A Short History of Vanbrugh College 1968 – 2018
Vanbrugh College is a community; an environment dedicated to finding the best ways to let people grow, learn, and flourish; where they make friends, study, and are inspired. The many students, staff, alumni and volunteers, whose ideas, and dedication have helped develop this college are just as vital to the history of Vanbrugh as those notable characters to whom Vanbrugh’s legacy and traditions are attributed. In the twenty years that I have been part of Vanbrugh College I have met so many people who have been part of Vanbrugh’s journey and it is thanks to the whole community that Vanbrugh is such a success fifty years on.

Georgina Heath, Assistant Head of Vanbrugh College

Thanks in particular go to those who have helped to make this celebration such a success:

Lenore Klassen, Vanbrugh College Administrator;
Andy Parsons, Vanbrugh Head of College;
Steven Burton, Vanbrugh Rock Tutor.

Thanks for Evie Pafford for assisting with the research and text for this book
Vanbrugh’s Great Leaders

Professor Bob Le Page: Provost 1967-1972
Bob Le Page, in 1967, accepted an offer to become Vanbrugh's first Provost. The social life of the College was important to Bob. He created 'Vanbrugh Nights', a termly event that involved dinner, dancing, live music and speakers. Amongst those who attended these events were Katharine Whitehorn, a famous columnist for the Observer, and Ted Hughes, the former Poet Laureate. It was also thanks to Bob that the Dining Hall in Vanbrugh has round tables. He felt that this was friendlier than long tables. Bob's humour and inclusive nature helped to shape the character of Vanbrugh from its inception. This ethos can be seen throughout its history. Professor Le Page died on 12 January 2006, at the age of eighty-five. Vanbrugh Quad was renamed Le Page Court in 2008, as part of Vanbrugh College's 40th Anniversary celebrations.

Reverend Dr Gerald Higginson: Provost 1972-1984
Gerald Higginson was known as the gentle Provost of Vanbrugh; quiet, but very welcoming, he had a deep passion for education and for young people and took his pastoral role at Vanbrugh very seriously. Under his stewardship, Vanbrugh hosted many Open University summer school events. One of Gerald's creations, the College Supper Party, remains a cornerstone of the social calendar of Vanbrugh College. Continuing the family theme, the parties were initially catered by Gerald's wife, June, though eventually she enlisted the services of a local caterer. This social event is a legacy of Gerald's time as Provost.

Dr Allen Warren: Provost 1984-2008
When Allen Warren retired as Provost of Vanbrugh he had been at the helm of the College for over half its years. In his 24 years in charge he shaped the College into his vision of the ideal academic student community, welcoming students into his home and inspiring them to grow outside of their academic achievements. His endeavours have given Vanbrugh the personality that it retains to this day. At the heart of Allen's ethos was that the Provost must be visible. He expanded the now infamous supper parties at his house so that every new student was invited when they first arrived at York. However, he was particularly interested in student activities away from academic work. He organised the fondly remembered 'Vanbrugh Weekends', where a group of students and staff would stay in the North York Moors and explore the countryside. Allen made music a central activity within Vanbrugh and employed the College’s first Vanbrugh Music Tutor, Edd Caine. This legacy continues to this day and is reflected in the College’s logo. The Warren was named for him, when it was converted to college space and offices in 2013.

Reverend Dr David Efird: Provost 2008-2013
David Efird defined Vanbrugh as the 'music college', building upon Allen Warren's appointment of a Music Tutor. He spearheaded a programme of further music opportunities with the appointment of a Rock Tutor which led to the creation of the immensely popular and well-equipped, purpose-built band practice space and recording studio, for Vanbrugh's burgeoning band scene: 'The Garage'.

Dr Barry Thomas: Principal and Head of College 2013-2016
Barry Thomas was the much beloved grandfather of Vanbrugh College, keeping up the traditions of supper parties as the college staff moved offices into The Warren. Barry was so popular with the students that there was a campaign to rename Vanbrugh Paradise 'Vanbrugh Barry-dise' and they named the weekly live music events 'Barry’s Bar Takeover’ after him.

Professor Andy Parsons: Head of College 2016-2018
Andy Parsons has been a dynamic force as Head of College, enthusiastically embracing the colour purple and introducing the Vanbassadors' Scheme, the Duckies Awards for STYCs and Vanbrugh Acts of Kindness Weeks to bring the community together.

Fun Fact: Vanbrugh College is named after Sir John Vanbrugh, playwright, architect and spy, and designer of nearby Castle Howard, who married Henrietta Maria Yarburgh of Heslington Hall, 1719.
Once upon a time, stood upon a hill overlooking a flood plain, the founders of the University of York gazed down at the farm buildings and fields and imagined a community of academia, flourishing with ideas and possibilities. Vanbrugh College was part of the second wave of colleges to be constructed started in 1966, using the then ultra-modern CLASP building style, where sections of building slotted over steel frames.

In 1967, Vanbrugh College was born, with Bob Le Page, the first Vanbrugh Provost, instrumental in getting the college set up and ready to open its doors to the first full college members in October of 1967.

The original Vanbrugh Nucleus hosted a number of academic departments, in particular the Departments of History and eventually History of Art, with its own library on the first floor. However, in the early 2000s, Vanbrugh bid goodbye to the Department of Mathematics, which moved to Goodricke, and to the college library which was incorporated into the main University Library, to make space for more teaching rooms - much to the cries of disappointment from students who would could no longer get books in their pajamas. C-Block was then developed in order to welcome the Department of Languages and Linguistics.

Vanbrugh Bar, fondly remembered as resembling an airport lounge by many students - with its variety of eye-bendingly colourful carpets, steadily replaced over the years - might now seem a very different place. V-Bar entered a new era when it took on a real ale pub atmosphere in 2012 which led to a name change to the ‘Vanbrugh Arms’ in 2017.

Home to regular live music events, such as the ‘Barry’s Bar Takeover’ that ran from 2014-2016, and DJ nights and pub quizzes, Vanbrugh Bar has always been at the centre of Vanbrugh life. Still home to some of the best events, Vanbrugh Bar has hosted Vanbrugh Jazz once a week for more than two decades. Vanbrugh has always been known for its entertaining evenings, in a tradition that goes all the way back to those Vanbrugh Nights, weekly Vanbrugh Bops were part of the 80s and 90s era, rebranded as ‘Volume’, ‘Planet V’ and ‘Velocity’ in the 2000s.

Even in 2017, Planet V is still an annual event at Freshers’ Week.

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The Dining Hall looks much the same despite many a change in style over the years: from large tapestries and rugs of Bob Le Page’s era, to murals that were met with such protest that they had to be painted over, to the ‘Mondrian’ phase, it is now settled in a light green to match the artworks still in pride of place.
Fun Fact:
Former Head of College, Barry Thomas, was responsible for the introduction of geese onto the University campus.

The Vanbrugh Foyer has had a major overhaul over the course of the last ten years, and changes are still being made to improve the space year on year. The Vanbrugh Porter’s Lodge was relocated to the Information Centre on Market Square to provide a 24 hour reception point for Vanbrugh College at the entrance to the University site, whilst the JCRC inherited the old porter’s lodge and now use it as their merchandise shop.

Vanbrugh Stalls, a mini-version of the old Vanbrugh Market, still runs at lunch-time every weekday for students to promote their enterprises, societies, businesses and to sell tickets.

Vanbrugh Bowl, which once played host to the University’s very own Woodstock Festival every summer, is now the front door-step of the Music Department. Instead, Vanbrugh Paradise and Piazza were given a facelift in 2016 and became ‘Greg’s Place’, courtesy of Greg Dyke, the University Chancellor, with an outdoor screen and places to sit and enjoy the lake vista.

Although long gone are the days of sailing toy boats from the pier and windsurfing on the lake, so too, the installation of a new fountain in 2014 also ended the days of dodging the showers of duck detritus (about which so many songs were written) while walking across the Vanbrugh bridge on a windy day!
Vanbrugh College started small but has never been a college that was easy to contain. Despite holding firm to its central position between the lake and the library, next to Central Hall, on the Campus West site, Vanbrugh is probably the most spread out of all the college communities.

After a year of planning, recruitment and community building, Vanbrugh College’s first accommodation blocks opened its doors to students in October 1968. The Vanbrugh Quad was surrounded by V/A, V/B and V/C Blocks and Vanbrugh Nucleus.

V/X-Block soon followed as additional accommodation, housing both staff and students. Some 250 students and 15 staff lived in Vanbrugh until 1999 when X-Block was converted to offices and teaching rooms and renamed Grimston House.

In 1999, Fairfax House on Heslington Road was attached to Vanbrugh College but it remained classified as an ‘off-campus residence’ until 2007 when it formerly became part of Vanbrugh College.

Between 2003-2012, Vanbrugh also had responsibility for two small off campus properties in Fulford Road, one of which was above a shop with a wooden plank across a flat roof-top to get to 3 of the bedrooms.

In 2006, while waiting for the new accommodation blocks to be finished, Vanbrugh first years were temporarily accommodated in Alcuin P and Q blocks. These were known as ‘Valcuin’ and ‘Vanbrugh on Tour’ posters appeared around the blocks. The Vanbrugh flag at the time was even planted on the lawn outside the blocks to stake Vanbrugh’s claim.

In 2008, six new blocks were opened on the old Bleachfield site to house a further 250 students, doubling the number of residents. Named Donald Barron Court and Barbara Scott Courts, they were soon known as ‘Vanbrugh Palace’.

In 2009, Vanbrugh temporarily took over Goodricke’s old A and B Blocks adding a further 190 rooms. The blocks were renamed Eric Milner White Court. Vanbrugh’s temporary custody of these two blocks is still ongoing.

Vanbrugh briefly topped over 750 student bedrooms in 2013 taking over Wentworth’s E block and renaming it Eric D, until the site was flattened to become the Environment Building in the summer of 2014. A candle-lit ceremony was held with the choir singing in tribute to the building that was part of Vanbrugh for so short a time. Vanbrugh now has 580 undergraduate rooms and a college membership of 1800.

Successive JCRC Chairs over the years have cited reaching both such a widespread and such a diverse collegiate community as the biggest challenge to their roles, however, the spread of Vanbrugh’s accommodation blocks has contributed much towards its character. Whether slumming it in the bustling old buildings, or retreating to the peace of the palace, chilling out in Fairfax House’s formal gardens, or camping out in another college, Vanbrugh folks have always made a home for themselves, leaving legacy and legend for the next generation of students to carry on.
In 2002, Caroline Hall, Deputy Provost of Vanbrugh College, started a small student-staff choir to sing Christmas Carols. In 2006, Edd Caine was appointed by the Provost, Dr Allen Warren, as the Vanbrugh Music Tutor to conduct the choir and provide access to musical opportunities for Vanbrugh students.

Thus Vanbrugh Music was founded with Edd going on to conduct the Vanbrugh Ensemble with original arrangements, mentor the Vanbrugh Chamber Choir and facilitating workshops on conducting, beatboxing and cuban throat singing amongst others. In 2012 Vanbrugh Voices celebrated their 10th anniversary with an all-day workshop and concert.

In 2008, a drum-kit was purchased by the college and set up in the space adjoining the Provost’s House garage and not long after an old keyboard was added. Unfortunately only six months into providing this facility, it was determined that an unheated room with an uneven floor was not an appropriate environment for students to be practising in and with a grant from the Vice-Chancellor and the College Alumni Fund, ‘The Garage’ was born and opened in October 2010.

In 2011 further funding was obtained in order to provide additional soundproofing and to install a recording studio facility. With the help of newly appointed Vanbrugh Rock Tutor, Steven Burton, and students from URY, the facility was set up and soon running at 90% capacity with over 300 members in the first year. ‘Vanbrugh Rocks’ was launched as an off-shoot to ‘Vanbrugh Music’ in order to provide access to alternative musical opportunities.

Year after year the project expanded with the addition of an Instrument Lending Library that has grown over the years through donations from student and alumni; band speed dating events; a regular acoustic jam night; open mic evenings; folk groups; studio recording training; music mixing classes; Drum and Rhythm Section Hub (DARSH); student instrument teachers, and more.
Vanbrugh College has always attracted busy people who want to join in and make the most of their time and in recent history many of the university societies have had Vanbrugh members on their committees. Within Vanbrugh, these leaders have also created college-based events and activities of their own.

From Vanbrugh Art Classes, to political discussion group, Brainstorm; from Creative Writing Group, Quill Theory, to Retro Games Night; from Baking and Cooking classes, to Crafty Vanbrugh; from building bird boxes to building guitar pedals; from teaching guitar to teaching chess; the Vanbrugh community is made up of people who want to share their knowledge, skills and talent with each other. Taking over The Warren in 2013, gave Vanbrugh a space in which these opportunities could be realised.

‘Green Vanbrugh’ was established in 2012 as an umbrella for Vanbrugh’s environmental and sustainable activities. With encouragement from Environment Reps, Vanbrugh has been in the running for the Student Switch Off 1st Place for 3 years and won in 2016. The Warren also has a Gold Award for ‘Green Impact’.

Vanbrugh College has always been a supportive community for RAG (Raising and Giving), fundraising and awareness raising for concerns close to our hearts.

Vanbrugh Choirs have been raising money for ‘Jessie’s Fund’ for more than ten years; Vanbrugh bands often support Amnesty International; since 2014, Vanbrugh JCR’s College charity has been SASH (preventing youth homelessness), which is a local charity in York; and more recently, Vanbrugh has also been supporting Toilet Twinning, with funds already raised to build two toilets in the Democratic Republic of Congo, our aims are to twin every toilet in the whole college.
Vanbrugh Plays Sport!

Vanbrugh College has always been a college that loves sports. Perhaps not the college that always wins the cup, or the college that always wins at Varsity, but we have had our successes and are always known for joining in and being able to field a team.

In 2008 the importance of college sport being free for all members rose to a head and over the next few years, Vanbrugh College students took a stand.

With regular grants from college budgets and sponsorship deals, each successive JCRC managed to keep college sport in Vanbrugh free to join in.

As an emphasis on the links between the mental and physical well-being of students came to the forefront of discussion, Vanbrugh has fought to give every student the chance to have a go at team sports, regardless of ability or experience, and without an additional cost attached to this.

In 2013, the first document detailing how students should be expected to behave to one another was created by the sports captains, in order to counter harassment, racism, bullying, sexism and homophobic attitudes, all of which were alleged to have tainted university sports in general. By standing up to this and ensuring that sports and sports socials were no longer focussed around a drinking culture, college sport became more open and welcoming, giving everyone the opportunity to be part of Vanbrugh’s sporting community.

Fun Fact:
Vanbrugh sports captains have produced a naked calendar on at least two occasions: in 2007 and 2013 to raise money for charity.
The origins of the first Vanbrugh logo are somewhat lost to myth. A JCRC Chair from one of the earliest committees are reputed to have come up with the design, based upon ideas of the crest that Sir John Vanbrugh designed for himself, however, the rumour mill has always favoured the un-named creator who scribbled it on a napkin at dinner one night. It was picked up by a member of the committee and taken to be photocopied and that one photocopy was copied again and again on successive publications. Where the original drawing is today, remains a mystery.

Vanbrugh merchandise throughout the years came in a variety of colours but college branding was not really consolidated until the mid-2000s when everything became Vanbrugh Green. The 'Planet V' (the new 'Vanbrugh Nights') logo was typically used on committee t-shirts up while the staff started utilising the iconic keystone used by Sir John Vanbrugh in his architecture as the logo associated with official letters, notification and publications.

In 2007, Ryan Bennett’s JCR Committee decided to follow their hearts and consolidate Vanbrugh’s reputation as the ‘best college’. Vanbrugh’s era as ‘the green college’, was short-lived.

Gazumped by Goodricke whose website was published in a deep forest green, Vanbrugh’s committees and council had to call an emergency meeting to settle on both a colour for the college that was not already claimed by one of the other colleges and to provide a brief for graphic designer Gary Scarborough to come up with am emblem for the college.

Going back to the original colours of mustard with a purple stripe was universally unpopular but votes for keeping the purple and having a secondary colour of teal won through. The emblem however was a different matter.

Surveying current students, alumni, committee members and the staff members of the senior common room, the hundreds of responses that came back were finally reduced to a brief: the emblem was to be modern and forward thinking, giving reference to the iconic Brutalist architecture of the College, emphasising the large music community within the college, and with some reference to the geese that were equally loved and loathed by students living around the lake.

Having rejected the first two offerings there was a final vote at which the new Vanbrugh emblem was agreed!

And everyone was happy ever after...

...until about 3 weeks later

The controversial surrounding the Vanbrugh emblem has been brought up year after year with arguments both for and against.

And so, the great Vanbrugh emblem debate continues with variations along the theme.

What will it be for the 60th Anniversary?
The most famous urban legend goes that if you kill a duck on campus, you’ll be banned for life. Allegedly a Chinese student living in Vanbrugh X-Block was thrown out of the University for eating the ducks. The cleaners found the feet in his bin.

The fourth accommodation wing to be opened in Vanbrugh College was named V/X block instead of V/D block for self-apparent reasons. According to York Campus folklore, students from the other blocks believed that V/X block was haunted so it became known as ‘The Dreaded X block’.

In 1991-1992, the railings on Vanbrugh Bar didn’t completely shut off the bar, and it was possible to put an arm through a gap and pull yourself a pint. After the place was closed up at midnight, a small number of students would sneak back in and pour themselves free drinks until 6am.

Bob Le Page, Vanbrugh College's first Provost, had round tables put in the dining hall because he felt they were “friendlier” than square or rectangular ones. We still have round tables to this day.

“Four years ago, some Donald Barren Court first year students tried to get a cow onto the top floor of their block. They succeeded, however as cows cannot go DOWN stairs the animal needed to be euthanised and its corpse removed by a crane out of the kitchen window. A STYC told me this some weeks after I arrived, once Freshers' Week was over.”
- current Vanbrugh student

A member of 'S Club 7' deliberately set off the fire alarm in Vanbrugh B-Block after performing as a solo act on campus earlier in the evening - he did not remember doing this but there were sufficient witnesses that the fire brigade fined him for interfering with fire safety equipment. His agent claimed that he would only pay it as a good will gesture but admitted nothing.

A former JCRC Chair used to keep a row boat hidden in the reeds by Wentworth College. At night he would row his girlfriend out onto the lake for moonlight picnics, whilst Campus Security looked on, unable to reach them to identify them.

A group of Computer Science students built an intranet around Le Page Court in 1998 by running cables to each others bedrooms through the ceilings in order to play games.

The record for the largest meal cooked in a baby-belling oven goes to a US student in 2006 who made Thanks Giving dinner for 26 people!

As a young lecturer living on campus, Dr Allen Warren, Vanbrugh’s first Provost, used to regularly give seminars in his accommodation in Vanbrugh due to the lack of teaching space.

Fairfax House students once held a farm-yard party, involving a number of animals borrowed from a farmer in Heslington Village. They got away with it until Monday morning when cleaners found the common room covered in pieces of hay. It took 2 days crawling on hands and knees with rolls of celotape to remove all pieces of hay to the cleaners’ satisfaction.

Rumours about a secret underground tunnel running from Fairfax House to an underground bomb shelter in the grounds of The Retreat (most likely haunted by the Grey Lady) so intrigued students that in 2007 they prized up the parquet flooring to try to find it. (It wasn’t there but they left a time capsule under the floorboards as a gift to any future students who tried to find the tunnel).

The release of Star Wars: Phantom Menace in 1999 led to a number of late night light-sabre fights across the top of the covered walkways between Vanbrugh and Derwent, that would regularly draw a crowd.