



St Hilda's College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



St Hilda's Pavilion by Peter Cook

ST HILDA'S COLLEGE

A Concise History

Founded by Dorothea Beale in 1893, St Hilda's was the last of the women's colleges to be established in Oxford. The College has remained true to its pioneering roots and continues to strive for equality as well as excellence. St Hilda's reached its 125th anniversary in 2018. The same year marked its 10th anniversary as a 'mixed' college that welcomes all students. In 2021, the Anniversary Building and Pavilion were completed in the first phase of the building programme that will transform St Hilda's site for future College members.

A Rich Past and an Exciting Future

As we look back over St Hilda's history, we look forward to the next chapter in our story.

In 2021 the first phase of the transformation of St Hilda's site was completed and the Anniversary Building and Pavilion revealed. These two buildings have increased our student accommodation by 52 rooms. They also include more social and teaching spaces, a new multi-faith room, 'The Sanctuary', and new Middle Common Room. The new Porters' Lodge and main entrance to the College have fundamentally changed St Hilda's profile on Cowley Place. St Hilda's College community is grateful to everyone who has worked with us on these beautiful new buildings, including Gort Scott architects and Beard Construction. We are all enjoying the new teaching and social spaces that the Pavilion and Anniversary Building provide.

We hope to provide more student accommodation and other facilities for the College with a [second phase of development](#).



Figure 1: St Hilda's Tower Entrance, Pavilion and Anniversary Building. Photos by Nick Kane.

St Hilda of Whitby

Dorothea Beale named the College after St Hilda (614-680), head of Whitby Abbey, which was the leading house of education of her time.¹

Hilda was the great-niece of Edwin, King of the Northumbrians, whom she converted to Christianity when she was 11. According to the Venerable Bede's *History of the English Church and People* Hilda spent the first 33 years of her life 'most nobly in secular occupations'. She spent her next 33 years as a nun, first in Gaul, and then as abbess of English monasteries at Hartlepool and at Tadcaster. She then founded and presided over the abbey of Whitby. Hilda suffered with a constant fever for the last six years of her life, but bore this bravely until her death in 680.

Hilda was the greatest of the royal-aristocratic abbesses of her day. She had a huge influence on the 7th-century English church. Miracles were associated with her as evidence of her piety. One of the College symbols, the ammonite, represent the serpents she is said to have turned to stone to protect the nuns of Whitby Abbey.



Dorothea Beale was a great educationalist. She chose to name the College after St Hilda when she was fighting to create opportunities for women in the second half of the 19th century. St Hilda too spent her life advancing the cause of learning.

Both Dorothea Beale and St Hilda are remembered at our annual Founder's Day service.

It has become a College tradition for our choir and orchestra to perform *Caedmon's Hymn* to celebrate Founder's Day. Each year, it is set to music by a St Hilda's student. Caedmon was a shepherd during the second half of the 7th century and, according to Bede, the greatest poet of his age. St Hilda was a great educational force for both women and men in early-medieval England and she persuaded Caedmon to become a monk in her abbey. Whitby Abbey was a double monastery of women and men in adjoining quarters. So, Whitby was not just a women's community but a mixed one, as St Hilda's College is today.



Figure 2: *Caedmon's Hymn* performed by Tom Carr (Music, 2017) at St Hilda's Founder's Day Service in 2019.

¹ An address by Jenny Wormald (1942-2015) Tutor and Fellow in Modern History (1985-2005), at our Founder's Day Chapel Service, 16 November 2005.

Founder and Principals

The Founder



Dorothea Beale (1831-1906)

Dorothea Beale was formerly Principal of Cheltenham Ladies College. She continued her work to promote women's education when in 1892, she purchased Cowley House in Cowley Place for ladies wishing to attend college lectures. In 1893 the Hall, renamed St Hilda's, opened as an Oxford Hall for women with seven students.

The Principals



1893-1910 Esther Burrows (1847-1935)

When Miss Beale started St Hilda's in Oxford, she appointed Mrs Burrows as Principal. This was a housekeeping rather than an academic role. In the early days Mrs Burrows was responsible for everything, from buying the furniture to chaperonage and discipline. The Burrows Wing in Hall Building was named in honour of the first two College Principals.



1910-1919 Christine Burrows (1872-1959)

Originally a student at Lady Margaret Hall, Miss Burrows assisted her mother in the foundation of St Hilda's whilst still a student. She became a tutor immediately after completing her studies and was Vice Principal when aged 23. She succeeded her mother as Principal, and was later Principal of the Society of Oxford Home Students (1921-1929).



1919-1928 Winifred Moberly (1875-1928)

A former scholar of Lady Margaret Hall, Miss Moberly oversaw the move to the newly-acquired South Building. Her term of office was marred by increasing ill health, and she died less than a week after it ended. The Winifred Moberly Room in South Building is named after her.



1928-1955 Julia Mann (1891-1985)

After studying at Somerville and the London School of Economics, Julia Mann was appointed Vice Principal and Tutor in Economics at St Hilda's in 1923. Miss Moberly's illness meant that Miss Mann had been running the College before her election as Principal. She oversaw considerable development and growth at St Hilda's, and was a generous benefactor to the College. The Julia Mann Room in South Building is named after her.



1955-1965 Kathleen Major (1906-2000)

Kathleen Major's first post at St Hilda's was as President of the JCR as an undergraduate. She went on to be Librarian and Lecturer at the College. She is recognised as one of the pioneers who established the disciplines on which the archive profession was based. As Principal she improved the administrative systems of the College and presided over a major building programme. The Kathleen Major Library is named after her.



1965-1980 Mary Bennett (1913-2005)

Mary Bennett was the first Principal with a husband. She and John Bennett broke new ground by hosting students in the Principal's Lodgings and leading the musical life of the College.



1980-1990 Mary Moore (1930-2017)

After reading History at Lady Margaret Hall, Mary Moore made her early career in the diplomatic service. She was obliged to resign when she married in 1963. When Mary became Principal in 1980, she and her husband, Tony, presided over a very sociable era in the Principal's Lodgings. Although the centenary of the College in 1993 fell during her successor Elizabeth Llewellyn-Smith's time as Principal, Mary was instrumental in launching the Centenary Appeal which by the end of her tenure had raised over £2 million, contributing to the permanent endowment of ten named Fellowships in the College.

1990 - 2001 Elizabeth Llewellyn-Smith

2001 - 2007 Lady English

2007 - 2014 Sheila Forbes

2014 - 2021 Professor Sir Gordon Duff

1 April 2021 - 31 January 2022 Dr Georgina Paul (Acting Principal)

1 February 2022 Professor Sarah Springman

In Hilary Term 2021, the Governing Body of St Hilda's College was delighted to announce the election of Professor Sarah Springman CBE FREng as the College's next Principal. Professor Springman was formerly Professor of Geotechnical Engineering and Rector at ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), one of the foremost technical universities in the world. She is a renowned geotechnical engineer and a pioneer in the study of soil-structure interaction and of geological mass movements that have become more prevalent through climate change.

Constitutional History

In 1896 St Hilda's was accepted as a recognized hall for women by the Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women (A.E.W.). The Hall became an incorporated company in 1897, with its own governing council. Four years later in 1901, St Hilda's Oxford was amalgamated with another Beale project, St Hilda's Cheltenham, to form St Hilda's Incorporated College.



Figure 3: The Principals of St Hilda's (Miss Moberley), Somerville (Miss Penrose), Oxford Society of Home Students, later St Anne's (Mrs Johnson), Miss Jordain (St Hugh's) and Miss Jex-Blake (Lady Margaret Hall) receiving Honorary Degrees at the Sheldonian Theatre. By kind permission of the Principal and Fellows of Lady Margaret Hall

It was not until 1910 that the University formally acknowledged the existence of female students in Oxford by forming the Delegacy for Women Students. St Hilda's then became a recognized society for women students. In 1920 women were finally permitted to become members of the University. For the first time women students were undergraduates and were eligible for Oxford degrees.

In 1926 St Hilda's Incorporated College was disbanded and St Hilda's Oxford was incorporated by Royal Charter as St Hilda's College, Oxford. Cheltenham Ladies' College had representatives on the St Hilda's Council but this final link

was broken in 1955 when a new charter and statutes gave St Hilda's self-government.

In 1959 the women's societies made an application to the University to be admitted as full Colleges of the University. This was agreed, and the change in status was effected by a supplemental charter and amended statutes in 1961.

St Hilda's celebrated its centenary in 1993. It was the only women's college in the University between 1994 and 2008. On 7 June 2006 the College's Governing Body voted to change the Statutes and Charter in order to be able to admit men to the College. A supplemental charter was granted in October 2007, and men were admitted for the first time in 2008.



Figure 4 St Hilda's Matriculation Group in 2008

College Symbols

The first symbol of St Hilda's Hall was the ammonite, a fossil consisting of whorled chambered shells, once supposed to be coiled snakes petrified. The early seventeenth century *Lives of Women Saints of our Contrie of England* explains their association with St Hilda: *'In that monasterie of Whitbye, there were such aboundance of serpents, what throughe the thicknes of bushes, and the wildernesses of the woods, that the virgins durst not peepe out of their Cells, or goe to draw water: but by her prayers she obtayned of god, that they might be tourned into stones; yet so as the shape of serpents still remayned; which to this day, the stones of that place do declare, as eye-witnesses haue testified.'*



Figure 5 Ammonite in the JdP Music Building Foyer

In The Cheltenham Ladies' College Magazine in 1893, Dorothea Beale wrote of the new St Hilda's in Oxford, *'We think of adding to our emblem, which must of course be an ammonite, the motto "non frustra vixi," - the old legend scarcely commends itself to modern ideas, but a fossil suggests the thought that every living thing, in passing away, should leave some work finished, something which remains for beauty, or for use.'* The use of the ammonite with the motto 'I lived not in vain' has continued to be used throughout St Hilda's history.



College Coat of Arms

When the College was incorporated in 1926 it could not afford a coat of arms, but a common seal was designed by Edmund New, a leading illustrator of his time. A bookplate, note paper and blazer badge were all based upon it. This remained the usual emblem of the College until the coat of arms was granted in 1960. The motto was not included in the grant of arms, although it is still occasionally used.

The Report and Supplement for 1959-1960 reported that, *'The College of Heralds has now the petition of St Hilda's for a coat of arms.'*

Azure on a fess or between in chief two Unicorns' heads coupé and in base a coiled Serpent argent three Estoiles gules.

azure

The blue field represents the colour most associated with Oxford University. It was also associated with St Hilda's Hall and College.

on a fess or

A fess is a band across the middle of the shield. Or is gold.

three estoiles gules

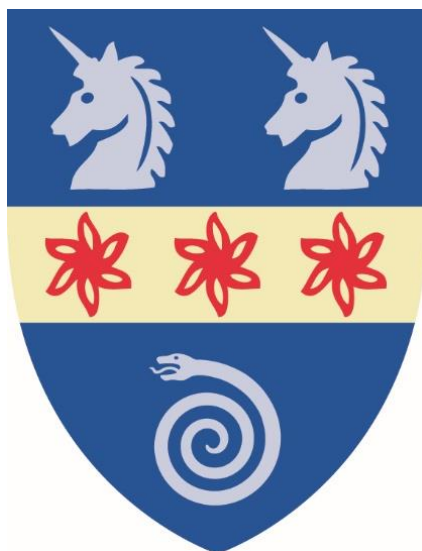
The College wanted to commemorate Miss Beale, but no evidence could be found that her family was armigerous. However, all Beale families seemed to have used arms with estoiles (stars with wavy points or rays) gules (red).

in chief two unicorns' heads coupé ... argent

It was found that Beale families all seemed to have used a unicorn's head for their crest (badge). Mr Michael Maclagan of Trinity College, who advised St Hilda's on the design of the arms in 1959-1960, felt that the symbol of a unicorn, *'with its ancient traditions, seemed not inappropriate to a ladies' college'*. Coupé means that the heads are cut off smoothly at the base. In chief means at the top, and argent is silver.

in base a coiled serpent argent

In base means at the bottom, where the silver coiled snake represents the name and reputation of St Hilda.



St Hilda's College Buildings

Dorothea Beale purchased Cowley House for £5,000 In November 1892. Originally built in the 18th Century, Cowley House was extended in the 1860s. St Hilda's Hall was established there in 1893 and the building became known as Old Hall (now Hall Building). It was extended in 1897 to provide a new dining room and student rooms. A further wing was added in 1909 with a legacy from Miss Beale. A final extension to Old Hall was added in 1935 to provide a new library and further student accommodation. This was called the Burrows Wing in honour of the first two Principals of St Hilda's.



Figure 6: Hall Exterior, 1923



Figure 7: Hall Exterior, 2015

In 1920, St Hilda's acquired Cherwell Hall, a teacher training college on an adjacent site. It



Figure 8: The Vernon Harcourt Family outside South Building

had originally been a family house named Cowley Grange. The house was built by Christ Church Chemistry tutor, Augustus Vernon Harcourt, on his College's land in the 1870s. In the Vernon Harcourts' time the house was smaller. A swing hung from the main stair for the benefit of the 10 children, who also enjoyed tea-tray tobogganing down the stairs. Vernon Harcourt, who was the first member of the University to admit women to his classes and the father of eight daughters, was a very supportive neighbour to St Hilda's.

The Vernon Harcourts left Cowley Grange in 1902. It then passed to the Church Education Corporation, which proposed to run it as a women's teacher training college called Cherwell Hall. At the time Miss Beale had been 'really ill', too ill 'to be told of anything so vexatious'. Her secretary expressed the hope that Christ Church would not agree to the scheme. Miss Beale does not seem to have been pleased with the decision to keep her in the dark. When speaking of a later potential purchase she wrote: *'I am glad to know of any sale that takes place, but it is no use to know after - if I had known, I might have bought the house now called Cherwell Hall'*.

The lease became available again in 1920, when the Church Education Corporation suddenly decided to sell, leaving the staff and students with little notice of closure. Whatever the reason may have been, this was to the benefit of St Hilda's and the lease was acquired for £17,500.

The College had launched an appeal to pay for an extension to Hall Building. The appeal was redirected promptly towards the purchase of Cherwell Hall. Supporters were encouraged to hold sales and entertainments (*'£20 or £30 can easily be raised in one afternoon'*), to send donations, and to purchase debenture stock at 5% interest. Within a year £13,400 had been raised by the stock alone. Provision was also to be made for renewing the lease when it expired in the 1970s, but in 1949 the College was able to purchase it outright from Christ Church and it became known as South Building.



Figure 9: South Building in 2015



Old Hall and South Buildings were separated by Milham Ford School. The School moved to another site in 1938. After various temporary uses, the building became the architecture department of the College of Technology, Art and Commerce in 1945. It was finally acquired by St Hilda's in 1958.

Figure 10: Milham Ford, post 1906



A new building programme began in 1952 and took over 30 years to complete. Many details of the plan were altered but ultimately the main objectives were all achieved. The first stage included an extension to the kitchen in South Building with a block of undergraduate rooms above it, a new lodge by the gates of South and a boiler house. Lodgings for the Principal followed and in 1958 the Dining Hall was extended. Following the acquisition of Milham Ford and its conversion into

Figure 11: Porters' Lodge and College entrance, 1971

undergraduate accommodation, a new driveway and Lodge unified the three buildings.

Both Milham Ford and the Porters' Lodge were demolished in 2018 to allow construction of the new buildings to start.



Figure 12: The College entrance in 2015. From left, Milham Ford, Hall Building, and the Porters' Lodge



Figure 13: HRH Princess Margaret with the Principal, Kathleen Major

A grant from the Wolfson Foundation made it possible to build a new residential block. Wolfson Building was opened in 1964 by HRH Princess Margaret. An additional residential block, between South and Wolfson Buildings, was designed by Peter and Alison Smithson and formally opened as Garden Building in 1971.



Figure 14: Alison Smithson, former Principal, Julia Mann, and Principal, Mary Bennett, at the opening of Garden Building in 1971

Over the next 20 years, smaller-scale projects were undertaken within existing space. These included a graduate common room adjacent to the Lodge in 1974. The Christina Barratt Building was opened in October 2001, funded by a legacy left by Professor Rosalind Hill, a graduate of St Hilda's. Named in memory of one of her closest friends, it provides undergraduate accommodation.

The growing need for student accommodation was met by the purchase of houses in east Oxford and the construction of Fulford House, a small block of flats for graduate students.

This cluster of student accommodation buildings on the junction of Iffley Road and Stockmore Street was developed later as part of our plans to improve and increase facilities for St Hilda's students. The

Jocelyn Morris Quad was formally opened in Michaelmas Term 2018. The buildings - Stockmore House, Rosalind Hill House (extension to Stockmore House), Catherine Fulford House (formerly Fulford House) and Sylvia Mann House (formerly 85/87 Iffley Road) were fully refurbished and extended to provide more accommodation. The completed project provides 67 high-quality study bedrooms for our students.

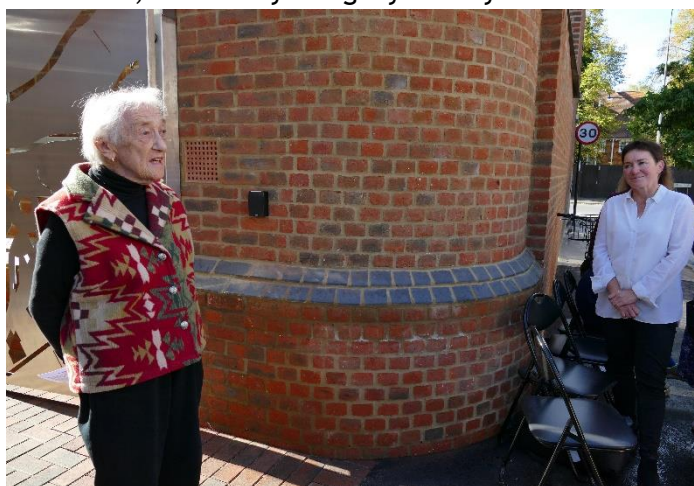


Figure 15: Dr Maggie Rayner (1989-2019), former College Lecturer, Fellow and Tutor, Vice Principal and Emeritus Fellow, at the opening of the Jocelyn Morris Quad in 2018.

The Chapel



Figure 11: The first College chapel in the 1920s.

When Cowley House became St Hilda's Hall in 1893, the billiard room on the top floor was fitted out as the first College Chapel. In 1897 the Chapel was partitioned to create an additional student room. Compulsory attendance at Chapel stopped in 1919. Even so, by 1921 the Chapel was no longer big enough to accommodate all the students. An appeal went out in October 1924, stating that *'we are only aspiring to a temporary wooden building, which shall be as pleasant-looking outside*

and as beautiful inside as we can manage to make it. If it is well-made and of good material, such a building should last from twenty to thirty years'. The pre-fabricated 'temporary' Chapel in the garden of South building, dedicated in 1925, was to stand for nearly 45 years. The construction of Garden Building necessitated its removal and a room in Milham Ford became a short-term Chapel in 1969. Like the previous 'temporary' chapel, this became permanent until the development of the site in 2018.



Figure 12: Chapel in Milham Ford in 2016.

The chapel was extended in 1971. A fundraising appeal in 1999 supported a further renovation of the space and the provision of new furnishing, including new windows. The project was generously supported by our former lecturer, Vice Principal and Fellow, Dr Jane Mellanby (1938 - 2021). The painted windows were given in memory of Jane's sister - in-law, Evelyn Fowe, an alumna and exhibitor of St Hilda's who died in 1998. There was a service to dedicate the chapel in Milham Ford in 2000 led by the Bishop of Oxford.



Figure 13: The Garden of Eden [1999-2000, painted glass]; Figure 149: Memorial Plaque in St Hilda's Chapel in Milham Ford;

With the demolition of the Milham Ford building in 2018, a new temporary Chapel was established in South 45. The Anniversary Building includes a multi-faith room, 'The Sanctuary'. This is an inviting and inclusive space, to which all members of College will be very welcome from 2021. The decision to create this space reflects St Hilda's commitment to inclusivity.

In autumn of 2018 we began the transformation of St Hilda's site. The Anniversary Building, which replaced the old Porters' Lodge and Middle Common Room and the Pavilion, which replaced Milham Ford, were completed in 2021.



Figure 20: Pavilion and Anniversary Building seen from the riverside walk. Photo by Amu Chandra.

The Library

The first College Library was in the room opposite the original front door of Hall Building. It was furnished as cheaply as possible. However, the room was made as warm and comfortable as the limited resources permitted, for if the students worked in the library money would be saved on coal for their rooms.

A new wing opened in Michaelmas Term 1909 included a basement library *'beautifully panelled and fitted in oak'*, which now forms part of the law library. The carved overmantel in the new library was given by Miss Christine Burrows at a cost of £20. Miss Burrows, second Principal of St Hilda's and daughter of the first Principal, had been the original Librarian of St Hilda's in all but name. She was purchasing books for the Library when still a student. In 1901, by which time she was Vice Principal, she compiled the first full catalogue.

Between 1893 and 1928 the students were required to subscribe to the library, with the Council of St Hilda's regularly contributing grants to match the subscriptions. The student library subscription was not abolished until 1928, when the payment of 5/- a term was taken over by the College. The announcement of the abolition was made to the meeting of students 'amid applause'.

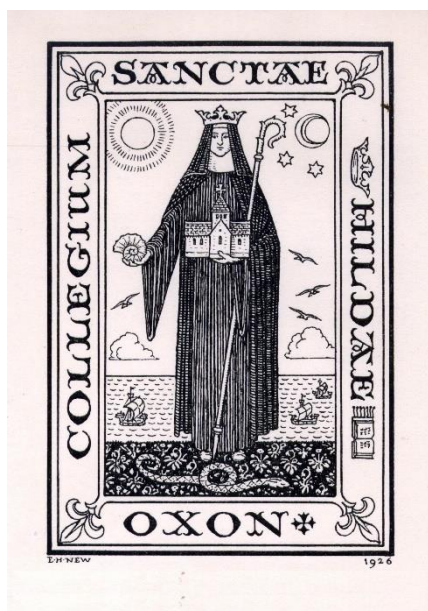


Figure 21: St Hilda's College bookplate, designed by E.H. New in 1926

Use (and abuse) of the library varied very little over the years, with regular complaints about missing books, noise, breaking of rules and excessive fines. For many years a list of missing library books was read out at the students' general meeting. Touches of sarcasm appear in the complaints of 1911 that *'as people seemed incapable of putting library books into their right shelves on returning them, the books should be put on the table in the library'* and of 1931 that *'many students seem incapable of using an alphabetical catalogue'*.

In 1925 the library was extended into an adjoining room, but the additional space was still insufficient. A memorandum written for consideration by the Library Committee stated that the Librarian had one small table, *'cramped and in a direct draught between two doors which are constantly used'*. The table was in such

an exposed place that nothing could be left about and if she made any noise she was looked on with resentment.



Figure 22: Opening of the Library in 1935

New shelves were added in 1931 and 1933, but the library had outgrown its two rooms. In 1935 the present library was completed and opened as part of an extension named after Mrs and Miss Burrows.

We have continued to extend the library. A new stack room was provided in 1956-1957, and enlarged in 1964. A refurbishment took place in 1992 and a major extension was added in 2003-2004. This included a lift, new reading rooms,

extended issue desk, environmentally controlled store for the archives and rare books, and offices for library staff. The Library was renamed the Kathleen Major Library in 2005, in honour of the former Librarian and Principal whose bequest to the College provided a substantial proportion of the extension costs.



Figure 15: St Hilda's Library Team in 2019

The Jacqueline du Pré Music Building

The Jacqueline du Pré Music Building was opened in September 1995. Jacqueline du Pré was an honorary fellow of the College and the Building is a memorial to her. It provides a concert hall, music practice rooms and recording facilities.

The JdP Music Building was the first purpose-built concert venue in Oxford since the Holywell Music Room, which dates from the time of Handel. A joint fundraising campaign by St Hilda's College and the Musicians' Benevolent Fund raised over £1 million with the support of a wide range of institutions, trusts, and many private individuals. The Music Building opened with a gala concert given by the Medici Quartet and the English Chamber Orchestra, in the presence of HRH the Duchess of Kent in 1995. Steven Isserlis became the JdP patron in 1998 and the Villiers Quartet became ensemble-in-residence in 2019.

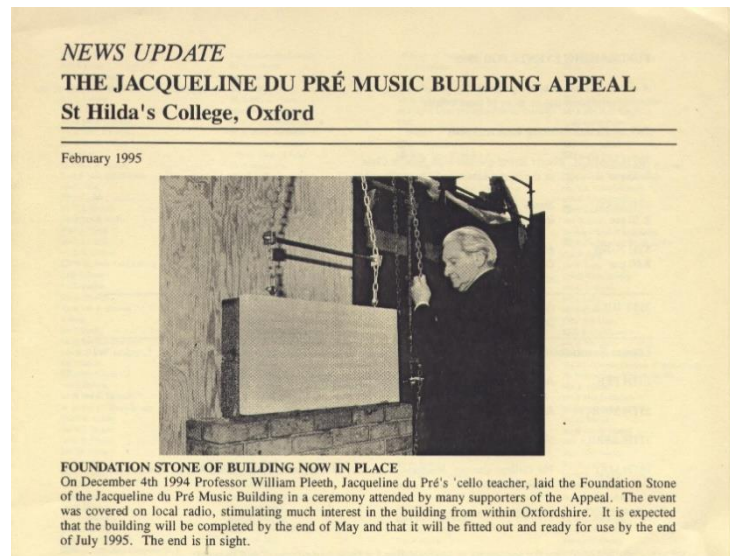


Figure 24: Newspaper article about the Jacqueline du Pré Music.

The Music Building was designed by architects van Heyningen and Haward, with acoustics by Arup Acoustics. The Edward Boyle Auditorium seats 180 people and is equipped with a Steinway D concert grand piano. There are four practice rooms and an electro-acoustic studio, all with disabled access.



Figure 25: The Jacqueline du Pre Music building on its opening night (above) and in 2018 (right).

Thanks to a legacy from the Reverend Brian Duke, the Brian Duke Foyer, also designed by van Heyningen & Haward was added in 2002.



Life at St Hilda's College

Early Days

'It is not considered desirable for students to go to dances.'

House rule, 1898.

St Hilda's early students had little opportunity to join the social life of the City and University. They arranged much of their own entertainment with regular tea and cocoa parties. Social evenings included charades, concerts, dancing, whist and plays, although the signing of the Armistice in 1918 was celebrated with a dinner and fancy dress dance. After the first World War ended, when women became members of the University, undergraduates began to join University-based societies.

The College Principal ran the domestic side herself until 1902, when the first of a series of housekeepers was appointed. Originally there was a staff of one cook, two resident maids and a gardener. Conferences were held during the vacations from the earliest days and were vital to the finances; even the Principal's rooms were let out.

St Hilda's College members were enthusiastic supporters of the women's suffrage movement. The Debating Society was affiliated with the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and prominent campaigners visited St Hilda's. Such enthusiasm was not surprising in a society of women kept outside the mainstream of University life and occasionally encountering such opinions as these, expressed by the editor of the Isis in May 1897:

'The ladies who visit Oxford at this period of the year [Eights Week] come to enjoy themselves, and are unhampered by anything in the nature of an ulterior motive. They can see a B.A. without envy, and can converse with a M.A. without experiencing any desire to denounce him forthwith as a tyrant or a usurper... The Ladies ought really to be satisfied; Woman is much nicer than Man, she is better looking, cleverer, more useful altogether. She is endowed with numerous and invaluable privileges, including the most constant companionship of that most useful of all implements, the hair pin. Why should she want more?'

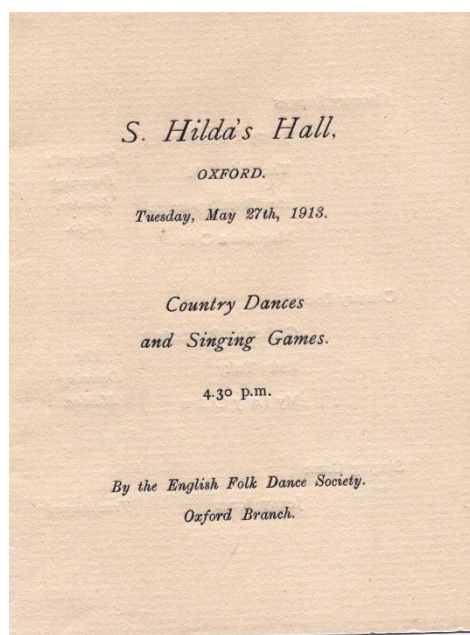


Figure 16: St Hilda's Folk Dance Programme, 1913

On the evening of Friday 12th June 1908 there was an attack on The Wild Goose, the half-rigger which had been 'proudly bought' by St Hilda's in 1899. A new back rail was needed, a pair of new sculls, repairs to the canvas cover and a new rudder. Investigations suggested that a party of drunken youths was probably responsible, but it was also thought that the damage may have been caused by male undergraduates who disapproved of suffragists.

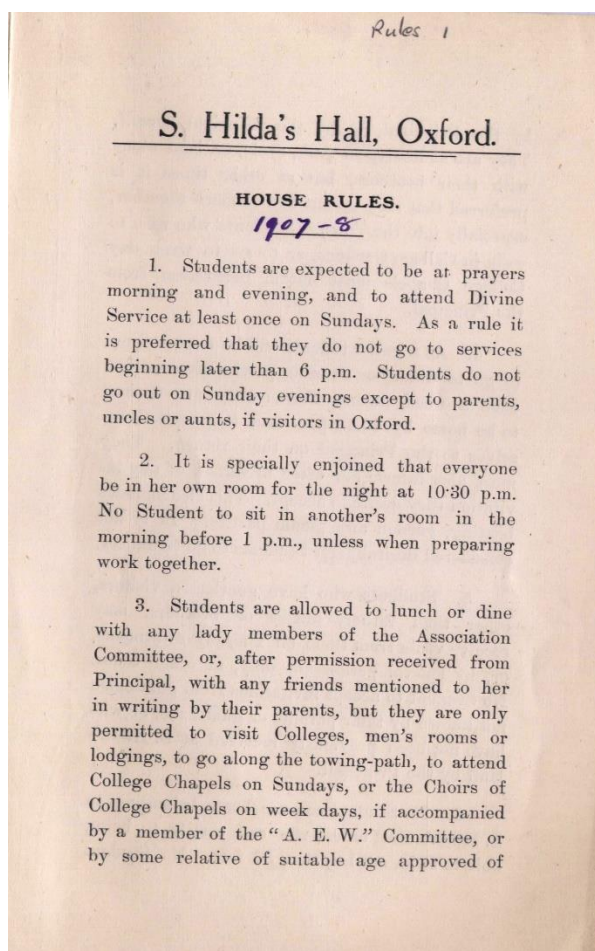


Figure 17: St Hilda's Hall House Rules, 1907-8

The rules of St Hilda's Hall in 1898 dictated that *'students ... are only permitted to visit Colleges, men's rooms or lodgings, to go along the towing path, to attend College Chapels on Sundays, or the Choirs of College Chapels on week days, if accompanied by a member of the A.E.W. Committee (Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women), or by some relative of suitable age approved of by the Lady Principal, or by the Lady Principal herself. They are at liberty to walk, cycle, or boat alone with their brothers, but at other times it is preferred that they go out two or more together, especially into Town.'*

It was stated that *'...students who have gentlemen visitors other than father, uncles or brothers, may receive visits from them on Tuesday afternoons, or, by special permission only, at other times. No student to accept invitations from gentlemen not known by their parents or guardians, or who have not been previously received at St Hilda's Hall by the Principal.'*

The rules were partly designed to prevent male lecturers from finding cause for complaint, for there were many who were opposed to the admission of women to lectures, and partly to satisfy anxious parents,

afraid that their daughters' marriage prospects might be compromised by attending Oxford.

The rules continued for many years, often to the great inconvenience of students and staff alike. The Principal spent a lot of her time as a chaperone. In 1909 an A.E.W. report stated that *'it is a rule well understood by women students, that attendance at College lectures is not to be made an excuse for conversation inside or outside the lecture room. There is also a general rule that young students do not go alone to College lectures.'*

The greater freedoms enjoyed by women during the first World War led to some difficulty in sustaining these rules, but it was only in the mid-1930s that they disappeared, when the rule that at least two women must be in any mixed party was abolished.

Dining at St Hilda's

Dining Hall etiquette in the 1920s required that evening dress was worn. Maids waited at table and formal bows to the Principal were expected. However, the quality of the bowing was not always satisfactory and members were asked 'to bow perceptibly'. Behaviour at Dinner was also governed by unexpected local customs. One student recalled that it was not the custom to ask anyone senior to yourself to pass anything at meals.



Figure 28: Dining Hall in 1921



Figure 18: Dining Hall in 2018

Music and Dance

A dance club for members of the University was founded in 1926, despite the fact that all undergraduates were forbidden to take instruction in dancing except from teachers licensed by the Proctors at that time. The club was so popular that the JCR voted to alter the late night pass 'from Saturday to Tuesday in the week when the dance club meets'. The dons were not so enthusiastic, feeling that 'dancing was peculiar in its disturbing effects upon work'. The Club was dissolved in 1931. When there was a proposal to found another in 1936 the Proctors were unable to sanction it 'owing to the opposition of the Women's Principals, who ... refused to give any reason for their action'.

By now, students were permitted to attend dances outside the College, but only three a term, and these requiring permission from Tutor and Vice Principal. During term they had to be back by midnight, except at Commemoration when no restriction on the time of return was sometimes allowed. So in 1938 a student saw 'the first faint touch of dawn' as it appeared over Balliol Hall. On a smaller scale was the College's own dance, held once or twice a term. In 1926 the Chronicle boasted that *'the College dances become grander and more professional every term - there were ice-creams at the last two'*.

Each student invited a male guest, who had to be introduced to the Principal. In 1938 the Dance Committee *'suggested that in future young men should be introduced to the Principal by their partners instead of the parlour maid'*.

In recent years, St Hilda's students have organised the annual May Ball, led by a Ball President and Committee. Themes for the event have included 'Seven Deadly Sins' and 'Enter Enchantment'.



Figure 30: St Hilda's May Ball, Seven Deadly Sins, 2016

Today, the Jacqueline du Pre Music Building is at the centre of musical life at St Hilda's. The College choir, orchestra, chamber groups, and jazz band perform at events throughout the year. Each week in term time, there is a free lunchtime concert in the JdP, given by students and professional artists. Many Dance Scholarship Oxford (DANSOX) events also take place there. Founded in 2013 by Professor Sue Jones, Tutorial Fellow in English, DANSOX promotes dialogue between academic disciplines and dance theory and practice.



Figure 31: DANSOX: Ensemble Klang and Rambert Dancers residency at the JdP in 2018



Figure 32: St Hilda's students perform at a lunchtime concert in the JdP 2017

Clubs and Societies

One of St Hilda's most active clubs was the Dramatic Society. However, it could only put on private performances as dramatic ventures were affected by the limitations on women. In July 1924 the Vice Chancellor and Proctors had forbidden public performances by any University or Intercollegiate societies except the Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS). This ban included the Oxford Women's Intercollegiate Dramatic Society. Women could not be members of OUDS and so could not take part in any public intercollegiate performance.



Figure 33: St Hilda's Drama Society performance of Hamlet in 1916.

In 1927 the President of OUDS sought permission for a woman undergraduate to play Miranda in a production of *The Tempest*. On this occasion the Vice Chancellor raised no objections but ruled that the President must obtain the permission of the Women's Colleges, particularly with regard to chaperonage arrangements. Miss Moberly, The Principal of St Hilda's, response was concerned entirely with practicalities: *'I am afraid the practical difficulties would be considerable as none of the women's colleges have any night porter, and our hour for shutting them up is 11 p.m. I do not think we could make special arrangements for a maid to sit up for any student who might be taking part, and I imagine that rehearsals as well as performances are liable to go on late.'*



Figure 34: Student performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 2014

In more recent years, St Hilda's has had great success in Drama Cuppers. In 2017, our cast of Freshers won **Best of Cuppers**, the highest award in the competition, for their performance of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' at the Burton-Taylor Theatre on 1 November 2017. In addition, Niimi Day Gough (2017, English) won the **Best Actor** award and the **Best Design** award went to George Twinn (2017, Law) and Eva Newton (2017, English).

St Hilda's during the War Years

War work was central to student life during World War I. The nature of the work ranged from rolling bandages and stitching stretchers to hosting plays for wounded soldiers convalescing at the Examination Schools in Oxford's High Street, which had been converted into a hospital. War work continued during the Long Vacation when parties of students undertook agricultural work at a farm in Brockhall, Northamptonshire. One of these students was Lorna Howell, who came up to St Hilda's in 1914. In a letter dating from 1952 accompanying a gift to the Hall of photographs of the farm work, she recalled that she worked the land in 1916, *"I am not quite sure the name of the place but it was near Northampton... only a small village and we worked for the Squire."*

Lorna donated a selection of photographs and documents to St Hilda's. The September 1916 issue of Brockhall Parish magazine noted, *"We have had with us a party of Students from St. Hilda Hall [sic], Oxford, and we can say that this 2nd Relay has shown what women can do for their Country and Church..."*



Figure 35: Students doing war work on a Northamptonshire Farm during WWI

Lettice Curtis 1915-2014 (Mathematics, 1933) was one of the first women pilots to join the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), serving from July 1940 to November 1945. She became one of the first women to qualify to fly four-engined heavy bombers, and was also the first woman pilot to deliver an Avro Lancaster bomber. She graduated to fly all categories of wartime aircraft, and her final ATA rank was as First Officer.



Figure 36: Lettice Curtis with a Spitfire during World War II.
Photo: Harper Collins/PA

War work by staff and students continued during the second World War. St Hilda's students trained as fire watchers, dug allotments on Headington Hill, and assisted with the Toc H canteen for Soldiers. The College also welcomed evacuee children from Bristol.



Figure 37: WWII Fire fighters from St Hilda's



Figure 38: Denise Bayliss (nee Dudley, St Hilda's 1938-1939, 1940-1942) with a group of evacuee children.

Junior Common Room Bar

From the early years, the Junior Common Room has been the hub of student life at St Hilda's. In 2014, we were able to open a refurbished JCR Bar Hall Building, with support from our alumnae. The JCR houses the Val McDermid (English, 1972) Bar and the Cynthia Watson (Music, 1950) Buttery. The bar opens out to the Rebecca Stetz (Chemistry, 1991) Terrace.



Figure 39: The JCR in the 1920s



Figure 40: Our alumna and Honorary Fellow, Dr Val McDermid, with former JCR Presidents at the opening of the Val McDermid Bar in 2014

Sport at St Hilda's

Tennis was enjoyed by St Hilda's students in the College's early days, so much so that in



1901, the College's first tennis court was extended. Miss Beale agreed to the enlargement provided it could be done for 30 shillings, although St Hilda's did not enjoy much success in early appearances in the Inter-Collegiate tennis matches.

Hockey was played at St Hilda's, but numbers were a constant problem. With an annual intake of only 6-8 students in the early years it was necessary to combine with other teams, like the Oxford Home Students or the Etceteras, a local club. An intake of 17 in 1899 resulted in the formation of a St Hilda's Hockey Club in 1900, but they struggled to form more than one team, even for practices.

Figure 41: Hockey, Boat, and Lacrosse captains, 1919

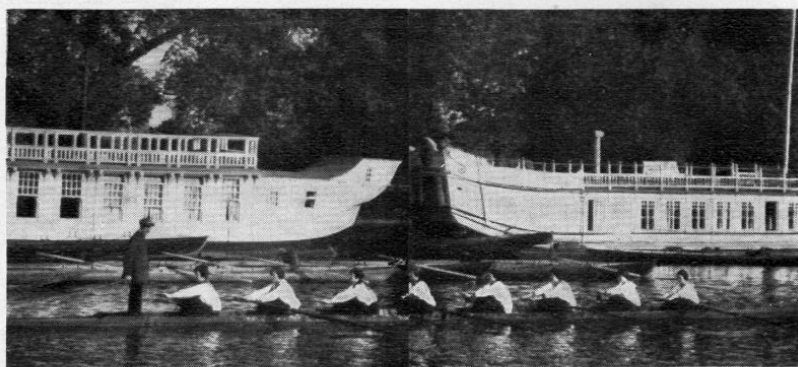
An unusual feature of past sporting life at the College was the Rifle Club. The Club was very popular, with about a third of the students becoming members in the first two years. The outbreak of war signalled the end of the Club (apart from a brief revival in 1921) as the rifle range the members used was soon commandeered by the troops.

The College's riverside location has always made boating a big attraction. Early expeditions were in a randan, a boat with a pair of sculls in the middle and an oar each at stroke and bow. In 1898 this was replaced by 'a new and elegant outrigger', called the Wild Goose. In due course a Four was started and, as one member recalled, *'in 1911 we actually rowed in an EIGHT, a hitherto unheard of thing for a women's college in Oxford... To do it we had to go down to the Isis at 8.30 a.m. when there would be few, if any, to see us'.*

A canoe named The Ammonite and a punt were acquired in 1900 and 1905. Students took to both enthusiastically. In 1906 it was reported that *'even among the less successful windmill sculling and bank-to-bank punting are steadily decreasing'.*

In 1921, St Hilda's was the first women's Oxford college to have an eight. Their cox, William Best, coached St Hilda's crews for over 20 years.

From *THE SPHERE*, November 12, 1921.



St. Hilda's Hall Eight Going Past the Barges

St. Hilda's is the only women's college in Oxford which has an eight. The cox, Mr. W. Best, has coached St. Hilda's Hall for over twenty years

Figure 42: Coverage of St Hilda's Eight in the student newspaper, *The Sphere*, 1921



Figure 43: St Hilda's Crew, 1917-21, with their coach, William Best

By 1926 it was accepted that the women's colleges should form united and independent teams, and St Hilda's was involved to the full:

'We are swollen with pride over our Rowing this year. Last Term we won an Intermediate Rowing Competition and now we provide the Captain, Bow and Cox, for the newly formed United Rowing Four which has just competed against Reading University. This term there are two St Hilda's people in the United Hockey Team and two in the Lacrosse. The Captain of the United Swimming was last year, and is again this, from St Hilda's.'

In 1927 it was reported that *'St Hilda's has distinguished itself recently in rowing, there being five Hall representatives in the boat that defeated Cambridge.'*

In 1969, St Hilda's boat crew qualified for the Summer Eights, the first women's crew to do so. Before this time, women did not compete at Summer Eights. By qualifying, St Hilda's crew opened up the event for the rest of the women's boat crews at Oxford. It was a huge breakthrough by a group that had only rowed a few times together previously (Eleanor Hicks, Barbara Welch, Yvonne Apelbourn, Janet Whiteway, Briget Sleeth, Angela Harvey, Pamela Martin, Dinah Woodcock and Jackie Wolf).



Figure 44: St Hilda's Rowing Crew, 1969

"St Hilda's College discovered that it had sufficient oarswomen to make up its own rowing eight. We decided to enter an eight for the hitherto male preserve of 'Eights'. ...we surprised the rowing world by doing extremely well in the 'getting on' races, so much that the men could not deny us entry to Eights Week."

Eleanor Rawling, née Hicks, (Geography, 1967)

In more recent years, St Hilda's men's, women's, and mixed teams have all enjoyed sporting success.

St Hilda's Ski Team won the Oxbridge Cuppers in 2016/17. Our Octopush (underwater hockey) team won Cuppers in 2017 and 2018. St Hilda's team won Trampolining Cuppers in 2016/17. In 2017, St Hilda's newly formed Mixed Lacrosse team were unbeaten in the league. St Hilda's won mixed touch rugby Cuppers for the first time in 2018.



Figure 45: Mixed Hockey Team, 2018

Our Men's Hockey team also reached the Cuppers final that year.

In 2020, St Hilda's Men's Football team, made history by winning the Football Cuppers completion for the first time! Having defeated Univ, Somerville, Worcester, and St Edmund's Hall along the way, they met Pembroke in the final on Friday 21 February 2020. The closely-fought match ended with a 3-2 victory to St Hilda's, who scored an unprecedented 27 goals across their Cuppers campaign.



Figure 46: Football Cuppers Team 2019/20



Figure 47: W1 at Torpids, 2019

Rowing success also continues. At the 2018 Summer Eights, our Men's 1st and 3rd boats won blades. M1 moved up four places, to 5th in Division 4. M3 moved up four from Division 7 to Division 6.

At Torpids 2019, our Women's and Men's 1st boats both won blades. W1 finished with five-bump blades and rose to division 2. M1 ended the competition at the highest position they have ever been, 7th in Division 4.

Cuppers are intercollegiate sporting competitions at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The term comes from the word "cup".

The 21st Century

Research at St Hilda's

St Hilda's has always cultivated innovative, independent thinkers. Today, the Fellowship pioneers outstanding research across all the disciplines represented in College. The Fellows support graduate and undergraduate students in engaging with research cultures and networks and in applying their academic skills and knowledge to real-world situations.

The College builds research networks to create interdisciplinary links and connections with those who use academic research. Three of these are Dance Scholarship Oxford (DANSOX), Mind and Brain, and the Centre for Clinical Therapeutics.

Founded by Professor Susan Jones, Dance Scholarship Oxford (DANSOX) provides a major forum for dance scholarship in Europe, promoting dialogue between prominent academic disciplines and the worlds of dance theory and practice.

Figure 48: 'Playground', a presentation on Revival, Reconstruction, and Performance with Yorke Dance Project, Yolande Yorke, Susie Crow, and dancers at a one-day conference on the life and work of the great twentieth-century choreographer Sir Kenneth MacMillan (1929-1992)



Figure 19: Criminality and the Brain, Brain and Mind Research Seminar, 2019

Launched in 2019, the St Hilda's Centre for Clinical Therapeutics Research is led by the Climax Chair of Clinical Therapeutics, Professor Duncan Richards. Our ambition is to create a world-leading centre of research excellence, placing St Hilda's at the forefront of interdisciplinary thinking about the future of medicines development and global health equality.

The Mind and Brain series of interdisciplinary workshops is led by Drs Maike Glitsch, Anita Avramides, Ann Dowker and Stephen McHugh. The workshops look at brain-related issues from the point of view of neuroscience, psychology, clinical medicine and philosophy. The workshops are aimed at a broad audience, including fellow academics, students and the general public.



Figure 50: Sir Michael Rawlins GBE, MD, FRCP, FMedSci, delivered the Centre for Clinical Therapeutics Research's inaugural lecture: 'Novel approaches to assessing the safety and efficacy of new medicines'.

As well as providing invaluable support for their students, our academic staff carry out ground-breaking research that they share through publications and by regular participation in conferences.

St Hilda's hardworking students excel in their studies, with 98% of our undergraduate students getting an upper second class or first class degree in their finals. They also find time to take part in charity work within the local community, hold welfare events within the College, and take part in a wide range of extracurricular activities.

After the first group of male and female Fresher matriculated in 2008, St Hilda's Junior Common Room members voted to hold the first Gender Equality Festival. This student-run, week-long festival of events (talks, panel discussions, workshops) on a range of topics concerning feminism became an annual tradition each Hilary Term. It became known as the Feminist Festival in 2017. The JCR also started holding an annual Cultural Festival in 2019 with a diverse range of international stalls.



Figure 51: Student helpers at an undergraduate Open Day in 2019

All College members celebrate St Hilda's at every opportunity, including its 125th anniversary in 2018.



Figure 52: Alumna, Zainab Badawi, and Principal, Professor Sir Gordon Duff, cut the 125th anniversary cake on Founder's Day 2018

St Hilda's during the Global Pandemic

On 23 March 2020 the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, addressed the nation about COVID-19, which he described as 'the biggest threat this country has faced for decades'. People were only allowed to leave their homes for the following very limited purposes for the duration of this first lockdown.

In alignment with the University, all St Hilda's teaching, learning and assessments were conducted remotely in Trinity Term. All staff members who are able to work from home did so, making only essential visits to College. Social distancing was observed in and around College. All common spaces were closed, including the Library, Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, JCR, MCR, SCR, and Dining Hall.

All St Hilda's planned events were cancelled, including the May Ball. Wider events were also cancelled, including the University of Oxford's alumnae event, *Meeting Minds 2020*, and the Oxford Literary Festival. Rather than disappoint our authors and audiences, we held our regular [St Hilda's Day at the Literary Festival](#) as a virtual event, the first of many that were held in 2020. Many of the talks are still available to view. We have continued to hold virtual events, including a DANSOX Summer School, a live lecture followed by an audience Q&A on [Brain and Mind: Understanding the Relationship](#) and audience Q&A, and many [events for our senior members](#). St Hilda's students also held a successful virtual Arts Week and Feminist Festival in Hilary Term of 2021. Many of our [virtual events](#) are still available to view.

During the long summer months of 2020's first lockdown, St Hilda's staff and students came together to support the NHS and the local community.

Our Domestic Bursar, Gerri Cane, and members of her team collected protective aprons and gloves from our own stores and gathered donations from colleges across the University, all of which went to the John Radcliffe Hospital to help the NHS workers there. Our Conference and Events Manager, Sarah Brett, made scrubs for NHS staff in local hospitals. On hearing from a friend that their staff were short of scrubs and PPE in general, she sourced fabric and patterns and got started, alongside a small group of women in the local area.

St Hilda's students fundraised for Oxford Food Bank and exceeded their target by raising over £600. Those who had to stay at College decided to reduce waste and help the Oxford Community Emergency Foodbank (CEF). They were able to take five boxes of food that had been left in College by those who were unable to return to St Francis Church.



Figure 53: Students' collection for food banks in summer 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic

Life for St Hilda's community continued through this virtual term. St Hilda's Fellows, tutors, students and staff shared their experience of life in lockdown from the perspective of their working, but also their wider, lives in a series of blog 'postcards'.

- Life in Lockdown: A Volunteer's View from the Frontline by J.P. Ay (Biochemistry, 2017)
- Doing Oxford from my Bedroom: A JCR Perspective by Georgina Findlay, JCR President (Modern Languages, 2018)
- My Take Aways from Oxford: Memories to cherish in lockdown life by Madeleine Davies-Brown (Modern Languages, 2016)
- Finding Our Own New Normal by Dr Helen Swift, Fellow in Medieval French
- Life on a Screen by Oliver Mahoney, Archivist at St Hilda's College and Lady Margaret Hall
- [St Hilda's Physicists' Online Short Options Party](#) by Dr Luke Jew
- [Presidency in a Pandemic](#): Reflections from James Bromfield, JCR President 2020-21



Figure 54: Lockdown postcards from our staff and students

More of our students, Peter Wallich (PPE, 2018), Scarlett Whelan (PPE, 2018) and Tejas Acharya (Physics, 2018), with Tom Flatters of Corpus Christi College, produced an e-book called *Learn Better at Home*. Drawing on scientific research and the authors' own experiences, the e-Book offers advice and guidance on how students can motivate themselves, get started, and continue to work effectively. Released on June 5, the book is offered on a pay-as-you-want basis with all its proceeds going to the COVID-19 fund run by The Life You Can Save, a non-profit body that advances the most cost-effective interventions against developing-world hardship.

Fran Woodcock, former student (Classics, 2004) and now our Alumnae Relations and Communications Manager, spent lockdown climbing Ben Nevis from her living room. She did this while wearing various homemade costumes to raise money for Shine Cancer Support, a national charity that supports people in their 20s, 30s and 40s with cancer. Fran received a Telegraph Lockdown Award for her efforts.

Our former Chaplain, Canon Brian Mountford, and St Hilda's team of chapel wardens helped to keep our spirits up by sharing weekly virtual Reflective Prayer Services throughout Trinity Term 2020. Like all colleges, we held our undergraduate Open Days virtually in June. Our senior members were also able to enjoy a virtual summer Garden Party with reunions. Some of the sessions are still [available to watch](#).

The beginning of the academic year 2020/21 marked a partial return to normality. Although social distancing remained in place and guidance from the government and University of Oxford was strictly adhered to, we were happy to welcome our students back to St Hilda's for Hilary Term.



Figure 55: Social distancing and wearing of masks became part of College life.

Despite managing the ever-present risks associated with COVID-19, there was much to celebrate. 2020 marked the centenary of the formal admission of women to the University of Oxford. From October 1920, women could matriculate and therefore take degrees for the first time, despite having studied at the University since the late 1870s.

In recognition of this milestone, a team representing the History Faculty, the Bodleian Libraries, the former women's colleges (Lady Margaret Hall, Somerville, St Anne's, St Hilda's and St Hugh's) and the Oxford Martin School Programme on Women's Equality and Inequality, created [Education and Activism: Women at Oxford University, 1878-1920](#), a new research project and online resource. This collaborative project commemorates the centenary and contributes to research on women, education and political activism.



Figure 20: Our catering team continued to look after the College community while following government guidelines.

The term continued, albeit at a distance, and further restrictions were introduced in November. Our annual Founder's Day celebrations took place virtually and for the first time in many years, we did not hold our traditional 'Carols on the Stairs'.

2021: Lockdown 3

Due to a sharp increase in cases, a further national lockdown was announced on 5 January 2021. All teaching and learning took place online except for the courses outlined in government guidance where in person teaching was permitted. Staff presence on the College site was at the minimum level necessary to provide essential services for students in residence and keep core operations running. All public spaces, including the JCR, MCR, gym and Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, were closed. We continued with an impressive programme of virtual events that brought the community together despite the physical distance. These included virtual lunchtime recitals brought to us by our talented students and the JdP Music Building Team. We also held our first virtual 'Brain and Mind' research event, at which we were joined by audience members from Paris, Munich and Bucharest,

as well as members of the University of Oxford and many A Level students from near and far. Throughout this challenging time, St Hilda's Chaplain has continued to support college members with a weekly programme of events. Our JCR and MCR Committee members have also provided many virtual welfare events for our students. St Hilda's community of Fellows, staff and students have all played a part in keeping the College going during this time.

St Hilda's contributed to efforts to vaccinate the nation by working with St John Ambulance to support the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme. Teams from St John's Ambulance were being sent to venues around the country to train volunteers to help roll out the vaccine. St John Ambulance used our Dining Hall, Marquee, and, for the first time, the new Pavilion to train their volunteers to roll out the vaccine in January and February 2021. We were very happy to be able to help support their efforts and to provide our buildings free of hire charge for this purpose.



Figure 21: St John Ambulance trained volunteer vaccinators at St Hilda's

At the start of Trinity Term 2021, COVID-19 restrictions continued to affect the day-to-day running of our College. The Government announced on 13 April that in-person teaching could not resume before 17 May, except for those on practical or practice-based courses who had been permitted to return in the previous term.

As the situation evolved, we were delighted to welcome our students back to St Hilda's before the end of Trinity Term and to resume some of our activities safely. Among these were the celebration of the 2021 Rachel McLean Award. This annual award goes to the member of St Hilda's JCR who has improved College life and/or raised the profile of the College within the University. Students, staff and Fellows gathered together in our Pavilion for a dinner to mark the occasion.



Figure 228: Students at the Rachel McLean Award 2021 with Acting Principal, Dr Georgina Paul

At start of the academic year 2021/22, we were delighted to welcome College members back to St Hilda's in person. We also celebrated the official opening of our new buildings and said goodbye to Sir Gordon Duff, Principal of St Hilda's 2014-2021.



Figure 59: Former Principals, Elizabeth Llewellyn-Smith, Lady English, Sheila Forbes, and Sir Gordon Duff

St Hilda's Anniversary Building and Pavilion were officially opened on 25 September 2021. In the absence of our honoured guests, Rt Hon the Lord Patten of Barnes and our alumna, Lady Patten, the buildings were officially opened by four former Principals of St Hilda's: Elizabeth Llewellyn-Smith (1990 - 2001); Lady English (2001 - 2007); Sheila Forbes (2007 - 2014) and Sir Gordon Duff (2014 - 2021).

At the 2021 Gaudy Weekend, we marked the achievements of and said goodbye to our former Principal, Professor Sir Gordon Duff. We gave heartfelt thanks to Sir Gordon and Lady Duff as we wished them well for the future. Speeches and a musical tribute performed by students and staff of the College took place in the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, followed by a garden party.



We welcomed our new Head of House, Professor Dame Sarah Springman, to St Hilda's, in February 2022. We are looking forward to the next chapter in St Hilda's history.

Figure 60: Professor Dame Sarah Springman

Appendix

History of St Hilda's

An address by Jenny Wormald (1942-2015) Tutor and Fellow in Modern History (1985-2005), at our Founder's Day Chapel Service, 16 November 2005.

We are very fortunate in and can be very proud of our college name; Miss Beale chose well. She did not aim quite for the top, as the founders of Jesus, Trinity and Christchurch did. And there are, of course, other colleges named after saints. But if we look at them, and more particularly the women's - now former - women's colleges, we can still feel good. St Anne's and St Hugh's may have their point, but which St Anne, which St Hugh? Somerville, of course, doesn't have a saint at all; but it is named after the remarkable 19th century scholar and strong exponent of women's education, Mary Somerville; and as she was a Scot, that, in my book, is just about as good. Even so, I would far rather have St Hilda than even Mary Somerville, let alone the tough-minded but dreary and humourless Lady Margaret Beaufort from whom LMH gets its name. And even among the Oxbridge saints, Hilda stands out. For she was very formidable indeed, but imbued with infinite grace, and someone who has something very particular and special to offer. And I am very grateful to my colleague Janet Howarth for telling me about just what an inspiration St Hilda was to Miss Beale.

Hilda was born in 614, great-niece of Edwin, king of the Northumbrians, and converted with him to Christianity when she was eleven. Our knowledge of her comes from the Venerable Bede, whose *History of the English Church and People* devotes a chapter to her life and death as well as discussing her role in the Synod of Whitby, and also in persuading Caedmon the stable-hand to become a monk at Whitby after the miracle which turned him into the earliest author of vernacular Christian poetry. She spent her first thirty-three years in the world, of which Bede says little; he simply records that she spent them 'most nobly in secular occupations' - which can perhaps be re-translated as 'had a very enjoyable time'. For the second thirty-three she was a nun, beginning her monastic life in Gaul, and returning to be abbess of the monasteries first at Hartlepool and then Tadcaster before founding and presiding over the abbey of Whitby. The last six years of her life were rendered hideous with a continual burning fever which she bore with immense courage and acceptance; her death was serene and moving.

Thus far we might see her, as Bede depicts her, simply as a role-model for religious women, the archetypal holy woman, whose example brought people to God and with whom miracles were associated as evidence of her especial piety; the ammonites on our coat of arms represent the serpents she turned to stone. And of course that was in part what Bede wanted to depict, and that is what she was. But there is far more to her; this was no holy cloistered nun. Bede rightly singled her out because she was the greatest of the royal-aristocratic abbesses of her day, and her influence on the 7th-century English church was profound; she was a national religious figure of immense spiritual power. It is a telling reminder that history is not a matter of linear progress and improvement that this was a great age for well-born religious women, in a position to operate with a vigour and an impact which was theirs by right. These were no second-class citizens. Men listened to them, often, clearly, in awe; kings and bishops consulted them, male saints and leading churchmen kept up correspondence with them. It is instructive to think about the fact that Miss Beale chose St Hilda when, herself a great educationalist, she was fighting to establish her school and her Oxford Hall to open up opportunities for women in the second

half of the 19th century. One feels that St Hilda would certainly have approved, even though founding institutions for women had not been an issue for her. For it was only after the seventh century that men took over and established that dominance in public, religious and educational life from which it would take more than a millennium to begin to dislodge them. Equality of the sexes, no need to feel inferior or defensive: these were alive and well in St Hilda's England. And I dread to think what she would have to say to any member of her modern college who dared to mutter about feeling inferior, overshadowed by confident and clever men.

It was no accident, therefore, that it was at Hilda's Whitby that the great synod called in 664 to resolve the conflict over the dating of Easter, which had divided the church in the British Isles, was held, in the presence of two kings, Oswy and Alchfrid, with kings and abbess presiding over the dispute between Colman bishop of Lindisfarne and Wilfrid abbot and later bishop of Ripon. And we may envisage Hilda not as the retiring, silent and deferential nun but as the woman in the full confidence of her power and authority, taking part in the debate along with other members of her community - and decked out in jewels (for jewels were found in the excavations at Whitby). It was not her only great public appearance. It was she, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who were the two accusers of the notoriously tough Wilfrid who got him dismissed from his bishopric in 678. I have already mentioned Caedmon, stable-hand turned author. And Caedmon exemplifies two other things about St Hilda and her fellow abbesses. First, Whitby was a community of highly educated women. Hilda had spent the first year of her monastic life at Chelles; and Chelles had a wonderful library. And it was not, of course, alone in that, alone in seeing the huge importance of a prestigious collection of books. Men might hunt, fish and fight. Women advanced the cause of learning; and that was what Hilda would do for the rest of her life. Second, Hilda persuaded Caedmon to become a monk in her abbey. So Whitby was not just a women's community. Like other monasteries presided over by these impressive abbesses, it was a mixed one. Whitby's religious and educational glory produced not only Caedmon, but no fewer than five bishops of the English church, men, Bede tells us, 'of outstanding merit and holiness'. So Bede's Hilda is not only the holy woman of great and enduring faith, marked out by miracles and ultimate suffering, though that is impressive enough. Bede's Hilda is also one of the great educational forces, for women and for men, in early-medieval England. And it is that combination of her particular style of the holy woman and her particular style of the woman of and for education that marks her out as one of the great figures in English history - and more than just English history - and one whom I personally find deeply and profoundly moving. Indeed, she is one of my own female role-models with whom I would like to have dinner - and I bet that not only would I be brought into the presence of an awesome personality, but the food and wine would be good.

What a role-model and an inspiration for Bede and for the society of her day. What a role-model and an inspiration for Miss Beale, seeking to redress over a thousand years of the playing down of women's education, and doing so, naturally, by founding her school and her college for women. And what of that college, in which I have had the privilege and pleasure of being a Fellow, in today's circumstances, with today's new pressures? I like to think that St Hilda might well have approved of our not simply joining the move to mix, but instead taking time, after the other women's colleges had voted to go mixed, to think about the alternative - continuing as the remaining college for women - although as that was not her *métier*, she might also have wondered about it. What I am sure of is that she would not at all approve of the college which bears her name meeting its present-day challenges in a spirit of pessimism and division. She who made Whitby great would certainly expect a great deal more of us than that. Her role-model and inspiration for us should be to inspire confidence, the confidence to make St Hilda's a notable Oxford college, particularly well-placed to make a strong input into a University now committed

to opportunities for women. Who better than us? And if we do go mixed, should we not equally remember St Hilda, and the fact that admitting men held no terrors for her, because she herself was so confident in her own position as a woman of great ability and power? We do well to ponder on St Hilda and on what that remarkable life has to tell us and to offer us. We can thank Miss Beale for having the wisdom to direct us to do so. And I think that it is appropriate to say here that we can thank God for St Hilda.



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