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# Somerville

2017

THE GLOBAL ISSUE

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*magazine*



FILL THE WORLD WITH KNOWLEDGE

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COVER IMAGE: 'DONEC RURSUS IMPLEAT ORBEM'; WHEN SOMERVILLE WAS FOUNDED IN 1879, THE COLLEGE TOOK ITS MOTTO FROM THE SOMERVILLE FAMILY COAT OF ARMS. OVER THE YEARS, STUDENTS AT THE COLLEGE HAVE PROVIDED THEIR OWN INTERPRETATION OF WHAT 'UNTIL THE ORB IS FILLED AGAIN' MEANS TO THEM: FILL THE WORLD WITH KNOWLEDGE.

EDITORIAL: SARAH HUGHES

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# Principal's Message

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It is a pleasure to introduce this year's magazine on the theme of Global Somerville. The College has been international in its membership and its outlook from the earliest days. In the year when Mary Somerville is celebrated on the new Scottish £10 bank notes, we may remind ourselves that in one of her influential works *Physical Geography* (1848) she considered the connections between science and exploration and ranged over the known world. A global vision and life-long friendships with scientists and writers in Europe and America informed her intellectual life. Some of the earliest undergraduates to study at the college that is named after her came from far afield, as befitted an institution founded to include people from any and all nations, backgrounds and beliefs.

My own tenure as Principal, now coming to an end, has been a globe-trotting one. Travelling for reunions and on development and fund-raising trips in North America, Europe and Asia (especially India), as well as welcoming students and alumni of numerous nationalities into the College, I have been privileged to meet some extraordinary Somervillians, and I have come to understand the college's global reach in personal terms. This issue of the magazine reveals just some of those world-wide connections.

Somerville's community of alumni and Fellows has always been enriched by its links with different parts of the world. In this magazine we hear from Somervillians who have travelled and sometimes settled far away from the UK, like Judith Crosbie-Chen, Penny Minney, Anita Isalska, Nina Faure-Beaulieu and her fellow Biology students on their field trip to Borneo, and the redoubtable educationist and Africa specialist Lalage Bown who, as so many Somervillians do, is still going strong in her nineties.

Other contributors reached Somerville after starting out far away: people like the Indians Avani Vieira and Siddharth Arora, American Grace Young and the valiant Eddie Ndopu, campaigner for the rights of disabled people in South Africa and the world, who has been a leading light of Oxford's graduate student community in the academic year 2016-17. Almut Suerbaum, who reflects on the importance of exchanging cultures, is herself a German scholar who has taken root in Oxford.



DR ALICE PROCHASKA BY ALISON BASKERVILLE

We read in these pages of the work done by the College in a previous generation to welcome refugees, notably the classical scholar Lotte Labowsky – and I am reminded of our current invitation to a refugee scholar to join our ranks for the next academic year. Helen Stevenson's work translating the Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou continues a college tradition that has included such illustrious translators as Anthea Bell (translator of *Asterix* among much else) and Dorothy L Sayers, who turned from writing detective novels to translating Dante. Natalie Shenker, whose Human Milk Foundation is about to launch, finds a kindred spirit in the great Cicely Williams and her work for impoverished and malnourished mothers and children around the world. I thought about Cicely Williams (who survived Changi prison during the second world war), when I visited Singapore in July. I met there Somervillians who share, with all the people represented in these pages, an adventurous global outlook and a commitment to public service.

If I may conclude this introduction with a note of personal farewell: it has been a great honour to serve Somerville as its Principal for the past seven years. The articles in the Global Issue of the Magazine remind me yet again, how proud I am of this college and its inexhaustible record of remarkable alumni who serve the world in so many ways. I hope all of you who read these pages will give a warm welcome to my successor Baroness Jan Royall, a committed internationalist too, as she inherits this extraordinary tradition.

# News & Events...

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PRINCIPAL ELECT, JAN ROYALL



## SOMERVILLE NEWS

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The Fellows of Somerville College have elected **Baroness Royall of Blaisdon** as their next Principal, in succession to **Dr Alice Prochaska**, who will step down at the end of August 2017.

Baroness Royall says, 'It is a pleasure and a privilege to have been appointed as the next Principal of Somerville. I look forward to working with academics, staff and students to build on the work of Alice Prochaska in this wonderful College where teaching and research of the highest quality are celebrated.'

'I am proud that I will be part of a vibrant community that is meeting the challenges of today, whilst finding solutions to the problems of tomorrow. My aim is to ensure academic excellence, whilst reaching out to young people with potential from all backgrounds so that our future leaders will reflect the diversity of our society. I am determined that Somerville's future will be as exceptional as its past and present.'

Jan Royall has had a distinguished career in politics, notably becoming Government Chief Whip in the Lords, appointed to the Privy Council and in 2008 became Leader of the Lords and a member of the Cabinet.

PROFESSOR ADITI LAHIRI



## FELLOWS AND STAFF

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Somerville's Professor of Conservation Biology and Director of the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development, **Professor Alex Rogers**, received national media coverage for his expeditions to deep-sea Bermuda and West Scotland.

Somerville's Lecturer in Music and Philosophy, **Dr Toby Young**, was awarded a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) for his project titled 'Transforming the Operatic Voice.'

**Professor Fiona Stafford** published a new book: *The Long Long Life of Trees*.

**Dr Elena Seiradake** was awarded a Wellcome Trust Senior Research Fellowship for her research into the role of adhesion G-protein coupled receptors (GPCRs) in brain development.

**Professor Aditi Lahiri** was awarded a European Research Council grant for her project titled 'resolving morpho-phonological alternation: historical, neurolinguistic and computational approaches.'

**Will Dawes** was appointed as Director of Chapel Music.

**Dr Annie Sutherland** won the Beatrice White Prize 2017 for her book *English Psalms in the Middle Ages, 1300-1450*.

Three Somervillians, **Jo Ockwell**, **Dr Quentin Miller** and **Dr Siddharth Arora** were presented with Oxford University Student Union awards for teaching and student support.

BRIGITTE STENHOUSE



## STUDENTS

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**Brigitte Stenhouse** (Mathematics, 2012) was awarded a Gibbs prize for her dissertation on Mary Somerville.

In a record year, 13 Somerville Students were awarded Principal's Prizes, up from the eight that were awarded last year. The tally will be even higher for 2017.

**Grace Barnes** (Medicine, 2013) won the Clinical School Year 4 Practice Essay Prize for her essay on her GP placement in South Wales.

**The Oxford Belles'** music video for International Women's Day featuring Alice Prochaska was picked up by multiple news outlets and retweeted by celebrities, including Cindy Lauper.

Somerville Engineering Science and Zoology post-graduate student, **Grace Young** (2014), was named as one of 14 global Emerging Explorers by *National Geographic* and offered an opportunity to work with NASA.

Somerville announced that planning permission has been approved for the **Catherine Hughes Building** – a new student accommodation building, scheduled to be completed by October 2019. If all goes according to plan, any student applying to the College in 2017 will be able to live on-site for the entirety of their three-to four-year undergraduate degree.



## BARONESS WILLIAMS OF CROSBY



## ALUMNI

Honorary Fellow **Baroness Shriti Vadera** (PPE, 1981), Chairman of Santander UK, was described as leading the way in post Brexit Banking – *the Financial Times* labelling her ‘Baroness Brexit’.

**Rachel Sylvester** (English, 1988), a journalist for *The Times*, won the Political Journalism prize at the British Journalism Awards and the Political Studies Association (PSA)’s Journalist of the Year award.

Honorary Fellow **Baroness Williams of Crosby** (PPE, 1948) was made a Companion of Honour in the New Year’s Honours List and awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Civil Law at Encaenia.

A further three Somervillians were recognised in the New Year’s Honours List: **Rachel Griffiths** (English Language and Literature, 1967), **Professor Kamila Hawthorne** (Physiological Sciences, 1978) and **Caroline Ross** (Modern History, 1993).

**Jean Fooks** (Physics, 1958) has become the Lord Mayor of Oxford.

Somerville Honorary Fellow, renowned British Philosopher and crossbench member of the House of Lords, **Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve** (Philosophy and Physiology, 1959), was awarded the 2017 Holberg Prize.

**Gwyn Morgan** (Jurisprudence, 1972) was made an OBE in The Queen’s Birthday Honours List.

## THE 2017 OICSD CONFERENCE



## THE OXFORD INDIA CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The OICSD hosted over 100 key players from academia, industry, government and civil society in a two-day conference, entitled *A complex recipe – why food is about more than what we eat: nutrition, power and the environment*.

Somerville hosted the Indian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, **Mr Dharmendra Pradhan**, who addressed a gathering of Oxford academics on policy initiatives in India to increase access to clean energy.

Somerville launched the **Cornelia Sorabji Scholarship in Law** and welcomed the first Cornelia Sorabji Law Scholar, **Divya Sharma**.

The OICSD, in partnership with the High Commission of India in the UK, invited more than 100 guests to India House to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Cornelia Sorabji.

Delegates from the OICSD at Somerville attended a reception at Buckingham Palace to launch the UK-India 2017 Year of Culture.

Alice Prochaska was invited by O.P. Jindal Global University in Sonapat, Haryana, to speak on a panel of many distinguished guests, chiefly the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, who inaugurated the event.

A conference was hosted jointly by the OICSD and the Tata Trusts at the Habitat Centre in Delhi. *Nutrition, Power and the Environment: Delhi 2017* was a follow-up event from the inaugural conference of the OICSD.

## THE 2017 SOMERVILLE GAUDY



## UPCOMING EVENTS

<b>13 -14 Sep</b>	1967 50th Anniversary Reunion
<b>16 Sep</b>	Luncheon open to all alumni as part of University Alumni Weekend
<b>17 Sep</b>	Luncheon and Symposium for year representatives
<b>10 Oct tbc</b>	The Somerville City Group: Q & A with Baroness Royall
<b>14 Oct tbc</b>	2007 Matric 10 Year Reunion Lunch
<b>19 Oct</b>	The Somerville London Group at the East India Club: Sherard Cowper-Coles and Dr Jane Darcy on Jane Austen
<b>28 Oct</b>	Literary Luncheon: Fiona Stafford on <i>The Long, Long Life of Trees</i> , hosted by Baroness Royall
<b>20 Nov</b>	Carol concert
<b>20 Nov</b>	The Somerville London Group at The Oxford and Cambridge Club: Reception for Baroness Royall
<b>2018 tbc</b>	1987 Matric Reunion Dinner
<b>3 Mar</b>	Somerville Medics AGM
<b>10 Mar</b>	Winter/Spring Meeting of the Somerville Association
<b>16-18 Mar</b>	Oxford Alumni weekend in Rome; details to follow at a later date

A reunion luncheon will be organised for 1957 to celebrate their 60th anniversary. Date tbc.

If any other year would like to celebrate a special anniversary, please contact Liz Cooke and Lisa Gyga

# Commemorating

Somervillians who have died

## HONORARY FELLOWS

**Jennifer Jenkins**  
Hon Fellow 2004 on 2 Feb 2017 Aged 96

**Ruth Mary Thompson**  
(1971; Hon Fellow 2009)  
on 10 Jul 2016 Aged 63

## ALUMNI

**Jean Austin**  
*née* Coutts (1937) on 26 Jul 2016 Aged 97

**Judith Barbara Barrow**  
*née* Hicklin (1964) on 12 Jun 2016 Aged 69

**Elsbeth Beckett**  
*née* McIntosh (1947) in Dec 2016 Aged 87

**Elizabeth Lynne Black**  
*née* Austin 1959) on 13 Sept 2016 Aged 79

**Mary Bowen**  
*née* Anderson (1944) on 21 Jun 2016 Aged 90

**Muriel Kathleen Bradshaw**  
*née* Quick (1947) on 17 Jun 2016 Aged 87

**Harriet Brookland**  
*née* Carswell (1969) on 14 Jul 2016 Aged 65

**Diana Margaret Brown**  
*née* Clements (1957) on 20 May 2017 Aged 80

**Elizabeth Foster Browne**  
(1943) on 16 Jun 2017 Aged 91

**Mary Burns**  
*née* Goodland (1933) on 11 Jul 2016 Aged 101

**Marie Corney**  
*née* Thurman (1966) on 22 Dec 2016 Aged 78

**Valerie Hermine Dundas-Grant**  
(1941) on 29 Jun 2016 Aged 92

**Gillian Laura Condie Falconer**  
(1944) on 27 Oct 2016 Aged 90

**Rosamund Elaine Fantham**  
*née* Crosthwaite (1950)  
on 11 Jul 2016 Aged 83

**Annis Ruth Harriet Flew**  
*née* Donnison (1949) on 8 Mar 2017 Aged 86

**Enid Pamela Roslyn Fouace**  
*née* Marshall (1938) on 7 Nov 2016 Aged 97

**Jean Mary Hamblin**  
(1948) on 16 May 2016 Aged 86

**Mercy Irene Heatley**  
*née* Bing (1939) on 5 Sept 2016 Aged 94

**Louise Margaret Campbell Hirst**  
*née* Campbell (1969) on 22 Aug 2016 Aged 65

**Diana Johnson**  
(1954) on 22 Nov 2016 Aged 81

**Mary Rignall Kenyon**  
*née* Humphrys (1941) on 9 Jan 2017 Aged 94

**Glenys Lesley Kerr**  
*née* Whysall (1961) on 20 Apr 2016 Aged 73

**Anne Pinsent Keynes**  
*née* Adrian (1942) on 28 Mar 2017 Aged 92

**Moira McColl Thorn Large**  
*née* Sydney (1946) on 5 Mar 2017 Aged 91

**Ivy Margaret Lee**  
*née* Cox (1943) on 30 Jan 2017 Aged 91

**Eleanor Joan Littleboy**  
(1943) on 4 Jun 2016 Aged 90

**Sheila Jean MacLeod**  
(1958) on 1 Nov 2016 Aged 77

**Celia Ann Male**  
*née* Carr (1955) on 7 Mar 2017 Aged 79

**Rosalind Mary Maskell**  
*née* Newcastle (1947) on 7 Sept 2016 Aged 88

**Mavis Evelyn Mate**  
*née* Howe (1953) on 20 Oct 2016 Aged 82

**Sylvia Meek**  
(1973) on 11 May 2016 Aged 61

**Prisca Mary Faith Middlemiss**  
*née* Mills (1967) on 15 Dec 2016 Aged 68

**Helen Moira Minter**  
*née* Knox (1971) on 31 May 2016 Aged 63

**Elizabeth (Biz or Bess) Murray**  
*née* Hickson (1951) on 31 Mar 2017 Aged 83

**Christine Linda McCree**  
(1972) on 28 Nov 2016 Aged 63

**Pamela Ayres Neville Sington**  
*née* Neville (1981) on 1 Mar 2017 Aged 57

**Joanna Mary Gordon Nicholson**  
(1984) on 1 Sept 2016 Aged 50

**Aleida Elizabeth Mabel May Roosegaarde (Betty) Norman**  
*née* Bisschop (1940) on 2 Mar 2017 Aged 95

**Joy Northcott**  
(1985) on 25th Jan 2017 Aged 51

**Rafael Baptista Ochoa**  
(2015) on 6 Apr 2017 Aged 23

**Christian Mary Parham**  
*née* Fitzherbert (1950)  
on 23 Apr 2017 Aged 84

**Henrietta Frances Phipps**  
*née* Lamb (1950) on 27 May 2016 Aged 84

**Priscilla Elise Read**  
*née* Roth (1965) on 17 Jul 2016 Aged 69

**Sheila Rosemary Richards**  
(1948) on 6 Sept 2016 Aged 87

**Ann Lorna Katharine Ross**  
*née* Chubb (1948) on 28 Jul 2016 Aged 86

**Katharine Elizabeth Mary Ross**  
(1940) on 7 Nov 2016 Aged 95

**Elizabeth (Liza) Shaw**  
*née* Mrosovsky (1955) on 26 Dec 2017 Aged 80

**Elizabeth Mary (Lis) Shephard**  
*née* Taylor (1955 ) on 27 May 2016 Aged 79

**Angela Sinclair Loutit**  
*née* De Renzy- Martin (1939)  
on 18 Aug 2016 Aged 92

**Caroline Margaret Storr**  
*née* Crawford (1969) on 21 Jan 2016 Aged 67

**Anne Symonds**  
*née* Harrison (1934) on 6 Feb 2017 Aged 100

**Janet Elizabeth Tanner**  
(1954) in 2016 Aged about 79

**Ann Gaynor Taylor**  
*née* Hughes-Jones (1946)  
on 23 Feb 2017 Aged 88

**Rosemary Thomas**  
*née* Toye (1976) on 2 Oct 2016 Aged 58

**Pauline Bladon Topham**  
(1947) on 4 Apr 2017 Aged 89

**Dorothea Wallis**  
*née* Back (1943) in early 2017 Aged 92

**Rosemary Theodora Walz**  
*née* Graves (1953) on 30 Nov 2017 Aged 82

**Ann Whitaker**  
(1946) on 8 May 2017 Aged 94

**Betty Williams**  
*née* Rollason (1947) on 8 Mar 2017 Aged 88

**Jacqueline Isabel Woodfill**  
*née* Iselin (1940) in Apr 2017 Aged 94

**Janet Lydia Wright**  
*née* Giles (1959) in May 2016 Aged 75

*These Somervillians were commemorated in a service in the College Chapel on Saturday 10th June 2017. This important event in the College calendar underlines the enduring relationship between Somerville and its former members.*

*If you know of any Somervillians who have died recently but who are not listed here, please contact Liz Cooke at [elizabeth.cooke@some.ox.ac.uk](mailto:elizabeth.cooke@some.ox.ac.uk) or 01865 270632.*

# Cicely Williams

A PIONEER FOR WORLD PAEDIATRICS

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Founder of the Hearts Milk Bank, Dr Natalie Shenker (Physiological Sciences, 1997) writes on the life of Dr Cicely Williams (Physiological Sciences, 1917) – one of the first female doctors to officially graduate from Oxford University and Jamaica's first female doctor.

DR CICELY WILLIAMS ON A VISIT TO GHANA  
(THE WELLCOME TRUST, LONDON)



Sometimes, an unexpected email can start a process of reflection that has even more unexpected consequences. For me, that email came several months ago when I was asked by Somerville to write a piece on Dr Cicely Williams. I had spent the previous year working around the clock, unpaid and largely out on a proverbial professional limb, to establish the Hearts Milk Bank (HMB) – a centre that will combine human milk banking and research. Given Dr Williams' interest in this area, they thought it would be an interesting fit. That was rather an understatement.

The HMB aims to solve two issues: the postcode lottery of access to screened donor milk, which can be the difference between life and death for premature and sick babies, and the lack of funding for research into breast milk, a rich but substantially under-researched biofluid responsible for the growth and evolution of our species. My PhD in epigenetic biomarkers of breast cancer risk at Imperial, combined with the arrival of two daughters, pulled me into the world of breastfeeding – a world that can be as murky and political as a thriller.

I confess now that I had never heard of Cicely Williams. As I read more about her, I began to feel a deep sadness about this, compounded by the fact she died in 1992, aged 98, just five years before I started to study medicine myself at Somerville. I would have liked to ask her views on all sorts of issues, and expect I would have received straightforward and forthright answers, but it would have been her insights into the field of infant feeding and maternal health that I would have loved to have heard.





BIRTHDAY CARDS GIVEN TO WILLIAMS BY HER FELLOW PRISONERS IN 1944

Cicely Delphine Williams was born in 1893 to a family that had settled in Jamaica 14 generations previously. Her mother had established a health clinic for young mothers in Kingston, and before she was dispatched to boarding school, a young Williams and her sisters provided an emergency service using their own first aid skills by cycling out to islanders in need.

In 1912, Williams passed the Oxford University entrance exam, and was accepted by Somerville to read History. Shortly afterwards, Jamaica suffered three major natural disasters, and she was summoned back to help rebuild the island's infrastructure. When war broke out, her chances of returning to England collapsed so she travelled to Boston for work experience in the Harvard Pathology Laboratory. She had found her niche. A quirk of the British wartime Visa Office in 1917 enabled her to return to Somerville, providing she studied to become a doctor as a result of the shortage of male doctors. With the resolution to confer BA medical degrees on female students passed in the same year, Williams became one of the first official female doctors to qualify from Oxford. Given that one of her anatomy lecturers at the time resolutely refused to teach women in the same room as the men, this was no small achievement.

She developed a passion for paediatrics and subspecialised in nutrition. However, her working life in the UK was a stifling mess of misogyny and unfulfilled opportunities, which ultimately led her to manage a refugee centre in Greece after the 1923 Graeco-Turkish war. She supervised the introduction of basic health interventions, including sanitation and anti-mosquito policies. After completing a Diploma of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, she was promptly sent to Ghana by the Colonial Health Service, where she took up the drive against endemic malnutrition.

At the time, the paediatric consequences of malnutrition were known to encompass marasmus and various vitamin deficiencies. Williams would listen carefully to the mothers, and recognised that an entirely separate condition occurred in children who were suddenly weaned from the breast when a new baby was born, as they were given a maize-based diet consisting almost entirely of carbohydrates.

These toddlers developed lassitude, protruding abdomens and wasted limbs, and in 1934 she published the first case series of what would become known as kwashiorkor, severe protein deficiency. It was received poorly by the medical establishment, who dismissed her findings, leading her to write, 'These men in Harley Street couldn't believe you unless you wore stripy trousers.' She published a larger series in *The Lancet* a year later, taking an Oxford doctorate as a result, but her work won her no friends with either her local colleagues or the civil service. Williams's spectacular outburst over a child forcibly discharged from her care, resulting in their apparently avoidable death, led her to be transferred in disgrace to Singapore in 1936.

After her experiences with impoverished London and African mothers, she had witnessed first-hand the dangers to a child of inadequate breastfeeding in resource-poor settings. As outspoken as ever, she was an early critic of companies that marketed tinned alternatives in developing countries. She had discovered that sales representatives dressed as nurses would tour the slums of Singapore, persuading mothers to try the earliest generations of tinned formula. Her 1939 talk to the Singapore Rotary Club entitled 'Milk and Murder' was the first salvo in the battle of breast vs. bottle – a particularly bold step, as the President of the Rotary Club at the time was a member of the Nestlé family. Nestlé had previously worked with Williams in Africa to develop a feed to treat older children with kwashiorkor. She subsequently broke that professional relationship, and never worked with the food industry again, predating the first World Health Organisation (WHO) international code on this area by 40 years.

When Singapore fell to the Japanese in February 1942, Williams was incarcerated in Changi Prison with 3,000 civilians. Five months were spent under arrest as a suspected spy, during which the Kempeitai (secret police) imprisoned her in a cramped shared cage with another woman, who she helped to survive. She went on to manage the health of women and babies as best she could as commandant of the women's camp for two years, recalling, 'Twenty babies were born, 20 breastfed and 20 survived – you can't do better than that.' Birthday cards given by



her fellow prisoners are now in the Somerville Archives, testimony to her strength and resilience and to that of her fellow prisoners.

After a period of recovery, Williams was made head of the new Maternal and Child Health division of WHO in Geneva. A survey she led on kwashiorkor concluded it was 'the most serious and widespread nutritional disorder known to medical or nutritional science.' She had many roles thereafter with the London School of Tropical Medicine, The American University in Beirut, and the UN Relief and Works Agency, working with refugees from multiple conflict zones.

With a career characterised by a hatred of red tape and established norms that was unorthodox and visionary in equal measure, Cicely Williams has become a true role model to me at this pivotal stage in my own unusual career. Her appreciation of the simplicity of the most effective interventions in paediatrics – sanitation, breastfeeding and cuddles – and advancements through research and observation, are the very foundations we seek to lay at the HMB.

Beyond that, the HMB was founded largely out of frustration at the inertia in infant feeding improvements in the UK and worldwide, vividly characterised by the collapse of NHS milk bank services in London and the Southeast in 2016. Breastfeeding is no longer the perceived norm in cultures where bottles are ubiquitous, and the message of 'breast is best' has become a source of rightful anger for women who 'fail' to breastfeed, but who

are actually let down by a system that does not take this issue seriously. The public health consequences of this 70-year uncontrolled experiment are becoming apparent, and yet have still not prompted a coordinated Government-led strategy to support women to breastfeed their children in the earliest days and weeks of their lives. With 95% of women now initiating breastfeeding in the UK, but only 22% of babies receiving any breastmilk by six weeks, the issue seems almost overwhelming.

The final page of Cicely Williams's biography quotes her discussing a strategy to address the appalling disparities in health provision in Ghana: 'The whole situation is crying out for just a little initiative, just a little expenditure, and above all for a school of training for health workers and interest in the care of children.' This sentence could have been written to address infant feeding in the UK in 2017, and I almost felt she was prodding me to take further steps.

Along with a team of academics, scientists, parents, funders and strategy leads, I have therefore created a charity with the core objective of advancing maternal and infant health through supporting research and education into human milk. Something has to change to disrupt the status quo, and science may hold the key. The Human Milk Foundation will launch later this year. We are currently creating lists of problems crying out to be fixed, sources of funding, and putting together the team and the strategy. I just wish Cicely was around to advise. I hope she would have loved it.

DR CICELY WILLIAMS BEING AWARDED THE ORDER OF MERIT IN 1976



# Lotte Labowsky

EXILED GERMAN SCHOLAR,  
VALUED SOMERVILLIAN

In the 1930s, Somerville was one of several Oxford colleges to offer refuge to academics fleeing persecution in Germany under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime.

*By Somerville Archivist, Kate O'Donnell*



Within months of Hitler's rise to power, scores of prominent Jewish professors had been dismissed from their posts. In April 1933, the economist William Beveridge founded the Academic Assistance Council (AAC) and the following month the AAC made its first appeal to universities across Britain, asking them to help persecuted and exiled academics with offers of work and sponsorship.

Somerville's Principal, Helen Darbishire, rose to the challenge and was particularly active in Oxford's refugee projects. She established a fund for the assistance of dismissed German women scholars, appealing to the Association of Senior Members via that year's annual report. The Council minutes of October 1933 noted that the Principal and Fellows had already agreed to offer temporary appointments where possible and Frau Dr Margarete Bieber, the former Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Giessen, was one of the first to benefit. She was offered an Honorary Research Fellowship and hospitality for three terms. Dr Bieber was also engaged to give a course of lectures, funded jointly by the women's colleges.

Over the following 12 years the College assisted other German scholars, including the Egyptologists Dr Kathe Bosse and Dr Elise Baumgartel, the Classicist Dr Herzog Hauser and the Hittite Scholar Miss Leonie Zuntz. Somerville's funds were limited and it deployed its financial resources as effectively as possible, offering meals or accommodation as well as research grants. The Classicist Dr Lotte Labowsky had the longest and closest association with Somerville, eventually becoming a Fellow of the College.

Lotte Labowsky was born in Hamburg in 1905 into a distinguished Jewish family of lawyers. Her schoolfriends included the daughters of Aby Warburg, the art historian and cultural scholar. Labowsky studied Classics and Philosophy at Munich and took her DPhil at Heidelberg in 1932; she then worked as a voluntary assistant



at the Warburg Library. She was prevented from sitting the state examination due to the anti-Jewish laws introduced in 1933, and sought a way to leave Germany. In 1934, the Warburg Library moved to London, becoming the Warburg Institute, and she was invited by the Institute, at the recommendation of fellow scholar (and the Institute's future Director) Gertrude Bing, to England to continue her research. By the end of 1934, she was in Oxford. Assisted by Gilbert Murray and his wife, Lady Mary, she was introduced to Somerville's Classics tutor, Mildred Hartley, who became a close friend.

As a voluntary assistant at the Warburg Institute, Labowsky worked on the *Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi* and Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies, supported by grants from the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL, the successor to the Academic Assistance Council). Her financial circumstances were precarious, and her family situation more so, with her parents still in Hamburg. They finally joined her in Oxford shortly before the outbreak of the war and a note in the College archives records that Labowsky managed to take her furniture out of Germany in readiness for their arrival.

In January 1939, Somerville's Council held a special meeting to discuss assisting the refugee scholars further; the SPSL had to reduce its funding and the Council allocated a sum from the Research Reserve Fund to distribute as grants. The Council also decided to provide board and lodging for one or two scholars, the aim being to assist those who would benefit most from being in Oxford. In February 1939, Helen Darbishire wrote to Labowsky to offer her meals in the College as a guest of the Senior Common Room. Four months later, she was offered a research grant, establishing a formal connection with the College which would continue for another fifty-two years.

During the Second World War, the College and its Principal did what they could to support the refugee scholars. Helen Darbishire wrote testimonials to keep Labowsky from internment

## DISMISSED GERMAN WOMEN SCHOLARS.

Members of the A.S.M. may be interested to know that the College has been able to invite Dr. Margarete Bieber, who has been dismissed from her Professorship at Giessen University, to come to Oxford to lecture and to carry on her researches for the present academic year. Miss Bruce is kindly giving her hospitality.

In consultation with the Fellows of the College, I have opened a Fund for the assistance of dismissed German women scholars whom the College resolves, on the ground of the value of their contribution to learning, to invite to work or teach for a period in Oxford. I am not making an appeal outside, but if any old students are interested and would like to contribute, I shall be very glad.

HELEN DARBISHIRE.

The Principal reported that she had heard of two eminent German women scholars who had been dismissed from their appointments in Germany owing to their Jewish nationality. It had already been agreed by herself and the Fellows that if possible an endeavour should be made to offer them temporary appointments here.

The Academic Assistance Council was prepared to help in such cases by a grant equal to the amount offered by the College. The Principal hoped to open a fund for subscriptions to augment College payments.

The Principal had communicated with Fraulein Noether, formerly Professor of Mathematics in the University of Gottingen, and with Dr. Bieber, a distinguished archaeologist, and it had been hoped to make it possible to offer both of them work in Oxford during the present academic year. The Principal had since heard that Fraulein Noether had been obliged to accept an offer to lecture in America this year. The other women's colleges had agreed to finance Lectures for Fraulein Bieber for two hours a week in the Hilary and Trinity Terms, and it was probable that an opportunity to lecture for the Ashmolean might be offered. Miss Bruce had offered hospitality to Fraulein Bieber for three terms.

and she also wrote to the Under Secretary of State at the Home Office to appeal for the release of her father Norbert Labowsky, interned in June 1940. Renewal of her grant and an honorarium for assisting in the Library helped Labowsky to continue her work on the *Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi*, she being the sole scholar left working on that project by October 1941. In 1943, she was appointed Acting Librarian at Somerville, a post she held until 1946, whereupon she became the Lady Carlisle Senior Research Fellow and later an Additional Fellow and Member of Governing Body. She was also a Senior Research Fellow at the Warburg Institute.

Labowsky's association with Somerville lasted until her death in 1991. She remembered the College in her will with a number of generous bequests, including a collection of antiquarian books, a painting by the German expressionist Paula Modersohn-Becker, and funding for an English tutor, the Fellowship named in honour of Somerville's late English tutor, Rosemary Woolf. The archives also hold an intriguing collection of papers concerning a portrait of

Heine, painted by Isodor Popper in Hamburg in 1843. The artist's descendant, Martin Popper, and his wife, gave the portrait to their relative, Mrs Labowsky, before she fled to Oxford. The Poppers were killed in Theresienstadt concentration camp. In 1970, the painting was collected from Mrs Labowsky's safe keeping and returned to Germany. It now hangs in the Heinrich-Heine-Institut in Dusseldorf.

Labowsky was one of many scholars who sought and found refuge in academia in Oxford and across Britain. The support offered by institutions and individuals, via sponsorship, paid employment and testimonials, was lifesaving. In return, the exiled academics brought with them the ethos of European scholarship, assimilated the culture and approach of their adopted country and contributed, professionally and personally, to intellectual, academic, and community life.

The Society for the Protection of Science and Learning continues its work and is now called the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA).



# Almut Suerbaum

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EXCHANGING CULTURES

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Somerville's Fellow and Tutor in German, Professor Almut Suerbaum, came to Somerville in 1990 and has since become a part of the long tradition of the teaching of languages at Oxford University.

In September of 1914, anthropologist and former Somerville student Beatrice Blackwood (1908) was given a watercolour painting of the summer home of 18th century poet, philosopher and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. She had recently returned home from visiting her German friends and they gave her the picture as a reminder of their time together, adding a dedication in the style of Goethe on the back:

'Waking, Beatrice saw it every morning: Goethe's calm tranquility renewed. Take this German greeting with you – take it with you across the sea'.

Over the years, this gesture has come to mean much more than just an exchange of gifts between friends, but has become a visual representation of Somerville's commitment to German and the importance of the exchanging of cultures. 'It is a very touching reminder of culture links, which are the result of connections between people,' says Professor Almut Suerbaum, Somerville's Fellow and Tutor in German.

The painting was given to Suerbaum by her predecessor, Olive Sayce, who was Somerville's German Lecturer, then Fellow from 1946 to 1990. Sayce also inscribed it on the back, exhorting Suerbaum to pass it on to her successor. 'It's a symbol of how important German was to Somerville from very early on, but also of how much the exchange with another culture has meant. I think that's a very Somervillian thing to do.'

Somerville is known for its inclusivity and pioneering spirit, but lesser known is the role women's colleges played in making languages a universally respected subject. Somerville offered French and German long before the University established them as honour schools in 1903. Today, a Somerville German student can claim to be part of one of the oldest, largest and most active German departments in the United Kingdom.

Options range from Eighth-Century German writings to studying contemporary films. There is a wide choice of topics from German philosophy to film and linguistics. Furthermore, all students in language subjects spend a year abroad. Suerbaum expresses how exciting it is to see students develop during this year. 'They've developed and experienced for themselves what it's like living in another culture and exploring what it might mean to their own identity.'

Suerbaum's own interest in languages was ingrained from a young age thanks to an 'incredible' English teacher at her school in Osnabrück. Her A-Level subjects were in the sciences – Physics and Maths – but she eventually returned to German, Classics and Semitic Philology. She was awarded a scholarship by the German National Scholarship Foundation to spend a year in Oxford, where she studied at Lady Margaret Hall.

'Oxford is the kind of place that you dream of,' says Suerbaum, 'because it's such a vibrant community where I got to know fellow students from all over the world but also because of the sense of excitement and passion for all aspects of a subject. Experiencing this polyphony of different views was very exciting.'

After her graduate degree, Suerbaum held research posts in Germany and in Oxford until she eventually came to Somerville in 1990. She joined the Governing Body at Somerville as the discussions about going mixed began and remembers feeling very impressed by a community in which opinions were held very strongly and were articulated very forthrightly.

'What I saw as special about Somerville – the inclusiveness, the liberal spirit, the international outlook – wasn't actually gender specific,' says Suerbaum. 'These values are at the core of Somerville and not necessarily to do with the fact that it was just for women.'



## SUERBAUM WITH THE WATERCOLOUR PAINTING OF GOETHE'S SUMMER HOUSE

She recalls that once the decision had been taken to go mixed, those who had opposed it were committed to making it a smooth transition. 'It struck me as very Somervillian – having strong views but also recognising that others may have good reasons for coming to a different conclusion, and in the end working together to achieve the best for the College overall.'

Quite soon after she arrived, Suerbaum realised that Somerville had one of the largest groups of medievalists in Oxford. She suggested they should have lunch together and quite quickly it emerged that there were areas in their work that overlapped. Thus, the lunches evolved into the Somerville Medievalist Research Group – an informal set of meetings that grew into workshops, then publications. Their first book, *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, was published in 2010 and their second book, *Polemic: Language as Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Discourse* appeared in 2015. Work on a third volume on *Temporality*, is under way.

In her own academic work, Suerbaum has been looking at the use of song in mystical writing and has collaborated with colleagues from musicology on rare German manuscripts. These works tie into her more general research interest in the relationships between cultures in the Middle

Ages which has been the subject of an EU-funded Marie Curie network – Latin and the vernacular, manuscript and voice, lay and institution and the role in which gender plays in negotiating such cultural tensions.

'The medieval songs I have been studying are often written by or for women and are a way of translating between cultures,' she explains. 'They often take their inspiration from really *recherché* theological ideas about how one encounters God and what it means to try to express the inexpressible. These ideas are then transposed into a vernacular which is accessible to lay people.'

Suerbaum is entering her 27th year as a Somerville Fellow and recommends Somerville to any talented prospective students who wish to pursue a degree in German. 'Learning any language is an amazing way of exploring a slightly different version of yourself,' she says. 'In another language you are still going to be recognisably yourself, but you will also always have that freedom of reinventing yourself.'

'Somerville, because of its history, is a particularly suitable place to do that. It embraces the fact that different people do things differently, but what it gives to everyone is that sense that it's exciting to take intellectual risks and to become someone you never thought you might be able to be.'

# Siddharth Arora

REMOTE TECHNOLOGIES FOR PATIENTS  
ALL OVER THE WORLD

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Applied Mathematician Dr Siddharth Arora (Mathematics, 2008) is an Early Career Fellow at Somerville College, with funding from Parkinson's UK. Here, he discusses his work developing simple and inexpensive remote technologies to improve the quality of life for Parkinson's patients all over the world.

**W**hat makes us tick, what inspires us and tickles our curiosity? I find it extremely fascinating to ask these questions and understand why we do what we do. Personally, a lecture that I attended about 15 years ago significantly helped shape my research interests. I still remember that day vividly: the lecture was on Synchronisation in Dynamical Systems, the topic was maths-heavy and, to make things worse, the lecture was scheduled post-lunchtime on a hot summer day. I give complete credit to the lecturer for keeping the class engaged by connecting the theoretical concepts of synchronisation with examples from real life.

During the lecture we learned about fireflies synchronising their flashes (as part of their mating display!), neuronal networks exhibiting synchronous firing (whereby alterations in synchrony are associated with neurological disorders), and crickets synchronising their chirping. This lecture helped invoke my fascination for patterns that occur in nature, especially the murmuration of starlings (which I give as an example during my lectures), dew drops on spider webs, shells and synchronisation of firefly flashes. This fascination inspired me to analyse and quantify such patterns. Hence, after my undergraduate studies, I decided to undertake research in applied mathematics, focusing on synchronisation in dynamical systems and time series forecasting.

Over the past few years I have been fortunate enough to work in different application areas, such as: synchronisation (in neuronal networks); macroeconomics (modelling gross national product); energy (forecasting national electricity demand and smart electricity meter data); climate (modelling temperature anomaly); and healthcare (analysing breast tissue autofluorescence). One of the main joys of working in applied mathematics is to see your work being

used in real life. I found it quite rewarding to work with the NHS on a project that aimed to develop models for forecasting the number of arrivals at A&E departments across hospitals in the West Midlands. Future estimates of attendances are useful for informing hospital staffing decisions. Although I work in different application areas, the underlying theme of my research is to develop models that can quantify various patterns. The rationale of my work lies in estimating a model using patterns observed in the historical data, and then using the trained model to generate forecasts for varying lead-times/horizons. The focus of my research is to generate probabilistic forecasts – and not just a point estimate – so that the underlying uncertainty and risk is adequately reported and taken into account during policy and decision-making.

Currently, I am working in healthcare, focusing on developing a remote diagnostic support tool for detecting and monitoring the symptoms of Parkinson's disease (PD). PD is the second most common neurodegenerative disease. The hallmark PD symptoms include tremor, rigidity, bradykinesia and postural instability. Unfortunately, there is no cure for PD, yet. Existing tests for PD assessment and monitoring require in-clinic patient examination, which incurs considerable staff time and logistical costs. Social and demographic factors have been also shown to contribute to disparities in care and outcomes. For example, compared to whites, African Americans are four times less likely to receive any treatment for PD. Such disparities can result in late diagnosis, high patient dropout rates and poor treatment and care. Crucially, our understanding of PD symptom fluctuations is quite limited, as symptom-monitoring by a movement disorders specialist or neurologist is recommended every six months. To try and overcome these limitations associated with PD detection and monitoring, we are using a smartphone





DEW DROPS ON SPIDER WEB  
(BY FLICKR USER DEVRA)

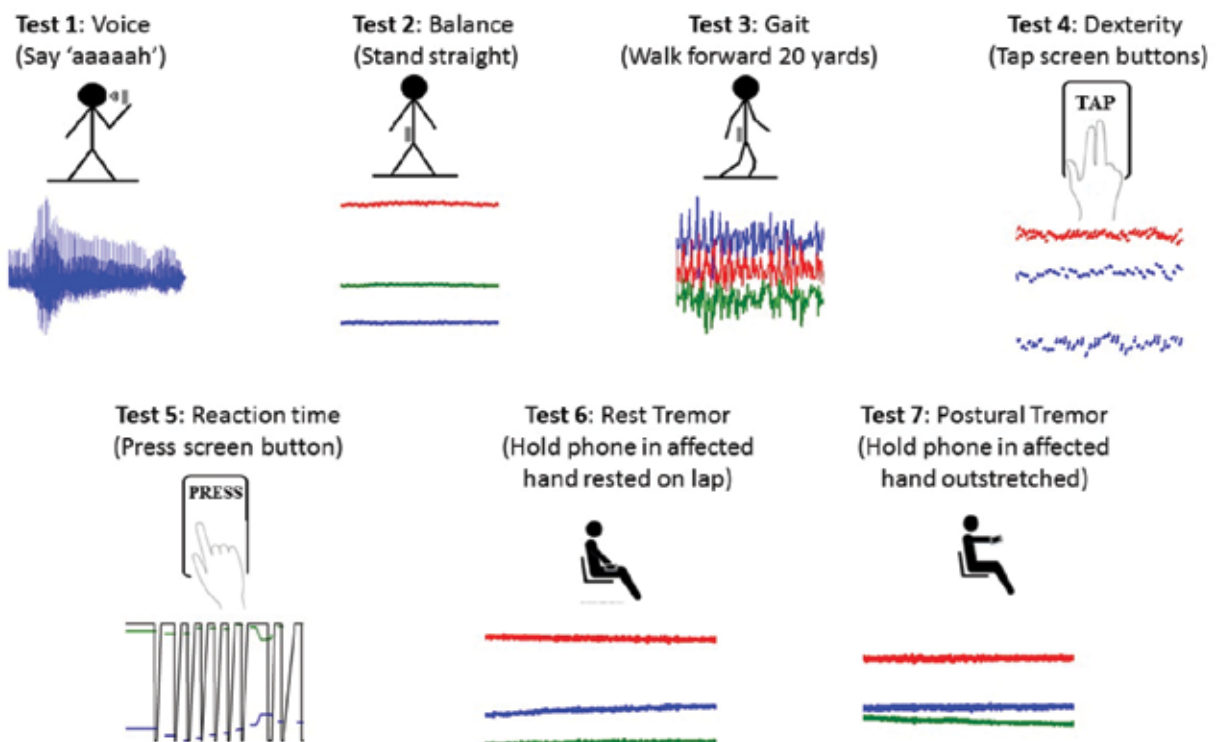
SPIRAL PATTERNS IN A SHELL  
(WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

STARLING MURMURATION  
(BY FLICKR USER AD551)

technology that can measure and quantify the key motor symptoms associated with PD, such as: voice, balance, gait, dexterity, reaction time, rest tremor and postural tremor. The data is collected using the in-built smartphone sensors such as the tri-axial accelerometer, gyroscope, microphone and touch screen sensors. In collaboration with the Oxford Parkinson's Disease Centre, we have been collecting this data as part of a large-scale smartphone trial from a cohort of PD participants, age-matched controls and PD at-risk individuals. Using this sensor data, we have been developing algorithms that quantify patterns of motor impairment that are specific to PD. Using these patterns, we detect and monitor the severity of symptoms associated with PD. The goal of this study is to replicate

the clinical diagnosis as closely as possible using only the smartphone data. I hope this research would be a small step in paving the way forward for remote precision medicine in PD and other related neurological disorders. My long-term vision is to help develop diagnostic support tools for different neurological disorders and contribute towards improved healthcare, especially for people living in rural areas.

Looking back, I feel that what started as a boring post-lunchtime lecture has taken me on a beautiful journey, whereby I have the joy and pleasure of playing with different patterns, and the satisfaction of seeing my work have some practical application.



SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING THE SEVEN SMARTPHONE TESTS THAT ARE USED TO MEASURE AND QUANTIFY KEY MOTOR SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE (PD).

# Anita Isalska

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TRAVEL WRITER



If you think writing about travel involves sitting on a beach, notebook in one hand and cocktail in another, think again. Travel journalism is seldom glamorous, but it's a thrilling career for a curious mind. Anita Isalska (Philosophy and Modern Languages, 2001), Somervillian and freelance travel writer, talks us through a typical day...if such a thing exists.

## 08:00

Since I went freelance, commuting has taken on an entirely new meaning. Depending on the assignment, my journey to work might involve a Barcelona-bound plane, a shared taxi in Tel Aviv or (my favourite) needlepoint bends up to a tiny Transylvanian village.

My last few years as a freelance writer have been madcap. I've contributed to travel guidebooks on Bulgaria, Spain and Malaysia for *Lonely Planet*, reviewed Greek beach resorts for *The Telegraph*, explored Chernobyl and Icelandic volcanoes for CNN, and penned features on Lithuanian folklore, Greenlandic icebergs and Tasmanian food for, well, anyone who's paying.

Making a full-time success of travel writing means squeezing as much as possible from every trip. Forget spending weeks immersing yourself in a remote culture; these assignments are rare delights. Juggling destinations and deadlines is a wonderful challenge but I do spend a lot of time in airports (or singing along to the radio in a rental car).

## 10:00

My current assignment has brought me to Jerusalem, where I'm working on the next edition of *Lonely Planet's* guide to Israel & the Palestinian Territories. It's a huge challenge to conduct research that does justice to the diverse religious communities in what is probably the world's holiest, and most deeply disputed, city.

The sheer number of sacred places means there's no time to hide from the midday sun; most of my day is spent outdoors, trekking around archaeological sites, getting caught up in processions of Orthodox pilgrims, queuing to enter shrines. My humble sarong has never enjoyed quite so many uses: draped over my head, or shoulders, or around my legs, to meet the differing modesty requirements of Jerusalem's Muslim, Jewish and Christian sights.



A RAINBOW OF DIFFERENTLY COLOURED HOUSES IN ILULISSAT, GREENLAND





ICEBERG BOBBING OFF THE SHORE IN WESTERN GREENLAND



BAHAI GARDENS IN HAIFA, ISRAEL



BULGARIA'S STOB PYRAMIDS; ACCORDING TO MYTHS, A WEDDING PROCESSION TRANSFORMED TO STONE

## 11:00

Reviewing hotels is a large part of travel writing and 11am is the golden hour for getting a glimpse inside. Last night's guests have checked out and today's haven't yet arrived, so it's my best shot at snooping around the hotels I don't have time to stay in.

Some publications prefer me to be stealthy and pose as a potential guest, so the hotel doesn't try to charm me into a favourable write-up. At other times I admit I'm a journalist and wheedle my way in for a tour. Sometimes staff don't notice me at all, because a guest sneaks me inside or I stay the night incognito.

When reviewing a hotel, nosiness is as important as attention to the design, history and amenities. Does that mattress look bouncy? Are they showing you the only room with a decent view? And is that a cockroach floating in the Jacuzzi? The priciest hotels are sometimes the worst offenders when it comes to hygiene (something to ponder over your next breakfast buffet).

## 13:00

I used to cringe at the idea of dining solo in a restaurant, but now it's second nature. Travel writers enjoy plenty of lunches with colleagues and locals along the way, but it's a requirement of the job to be absolutely at ease with a table for one.

As a former French student I'm biased, but some of my most memorable meals have been in France. I've written extensively about the Auvergne, and sampling bleu d'Auvergne cheese, rich

truffade and perfectly seared steaks doesn't exactly feel like work. Dining alone forces you to savour every mouthful thoughtfully, undistracted by dining companions.

Depending on the country, a diner alone – in particular a woman – can attract astonished stares. Sometimes local cultural expectations about women are the source of the surprise, and occasionally it's concern for my safety. I've also fielded a great many enquiries about where my spouse and children are (mysteriously, it's a question that my male colleagues rarely seem to hear). Unfortunately my answer, that I'm unmarried and child-free, furrows brows even more deeply.

The only possible response is to smile broadly and order another glass of wine. Provided there is no disrespect to a local custom, a woman should never feel apologetic about her presence in a public space.

## 17:00

Museums are shutting, markets are winding down and commuters rush home. Meanwhile restaurants and bars are quiet. This is the dead zone of the day, so I'm likely to be checking into my hotel for the night and jamming my suitcase full of complimentary toiletries. Time zones permitting, I'll Skype my partner or WhatsApp my mother (who naturally assumes I'm bedridden with dengue fever or kidnapped by pirates unless I send her regular selfies).

But this isn't the time to wind down. On sponsored trips where a PR company or hotel allows me to stay

gratis, they always get maximum mileage out of the journalist in their midst. On a recent assignment in Corfu for *The Telegraph*, I rocked up at my hotel – sweat-slicked and unkempt after a day of research – and tried to smile broadly while an immaculately coiffed marketing pro led me on a two-hour tour of the hotel. No spa treatment was unexplained, and barely a single room was unexplored. I dutifully took pages of notes while gazing longingly at the infinity pool that I wouldn't have time to swim in...

## 21:00

Here in Jerusalem, I've hooked up with a local journalist who promises to show me some wine bars off the beaten track. She scoffs at my proposed meeting time.

'No one goes out before at least midnight!' she exclaims. Nonetheless we start early, clinking glasses of Mt Carmel cabernet sauvignon under the stone arches of a candlelit bar in downtown Jerusalem. In between gossip about local scandals and dodgy hotels, a familiar thought arises. A thought that I have on almost every trip, when I start to feel a pang of yearning for the place: 'Maybe I could live here...'

As the hours tick by, it would be easy to fret about my long drive tomorrow, the photos I have to back up, and the update I should send my editor. Instead I sip from my wine glass and decide that at the end of a long day, this is one piece of research that I simply mustn't rush.



REPORT ON THE SECOND

# *Oxford University Alumni Weekend in Asia*

24 -26 MARCH 2017

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Expectations had been high following the success of the inaugural Oxford University Alumni Weekend in Asia (which had taken place in Hong Kong back in March 2014) and the second Alumni Weekend did not disappoint. Judith Crosbie-Chen (Jurisprudence, 1982) reports.



The formal Weekend programme was preceded by a series of events in Hong Kong, including a reception for alumni hosted by the University in the Penthouse of Jardine's House – Hong Kong's first true 'skyscraper' and the tallest building in Asia when it opened in 1973.

The University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, started the reception with some remarks about the recent achievements of the University in world rankings and was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Professor Nick Rawlins (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Development and External Affairs), at which Professor Anne Davies (Dean of the Law Faculty), Mr Miles Young (Warden of New College) and Professor Steve Cowley (President of Corpus Christi College) analysed the reasons for the University's distinctive strengths as well as its 'future in an uncertain world.' In the spirit of good Oxford debates, no firm recipe for academic relevance over so many centuries was unanimously agreed upon but the panel charmed the local attendees by confirming that Asian academic talent as well as philanthropy indisputably plays a significant role in the University's current success and this influence and contribution is only expected to grow in the decades ahead.

The panel's comments were the topic of many conversations the following evening at Somerville's alumni cocktail party – held at the Continental Restaurant in Pacific Place, Admiralty – which had been organized by Raj Nihalani (PPE, 1997) as well as Lisa Gyax (PPE, 1987), Joint Secretary of the Somerville Association. Unfortunately the Principal had to cancel the Hong Kong and Singapore legs of her Asian trip due to a wrist injury but Fellow and Director of Development Sara Kalim (Classics, 1990) stepped into her ambassadorial role at this event, as well as a number of other lunches and gatherings during the University's visit to both Hong Kong and Singapore. Her vivid description of the College's vision for the next few years, as well as details of recent campaigns and the search for a new Principal after Dr Alice Prochaska's retirement later this year, triggered lively conversations amongst all the alumni present. Many alumni had attended the 2014 Hong Kong junk trip, but the "new-comers" brought fresh ideas and perspectives to the debate and were warmly welcomed.

The Singapore weekend events took place in another landmark architectural building, this time the Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre, which is entirely built on reclaimed land. At the time of its opening in 2010, it was billed as the most expensive standalone casino property in the world. Somerville's Singapore alumni cocktail party, again organised by Lisa Gyax, took place on the Friday evening at the more discreet Peach Garden restaurant. It was once again well attended by numerous alumni from different generations and academic programmes, who enjoyed the chance to reflect upon their experiences at Oxford, as well as their relationships with the College and the University after graduation.



JUDITH CROSBIE-CHEN WITH DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR SARA KALIM AT THE ALUMNI WEEKEND

The University's formal academic programme took place the following day, with speakers including the academics who had spoken in Hong Kong along with a number of colleagues. These included Professor Rhodri Lewis, Professor of English Literature and Director of the Ertegun Scholarship Programme in the Humanities (who somewhat bravely tried to convince the audience that Shakespeare intended Hamlet to be played by a teenage actor), as well as Professor Jim W Hall, Professor of Climate and Environmental Risks, who focused his lecture on water security issues.

The day's lectures were followed by a black tie University gala reception and dinner, which took place in the world's largest glass greenhouse at the Flower Dome of Gardens by the Bay overlooking the Marina Bay skyline. Tickets sold out weeks before, as capacity was capped at 300 attendees, although probably double the number of tickets could easily have been sold. Musical entertainment was provided by the Keble College Choir, though I am reliably informed that the Somerville Choir would have been a better choice! Glamour and elegance, as well as interesting and animated conversation, were not in short supply.

The following day's programme included brunch at the British High Commissioner's residence, Eden Hall, built in 1904 in the late Edwardian classical revival style, followed by the Oxford and Cambridge Alumni Boat Race which was organised by the Oxford and Cambridge Society of Singapore. However, I chose to miss these events to catch up with a very dear Singaporean Somervillian who had cut short her business trip to Shanghai to meet up with me for a few hours before I flew back to Hong Kong to join my family.

As we sat eating brunch at Spago's restaurant on the 57th floor of Sands Casino both of us questioned why it had taken over a decade to coordinate our schedules despite the relatively small geographical distances between us. However we were delighted that the second Oxford University Alumni Weekend gave us a perfect excuse for the long overdue rendez-vous. We resolved to buy our black tie dinner tickets early for the third Oxford University Asia Weekend in 2019.



# Helen Stevenson

TRANSLATING AFRICA'S SAMUEL BECKETT

This year, Helen Stevenson (Modern Languages, 1981) was longlisted for the 2017 Man Booker International Prize for her translation of Alain Mabanckou's *Black Moses* – her fifth translation of the Congolese author's work. She has been working with the author since 2004 and has translated five books to date. She writes on how she has become Mabanckou's English voice.



HELEN STEVENSON BY ANDREW CROWLEY

I never imagined that I would become a professional translator. I remember discovering the multiple pleasures of literary translation, sitting in a room on the ground floor at the far end of Somerville with Adrienne Tooke, the Tutor in French, teasing out the sense of Flaubert, finding rhythms to match the original, catching the spirit of the French text and rendering it in English. It was many years before I fell into translation as a career.

I translated several different authors before I was matched, by an adventurous publisher, with Alain Mabanckou, a French Congolese writer who grew up in Pointe Noire, where the Congo river flows out into the sea. Alain is a charismatic figure, hugely popular in France – a black intellectual, satirist, poet, novelist, adored by magazine editors. In the 15 years since I began translating his books, his face, beneath his signature cap, has become as well-known as his writing. Alain's novels have been described as tragicomic; he is often referred to as Africa's Samuel Beckett.

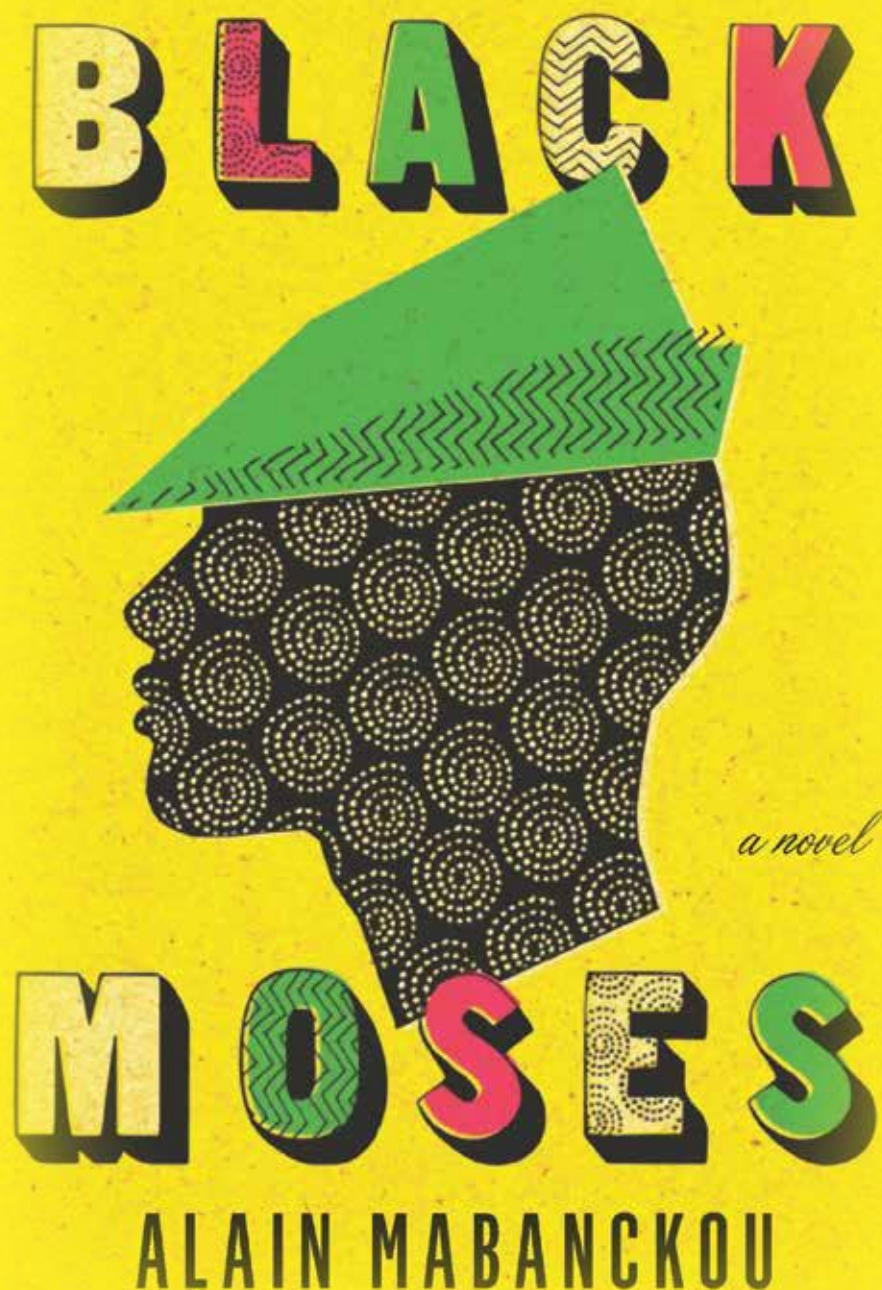
It was an unlikely match. I knew shamefully little about West Africa, despite having studied French and lived in France for much of my adult life. Even hugely important dead writers like Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, didn't feature on the syllabus when I was an undergraduate, and it never occurred to me that there was a whole literature of French African writing which I had never touched upon. 'Francophonie' wasn't heard of when I was studying in the 1980s. (There were also very few women on the syllabus.)

The first book of Alain's that I translated (I've just finished the fifth) was called *Verre Cassé*, (*Broken Glass*). It is constructed similarly to Camus' *La Chute*. A drunk in a bar in Brazzaville meets a series of other people who've washed up there and who tell terrible, funny, heart-rending stories that flood onto the page. I was living in London at the time, and I'd listen out for African voices in the street and in cafes, trying to find equivalent rhythms for Alain's characters, how they might have sounded if they'd spoken in English. There is no punctuation in the book, so it gushes out at you – as I translated it I felt as though I was being swept down a river on a log at high speed! Through the book, Mabanckou weaves in 300 or so titles of books by mostly African writers – a dispersed bibliography that peppers the narrator's speech, creating a reading list of works which I'm still discovering.

Now Alain Mabanckou is an August Professor of Francophone Studies at UCLA, dividing his year between Paris and Los Angeles. He recently gave a series of lectures at the College de France, which is a bit like being invited to give a series of lectures at the Sheldonian. Although he could have an American translator, he sticks with the person least like him, in some ways, he could possibly find – European, white and female. It's possible he appreciates my total absence from the world he lives in; it means I engage only with his words, not with an idea I have of them based on a wider experience of his everyday life. On the other hand, he and his family stayed with us when we lived in a small town in rural France. When we spent time



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY HELEN STEVENSON



ABOVE: COVER ART FOR BLACK MOSES

BELOW: STEVENSON AND MABANCKOU AT THE WORLD LITERATURE WEEKEND 2010



together, I became familiar with his speaking voice which is strangely pitched, both high and very low, with the middle range almost entirely absent, and with his laugh which is so present on the page: a pained chuckle of disbelief. That was a help too. As his voice in English, I have to be able to impersonate him. His written French, learned at the Karl Marx Lycée, is beautiful and exact, almost mockingly so. I often feel as though I'm translating a subversive send-up of the writers I studied at Somerville, and of myself as a diligent, fastidious Francophile reader.

I've learned hugely from translating Alain's work. My world has become wider, deeper, and I see and hear more keenly. I've never been anywhere near the Congo, though my grandfather worked on ships that sailed between Liverpool and the West Coast of Africa in the 1920s and 30s, so maybe I'm drawn there by a kind of poetic yearning. But the smells, the vegetation, the light, the street sounds, the animals, the food, the voices, the politics and history of the Republic of the Congo are things I have only discovered through the writing of this one man.

Last year, the school my children attend published a booklet setting out the advantages of studying a language. Parents had been invited to explain how the knowledge of a second language had affected their lives for the better. One worked in the nuclear industry and said he found it useful to be able to conduct meetings with EDF Energy in French. Another was a vet who liked to be able to speak in German to pharmaceutical companies. But in learning a language you acquire more than the advantage of being able to communicate in the interest of striking a good deal, say, or landing a great job. In addition to the joy of speaking another language fluently, with all the endlessly nuanced understanding of different people and culture that entails, there is also a quieter pleasure to be had, one of the intellect but also of the soul.

When I translate, everything I find words for comes from the author. Through Mabanckou I've connected with prostitutes, mercenaries, addicts, vagabonds, pedants, politicians and crooks (and come to understand better those I realise now are all around me, and even inside me – that's what great writing does). I even understand books I first read as an undergraduate far better as a result. Through translating his novels I've stepped into his world – a vast, colourful and tumultuous world, conveyed by the written word made almost flesh.

# Penny Minney

## SOMERVILLIANS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: A JOURNEY FROM MALTA TO ISTANBUL IN THE 1950S

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In the summer holidays of 1950 after her second year studying Classics at Somerville College, Penny Minney (née Hughes, 1953) with fellow classicist Sally Hinchliff (1953) embarked on what would become a 1,500-mile voyage on an open boat across the Mediterranean sea.

Greece grabbed me young, I was seven years old when I started to try and learn Ancient Greek under my older brother's tutelage. The culture held a magical attraction: it had conquered Rome and is a remote origin of much of what we prize as British. The peak of my Classics career was studying it at Somerville. Somerville gave its students every encouragement to set their targets high, overcome constraints and follow their passions.

In contrast to the utilitarian drabness of Britain in the post-war years, Egypt and Greece were places of mystery, hence the widespread interest in the books of emigrés like Lawrence and Gerald Durrell, and Paddy Leigh-Fermor. In the 1950s, however, the post-war foreign currency allowance was £50 a year and in any case, most students were penniless. Greece was recovering from the terrors of WWII followed by civil war and Turkish hostilities. Dreaming as we studied for fifth-term exams, huddled over a coal fire, fellow classicist Sally Hinchliff and I decided we would somehow acquire a boat and get it out to the Mediterranean. We both were keen sailors, members of the Oxford University Yacht Club. We wrote to Captain Naish, the father of a fellow member, who was stationed in Malta and who replied with an unexpected suggestion. Sally wrote to her parents:

'Our summer holiday is at last fixed up. Penny got a letter from a father of a friend of hers in Malta, saying he could buy us a ship's lifeboat complete with sails for £90 – ideal for us, really small, slow and uncomfortable but absolutely safe and seaworthy, meant for use in gales. The idea is to go out and sail about Malta until we know the climate pretty well, then try and get to Sicily (70 miles, which would only take about 24 hours) if we feel confident enough.'

For finance, Sally offered fortnightly timeshares of potential sailing. We signed up a third co-owner in Robin Minney, ex-Oxford and a rowing friend of my brother, now working for Shell in East Africa. He agreed to meet us in Malta or Sicily. My father, writer Richard Hughes, who loved sailing adventures all his life, became the fourth owner and lent us his Seagull Long-shaft Outboard and prismatic compass.

After three weeks of preparations in Valetta we were ready to set out. It was dusk by the time the skyline of Malta behind us dropped below the horizon. Ahead was empty sea. It was an extraordinary feeling to be in the middle of such emptiness, with big lazy waves ambling past on a diagonal course to us, humping first the stern, then the bows, and with only 18 inches of planking as protection against whatever that sea might throw at us out of the darkness. But dawn revealed the mountains







PATMOS - PILGRIM PATH



MINNEY COOKING DINNER



THE WATERFRONT AT SKIATHOS

of Sicily on the horizon. We reached Syracuse but the weather deteriorated. We just managed to get back to lay up the boat in Valetta for the winter before term started.

Luckily Sally's parents did not initially realise the scale of our ambition and assumed my father would favour safety for his daughter, not wild adventure. Over the next three summer vacations we got as far as Istanbul, and then Rhodes – a total of about 1,500 miles.

Food was bought day by day. Our galley (kitchen) was a small primus and when you used it at sea, it required one hand to hold it in place on the central thwart, and the other to hold the cooking pot in place. Mostly, when we rested in the middle of the day, we lit a fire on the shore for slow cooking while we swam and took siestas.

The next year, 1956, we followed the coast of southern Italy, and then crossed from Otranto, on the heel of Italy, to Greece. We left at the end of the three-day festival of the 800 Martyrs of Otranto, fireworks lighting up the evening sky behind us.

Living on an open boat has huge advantages. You don't keep hitting your head, you don't suffer from the whiffs of escaped calor gas in the bilges and you get brown quickly. There can be bizarre moments, as when we were moored to the main ferry quay in Patras, since there was at that time no separate small boat harbour. 'It's sugar' I heard, 'No, it's salt', 'That must be cinnamon'. I looked up from my cooking and counted 109 people on the quay looking down and watching me cook.

Many people in Greece and other places shared the tradition of hospitality we had read about in Homer. In the little harbour of Galaxhidi on the North side of the Corinthian Gulf, we became aware that we had lost two tins of two-stroke oil, and also there was a sense of anxiety among the onlookers. Apparently a very small boy had hopped on board, grabbed the tins and run home. Despite the desperate poverty, his mother made him bring them back and a man was saying 'They will go back to their country, these strangers, and say, "In Galaxidhi there is a thief". Think of that!'

The most risky crossing was in the northern Aegean to Lemnos, under tow from a fishing boat, after five days of being stormbound. It was so rough during the night that we had to transfer two members of crew to the fishing-boat, so that *Crab* rode higher and took in less water. From Istanbul we made our way as far up the Bosphorus as was possible without a permit, and then back to Piraeus via Rhodes.

By the end of the 1958 season *Crab* was no longer so seaworthy, and we sold her that autumn to an elderly Greek who wanted to do a bit of fishing.

*Crab's Odyssey, Malta to Istanbul in an Open Boat*, by Penny Minney, Taniwha Press, 2017. (available from [www.pennyminney.com](http://www.pennyminney.com) or from Amazon)



# Lalage Bown

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION: FROM OXFORD TO AFRICA

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Lalage Bown has received five honorary degrees, and an OBE for her work in founding and implementing adult education programmes across the world. She talks about what drove her to pursue a career in education and her experience as a Somerville undergraduate in 1945.



In Lalage Bown's 19th century home, in the historic town of Shrewsbury, hanging among walls of family photos in vibrantly decorated rooms, you will find small treasures by African artists, each with a wonderful backstory waiting to be told. These artefacts are subtle clues that hint at Bown's life-long love affair with Africa, and offer a small glimpse into the story of her successful, illustrious and adventurous career dedicated to providing literacy and education for all.

Since Bown was young, she had always felt a strong pull to Africa and as an avid reader, would devour books on the continent's history and traditions. At university she made many African friends, including Alex Quaison-Sackey, who would become the first African to become President of the United Nations General Assembly.

The opportunity to pursue her dream would arise during Bown's post-graduate degree, when her tutor, Thomas Hodgkin (historian and husband of Dorothy Hodgkin), was asked by the Colonial Office to set up Extra-Mural programmes in the new university college in the Gold Coast — now Ghana.

'The work that I did with him excited me,' recalls Bown. 'Not just in the idea of Africa but in the idea of how universities could work towards independence and help support Africa while the post-imperial phase began'.



EXTRA-MURAL CLASS - GHANA 1952/53

This would start her on a long career in university adult education. In the Gold Coast, she established the first African folk high school. Next she became the first ever field-resident tutor at Makerere University, Uganda, followed by a period as Deputy Director of Extra-Mural Studies of Ibadan, Nigeria in the 1960s.

Joining the University Senate in 1964, she found herself sitting in senates continuously, except for a one-year break in 1980, until retirement in 1992. Whilst in Nigeria Bown worked on Africanising the curriculum, organising radio listening groups for adults and established the first systematic university training course for adult educators in Africa. She was also the original secretary of the International Congress of Africanists.

Returning to the UK in 1981, Bown became a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, before going to the University of Glasgow as a Professor and Director of Adult and Continuing Education. Eventually, her journey brought her back to Shrewsbury — in the county where she had spent most of her childhood with her sister and two brothers.

A delicate piece of white lace is framed in her living room, made by the first highly influential woman in Bown's life: her mother, Dorothy Bown (lace making was a hobby she had picked up at 85 years old). Lalage remembers her mother fondly as a unique woman with an enquiring mind. She was hugely resourceful and creative and would knit

sweaters from old bits of wool and cure rabbit skins to make hoods and gloves for her family in war time.

She also had a strong political leaning, and agreed to marry Bown's father on one condition: that any daughters would have the same educational opportunities as any sons they might have. She would later become the Chairperson of the Women's Institute which would lead to her election as district councillor. Bown remembers how her mother's predecessor was a 'rather boring old man', and joyfully reminisces about how her mother 'wiped the floor with him when it came to the election.'

Bown's early years were spent in Burma where her father worked in the Indian Civil Service. When she was old enough to go to school she moved back to England to attend St David's Preparatory School in Englefield Green, where she first learned of the existence of Somerville College. The Principal at the time, Isabel Llewellyn Rhys (1899),

told a seven-year-old Bown that she had been a Somervillian and from that moment on, Bown made up her mind and never thought about going anywhere else. She was offered a place to read Modern History in 1945.

The effects of war were always present for matriculating Somerville students in 1945, from the bizarre meals in Hall (including whale-meat steaks) due to the rationing that would continue into the 1950s, to an acute awareness of Principal Dame Janet Vaughn's responsibility for the rehabilitation of Auschwitz survivors shortly before accepting her role as Principal.

Additionally, the War Veterans' Scholarships Programme meant that out of her cohort of 49, ten had been through the war, including her good friend Muriel Curtis, a mathematician who served as a computer at the Admiralty — back when a computer was a human being.

Students were naturally concerned about the future of Europe, which led them to establish the Oxford Bonn Committee. This student society aimed to bring European students together to build a peaceful relationship between countries. The first group of civilians to visit war-torn Germany were 30 British students, including Bown, to join with 30 students from the former 'enemy' countries from all over Western Europe. Among European students who belonged to the group were Birgitta Dahl, who became speaker of the Swedish Parliament, Michel Poniatowski, who became French Foreign Minister and Kurt Muller, who became a senior German diplomat.

### BOWN WITH HER MOTHER'S LACE





They stayed with German families and worked daily at the hotel in Bad Godesberg, where Chamberlain and Hitler had met in 1938; it had no glass in the windows and they lived on German rations: mainly boiled potatoes and dried apples. Before she left the UK, Bown remembers sacrificing space in her rucksack for packs of bacon that she could give as a gift to her exchange family, a sentiment that was greatly appreciated, to a point where her exchange hostess broke down into tears of gratitude.

The Oxford Bonn Society was just one of the many student organisations with which Lalage was involved as a Somerville student. At one point she was a member of 15 at once, even joining the Archeological Society on digs, which compelled Dame Janet to warn 'if you keep burning the candle at both ends, there won't be any candle left!'. Still, Bown's diligence and commitment left an impression on Dame Janet, and they would form a friendship that lasted long after Bown's College years.

There was one student society which Lalage tried and failed to join. She ran

an unsuccessful campaign with the then-Oxford Union president and later British politician, Tony Benn, to try and allow women to join the Union, a privilege which wouldn't be granted until 1963. Instead, she joined the National Union of Students (NUS) where one of her roles was to run the hardships committee. The NUS of 1945 was hardly like the programme today, with very few paid employees, meaning that the committee was made up of just Bown and her close friend Ann Murland (Modern Languages, 1945), who held their meetings on the floor of Lalage's room in Park building.

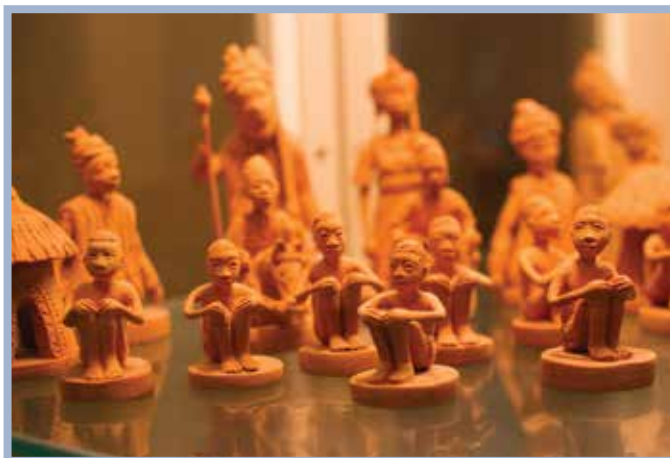
Students who couldn't afford their fees in those days had to depend on 'rather erratic' local authority grants. In poorer areas, it was extremely difficult to find funding for Oxford degrees, so Bown and Murland would study encyclopaedias to match trusts with students. One of their most memorable cases was that of a student called Quainoo, who was originally from the Gold Coast but studying in Bangor. His professor wrote to Bown to say that the student was slated for a scholarship in a few months time, but the school had no means of

supporting him in the meantime. Bown and Murland couldn't think of a specific charity to help, but she travelled to Friends' House in Euston and spoke to a Quaker who agreed to help Quainoo until the scholarship came in. Three years later, when Bown went to work in the Gold Coast, she met him for the first time and she was delighted to discover that he had become the first African Director of Agriculture for the Gold Coast.

Lalage's formative years at Somerville College paved the way for a career dedicated to helping people and particularly promoting the empowerment of women. One of her great joys in life has been fostering twin daughters whom she took on while working in Nigeria and are now of retirement age. In Shrewsbury, she continues to be a positive pillar of the community. Among her many projects, she is an editor of the talking newspaper for the blind. Her work has continued long beyond her retirement, and in June she was presented Shrewsbury's 'unsung hero' award by the Mayor. At 90 years old, Lalage shows no sign of slowing down.



*'When I went to Nigeria, we were very keen on trying to encourage people to be interested in their own culture so we used to run seminars for craftspeople. One day, my colleague was walking in town and suddenly kicked a tiny copper lion. She picked it up and said 'the person who did this is an artist, I must find them.' She hunted this person down and he was a mechanic named Asiru Olatunde who worked for a blacksmith. We invited him to our seminars and he eventually became so famous that Barclays bank commissioned him to make two eight-foot high plaques for their branch in Lagos.'*



*'This chess set is my absolute pride and joy. This is a technique that the Nigerians perfected, called thorn carving – a technique that requires each figure to be carved from a single thorn of a tree. It was made by the most skilful thorn carver Akeredolu, and I happened to be friends with one of his wives. One day when I was visiting them, I told them that I was feeling a bit sad because my father had gone to hospital. A few months later he presented me with this chess set and told me "this is for your father". When Nigeria became independent, one of the presents they sent to the Queen was the same chess set by Akeredolu.'*



# The Development Awards

A NEW INITIATIVE FROM THE MARGARET THATCHER SCHOLARSHIP TRUST

Claire Cockcroft, the MTST Programme Director, reports on the Thatcher Development Awards: a novel funding initiative that has made travel dreams, scholarly pursuits and artistic activities possible for several students this summer.

**T**his academic year saw the launch of the Thatcher Development Programme – a series of seminars supporting academic development, enriching transferable skills, career development and mentoring through the College's new e-mentoring hub, and the Thatcher Development Awards.

Designed to give students, at any stage of their studies, the financial backing to pursue an innovative business idea, academic project or travel opportunity, the Thatcher Development Awards competition generated considerable interest in Hilary Term. While the underlying intention is to advance students' personal and intellectual development, applicants were also encouraged to consider how their project would have a positive impact on others.

The Somervillian reputation for care and compassion shone through, with several students planning voluntary work or unpaid internships around the world, as well as projects to support student wellbeing. Other proposals concerned local social issues, environmental concerns, business plans, field trips, expeditions and summer research internships.

## Reaching out overseas

**Benjamin Hawkey Gilder**, a fourth year chemist who plans to pursue a career

BENJAMIN HAWKEY GILDER



in international development, heads to Kenya in July to do voluntary work in a refugee camp on the outskirts of Nairobi. An active volunteer while and undergraduate, Ben gained experience teaching disadvantaged year-one students to read English through the Schools Plus scheme. 'I will be part of a team teaching English and other subjects but will also take part in programmes such as improving water sanitation and developing sustainable farming,' he explains. 'After volunteering at the Calais refugee camp last summer, I saw first-hand the migrants' desperate need for support and also how valuable this help can be, which motivated me to seek opportunities to support refugees this summer and broaden my experience.'

**Mariella Brown**, a PPE finalist, will be polishing up her Spanish and putting her economics into play, volunteering

MARIELLA BROWN



in the economic development department of a charity supporting economically disadvantaged children in Trujillo, Peru. Ranked in the top 30 NGOs in South America in 2015, 'Supporting Kids in Peru, SKIP, helps children realise their right to an education and works with families to help them create sustainable incomes and improve their standard of living,' she explains.

'My responsibilities on the programme will include issuing small loans to improve housing and issuing loans to help business and those with new business ideas. This could include organising and running handicraft workshops, such as jewellery making, sewing and knitting workshops and selling the products made at market, as well as planning and coordinating business-training workshops.'



THE PIND COLLECTIVE: FAZAL KA BANGLA BY SANA NASIR

## Supporting the Arts

Art and drama initiatives were also funded. *The Pind Collective* is a collaborative online art space founded by postgraduate **Avani Tandon Vieira** (*World Literatures, 2016*). 'In 2013, I made a trip that very few young Indians ever make, travelling across the Wagah border to Lahore, in Pakistan. I was confronted with a history of prejudice and violence that I had carried with me all my life,' she explains. '*The Pind Collective* was born out of a desire to enable people to reach out and connect across the border. This online art collective brings together young artists from India and Pakistan to give visibility to new art, connect young creators and redefine the relationships that exist between our nations. This year marks 70 years since the partition of the subcontinent, a moment of immense violence for the people of both nations. As we pause to give remembrance, I hope that *The Pind Collective* will allow us to look ahead.' <http://thepindcollective.org>

*Dates*, a comedy sketch show, written and directed by Modern Languages finalist, **Rebecca Heitlinger**, is heading to the Edinburgh Fringe (2-19 August), thanks to a Development Award. From *Tudor Tinder* to *Let's Pay Tribute to the Patriarchy*, the sketches offer a feminist take on the trials and tribulations of dating in the modern age.

'After a sold-out run and positive reviews at the Burton Taylor Studio, we realised that our anarchic show would be perfect for the Edinburgh stage,' Rebecca enthuses. 'Many of our cast and crew hope to pursue careers in the

arts, from writing and performance to illustration and design. The experience of putting on a show in Edinburgh will be a springboard for future opportunities.'

*Balagan Productions*, the brains behind the show, comprises a diverse bunch of Linguists, Chemists and graduate students, all united in their love of comedy. If you're in Edinburgh and want to support them, you can book here: <https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/dates>

## Building a cohort of cohesion

Several applications had an underlying mission to build cohesion within subjects to facilitate cross-talk between the JCR and MCR, and to contribute to outreach activities.

**Rebecca Bowen**, a Clarendon Scholar and DPhil candidate in Medieval and Modern Languages, was granted a Development Award to fund a project of College engagement and personal academic growth. Rebecca will be presenting her research at the Leeds International Medieval Congress this summer, during a day dedicated to Dante studies. She is keen to foster dialogue between (Italian) Medievalists in the MCR and JCR with an interest in, or already pursuing, medieval literature options during their degree or future study.

To break down barriers between common rooms, she is inviting postgraduates and undergraduates to participate in joint seminars next term. In Hilary Term, there will be a day of roundtable discussions and short talks on topics related to her research into the role of metaphor and figural imagery in





COMEDY SKETCH SHOW, DATES

Late Antique and Medieval visual and literary culture.

Rebecca also has her eye on the Library's Dante holdings, involving Italianists from the JCR with the preparation of collections. 'Working with Anne Manuel, the Somerville College Librarian, and David Bowe, the Victoria Maltby JRF in Italian, I'm planning to organise a Dante-based book display in the Library loggia from the holdings we have in the College Library, particularly from the Dorothy L Sayers collection.'

First year Biologists, **Jai Bolton** and **Daniel Simonsen**, are heading to Guyana, working as research assistants with *Operation Wallacea*. 'This will allow us to fulfil ambitions of doing rainforest research, teaching us project planning, real world data-gathering and how to conduct genuine scientific investigations,' they explained. 'We plan to share our knowledge and experience with school students, to help them make decisions about future study, and the Somerville biologists.' They will pilot a Science and Society Forum in Michaelmas Term, with external speakers and panel discussions on topical science issues.

## Cultivating a culture of care

Two projects are directed closer to home, supporting student welfare and tackling environmental concerns. Third-year Biochemist **Finn Strivens** is pioneering Bystander Intervention workshops in Oxford Colleges, to help prevent sexual violence against women. Formerly the JCR's Welfare Officer, he says, 'The voluntary workshops would



REBECCA BOWEN

empower participants with the skills necessary to intervene when they come across harassment and the confidence to step in and make a difference.'

A recent report by the Universities UK Taskforce examining violence against women recommended that, 'Universities should adopt an evidence-based bystander intervention programme'. Finn explains that there is currently no other group in Oxford doing this. 'The focus will be on building a community of trained bystanders from people who want to make a difference, but are not sure how to. We also encourage participants to think about the nuances of consent in a non-confrontational manner.'

**Rob Pepper's** (English, 2015) project puts food waste firmly on the table. 'In the journey from farm gate to dinner plate, 10 million tonnes of food and drink are wasted in the UK each year,' he reveals. 'This carries a heavy economic and environmental burden.



DANIEL SIMONSEN

The Waste and Resources Action Programme estimates that British food waste has a value of over £17 billion per year and is linked with 20 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions'. Rob is assembling a team to take the issue into the community – with a local school in Jericho and an event during Freshers' Week with the local council – to raise awareness about the prevalence of food waste and how to reduce it. Cultivate Oxford, which donates excess produce from a mobile greengrocer, will provide the raw ingredients for discussion and for creating tasty treats at his event. Plenty of food for thought in the fight against food waste.

***The Margaret Thatcher Scholarship Trust (MTST)**, established in 2013 to create fully-funded scholarships, also supports a programme to support the personal and academic development of the whole student body at Somerville and a competition to fund innovative projects.*



FINN STRIVENS



# Eddie Ndopu

BREAKING BARRIERS FOR THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

Somerville postgraduate student, Eddie Ndopu (Public Policy, 2016), has become the first African with a disability to study at Oxford University. Eddie shares his vision for a better world for people living with disabilities.



Upon first meeting Eddie Ndopu, it is difficult not to be instantly charmed by his infectious smile, impeccable style and warmth and friendliness, which he retains even while speaking about the innumerable hurdles he has had to overcome to get himself to where he is today. In 2016, Ndopu was awarded a full scholarship within the Master of Public Policy programme at the Blavatnik School of Government – one of the most academically rigorous postgraduate degrees Oxford University has to offer.

‘It came out of feeling a deep sense of obligation to do something,’ Ndopu says of his decision to pursue a career in policy making. ‘In 1990, the year that I was born, I don’t think policy makers in Southern Africa would have imaged that somebody with the kind of severe disability that I live with would be here talking to you. I know that the vast majority of Africans with disabilities are not even close to where I am, and that’s at the forefront of my mind.’

Originally from Johannesburg, South Africa, Ndopu came to Oxford with an impressive set of distinctions for a person aged only 26. He was named by Shaw Trust as one of their 50 most influential disabled people in the world, one of the 200 most influential young South Africans by *The Mail and Guardian* newspaper and one of the world’s 30 top thinkers under 30 by *Pacific Standard* magazine.

His many achievements are a product of sheer determination, a trait he says to have inherited from his

mother. At the age of two, Ndopu was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy, a motor neurone disease that results in progressive weakness, and given until the age of five to survive. Up until the age of seven, he was deemed unable to go to school, until one day his mother decided to knock on the door of every school in the area until she found one willing to admit him.

He was later accepted to the African Leadership Academy in South Africa, a high school that specifically seeks to transform Africa by identifying, developing and connecting its future leaders. After graduating, he was offered a place at Carleton University in Canada, a moment that Ndopu looks back on as if the universe had conspired in his favour.

When he applied, Ndopu was unaware of Carleton University’s unique system that supports their disabled students. The Paul Menton Centre for students with disabilities was opened in 1990, named after the first coordinator of the program. Paul Menton was a quadriplegic Carleton alumnus who, whilst a student, had established a way to source all care for disabled students from their peers. The university now offers training in care work and pairs students with carers based on their academic and extracurricular schedules.

‘It worked phenomenally well as a policy,’ says Ndopu. ‘It’s so simple but yet so brilliant because there isn’t any specialised knowledge that is required. It really was great in terms of developing friendships and demystifying disability.’

I think that if universities around the world had similar programmes, we would have more people with disabilities who are actively participating in the economy and social life.'

After graduating with a BA in Critical Pedagogy, Ndopu immediately landed a job with Amnesty International, as the Head of their Youth Engagement programme across the Nairobi, Dakar and Johannesburg Regional Offices. He was responsible for growing youth constituencies across the African continent.

Whilst at Amnesty, he felt there was work he needed to do in order to help fellow disabled people have access to the same opportunities as himself, and so Evolve Initiative was born, a global organisation that seeks to influence public policy. He applied to Oxford in order to gain the skills required to make his organisation a success. In his research he asks questions on how to get governments and institutions to think beyond compliance.

'Globally we have made compliance the ceiling rather than the floor,' says Ndopu. 'Access to community, to belonging, to autonomy are all the more nebulous parts of life that are harder to quantify and measure. How can we incorporate that understanding into our conversations around accessibility and disability and the role that institutions play in enabling people with disabilities to live their best possible lives?'

As part of his research, Ndopu is creating a global index that ranks institutions from 0-10, with 0 being compliance. He asks questions about what a 10 score would look like and is creating algorithms for policy makers that will help them bridge the access gap.

Ndopu's UK experience has been far from a 10 on his scorecard and he has personally been exposed to some of the structural problems that make the day-to-day existence of a disabled person far tougher. Being disabled is hugely

expensive, especially for someone like Ndopu who chooses to lead a life with no boundaries.

While still in South Africa, he crowdfunded for the expenses of his full-time carer and right-hand man, Tinno, to accompany him to Oxford, yet discovered later that there was no visa category for a carer of a student. Next, he had to navigate the UK's private care system, learning that UK law dictates that Ndopu employ two carers, each of whom must be provided with accommodation.

Never one to back down from a challenge, Ndopu launched his second crowdfunding campaign which was featured on the Al Jazeera network on the International Day of Disability. Somerville assisted with facilitating a specially equipped room, and some very generous Somerville donors came forward to help with the added costs.

'Fellow students demonstrated this incredible empathy. What I will take away from this experience is meeting really kind and generous people and, more philosophically, recognising the importance of interdependence and how we need one another to make it through. If there's a thread, it's really the people around me who make my life possible.'

Ndopu has consistently placed himself as a pioneer, forging a path so that others will have an easier experience. This, he admits, is a lonely journey that can often exhaust him physically and emotionally but he continues to think of ways to push the envelope even further. After Somerville, he plans to travel the world while influencing policy, and will invite the rest of the world along for the ride. How far is he willing to go? Ndopu does not accept that the sky is the limit and is looking into options for space travel.

'I stretch myself to do more and seize opportunities but I never go into it thinking, "will this work or won't this work?". There's a reason for that. So many people have said "no" to me. Doctors have said "no", schools have said "no" and so I have internalised a refusal to say "no" to myself.'

IN OXFORD WITH CLASSMATE TEBELLO QHOTSOKOANE



WITH CLASSMATE LAMA KHAIYAT AT MATRICULATION





# Grace C. Young

EXPLORER OF THE YEAR

Somerville's Engineering and Zoology postgraduate student, Grace Calvert Young (2014), is making waves in the world of robotics by building technologies to help scientists across the world acquire a clearer understanding of our fragile ocean's ecosystem.

Her work hasn't gone unnoticed. In this year alone, Young has been named as one of *National Geographic's* global Emerging Explorers and has also been offered a place to work with NASA over the summer. 'It's a fantastic opportunity to develop my skills and learn from NASA in ways that will further develop our underwater 3D modelling techniques,' says Young. 'It's also great to work on an outside project that is extremely related to my thesis.'

Her thesis, which she is set to finish at the end of this year, uses new computer imaging techniques to build 3D models of coral reefs. In collaboration with The Hydrous, an organisation that maps coral reefs around the world, Young creates models made from thousands of images captured around a small island off of Honduras called Utica, where she conducts the majority of her field research.

Conveniently for Young, NASA is interested in 3D shape modelling near-earth objects, and so have invited her on an eight-week artificial intelligence research accelerator based in Silicon Valley, California. Still, the prospect of working in space is no match for the strong responsibility she feels for the ocean. In fact, her undergraduate thesis is titled *Missiles and Misconceptions: Why We Know More About the Dark Side of the Moon Than the Depths of the Ocean*, which she presented as a TEDx talk.

The Global Ocean Commission and Somerville's Fellow in Biological Sciences, Professor Alex Rogers, were just two of the many factors that enticed Young into the College. When she was awarded a Marshall Scholarship after graduating from MIT, her tutors presented her with a list of reasons why Somerville was the perfect college for her. As well as the aforementioned research links, she was impressed by the College's long history of supporting women and minorities in science, as well as its dedication to supporting students with their artistic endeavours.

This last quality on the list particularly resonated with Young. Before robots, she was well on her way to becoming a professional ballerina – one of many such anecdotes that make Young's early years sound so exceptionally dreamy. Her life began in Ohio, where she and her sister grew up around the family-run chocolate factory founded by her great-grandfather. An early indication of her mechanical mind, Young remembers feeling mesmerised by the huge robotic arms, built by her uncle, that would mix and wrap the chocolate.

At 12, her family sold the factory and moved to Washington DC where she began training with the Washington Ballet, then City Dance, and eventually the Royal Ballet School in London. She dedicated all of her time and energy to dance which, she notes, gave her an invaluable, deep-seated self-discipline. She appreciates the parallels between dance and engineering, both practices which require an intense focus on minuscule details in order for the final product to succeed.







PHOTO BY ALLEGRA BOVERMAN

The introduction of a robotics team at her school would throw a spanner in the works. Young had never heard of robotics competitions, a growing sport popular amongst American students, where robots are programmed to accomplish small tasks in competition with other robots. Young was captivated by robotics, which led to her the decision to leave school at 17 to study Mechanical and Ocean Engineering at MIT, where she helped develop underwater robots to 3D-map ice shelves and an underwater camera system for the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration to monitor the health of fisheries in marine protected areas.

The ocean was a passion that Young developed separately from her engineering undertakings. Going back to her days growing up in Ohio, she would often spend her free time swimming and sailing on lakes. As she grew older, she took family holidays to the ocean where she learned to dive. 'When I realised that Ocean Engineering could be a major, I immediately thought it sounded like the most fun, and a perfect way to combine my passions for engineering and the ocean.'

Her diving expeditions wouldn't begin until her senior year at MIT, before which she would conduct lab-based research and test her work in tanks and rivers. Engineering an ultra-high-speed camera to work underwater would be the gateway into her first expedition. Mission 31 was an expedition headed by Fabien Cousteau, grandson of one of the most recognisable names in ocean exploration, Jacques Cousteau.

'I would go back in a heartbeat,' Young enthuses, as she reminisces about her 15 days underwater in the Aquarius, the only underwater marine laboratory. The vessel, which can be found 63 feet underwater off the Florida Keys, has remained bolted to the ocean floor for 24 years and is now completely covered by marine life. Living in pressurised undersea conditions meant that the team could dive for as long as they wanted, as opposed to normal surface dive times of about an hour. This was crucial in carrying out the mission's objectives: to capture never seen before slow motion imagery of marine life.

The ultra-high-speed camera films at 18,000 frames per second. For comparison, the human eye sees at about 30 frames per second and the slow motion setting on an iPhone camera films at 240 frames per second. The ultra-high speed camera was developed by MIT engineers for on-land use, and Young



EXPEDITION USING REBREATHING TECHNOLOGY

adapted it for underwater use alongside a team from the Sexton Corporation. It enabled the scientists to capture marine behaviour that was otherwise undetectable to the human eye and the work was featured in documentary series, aptly titled *Mission 31*. The camera is now commercially available as the Edgertronic.

Shortly after having to hold her own unconventional MIT graduation ceremony from under the sea, Young crossed the pond to carry out her next stage of research in the UK. She has been part of an expedition, alongside two other postgraduates from Professor Alex Rogers' group, which formed the third team in the world to use rebreathers for scientific diving. Rebreathers allow divers to recycle their breath underwater by removing CO<sub>2</sub> and adding oxygen. Having no bubbles meant that fewer fish were scared away and the team was able to study hitherto unseen coral reefs because the technology offered the ability to dive longer and deeper than traditional SCUBA technology.

'Alex Rogers is always so encouraging and never says "no" to an idea,' says Young. 'I feel like I can come to him with a crazy idea – and I have!' One of the most ambitious of Young's extracurricular adventures is an ongoing project started three years ago by a Kansan, Scott Walkers, to refurbish a 1970's submarine for deep-ocean exploration. Young has enjoyed combining new and old technologies. She explained how around a tonne of 70s-era electronics have now been replaced by what is essentially a laptop inside the submarine. The 'new' sub will begin sea trials in two years, making deep-sea exploration more accessible and affordable to scientists around the world.

And what else might the future hold for Young? In addition to her work with NASA over the summer, she will be working with a London startup company Octo23 Technologies. They are developing a novel technology that will allow aquanauts to communicate with each other underwater. In the long-term, she is keen to stay in research: 'I love the challenges, creativity, and freedom. I can say things like, "I want to study how mantis shrimp are feeding at night," and people will support that, even when commercial applications are not yet clear.' She plans to continue her work developing and applying technologies to help better understand, conserve and manage our ocean's resources.

# Nina Faure-Beaulieu

## BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES TRIP TO BORNEO

Each year, third-year Biological Sciences undergraduates are offered the chance to participate in field work in Borneo. Somerville undergraduate, Nina Faure-Beaulieu, reports on the most recent expedition to Asia's largest island.

Every year, third-year students from the Biological Sciences course have the opportunity to travel to Borneo and experience one of the world's most diverse tropical forests first-hand. The course takes place at the Danum Valley Field Centre, which is one of South East Asia's most advanced and influential rainforest research centres. This year four Somervillians, myself included, took part. The 10-day trip involved tropical field work experience alongside lectures and tutorials also based in the forest — after all it is Oxford so where students go, lectures and tutes must follow!

We all met our professors in Kota Kinabalu, which is the capital of Malaysian Borneo. This was followed by a long transit, involving a small propeller plane and multiple van rides, to reach the core of Borneo's dense tropical rainforest. For most of us it was also the first time we had experienced the hot and humid environment of tropical rainforests and we all quickly realised that this makes tropical systems a very tough environment for researchers.







NINA (CENTRE) WITH CLASSMATES

The first half of every day was spent participating in a different field-based activity, with the afternoons left for sample identification and lectures. There were also night walks and night drives organised most evenings, giving us the opportunity to see a completely different aspect of tropical forest life and incredible creepy crawlies! This involved getting kitted up with headlamps and venturing into the darkness to meet goliath spiders, flying squirrels, and the occasional slow loris.

Some morning activities involved getting up at dawn to sample tropical forest birds. Simply walking into the forest before the sunrise was an experience in itself as it allowed us to witness the incredible cacophony that is a tropical forest dawn chorus. Bird activity reaches its peak at dawn, as birds make the most of a calm and quiet forest to reassert their territory to neighbours or signal to potential mates. The morning would be spent sampling birds that fly into inconspicuous mist nests that we had set up in various parts of the forest earlier in the day. We would collect the birds, take various measurements, and then release them back in the rainforest. Getting to release a little spiderhunter is to date one of my best experiences.

Another morning might be spent trekking through the forest to collect moths and butterflies caught in traps left out throughout the night. It is worth mentioning that any forest trekking involved numerous encounters with leeches, which seemed to always find a way past our meticulously-tied leech socks.

These activities allowed us to experience first-hand the difficulties that come with tropical field experiments such as leeches, dehydration and unexpected thunderstorms. There were of course many welcome distractions such as orangutan and red leaf monkey encounters.

LEFT: ORANGUTAN SIGHTING



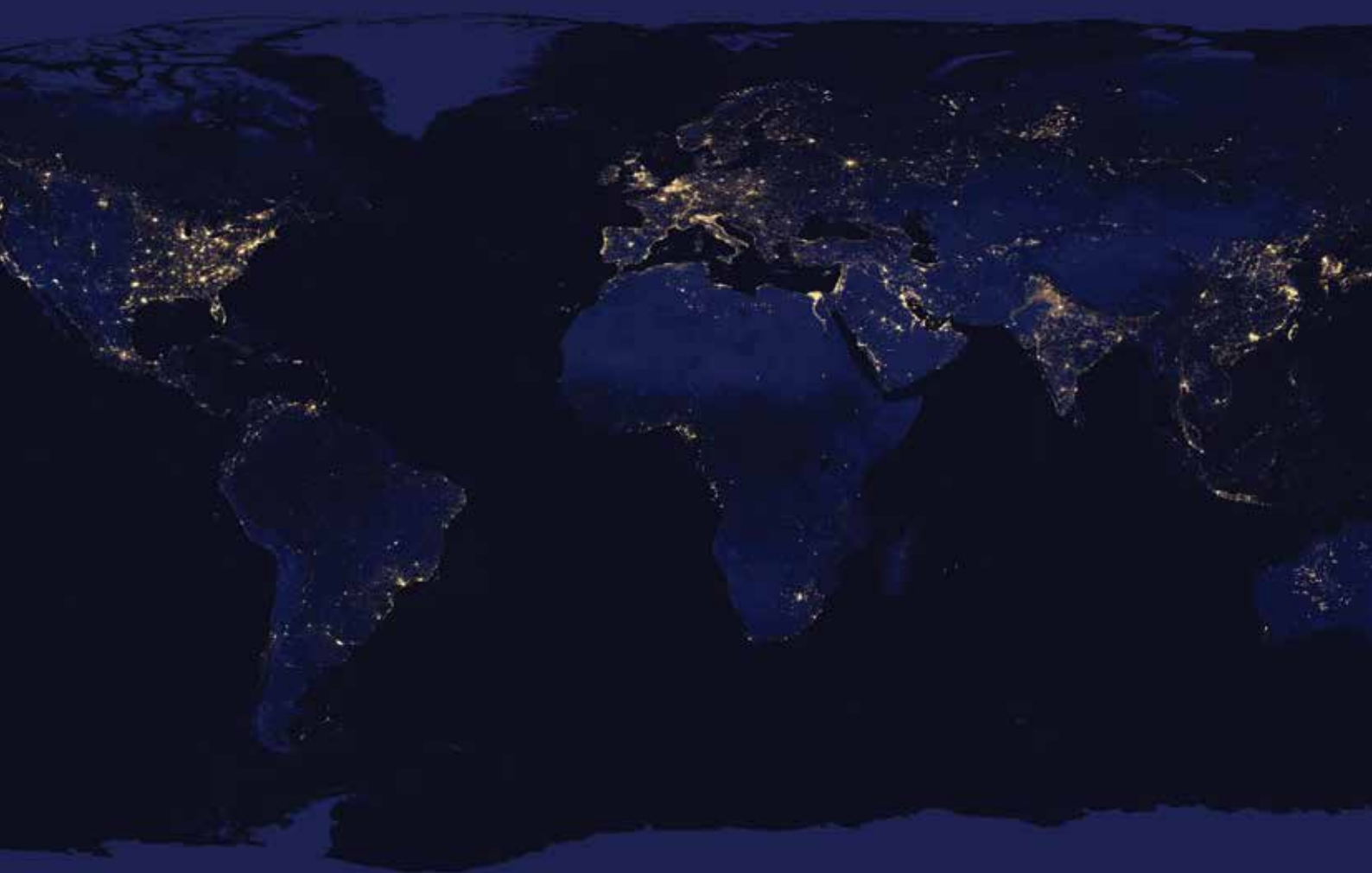
MOTH IDENTIFICATION

Towards the end of the field trip, we took a day trip to travel outside the field centre to visit palm oil plantations and gain a better understanding of the threats facing South East Asian tropical forests. This was one of the most important days as we were exposed to the ongoing struggle around balancing the needs of a growing population with the conservation of tropical forests. Palm oil production is a growing industry in Borneo and is mostly carried out by local small-scale farmers that depend upon it entirely for their livelihoods. Therefore, one of the many ongoing studies carried out by the field centre revolves around how to sustainably intensify palm oil production to minimise damage to tropical forest biodiversity, and it is one of the overarching themes of the field course.

Borneo is one of two optional trips organised by the Biological Sciences course, with the other involving a visit to Tenerife. Getting the opportunity to apply what is learnt in lectures is in my opinion one of the most enjoyable and important aspects of the course. This trip in particular helps communicate the issues facing tropical forests worldwide and provides us with the tools to help in their conservation, as we cannot hope to address issues that we do not fully understand.



PHOTOGRAPHING A SPIDERHUNTER



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