

The fight for beauty – Fiona Reynolds

Dame Fiona's presentation will chart the story of the fight for beauty from the moment Wordsworth's devotion to it tipped from admiration into defence, as his beloved Lake District came under threat from suburbanising villas, the spiky-leaved larch and the thundering railway. Ruskin took up the fight for beauty and inspired a generation of campaigners, leading to the foundation of the conservation movement in Britain. Then, following the Second World War, beauty was one of the objectives of a government determined to build a better, fairer Britain for all those who had come through two devastating conflicts.

Drawing on these stories and her own as a campaigner for beauty, Fiona Reynolds will describe how beauty has been progressively fought for, diminished, revived and marginalised as our country has been through the process of change. Her argument that in a world where, it too often seems, only the economy matters, we have forgotten how important beauty is to our lives, will resonate with many Cambridge residents. The economy cannot grow without limit, and will not, on its own, make us happy. But beauty can, and Dame Fiona will argue that policy-makers would do well to make this central to our, and our children's, lives.

Dame Fiona Reynolds

Dame Fiona Reynolds DBE became Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 2012. She came to the college from the National Trust, of which she was Director-General from 2001-2012. During her time at the National Trust she made it warmer and more welcoming, bringing the houses to life and raising the profile of the Trust's work in the countryside.

Before becoming DG of the Trust she was Director of the Women's Unit in the Cabinet Office (1998-2000), Director of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (now Campaign to Protect Rural England, 1987-98) and Secretary to the Council for National Parks (now Campaign to Protect National Parks, 1980-87). Fiona was also a volunteer with the National Trust from the mid 1980s until the late 1990s, first as a member of the Thames and Chilterns Regional Committee and later as an elected member of Council. She chaired the Sutton House Local Committee in Hackney.

Fiona is the Senior Non-Executive Director on the Executive Board of the BBC, a Non-Executive Director of Wessex Water, has been chair of Green Alliance since December 2014 and became chair of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England in June 2015.

Fiona was appointed CBE for services to the environment and conservation in 1998 and DBE in 2008. She is married with three daughters and lives near Cirencester when not in Cambridge. She loves walking, reading, classical music and opera.