

Downing Book

Foreword

August 1981, aged 25, newly qualified solicitor. Family package holiday. The beach at Albufeira, emerging Algarve resort. Suddenly my father appears above me, smiling, and proffering unexpectedly one of two small bottles of beer he's carrying. He's just made a long distance call from a telecabina, and confirmed that the Americans have indeed made a commercial success of a slimming product he's spent the last decade working on. It's the stuff of every inventor's dream!

Let's park the Albufeira of 35 years ago, and fast forward: you can read elsewhere about the remarkable "Cambridge Diet" story (1) (2) and how a working-class lad from Norwich came up to Downing in 1948, never left the University, then established the charitable Howard Foundation (3) which has invested in pioneering companies, scientific research, but principally in Downing. That little bottle of beer started four decades of largesse, of which this book to celebrate the architecture of the College is just the latest instance, though hopefully not the last!

Tim's remarkable work charts the roller coaster ride of the development of a College that was but backstop in a Will; which after ferocious opposition was left near destitute as an institution for well over a century, a tragedy in in comparison to what could have been achieved had the original 18th century Downing fortune worth some £100 million in modern money not been squandered! Over the last thirty or so years benefactors such as ourselves, and others you will read about, have effectively re-founded and stabilised the College by providing facilities which are not only essential for College life, but wherever possible are income producing. I joke with College staff by asking about their Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre, with Costa Coffee outlet, but in fact Downing has merely shown a way for academic institutions in the contemporary world to utilise their improved facilities commercially. In Downing's case, the income generated by the Howard buildings helps make up for the endowment never received; and of course we are only part of a modern history of donations from generous alumni and associates who have funded renovation, new facilities, scholarships, indeed anything needed, and why this book is dedicated to these College benefactors.

With wealth comes great choices. Many successful businessmen sail away to tax-exile, lobbing a few gifts at charity bashes. In emulating Wellcome (4) we sought to act as a modern role model: indeed, in timely fashion given the Thatcherite revolution and Dotcom-type bonanzas that followed. However, we've been assisted by the College itself, which has nearly always honoured its classical tradition, and fought hard to ensure that any new facilities provided are aesthetically appropriate, practical for College life, easily maintained, and part of its ethos of being accessible to all. I won't be rude about other Oxbridge colleges or some of their university departments, but I will comment on Albufeira, which I revisited for the first time a couple of years ago. I have never seen such a ghastly concrete-jungle of overdevelopment and bad planning: they certainly blew the opportunity that investment of the last 30 years threw at them, and will probably never recover. Downing, meanwhile, is not just the good-looking set of buildings you will now read about, but also a very distinctive and vibrant collegiate community of excellence which those who fought to found it could but have imagined, and to which all with links are proud to be a part!

Jon Howard, Secretary of the Howard Foundation, July 2015.

- (1) See "The Cambridge Diet", by Alan Howard (Jonathan Cape 1985, ISBN 0 224 02311)
- (2) www.cambridgeweightplan.com
- (3) www.howard-foundation.com
- (4) See "Henry Wellcome" by Robert Rhodes James (Hodder & Stoughton 1994, ISBN 0 340 60617 7) and www.wellcome.ac.uk