

DOWNING COLLEGE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

93rd Annual General Meeting

held via Zoom

at 17.20 on Saturday 26 September 2020

DRAFT MINUTES

- 1 Professor Richard Bowring, President of the Association, chaired the meeting and welcomed the 56 attendees.
- 2 The Minutes of the 92nd Annual General Meeting were accepted.
- 3 There were no matters arising other than those covered on the agenda for the present meeting.
- 4 **President's Review**

I think I should start by thanking you all for turning on your computers to participate in a very strange affair. This is the first and, I hope, the last time that the Association meets virtually rather than in person. The proceedings will be as follows:

I shall give a short address. This will be followed by a discussion between myself and the Master, an AGM that will last all of 5 mins, a short commercial break, a report by the Senior Bursar and then a virtual transfer of the medallion. We shall be done and dusted by 5.45 in time for Chris Haniff's wine-tasting event at 6:00.

I will begin straight away by mentioning two important individuals who did much to keep the institution thriving: we have had to say farewell to John Hicks, who was secretary for 12 years, and Frank Weiss, who did so much to establish the context in which we could produce College merchandise and so raise funds to help students. I should also mention past President Alan Howard, whose generosity will be with us for many years to come.

Four fellows retire this year. Bill Adams, Susan Lintott, Paul Millett, and Cathy Phillips. Bill continued the tradition of geography that had been established by my old tutor Dick Grove and became a professor. When Susan arrived, she had the unenviable task of dragging the College into the 20th century somewhat against its will. Her much admired predecessor would send chits to the fellows in elegant handwriting; it became Susan's job to modernise, rationalise and ensure that Downing would survive and grow in difficult times, and difficult times they have turned out to be. But I want to concentrate on the other two fellows, for reasons that will become clear as we proceed.

Paul Millet. Here is someone who has been at the heart of Downing for as long as I can remember. He retires this year as Senior Lecturer in Classics. There is no doubt in my mind, however, that he sacrificed his academic career for the good of the College. What do I mean by this? Well, many years ago the main job of a University Lecturer was to teach, lecture in the University and supervise in the College. If you became a reader, or possibly, but rarely, a professor, then your prime job became to publish the results of your research. You were *not* allowed to supervise. Your

University stipend increased, but that was largely offset by the disappearance of supervision fees. During the past 30 years this situation has radically changed. Largely due to the way that government funding now works, there has been an increasing emphasis placed on research and publication and a concomitant reduction in the status of teaching. The effect of this shift has been dramatic. Not only is the majority of the academic body in the University essentially unconnected to College life, but there are faculties that now actively discourage newly arrived lecturers from taking College fellowships and from supervising, on the grounds that that would detract from what is now their main role. If they do not produce enough research, the funding of the faculty will be in jeopardy. What used to be a world where the majority of academics were lecturers, with a smattering of readers and the rare professor, has become (thanks to the market-led reforms ordered by Mrs Thatcher) a world where there is now a fixed pathway from lecturer to senior lecturer to reader to professor, each stage depending largely on an appraisal of the number and quality of one's publications. Supervising in a college (ie teaching) counts for very little. You will see why devotion to college teaching and college life reduces the possibility for advancement in such a system. I am not suggesting for a moment that Paul was unhappy with the choice he made, but it was a choice, exactly the same choice made by John Hopkins, whose influence on the law profession was profound, but who always remained a simple lecturer. I venture to say that without such individuals, Downing would not have provided the kind of environment, or indeed the kind of supervision, that most of you have enjoyed.

This leads me to the second example. Cathy Phillips, whose field is English literature. Cathy was what was known as a NUTO, but is now more charitably known as a CTO. This means that Downing paid her full salary, not just a top-up to a University stipend. For faculties such as English, MML, History, Law, Maths, and Economics, it is the rule that most Colleges have to employ at least one academic to fulfil supervision requirements. I suspect that this is a cost, a major cost, that has never really occurred to you as being of moment.

I will freely admit that I am not one of those who believe that you can divorce alumni relations from fund-raising, although I realise this is not a universal view. The fact is that unless the alumni commit themselves to supporting the College in whatever way we can, big or small, medium or tiny, the next generation will not be as fortunate as we were. The real cost of educating a student today far outstrips the fees that are charged. I have spent long enough in the United States to see the enormous benefits that come from benefaction. We should, as a matter of course, *all* have Downing in our wills, for example. It is one way to say thank you. And for are those who shy away from the idea, feeling that it is somehow distasteful to be asked for support, remind yourselves that Downing would not exist were it not for benefaction and gifts in the past.

5 Treasurer's Report

Mr Riddoch presented his report as Treasurer. The Treasurer's report and accounts had been included with the agenda. Mr Riddoch noted that income was down due to no merchandise sales between end March and July and the Association agreeing for waive membership fees for the Easter term at the request of the College. However, a reduction in the cost of the Magazine and fewer grants from the Student Fund

resulted in the accounts being balanced. He anticipated that next year would be challenging and the Executive had agreed that if necessary it would use some of its reserves to support the Student fund. The Accounts for the year ended 30 June 2020 were accepted.

6 Sales of Merchandise

The Chair of the Merchandise Working Group, Kate Dyer, reported:

Sales to the end of February this year were up by about 25% compared with the end of February last year (£8105.95 vs £6451.47). However, since February like everyone else we have felt the effects of Covid 19. Last year about half of our income was from events. When Covid 19 hit we also suspended our online sales as we could not go into College to complete orders and we needed to keep everyone safe. I'm pleased to say that, thanks to our Merchandise Secretary Peter Whittington, our online sales are now up and running again. Income after the web site opened is now £232 for 2020/21.

We are very fortunate to have had a new signed limited-edition print created for us by alumnus Sir Quentin Blake and also new solid silver and red gold cufflinks made exclusively for us by the renowned jewellery designer, Vicki Ambery-Smith, who happily for us is married to the Master.

The print features a painting created during the design process of the wall hangings on display in the Grace Howard Room. Sir Quentin has very generously donated 50 to the Association. The Downing Neo-Classical cufflinks have been created by Vicki exclusively for the Association and were inspired by the College's architecture. Vicki has also designed a new scarf for us, also based on the College architecture, which we hope to have on sale soon. We are very grateful to both of them.

All our profits go to support current students so please do take a look at what we have. There is a link on the college website or go to www.downing-gifts.com

7 Address by the Senior Bursar

The Bursar reported:

The last academic year can be divided into three periods. In the first period of four months the College raise £20 million through a 50-year bond at an interest rate of 2.09%. She was told that the College had a better rating than some other more wealthy colleges due to its conference trade. The period had also been spent designing a new student centre and the College had been on track to generate £3 million from conferences.

The second four months were concerned with dealing with the initial consequences of Covid 19. There were 550 students in residence and they all had to go home and their possessions sent to them afterwards. 70 remained and were accommodated in the best locations in College to ensure that the lockdown experience was as acceptable as possible. In addition to losing the conference trade the College lost

£1million of student rental income in the Easter term. Furthermore, tenants on Regent Street were not paying rent. The private placement has at least ensured the College has sufficient cash reserves. The College has had to look at costs and as trustees of a charity has had no alternative but to make some redundancies.

The last three months have been taken up with preparing for the new term. Some returning students are isolating. The College has appointed a manager to oversee how students are coping with Covid 19 related matters and to provide comfort and guidance to students. As a result of the U-turn by the government regarding A-level results the College has had to accept 149 first-year students as opposed to 128. At the same time the College has had to lose 10% of its rooms in order to accommodate students in groups of eight. Thanks to student input, students in years 2,3 and 4 have been put into these groups according to their wishes, a Downing engineer producing software which ran 1.4 simulations to establish them. It is intended that all students will be tested weekly via these groups. The College has built an outside seating and covered area with heaters in the Fellows' car park. On the paddock, 150 circles 2 metres in diameter and 2 metres apart have been marked and staging has been erected so that activities which would previously have been carried out in The Butterfield and The Howard Theatre can still take place. The College does not expect conferences to resume until summer 2021.

The President thanked the Bursar for all she had done for the College over the last 23 years and wished her all the best for her retirement.

8 Election of Officers

President

From President Elect: Miss Kate Panter (1981)

President Elect

Proposed by the Executive Committee: Mr Charles Harpum (1972)

Vice President

Proposed by the Executive Committee: Mr Barrie Hunt (1966)

Member of the Executive Committee

Proposed by the Executive Committee: Miss Zara Goozee (2009)

The proposals were seconded and approved.

The appointment of Dr JSL McCombie and Mr RK Taplin as Hon. Auditors was seconded and approved.

9 Any Other Business

None. The meeting closed at 17.50.

10 Date of Next AGM

Saturday 25 September 2021.