

## From The Mistress

Professor Susan J. Smith, MA, DPhil, FBA, FRSE, FAcSS



The Mistress's Office

A letter to Girton's Alumni, 23 March, 2020

Dear Friends,

Who would have thought, so soon after the end of our glorious 150th anniversary celebrations, that Girton would be facing one of its most pressing ever challenges. The reality, and the fear, of coronavirus is touching all of our lives, and I am writing first and foremost to send to you, our alumni, every good wish from all of us here – Fellows, students and staff alike. We hope that you are keeping safe and well; and we urge you to stay in touch in these troubled times.

I am sure that you will be eager for news of Girton and in particular of your successors, our current students. I must admit that it has been a difficult ten days, with important messages flooding our inboxes, and a media storm in the air. Nevertheless you probably will not need me to tell you that our students, both graduates and undergraduates, have been magnificent: calm, constructive, caring towards friends and colleagues, and mature in decision-taking and problem-solving.

In line with University and Government guidelines, we have encouraged all those who are fit and able to travel to go home. Most University buildings are closed, and we now know that there will be no face-to-face teaching, and no examinations, in Cambridge next term. There are, on the other hand, good reasons for some students to stay on site, and I would like to assure you that no one is being required to leave. We are, moreover, doing everything we can to support those who remain in all the ways you might hope.

Looking to next term, as University faculties and departments roll out new styles of teaching, learning and assessment, we in College are pooling our resources, imagination and creativity to maintain bespoke supervisions, offer personalised tutorial support and mount an engaging programme of 'virtual' activities. It is uncharted territory, but we are ready to rise to the occasion, and we hope, in due course, that some of you might be willing to join our 'virtual' projects. Deborah Easlick, Development Director, and her team, will be in contact as soon as we have details.

I would also like you to know how positive our staff – working in various administrative and operational departments – have been throughout the current crisis. Their first priority has been our students, to whom they have delivered an array of wise advice and practical support, leaving students in no doubt that we are a College that cares. I have written today to thank our staff, assuring them that their hard work and great service are widely recognised and valued, and that their wellbeing, safety and financial security are high on our agenda.

Finally, the Fellows and I are proud to be part of a world-class University that is leading the fight against coronavirus. Cambridge University is closely linked to Addenbrooke's – the internationally renowned teaching and research hospital at the heart of our Biomedical Campus – which is in the frontline of care for coronavirus patients in this region. In research, too, the University is taking a lead: spearheading an alliance to map, and thereby understand and control, the spread of coronavirus ([www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/cambridge-to-spearhead-ps20million-alliance-to-map-spread-of-covid-19-coronavirus](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/cambridge-to-spearhead-ps20million-alliance-to-map-spread-of-covid-19-coronavirus)); and pressing ahead in the race to find a vaccine ([www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/cambridge-research-team-working-towards-vaccine-against-covid-19](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/cambridge-research-team-working-towards-vaccine-against-covid-19)).

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Over the coming weeks and months, our College will feel very strange. It will not be full of students or the myriad activities they engage in, alumni events are postponed until at least September, conferences have been cancelled; even the summer programmes are at risk. What I believe will endure, indeed flourish, however, is the sense of community and belonging that we share as members together of this game-changing institution. Girton's foundation and history are testimony to the triumph of hope over adversity, and as we all pull together, that will be true too of our future.

We will be in touch soon with more news. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this picture of '(nearly) All at Girton' taken on the 16 October 2019, exactly 150 years after 'The College for Women' first opened its doors.



With our warmest wishes and please do keep safe

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Susan J. Smith'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan J Smith, Mistress