

The admission of Her Excellency Dame Karen Pierce as an Honorary Fellow, on the occasion of a Festival to mark the 150th anniversary of the foundation of Girton College.

Her Excellency Dame Karen Pierce came to Girton for the weekend of 28-30 June 2019, when she was admitted as an Honorary Fellow and invited to deliver the final anniversary lecture - the Festival Lecture - at a weekend-long Girton150 celebration.



As is now customary, the process began with a tree planting ceremony - part of a project to restore the Old Orchard which dates from 1886; before that the College was surrounded by wheat fields. On this occasion, Dr. Roland Randall invited Dame Karen to plant a Blenheim Orange (which is in fact an apple) tree.

The Blenheim Orange, observed Dr. Randall, originated at Woodstock, Oxfordshire, near Blenheim Palace in about 1740. Appropriately, perhaps, for Girton, a tailor and cobbler named George Kempster planted the original apple-pip, which was taken from a tree growing against the wall of Blenheim Palace. The result was known locally as Kempster's Pippin. The Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim Palace approved of the apple, however, and it was renamed 'Blenheim Orange' in 1804. It was first catalogued for sale in 1818 and received the Banksian Silver Medal in 1820; thereafter it spread through England to Europe and America.



Dr. Randall took the opportunity to note that besides the apples, pears and plums, there is also quince growing in the orchard. This was common in Victorian times, when the fragrant fruit was used to add a delicate flavour to apple pies. The first recorded UK cultivation of quinces was in 1275, when King Edward planted them at the Tower of London. Although, historically, quince were the only fruit used for marmalade - a word derived from the Portuguese marmelada, meaning “quince preparation” - at Girton they were added to complement the apples. The challenge is not to use so many that they overpower the pie!

Although only a few Blenheim Orange and Bramley apple trees remain from the original planting, they continue to produce excellent fruit alongside the rest of the mature trees of the orchard. Describing the Blenheim Orange in more details, Dr. Randall observed:

This apple has a greenish-yellow-orange skin streaked with red. It has a distinctive nutty flavour and is excellent for cooking. For cooking purposes, the apples should be used from early October. They are especially good for making 'Apple Charlotte' as they cook to a stiff puree. Also, by Christmas, they develop a sweeter flavour and a crumbly texture and are recommended to be eaten with cheese. Typical of triploid apple varieties (apples that need another variety to fertilise the flowers and will not themselves fertilise other varieties), Blenheim Orange is a very vigorous tree, and on standard rootstocks can grow in excess of 10m tall. It is slow to come into production but will then produce heavily; in fact it needs to be thinned regularly to control its biennial fruiting habit. The apples are slightly larger than those of most varieties and the shape is rather flattened.

Let us hope, Dr. Randall concluded, that the specimen Dame Karen Pierce plants today will have a similarly long life to those that were planted in the late 1880s! And with that, Her Excellency completed the planting on a fine and sunny afternoon, overseen by a crowd of well-wishers.



The Mistress (Professor Susan J. Smith), The Visitor (Lady Hale), Dame Karen Pierce and Dr Roland Randall, surrounded by Fellows and scholars of the College

By now, the Festival welcome was underway, and around 400 people had assembled on the hockey pitches by the 'Emily Davies Marquee' to enjoy warm sunshine, welcome drinks and close up magic from Tony Rix and Terry Machin. As the Fellows assembled into a procession, the brass band of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, with their musical director Dr. Robert Childs, took to the stage and the scene was set for the festival Opening Ceremony (which is documented in full elsewhere). Part of the ceremony included the admission of Dame Karen to the honorary fellowship, witnessed by the Fellows and scholars of the College and, uniquely - to celebrate 150th anniversary of the foundation of the College - by assembled alumni and guests.



Earlier in the year Girton was proud to mark the anniversary of its Foundation by electing as Honorary Fellows five of today's outstanding women - pioneers of excellence and achievement for the 21st century. The number five is a reference to the first cohort of students, whose decision to join the College was brave, bold, and life changing. Their 2019 counterparts are not 'firsts' in *that* sense - the College has long benefitted from the wisdom of a vibrant Honorary Fellowship. However, they are all alumnae of the College and of the University of Cambridge, they are all pioneering in their own sphere, and each has made a remarkable difference to the world. They are: scholar, conservationist and sports enthusiast, HIH Princess Hisako Takamado; writer and presenter Sandi Toksvig; leading Pathologist Dr. Suzy Lishman; physicist, Professor Dame Pratibha Gai; and tonight, our guest of honour, accomplished diplomat, Her Excellency Dame Karen Pierce.





An Honorary Fellowship is the highest distinction that Girton can award, the warmest hand of friendship it can extend. It is a great privilege to welcome these remarkable women into the College community, to celebrate the difference they have made in the world, together with all that their election - their wisdom and experience - lends to the life of the College. So on this very special day in the midst of the G150 celebrations, as our flagship festival opened *its* doors, we were proud to invite Her Excellency Dame Karen Pierce to join the College as an Honorary Fellow.

The admission ceremony opened with a scene setting statement from the Praelector, outlining the history of admissions ceremonies at Girton - an event warranted after the granting of the Charter in 1924, and dating from 1928. To introduce today's special ceremony we enjoyed a song, set to music in 1651 by Barbara Strozzi. Strozzi herself was born 400 years ago, in August 1619; she was one of very few women, probably the first, to publish under her own name (rather than a male pseudonym). The love poem we chose to recognise her work - *Amor dormiglione* - was played by Musician-in-Residence Jeremy West on cornetto and Director of College Music, Martin Ennis on keyboard.



I was then pleased to recount that Her Excellency Dame Karen Pierce had been elected to her Honorary Fellowship by the Governing Body for her outstanding contribution to diplomacy and global politics. As one of Britain's most senior Diplomats, Girton recognises her service in Japan, the USA, Eastern Europe, and South Asia, and is proud to know that she, an alumna of this College, is the first woman to hold the position of the UK's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York.

In acceptance of the Fellowship, Dame Karen gave a short speech about the qualities of the College that had inspired her, and offered a comment on the ideas - diversity, originality, inspiration, excellence, resilience and fearlessness - that had been incorporated into the décor of the marquee. She noted that this year's Honorary Fellows contributed to 'Diversity': she additionally identified her own key words as 'opportunity', 'partnership', 'impact' and 'friendship' and mentioned the Mistress's participation in work at the UN and with the Foreign Office to advance girls' education, as Girton had pioneered 150 years ago. She concluded by observing that she would, as an Honorary Fellow, endeavour wherever possible to encourage and promote the values and vision of the College as an institution committed to inclusive excellence, and inspired by an ethic of care.



On completion of the formalities, Dame Karen joined other guests at the opening ceremony, which - after duly reflecting on the rich heritage of the College - included comedy, magic and music until midnight.

On Saturday, Dame Karen delivered - as the Festival Lecture - the fifth and final talk in an anniversary lecture series that commenced in February when Her Imperial Highness Princess Hisako Takamado delivered the 58th Founders' Memorial Lecture.

Dame Karen's lecture - its title slightly amended from that listed in the programme to *The UN Today: Parliament of Man or Parliament of Futility* - was delivered to a packed audience in the Emily Davies Marquee. Her words and the subsequent discussion have been filmed, and the text is posted separately.



Dame Karen was guest of honour at the Festival formal hall, and returned to New York the next day to participate in World Pride 2019. On the way, she tweeted: *'Just as when I was a student, Girton remains committed to innovative thinking, inclusion and its strong feminist history'*. We in turn salute her leadership on LGBTI inclusion and echo her words at the World Pride Parade: *'we won't stop marching until everyone, everywhere enjoys the right to be themselves, without discrimination, without hate'*.

The Mistress, Professor Susan J. Smith
July 2019

Photography credit: David Johnson and Phil Mynott (© Girton College, Cambridge)