

# changinglives

Secret Gardens Ball  
Special Edition



Newnham College Newsletter

# secretgardensball



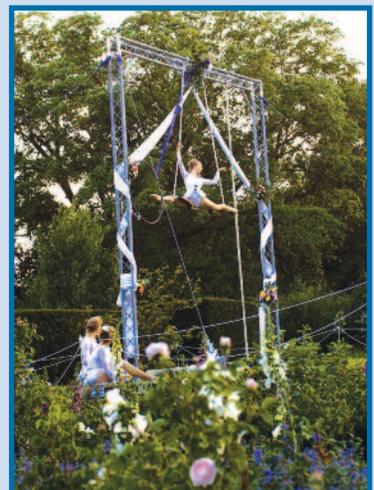
## The Plan

The idea of holding a Ball to showcase Newnham's Gardens, mentioned, almost as an aside, to Professor Jenny Morton, Chair of the Garden Committee, was hatched at the Associates' Garden Conference in 2009. Jenny rose to the challenge and with the support of the Development Office enthusiastically adopted the suggestion which evolved to become a formal proposal to the College Council in February 2012. Newnham led the way in Cambridge as the first College to hold a May Ball specifically for our alumnae. Its focus was to encourage the Newnham Community to re-experience the magic of a Newnham Ball on a summer's evening and to share their pride in the College by inviting their guests to join the party whilst raising funds for the gardens.

## The Date

Choosing the date was the first dilemma. Our licence from the City Council permits us to hold a Ball in May Week every other year. Recognising that alumnae could not attend mid-week, the last possible night within that period, Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June, was therefore fixed upon and we persuaded the City Council to allow us to hold an extra event in the 'alternate year'. Mindful of the fact that Newnham lies right in the heart of a residential area, Newnham always ends its balls at 2am and the Domestic Bursar, Wendy Evans, charmed the neighbours by writing to give advance notice and invite them to a meeting to discuss our plans. The Health and Safety file for an event of this nature is six inches thick and Wendy was invaluable at guiding the Ball Committee through potential pitfalls: Development Director, Penny Hubbard, was astonished to be told by the Council Fire Officer 'Yes I am afraid you do have to fire-retardant spray real ivy!'

*What an utterly magical night was had by all of us on Friday. We could hardly believe how beautifully college and the gardens provided their earthly delights, and how tasteful in every sense was the entire celebration. We met old friends and new and enjoyed an extraordinary and memorable experience. Even the weather was miraculous (did you have snipers in helicopters shooting at the clouds?)*





## Ticket Cost and Dining

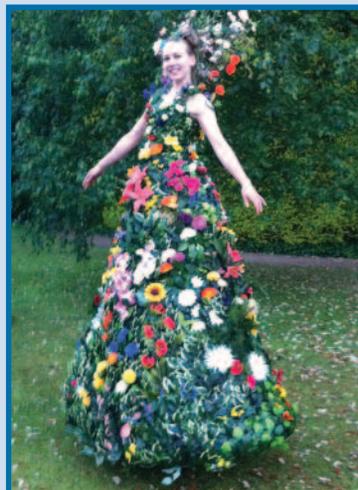
We kept the ticket cost down to the same level as that currently charged by student Balls with a view to suiting as many pockets as possible. A range of dining options were on offer: a four course Gala Dinner for 180 in the Orangerie (College Hall), a three course meal for 400 in a huge Sidgwick Dining Marquee and up to 620 non-dining Fawcett tickets entitling guests to delicious Hog Roast, barbeque and fajitas with a wide range of vegetarian options. Ice creams, chocolate fondue, strawberry pots and candy floss provided dessert throughout the night for those with a sweet tooth. Intense tastings in the months leading up to the Ball ensured that the menus were 'just right'. Specialist May Ball caterers who could produce a sit down meal for 400 in a marquee (with the only equipment required of the College being a hose for water) were commissioned and the entire in-house catering team signed up to work on the night in support of the chefs and Peter Robertson, our Catering Manager, for the special Gala Dinner.



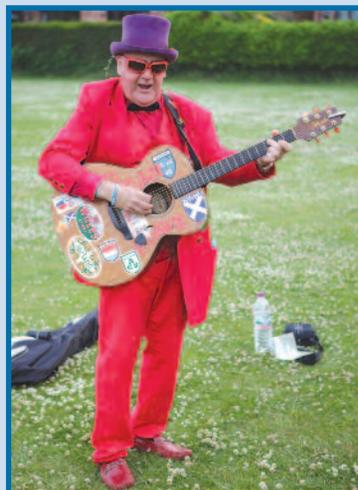
## A Ball for Newnham

This was a Ball for Newnham and accordingly we used as many acts and performers connected with the College as possible. We worked with Frankie Dubery (NC 2007), Director of Wildfire Productions, to create a magical tone for the night. Elegant garden nymphs twirled and spun above our heads as guests arrived to collect their first glass of champagne; cheeky 'Puck-like' acrobats tumbled and entertained and stilt walkers elegantly paraded around the beautiful gardens. Frankie's handmade dress, for her 'Flora' character, created especially for Newnham, drew gasps of admiration. Music played by our virtuoso harpist, Anne Denholm (NC 2010) and saxophonist, Judith Swinhoe-Standon (NC 2010) floated across the air.

As night fell mysterious dancers, lit up by their costumes, fluttered in front of the lights and glow performers surprised those walking down



the Nut Walk or past the yew hedges by popping out in their stunning costumes. Hazel Hancock (NC 2005) enchanted guests with her caricatures drawn in the specially designed Potting Shed and Vito Vallega, from the IT department, and his band entertained those enjoying liqueurs in the MCR. Fellows Katy Edcombe (NC 1963) and Claire Cockroft (NC 1994) sang and student Claire Nicholls (NC 2010) dazzled her audience with her flute playing. Accordionist Zoe Wyatt (NC 2010) brought a smile to everyone's face as she performed her original *Newnham Song* and Emma Clement (NC 2011) ably compered guests who wanted to have a go on the piano. At 1.00am Martha Hawker (NC 2011) leading the Cambridge University Improvised Comedy Society, The Impronauts, reduced the packed MCR to tears of laughter. Singing porter, Dave Simmons, acted as wandering minstrel all night – he was spotted at 2.15am still singing his folk songs sitting on the tree bench near the Sports Field surrounded by an appreciative group.





## Bands and music

One of our first decisions was to appoint the brilliant covers dance band, *Mind the Gap*, recommended by committee member Liz Hooley (NC 1980) and thanks to generous sponsorship we were able to house them in a beautiful Grand Pavilion Tent. The City Council impose strict limits on the decibel levels of music to be played throughout the evening; after midnight it has to drop to a non-amplified level. We had to check the limits hourly on a special meter and record them for production to the Council Officer who 'dropped in' from time to time throughout the evening. Having seen the fun enjoyed by the Newnham students at their ball last year with a 'Silent Disco' we knew our guests would find it intriguing. Those dancing wear headsets and choose the tunes they wish to dance to from three channels playing very different music. One guest reported *'I was swaying to Silent Rhapsody by Queen whilst my husband was going crazy to the Spice Girls; it was absolutely hilarious. One of the most bizarre experiences was taking off my headset and seeing everyone bopping away in total silence.'*

Three other venues hosted live music throughout the night; following the dinner in the Sidgwick Dining Marquee a team of Newnham students swooped to transform it into a Speakeasy. The lights dimmed, coloured table cloths were thrown over the dining tables and delicious cocktails were served. Guests sipped Singapore Slings or Margaritas whilst enjoying blues music, jazz, acapella singing from former choral scholars *All the King's Men* and acoustic guitar duets. In College Hall the founders of Newnham gazed down on guests jiving to the spectacular London rock and roll band *Let the Good Times Roll*. For those less keen to dance we ran a range of smaller acts throughout the evening in the MCR, accompanied by liqueurs, including the specially created *Newnham Dream* (Jack Daniels, Baileys and another mystery ingredient).



*Huge congratulations to everyone involved in the Newnham ball. It was a truly magical evening that we will remember always and was so perfect in every way! We brought friends from Devon and came from Cornwall and it was well worth the trip!*

*We heard rumours that there will not be another one for ten years! We all had such a great time so please, please, please do one before then!*

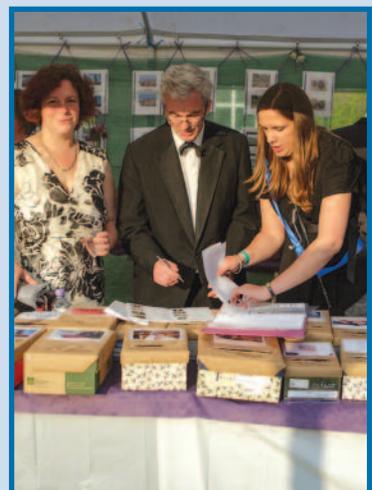


## Tea in the air raid shelter

Head Gardener Tony Arnold loves a challenge and he and his team work tirelessly to help deliver all Newnham's balls. When Professor Jenny Morton had the idea of recognising Newnham's history of having wartime air raid shelters, he and his team built an entrance to an air raid shelter tea tent where shellac 78rpm specialist, Greg Butler, played 30s and 40s music on an original pair of HMV wind-up gramophones. Traditional jam tarts, Battenberg and malt loaf were served and the University Lindyhopper team provided spectacular dancing. As one guest commented *'Only at Newnham would you find yourself queuing to get into a tea tent!'*

## Charity Auctions for the Gardens

Having taken a deliberate decision to price the tickets no more expensively than student May Balls we planned a Live and Silent Auction as the fundraising element lying at the heart of the Ball. With the fantastic support of the Associates, the Roll Committee and other alumnae who generously donated incredible prizes, Serrie Meakins (NC 1976) and Anna Wakerley (NC 1976) helped us create a unique Newnham Charity Auction with something to appeal to everyone. Whether you fancied a one-off experience (accompany Clare Balding (NC 1990) on a Rambling, see ITN News at Ten being filmed with Julie Etchingam (NC 1988), take a walk round the Botanic Gardens with Professor Germaine Greer (NC 1964) or have Professor Mary Beard (NC 1973) as your personal tour guide of the casts in the Museum of Classical Archaeology), the use of a holiday home, a canoeing lesson or premium tickets to attend a concert with the Academy of Ancient Music, the wide range of unique prizes on offer gave testament to the breadth of our alumnae and their interests. Anna pulled personal strings to persuade David Palmer, the auctioneer of the TV programme *Cash in the Attic* to mastermind the Live Auction in College Hall (quite an acoustic challenge with 180 guests). A surprise highlight prize





consisted of a pair of Head Gardener Tony's wellies planted up with Newnham plants. We borrowed an electronic white screen to keep track of the bids for the other items in the Silent Auction. A team of ten Newnham students, wearing ivy crowns and yellow sashes to identify them as 'Bid Porters', 'worked' the entire Ball, charming our guests as they enjoyed dinner in the Marquee, queued for the dodgems or the ferris wheel and encouraged them to place bids.

## The Newnham College Iris Collection

The Secret Gardens Ball also saw the launch of the Newnham College Iris Collection. Specialist breeders from the English Iris Company attended to answer questions from prospective buyers. You can download an order form at the following link [www.newn.cam.ac.uk/about-newnham/newnham-gardens/content/the-newnham-college-iris-collection](http://www.newn.cam.ac.uk/about-newnham/newnham-gardens/content/the-newnham-college-iris-collection)

## How do you decorate a garden?

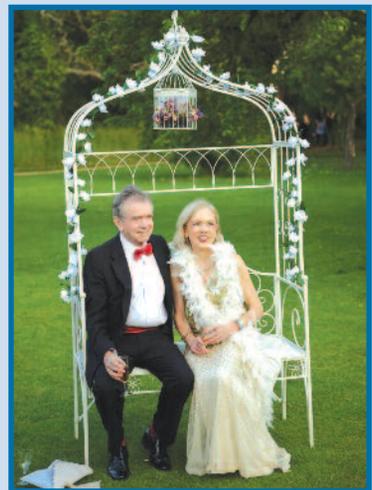
Ball Committee member Alison Sansome (NC 1982) ran what, one helper called, 'a professional flower arranging course' for our team of students and alumnae helpers to create beautiful table displays. 'Mary Poppins Like' Ali produced stunning piece after stunning piece from her car to add that little something extra around the gardens. You might have come round a corner and found a love seat upon which to pose for a photograph or a pair of deckchairs to rest weary dancing legs.

## Student participation

The Ball could not have taken place without the fantastic support of Newnham's current students. All undergraduates agreed to vacate their rooms for the night and 130 volunteered to work (in two shifts) in bars, in the Marquee, as fire stewards and monitors. Katie Roberts (NC 2010) helped the Development Office in the enormous logistical task of allocating individual roles and signing contracts. A Hit Squad of



*The Garden Ball was wonderful; it was the best ball I've been to in my four years here as a student. Thank you for letting me be part of it by helping and I'll definitely come to the next one as an alumna!*



*Thank you SO much for organising a perfect ball. My party of 9 really enjoyed it and are already asking for you to organise another one!! The whole event was so relaxed and fun. We felt pampered and special from the beginning to the end.*

helpers who were 'parachuted in' to deal with urgent tasks and emergencies were admirably directed by Heather Davis (NC 2010) and the recycling team worked overtime to clear rubbish and keep the gardens beautiful. We are very grateful indeed for our students' support and enthusiasm for the Ball – and next time we hope they all come as alumnae themselves!

## Clearing up

Most of the Development office team got to bed at about 3.30am although Head Gardener Tony worked on through the night to be joined at 6am by Ball Committee member Pippa Rogerson (NC 1980) who martialled three bleary eyed students who were on clear up duty. By the time the two main marquees were finally cleared away at 4pm on Saturday you would not have known a ball for 1,200 people plus 300 helpers had taken place the previous night.

## Funds Raised

We are thrilled to report that we raised £27,896 for the gardens and received a further £10,000 donation for the College.



## Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who helped in a myriad of ways. In particular we would like to record our gratitude to the Garden Ball Committee, to their friends, husbands and sisters (who cheerfully stuffed sandbags for the air raid shelter, painted beautiful signs, lugged tables and chairs and moved drinks and ice into position), to the College Accountant and to Senior Members and staff who helped man the gates. Finally, we must thank the wonderful members of our Development Team who, undaunted by being responsible for one of the biggest alumnae events ever held at Newnham, smiled throughout.

The fantastic collaboration helped produce a spectacular event, voted by one experienced ball-goer as 'the best she had ever been to in Cambridge'.



*I wonder what I would have said 50 years ago, had I been told that I'd be on a Ferris wheel in the small hours, level with the 3rd floor windows of Old Hall, when I was getting on for 70? I couldn't even have imagined fairground rides being allowed on what was then the hockey field...*



*Huge thanks to you for making the whole evening work so well – the weather even listened! In particular, I loved the dodgem cars (4 times for me) and the caricaturist (got a super picture of me with my partner drawn with such care).*