges, beginning with whom we admit, and why, then staying committed to those students once they've arrived. We have, for example, engaged a teacher to help people acquire or hone their writing skills; we spend time with new students, helping them to make that transition. For those who are still finding it difficult, there are multiple forms of support within the College through which we can address the causes and work out strategies to help our students fulfil themselves whatever that means for the individual student. This is what is special about the college system, as I am sure you will remember.

However, success in one particular year isn't the point; it's about consistently providing an environment where everyone can flourish. As ever, we stand by the principle that educational and academic research go hand in hand. This was perhaps clearly underlined this year when Graham Virgo was promoted to Professor whilst in the post of Senior Tutor. The link is also highlighted in our profile of David Pratt, Fellow in History, who describes his work with students as part of the public communication a historian has to engage with. We are especially pleased to feature in this issue the life and work of marine biologist, author and poet, Professor Ralph Lewin, who has had a distinguished career both in teaching and research and who was recently admitted to the College as a Wilkins Fellow.

At the start of this new academic year, we say farewell and also congratulations to Jude Browne on the birth of her twins, and wish her well as she takes up her new post at Warwick. We are also pleased to welcome a new Research Fellow in Biological Sciences, Amy Milton, and new Fellows Brigitte Steger (East Asian studies) and Franco Basso (Classics).

Finally, we are now able to announce our receipt of another major benefaction from the Howard Foundation, specifically to build a new theatre in the West Lodge garden. This will boost our conference business potential, the vital revenue from which will help us to fulfil our educational objectives in an increasingly difficult financial future. It will also provide a wonderful enhancement to the College facilities provided for our students.



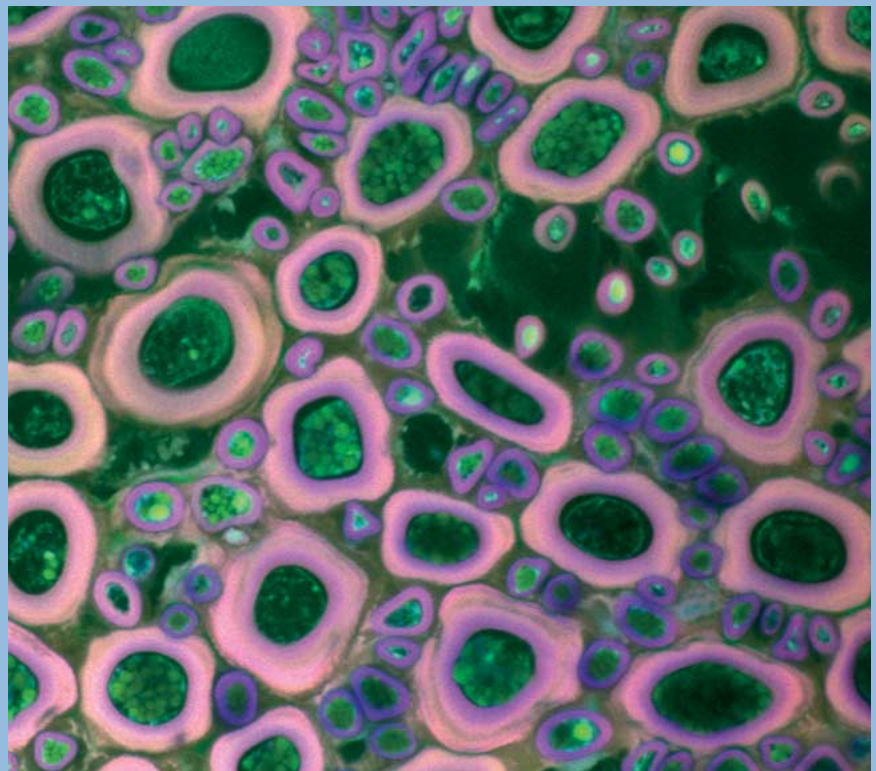
Plankton and poetry

In these days of dwindling oil supplies, scientists are energetically pursuing possible alternative sources of fuel. One of the more surprising leads, perhaps, is one that points straight back into the sea. There could, it seems, be oil beneath the waves. Not from the sea bed, but from a sea-dwelling organism. One of the scientists recently involved in the investigation on the viability of an alga as a source of energy is world expert on seaweed and other algae, and recently admitted Wilkins Fellow at Downing College, Professor Ralph Lewin.

This will not be Ralph Lewin's first work on oil-producing algae. His initial investigation was made in the days of the Gulf War oil embargo when the United States was anxiously looking about for alternative sources of fuel. Ralph describes how he set about his task: "Well, you need an abundant supply of an alga that grows rapidly. And the smaller the algae and the warmer the water, the faster they grow. So I suggested that we look in tropical marine habitats for some little ones." Aided by a US government grant, he went to look for some likely species, and found one in the Caribbean, by the name of *Nannochloropsis*, a tiny marine organism that can produce up to 40 per cent of its dry weight in oil.

It doesn't take much imagination to realise that to get the co-operation of sufficient numbers of these "Nanno-Q" cells would require production on a massive scale. Asked if he thinks it's feasible, Ralph expresses a typically offbeat opinion. "I think it's not a bad idea. I'd rather use oil from algae than corn because I happen to like the taste of maize, and I'd rather the maize crop went into fuelling people than fuelling cars."

Ralph's research interest in seaweeds began as a result of a much earlier government response to a different crisis. Having come up to Downing at the start of the war, his studies were interrupted after Part 1 when he was



Confocal laser scanning micrographs of fronds of the brown alga Fucus from a collection of plant and algal specimens held at the Department of Plant Sciences

called up to work for the Ministry of Supply. With the Japanese controlling much of the Far East, supplies of agar – vital for medical work – had been cut off, so a local source of agar-producing seaweed was needed. Thus, a seaweed survey was instigated. Ralph describes how, armed with cars and boats and maps, he and two other young men spent nine months touring the coast of Britain. "Our survey was very

superficial," he admits. "We would travel round, survey the seaweed growing on the shores, ask people how much seaweed washes up, how often and how high it was piled – and then make estimates of tonnage. They were dreadfully approximate numbers!" Following the coastal survey and three years in the non-combatant pioneer corps, looking after Italian prisoners of war in Herefordshire and Cheshire,

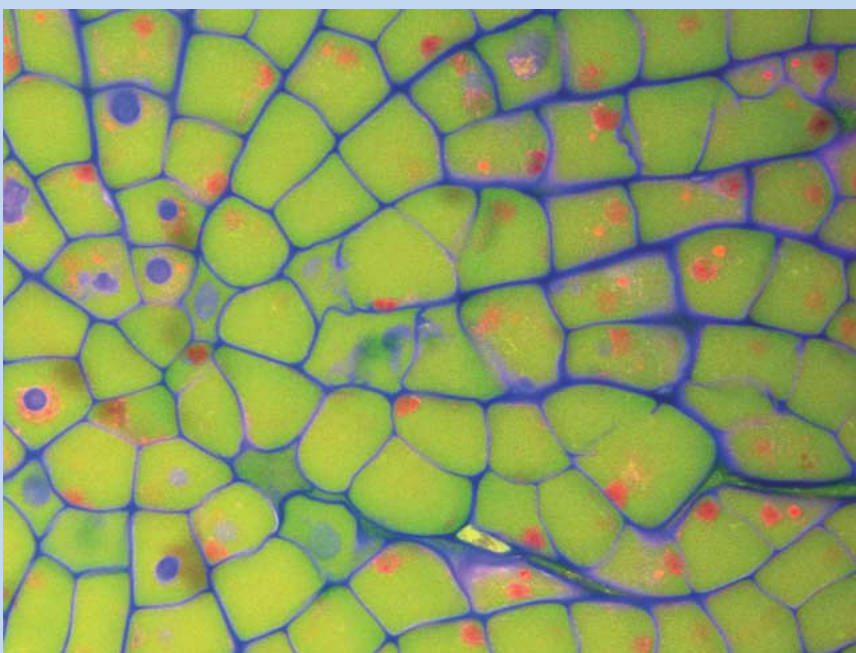
Ralph was finally able to return to Downing to complete his Part 2, specialising in botany. He then began in earnest on research into marine algae that has taken him around the world. It was, as he says, a shrewd decision, to study *Prochloron*, a symbiotic alga that lives only in warm sea water; he and his wife, Dr Lanna Cheng, have spent a lot of time around the Pacific Island of Palau.

Much of Professor Lewin's professional life has been spent at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, which is part of the University of California, near San Diego. It's been a career devoted as much to teaching as to research, and his teaching in marine biology has always been through a hands-on approach. "Instead of looking at books," he explains, "we did experiments. We'd say, are there any bacteria in the sea? Well, probably. How are we going to find out? And then we do this and that – and it doesn't work. Why? Because we didn't put in phosphorus ... and so on."

Ralph Lewin is now officially retired ("old fuddy-duddies should generally retire and make way for young people with modern training!") but is grateful for being allowed to keep his office. He still spends the hours between eight-thirty and five-thirty in the lab – "with a long lunch hour, though!" – and is running various algae-related

projects. At the time of our interview, for example, he is preparing to give a lecture in Spain on *Gloeocapsa*, an alga which Ralph says most people will recognise as the black deposits on buildings. "It's probably the best known alga to the layman but among the least studied by phycologists because they rather like pottering around by lakes or on seashores. Nobody ever thinks of looking at the black stuff on walls. But it's actually very interesting because it's a very special habitat. It has to put up with bright sunlight, long periods of drought and the possibility of being washed away when it does rain."

Having made a significant contribution to the scientific literature on algae, Ralph thought that in retirement he might point his writing skills in other directions. "I decided I would write a book on a subject on which, apparently, no work had previously been published," he says. "So, what was there? And I thought ... maybe shit." The resulting work examines the subject thoroughly from almost every conceivable disciplinary viewpoint and includes serious biological, chemical, medical, parasitological, legal and literary treatments. It even takes in Shakespeare. The publishers were enthusiastic, but unfortunately, perhaps, not about Ralph's suggested, rather explicit, title, as he explains: "They said, we're a respectable publishing house, we can't put *that*



Confocal laser scanning micrographs of the green algae *Coleochaete scutata*

Biography in brief



- 1939** Came up to Downing College with an exhibition to read Natural Sciences
- 1943** Called up for national service
- 1947** Graduated from Downing, then moved to Yale for PhD and Graduate School
- 1953** Employed by the Canadian National Research Council, to set up a biological research centre
- 1956** Went to work for the Canadian National Research Council, setting up a biological research centre in Halifax, Nova, Scotia
- 1960** Continued research in Woods Hole, Massachusetts
- 1960** Moved to La Jolla, California
- 1971** Awarded SD
- 2007** Admitted as Wilkins Fellow at Downing College

Merde! is published by Random House (1999)



on the cover. Give it a French name.” The book did attract a lot of interest from the press and broadcasters, but sales have been disappointing – probably, Ralph suspects, because few people knew what *Merde!* was about.

Ralph’s slightly irreverent take on life is also evident in his prolific poetry writing. In a corpus that now numbers over 1000 poems, a vast scientific and general knowledge is combined with razor-sharp observation and a cunning way with words, for example:

The praying Mantis operates with simulated piety:

It solemnly embraces the poor prey for which it prays.

(Though striving for acceptance in respectable society,

It merits no approval for it’s irreligious ways.)

Reading lines such as these, it comes as no surprise to discover that Ralph counts Gilbert and Sullivan amongst his particular interests, and reveres WS Gilbert as “a genius”.

The seeds of Ralph’s poetic talent were sown in childhood by a mother who would pen birthday verses for her children – a job that the young Ralph quickly took over. He readily attributes his interests to childhood experiences, and traces his lifelong fascination with biology to parents who “turfed me out into the garden in north-west London where I watched earthworms and



spiders and ants.” He describes, too, how his father started him off on another lifelong preoccupation. “When I was a little boy, my father used to go off to the London Esperanto Club, and he said if I could learn enough Esperanto, he would take me with him and I could stay up after nine o’clock. So I learnt Esperanto.” Ralph is now a fluent speaker of the language, often attends and lectures at international Esperanto conferences, and has written an Esperanto–English dictionary of microbiology. He also lectures in the literature department

of the University of California on international language problems. When they are not travelling for research or conference purposes, or visiting Lanna’s family in Singapore, Ralph and Lanna divide their time between their two homes, one near Oxford and their other near San Diego, an arrangement which Ralph sees as having biological precedent: “We come over here and have summers in England, and when summer stops, we go over to California. The swallows worked it out years ago, and I thought, it’s not a bad idea.”

Phycology by Fiat

*The blue-greens are not algae any more ... any more.
It seems that they’re not lost, but gone before.*

*By a stern decree despotic,
Since they’re all prokaryotic,
The poor blue-greens can’t be algae any more.*

*Euglena’s not an alga any more ... any more,
Whatever people thought of it before.*

*Its form is somewhat plastic
And its pellicle’s elastic,
So Euglena’s not an alga any more.*

*Spirogyra’s not an alga any more ... any more,
Though it passes nuclei from pore to pore,
Since it hasn’t swimming gametes*

*It’s reclassified with Trametes.
Spirogyra’s not an alga any more.*

*Red algae are not algae any more ... any more,
Though the reddest weeds abound on every shore.
Since their microsporulation
Is devoid of flagellation,
The red algae can’t be algae any more.*

*You cannot regard an alga as a plant ... as a plant.
However much you want to, you just can’t.
If it’s not too late to switch
You should throw away your Fritsch,
For the algae are not algae any more.*

Green theatre for Downing College

We are delighted to announce plans for a new Downing College theatre which will be built following a generous gift of £7.2 million from the Howard Foundation.

The 184-seat building, to be called the Howard Theatre, will create a new court to the west of the College's main quadrangle. This area has already seen great expansion thanks to the generosity of the Howard Foundation – the Howard Building which houses meeting and conference facilities was built in 1986 followed by Howard Court, a 32-room accommodation block completed in 1994.

The Theatre will be used for conferences, concerts, and theatrical productions. It will also include dining/reception rooms, associated catering facilities, meeting rooms and a full basement for services and storage.

It has been designed as an environmentally sustainable building. Made of stone, it will use ground source technology to provide heating and

cooling, solar panels to generate hot water, and 'harvested' rainwater for the building and surrounding landscaping. It is designed specifically to minimise heat loss and reduce noise pollution.

The design by Quinlan and Francis Terry LLP Architects continues the College's commitment to classicism as initiated by the College's first architect, William Wilkins (1775–1839).



Dr Alan Howard signs the deed of gift finalising the £7.2 million donation from The Howard Foundation on 7 September 2007. From left to right: Professor Barry Everitt, Master; Dr Susan Lintott, Bursar; Dr Alan Howard; Mr Jonathan Howard; Sir Anthony Grant



Mark Stroomer of Theatre Projects Consultants who are advising the Howard Foundation and Downing College on the planning and equipping of the new building, said: "The Theatre will be unique as it will combine the latest technologies within a design that has been influenced by historical precedents, including the famous Georgian Theatre at Richmond in Yorkshire, one of Britain's oldest surviving theatres."

Cambridge biochemist Dr. Alan Howard, who came up to Downing from the City of Norwich School in 1948 to read Natural Sciences and is an Honorary Fellow of the College, said: "I owe a tremendous debt to Downing College and the University of Cambridge, and it gives me great pleasure as Chairman of the Trustees to make this Gift."

"I am delighted that the new premises will be completed during 2009, during the University's 800th Anniversary celebrations, and I hope that other alumni who are in a position to do so will take the opportunity to contribute to the University's current appeal."

The Master, Barry Everitt said: "The College is very grateful to the Howard Foundation and Dr Alan Howard for this splendid new building which will use modern technology while retaining the traditional classical architecture characteristic of Downing."

"I am sure that it will become one of the finest theatres in Cambridge; it will be a superb facility for holding conferences and meetings and will also enhance the facilities available to the College's clubs and societies. Dr Howard's generous philanthropy has always enabled Downing to improve its ability to generate revenues through conferences to support its educational and charitable objectives."

Main construction works will commence in November 2007 to plans already approved by the City Council.



An exterior perspective of the Howard Theatre by Francis Terry



Warwick Sweeney/RICS



Dennis Gilbert

Inspiration will be drawn from the Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds designed by William Wilkins (above) and the Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond (centre)

Development Office

Discover the new website!

www.downingcambridge.com/development

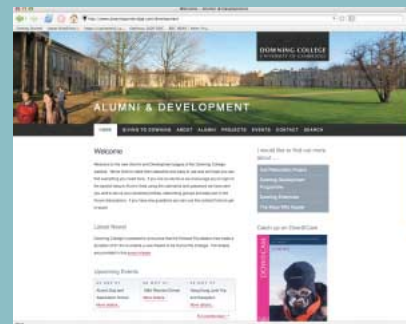
The new website was launched in spring 2007 and since then many of you have logged in and set up your personal profiles. All alumni should by now have received a username and a password to enable you to access the secure alumni only areas of the website where you can take part in forum discussions, join groups, and send messages to friends and contemporaries. You decide how much information on your profile you want to make public and visible to other alumni. You can also book online for alumni events.

Several online groups have already been set up including one for Medics and Vets and for year groups for 1973, 1979, 1980, 1985 and 1987. Please do join these groups or set up your own and encourage your friends and

contemporaries to use the service and the discussion forums.

We've had lots of feedback from you and we've made many improvements to the site since its launch to make it more intuitive and easy to use and we're continuing to make refinements. So, if you haven't visited our new webpages yet or you haven't been back for a while, please do go and see.

Why not use the facility to organise your own reunion or get together with Downing friends? If you want to visit and stay in College or organise a conference there then visit the Conference Office's part of the website at: www.downingcambridge.com/conferences.



Restoration of the Hall

The total amount raised for the Hall is now more than £1.1m of which the College has received £823,000. Donors who have given £250 or more are entitled to name a chair and those giving more than £500 can name one of the dark limestone floor tiles as illustrated. These opportunities are limited in number so please do get in touch as soon as possible if you would like to take advantage of them. You can also find more information on our website www.downingcambridge.com, click on Hall Restoration Project in the menu.



Jenny Deepprose and Victor Southan christen the boat named in honour of their father

Naming of the 'Keith Southan'

We were delighted to welcome Jenny and Colin Deepprose, daughter and son-in-law of the late Keith Southan (1930) and his son Victor Southan to the College on 17 June for the Donors Garden Party and for a ceremony at the Boathouse to name a boat in Keith Southan's honour. Mr Southan was Captain of the Boat Club in 1933–34 and left the College a generous legacy to be used for student support funds.



Tax and Estate Planning Seminar

On 10 May the College held its first 'Tax & Estate Planning Seminar for Downing Alumni' with Stephen Pallister (1982) a leading practitioner in the personal tax and trusts field and also in the charities field. Stephen is a frequent contributor on tax and private client matters in the newspapers and media, appearing for instance as a panellist on BBC Radio Four's Moneybox programme and is a partner at Charles Russell Solicitors at whose main office in London the seminar was held.

100% phone success

Downing had another very successful telephone fundraising campaign this year with students calling 714 alumni in March-April and raising £132,000. The College has now received all of the money pledged for which we are extremely grateful. Thank you to all those who gave and took the time to talk to our students.

Sussex Reception

George Pulman QC (1967) kindly invited alumni in the southeast to a reception at his lovely house near Tunbridge Wells. A very pleasant afternoon was had by alumni and their families and we are grateful to George, Alice (1997) and the rest of the family for being so hospitable, even down to serving canapés!



Rooftop history of the East End

On 10 July alumni gathered on the roof of the new Allen and Overy building at One Bishop's Square near Liverpool Street Station in London to hear a fascinating talk on the history of the East End and its people by Mike Lear, a City of London guide. This was one of our regular bi-annual City Group events which are aimed at people working in City related occupations. Talks are usually about business topics but on this occasion Calvin Walker (1982), partner at Allen and Overy, provided the venue and arranged the speaker to take advantage of the fantastic views of the East End from the top of the building. Mr Lear talked about the history of the different groups that had lived and worked in that part of London from the Huguenot refugees, to the Jews and the Bengalis.

1979 Reunion



Members of the 1979 year group met for a reunion lunch in College on 30th June

Treasure in translation

Walk into any Fellow's college room, and you quickly begin to pick up the clues to their research interest: the journals on the shelves, the pictures on the wall, intriguing artefacts on the coffee table. But can there be any with such an obvious indication of pursuit as that of Downing's Dr David Pratt? The first thing you notice, propped up on the floor beside the desk, is a vastly enlarged print depicting the Alfred Jewel.

For David Pratt, the conventional interpretation of the Jewel as a book pointer fits well with what we know of the great man as a ruler for whom learning and study were of the utmost importance. And, thanks to the extensive documentary record, we know more about Alfred than about any other Anglo-Saxon king. That being the case, why spend any more time on him? In fact, to quote the opening sentence of David's recently-published book on the subject: "Is there anything left to say about King Alfred?"

David describes how, as an undergraduate historian, his interest in Alfred was first sparked when he did his third-year dissertation: "I've

always been interested in political thought, and it struck me that there was a bit of a lacuna in the early medieval period. I was then bowled over by this series of late ninth-century texts, attributed to the West Saxon king."

Many of the texts in question were translations from Latin to Old English of sections of the Bible as well as other works such as Augustine's *Soliloquies* and Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The translations, David explains, would have been produced with the assistance of scholars recruited from neighbouring kingdoms, but with – modern scholars believe – the certain personal involvement of the king. "They are," he says, "relatively free

translations, and some of the departures are very revealing of the way the court saw itself. You gain a rich sense of what the king was up to."

To continue his research would require facility with Latin and with Old English, neither of which David possessed. Not to be deterred, he applied for a scholarship run by Christ's College. The successful award meant that by selecting courses from the ASNaC (Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic) tripos, he could acquire the necessary ancillary skills to start grappling with the translations in earnest.

He found that the body of texts presents a coherent vision of a reorganised kingdom, and clearly describes the political structures and the resources required for successful rule. But at the heart of it all, David argues, is the theological concept of wisdom. "This was a crucial concept for Alfred, and one that probably has its origins in a Biblical model of King Solomon, who asks God not for wealth but for wisdom, and then receives not only wisdom but other riches as well."

David then extended this work by relating the texts and their messages to the wider social and political context of a kingdom that was extraordinarily successful, not only in defending itself against an almost imminent Viking threat but also in expanding, reorganising and fortifying itself – notably through building a network of fortified towns or 'burhs' across the land. Such a programme would have required a "mind-boggling" amount of manpower and resources, and thus the support and co-operation of local

Biography in brief

David Pratt first came to Downing in 1991 to read History. After graduating, he was awarded the Robert Owen Bishop Scholarship at Christ's College, where he also did his PhD. After three years as a Research Fellow at Emmanuel, he returned to Downing in 2001. David's extra-curricular activities also have a historical bent: he has a keen interest in architectural history and classical music, although he regrets not having played his violin "for too long". He also enjoys walking up mountains, an activity which he sees as the perfect metaphor for writing a book: you need a lot of stamina, and just when you think you're there, there's another bit to climb.

The Political Thought of Alfred the Great is published by Cambridge University Press (2007).

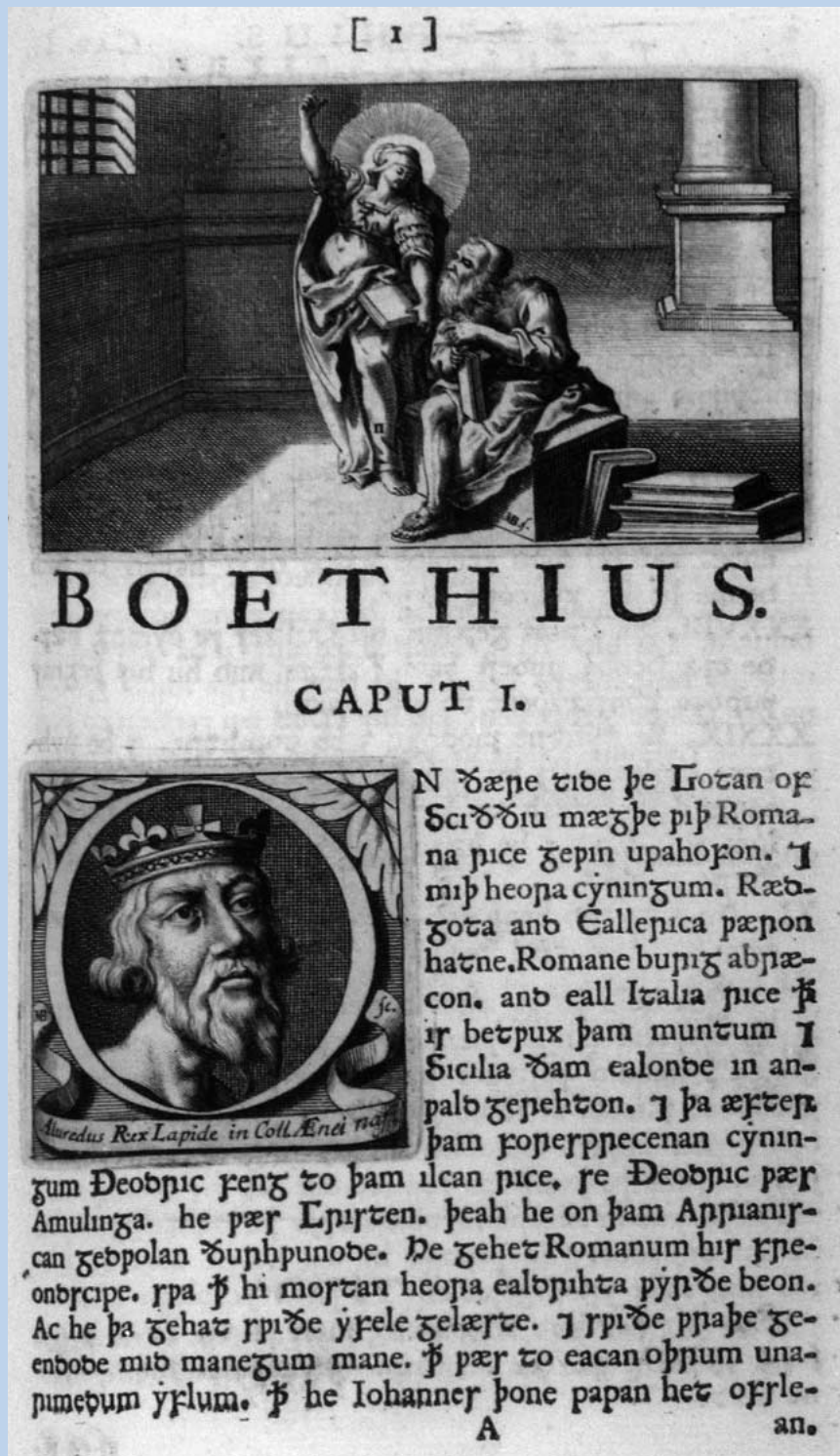




– management of land, distribution of power and so on. Visiting sites can also help to enhance the picture. But all this, says David, is just part of the task: “There is a strong ‘perspirational’ element to historical research, but one is constantly engaged in a process of imagination. And to that extent, an important part is having time to think and reflect and to return afresh to the things you’re looking at. It’s perhaps a slightly neglected view of what being a historian involves.”

David says that during his time as a Research Fellow at Emmanuel College, he found the swimming pool was especially conducive to post-lunch reflection. Unfortunately, Downing has yet to invest in this particular research facility, but he has found plenty of other benefits, not least the opportunity to teach. He enjoys engaging with students week by week, and sees it as very much part of the public communication that a historian has to engage with. “I say to students, ‘An essay is a public act. You are engaging publicly with historians who have declared some kind of position, so there’s a form of argument – and one that should be accessible to a wider, historically interested public.’”

With his book now published, David is contemplating moving on – in historical period at any rate – to look at the nature of tenth-century kingship under Alfred’s successors. He also has plans to work on the texts of early medieval coronation orders of service, which apparently reveal “a remarkable continuity” with the coronation liturgy that we have today. However, David is clear about the possibilities and the limitations of these sorts of correlation: “Ultimately, the benefit is perhaps that it helps us to appreciate our own world and recognise its richness and complexity. But I think if we try and make direct connections, then we lose something about the intrinsic difference of these past societies. Here are the origins of many of the structures we see now, and that’s important because there are certain features of continuity. But I wonder if that isn’t underselling the interest of the period, because to me these are still alien worlds, and it’s the challenge of reconstructing an alien world and piecing together the framework of understanding that clever people had at that time.”



people. David believes that the texts, whose messages were disseminated through Alfred’s promotion of scholarship and learning, were instrumental in its success. “One can see a binding ideology that held the kingdom together,” he says. “They were, if you like, persuasive tools to strengthen the king’s position.”

So was this an early form of propaganda? “Well, some have used that term,” says David, “but I think it’s a bit strong. It’s all too easy to see this ideology as a form of brainwashing, but actually

it’s something much more delicate, something that played with plausible contemporary aspirations that we might appreciate but not fully understand. There’s actually a very complex game going on here. Indeed, we shouldn’t be surprised by the fact that past societies were enormously complex, and we owe it to them, perhaps, to try and piece that together.”

To do the ‘piecing together’ of the operational aspects, David draws on documentary records such as charters that convey snapshots of king’s activity

Animal attraction

Like millions of other London commuters, Becky Coe's day starts with an hour-an-half's train journey she'd be happy to do without. But once out of the station, her walk to the office offers a dramatic change of scene, taking her into the leafy confines of Zoological Society of London (ZSL) London Zoo, where she works as an Education Officer.

"First thing in the morning is a lovely time," she says. "A lot of the animals are making noises. We've got a pair of gibbons that sing, and it's the most beautiful, haunting noise."

Becky has always been fascinated by animals. "I can definitely trace it back to childhood. I didn't have a big menagerie, although I probably would have done if I'd been allowed. I remember desperately wanting terrapins and my mum not letting me because they can carry salmonella."

Childhood curiosity led to a first degree at Downing in Natural Sciences, specialising in Zoology, followed by a PhD at Edinburgh researching the calls of Australia's bowerbirds, which – inevitably – involved long periods of sitting in the middle of Queensland's

outback with a tape recorder. Although she enjoyed field work, Becky wasn't especially keen on "sitting in front of a computer fiddling with numbers". Realising that she wanted to do something that involved people as well as animals, she did an MSc in Science Communication at Imperial College, London. Whilst still on the course, Becky began to work part-time at the Science Museum as an Explainer. Describing the role, she says, "You're timetabled to particular galleries and you're there, highly visible in an orange tee-shirt, so any member of the public can ask you questions. You have to be quite proactive as well, talking to people about what they're doing. But it's never about trying to tell people the answers but encouraging them to interact with the exhibits and work things out for themselves."

Fired with enthusiasm

As well as giving school groups introductions to galleries she would also do shows. She recalls one called 'Flash, Bang Wallop!': "The highlight was firing a Barbie doll from a human cannon, which the children absolutely loved. She would smash against a wall and sometimes a limb would fall off – and that was even better!"

Becky clearly has an aptitude for performing – she declares an interest in dramatic activity and, whilst at Downing, membership of the dramatic society – something which must be a distinct asset in this line of work. Now, as an Education Officer at ZSL London Zoo, she spends much of her time running sessions for visiting school parties. So, as Becky says, "You're





A Pygmy Marmoset at ZSL London Zoo

continually performing, and for each school, it's their special day, so you have to give them your best."

The activities all plug into the National Curriculum, and schools can book a session to suit their age group and curriculum interest. 'Hands-on', for example, shows Foundation-stage children the difference between mammals and reptiles by getting them to touch real skins and asking: How does a tiger feel? How does a crocodile feel? The Education Centre is in fact strewn with animal artefacts. (A gigantic stuffed turtle very close by exerts a sort of silent presence throughout this interview.) All are confiscated goods kindly loaned by Customs and Excise.

Live and scurrying

The beastly treasure trove has its uses, but the Education Department is trying to move away from the classroom environment to put children directly in contact with the live animals. Becky has started to do sessions around the zoo itself, including a tour of African animals in which she gets the children to join in with an African action rhyme. She also enthuses about the newly-opened 'classroom' attached to the biome of the Clore Rainforest Lookout exhibit, where children can view small Goeldi monkeys scurrying about during the session.

Summer has always been the busiest time, but this year has been busier than ever, with over 25,000 children

coming through the centre since Easter. The team of education officers were working flat out, five sessions a day, five days a week. Becky says that one of the biggest challenges is having to switch from GCSE students one session to four-year-olds the next. She loves the enthusiasm from the younger children. "In our session on British wildlife, we talk about puffins and get them to guess how many sand eels a puffin can hold in its beak," she says. "When we tell them the greatest recorded number is 63 there's always a gasp, and once I even got spontaneous applause!"

Animal ambassadors

She also enjoys working with older children, when there is the opportunity to engage with zoology on a deeper level and also to talk about the zoo and its work in a broader context. Because, she points out, the zoo is part of a complex system. "There's breeding of endangered species, there's research going on in the zoo itself, we're involved in conservation – and of course we're actually part of a much larger organisation, the Zoological Society of London. It's not just about the animals you see here in the collection – although we think of them in a way as ambassadors for their wild cousins."

Now, as never before, children have access to films and documentaries showing animals in their natural habitats. But Becky strongly believes that, valuable though these things are,

nothing beats real-life interaction. "I'm a great fan of David Attenborough and his programmes, but nothing comes close to coming eye-to-eye with an animal," she says. "I still find it amazing, even though I'm here every day. I think there's just something deep in human nature that responds to being close to wild animals. One of my favourite things is taking small children to see the giraffes, and there's always an audible gasp of 'They're so BIG!'. I don't think any TV programme can ever produce that sense of marvel. And I think that's the most important thing we can give them."

Biography in brief



Becky Coe read Natural Sciences at Downing (1997–2000). After working as a research assistant at Taunton National Park in Australia, she went to Edinburgh for her PhD. Since completing an MSc in Science Communication at Imperial College in 2006, Becky has worked as an Explainer at London's Science and Natural History Museums and is now an Education Officer at London Zoo, covering for maternity leave. She can't imagine doing anything she would enjoy more and hopes to be able to stay on – although she would be very keen to follow in David Attenborough's footsteps, should the opportunity present itself.

Also a keen photographer, Becky has had her work published in the BBC's *Wildlife* magazine.

Rock 'n' rolling for Britain

It was November 2003 and Steve Romans, then a second year Downing Medic, was sitting in the Hall enjoying the entertainment at Downing College Cabaret. The next act was announced as 'Acrobatic Rock 'n' Roll Dancing' and his first thought was what an earth is that? What followed was an impressive and energetic display of dance and acrobatics. As Steve tells Dow@Cam, he just had to see it again and try it for himself.



The following Lent term I went to my first class, accompanied (after some gentle persuasion) by a friend. The teachers, Guido and Cristina, were funny and enthusiastic. They encouraged the class to have fun and kept strictly to the basics. This was in stark contrast to the rather stern, technique-focused ballroom and Latin classes I had been attending previously. Within three weeks I could flip a girl over and swing her round my back – in time to music! It was pretty clear to me that this was not just dancing; it was also a sport. It was a sport where you got to pick girls up and throw them around your body. I was keen to do some more.

A bit of luck then got me onto the University Team. One of the guys had injured himself and I, being an empathetic medical student, helped out by stealing his dance partner. Being on the dance team is brilliant, I discovered. The aims seemed pretty clear (i) to perform choreographed dance routines for the public; (ii) to compete; and (iii) to go to the pub every Tuesday. Dancing is a great place to meet people, and we see each other a lot, both dancing and socially. In fact, honouring our team motto – 'Rock 'n' Rollers do it together' – about half the team couples are also romantic couples. We all love performing; it's such a thrill and a real confidence booster when peers and members of the public are cheering because of you.



I captained the team for a year, during which time I was pleased to be able to increase the team size, choreograph a routine for the group, perform at six Cambridge balls, establish a website and bring international coaches over to Cambridge. The role also helped me to develop leadership skills, and I found the appreciation I received from the team extremely rewarding.

Around about the same time as I first joined the team, I met a rather nice-looking girl called Amy Oliver in one of the dance classes. She was from St John's College (nobody's perfect) and apparently I suggested we meet the following week, but failed to turn up. However, I think she must have forgiven 'Red T-shirt Boy' (as I was known to Amy at that point), since we're still together three-and-a-half years later. As dance partners, we've now won ten UK student open competitions and have been National Student Champions two years running. Winning for the first time in 2006 was exhilarating. I've always been addicted

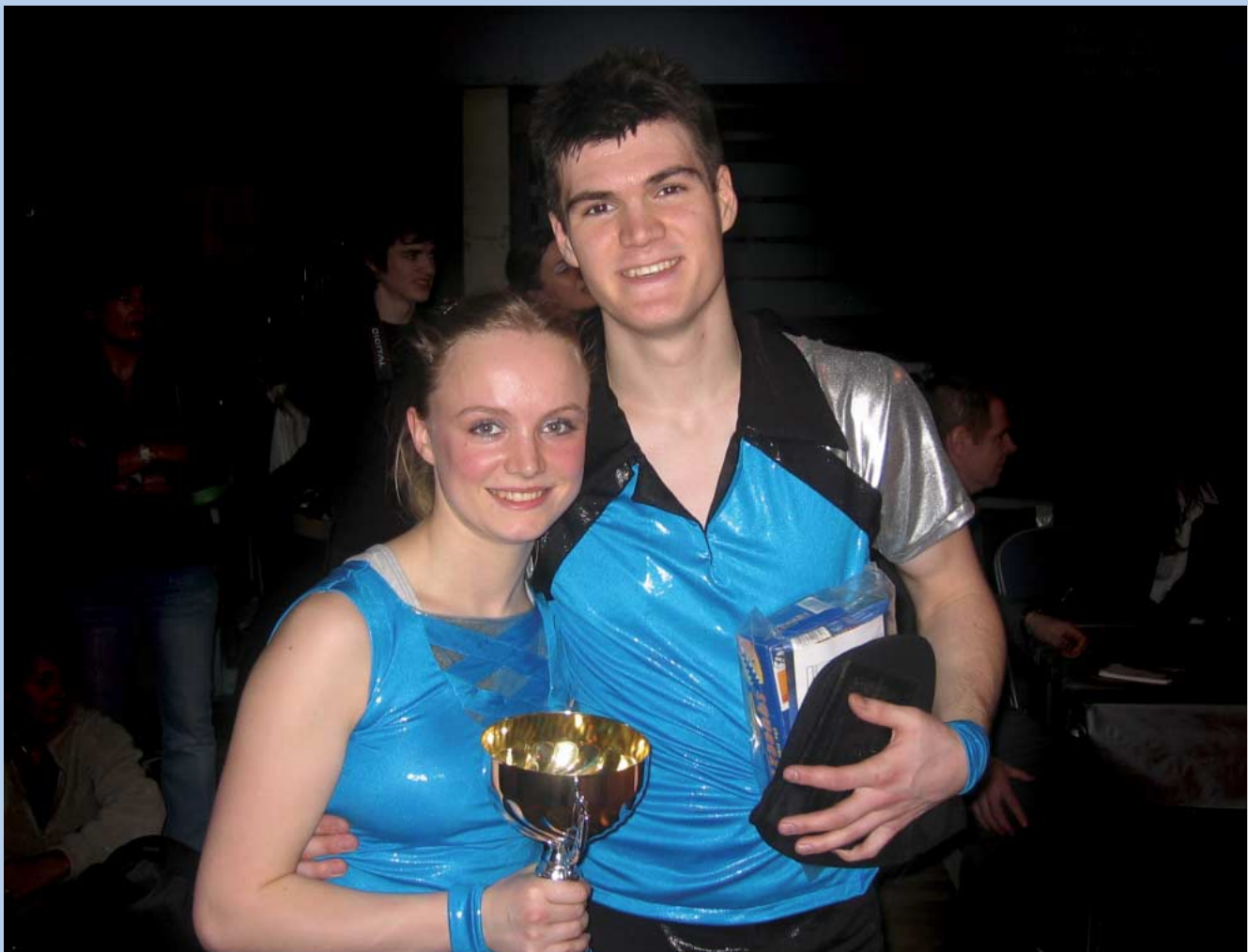
to sport, but never dreamed I could become a champion.

In 2005 we travelled to Duisburg, Germany to watch the best Rock 'n' Roll dancers take part in the first World Games. My idols were even better in real life than on film. Afterwards, we were approached by the Austrian champions, who had spotted our Cambridge Rock 'n' Roll T-shirts and were offering to fly over to Cambridge to coach us. And with the help of their invite to the official after-Games party, and a photocopier, we managed to blag our way into the plushiest party I have ever seen.

Since then we have been coached by new friends from France, Austria, Slovenia, Belgium, The Netherlands and Sweden. Everyone we have contacted has been so willing to help us reach the next level. I was especially touched when a trainer from Bosnia and Herzegovina offered to coach us for free and to put us up in his own home.

In December 2006, three couples from our club, including Amy and I, unofficially represented the UK in an international competition. Our scores were higher than anyone expected, and with support and commitment we have a good chance of reaching the finals in the future. It was thrilling to be representing our country and to be the first to do so in this sport, especially in the knowledge that as a recently-recognised Olympic event, it could soon feature in the Olympic Games. In the meantime I'm helping to form an official British Rock 'n' Roll Dance Federation, with the support of the World Rock 'n' Roll Confederation and English Amateur DanceSport Association.

As a result of that inspirational performance at the Downing College Cabaret and my decision to get myself along to a dance class, I now have a sport I'm passionate about, wonderful friends, a free ticket into May Balls and – who knows – perhaps one day a chance to go to the Olympics.



Steve with his partner, Amy Oliver (St John's College 2003)

Reunion Dinner Saturday 29 March 2008

For years pre-1951 and 1958, 1968, 1978, 1988, 1998

The date for the Reunion Dinner is now **Saturday 29 March** not 5 April as mentioned in Magenta News. This is to enable the Master to represent the College at the Cambridge in America Day in San Francisco on 5 April and to host the Reunion Dinner.

Because of the Hall restoration the Dinner will be held in a marquee but we hope that during the weekend there will also be an opportunity for you to see the restoration work in progress.

Invitations will be mailed at the end of January or for further details please visit the Development website, www.downingcambridge.com We hope that many of you will be able join us for this special occasion.

Downing College Chapel Choir heads Stateside!

In July the Downing College Chapel Choir set off on a two-week tour of Canada and the United States. The twenty-strong, student-led choir began by spending a week in Montreal, Quebec, giving evening performances at St Matthias' Church and St George's Church, and singing at services at Christ Church Anglican Cathedral where Evensong was broadcast live on local FM radio and over the Internet.

The choir then drove south to Blue Mountain Lake in the Adirondack National Park, as guests of Mr Flemming Heilmann (a Wilkins Fellow of Downing College). After singing from a launch on the lake to various surrounding guesthouses and residents, they performed an evening concert at The Blue Mountain Lake Centre for the Arts, which was recorded for broadcast by North Country Public Radio.

Moving on to Woodstock, Vermont, the choir played a central role in St James' Church four-day festival of liturgy, art and music: 'Building Faith: The Role of Space & Place in Worship'.

The tour gave the choir a chance substantially to increase its repertoire – both sacred and secular, for example it can now offer cappella jazz arrangements! The group is extremely grateful to the following people, without whom this trip would not have been possible: The Downing College Chaplain, Revd Keith Eyeons; Professor Oliver Goodenough and St. James' Church, Woodstock; Mr Flemming Heilmann; Mrs Alice Fleet; The Downing College Development Office and The Downing College Amalgamation Club.



EVENTS CALENDAR 2007

Saturday 6 October 2007

1964 Reunion Dinner

Saturday 20 October 2007

Hong Kong Junk Trip organised by
Bob Bunker (1965, Modern Languages)
and Colin Cohen (1977, Law)

Wednesday 24 October 2007 6.30–9pm

London Alumni Reception
The Commonwealth Club,
25 Northumberland Avenue, WC2N 5AP

Wednesday 5 December 2007 6–8pm

Downing City Group at Killik & Co,
46 Grosvenor Street, London, W1K 3HN
by kind invitation of
Fred Robinson (1979, Natural Science)
Speaker TBC

EVENTS CALENDAR 2008

Saturday 19 January 2008

Griffins' Annual Dinner

Wednesday 30 January 2008

Year Reps Meeting and Dinner

Saturday 29 March 2008

Reunion Dinner for years pre-1951
and 1958, 1968, 1978, 1988, 1998

Saturday 26 April 2008

Segreants Dinner

Friday 9 May 2008

London Griffins' Dinner
at The Oxford and Cambridge Club, London

May 2008 TBC

Cambridge Reception
Speaker TBC

Saturday 14 June 2008 12noon–2pm

Donors' Garden Party

Saturday 5 July 2008 TBC

Event for years 1980–85 to
Celebrate the Graduation of the first
Downing female undergraduates

July 2008 TBC

Downing City Group

Saturday 26 July 2008 12noon–2pm

1749 Society Reception

Saturday 27 September 2008

Alumni Day and Association Dinner

Friday 26 – Sunday 28 September 2008

Cambridge University Alumni Weekend
University programme of lectures and tours.

For further details or to receive a booking form
please contact Cambridge University Alumni Office
on 01223 332288, alumni@foundation.cam.ac.uk
or visit www.foundation.cam.ac.uk

*Please note that the information above may be
subject to change and you are advised to contact
the Development Office for confirmation.*

For further details on any of the events listed,
or to find out what else is happening throughout
the year, please visit the Development Office
website www.downingcambridge.com or
contact Sara Brinkley in the Development Office
on 01223 334850 or email sjb244@cam.ac.uk