I am very pleased to introduce to you this year’s college newsletter. It has been a momentous year; we have emerged from the restrictions of the Covid pandemic; we have established the Edward King Centre; and we have mourned our late Sovereign and acclaimed our new King. We have also said goodbye to respected and long-serving staff, and are preparing to welcome new people and new opportunities for teaching and learning. Theological Education remains in flux – as it has ever since I began here in 2006 – and the House Council and college staff continue to discern the signs of the times while remaining faithful to the core purpose of the College, the formation of priests in the Catholic tradition to serve in the Church of England and in the Anglican Communion.

This newsletter brings to you a rich variety of activities and reports from members of the College. In what will be the last edition to come to you while we are a Permanent Private Hall of the University, I want in particular to acknowledge the way in which those students of the House who have not been ordinands have enriched our life in the last twenty years, and made such a signal contribution to our work and mission.
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The College was sad to learn of the death of Sister Benedicta Ward SLG, an Honorary Fellow, who died on May 23rd. The College was also sad to learn of the death of Harry Hague, Bursar of the college between 1988 to 2002, who died aged 97. Harry was very fondly thought of by his former colleagues and greatly enjoyed and valued being part of the wider St Stephen’s community.

SJE Arts 10th anniversary - an update from Artistic Director Michèle Smith
It has been a curious time to celebrate our tenth anniversary while the pandemic was still very much affecting public performances. Last minute cancellations as people found they tested positive for Covid meant a once fully booked performance was played to much smaller audiences, and we also noticed missing regular concert goers which was very sad.

Another hurdle, due to Brexit, was that European performers had to receive a formal invitation in order to obtain their permit to perform. This turned out to be pretty much a formality but added to uncertainty.

Looking forward, we will be celebrating the tenth anniversary of the SJE Arts International Piano series in 2023. Who would have thought back in 2013 this would have become such a major event in our calendar.

We will start the series early on 11 January 2023 with the Georgian pianist, winner of the 2014 International Franz Liszt Piano Competition, Mariam Batsashvili, performing a programme largely based on music by Liszt but also including Beethoven’s “Appassionata”. Other performers include Maki Sekiya, Sir Stephen Hough, Steven Osborne, Angela Hewitt OBE, cellist Laura van der Heijden with Jâms Coleman on piano, Eric Lu and Tamara Stefanovich.

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It’s not a holiday!” is what I kept saying when telling people about my summer placement in the Caribbean.

Located 120 miles west of Barbados, St Vincent and the Grenadines is undeniably a picturesque cluster of idyllic islands, complete with sand and palm trees. A tourist could easily glide through Bequia (the second largest island in the Grenadines) and be charmed by its stunning beaches, seaside bars and cocktails. And yes, I did enjoy some of these things – it is the Caribbean after all. However, the key aim of my placement was to see what a tourist wouldn’t, if possible, and get a sense of the Church’s mission in this beautiful part of God’s vineyard.

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I was aided in this by my supervisor, the indefatigable Very Revd Otis Nichols, Dean of St George’s Cathedral, Kingstown. He helped show me that, beneath the colourful exterior, these islands have known poverty and suffering that it is hard for most Westerners to imagine. On top of an economic decline which has lasted decades, in 2021 alone, on top of the Covid pandemic, Vincentians dealt with a major hurricane and the devastating eruption of local volcano La Soufrière. Thousands lost their homes and thick ash covered much of the island. We passed through towns cloven in two by mudslides, or completely abandoned in the face of coastal erosion. Access to advanced healthcare is severely limited, so it is necessary to go abroad – often Barbados or Cuba – for more complex procedures. Sadly, the reality is that few can afford this.

I thought the beaches proved something of a metaphor for the general situation: since 2017 huge volumes of seaweed floating south from Florida have choked St Vincent’s coastlines, reducing once glorious locations to amorphous quagmires.

Life for Vincentians is tough, and not something we in the UK hear much about. Through all this the Church does what it can to provide support, stability and prayer. Fr Otis works tirelessly, wearing ‘ten faces a day’ as he puts it: juggling the responsibilities of a public figure, construction manager, teacher, landlord, and therapist all at once. With a population of only 100,000, everyone seems to know everyone else (we would walk down the street and pass senior government ministers on a regular basis). The priest’s burden is being a kind of social crossroads, universally recognised and often taken for granted. Fr Otis lives out this calling selflessly, meeting the needs of people across the community with little privacy or rest. I was blessed to accompany him throughout the placement, which involved daily worship, parish visits and study groups. It was a particular joy (and challenge) to preach one Sunday at 5:30am, for the first of three Masses that morning!

The placement gave me a lot to reflect on. Anglicanism, especially its historic association with empire, has a rather ambiguous place in St Vincent. On the one hand the cathedral’s furnishings point to its colonial past, filled with marble memorials to British naval officers, politicians, and lawyers. There are calls to remove these, following heightened tensions over the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. Yet among worshippers there is also a strong appreciation for their Anglican heritage. The West Indies’ Prayer Book, inspired directly by the Church of England’s liturgy, sets all the major events of life in the context of the Church: birth, baptism, marriage, having children, illness and death. Fr Otis consequently advocates humility in our judgment of the past; we will also be judged for our failings by future generations. The Church is complex, he argues: simultaneously an institution bound up with human sin, and the Body of Christ continually ‘aspiring’ for union with God. Negotiating the tension between the two, however, remains a difficult and ongoing task.

As important as these conversations are, I was struck most by the character of the people I met. One young man I spoke to, about my age (26) lost his home and livelihood to the eruption. Yet, working in construction, he had found a renewed sense of purpose, firmly believing that the Holy Spirit was with him and guiding him to help others. The Vincentian attitude towards suffering and death in general was inspiring. Funerary services there are more celebratory than those I had experienced before, with loud music, dancing and uplifting songs about meeting Christ in heaven.

We could learn so much from our brothers and sisters in St Vincent and the Grenadines, if we just moved past the clichés. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to go and see for themselves.
From 1st October 2023, the College is changing its relationship with the University of Oxford and looking to a new future focused on its core status as an Anglican theological college. In this interview with the Principal, Robin Ward, we explore what the upcoming change means for the College, and what the future looks like for St Stephen’s House.

Why has this change of relationship with the University taken place?
In 2003, when St Stephen’s House first became a PPH, almost all our ordinand students were studying for Oxford qualifications. However, since the introduction of the Church of England’s Common Award, in partnership with the University of Durham, many of our students have chosen to study on this pathway.

Our new relationship with the University of Oxford means we can maintain relationships with both Durham and Oxford Universities and in turn offer the widest range of courses to ordinands. It also means that we can respond to the way in which training and professional development is moving and in doing so, to better support the overall aspirations that the Church of England has for both lay and ministerial formation.

What does this mean for the College?
It means that we have secured a future for the College in which we can continue to offer qualifications appropriate for ordinands of every educational background and every age. This was a key aim of the House Council.

Whilst it does mean that we will no longer welcome other cohorts of students, such as teachers, who have studied with us since 2003, it means that we can develop new ways to offer development and education – both remote and in person – to both ordinands and those who are already ordained.

Will the focus moving forward be solely on ordinands and those already ordained?
Yes. And that was one of the more challenging aspects of the decision. The cohort of non-ordinand students and in particular trainee teachers has contributed enormously to the life of the College community over the last 20 years, and I – together with many who have studied and lived alongside them – am thankful to them for this.

How will the College be developing its core offering moving forward?
Last year saw the launch of the Edward King Centre, the College’s online learning portal, which is our response to the way in which we see people increasingly want to learn, and indeed the way that training and professional development is moving.

The Edward King Centre will be an important part of the College’s offering moving forward, alongside the core residential training we currently offer. It will enable people all over the UK and wider world the chance to access the internationally-renowned academic excellence and teaching that takes place at the College, and to access it in a way that suits them, which is often online.

We also hope to expand the range of subjects we offer. For example, we’re currently considering the topic of Canon Law.

At a practical level, what changes will take place at the College?
We have, with the support of a substantial grant from the Fellowship of Saint John, been able to lay very strong foundations for the first cohort of students studying for the Masters in Theology course through the Edward King Centre. Some staff time will be dedicated to delivering this course, alongside their teaching of residential ordinand courses.

As part of our aspiration to deepen and expand our educational offering, we’re delighted that Dr Ian Boxall will be returning to the College as Senior Tutor following his time at The Catholic University of America in Washington, USA. As well as bringing his skills teaching New Testament studies, he also brings expertise in delivering online and virtual teaching, which will be a great asset to the College.

Finally, with the pressure on college rooms reduced in the immediate term, we are in the fortunate position of being able to welcome more visiting academics from around the world, as well as those on retreat or sabbaticals. I expect this to contribute greatly to our aim of widening our offering and expanding our community beyond Oxford.

Any parting thoughts?
In a few years, the College will celebrate the 150th year of its founding by Bishop Edward King. It is a great responsibility to be leading this exciting new chapter for the College. I believe it is the trajectory which stays truest to the College’s founding – and still core – mission: to train priests in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, whilst evolving and responding to new ways of teaching and learning and making the very best of what we have here to enhance lay and clergy lifelong learning.
Fr AKMA and Margaret will remain in Oxford, with AKMA taking up the role, so I knew how vigorously the Christian vocation to hospitality was taken, but I was really surprised by the way in which everything was suffused with a seriousness of purpose which yet did not exclude laughter and enjoyment. One of the vital differences about SSH compared to other parts of the University in which I had worked was how staff and ordinands seemed to form a proper community. My happiest memories of being a residential part of the SSH community I think fall into five categories: in the classroom with the ordinands; having the privilege of trying to help support ordinands and others; working with colleagues like Mrs Sparkes, Fr Damian and Mthr Lucy; spending time with the children (particularly perhaps playing trains during tea, and babysitting one little girl while her brother was being born); and some noisily fun Group Socials.

Dr Mark Philpott joined SSH in January 2014 and was later joined by much-loved (and spoilt!) cats Llyr, Llywelyn and Niles. Prior to joining the College, Dr Philpott had lived and worked in Oxford for many years, teaching at Keble since the mid-1990s and holding the role of Senior Tutor at the Centre for Renaissance Studies since 1999. Mark’s calmness and kindness, as well as his sharp wit and great sense of perspective will be much missed by those whose time at SSH overlapped with his.

I applied for the post at SSH amongst other things because I really wanted to return to being a teacher and a pastor; but also, because I relished the privilege of teaching ordinands what I consider a vital discipline in shaping them for future ministry. I had been lucky enough to spend time socially at SSH before I took up the role, so I knew how vigorously the Christian vocation to hospitality was taken, but I was really surprised by the way in which everything was suffused with a seriousness of purpose which yet did not exclude laughter and enjoyment. One of the vital differences about SSH compared to other parts of the University in which I had worked was how staff and ordinands seemed to form a proper community. My happiest memories of being a residential part of the SSH community I think fall into five categories: in the classroom with the ordinands; having the privilege of trying to help support ordinands and others; working with colleagues like Mrs Sparkes, Fr Damian and Mthr Lucy; spending time with the children (particularly perhaps playing trains during tea, and babysitting one little girl while her brother was being born); and some noisily fun Group Socials.

Dr Philpott remains both in Oxford and actively involved in the SSH alumni community who come from both rural and urban parts of the SSH benefice all over the globe, in many different places and parishes. Contrasts exist between all the various locations that priests can be called to, but arguably amongst the most stark disparities are those presented by urban versus rural ministry. However, it does tend to be the same faces providing the Harvest lunch, doing the online bible study group, attending Compline in Lent, small groups of Christians, and lots of fun and laughter to be had. There is one bus that passes briefly through the benefice twice a day, otherwise this is a car-based ministry, although one parish is really on the outskirts of the town of Ross. My urban experience in London and Gloucester in the 1980s and 90s was as part of a very different church to rural ministry today. In towns and cities there are far more people that one can call on to do the essentials of keeping churches open, engaged and functioning fully. In the current rural church, every parish is hugely stretched to fill offices (Warden, Treasurer, Secretary), indeed one of mine is completely without Wardens currently.

My urban experience in London and Gloucester in the 1980s and 90s was as part of a very different church to rural ministry today. In towns and cities there are far more people that one can call on to do the essentials of keeping churches open, engaged and functioning fully. In the current rural church, every parish is hugely stretched to fill offices (Warden, Treasurer, Secretary), indeed one of mine is completely without Wardens currently. Liturgically, the rural church is much less creative in worship and there is strong representation of the Prayer Book Society with a desire for BCP services only. Nevertheless, Messy Church is still possible in some, and links with the local primary schools are vital, just as in urban areas, but many children get bussed into schools from outside my parishes, making forging a genuine local community link more challenging.

With village populations much smaller than in urban areas, it is possible to build stronger relationships with more local folk and become immersed in the local community. Pastoral offices are very important and rewarding. There is lots that can be achieved with even small groups of Christians, and lots of fun and laughter to be had. However, it does tend to be the same faces providing the Harvest lunch, doing the online bible study group, attending Compline in Lent, doing the Walk of Witness on Good Friday.
On the theological and liturgical side, St Stephen’s House prepared me very well for my ministry, and I’m hugely grateful to SSH for instilling in me a sense of the ‘right’ way of leading worship, and of serving people in a sacrificial ministry. It is always better to have a clear framework that is the pattern from which one can work flexibly, than to have no guidelines, and just be making stuff up as you go along. We’ve all seen the latter. SSH had a very strict culture, from which, no doubt, I may have digressed in some of the smaller details, but I have never lost sight of the Mass as the focal point of the Church’s life, nor that it merits the greatest care, respect and humility in its celebration.

Today, I have no support network beyond the local Chapter. Nowadays, curates leaving college seem to have lots of peer groups to which they can turn – this didn’t happen 36 years ago. But I endeavour whenever possible to take an annual retreat and will do so next week for the first time in three years.

The tradition of the parish was consolidated further due to the influence of the Anglo-Catholic congresses, the first incumbents were devoted, and embedded theology and practice into parish life. Whilst warmly received by most, on the day of consecration there were protests, brass bands, mounted police and an arrest!

Saint Columba’s has continued in this tradition to this day offering the divine life through sacramental worship.

The parish is a largely residential area, and includes a wide variety of housing styles, from flats to small terraces and slightly larger semi-detached. We do not have a ‘high street’ in any sense, but there are clusters of shops in the north east and east of the church. The number of people within the locality is increasing, new homes are currently being built within our boundaries and there are large number of social housing properties. The Church Urban Fund statistics detail that the area is considered one of deprivation, and is ranked in the top 150 most deprived places in the country.

My experience of rural ministry is very limited, it must be said. That taken into account, the bridging factor is of course, people. People are broadly the same wherever ministry is exercised: there will always be those who are lost, those who are poor, those who are searching. Rural and urban ministry have that much and more in common. I think that fundamentally, the differences lie in perception, sense of community and of course, size.

The real joy of being a priest in an urban area is the level of contact that it affords. Urban parishes, whilst generally smaller geographically, are bigger numerically. So that opportunities for ministry and ministering to those quite literally on the doorstep are a joy, that, and of course the opportunities for proclaiming the gospel that this brings.

But whilst there are many joys of being in an urban parish, there are also many challenges. The constant problem of anti-social behaviour and general disrespect for the church building is a constant. The parish is a largely residential area, and includes a wide variety of housing styles, from flats to small terraces and slightly larger semi-detached. We do not have a ‘high street’ in any sense, but there are clusters of shops in the north east and east of the church. The number of people within the locality is increasing, new homes are currently being built within our boundaries and there are large number of social housing properties. The Church Urban Fund statistics detail that the area is considered one of deprivation, and is ranked in the top 150 most deprived places in the country.

The social problems, such as poverty in all its forms, anti-social behaviour, addiction and so on are not always as apparent as it might seem when statistics are offered. I think the cost of living crisis in which we find ourselves will lead to a great increase in awareness of many of these problems and as we are a church trying to provide means of support.

Prior to ordination, I felt that urban settings tended to be more connected: there would be a common identity and people would share a ‘common life’, this perception has been increasingly challenged. Whilst there is a level of connectedness – personal investment in a community seems to be more limited with people preferring to live more ‘private lives’, this is certainly not the case for my priest.

My life as a priest is not quite what I imagined when I was studying at St Stephen’s House, that is for sure! But this proves that formation is necessary to ground the ordinand and future priest into the rhythms of life that will sustain them in the exercise of their ministry.

SSH is particularly good at consciously building groups of people into Christian communities. Ordinands from radically different backgrounds share that common Christian life and so become one through prayer, study and active participation in the liturgy. This has always remained with me, and I have tried – with successes and failures – to try and replicate this style of living within the parishes I have served. Through prayer, learning and a eucharistic spirituality, I have hoped to draw my own people deeper into the mystery so that they may be better equipped to proclaim it.

One thing that is a real challenge in urban ministry is getting time to rest and recharge – it can be very difficult when you are in such close proximity to all those in your parish. The demands are constant so the best thing that we can do as a family is to physically get away from time to time when possible. The other advice that is always given is to be protective of time off, I’m not very good at that!
Following a request to look again at what we had not thought possible, I worked to support the team at Lambeth Palace to establish ecumenical and multi-faith chaplaincy support to offer care to the many thousands of people expected in London upon the death of the Queen, and specifically to the queue for the lying-in-state.

As soon as the news of Her Majesty’s death broke, St Paul’s cathedral had to be closed to allow a full security sweep to take place in advance of the public service of remembrance due to take place the next day. With many people arriving at St Paul’s in order to pay their respects and pray, we opened up nearby churches outside their usual hours to provide alternative places of worship for people to go to. The Chapel remained open for people to pray and reflect, and we also held memorial Evensong and Sung Requiems. I was very clear to me when I witnessed the grief and floral tributes here that, fundamentally, the role of the Monarch is a spiritual one. The Monarch brings together the nation as a family, a community, and this moment when we sang the National Anthem with the words ‘God save the King’. Very few of us today have ever witnessed the succession of a Monarch, and the events around the Queen’s death reminded me that, fundamentally, the role of the Monarch is a spiritual one. The Monarch brings together the nation as a family, a community, and this was very clear to me when I witnessed the grief and floral tributes here at Hampton Court Palace.

My immediate focus was on pastoral care of the community here in the days afterwards. The Chapel was full, and it was a very moving moment when we sang the National Anthem with the words ‘God save the King’.

The Revd Canon Anthony Howe, Chaplain of His Majesty’s Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace (SSH 1998–2001)

I had the honour of being appointed one of the members of the Domestic Ecclesiastical Household in 2015 and met Her Late Majesty The Queen on several occasions, including when she visited the Chapel Royal here at Hampton Court Palace. The chapel here functions – in some ways – not unlike a parish church, but with a very tiny parish; namely the small administrative team living within the Peculiar (royal parish) of Hampton Court. Our congregation is varied, from members of staff and the volunteers helping to run the Palace, to tourists, and those living in the wider community. Our worship is based on the Book of Common Prayer, and we are fortunate to have exceptionally good music, as well as a fantastically beautiful building.

2022 has been an extraordinary year, and the contrast between the joyful celebrations of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee and the events of her death in September are stark.

I had been involved in discussions as to how we might support members of the Royal household in the event of the Sovereign’s death, and as soon as the news broke, we quickly changed chapel around and announced that there would be a Requiem the next day. The Chapel was full, and it was a very moving moment when we sang the National Anthem with the words ‘God save the King’.


Fr Luke Miller was made a Chaplain to the Household in 2015 and met Her Late Majesty The Queen on several occasions before.

Following the death of Her Majesty the Queen, we spoke to present and former members of the College Community about the different roles they played in the events surrounding the death of the Monarch.

As part of my core day-to-day role as Archdeacon of London, I played a part in the resilience planning for Operation London Bridge, and was also present at the public service of remembrance which took place at St Paul’s Cathedral the day after the Queen’s death.

The last ten years, I have chaired the Faith & Belief panel within the London Resilience Forum (LRF), a role which sees me and my colleagues in Sound 3, the choristers were doing what they had done so many times before (albeit as juniors) singing the Daily Office. As the coffin moved before them, they had the reassurance of knowing that they were in their familiar stalls alongside their friends, doing what they do every day. They learnt and performed two new choral works in record time. Such is the beauty and might of a long-lasting community which has witnessed so many momentous occasions. So much is made possible only by continuity.

The choir of Westminster Abbey, September - the beginning of the new academic year - must have been the last period they would have chosen to broadcast to the world: all the senior boys had left the choir and their replacements had barely begun their new roles as leaders. Yet those children rose to the occasion magnificently because they had been there so many times before (albeit as juniors) singing the Daily Office. As the coffin moved before them, they had the reassurance of knowing that they were in their familiar stalls alongside their friends, doing what they do every day. They learnt and performed two new choral works in record time. Such is the beauty and might of a community that worships daily in song. The audience was bigger, the experience honed over many years. But in some ways, the most precious moments for me are the times beforehand and afterwards, when the Abbey sits in repose. Entering the nearly-empty building early that morning was to inhabit a place of ordered calm. The catafalque sat in readiness and the lofty vaults stood exactly as they have for hundreds of years.

Such events bring a particular moment of history into the context of a long-lasting community which has witnessed so many momentous occasions. So much is made possible only by continuity.

REMEMBERING HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

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The Revd Canon Anthony Howe, Chaplain of His Majesty’s Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace (SSH 1998–2001)

I had the honour of being appointed one of the members of the Domestic Ecclesiastical Household in 2015 and met Her Late Majesty The Queen on several occasions, including when she visited the Chapel Royal here at Hampton Court Palace.

The chapel here functions – in some ways – not unlike a parish church, but with a very tiny parish; namely the small administrative team living within the Peculiar (royal parish) of Hampton Court. Our congregation is varied, from members of staff and the volunteers helping to run the Palace, to tourists, and those living in the wider community. Our worship is based on the Book of Common Prayer, and we are fortunate to have exceptionally good music, as well as a fantastically beautiful building.

2022 has been an extraordinary year, and the contrast between the joyful celebrations of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee and the events of her death in September are stark.

I had been involved in discussions as to how we might support members of the Royal household in the event of the Sovereign’s death, and as soon as the news broke, we quickly changed chapel around and announced that there would be a Requiem the next day. The Chapel was full, and it was a very moving moment when we sang the National Anthem with the words ‘God save the King’.

Very few of us today have ever witnessed the succession of a Monarch, and the events around the Queen’s death reminded me that, fundamentally, the role of the Monarch is a spiritual one. The Monarch brings together the nation as a family, a community, and this was very clear to me when I witnessed the grief and floral tributes here at Hampton Court Palace.

My immediate focus was on pastoral care of the community here in the days afterwards. The Chapel was open for people to pray and reflect, and I also held memorial Evensong and Sung Requiems. I attended the Committal at Windsor alongside other members of the Royal Household. I was right in the sanctuary, by the altar, and it was a simple and beautiful service, led by course of David Connor, another SSH alumnus.

We now look to the coronation. Traditionally there has been representation from here, but of course we wait to see – whatever the role that is required of me, I look forward to fulfilling it and to continuing to provide a public face of the private spiritual side of the monarchy.
THE HIDDEN LIFE

Remembering the late Sister Benedicta Ward, Serenheid James looks at Fairacres Convent in Oxford.

When a don dies, a sombre ritual invariably follows, in which surviving colleagues descend to pick over the deceased’s books in the period of limbus librorum, which is to say after the professional booksellers have been and before the arrival of the charity-shop van with a bloke called Dave. It was in those circumstances that the Principal and I found ourselves at Oxford’s Fairacres Convent in June, at the invitation of the Prioress, going through what was left of the library of the late Sister Benedicta Ward.

Benedicta’s death in May 2022 was a loss to the academy as a whole; she was one of the leading medievalists of her generation, and her output was prodigious. It was a loss to St Stephen’s House, too, for she was an Honorary Fellow, and (like all the best people) a former resident of Moberly Close. Staggers lore holds that her scout here in College, knowing that Benedicta was a woman who wrote books and collected Peter Rabbit memorabilia, somehow came to the conclusion that she was in fact Beatrix Potter herself.

Most of all it was a loss to her sisters at Fairacres, where for decades, Benedicta walked the tightrope – not always to her own satisfaction – between a distinguished academic career and her vocation to the contemplative life within the enclosure of her convent, from which of necessity she was so frequently dispensed. Many reading her obituary in the Daily Telegraph on 3 June may well have been surprised to discover that such a community, cloistered and contemplative, exists in the Church of England at all.

The growth of the contemplative life in the CofE owes a great deal to George Seymour Hollings. As Peter Anson put it in his book Call of the Cloister, after its rediscovery at around the turn of the twentieth century, Christian mysticism “soon became a fashionable craze and much of it was of an extremely superficial character”. It also flirted dangerously with heterodoxy, which is where Hollings came in; he was an orthodox expert with a wide ministry of reconciliation, who encouraged many of his penitents to engage in contemplative prayer. Hollings was also a member of the Society of St John the Evangelist (SSJE), and so the College’s buildings had their part to play in this development in the life of Anglican prayer. It had become clear that there were many women who felt called to the religious life, but not necessarily to the active sisterhoods that had led the way from the 1840s. In 1906 the Superior General of the Cowley Fathers, Robert Lay Page, encouraged Hollings to use his gifts to found a contemplative women’s community: the Sisterhood of the Love of God.

The nascent sisterhood grew steadily under Hollings’s guidance, and the first Life professions took place in 1910. Ever-increasing numbers prompted a move to its present site a year later, tucked away between Oxford’s Iffley Road and the Isis. Hollings died there suddenly in 1910, while saying mass for the Sisters in the chapel. His work was picked up by Lucius Cary, also a member of the SSJE. By 1920 the community had again run out of space. In an appeal for funds for new building work, Page’s successor as Superior General of the SSJE, Henry Power Bull, explained in the Cowley Evangelist that “The enclosed life […] is no self-centred idle life, no dram of prayer or following of self-will. It is a burning desire to love God, in great humility, and with an ever increasing intensity of worship and self-oblation.”

The same rings true today; in their brown habits and black veils, the Sisters of the Love of God continue their round of prayer and intercession on the same site whose buildings were enlarged, together with a new chapel, in the early 1920s. A hundred years later, a new wing now allows the sisters to access the library, chapel, chapter house all on one level, and there is more guest accommodation. Reverend Mother has observed that “A newly renovated building is only the beginning of the story, and can only be brought alive by the Community living within it.” With only one lay brother now surviving, the last chapter of the English Congregation of the Cowley Fathers will be over soon; the American Congregation, from whom we hear regularly, continues to thrive in Boston, MA.

For the Sisters of the Love of God at Fairacres, whose story is so much part of that of the buildings that we ourselves now inhabit as a community, a new chapter has only just begun.
For many, particularly those who have studied at the House in more recent years, it is hard to imagine St Stephen’s House being based anywhere other than Marston Street. SH has, however, previously occupied two sites elsewhere in Oxford. The original House was in Parks Road, nearby Wadham College, and in 1919, it moved to Norham Gardens, where it was based for 61 years until 1980 – longer than anywhere else (so far) in its history.

In September, as part of this year’s alumni reunion event, we arranged a tour of two of the College’s former buildings: numbers 17 and 19 Norham Gardens, a sweeping residential road in north Oxford. We share here some photographs from this visit, together with memories of time spent by former students at the site.

Noel Vasey made cassocks for SSH students for generations, and always had them ready in time for ordinations. They were red wool, with a waist seam with 5 pleats and 39 buttons! It was a design especially created for Staggers, with an in-built cape over the shoulders – it looked a little like a mini skirt. Most ordinands got a cassock from him. You weren’t allowed to wear one of the cassocks unless you were ordained and in a parish, but I remember one of the students sewed his in place so that The Principal (David Hope) couldn’t make him take it off.” – Anon

“Arthur [Couratin, Principal 1936–62] had run the House as a kind of family affair. His sister Marian ran the domestic side and oversaw the kitchen. There was of course a cook; but Marion was always around in the kitchen at mealtimes, sometimes serving at the hatch. Discipline was indeed strict. Students had to be in chapel every morning for half an hour’s silent prayer before Mass. It was told that one morning, when several students were walking out of chapel after meditation, Arthur murmured audibly as they passed him kneeling at the back of the chapel, “And Judas went out, and it was night”. Evensong was obligatory and so was Matins, said by anticipation at 9.30 pm. The greater silence then set in until after Mass the next morning. There was one free evening a week, when students could stay out with permission until 11.00. The Vice-Principal lurked in the entrance hall to take note of anyone who dared to come back later. Permission to stay out would not be forthcoming for the following Thursday evening.” – Canon Hugh Wybrew, SSH Tutor 1965–71

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“I remember the married quarters (opposite the main College building) won an architectural award for the most economical use of space. Certainly true! You could sit on the loo with your feet in shower! There was no cupboard space, nowhere to store a cassock, for example. One ordinand put up a pulley in the eaves of his room so that he could hang up his cassock!” – Anon

“For the first years of its existence in Norham Gardens, the House used to hold its services in the chapel left behind by St Hugh’s, which was afterwards incorporated into the dining-room. The chapel was built as a result of the Jubilee Appeal and dedicated in 1927. The painting of the Vision of St Stephen which still dominates it is a youthful work by a former student Vincent Lucas (1905) the then Bishop of Masasi, Lorimer Rees (1929) now a member of the Governing Body, serving as the model for the Christus.” – The late Canon Peter G. Cobb (a former student) in his 1976 book ‘A Brief History of St Stephen’s House’
The Edward King Centre offers graduate qualifications in Theology, Mission and Ministry as taught at St Stephen's House, Oxford, ranging from certificate level to Masters. These courses focus on sacramental, liturgical, moral, and pastoral theology in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. The qualifications form part of the Church of England’s Common Awards and are validated by the University of Durham. Depending on previous qualifications there are different entry and exit points for graduate students.

Who can apply?
The Edward King Centre’s graduate qualifications are open to both lay and ordained people who wish to reflect on their own contribution to the life and mission of the Church. The normal entrance requirement for postgraduate study via the Edward King Centre is an upper second-class honours degree in theology or related subject, however other qualifications or significant relevant experience can sometimes form the basis for exceptional admissions. Its courses are not limited to those within the Anglo-Catholic tradition: prospective students of other traditions and denominations are equally welcome. Tuition via the Edward King Centre is non-residential and makes use of online teaching facilities such as live Zoom lectures, live Zoom seminars, and some pre-recorded material. Furthermore, wider study support is provided for those worried about returning to academic study, for example after a long break.

How much does it cost?
Many resources on the EKC hub are free. For formal qualifications, fees start from £2,500.

Are bursaries available?
Yes, a range of bursaries are available. Please contact the Centre for more details.

www.edwardkingcentre.org.uk

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
In each issue of the College newsletter, we catch up with an alumnus to find out what they have gone on to do after leaving the College and their memories of studying here…

Raveena Balani
Name: Raveena Balani
Studies undertaken at SSH: MSc Child Development and Education
Year of graduation: 2016 (MSc)
Undergraduate degree/other studies: Undergraduate degree in BBA at Assumption University, Thailand (2012), Masters of Education, Framingham State University, Massachusetts (2020).
Current role: Head of Marketing and Events at SI-UK Education Council in London.

Who can apply?
I help UK universities formulate plans to recruit students from all around the world. My office is in London and I tend to be office based most days. We liaise with our university partners, planning events such as our University Fairs which attract 80+ universities and thousands of international students. Some of my time is also spent attending and speaking at Higher Education conferences. No two days are the same!

Could you tell us about your time at SSH? What was life like when you were here?
I am originally from India and I was quite nervous when I first arrived. However, I went on to meet some of my closest friends here and my year wouldn’t have been the same without them. I also volunteered at the church. I miss the late-night reading in the library and the Thursday night formals.

How did SSH prepare you for what you’ve subsequently gone on to do?
My most memorable moments would have to be the surprise party for my 23rd birthday where I met so many new people and made close friends. I also loved being able to invite my parents to a Thursday formal at graduation. That was truly special.

Any parting thoughts?
It’s been exactly seven years since I arrived in the UK and it changed my life. I’m grateful for all the doors this has opened for me, and all the experiences I have had. Thank you SSH!
A complex painting of the stoning of St Stephen that we moved in 1980, and in particular the rather old members is to be demolished as part of this development; that the 1926 chapel who had not been back since the 1970s. We did with us some old members of the college who St Edmund Hall. It was particularly good to have and some joining via Zoom. So far it has been a stimulating and enjoyable experience, with our external students bringing lively engagement and a wider experience to the seminars. Our intention is to focus on aspects of theology which cannot be learned easily elsewhere and which are fundamental to Catholic formation: liturgical theology, sacramental theology and moral theology. We look forward to building on this work in the years ahead, especially in expanding our capacity for the study of canon law.

The exceptionally high standards of ceremonial and liturgical observance characteristic of British state occasions was very evident at the State Funeral for the late Queen, and it was particularly impressive to see the involvement of old and current members and friends of the House. The Dean of Windsor Bishop David Conner (SS6 1969–71), Canon Paul Williams, Rector of Sandringham and a frequent sabbatical guest, and Canon Anthony Howe, chaplain at Hampton Court, all had clerical parts to play, and James Whittoun our Senior Research Fellow was responsible for producing the radio broadcast for the BBC. We are grateful to them for sharing some of their experiences in this newsletter. I was honoured myself to attend as part of the University delegation to hear the proclamation of the King at Carfax, and it has been poignant to hear for the first time ordinations at the Office praying ‘O Lord, save the King.’

Canon Robin Ward

ORDINATIONS TO THE DIACONATE 2022

The Revd Canon Thomas was ordained to the priesthood in 2021 and is now Curate, Potters, North, Comprising Burslem St Werburgh, Smallthorn, and Swynnerton.

Andrew Bailey, London Dockside (St Peter) with Wapping (St John), London

Milke Day, Fernbridge (St Andrew) & Brotherton (St Edward the Confessor), Leeds

Daniel Heath, Horbury (St Peter & St Leonard) & Horbury Bridge, Leeds

Tristan Meares, Rufford (St Mary the Virgin) and Tarleton, Blackburn

Thomas Cotterill, Brighton (St Bartholomew), Chichester

Michael Dixon, Cantley (St Wilfred), Sheffield

Sebastian Way, Reading (St Giles with St Catherine) and Bonchurch, Southwell

Stephen Miller, Hammershmit (St Luke) & Hammershmit (St Matthew), London

Tabara Gutteridge, Greenwheat (St Allge), Southwark

Calvin Robinson Christ Church, Harlestone

ORDINATIONS TO THE PRESTRIEDTH 2022

Luke Demetri, Croydon (St Michael & All Angels with St James), Southwark

Seamus Hargrave, Norbatch and Tenby, St Davids

Anthony Lawrence, Ventnor (Help Trinity, St Catherine) and Bonchurch (St Boniface), Portsmouth

James Walton, Castlefields (All Saints with St Michael) and Ditherington, Lisfield

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HAVE YOU JOINED THE 1876 SOCIETY?

The 1876 Society is a membership society for alumni, friends and supporters of St Stephen’s House, with the aim of providing a community of stewardship to help support the work and future of the College. Simply by becoming a member you are supporting this aim. You can join yourself, join in memory of someone, or gift someone else membership.

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