

Annual Report to the Methodist Conference 2010 of the Board of the Directors of Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd

1. Introduction

The board has continued to meet each term to scrutinise the operation of the merger agreements between Westminster College, Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, and to discharge its defined duties.

2. Board

After a long and distinguished tenure of office, the Revd Professor Frances Young FBA retired as Chair of the board of the company and representative of the Methodist Church on the main board of Oxford Brookes University, to be succeeded in both capacities on 1 August 2010 by Mrs Susan Howdle. Mrs Howdle brings to the position a strong legal background and experience of working within Methodism over many years; she is already enriching the counsels of the company – and of the university – in various ways. Mrs. Susan Barratt, the Vice-Chair, has continued to provide invaluable support and advice in the financial domain. The appointment to the board of the Revd Dr Martin Wellings during the year was warmly welcomed; and another distinguished Oxford Methodist, the Revd Philip Beuzeval, who retired at the end of his second term of service, will be sadly missed. Dr Clifford Marshall has continued to serve on the board, contributing important insights into the educational mission of the Institute. We are pleased to report that Mrs Ann Leck was nominated to the board by the General Secretary as an *ex officio* member, and took up her duties in February 2010. The Liaison Committee, providing a formal link between the company and the university, has continued to fulfil its function effectively.

3. Westminster Institute of Education

Professor Derek Elsom was appointed Dean of Westminster Institute in summer 2009 and has established a good working relationship with the board and its new Chair, Mrs Susan Howdle. He has activated a research strategy for the Institute which entails seventy per cent of staff being included in externally assessed research excellence returns by 2020. Student enrolments for 2009–10 achieved their overall target for undergraduate courses, while recruitment to graduate courses, at seventy per cent, fell short. The Institute will seek to increase income through enhanced research activity, by recruiting more international students, and by consolidating work in the areas of employer engagement, consultancy and collaborative provision. An instance of the latter was provided by the occupancy of office spaces on the Harcourt Hill campus from the end of 2009 by staff from the Oxfordshire County Council Workforce Development Team: this was expected to facilitate new partnerships and collaboration with the Institute in such areas as initial teacher education, leadership development, continuing professional development, and services for school support staff. The Westminster Institute has continued to support lay and ordained ministerial training in the region. 175 students are enrolled on the Oxford Brookes Foundation Degree in Ministry and the MA in Ministry. These courses are offered by the Department of Religion and Philosophy (one of three departments in the Westminster Institute) and are delivered in partnership with Oxford, Salisbury and Guildford Dioceses and Ripon College Cuddesdon.

4. Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History

The Centre now has its own part-time Administrator, Mrs Margaret Pye. During the year the Centre was host to visiting Research Fellows from New York, Australia and Cambridge whose areas of interest included Mary Fletcher and Wesley's preaching. The Director of the Centre, Professor William Gibson, published widely during the year and contributed papers to many conferences at home and abroad: Methodist historical themes were prominent in his output which included a re-consideration of the Conformity of Samuel Wesley. The Centre, in co-operation with the Manchester Wesley Research Centre, launched a new journal, *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, of which Professor Gibson is co-editor, and of which his colleague, Dr Peter Forsaith, was until

recently Reviews Editor. Dr Forsaith also co-edited, with Revd Dr Martin Wellings, *Methodism and History, Essays in Honour of John Vickers*, which was published with financial support from the company.

5. Methodist Collections

In 2009 Dr Forsaith arranged for exhibitions of the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art in York, Greenwich, the Lake District, and Stirling, sometimes in split locations. The Trustees of the Collection have been informed that storage space at the Institute is approaching capacity. Remedial work has taken place in the archive stacks, and the climate has been stabilised to an acceptable level. Dr Forsaith is constructing a web gallery of John Wesley Iconography entitled 'John Wesley in Art and Artefact'. In the course of the year he published a catalogue of the oil paintings belonging to the former Westminster College under the *aegis* of *The Public Catalogue Foundation*. The portraits of the College Principals are included in this group. Dr Forsaith served on the Methodist Church Listed Buildings Advisory Committee and as UK Secretary and Treasurer of the Charles Wesley Society. Dr Francis L. Bartels, who was a student at Westminster College 1931–1935, and who had worked on education with UNESCO in Africa, donated many of his papers to the archive in the course of the year. Dr Bartels died on 20 March 2010, just a week after his 100th birthday

6. Chaplaincy

The pattern for daily morning prayers has continued and the Chaplain, the Revd Dr Robert Bates, has led discussions and conversations on Sunday evenings. The carol service was well-attended, and there has been a number of 'one-off special services' throughout the year. The Holocaust Memorial on January 27 was particularly well attended. Memorial services were held in the chapel for two members of the Westminster community who died early in the academic year. There was a Westminster Society Reunion in June 2009 marking the 50th anniversary of the move of the college from London to Oxford and this included two Sunday services. Dr Bates has continued to offer services to the Oxford Methodist Circuit plan and regularly leads worship at the Lime Walk and Cowley Road Methodist Churches. He teaches on the Primary PGCE course at Westminster Institute, assists in the development of the new theology degree, and contributes to the theology distance-learning residential schools. His external lectures have included the A S Peake Memorial Lecture at the Methodist Conference in July 2009; and a lecture commemorating the November 1934 decision by the German-speaking Evangelical Churches in Great Britain to join the Confessing Church. He has been commissioned to write a book on 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Church Struggle'.

7. Academic Restructuring

The board is currently working with Oxford Brookes University in connection with its objective to reduce the number of academic faculties to four. The directors are being fully involved as ways are found to protect and promote the spirit and the practical effect of the merger agreements within the new structure. A fuller account will be possible in next year's report.

8. Estates

Oxford Brookes University has now applied to demolish part of the Harcourt Hill estate and to build four three-storey blocks of student accommodation with enhanced amenities, matching the current expectations of young people and conference delegates alike. The working environment of the Institute, including the area beneath the Chapel and the building surrounding the main entrance foyer, has been significantly enhanced in the course of the year, affording open-plan offices, a light and airy atmosphere, and modern work spaces.

*****RESOLUTION**

56/1. The Conference received the Report.