

## FROM THE LODGINGS WINDOWS

..... *we have first raised a dust and then complain we cannot see*

This has not been the easiest of years in which to look out from the Lodgings windows. When they have not been out of action for repairs – clearly in some cases the first since installation in 1776 – they have been clouded with dust rising from the disabled access scheme in the basement, the first phase of an ambitious and costly plan to provide wheelchair access from the Provost's Yard up to the Terrace and within the Lodgings.

The need for such a scheme has been more evident since we opened, during the year, 87 new rooms on the Northern side of the College site in a new quadrangle beyond the Sainsbury Building. After a Long Vacation of intensive work there should be new lifts up to the Terrace and down to the Pump Quad – in time for 32 more new rooms in a building following the line of Ruskin Lane. By halfway through the academic year 2007-8 the Ruskin Lane Building will be faced by 34 further new rooms, partly the reconstruction of 14, 15 and 16 Worcester Place, partly a wholly new pastiche of those houses to complete the line.

These developments will mean that over 250 rooms will have access to the Lodge via the orchard, the Provost's Yard and Staircase 6: the need for a good wheelchair-friendly route becomes obvious, and the desirability of improving the whole look of the Provost's Yard compelling.

Adapting listed buildings for disabled access is necessarily very expensive, but as trustees of beautiful buildings and grounds we owe it to future generations to commission as elegant and ingenious a scheme as we can afford. Similar considerations apply to the renovation and conversion of 5, 6 and 7 Beaumont Street. Contrary to the belief that St. John's College laid out the whole of Beaumont Street in the 1820s, research undertaken as part of our planning application to redevelop these properties showed that they were originally built for Worcester, which helps to make the great expense of restoring and adapting them to 35 student rooms somewhat more palatable.

If only it had not turned out that the internal walls were holding up the rear external walls! Curiously, the renovation of 'Staircase 24' (14, 15 and 16 Worcester Place) is running late for much the same reason: additional structural strengthening has been required here, too. Whether preserving and clearing the façade of these houses is quite in the same league of architectural importance as it is for Beaumont Street only future generations will tell. Still, these delays have given us an unexpected opportunity. Rather than have 60 new rooms lying empty for half the academic year 2007-8, we are going to move the occupants of the Casson

and Wolfson Buildings (Staircases 17 and 18, 19 and 20) into Beaumont Street and Worcester Place during the Hilary Term, and take the opportunity to fit these rooms, too, with en-suite bathrooms.

By October 2008 all this work should be completed. All undergraduates – some 425 nowadays, about 40% of them doing four-year courses – will be able to live in College for the whole of their time, something which has not been possible for at least a century (see Sir John Masterman's memoirs, *On the Chariot Wheel*.)<sup>1</sup> Even more importantly we shall be only about 50 rooms short of being able to house all 600 or so students, graduate as well as undergraduate, for the whole of their courses in Oxford.

In October 2008, then, after five years of intense activity, during which we shall have built or completely renovated 231 rooms, we shall pause to evaluate our future strategy. We cannot afford to leave rooms unoccupied: so how many undergraduates, in their third or fourth year, will want to live out of College, perhaps with friends from other Colleges? What kind of accommodation is needed for graduate students? When we started the current intensive phase it seemed that the University's newly-built flats would more than satisfy the need for small family units, but recent indications are of a resurgence of this type of demand.

So much for the builders' dust which has pervaded the Lodgings. Irritating as it has been (and for the whole Long Vacation will continue to be), this dust is, as it were, constructive and optimistic dust, leading to a better College in the future. I wish I could be so positive about the metaphorical dust with which the University has surrounded itself in the past year.

There have been two major disputes, in one of which individual members of the College, in the other the College as an institution, have been in strong opposition to official policy. The first dispute has been over 'governance', on which I touched briefly last year; the second over the proposals for a 'Joint Resource Allocation Mechanism' to distribute public funds between central university divisions, faculties, departments and services on the one hand and the Colleges on the other ('the JRAM'). Each issue has been hotly contested, but much of the heat has been over details which are unlikely to be of compelling interest to all but the most avid readers of this *Record*. Yet whilst Oxford has been full of contending groups, Cambridge, which faces exactly the same issues, has sailed serenely on, ignoring what Oxford policymakers have clearly regarded as strong hints from outside bodies which must be obeyed. As the former

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<sup>1</sup> Sir John came up to Worcester in 1909. 'Those receiving tuition when I came up were, as nearly as I can calculate, about ninety in number..... We could all have two years in College, and some could have three.' (loc.cit. pp 61,65)

