

# Cherwell

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## Colleges celebrate 50 years of co-education

Five colleges first admitted women in 1974

By LIYA SEBHATU

Five colleges at Oxford University – Wadham, Jesus, Hertford, St Catherine's, and Brasenose – are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their admittance of female students and becoming the first co-educational colleges. Events are organised throughout the year to celebrate this milestone.

Hertford College plans to release a video series, Hertford Voices, to commemorate both the 50th anniversary of women's admittance and the 150th anniversary of Hertford's re-foundation. St Catherine's College and Brasenose College have also scheduled talks or lecture series from their alumni. Jesus College held an alumni gala night to start their festivities, and Wadham College's celebrations commenced with panel discussions by alumni from the early years of female admission.

The move to co-educational learning started in 1968 when Wadham's JCR passed a resolution in favour of it. This eventually became a larger movement, involving the creation of a subcommittee to investigate accepting women. In 1974, the five colleges

decided to open their doors to both genders. Previously, womens' only colleges such as Lady Margaret's Hall and Somerville College have been educating women since 1879, and St Hilda's became the last women's only college to accept men in 2008.

A Hertford College spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Hertford is incredibly proud to have been among the first colleges to admit women – a testament to our progressive, inclusive, and academically excellent community."

The first video of Hertford Voices features stories from Hertford's first cohort of women. Hertford told *Cherwell*: "Cathy Shingler recalls the attention [the women] attracted, which sometimes bordered on harassment, though they didn't use that term at the time. Another memorable story is from 1976 when the first Hertford women's rowing team competed in Summer Eights. Though they didn't win, the team symbolised women's growing integration into college life."

In a video released by Hertford, these trailblazers also recalled

*Continued on pg. 2*



## Oxford accepted up to £99m from Chinese donors since 2017

By *Cherwell Investigations*

Tucked away on a nondescript side street in North Oxford is Oxford University's Dickson Poon China Centre, home to the Bodleian KB Chen China Centre Library. The £21 million facility is funded by some of China's wealthiest individuals, from Dickson Poon, a Hong Kong billionaire businessman, to Daisy Ho, the daughter of a Macau-based billionaire who made his fortune from monopolising the Macau gambling industry. This is just one out of over 20 other buildings, scholarships, projects, and faculty positions in Oxford, named after and funded by Chinese individuals and organisations.

Over the last seven years, the University of Oxford has received up to £99 million from Chinese individuals and organisations. The majority of such donations are uncontroversial and the source country does not automatically make any funding problematic; several Chinese entities help financially support research projects, students, and museum exhibitions.

However, some of these donations stem from more contentious sources including companies facing sanctions from different countries and individuals involved in

the Chinese government. This investigation explores the extent of China-linked money at Oxford University and its impact on research agendas, free speech, student welfare, and national security.

The report described the failure of analysing data acquired through Freedom of Information requests from the last seven years as well as from academic reports the full picture of Chinese funding at the University is exposed. Funding from Hong Kong-based companies and individuals are also covered in this investigation due to their links with China.

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## No bonfire at bonfire night for the first time in 56 years

By CHARLIE BAILEY

This year's Guy Fawkes Night celebration in South Park will not feature the traditional bonfire, marking a first in the event's 56-year history. Following complaints from local residents after last year's event, Oxford City Council permitted Oxford Round Table, which organises the annual charity occasion, to proceed on the condition that the bonfire be excluded from this year's festivities.

Last year the event coincided with Storm Ciaran, which over-saturated the park, making it vulnerable to the heavy machinery. The damage was caused by vehicles transporting logs for the bonfire, and despite prior concerns and suggestions that Oxford Round Table protect the ground with sheeting, this method continued "on the grounds of cost."

Around 40 locals lodged complaints with the City Council about the grounds, and additional complaints referenced the large amount of smoke generated by the bonfire. Oxford Round Table was ordered to cover the cost of repairing the extensive damages.

This decision comes after negotiations with Oxford Preservation Trust and Friends of South Park group. Other conditions include the implementing metal roadways underneath the funfair and only allowing essential and emergency vehicles

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## 2024 Nobel Laureate reflects on Oxford experience

By SUREEN HEER

This year's Nobel Prize in Economics has been awarded to Oxford alumnus Simon Johnson and his colleagues Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. Their research aims to answer the age-old question: Why do some nations flourish while others remain trapped in poverty? Their pioneering work reveals that the answer lies in institutions – both political and economic – and how they shape the prosperity of nations.

Simon Johnson studied History and Economics and later PPE as an undergraduate at Corpus Christi College from 1981 to 1984. Currently a professor at MIT, he has long focused on the role of

institutions in shaping economies as he taught at Harvard, Duke and MIT. Johnson also served as the chief economist at the International Monetary Fund from 2007 to 2008.

Johnson and his colleagues arrived at their award-winning conclusions by studying historical data, particularly focusing on settler mortality rates during European colonisation. They found that regions where settlers faced high mortality rates often developed extractive institutions – designed to exploit resources for the benefit of a few. These institutions continue to contribute to modern-day poverty and inequality.

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## SU apologises to former president Danial Hussain over 'unfounded' suspension

By CHERWELL NEWS

The Student Union (SU) has released a statement apologising to former president Danial Hussain for "fail[ing] in its responsibilities, and in particular its duty of care" following an independent report. The apology comes after Hussain's suspension last year over allegations the report finds "unfounded" and that the period of suspension was "not warranted". Hussain was initially sus-

pending in summer last year, reinstated after the complaint was dismissed, and then suspended again in November, following a complaint that he shared pornographic material to SU staff via Google Drive. The report finds the allegations against Hussain to be "unfounded and unsupported by evidence (as confirmed by the investigation carried out at the time)" and the following suspension "not warranted in the circumstances". Hussain should have been allowed to return to his role, it stated.

In a statement, Hussain said: "I had to overcome constant unprofessional, hostile,

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### NEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS 1-5

#### CHANEL announces sponsorship of Boat Race

Advertising for its J12 watch, the luxury brand highlights synchronicity in both rowing and watch-making

#### India's prominent family donates new Somerville building

Ratan Tata, after whom the building is named, is a well known philanthropist associated with several controversies

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#### For good free speech: Listen

For good free speech: listen The Vice-Chancellor's new Sheldonian Series, which aims to champion free speech, should encourage listening as much as speaking.

#### Tu-tory-ial lessons

What I learnt about Oxford from the Tory party conference

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#### A whistle-stop tour of Oxford's women's societies – in the words of their presidents

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#### Alan Johnson on higher tuition fees, his time as Home Secretary, and his love for Harold Wilson.

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#### Oxford Horror Society, un-earthed

Now in the thick of the Halloween season, Cherwell speaks to the University's only society dedicated to the horror genre.

#### Lights, Camera, Liaisons

Christopher Hampton's 1985 play comes to Oxford's Playhouse with an ambitious technical twist: live cinematography.

### LIFESTYLE 20-22

#### Dishoom's Permit Room brings the spirit of Bombay to Oxford

*Cherwell* reviewed the Permit Room at its press night and from curries to cocktails, expectations were exceeded.

#### What's your purpose? (In six words or less)

Find your purpose. Find something we can profit off of. Find your place within this system, within this order.

## Stephen Fry 'delighted' to be Visiting Professor of Creative Media

By POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

Stephen Fry has been named a Visiting Professor of Creative Media within the Faculty of English at Oxford University. A renowned actor, comedian, author, director, and screenwriter, Fry, a Cambridge alumnus, is the recipient of a Golden Globe and two Tony Awards, and has graced both the silver screen and the Broadway stage throughout his career.

Fry told *Cherwell*: "Naturally to be asked to accept any visiting Professorship – even at a University that isn't quite Cambridge – is a tremendous honour. No, but shush. Truly, I am delighted to have been offered this post, whose duties I shall endeavour to discharge with diligence."

Fry studied English at Cambridge University, where his interest in the theatrical arts firmly took root. He was an avid participant in various drama clubs including the esteemed Cambridge Footlights where he met Hugh Laurie, with whom he would go on to produce a comedy double act Fry and Laurie in the 1980s and 1990s.

Since leaving university, Fry has appeared in numerous films, holding the titular role in *Wilde* (1997), and voicing the character of the

Cheshire cat in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010).

As an openly gay man, he has been a prominent voice within the LGBTQ+ community and produced the critically acclaimed documentary *Out There*, which examined the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people from different walks of life across the world.

Recently, Stephen Fry has extended his literary works by penning a series of texts that reimagine the Greek myths, in which he argues that Classics and mythology should be accessible for everyone, not just the formally educated.

Despite completing his undergraduate study at "The Other Place", Oxford University warmly welcomes Visiting Professor Fry, who is due to give a lecture at the Sheldonian Theatre on 24th January.

Chair of the English Faculty Board Professor Marion Turner said: "Stephen's versatility, experience, and innovation across so many forms of media fit him perfectly for this role. Our Visiting Professors of Creative Media always inspire our students and add new perspectives and energy to our community. We can't wait to welcome Stephen."

*Image Credit: Marco Raaphorst/CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Prominent Indian business family sponsors new Somerville building

By ZACH BURGESS

A building donated by Indian company, Tata Group, and named after philanthropist Ratan Tata – who passed away earlier this month – will be constructed in Somerville College in 2025. Tata was one of the most prolific philanthropists in India but has previously faced accusations of paying off militants, withholding information from the police, and corporate mismanagement. However, all allegations were dismissed.

The Ratan Tata Building will house the Oxford-India Centre for Sustainable Development. When planning began in 2012, the centre was called the Indira Gandhi Centre after Somerville alumna and former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. In 2016, two years after Gandhi's Congress Party fell from power, the project was renamed to the Oxford-India Centre. The building was endowed with a grant of £3 million from the Indian Government and £5.5 million from Somerville and Oxford University, with a remaining figure of around £10 million sought from donations. Somerville found their principle benefactor, Tata Group, this month.

Tata was known for his philanthropic activity. In 1984, he donated to supporting victims of anti-Sikh riots,

allowing them to rebuild their lives. He also gave money to medical research, enabling neuroscience research and stem cell therapy. His donations to higher education include gifting \$50 million each to his alma mater Cornell University and Harvard University.

However, Tata was associated with the Tata Tapes scandal of 1997: subsidiary company Tata Tea was publicly accused of paying off militants to protect tea plantations in Assam and of obstructing justice, when they allegedly withheld from the police the whereabouts of a wanted employee. There was no conclusive proof of any wrongdoing, and no police action was taken.

Furthermore, Tata faced controversy over his ousting of Cyrus Mistry – his handpicked corporate successor. The removal came after the relationship between the two men collapsed, and Mistry consequently sued Tata for corporate mismanagement. The case went to the Indian Supreme Court, which ultimately dismissed allegations against Tata in 2021.

The Tata Group has had a presence in the UK for a long time. Notably, the Group owns Tetley Tea, Jaguar Land Rover, and Tata Steel, which has made national headlines when they cut jobs at steel plants in Port Talbot.

Somerville's building is not the first

project Oxford has worked on with the Tata Group. Its subsidiary Tata Consulting Services was contracted to administer last year's admissions tests which then experienced technical errors. The English Language Admissions Test (ELAT) and Geography Admissions Test (GAT) both had to be scrapped – they've yet to be reinstated – and all takers of the Maths Aptitude Test (MAT) were given the chance to re-sit.

*Cherwell* has contacted the Tata Group for a reply.

*Image Credit: St Gallen Symposium // CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons*



## 50 years of women in co-ed colleges

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the attention [the women] attracted, which sometimes bordered on harassment, though they didn't use that term at the time.

"Another memorable story is from 1976 when the first Hertford women's rowing team competed in Summer Eights. Though they didn't win, the team symbolised women's growing integration into college life."

In a video released by Hertford, these trailblazers also recalled the college's infrastructural challenges in accommodating women, including outdated facilities and long walks to showers and toilets.

This sentiment could be seen during the Five@Fifty panel, where women of the first co-educational colleges spoke about their experiences.

Francine Stock of Jesus's third cohort said that the loss of the male rugby team was partially blamed on female students: "A little note was put under all our doors suggesting that women might not want to go down to the bar that evening."

A Wadham spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Wadham has a progressive history and remains true to its values of inclusion and diversity today. The College is proud to be among the first tranche of former men's Oxford colleges to admit women, and of being the first college to be founded by a woman who was not a queen or an aristocrat."

Wadham's Diversity Project in 2016 led to the inclusion of portraits of women in Hall and around the College site; previously only men's

portraits hung in the Dining Hall with the exception of Dorothy Wadham. Other celebratory events included a panel discussion on issues of gender and power within the University.

Dame Sally Mapstone of Wadham's second-year cohort, now an Honorary Fellow of the college, discussed the imbalance of female and male academic staff at Oxford. She said: "It would be a very big mistake to think that it is a level playing field. When you start to look at issues of intersectionality, the imbalances are still really severe."

Women make up only 22% of all Statutory Professors, and 33% of Associate Professors.

*Image Credit: Bencherlite/CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.*



## No bonfire at bonfire night after South Park damage

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to enter the site. Attendees are encouraged to use the Oxford Bus Company for transport now that parking is prohibited on the main site.

Some council members argue that complaints about smoke and mud are not substantial enough to justify discontinuing the bonfire. Independent councillor Ajaz Rehman called the decision "draconian" and emphasised that the event "belongs to the whole of Oxford." Rehman also expressed concern that the absence of the bonfire could lead to lower ticket sales – last year's event attracted 20,000 attendees and

raised £85,000 for Oxford Round Table to continue their work aiding local charities.

Despite this change, the event, scheduled for the evening of 2nd November, will still include a fireworks display, food villages, bars, and funfair rides. Chairman of Oxford Round Table Josh Worsfold confirmed that Illusion Fireworks, the reigning National Fireworks champions, will once again handle the display.

Event director Joseph Garbett added that to make up for the absence of the bonfire, this year's fireworks show will be the "biggest and best ever."



## NEWS SHORTS

### Oxford professor's research urges countries to stop assisting Israel

Oxford Professor Janina Dill's new paper argues that Israel is in violation of international law and that there are grounds for countries to cease providing material assistance to them, such as weapons. Dill contends that countries should be evaluating harm done in real time to mitigate the "devastating human toll" of the conflict.

### History admissions test scrapped over 'Technical difficulties'

The HAT was supposed to take place at 9am on Monday, but technical difficulties meant that students could not begin the exam until 11am at the earliest, two hours after the test was expected to start.

It comes after multiple issues with tests last year, including for Geography, English and Maths

### Least popular undergrad colleges revealed

Oxford's undergraduate colleges have been ranked according to the number of applications. Harris Manchester College and Regent's Park College tied in last, both having received 137 applications. Oriel College came next, with only 437 applications.

## CROSS CAMPUS

MIT

### Pro-Palestinian demonstrators arrested by campus and local police

Witnesses report acts of police brutality and abuse of force in response to Pro-Palestine protesters during a recent rally. Dozens of policemen from MIT Police and Cambridge Police arrested three protesters. Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA) said people of colour were targeted.

CAMBRIDGE

### University projects £53m deficit, doesn't know why

The University projects a £53 million deficit for the 2023/24 academic year, which Cambridge's finance committee attributes to a "lack of budgetary control."

An internal report describes the institution as "flying blind" financially. Although the University targets a £30 million annual surplus, the report indicates "no fully worked-out proposal" currently exists to address the deficit. Cambridge also cites the lack of tuition fee increases and Brexit.

GLASGOW

### Scottish university bans all children from campus

The University of Glasgow have decided to ban all children from their main campus, after concerns of 'antisocial behaviour'. All unaccompanied children seen on campus, who are not part of an official event, will be told to leave.

It remains unknown how the majority of Freshers will attend the University, considering Scottish students start at age 17.

# Heritage group calls for Welsh skeleton's return from Oxford

BY CHARLIE ROBERTS

The heritage group Gower Unearthed has called for the return of the "Red Lady of Paviland" skeleton remains from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH). To raise publicity, the campaign's director Helen Nicholas and her friend completed a 200-mile run with 20,000-foot elevation from the museum to Goat's Hole Cave this week.

The Red Lady was discovered in Gower, South Wales, by Oxford's geology professor William Buckland in 1823. The remains were then transferred back to Oxford, along with other archaeological finds, where they have remained for the past two centuries.

The Red Lady takes its name from the red ochre colouring on the bones. Originally believed to be the remains of a Roman woman, it is now understood to be the skeleton of a young male hunter who lived around 35,000 years ago during the Upper Palaeolithic period. The site of discovery is considered to be the oldest ceremonial burial found in Britain, with the skeleton being buried with stone tools, burned animal remains, and carved ivory.

Nicholas wrote on social media of the run: "We will pass some extraordinary landscape and will be seeking out some pretty amazing prehistory. We are running to shine a spotlight on the conversation around The Red Lady of Paviland as part of the Red Lady Futures campaign."

While Gower Unearthed have made their desire for the Red Lady's return clear online, a spokesperson for the OUMNH said the museum has not been contacted directly by the group. They told *Cherwell* they follow "clear guidelines on human remains which include procedures for legitimate claims for the return of human remains to source communities."

Calls for repatriation follow the recent return of other human remains from the OUMNH. Along with the Pitt Rivers Museum, the remains of eleven Aboriginal people were returned in 2023 as part of a larger project of repatriation between the UK and Australia.

Image Credit: David Hays.



# What a Nobel Laureate learned at Oxford

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In contrast, regions where settler mortality was low saw the establishment of more inclusive institutions, which fostered long-term economic growth by encouraging investment, political participation, and the rule of law. Their research revealed a "reversal of fortune", where less developed regions with more inclusive institutions were better positioned during the Industrial Revolution to leverage technological advancements, driving rapid economic growth.

*Cherwell* asked Johnson to reflect on his time here at Oxford and how it influenced his career.

**Cherwell:** How did your time at Oxford affect your career and the accomplishment of this achievement?

**Johnson:** In three years at Oxford, I learned to think and to argue. I also learned to listen and to take on board the perspective of others. I attended every lecture that seemed at all interesting, undergraduate and graduate level. I went to any seminar that I could fit into my schedule. And then I studied hard at some very different places – I have a master's from Manchester and a PhD from MIT, I did a post-doctoral fellowship at Harvard; and I worked for 6 years at a leading American business school (the Fuqua School at Duke University), where an important part of my job was to set up a management education centre in St. Petersburg, Russia, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I ran research projects based in Poland and Ukraine, attempting to understand

post-communist realities. Then I joined the faculty at MIT Sloan, where I worked on the ground during the Asian Financial Crisis, trying to figure out how countries like Indonesia and South Korea could get back on their feet, and helped build a global entrepreneurship program.

To return to your question: Underpinning my entire career – research, publications, and a wide variety of policy roles – is what I learned.

**Cherwell:** What was your student experience like - did you enjoy it?

**Johnson:** Oxford was incredible. I took a year off between school and university and had a wide variety of experiences (including five months as an army officer and supervising the kitchen shift at a fast food restaurant in Sheffield). I started Oxford with a clear understanding that, if I did well, my life opportunities would improve. Everyone I met in my first week at Oxford was smart and articulate. My first history essay was entirely mediocre (I started in History and Economics). To swim in this ocean, I realised that I needed to work hard. The returns to that effort were immediate and rather amazing.

**Cherwell:** Is there anything about Corpus specifically that you found particularly special?

**Johnson:** Corpus was (and I'm sure still is) a brilliant place. The people around me were clever and thoughtful. Almost all of them were better prepared than I was. It felt intensely competitive but in a good way. The

tutors were tough but extraordinarily kind, and they gave me access to top minds across the university, including for one-on-one tutorials (I've supervised budgets at a wide variety of schools, and the economics of this still blows my mind). As an 18-year-old, I was thrown into the midst of intense ideas and arguments. If you did the work, you were always treated as plausible equal by much more knowledgeable people. There are not many places in the world where that is true. I still can't believe how lucky I was to spend three formative years at Corpus.

**Cherwell:** What do you think Oxford gives its students to be able to succeed in their chosen careers?

**Johnson:** I can only really speak to my experience – History and Economics for prelims, and then PPE (with as much Economics as possible, and never any Philosophy!). In those programs, at least as run at Corpus 1981-84 (although I'm confident this part is quite general and still true), it's the intensity of the tutorial system, the feedback on your thinking, the pressure to be coherent, and answer the question on two very different topics every week. It's not easy to stay organised, to get enough sleep, and to keep that focus for an entire term. But if you crack the code and figure out to do well at that pace, you can do anything.

**Cherwell:** How has winning the Nobel Prize affected your life?

**Johnson:** Winning the Nobel prize

## SU apology

Continued from Page 1

and discriminatory behaviour from those within the organisation intent on discrediting my leadership...I am proud to have persisted despite these challenges and to have succeeded in both bringing about reform to the SU by spearheading a root and branch transformation and in delivering meaningful change to Oxford by publishing the College Disparities Report."

The report described the failure as accumulated by the SU as a whole instead of by individuals, and that "had a significant and negative impact on Mr Hussain and his wellbeing". In particular, it highlights the "publication of media articles containing sensitive, confidential but incomplete information about internal HR processes".

The SU declined to comment throughout the investigation period, nor when Hussain was reinstated as President in February, stating that they "do not comment on confidential HR matters".

The statement goes on to acknowledge the effect on Hussain, saying that he "did not receive the level of support he should have received" and thanking him for the significance of the work he did whilst in office, with initiatives such as "diversity unconscious bias training", "clarity about people's roles, relationships and responsibilities", and "support for elected officers in their roles" will be implemented as a result of the report.

At the time of Hussain's suspension, he said that a "thorough and fair examination will clear me of any wrongdoing", and was reinstated in his role after four months of suspension with pay.

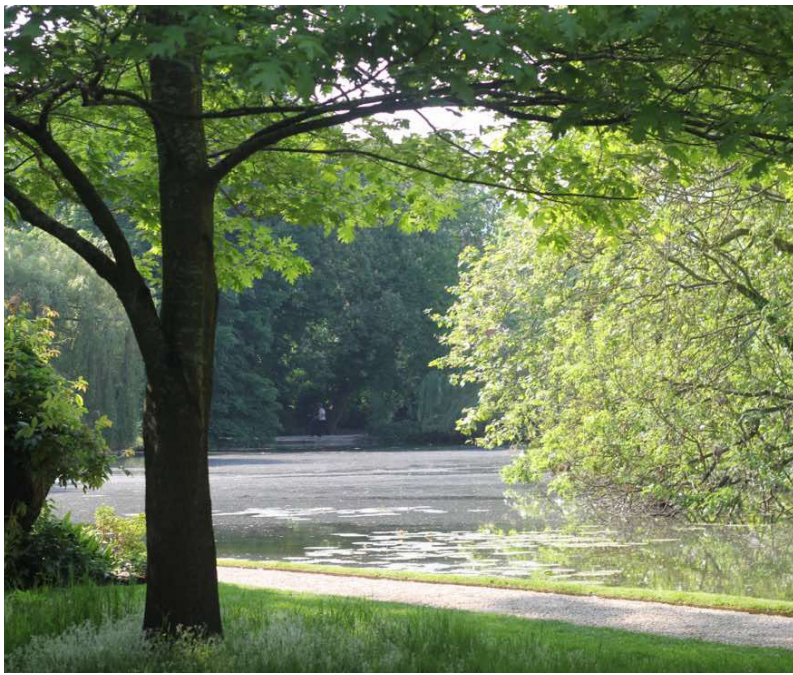
Hussain faced backlash during and after his suspension. The incident was referenced in a JCR's motion to formally disaffiliate from the SU, stating that "the SU is marred by controversy". His suspension was referenced during the most recent elections for President, as one candidate ran on a platform of an "empty chair", as "the SU is currently running just fine without anyone fulfilling the role of SU President."

Image Credit: Andre Camara / The Times

in economics is an incredible honour and a much greater accomplishment than I expected from my career. My current focus is on building a research and policy group at MIT, focused on how to develop technology (particularly AI-based) that will help boost the productivity and pay – and therefore improve the lives – of workers who do not have a lot of formal education. This work is joint with Daron Acemoglu and David Autor (of MIT Economics), and I hope that winning the prize will enable us to make progress faster in a way that is more relevant for people around the world.

Read the full story at [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org).  
Image Credit: Michelle Fiorenza.





## Worcester college calls for 'urgent' repairs for leaking lake

By RANI CHOR

Worcester College has made a fundraising appeal to support "urgent" repairs for its lake, which has been leaking since at least Trinity term of last year. The work to repair the lake is likely to cost over £350,000 according to an official video. The Lake Repair Fund, to which Old Members have pledged to match the first £50,000 of donations, is one of four funds donors can contribute to for Worcester's Giving Day in late November.

The lake is currently leaking into the nearby Oxford Canal. In light of recent heavy rainfalls – this September marked the wettest month Oxford has seen in 250 years – Worcester's ground-people have been given training and permission to use Isis Lock 46 to control the high water levels. A buildup of silt on the lakebed also poses a threat to the lake's ecosystem.

The lake holds a dear place in the hearts of students, teachers, and visitors alike. It often serves as the backdrop for various art shows and per-

formances hosted by the college, most notably an annual performance from Buskins, which has a strong claim to be Oxford's oldest college drama society.

In a promotional video for the Giving Day, Worcester Provost David Isaac said "who can imagine Worcester without its lake?". The head gardener described it as "the heart of the college [and] a very special place for all of us". The Giving Day also seeks to raise money for music and student support.

Worcester lore holds that Imran Khan, international cricket star and ex-prime minister of Pakistan who was recently ruled out of the race for Oxford Chancellor, once hit a cricket ball for six into the lake from the nearby field – a feat that has yet to be replicated.

The lake also plays a crucial role in one of the three components to the unofficial "Worcester Challenge", which supposedly includes skinny dipping in the lake, public streaking, and copulation in its historic library. Such acts are forbidden by the college.

Image Credit: Indiana Sharp

## Chanel to sponsor Boat Race

By BRYN MOLLET

Luxury fashion brand Chanel has entered a long-term partnership with the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race, now renamed The CHANEL J12 Boat Race, as its titular sponsor and timekeeper after the previous sponsor filed for bankruptcy. J12 refers to one of Chanel's watch collections, with the company drawing on a connection between synchronicity in rowing and watchmaking.

President of Chanel Watches & Fine Jewellery Frédéric Grangié said in a press release: "Synchronicity in rowing is as crucial to the race as watchmaking craftsmanship to ensure accurate timing. Every rower, like every mechanism in a watch, must work together as one; the balance, the weight and the oar movements must all be impeccably timed."

Chanel's founder Gabriel "Coco" Chanel was inspired by her own interest in sport to create clothes for women that were less restrictive and easier to move in.

The previous titular sponsor of the boat race was Gemini, a platform for cryptocurrency portfolio management founded by two twins and Oxford alumni, Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss, who rowed for the Blues in the 2021 Boat Race. The company filed for bankruptcy earlier this year having faced accusations of defrauding investors, resulting in a \$37 million fine and having to refund users.

Other sponsors over the years include Ladbrokes, Beefeater Gin, Aberdeen Asset Management, and Newton Investment Management.

Chanel is the first company in the race's 195-year history to be the Boat Race's official timekeeper as well as its titular sponsor and official partner. The contract extends until 2029, which will be the race's bicentenary.

Each year over 250,000 watch the Boat Race from the riverbank, with millions more tuning in on television. This year saw defeats for both Oxford's Men and Women, giving Cambridge a record of 87–81 for men and 48–30 for women.

## Researchers receive funding for treating type 1 diabetes with tick saliva

By RAAKHI BHAGDEV

Oxford University has been given £2 million funding from the Type 1 Diabetes Grand Challenge to research whether proteins in tick saliva could be used to treat the disease.

Oxford Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine Shoumo Bhattacharya told *Cherwell* that type 1 diabetes is caused by inflammation due to chemokines produced in pancreatic islets. Bhattacharya said: "We have been intrigued by the anti-chemokine properties of tick saliva's Evasin proteins. Evasins evolved over 200 million years to allow the tick to bite and feed without being destroyed by the body's defence mechanisms."

Bhattacharya's team identified small peptides from tick Evasins that block most chemokines, and evolved them

further in the lab to improve them. He continued: "These peptides could be turned into drugs. By targeting these peptides to the islets we hope to be able to block islet inflammation. These targeted peptides could protect transplanted islets and beta cells and also protect the native islets in the early stages of type 1 diabetes."

Director of Research Partnerships at Breakthrough T1D Rachel Connor said: "by exploring the unique properties of tick saliva, this research could [...] pave the way for a future without the burden of daily insulin."

Affecting over 400,000 people in the UK, type 1 diabetes has no permanent cure. The current treatment for type 1 diabetes involves lifelong administration of insulin. Alternatively, patients can have beta cell therapies to replace the destroyed insulin-producing cells.

However, the immune system also attacks transplanted cells, meaning patients must take immunosuppressant drugs which have severe side effects. If successful, the tick research could increase the efficacy of beta therapies and alleviate the need for immunosuppressants.

Director of Research at Diabetes UK Dr Elizabeth Robertson notes the "transformative potential" of this research and shares its potential to "revolutionise the way type 1 diabetes is treated and improve the lives of those affected by the condition".

The funding is part of a wider initiative supported by the Steve Morgan Foundation, Diabetes UK, and Breakthrough T1D. Imperial College London, the University of Exeter, and the University of Cambridge have also received money to pursue this research.

## KFC re-opens after mouse sighting

By EKAM HOTHI

The KFC on Cornmarket Street has reopened following a week-long closure prompted by a hygiene concern. The fast-food restaurant closed on 18th October with a notice in the windows that read: "Really sorry...we're closed at the moment. But don't worry – we'll be back at the fryers as soon as we can."

A KFC spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "a mouse had been spotted near the front counter and so, in line with our procedures, the team immediately

closed and co-ordinated a full investigation with our health and safety specialists to ensure the restaurant meets our high standards."

He added: "We have strict processes in place to ensure the quality and hygiene standards of all our restaurants."

The Cornmarket Street location was awarded a Level 5 (very good) food hygiene rating by the FSA (Food Standards Agency), with the last inspection taking place in June.

The KFC webpage for the Cornmarket Street restaurant states: "The safety of our guests and our teams remains

our top priority. You can be assured we're closely following the latest guidance and have all the necessary safety measures in place, including protective screens and increased sanitising in our restaurants."

The KFC at the Oxford M40 Welcome Break service station, a 20 minute drive from Oxford city centre, was closed in June earlier this year after a cockroach infestation was discovered in the food preparation area. During the pandemic, the KFC on Cowley Road was fined £1000 by Oxford City Council for breaking COVID-19 restrictions.



## New College walls inspected by Lord Mayor, a 650-year tradition

By DEVON DARLEY

In an historic ceremony dating back to the reign of King Richard II, Oxford's Lord Mayor Cllr. Mike Rowley inspected Oxford's medieval city walls on 23rd October. This ceremonial tradition has been observed for nearly 650 years, honouring an agreement made on 30th of June 1379 between New College and the City of Oxford.

King Richard II granted New College founder William of Wykeham a royal charter to establish the college in 1379. Along with this charter came the land on which New College would be built. The land, however, came with a condition: since the Oxford City Walls would pass through New College, the college

was entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the walls and providing two entrances through which the Lord Mayor could inspect them. Since then, every three years, the Lord Mayor has carried out this ceremonial inspection of the city's historic walls – which today stand as one of the last remaining stretches of the walls that originally encircled the city.

New College has taken its role of wall upkeep seriously. Climbing or walking atop them is strictly forbidden in the Dean's Handbook, a book of rules that govern New College students' behaviour. Common myth says that anybody found on top of the wall is faced with immediate expulsion. While it is unlikely that the walls will ever again be used for their intended purpose of protecting Oxford from

siege, save for protection from commemoration-ball-breaking hopefuls, the preservation of the walls remains crucial to the college both to preserve an important part of the city's history, and to uphold their 14th-century agreement with the King of England.

As part of the ceremony, the Lord Mayor and City Councillors walked from the Town Hall to New College's gate on Queen's Lane. Led by the City Mace, upon arriving, the second Sergeant of Mace knocked three times on the Non-Nicet Gate to New College, symbolising a formal request for entry. After being greeted by the Warden and Fellows of the college, they began a thorough inspection of the walls.

Image Credit: Eric Longfellow.

# Hidden costs: The influence of donors on academic priorities at Oxford

Continued from Page 1

## Threat of espionage

It is first important to consider why certain donations from China-linked entities can be problematic. In April of this year, MI5 warned 24 universities, including Oxford University, about the possibility of espionage by foreign states targeting their research in a briefing to the universities' vice-chancellors. MI5 did not name countries that it feared may attempt to gain information, but last year it also issued a warning which focused on China.

Following the MI5 announcement, the government introduced new measures, including increasing the transparency of research funding and government funding for universities to improve internal security. Researchers and university staff coming to the UK from certain countries, including China, must also now pass security clearing when applying for academic visas.

## Academic freedom

Former head of the National Cyber Security Centre, Ciaran Martin, stated in April that British security services were concerned about the targeting of university staff to influence research, and argued that scholarships awarded by China or China-affiliated organisations are often suspected of exerting such influence.

UK-China Transparency (UKCT), a think tank, found evidence based on official translated documents that programmes co-governed by the CCP, such as China Scholarship programmes and Confucius Institutes, may pose a threat to academic freedoms. According to UKCT, these programs involve "discrimination, restrictions on freedom of speech, obligations on Chinese university members to inform on their peers whilst in the UK, and other elements inimical to academic freedom and the

protection of free expression."

Sam Dunning, director of UKCT, told *Cherwell* that there was an "ever-present threat of CCP action against individuals, which hangs over thousands of Chinese students at Oxford, as well as academics and even administrative staff from China."

He stressed that the CCP's influence on universities does not just prove problematic for freedom of speech and specifically, that "it is the force that prevents freedom of speech and academic freedom for tens of thousands of students and academics in the UK - those from or with family in China."

A scholarship awarded by the Chinese Scholarship Council - an organisation run by the Chinese Ministry of Education - provides full funding and a maintenance loan to up to 20 mainland Chinese students per year studying for a DPhi at Oxford University.

According to UKCT, to receive this scholarship, students must undergo a rigorous review of their political ideology and be assigned to two guarantors. Additionally, if granted a scholarship by the Chinese Scholarship Council, scholars are required to "support the leadership of the Communist Party of China", "love the motherland" and "maintain a sense of responsibility to serve the country".

Due to these restrictions, there have been calls for top UK universities to reject such scholarships. Russell Group universities declined, expressing fear that doing so would harm foreign relations. A spokesperson for Oxford University told the *Daily Express*, "We take the security of our academic work seriously, and work closely with the appropriate government bodies and legisla-

Amnesty International UK said earlier this year that Chinese students in Europe, the UK and North America are "intimidated, harassed and silenced by the Chinese authorities as part of a sinister pattern of transnational repression."

Sacha Deshmukh, Amnesty International UK's Chief Executive, said, "The Government and UK universities need to understand the dangerous realities Chinese students face from China's transnational repression." Oxford University did not reply to Amnesty's comment request.

The University seems to understand these dangers, and undergraduates studying politics are warned about saving content relating to China on their computers.

Furthermore, those taking the 'Politics in China' paper are required to sign a legal document acknowledging that they understand the risks involved due to Chinese extraterritorial national security legislation.

## The scale of funding

From 2017 to 2024, China-affiliated individuals and organisations have given Oxford University a total of between £57 million and £99 million. This total consists of £42 million to £58 million in research funding and between £15 million and £41 million in donations and gifts.

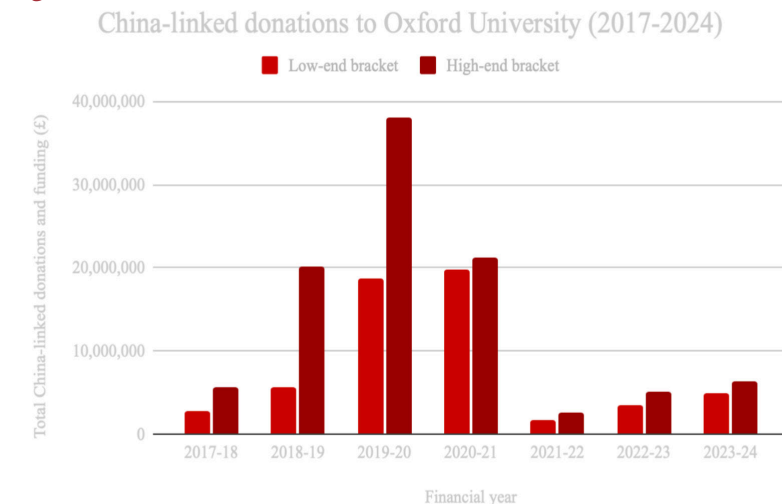
The large range of amounts given is due to the university's choice to provide bracketed figures. This means that for most donations, they do not state the specific amount but give a minimum and maximum amount that it falls between.

A report into the strategic dependence of UK universities on China, published by think tank Civitas, noted that data in this format tend to contain "extreme divergences" and, in any case, do not provide a clear image of the actual magnitude of money involved.

The 2019 to 2020 financial year saw the peak amount of Chinese funding, according to the maximum bracket estimate. This is also when there was the largest disparity between the possible lowest and highest amounts with the maximum estimate (£38 million) being double the lowest estimate (£19 million).

According to Civitas, between £5.7 million and £6.6 million was given to Oxford from Chinese military companies sanctioned by the US and compa-

Figure 1



nies either linked or widely suspected of being linked with the Chinese military from 2017 to 2022. This constituted 15% of all money from Chinese entities to the university.

## Academic institutions

It's often obvious to students where the funds go - they only need to pay attention to the titles of buildings, positions, and faculties around them. But much less is known about the people and institutions behind these names.

The three major categories of China-linked donors to Oxford University are academic institutions, businesses, and individuals (figure two). As mentioned, the vast majority of these donors are honest and reputable sources, choosing to donate their funds to the University for the same reasons as donors from all other countries.

Academic institutions, including Chinese universities, have been the most common type of China-linked donor to Oxford University and they make up 58% to 68% of all donations and research funding originating from China since 2017.

Moreover, the two largest individual donors over the past seven years are both academic institutions, with the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences (CAMS) taking the top position and giving £28 million to £37 million during this time period (figure three). The institute's single largest donation was £13 million, given in the year 2020 to 2021. The donations were directed to the CAMS Oxford Institute at the Nuffield Department of Medicine.

ShanghaiTech University was the second-largest donor, having given between £5 million and £9.9 million since 2017. Their donations to Oxford aim at "establish[ing] cooperative relationships" between the two universities. First-year students at ShanghaiTech are required to perform one week's worth of military training. The *Guardian* recently described how "the growing emphasis on military training for civilians reflects a heightened nationalism in today's China under Xi."

Sichuan University, the eight-largest donor, gave £1.8 million between 2017 to 2024 and has been designated as 'Very High Risk' by a report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) due to its links to the Chinese military. Freedom of Information requests revealed its donations have been directed toward biomedical research. The ASPI report notes the institution's close relationship with the Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics (CAEP), China's primary nuclear warhead research facility.

## Business donors

In 2020 to 2024, business donations were the second-largest category of donor, accounting for 22% to 28% of donations (figure two). This represents an increase of 10 to 17 percentage points since the period 2017 to 2020. Three of the most prominent businesses to donate to Oxford University are Tencent, Huawei, and Baidu.

Among other technological products, Tencent operates WeChat, and the conglomerate has been accused of significantly aiding the Chinese authorities' suppression of civil freedoms through

the intense regulation of the use of their products. Tencent has been approved as an "appropriate donor" by an independent university committee that vets donors and has made several donations to computer science research.

Article 7 of the Chinese National Security Law requires companies such as Tencent to cooperate with the government on matters deemed relevant to "national intelligence", which can include censorship and data sharing. Private enterprises with more than three Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members are also required to have an in-firm branch of the party. According to the *East Asia Forum*, "the private sector is still seen as a frontier for party-building" and more specifically, company law in China requires that these in-firm party units carry out the activities of the CCP.

Huawei, a Chinese multinational technology company, is also subject to this rule. Since 2017, the world's largest smartphone manufacturer has donated between £500,000 and £1.2 million to Oxford University. Huawei has faced a wave of sanctions from several states, including Germany, Japan, the USA, and Australia, for its links to the Chinese military; evidence that its technology was being used in the mass surveillance of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang detention camps; and accusations of intellectual property infringement.

The UK has Huawei as a vendor of 5G networks due to perceived cyber security and espionage risks. Huawei denies all allegations of misconduct. The University's records on rejected donations since 2017 reveal it has recently refused to accept funds from Huawei. The University states this is due to their wanting "to pause negotiations concerning any new projects and as such not accept funding for new projects."

Between 2017 to 2024, Baidu, a Chinese technology company specialising in internet services, contributed between £100,000 and £250,000 in research funding to Oxford University to support technological research, including 3D machine perception for autonomous driving cars. Baidu's search engine censors certain content, blocking results for Xi Jinping as well as for Vladimir Putin, according to recent research from the Citizen Lab.

## Individual donors

Individuals are the third largest category of donor, although their corresponding proportion has decreased from 15% to 26% in 2017 to 2020 to 3% to 4% in 2020-2024 (figure two). However, these donors still provide significant amounts of funding to the University.

Jesus College's Cheng Yu Ting Building was partially funded by a £15 million donation from Hong Kong property developer Henry Cheng Kar-shun. Cheng Kar-shun owns a highly prominent business empire and is Chairman of New World Development, which the *Financial Times* recently reported as increasingly reliant on the mainland China market.

Cheng Kar-shun was a member of the twelfth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a political advisory body in China, composed of individuals from different fields, including business and academia. It exists

to advise government bodies on political and social issues. The CPPCC has no real legislative power, but is subject to the direction of the CCP. Regarding Cheng Kar-shun's donation, Jesus College told *Cherwell*: "The College named the building after the Cheng family in gratitude for their generosity. The donation was not conditional."

The biggest individual donor, and third biggest donor overall to Oxford University since 2017, is Yang Huiyan, Vice-Chairwoman of Country Garden, one of the largest private real estate developers in China. Before the recent Chinese property crisis, Yang was the richest woman in Asia and is married to Chen Chong, the son of a senior provincial official. An article by *Forbes* noted that over 90% of China's 1,000 richest individuals are members of the CCP.

## China Oxford Scholarship

A large proportion of donations from Chinese entities also go towards supporting scholarships. This includes the China Oxford Scholarship Fund (COSF), which supports students from China, Hong Kong, and Macau in their postgraduate studies at Oxford, with scholarships awarded to students who show academic excellence, financial need and a "commitment to contributing to the development of China."

Johnny Hon, Hong Kong businessman and founder of conglomerate the Global Group, is a prominent donor to this scholarship. As with Cheng Kar-Shun, Hon is a member of the CPPCC. Moreover, according to *The Times*, Hon is a former chairman of the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il Foundation, which seeks to promote the state ideology of North Korea, known as Juche.

Lord Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong and the outgoing Chancellor of Oxford University, is described by the Fund as a longtime supporter. This June, he invited COSF scholars to his home for a garden party.

## What about Oxford?

Oxford is far from being the only university that has such engagements with China and, comparatively, since it is more financially independent than other universities, it is not as reliant on particular donors. In 2022 to 2023, only 5.6% of the University's income was from international fees, compared to a UK average of 23%. Despite this, the University continues to accept millions of pounds from Chinese entities every year.

Across the UK, universities received £125 million to £156 million from Chinese entities during the period 2017 to 2023. Of this sum, 30% to 33% of the total amount of money received was from entities subject to US sanctions or connected to the Chinese military, compared to Oxford's 15%.

In an interview with the *Telegraph*, Patten spoke about universities' dependence on China, warning that authorities may pressure academics to avoid certain topics and that students are being reported on. However, he also stressed that universities should not treat their Chinese students differently for "fear of being ticked by the Chinese government."

Read the full, up-to-date investigation at [Cherwell.org](#)  
Image Credit: David Hays.

Figure 2

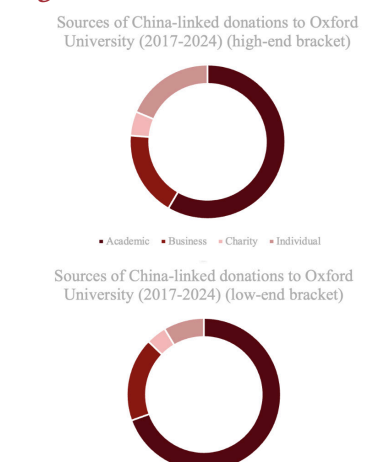
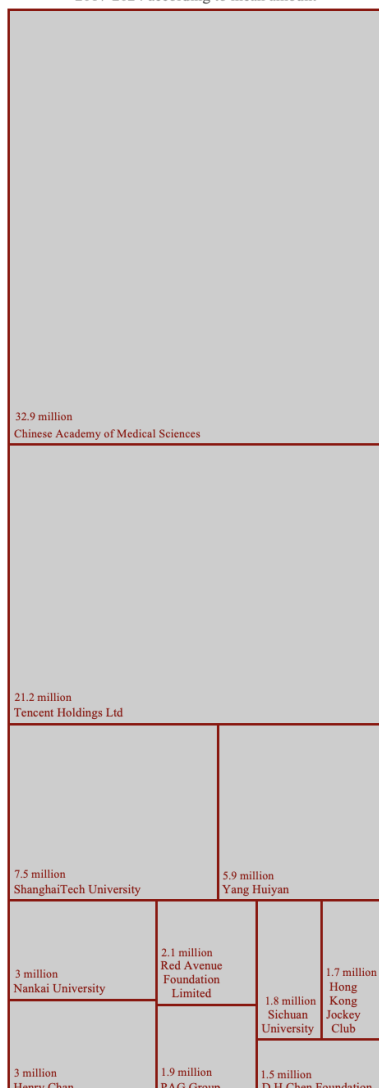


Figure 3

Top China-linked donors to Oxford University from 2017-2024 according to mean amount



# OPINION

DR RACHEL STENHOUSE AND PROF  
NICOLA INGRAM

## Oxbridge admissions favour private school students

The prestigious universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Oxbridge) are regarded as amongst the top universities in the world. As such holding a degree from Oxbridge axiomatically provides the bearer with a form of cultural capital, which makes accessing these universities important for the generation of privilege. Ultimately, a degree from Oxbridge facilitates access to top jobs.

Evidence shows a clear link between attendance at Oxbridge and access to elite professions. For example, 31% of politicians and 71% of senior judges were Oxbridge graduates. This privileged access to elite professions is compounded by a private school premium in access to Oxbridge itself as while just 6% of children in Britain attend a private school, the percentage of privately educated undergraduates in these two institutions is around 30%. The question of how this overrepresentation occurs is therefore important for unpacking both educational and labour market inequalities.

It is well established that in the past students from private schools drew on their social and cultural capital to access elite institutions, but today cultural capital is

what really counts. While in the past students stood out through obvious forms of cultural capital, e.g. playing the piano, or being a member of the debating society, today, it is embodied cultural capital (one's dispositions, habits, characteristics, how one responds in certain situations etc.) that now makes a difference.

Since many people from different backgrounds are accessing university and applying to Oxbridge with top A-Level grades and experiences of extra-curricular activities, it is impossible to differentiate between them on paper. The interview becomes, therefore, the site for this differentiation. When interviewing people with similar characteristics the thing that has value is the person's embodied cultural capital. Knowledge and skills alone are not enough for students to stand out in Oxford interviews, but students must show they 'can think independently'. This is where private schools excel in preparing their students.

We conducted research in a private 11-18 boys' grammar school in the North of England and examined a bespoke programme to prepare students to apply to elite universities. The school has a successful history of sending students to Oxbridge. The school-based programme was introduced in 2012 to replace previously named "Oxbridge lessons" as there was an awareness that getting top grades at A level was no longer enough to secure a place at Oxbridge and other elite universities. We gathered data from 17 teachers on the programme through reflective writing tasks, lesson observations and semi-structured interviews. Our research shows that teachers in private schools draw on their own social and cultural capital to choose activities that will develop embodied cultural capital in their students. Activities focus on 'putting students on the spot', making students 'grind out an acceptable answer', and training students to 'think under pressure'. Teachers attempt to replicate the interview experience and situation to develop the 'right' embodied capital and a sense of ease with an

Oxbridge interview environment. In these activities, the emphasis is not on what the answer is, but how one gets there, and students need to show confidence communicating this. Through these activities, students develop embodied ways of performing and displaying their worthiness of a place at Oxbridge. Thus, ease of performance is magically transformed into evidence of knowledge and skills when in fact it is just a display of privilege. While it is claimed that 'manners, appearance and background' do not affect decisions they are not actually inseparable from the performance of 'thinking independently and engaging in new ideas'. In fact, the former is an embodiment of the latter. Thus, the problem is that when interviewers are looking for markers of thinking they will turn to manners and appearance for evidence of these.

We want to challenge assumptions by those involved in the admissions process in which they claim they are operating with objectivity. Oxford and Cambridge should interrogate their practices on a micro level and awareness of the complexities of embodied cultural capital should be a component of unconscious bias training for staff involved in the admissions process. Currently, those from privileged backgrounds are recognised as being the right candidates with the right knowledge as they embody the cultural capital that is arbitrarily valued by those conducting the interviews. The University says that all of its tutors are trained and that it uses contextual data, as well as offering lots of outreach to help people from under-privileged backgrounds. Our research shows that privilege continues to be reproduced through private school students' access to Oxbridge that in turn opens the doors to elite professions. Unless recognition of the embodied cultural capital of the elite is challenged private school advantage and Oxbridge elitism will continue to be perpetuated.

## From the Editorial Board: From Commoners' gown to Chancellor's robes

The first round of online voting for Oxford's new Chancellor has opened: one of the most prestigious, ceremonial, and impotent roles in the country. While politicians flock to it, and national newspapers clamour over it, **Lilly Law** questions the meaning behind this title. She points out that the Chancellor has little contemporary function, yet still holds significant sway over the University's reputation on a global stage. Addressing concerns closer to students' everyday experiences, **Laurence Cooke** encourages the University to push forward on interdisciplinary education, citing its importance for critical thought and engagement with a complex world. Noting the collaborative advances of last year's Colloquium on Climate, he proposes how humanities students might take on the sciences, and vice versa. The University would do well to broaden students' focus.

Exploring how productive debate and discussion around complex topics can happen is at the forefront this week. **Conor Walsh** leads the edition with a piece that explores the potential of the new Sheldonian Series. Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey's effort to provide space for controversial discussions, organised by 'Free Speech Tips,' may be a turn in the right direction – if real listening is as integral as diversity of thought. **Dylan Thomas**, fresh off attending the Conservative Party Conference this summer, reports back with an analysis on the Oxford roots of his speakers. Tracing tutorial origins in Tory speech, he questions whether University knowledge comes with wisdom. While these students-turned-politicians had impressive debating flair, it wasn't enough: when it comes to making their voices heard, speakers should take more into account than reading lists. To improve upon Johnson, Tories would do better to address people with more humility. Back at Boris' rhetorical birthplace, **Arun Lewis** tackles the Oxford Union's committee dysfunction. The voices speaking here have obscured the Union's purpose, he argues, and should turn down the volume. Only then will the Union cease to look inwards and become the platform for genuine expression it claims to be.

Alongside the Union, matriculation day is another one of those quintessential Oxford institutions. A pompous baptism into the ranks of University, the ceremony sure does drag on, and what's with all that Latin? **Magnus Page** argues that we should embrace the absurdity of it all. From the compulsory Spoons trip to the never-ending queue for punts, matriculation day is in an idiosyncratic league of its own. Another rite of passage for some fresher students is EDI training. However, as **Ellen Roper** points out, it is rather less memorable than its Latin counterpart. Although not particularly innovative, this training is important, primarily for making clear the University's stance that discrimination isn't just something that can fly under the radar. What we have now is better than nothing, but we need to start working towards more concrete initiatives so these lessons aren't lost as the year wears on.

The University's prospects, at least for this week, seem to be looking up. New initiatives on EDI and renewed fervour for interdisciplinary learning show promise. There's no shortage of ideas for Oxford's growth on the table – it remains to be seen whether there's boldness enough to make them happen.

ARUN LEWIS

## The Union needs to pull itself together

*After last term's controversy, unity was possible. Botched rules reform has wasted that opportunity. The Union needs to ensure that procedures are followed.*

The Union has never been far from controversy, and this year is no change. Last term, questions emerged over the power of electoral officials. The returning officer and deputies ('RO world') had enormous independence, opening the door for malpractice. They removed then-President-Elect Ebrahim Osman-Mowafy in a trial tarred by racism. Briefly, the Union united - its committees declared RO world 'institutionally racist' and both presidential candidates ran on a platform of rules reform.

Unity didn't last. Rule changes to weaken RO world sparked upset through a lack of transparency in their implementation. Restored, Osman-Mowafy pushed the changes through in half an hour of procedural wrangling, winning a vote of bored non-member freshers who didn't understand. The Union now has two sets of rules and has elected two ROs. Electoral officials have been removed and Social Events Officer Shermar Pryce was fired after accusing Osman-Mowafy of overreach and tolerating racism among his own friends.

In pursuit of laudable aims, the President split the Union. Factional disputes distract from Union business, delaying the No-Confidence Debate by over an hour. Constitutional minutiae can be important to those involved, but the infamy and length of this fracas astounds. The Union's draw is its events and facilities, not students politicking for positions with no appreciable power. That the Union is known for its internecine bickering rather than its opportunities, blemishes its record.

There must be reconciliation between groups who share a common ideal – a diverse and reformed Union – without such divisiveness. Greater transparency and a gradual approach to reforms would do much for confidence.

I think highly of many on the Union committees, but strife serves no-one; few want to join a society that looks inward. The institution isn't meant to be the story. The sooner factional divides move from the headlines, the better for everyone.

LAURENCE COOKE

## Interdisciplinary is the future

*Allowing students to study a wider range of subjects makes them well-rounded and better equipped to solve problems in a complex world. The University has made a promising start.*

The University is waking up to the environmental, social, and geopolitical crises of our times – in one sense at least. The British higher education system pigeonholes us into one or two subjects of study for three or four years, an exception being the liberal arts format of some ancient Scottish universities. Oxford is rightly beginning to understand that the graduates of today and tomorrow need so much more. A new emphasis on training students to be well-rounded critical thinkers who can reason beyond their discipline is absolutely pivotal. STEM students need the tools to interrogate sources and communicate knowledge to policymakers and the public. Humanities specialists and social scientists can benefit from a contextual understanding of future challenges in order to apply their critical abilities.

This can take all kinds of forms, not least through the ability for some students to take outside options – such as the Physicists who can study a language for one paper. It is essential that this be expanded to allow – or even require – one Finals paper to be taken from a different subject altogether, technical abilities allowing. While as a Philosophy and French student I would obviously struggle to take 4th year Medicine, there is no reason why I should not be able to take an introductory statistics course or some Geography.

Those ambitions may be for the longer term, but the University is already taking action. The Vice-Chancellor's Colloquium was a great success, and I was delighted that my group's presentation on reducing emissions from college travel grants reached the final. The new series on free speech, if it grasps the nettle of addressing the University's own controversies and debates rather than ironically lapsing into didacticism, will succeed. Oxford Ministry for the Future is another bold new interdisciplinary programme. These initiatives are a great start, so let's build on their momentum.

MAGNUS PAGE

## Embrace the absurdity of matriculation

Matriculation is one of Oxford's oddest traditions, and that's exactly what makes it worth keeping. My experience began with photos and then a march to Spoons for breakfast in full Sub Fusc. Although it did feel a bit awkward and embarrassing, that oddity made it all the more memorable. Later, I played poker in a suit while my friends and I spent the afternoon winding each other up by tying our gown tassels together. While it's true that anyone can wear Sub Fusc anytime, only a tradition like matriculation can inspire such widespread participation.

Even if the ceremony itself was underwhelming, dressing up and having a valid excuse to take the whole day

off work made it worthwhile. It's not just about the ceremony; it's the entire experience that makes the day worth keeping.

When I asked others about their matriculation experiences, regardless of their college, they shared the same sentiment: they loved it. While opinions on the ceremony varied, the overall day was enjoyed by all, with everyone fully embracing its absurdity. The only real complaint was the long queue for punting, which, in the end, is a minor detail.

Matriculation may be antiquated and frankly bizarre, but that's precisely what makes it so delightful and essential to preserve. It's just one of those traditions that makes Oxford special.



# For good free speech: Listen

Free speech is one of the most contentious and divisive issues of our time. The Vice-Chancellor's new Sheldonian Series, which aims to champion this principle, should encourage listening as much as speaking.

CONOR WALSH

Wherever you turn to in Oxford, the words 'free speech' or 'freedom of expression' never seem too far away. Following the disbandment of Oxford Action for Palestine (OAP)'s encampment and the revision of university-wide free speech guidelines, you'd be forgiven for being cautious about what you say, or more prudently, don't say, on university grounds. Nonetheless, free speech is an integral part of democracy. And as intellectual power-houses, encompassing diverse student bodies who are often politically organised and politically motivated, universities are at the heart of free speech and social justice. If you can't speak freely on a university campus, all hope seems lost.

During her annual Oration, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Irene Tracey, announced plans for the 'Sheldonian Series'. This new, termly event seeks to explore "the big questions of our age," representing a variety of views from across academia. The discussions will be guided by the 'Free Speech Tips' devised by students and staff at Worcester College, as well as Heads of Houses from Balliol, Brasenose, Mansfield and Somerville, and hope to tackle difficult or otherwise controversial topics. The tips provide guidance on organising and orchestrating controversial events, upholding the right to disagree, and the importance of "respect for the individual." Yet they're only the tip of the iceberg – if you'll pardon the pun – when it comes to fostering inclusive, civil debate. In a time of heated, geo-political tensions – a world shrouded in war, violence and humanitarian crises – it seems almost impossible to reconcile humanity's deep-rooted, complex divisions. "Free and inclusive speech" requires balancing freedom of intellectual exploration with respect for all identities and beliefs. But in 2024, the ability to hold a conversation about Gaza, trans rights or reparations for slavery in which everyone feels equally heard and free to speak is but a naive dream. Such polite disagreement is more akin to a utopian vision than an achievable reality.

Like much of our political language, free speech finds its origins in ancient Greece, arising from two, quite distinct concepts. The first, *isegoria*, refers to the idea of equal speech in public, as practised in parliamentary chambers. Whilst the second, *parrhesia*, is about speaking freely and

frankly: think die-hard Trump supporters. Over time these two concepts converged to denote what we now call freedom of speech. But there is a tension here between these differing terms: the former expresses equality, whilst the latter is concerned with liberty. This tension between liberty and equality is as clear today as it was in ancient Greece. As seen in its origins, what we often think of as freedom of speech can have different, nuanced and misconstrued meanings. Much like an elephant and a squirrel on a seesaw, balancing freedom of expression with respect and sensitivity is impossibly problematic.

Last week I attended a talk with Lord William Hague. The former foreign secretary was grilled on countless topics, including everything from war in Ukraine and the failings of the UN, to the future of the UK Conservative party and his bid to become the next Chancellor of the University. Amongst the many interesting insights made by Lord Hague was a comment on the tensions surrounding free speech. In reply to a question about freedom of expression on campus, he remarked that: "listening to views that make you uncomfortable is one of the most important parts of education."

Lord Hague's comment has been rattling around my head for the past week, leading to the dawning realisation that, perhaps, we have been taking the wrong approach to freedom of speech all along. The impossibility of reconciling freedom of expression with respect and sensitivity seems less intimidating when we shift our attention from speaking to listening.

When it comes to freedom of speech, we're so obsessed with being heard that we often forget to listen. Whilst liberty and equality of expression are naturally important, polite disagreement can only work if it consists of a dialogue as opposed to a one-sided speech or lecture. In times of heated divisions, especially when our personal ideologies are at stake, we can get lost in the heat of the moment. We can focus so intently on getting our point across, on being heard, that we're oblivious to the arguments and thoughts on the other end of the spectrum, or the other side of the debate. For all our good intentions, we end up talking past each other instead of to each other. We must ask ourselves, if we so long for freedom of speech, for polite conversation and civil discourse, shouldn't

that involve listening as much as speaking?

If done correctly, the Sheldonian Series might enable conflicting and potentially polarising views to be expressed respectfully in a publicly accessible forum. But, more fundamentally, the series can provide an opportunity for varying opinions to be heard as well as expressed. Specific details about what we should expect of the series – how it is to be orchestrated, the speakers it will invite and the views it will represent – are yet to be established. But the Vice-Chancellor's endorsement of the 'Free Speech Tips' is crucial. Whilst listening is not the primary concern of the tips, they do well to highlight that speakers should be "listened to in good faith". No guidance on free speech can ever be perfect, but the principle that attendees should "respect the speaker's right to speak and agree to allow them to be heard" is an important point. If we wish to talk to one another instead of talking past one another, listening, even if we find something disagreeable or

uncomfortable, is an important skill for attendees as much as it is for speakers. A public speaker is only as powerful as its audience – if nobody cares to listen, our words will only ever fall upon deaf ears.

Of course, listening alone cannot solve our problems. Reconciling the world's geo-political tensions – cultural, ethnic and religious divisions – is not so easy. But it's possible that a greater emphasis on listening might help this age-old tension in freedom of speech feel slightly less utopian and increasingly realistic. Providing a venue for polite disagreement, a safe space for debate and reconciliation, is a noble, if not challenging, endeavour. But if the Sheldonian Series embraces listening as much as it does equal representation and diversity of thought, there might be hope for freedom of speech after all.

*Image Credits: David Hays*



## Tu-Tory-al lessons

DYLAN TURNER

Writing for *The Telegraph*, Boris Johnson's former tutor questioned: "Had we taught him truthfulness? No. Had we taught him wisdom? No...even Socrates was very doubtful whether virtue could be taught." Johnson the Prime Minister was once Johnson the undergraduate; if not honesty and wisdom, what did his tutorials ultimately teach him?

The answer: how to use his voice. Over the course of degrees, tutorials gradually groom us to project our views through our voices. Each tutorial becomes a moot in which we are forced to adopt the defence against disciplinary experts. By enabling us to speak our truth to their power, Oxford strives to leave us with a voice many universities don't have the capability to provide.

Nowhere has this become more apparent than at this year's Conservative Party Conference, where it was no challenge to spot former Oxonians and Cantabrigians. How? Not through stalking LinkedIns but by the way they spoke.

Sat in the main hall I was transported to my tutor's office. Tom Tugendhat's (Caius, Cambridge) speech was unscripted yet quickly morphed into an uninspiring essay reading, Robert Jenrick (John's, Oxford) utilised Brexit-esque rhetoric to attack the ECHR, and together

their never-ending pauses, as they pondered their next words, evoked not-so-fond memories of those awkward silences tutorials often involve.

Overall, I found James Cleverly (University of West London) the most inspiring. To "be more normal", as he implored us, is precisely the Socratic virtue our tutorials do not teach. We must speak – not shout – to find common ground; discuss, not debate – there are no winners – and "sell conservatism with a smile."

As Cleverly demonstrated, being more normal doesn't require that we renounce Oxbridge. It simply demands that we engage with each other beyond the tutorial room. To be spontaneous, to own our mistakes and to talk people up – not down – provides us with a wisdom that contemporaries may lack.

As I step from Oxford the city through the portal of Tom Tower into 'Oxford the university' for my weekly tutorial, I wonder how I will use my own voice.

Our University's current track record would suggest that at least one of my peers will occupy Number 10 during my lifetime. In 30 years' time, when I have made my impact on the world, however big or small, I wonder: what will my tutor say about me?

**In 30 years' time...  
what will my tutor  
say about me?**

## A case for the EDI training I forgot about

ELLEN ROPER

With everything Freshers' Week has to offer, the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) trainings risk being overwhelmed.

Even so, they should be welcomed. The session itself was simple. There were a few slides on why EDI matters and what forms it takes at the University, while most of the training was focused on a handful of hypothetical case studies.

In small groups, students were encouraged to consider what to do about a sexist tutor, or fellow students making antisemitic comments at lunch. Everyone seemed engaged in friendly, if awkward discussion. Uneventful, but enjoyable, as far as compulsory training sessions go.

And yet, when I first saw this commission, I had forgotten that this training had even happened. I suspect the experience also got lost in the whirlwind of freshers' week for those less forgetful than me.

Whatever the context, an hour-long briefing will hardly change one's habits. Those who are used to being proactive in these situations won't learn much, while those who would benefit from the content can easily tune out.

Is there any point to these sessions, then, besides making the University look better on paper? The true impact seems almost impossible to quantify.

Still, in a word, I would say yes.

First, the problem of discrimination is made explicit, harder to brush off as simply 'the way things are'. Even those who are not personally affected might be more likely to take notice of problematic behaviour.

Second, the sessions might just spark empathy in unique ways. One of the scenarios featured two imaginary countries in need of aid: one (seemingly) Western, the other a Muslim-majority country. Naturally our mode of communication should cater to the needs of the specific situation. Highlighting human experiences is better than nothing amidst relentless polarisation.

My own takeaway was to react with more empathy towards 'offenders'. Students come from radically diverse personal contexts, and not all missteps are ill-intended, and an open question might be more constructive than an angry confrontation.

Most importantly, the training legitimises help from action-seeking third parties, and encourages speaking out in a problematic situation, even if the specifics are lost in the general haze of Freshers' Week.

At present, EDI trainings are a mere nod in the right direction. Even that is better than looking the other way.

**Most important,  
EDI training  
legitimises action**

# A whistle-stop tour of Oxford's women's societies – in the words of their presidents



By SOPHIE LYNE

A former President of the Feminist Society spoke to seven different women's society leaders discussing their roles, aims, and the aspiration to create a sense of community. Tracing their histories and specialisms in honour of the 50th anniversary of co-education

**W**omen have only received degrees from Oxford since 1920 and most colleges have only been co-educational since the 70s. Yet, today, Oxford hosts an impressive number of women's societies.

We have societies which focus on issues facing women and gender minorities in Oxford, like the Feminist Society (FemSoc) and the SU Women's Campaign (WomCam). We have societies promoting gender equality in male-dominated subjects, like Oxford Wom\*n in Computer Science Society (OxWoCS) and Oxford Women in Engineering, Science and Technology (OxWEST). There are countless societies supporting women seeking careers in male-dominated fields, including the highly influential Oxford Women in Business (OxWIB, which boasts a 45-person committee), as well as Oxford Women\* in Law, Oxford Women\* in Consulting, and more recently Oxford Women\* in Government. There's an Oxford Women of Colour Society (WocSoc), the annual charity campaign Oxford PinkWeek, and Oxford FemTech Society promoting research into women's health. Alongside these, new women's societies are being organised each term.

Student-run organisations for women have been around for almost as long as Oxford has had female students. The Oxford Women Students' Society for Women's Suffrage (OWSSWS) formed in 1911, when individual suffrage societies at the women's colleges combined to form one movement. The OWSSWS (catchy) was allied to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, led famously by Millicent Fawcett, and Oxford's

women joined mass demonstrations in London. To this day, The banner they carried still hangs in St Hilda's College.

It is easy to see the need for women's organisations in this era: a time before equal voting rights and the widespread social change we have seen across the 20th and 21st century. But perhaps the demand is less clear now. Discrimination based on sex is prohibited under UK law following the 2010 Equality Act. What can all these women's societies be fighting for? To find out, I spoke to eight of their presidents.

## The societies and their aims

Anita Okunde, co-chair of the SU Women's Campaign, summarised their work as "making sure that women in Oxford feel like their experiences are valuable and meaningful". WomCam is, both nominally and in practice, a campaign, so it is perhaps the most overtly activist of the societies I encountered. WomCam's goals change depending on the priorities of its committee, as well as in reaction to what's going on in Oxford. Anita elaborated on her current project to advocate for awareness of women's health issues: "After the last set of graduations we had loads of people messaging the account about how they had certain [health conditions] that under the university guidelines don't class as serious issues, but really impacted their exams."

Other societies have less focus on taking action or campaigning for change, instead running social or discussion-based events. For instance, Oxford FemSoc meets weekly for their 'Liberation and Liquor' discussion group, which promises

cheap drinks and a circle of students sharing opinions on a feminist topic. On their termcard for Michaelmas 2024 are discussions such as 'Is there a useful universal feminism?', and the no doubt controversial 'Is Oxford sexist?'. Kaiya Tiwari, FemSoc president, said, "our principal goal is education," which she described as "the key catalyst to making social change."

Oxford's Women of Colour Society (WocSoc) runs a mix of discussion groups and social events such as karaoke, friendship bracelet making, and trips for boba. WocSoc began in 2022 from a group of three friends, and has grown to a committee of 14 people, including two dedicated welfare roles. President Eugenie Sumkoska said that the society focuses on "creating a safe space for women of colour [...]. The core of it is that shared experience element." They are also working on events to actively help women of colour combat discrimination, featuring a workshop "to give people the instruments and tools to react to microaggressions."

Other societies focus less on the present experience of women at Oxford, and more on their future: in entering careers that are either male-dominated, or present difficulties to women which male counterparts may not face. "Our primary mission is to democratise opportunity," said Elisha Khannah, President of OxWIB. "We want that to be opportunity for everyone." Although it is now a well-known Oxford powerhouse, OxWIB was founded less than 20 years ago, in 2008. "Women had finally reached the higher levels, [so] they were able to institute these programmes that they would love to have had when they were younger."

Oxford Women\* in Government is the newest society I spoke to. Founded in October 2023, they already have over 900 Instagram followers and a well-stocked termcard. Co-presidents Gaya Wimalasundera and Anika Gupta also referred to a primarily educational purpose. Their main mission, said Gaya, is "to spread knowledge and be a place where women can learn about a career path that they might want to explore". Anika also noted that OxWIG is committed to being politically neutral, and is a "place to foster diverse conversations". It stands as an accessible alternative to party-aligned political societies, which some may find more intimidating.

I also spoke to the Nirali Jain, President of Oxford Women in Engineering, Science and Technology, and Allie Clement, President of Oxford Wom\*n in Computer Science. Nirali emphasised the importance of a "safe space for women in STEM", with a goal to "equip [them] with the resources that you might not find so easily in other societies." Allie also described a focus on "building community", alongside highlighting the work of women who are currently making a name for themselves in computer science, and providing networking and industry opportunities.

Oxford admissions statistics from 2021 to 2023 show that while some STEM subjects, like chemistry, have almost equal numbers of male and female students (45.4% of admitted UK students were female), this remains far from the case for subjects like engineering (22.4%), computer science (26.7%), and physics (19.8%).

Allie describes computer science as highly male-dominated: "It's almost a social norm to walk into



a room and it all be men [...] It feels strange if it's a room of females." OxWoCS provides conferences and talks where female majority is for once the norm.

### A common mission?

It is worth noting here that I myself have been involved in women's societies. My time as President of Oxford FemSoc in the 2023-2024 academic year was without a doubt the most rewarding experience of my time at university.

While president, I was presented with lots of opportunities to collaborate with other societies – not just women's societies, but groups from all over the university. I spent a lot of time thinking about whether our missions aligned, and whether such collaborations would be enjoyable or beneficial for FemSoc members. Some collaborations went so well that we repeated them – FemSoc X WocSoc will always be a favourite of mine – but other collaborations were politely declined.

FemSoc welcomes all opinions in its discussions, but the committee holds a firmly intersectional feminist ideology. Other women's societies might

***“Women had finally reached the higher levels, instituting programmes they would have loved to have had when they were younger”***



be perceived as feminist and/or activist, but several presidents told me activism was not a key priority for them. Gaya (OxWIG) said, “I don't think we see OxWIG as merely a form of activism, it's very much just, this is what we're interested in, this is what we want to do.” Elisha (OxWIB) agreed. “It's funny because when I'm in it, I don't think it [is activist] at all, I think it's so normal. [...] It's like our safe space.” However, the story changes when she speaks to people outside of the society bubble. “It feels activist, because some of the things that I'm saying, that I think should be apparent, become controversial.” The need for women's spaces is a given at OxWIB – less so in the corporate world.

Nirali (OxWEST) says that while her society may be perceived as activist, “[the] mission is very much to create opportunity for like-minded people to be around each other, as opposed to making women in STEM known as a ‘new’ concept [...] It's for the women, by the women.”

### Women's societies aren't all activist, and that's okay

These societies are not explicitly aligned with any activist movement: their internal purpose is one of community. It might not be what the Suffragettes had in mind, but spaces for connection – even when apolitical – are undeniably vital. Allie (OxWoC) told me that she moved to Oxford in January and knew nobody in the city. “OxWoC was a bunch of people that had similar backgrounds, similar interests to me. And now most of them are my best friends.” Gaya and Anika (OxWIG) had a similar experience: “We met through OxWIG, and it turns out she lives down my road!”

Even if activism isn't everyone's priority, I think it's fair to say every society plays some role in the feminist movement: social gatherings, discussions, and community are an inherent part of activism too. Feminism is often perceived as an ongoing struggle, at times dangerous for those involved. We can picture protests, and recall militant suffragettes smashing windows or going on hunger strike. I don't deny the importance of such forms of activism, and every day I feel indebted to the sacrifices of feminists before us. However, there is no reason that activism cannot also be enjoyable. Writer adrienne maree brown, in their book *Pleasure Activism*, reminds us: “There is no way to repress pleasure and expect liberation, satisfaction, or joy.” The feminist movement can – and should – involve community, and be fun. After all, marches and protests only occur because a group of people came together to organise them.

I asked Georgia Lin, a DPhil Education candidate researching student activism by women

of colour at Oxford, for her perspective on whether social groups can constitute activism. Her research has involved attending meetings of FemSoc and WocSoc, and interviewing their members and committees.

Georgia told *Cherwell*: “Student societies like FemSoc and WocSoc provide a much-needed and often intimate space for feminists to gather in Oxford. In an institution that can be hostile to feminist thought, coupled with the sense of isolation many marginalised students feel, student-run organisations are facilitating a politics of care through weekly discussions and socials. The creation of these spaces is in itself resistance against Oxford's patriarchal foundations.”

We attend a university where women have historically held few leadership roles. As a result, there is something inherently powerful about female society presidents. Their societies are hugely successful: proof, if any more was needed, that women are competent leaders.

***“In an institution that can be hostile to feminist thought, coupled with the sense of isolation many marginalised students feel, student-run organisations are facilitating a politics of care”***

I would suggest there are potential ideological differences between the societies, although this can certainly change with constantly shifting committees. While I was FemSoc president, meetings frequently involved discussion of fairly radical ideas, including the link between capitalism and the patriarchy. In Trinity 2024, FemSoc members discussed the question, ‘Is feminism inherently socialist?’ and of the 27

attendees, 26 voted in favour, and one abstained – far from politically neutral. While FemSoc welcomes all opinions, attendees frequently express a desire to change the roots of our social, economic, and political systems. In contrast, other women's societies empower women to enter such capitalist systems.

Can these ideas be reconciled? Personally, I think we can acknowledge the need for wider structural change while also seeking gender equality within such structures in the short term... but that's a FemSoc L&L debate for another time.

When all of the featured presidents gathered together to answer my questions, it certainly felt like they had common ground. They frequently echoed each other's answers, happily chatted about annoying male employers, and discussed future inter-society collaborations. It was truly inspiring to witness.

### Should men attend women's societies?

Most societies mentioned here have at least some events open to men. In fact, one of FemSoc's elected committee roles each year is a ‘Men's Rep’ who advocates for men's issues within a feminist context. This academic year, they also have a male Vice President.

Kaiya (FemSoc) said, “The men on our committee are really amazing, and you can really tell that they are so passionate about it – it's really refreshing to see.” She also mentioned that having men on their committee might encourage male attendance, joking: “Sometimes the only way to get men to engage is getting a man to tell them.”

FemSoc encourages male attendance both to “hear their points of view, but also let them hear what we think as well.” However, Kaiya also acknowledges the danger of this: “When you welcome men into a space you do have that issue of it no longer being a safe space... I'm conscious of things being said that are going to make people feel uncomfortable.” She begins every meeting by pointing out their Welfare Rep, encouraging attendees to step out or speak to a committee member if something makes them feel unsafe or upset.

Elisha (OxWIB) also described attempts to boost male attendance at their termly Presidents' Ball: “One of our favourite things to do now is we all bring every single male friend that we can rope in to attend [...] it's actually been one of our most successful initiatives.” Male attendees (affectionately called the OxMIBs) are welcome at many of their events. “We have a specific focus on accessibility, and getting men involved is crucial. We wouldn't be helping ‘women in business’, unless we recognise that the necessary culture shift requires huge support from other groups,

specifically men.”

### Looking to the future

Women's societies continue to pop up in Oxford every year. But after sufficient social change, will they eventually become obsolete or unnecessary? Should we be aiming for more women's societies, or fewer?

Gaya (OxWIG) can see “no issue” with more women's societies – “the more the merrier!” Eugenie (WocSoc) said: “We will continue to exist because what connects us is the shared experience, rather than any sort of equality in the world,” noting that, “it's also slightly different with cultural societies, because there is a different dimension of connection there, so I think definitely it is something that will always exist.”

Nirali (OxWEST) does however hope for a change in their *raison d'être*. “I do hope that in the future women societies can exist and flourish out of the joy of being together and having shared goals, without the current societal need to simultaneously be a form of implicit activism.”

WomCam's future really depends on Oxford, but Anita isn't hopeful: “If the university ceases to have any problems [...] so be it, WomCam has lost its purpose. But I do not see that happening.”

My key takeaway from meeting all eight women's society presidents was how much they love their societies. They are proud of their work, and the safe, welcoming spaces they have created. They also truly enjoy attending the events they run. Maybe there are so many women's societies because women's societies are fun!

Oxford's women's societies are young – the oldest of the societies featured here (OxWEST) began in 2005. Less than 20 years later, women's societies have large, flourishing committees, consistently high membership and attendance, and ever-growing social media followings. The numbers don't lie. Demand is high and only increasing.

As Anika (OxWIG) said, “The fact that our societies are growing, and more and more are coming, there's a conversation around it [...] and conversation provokes people to think critically about why there is need.” So while there may still be sceptics, it doesn't seem like women's societies are going away any time soon.

Throughout this article, ‘woman’ is used to refer inclusively to anyone who identifies with the experiences of women, and to other marginalised genders.

Image credits: David Hays (page 8), featuring [left to right] Allie Clement, Gaya Wimalasundera, Anika Gupta, Eugenie Sumkoska, Nirali Jain, Elisha Khannah, Kaiya Tiwari

Oxford Women in Business (page 9)

# Oxford University's long vacation vexation

It's longer than both Brian Clough's tenure at Leeds United and the 1940 Battle of France, but do we need to cut the long vac some slack? *Cherwell* spoke to Oriel students to find out.

By THOMAS ARMSTRONG

In a recent poll of Oriel College students for *Cherwell*, almost two thirds of those surveyed agreed that the University's 8-week terms are too short. So, how are we to explain the notoriously overworked Oxford student's counter-intuitive desire for more time spent studying? The answer lies deeper than a simple enthusiasm for hitting the books.

One of the main concerns raised by those students in favour of longer terms related to workload. Rather than advocating for more of the same system, it seems students would appreciate extended terms to allow an extra week for revision, or just a 'reading week' as is common in other UK universities. Of course, there's more to Oxford than academics. It's also worth considering the impact this extra breathing space would have on the extra-curricular scene. Over 400 societies are currently affiliated with the University, not to mention those at the college level: surely it can be no bad thing to allow students' sporting, dramatic, or creative talents more time to flourish.

Furthermore, it is important to appreciate the respite that student life provides for those with difficult home situations. According to the Office for Students, the 3,000 students who enter higher education every year while dealing with estrangement achieve lower average marks and leave their courses more frequently. Oxford's terms – with Cambridge, as short as any in the country – mean that these students spend less than half the year actually living in Oxford University accommodation. If one accepts that estranged students are at their least vulnerable when in their college, they are denied this protection for six months out of the year.

Some have suggested that the issue seems an easy one to resolve. This year's long vac, at 16 weeks, lasted longer than the 1940 Battle of France and Brian Clough's tenure at Leeds United put together. Surely it's as simple as adding a week onto each term and shortening the summer vacation accordingly to compensate for the change.

Yet things aren't nearly that clear-cut. The same Oriel students who broadly favoured longer terms were split almost exactly evenly on whether or not the long vacation should be made shorter to compensate, a result which seems strange until you examine the motives respondents offered. One, writing anonymously, suggested that "[the vacation] drags sometimes, but that's what it's for". Several others highlighted that the sheer length of time away from study allows for both leisure and professional development through internships.

The main reasons for opposition to a shorter summer vac among *Cherwell's* focus group were

financial: many are reluctant to take on the burden of another week's accommodation costs. And these material pressures have even deeper impacts still. For some students, Oxford's accommodation system presents a difficult choice between strife on the financial front or on the domestic one. Students wishing to stay in Oxford over the vacation must not only pay additional fees, but also justify their presence to college authorities – a situation which, for some, is symbolic of the University's callous attitude towards its students outside of term time.

Mel Monemvasioti, also of Oriel, remarked that "Mental health and caring for your students goes beyond having a counselling system and therapy llamas. It needs to translate into material changes that actually provide benefits and support to students and don't just treat them like cash cows. The vac issue actually illustrates a wider problem with the way [Oxford] approaches mental health and student support."

This warning in some ways reflects the current state of the relationship between students and the university. *Cherwell* has repeatedly covered the rise in mental health concerns among Oxford students and young people in general, as well as allegations that the University is still yet to adequately deal with these problems. As with the rent question, some of Oxford's perceived failings return again and again to issues of cost. The University's collegiate structure is often cited as a defence against calls for greater investment. Oxford administrators claim to be hamstrung by the fact that £6 billion of the University's £8 billion endowment is tied to individual colleges rather than a single central body, meaning that University-wide improvements are extremely difficult to implement.

However, there are some cases where that argument has met fierce opposition. The College Disparities Report from the Student Union highlights that certain colleges would be more than capable of enacting financially sustainable reform across the University. Christ Church's endowment, for example – said to be in excess of £700 million in 2023 – is greater than that of every university in the country bar Cambridge and the remaining Oxford colleges.

The picture, therefore, is characteristically bleak. Lengthening terms and shortening the summer vacation would likely alleviate the significant pressures on students' mental health, but that would require financial sacrifices. If some colleges were to subsidise others, the entire University could take steps to accommodate such changes and provide students with longer leases for the same price. Yet for many, there is a recurring feeling that asking for aid from Oxford's wealthier colleges seems less feasible than drawing blood from their centuries-old stone.

Art credit: Joe Walford



## Harry Potter and the Goblet of Sangria

Oxford and Barcelona have had their fair share of tourist troubles, from housing to Hogwarts hysteria.

By VICTORIA MCKINLEY-SMITH

Oxford is a historic university town, steeped in tradition and academic rigour, whilst the other is a metropolis famed for its vibrant Mediterranean culture, art, and architecture. As Michaelmas rumbles on under increasingly grey skies and the increasing threat of vitamin D deficiency, one sentiment unites these two cities: a collective hatred for tourists.

Barcelona is home to some of the most impressive modernist architecture in the world. But the reality is that most of these buildings are not inhabited by locals. Just look at Casa Batlló, Casa Vicens, and Casa Tilly-Clemmie-and-Minty-on-their-three-week-interrail-trip. The influx of tourists has driven up property prices, making it increasingly difficult for locals, especially those dependent on low-paying, tourism-related jobs, to afford to live in the city. This has resulted in the sale of only 58,199 houses in the area last year. It's not the vertiginous towers of the Sagrada Familia that have sickened locals, but a dire case of Airbnbitis that has made their city a tourist village. Even Gaudí himself couldn't afford to live there anymore.

Enter Oxford. More and more properties are split into accommodation for weekend getaways to the city of dreaming spires and sleepless students. The fantasy of living in a picturesque, historic city has driven up demand for accommodation, leading to rising property prices that are making it increasingly difficult for locals. University employees have a particularly hard time. Even academics are being priced out, forced to live further away, and endure long commutes, a reality that threatens the city's academic core. According to the Office for National Statistics, housing affordability in Oxford has stagnated, with the average price for first time buyers rising from £376,000 to £414,000 in only the past year. Adios to my dreams of that Jericho townhouse.

Of course, tourism brings both cities benefits. It generates over €9.6 billion annually for Barça and accounts for a colossal 14% of its GDP. Each year, approximately 32 million tourists descend upon the city to Oxford's 7 million. This comes at a cost: local businesses that once served the community are now seedy sangria speakeasies, "I love milf" t-shirt vendors, or our particular poison – the Harry Potter merch store. There are now two of these shops on Cornmarket. Is it really so difficult to take ten steps down the road to pick up your Gryffindor scarf and sorting hat?

Unfortunately, the tourists don't seem to use the spell *accio bin*. On Las Ramblas, the bins are said to have been emptied a startling 14 times in a single day, whilst Oxford has imposed fines of up to £150 for littering in the city's popular green spaces.

Compared to Barcelona, Oxford may not be swarming with sun-seekers, but it faces its own unique set of challenges. While we as students haven't resorted to squirting tourists with

water pistols like our Catalan counterparts, it's undeniably frustrating to have to push past swarms of people on High Street when you're already late for your tute. A critical artery for locals and students alike, the street often feels more like a tourist trap than a functioning part of the city.

But it's not just the buildings who attract the tourists, it's us, the students. Picture a brown-haired, glasses-wearing fresher at Matriculation being gawped at by a group of tourists. "Look! It's Harry Potter!" Yeah, only this Harry Potter speaks Latin, not Parseltongue and lives in a four-bed in Tunbridge Wells, not a cupboard under the stairs. Tourists line the street, mystified by the common Oxford student, eager to catch us in our gowns, or on our way in and out of the Rad Cam. This is perhaps an indication of the exoticisation of culture which comes as a result of tourism. The visitors coming for the bank holiday weekend don't know the realities of life behind the façade. Behold, the lesser-spotted Oxford student, home from Bridge only a few hours ago, Bod card left somewhere in Spoons, wearing the same jumper for the third day in a row. All they see is the perfect scholar on their way to another intellectually stimulating discussion with a professor dressed in tweed and a monocle.

Really though, Oxford students are no better than the common Barcelona tourist. Granted, we may stay a little longer, and our days are spent in the library, not laying on a sandy beach, but we are still very much temporary residents. We spend so much time complaining about tourists that we disregard what it's like for the locals who view us in much the same light. In fact, students and University staff make up over 22% of the population of Oxford, the highest such ratio in England and Wales. No wonder you can't walk down Broad Street without running into that tutor you promised an essay to.

Addressing the issues of tourism will require a nuanced and balanced approach that considers both the economic benefits of tourism and the needs of local residents. Without careful management, Oxford, like Barcelona, risks becoming another example of a city victimised by its own success, where the quality of life for its residents is sacrificed in the name of economic gain. It's a cautionary tale that resonates with historic cities across the world, many of which are grappling with the same challenges. As both Oxford and Barcelona navigate the complex dynamics of tourism, the lessons learned here could serve as a blueprint for other cities like Venice, Santorini, and Dubrovnik, all facing similar pressures.

So then what's the solution to dealing with tourists? Take a deep breath, and put the water pistol down.

Image credit: David Hays

# John Evelyn

All hail our supreme leaders! – Peace be upon them! I, John Evelyn, am honoured to officially announce the beginning of the glorious Ramses-Khan dictatorship, and the end of the Oxford Union as we know it.

Attendees, who were definitely members, were dazzled during the first debate of term. They were left speechless and captivated, utterly convinced that the Reign Reinforcement Committee's decrees would save the Union from the dark arts of discrimination and launch us into the Age of Ailuropoda. Any suggestion that their lack of engagement was the result of them not knowing what was happening is, of course, fake news and obviously racist.

Besides forced standing ovations, panda tears, and rhetoric that would make Mussolini blush, viewers also witnessed the last bastion of free speech defy expectations by not allowing free speech. Indeed, after the Convict wooed crowds with his false objection, the false MichaelMessiah, also a convict, helped the convicted Ramses II 'pass' his decrees by using a bespoke procedural motion to ban the Grad Soc Guru from nitpicking over minor technicalities – such as how the changes transform the Union into an autocracy. Genghis Khan, unfettered by selective hearing, declared in multiple votes by acclamation that dissent was not only intolerable but also inaudible, thus ensuring the motion "passed".

Unfortunately, the insolent Resistance Officers, led by their commander, Joan of Arc – misguided by vices such as truthfulness and reading comprehension – exposed the decrees' invalidity before both the Clueless-Cabal and the Seat-warming Committee. Undeterred by such a minor inconscience as the Rules and Standing Orders, Ramses II pressed on. The first score of Resistance Officers were culled by the Seat-warmers on the grounds of 'prejudice by proximity,' as they were deemed too prejudiced toward acting competently and independently of our dear leaders.

Attendees were, once again, thoroughly impressed as the 2nd debate of term went on without a hitch! The 1st elected BNOC was questioned about his freelance photography hobby by Temu JK Rowling. Though she wasn't actually there; likely off somewhere accusing someone of misdeeds that happened in an alternate reality

or publicly mourning the loss of a recently deceased mass murderer – the usual. Ramses II then proceeded to educate the membership on the nuances of racism, explaining how it exists only when directed at himself and that a coconut is merely a fruit. An emergency meeting was called to exterminate the last remaining Resistance Officers. Meanwhile, still operating in the real world, the Resistance Officers elected the Kwok-blocker as their new leader in the fight to keep the Union's IQ from slipping below room temperature.

Finally, Monday saw the Union relocate from Frewin Court to Cairo as Ramses II directed his Deputy Rigging Officers to "elect" a Chief Rigging Officer, whose main qualification is not falling into the river during his matriculation last week. This was swiftly followed by the resignation of The Last Air-Bender and the summary execution of the 1st Elected BNOC after a brief show trial.

Watch this space – vive la résistance!



## EDITORIAL:

*Deputy Editor of Features, Laurence Cooke, discusses his experience of journalism in the age of the algorithm*

The media landscape, as I'm sure you're aware, is undergoing a huge transformation. According to Ofcom's Online News Research Update from last March, 71% of 16–24 year olds use social media for news. That means you're in the minority right now, reading our wonderful print edition. Instagram, Facebook, our weekly newsletter, and Cherwell.org are vital levers in sharing our content as widely as possible. That being said, the print is our pride and joy, and, I would venture, enjoys a privileged position at Oxford due to the romance of picking up a copy in your plodge or JCR. However, this success goes against the grain.

Ofcom has remarked that online intermediaries – not just social media but rankings like Google News – hold an increasingly tight grip on which articles reach people's eyeballs. Such a tight grip, in fact, that the Competitions and Markets Authority have begun to investigate the privileged market power that Google enjoys. It has been noted that news organisations increasingly tailor content – and in particular headlines – for what they think may succeed within the Google-Metasphere.

Of course, search engine optimisation in one form or another has been around for as long as the internet. When the Cherwell team uploads articles to the website, things like meta descriptions, article tags, keywords, and readability ratings are all taken into consideration. I would conjecture that it partly explains why my article from the Week 1 edition, "The 'cult' that recruited Oxford

students... including me", blew up in the way did. With several engaging key words in the title which are repeated regularly through the article, the piece shot the top of people's Google News feeds. Many friends – from as far as Leeds and even Aberdeen – messaged me to say they had read my article as the algorithm had promoted it to them. I was stopped by an acquaintance of my girlfriend while walking in Cambridge, joking that the article had "got everywhere".

This is a strange feeling as a writer and editor working on an Oxford-centred publication, since the notion of the article reaching beyond this rather limited audience, whilst not uncommon, still feels pretty remarkable. I would like to believe astute choices boosted my work's readership. Yet, its success was also a testament to the seemingly unpredictable power of the algorithm, that the experiences I reflected on in my article could be transported so far beyond the print pages of Cherwell. In the truest example of globalisation of media, I was contacted for interview by the New York Times in the days after. After all that, however, I still had to rush that philosophy essay. No algorithm can hide those from the beady eyes of my (admittedly brilliant) tutor. Enjoy our 3rd Week print.



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Michaelmas Term 2024

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# Meet the founder of Youni: Oxford's own Georgia Gibson

By Melinda Zhu

You may have come across Youni when buying your club tickets or for events like the Oxford Fashion Gala. What you might not know is that Youni has been on a mission to build the best event based social network for students out there.

I spoke to Georgia Gibson, one of Youni's co-founders over the summer. Georgia co-founded Youni with Omar, a Jesus college law student during Finals. "It hasn't been easy. We had our first big party two weeks before my first Final. Like all great social networks, it was born in a uni bedroom. Omar and I lucky in the fact that we have very complimentary skills and the same mission. We want to completely revolutionize the university experience for as many students as possible. Help make extracurricular more accessible, help students to start things, to find things."

Becoming an entrepreneur definitely pushes the boat out from the well-trodden path of most Oxford grads. Was a nine-to-five job ever on the cards? "Yes, definitely. I think that like I would be lying if I



said I didn't. I really thought about that for a while, but I have been someone since I was about four that would be selling stickers in the playground. I literally started businesses every year from like the age of four. And I'm not exaggerating. I had exhibitions going on. I started a furniture company. I did so many things that I genuinely could not viscerally stop.

I had a sense that if something didn't exist and I thought it should, then it meant that I was the person to build it. And that led to me starting so many things. Obviously, that's not true. But I've just always known that. I think that I have to do this, someone has to build this business, I know this business has to exist. I need this to happen for the world, so why not be the person to do it?"

It's clear that Georgia's own university experience has shaped what Youni has become. "I did Spanish and Italian, which is all about speaking and communications. Going on a year abroad is quite similar to building a business. Building a life around yourself and speaking people's language, literally and metaphorically – that's what I have to do on a daily basis." The music scene at Oxford and playing the saxophone has also shaped her conception of social media that has driven the Youni USP. "I always did a lot of music growing up which taught me the power of delayed gratification. That ultimately lead me to not use social media from the ages of 14 to 24 because I just realized that my own happiness was starting to hinge on how many likes I was getting on posts. I decided to give up social media for 10 years, inadvertently preparing myself for the business that I'm building today."

People often imagine the entrepreneurial life as someone coding in their garage, probably eating pot noodles for three meals a day. I asked Georgia what her biggest sacrifice was in building Youni, and the challenges of starting something on your own. "The biggest sacrifice is often the sense of you have to really submit yourself to the process, and that the business kind of becomes you. The boundaries between your own personality and the profession are definitely blurred. I have made a decision to be a very founder led brand. I did a story about being gay, I did a story about not using social media, and I've chosen to put that out there, because I want to connect with people. But sometimes it's quite taxing, because the more you put out, the more people can take away from you. You're definitely sacrificing that, and you have to be okay with the hits that will ultimately come right back to you.

Ultimately, I don't hate social media. I love creating content like you've seen on Instagram. I just think you're kidding yourself if

you're going on it to be social. I think our generation needs to lose the idea that that's a social platform.

I mean, who actually goes on social media to connect with friends anymore? What I want to build is a social network that maintains the social side. It's an event based social network that doesn't make money from keeping people on the app. That's the crucial difference. If your business model is aligned with keeping eyes on screens, everything will be towards that, and then the platform will become a glorified ad board. Our app will never become that, because we don't make money from people scrolling through media ads. We only make money from getting more people to events and helping these communities monetize their efforts. It means that you have to stay on track."

Youni has been growing rapidly, and there are big ambitions on where it's going to go. "In one year's time, we want to have a good coverage over a lot of universities. We're about to launch across Cambridge, Durham, York, and St Andrews. Then it would be also about spreading to the US. Within five years, we'd want to be in every university in the world, and especially those universities that, because of lack of resources, haven't been able to develop as much of an extracurricular scene."

Perhaps the most interesting part of Youni's journey is what inspired Georgia to start it in the first place. "Growing up, I really didn't see a lot of women building really successful business, especially in tech. I did a talk at school once, and a little girl came up to me at the end, and she said, before meeting you, I didn't know that girls could run companies. Improving representation really drives me when I have days where I feel like I can't do this. I have, and I think you have to have this to be a good entrepreneur, a massive sense of delusion. I genuinely believe that I'm the only person that with my team, can build this exactly the way I think it should be.



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# PROFILES

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“This idea that higher education should be completely free is ludicrous.”

## Alan Johnson on higher tuition fees, his time as Home Secretary, and his love for Harold Wilson.

By HASSAN AKRAM

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**A**lan Johnson was an MP from 1997 until 2017 and worked in various shadow Cabinet positions under both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, including as Education Secretary, Health Secretary and Home Secretary. He has written four volumes of memoirs and three crime fiction novels, as well as the biography *Harold Wilson: Twentieth Century Man*. He is currently Chancellor of the University of Hull.

**Cherwell:** *You were an MP for 20 years between 1997 and 2017, and held three major posts as Education Secretary, Health Secretary, and Home Secretary. What would your proudest achievement be from each post?*

**Johnson:** On education, probably lifting the education leaving age from 16 to 18. That was something I'd seen work in Canada, and I convinced both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, and you had to convince them both because it was like a duopoly leadership at the time, that it was the right move to make. In the end, it was my successor at education, Ed Balls, who took it through Parliament.

On health, we did loads of things. I went to Health in 2007 and the increase in investment was already showing, we were recruiting more nurses and doctors and waiting times were coming down. When we came into government, people waited two years for elective surgery. We brought that down to eight weeks, which was a tremendous achievement. By the time we left government in 2010, satisfaction with the NHS was at record levels. I would say my biggest achievement there was the introduction of something called IAPT, which was Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, recruiting 1,600 psychological therapists which I was very proud of. At the Home Office, crime had halved, neighbourhood policing was a reality, satisfaction with the police was at its highest level ever. So without naming one single achievement, I would say that all in all, Labour's record on

crime and antisocial behaviour was very good.

**Cherwell:** *One of your policies that you pushed through was the raising of tuition fees to £3,000. Do you think that that might have set a precedent for endless increases in fees, warding off more and more young people who feel they can't afford it. Recently, the government announced plans to raise it to £10,500. Would you change anything if you could go back?*

**Johnson:** No, I wouldn't. No, I've always thought that this idea that higher education should be completely free for one group of students, undergraduates, is ludicrous. Free education is absolutely right when everyone can participate in it. I left school at 15. I was paying taxes at 18, so that basically meant I was paying for people from much more prosperous backgrounds than me to have a free university education. I saw that as regressive, not progressive. Tuition fees are like a graduate tax. I found it was students that were the least opposed to this. It's a great system. I was proud to take that legislation through, though the fees have been frozen virtually since 2014. When higher education is in crisis, fees are part of the solution, not part of the problem.

**Cherwell:** *Do you regret never becoming party leader or prime minister?*

**Johnson:** No, never. The regret would have been if I had become party leader. I mean, I didn't want to do it. And if you don't want to do something, you shouldn't do it. I was always more of a team player, I think. What I wanted to do was write books, which eventually, thank God I did.

**Cherwell:** *Your first memoir came out 2013 and that won The Orwell Prize. Did you feel a drive to write about your experiences?*

**Johnson:** It won the Euro Prize and the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. So I was very proud. In fact, all my memoirs won prizes. I was very proud of that. I'd wanted to be a writer and never thought the opportunity would come. And

of course, it wouldn't have come had I not been a government minister. So when the electorate dispensed with our services in 2010 and the coalition came in under Cameron and Clegg, I was suddenly a shadow minister rather than a minister. There was a lot of interest in an Alan Johnson book, but I didn't want to write the kind of usual, boring political memoir. I don't read them, and I don't find any excitement writing them, but my agent suggested that I write about my childhood, which was an opportunity to write about my mother – who died very young – and to make her live again on the page, which was a privilege to be able to do, and to give full credit to my sister, who virtually brought me up despite her youth, because my mum was in and out of hospital before she eventually died of the heart complaint that she had. So this book ended when I was 18, just getting married. I thought that was it, but it did phenomenally well. Still, is doing well, by the way. And you know, there was an interest in what came next, hence, *Please, Mister. Postman*, and then an interest in what comes after that, where it gets to the political memoir stage. And then it ended just as I was appointed Home Secretary. And that was enough memoirs, although I did write a music memoir about my love of music and my time in the music industry called *In My Life*.

**Cherwell:** *You balanced statesmanship with novel-writing, which is a combination perfected by few since Disraeli, and that includes the political thriller One of Our Ministers is Missing. Why did you turn to novel writing and which of your three novels is your favourite?*

**Johnson:** I turned to it because I wanted to continue writing but I made that dramatic switch to fiction. Some politicians have attempted it and failed. If anyone wants to read Boris Johnson's novel, they're welcome to. It was terrible. And he's a good writer, you know, so people who can string a sentence together and write elegantly sometimes struggle with fiction. So that was my



mountain to climb that was my big challenge, and *The Late Train to Gypsy Hill* was the result. It's currently being dramatised by BBC studios as a television series. You heard it here first. It was a three-book deal with the publisher, and I wanted to write a trilogy with my detective Louise Mangan, and completed that with *Death on the Thames*.

**Cherwell:** So now on to your latest book, Harold Wilson: Twentieth Century Man. Why did you choose Harold Wilson, of all the prime ministers to write about?

**Johnson:** Well, I was commissioned by the press who were doing this series of concise biographies of great prime ministers, of which I think Harold Wilson was one of the greatest. And so they approached me. I had to write it at the same time as writing the thriller, *Death on the Thames*, and, you know, I had such fun doing it. I remember Harold Wilson, he was as much a part of the 60s, when I went into my teens as the Profumo scandal and Twiggy and The Beatles and all of that. Wilson was a very significant political figure, but his reputation was traduced, I think, after he stepped down, and because although he had a brilliant mind, he was hit by dementia, and he found it impossible to defend himself for very long, and it's about time his reputation was restored.

**Cherwell:** And what do you think the current government could learn from Wilson?

**Johnson:** Oh, goodness, everyone of whatever political persuasion. He was a master of the political arts, and he saw it. Wilson's great credit was keeping the two parts of the Labour Party: the intellectual wing, Gaitskell, Tony Benn; and the proletarian wing, Morrison, Bevan, Cripps. And he did that superbly. I think one of the greatest examples was the way he found a solution to the European problem. In the 1970s, Labour were

basically against us entering Europe, and the Conservatives were basically for it. Wilson was for it, and called a referendum. How he navigated his way through that took a political mastery that I don't think we've seen either before or since. The other thing about Wilson, while we're talking about it, and very important to students today, is Wilson probably did more for the happiness of individuals and their families than any other prime minister. I'd put him much higher than Churchill, who was a great war leader, but didn't do much else. What Wilson can point to is the changes to the Divorce Act, decriminalisation of homosexuality, the Equal Pay Act in 1975, protection for ethnic minorities through the Race Relations Act.

**Cherwell:** And I also think that he had a lot of legislative successes, but he also had a very witty and appealing personal style. My favourite moment is from a clip of him at a public meeting when a heckler yells, "Why do you support savages?" And then he retorts, "My friend, we do not support savages, we just allow them to come to our meetings, that's all."

**Johnson:** And that was typical, and he taught himself how to do that. Originally, he wasn't a very good speaker. In fact, when he was in Attlee's government as President of the Board of Trade, the youngest cabinet minister since 1804, and his speeches were described by a critic as mountainous sandwiches of medium, it was Nye Bevan that said to him, "Forget this: learn repartee." And he went out to these town hall meetings and all that and, gradually, kind of taught himself how to relax more and how to make those spontaneous remarks.

**Cherwell:** What was Wilson's career at Oxford like?

**Johnson:** So he was a Huddersfield lad, grammar-school boy. Went to Jesus College, Oxford, and at the time, all the Labour intellectuals, like Gaitskell, Tony Crossland, Roy Jenkins, they

were all Balliol people. He went to Jesus, but became the outstanding student of his generation. He was the first student ever to get an alpha plus in economics, he won the Gladstone prize with an 18,000 word essay with 400 footnotes on the railways. He then got the Webb medley Scholarship, which meant he could go to New College, where he studied under G.D.H. Cole and became a don at Oxford, aged 21, so he was incredibly successful at everything he did because of that incredible brain. But despite that incredible brain, he was entitled to be a little bit arrogant, and yet everyone who knew him, no matter what political persuasion, all say he was a man totally without pretentiousness, totally without pomposity, decent and kind. It's quite easy to become pretentious, as you've probably found talking to former politicians, but not Wilson. I'd love to have met him, and I'd love to have worked with him in Parliament.

**Cherwell:** I think there's a lot that our current crop of politicians can learn from him, his skills and his achievements, and your book will help spread the Wilson legend.

**Johnson:** Yeah, I hope so. And it's concise, and when you distil all of Wilson's life into, you know, 33,000 words, it shows just how remarkable his achievements were.

*Alan Johnson's sharp, pacy, and informative book, Harold Wilson: Twentieth Century Man, is available now in hardback from Swift Press. The book traces the development of Wilson's career in a more concise way than the longer biographies of Ben Pimlott or Nick Thomas-Symonds, and is well worth reading not only for students of history and politics but for anyone interested in the fascinating story of the prime minister who, more than any other in living memory, reshaped the norms and laws of British society.*

*Image Credit: Chatham House//CC BY 2.0 via Flickr*

# Lights, camera, *Liaisons*

## STAGE

Georgia Campbell goes behind the scenes of a new student production of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, coming to the Oxford Playhouse next week.

If you were looking for a single emblem of Clarendon Production's mammoth staging of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* at the Oxford Playhouse, you wouldn't be hard-pressed for impressive options. Maybe it would be the the palmful of butter beans in the orchestra pit, gently sifted to imitate the sound of rainfall. It might be the several onstage (and offstage) cameras, manually operated, live-projecting otherwise hidden moments of the performance. Or perhaps it would be the 60 plus members of cast and crew, who have worked intensely over the course of just a few months to construct the show from the ground up.

In short, there is nothing 'low-key' about this production.

Christopher Hampton's Olivier award-winning play, based on the 1782 epistolary novel of the same name, is a tale of deceit and seduction amongst the upper echelons of 18th-century French society. Letters and secret communications take centre stage here: at one point a character's lower back is used, naturally, as a writing desk. In this new student rendition, however, the play's themes of perspective and specularly will be amplified by the use of live cinema.

*Liaisons* represents, for Clarendon Productions, a natural progression from their previous production of *Amadeus* – also set in 18th century Europe. Director and Clarendon co-founder, Lucas Angeli, states the incorporation of cinema emerged organically from the content of the play itself – what he calls 'the ultimate play of surfaces'. The cameras will capture and broadcast actors' expressions and movements in detail usually impossible with ordinary theatre, allowing the audience to close in on the most intimate and tense moments of the show. But it is no small feat. Beyond the people operating the cameras, there will also be a team behind a switchboard performing live edits, deciding in real-time which camera will be streaming and when. On this point, the company had input from celebrated theatre director, Katie Mitchell OBE (alumni and Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College), one of the pioneers of this form of live cinema. The show has also been produced in collaboration with the Oxford Playhouse itself, a partnership that Sonya Luchanskaya, Coordinating Film Lead, stated was a 'massive gift...we've been able to work with people who really really know what they're doing'.

Through the tension between the realism of this onstage film and the layers of artificiality created within the theatre itself, the team hope to capture a 'postmodern' approach 18th century drama. Cos-



tumes and set design will 'gesture towards' period without being beholden to it (going 'full period' is also, notes Angeli, 'bloody expensive').

It is a production that, through every possible outlet, pushes the envelope of student theatre. The entire performance will be accompanied by an original score composed and conducted by Musical Director, Lou Newton. It is the first time the orchestra pit of the Playhouse has ever been used for a student production. The music was written completely from scratch over the course of the summer, and is timed down to the second to ensure that it matches up with the actors' dialogue (the speed of which, of course, changes with every performance). The music is so closely bound with the drama that it's now almost impossible to imagine how the play is ever performed without it. With over 20 orchestral musicians and a percussion

section that includes, amongst other things, sandpaper, cellophane, and the aforementioned 'rain beans', it is an incredibly impressive set up. This blending of foley (sound effects usually added in post-production) into the live score aims to, as Newton states, 'gradually challenge the audience's ears...I wanted it to feel like there was a boom mic over the scene'. Though it would have been simple enough to find a decent audio file of, for example, rain or crackling fire, 'short-cut', it would appear, is a term that this team has never heard of. 'The show just requires', jokes Angeli, 'a real commitment to the bit'.

Now, less than a week out from opening night, all of the play's many moving parts – cast, film team, orchestra, crew – have begun to slot into place. It will undoubtedly be the one of the most all-out, technically spectacular shows that Oxford student

drama has seen in a long time. So, is there anything the production team would like an audience to know in advance?

Angeli is keen not to kill the mystery: 'I don't love the idea of the audience knowing all our tricks'. In a leaf out of protagonist Valmont's playbook, apparently some dramatic scheming is best left under-wraps.

But, then again, the story of *Liaisons* teaches us not to trust the middle-man (or any man – or woman – for that matter). Who can know what's real in a play so doused in secrecy?

The public's only option, then, is to experience the drama for themselves.

*Les Liaisons Dangereuses* will run from 7th-9th November at The Main Stage, Oxford Playhouse

Image Credit: Honey Christophers

## Review: *The Other Place* – Agony, Antigone, and Annie



By FAYE CHANG

Alexander Zeldin's *The Other Place* casts a captivating new light on the familiar beats and characterisations of Sophocles' Athenian tragedy.

The play follows the estranged Annie (Emma D'Arcy), returning to the family house, taken over by her uncle, Chris (Tobias Menzies) on the anniversary of her father's death for the scattering of his ashes. While Chris is desperate to start anew, reneging on his promise to always keep his brother's ashes in the house, Annie's refusal to allow him to do so unveils the dark secrets which underpin the fragile family structure.

Izzy (Alison Oliver) bears all of Ismene's restraint and outrage, Erika (Nina Sosanya) parallels Eurydice's sense of decorum and, later, betrayal; Chris adds layers of twisted complexity to the strident, guilty tyrant that is Creon. Most of all, Annie recaptures the frantic justice, grief, and taboo devotion that makes up Antigone. In an interview with Financial Times, Zeldin singles

this out as the heart of the original: "a play about the aftermath... [about] two forms of grief."

These compounding griefs take centre stage in *The Other Place*. The single setting turns the kitchen into a physical manifestation of the years of family tension, and trauma. There is no escape from history: every evidence of family conflict is left indelible on the stage. Spilt ashes litter the rug around the countertop. The family attempts to eat take-away at the same table where Chris' violently physical confrontation with Annie occurred. As the play progresses, the taboo which tainted this family makes itself obvious in the physical setting too – the very trees in which Annie and Izzy's father hung himself continue to loom over the backyard.

In some ways, Zeldin gives us a more complex heroine than Sophocles did: *The Other Place* poses

uncomfortable questions of agency, culpability, and victimhood. Her vulnerability to her father and uncle are all the more exposed, but does she only exist as the consequence of their actions? How responsible is she, and how responsible are we to ask these sorts of questions?

With the ending, there is no cataclysmic collapse of the building under the metaphorical weight of paternal sins. There is no deus-ex-machina, creating order out of the ruptured family fabric. The last beat of the play keeps the audience begging for a catharsis it continues to withhold: we all saw this coming, and now it's happened. There is nothing we can do but watch.

Read the full story at [Cherwell.org](http://Cherwell.org)



## What Oxford's Watching

### IN THEATRES



#### THE APPRENTICE

As we lead up to the US election watch Donald Trump, played by an unrecognizable Sebastian Stan, as he navigates the 70s New York real estate business.

### TO STREAM



#### DISCLAIMER

Starring Cate Blanchett and written and directed by Alfonso Cuarón, this new Apple TV miniseries follows a documentarian forced to confront the past she has tried her best to bury.

Image Credits: [The Apprentice] - Jay Dixit/CC-BY-4.0 via Wikimedia Commons [Disclaimer] - Thore Siebrands/CC-BY-2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

# REVIEW: BEETLEJUICE, BEETLEJUICE

By KEZIAH McCANN

With this sequel, Burton truly does justice to his eighties cult classic. Set over three decades after the events of *Beetlejuice*, this year's release follows Lydia Deetz's struggle to keep her family together as they mourn a tragic loss. In the meantime, the demon Betelgeuse has returned to haunt her. The film sees several of the same iconic actors reprising their original roles: Catherine O'Hara as Delia Deetz, Winona Ryder as her daughter, Lydia, and Michael Keaton as the titular antagonist, a seedy 'bio-exorcist'. However, it also features many new and memorable additions. Jenna Ortega stars as Astrid Deetz, Lydia's apathetic daughter, and Monica Bellucci joins the cast as Betelgeuse's torn-up ex-wife, hell bent on revenge.

This sequel's success owes a lot to its casting. We are yet again gifted with a hilarious and formidable performance from Keaton as Betelgeuse. To see Ortega's name featured on a cast list primes the audience to expect a dark and troubled teenage character, and Astrid is no different. The actress embodies the ennui and passivity of Gen Z with refreshing nuance, reminiscent of young Ryder's quintessential Lydia. She is her daughter, after all. Ortega's dry comic style also blends seamlessly with the spirited

humour and energy of the film. Equally, O'Hara never ceases to charm and Dafoe proves he is just as gifted in a comedic role as he is in anything else. Every cast member in this film is praiseworthy, and as an ensemble the actors bring Burton's genius as a director and producer to life. Although DeVito's character feels slightly pointless and Bellucci's underused, neither of these directorial decisions have a significantly detrimental impact on the film's magic.

Burton's famous gift for mixing the dark and eerie with the fun and satirical shines through once again. He is able to brilliantly capture the tone and spirit of his original, whilst manoeuvring away from the classic trap into which many attempts to extend beloved franchises fall: a failed, pointless rehash. He is well aware that, just because a formula has worked in the past, it does not mean that you can simply remake the same film and reap the same rewards (an accusation that has been launched recently at the new *Joker* reprise). With a piece of media as beloved and memorable as 1988's *Beetlejuice*, such a blunder would have been unforgivable, but all-too easily made.

Instead, the plot of *Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice* moves away from its predecessor in a fun and unpredictable fashion. Burton even manages to work in a musical number featuring the de-

monic possession of several characters. While reminiscent of the iconic Day-O sequence in the eighties iteration, this reference never feels forced. This is a feat more impressive than it sounds, and one cannot help but revel in the nostalgia of it all.

*Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice* makes for essential Halloween viewing. The costume design retains its originality and intricacy, enriching the film, and successfully maintaining the spooky atmosphere we have come to expect from Burton pictures. There is no shortage of laughs, either, from Keaton's hilarious lead performance, to the Soul Train skit, to the relationship between Dafoe's character and coffee. There are an infinite number of humorous details that generously intersperse this unique, sharp script. Screenwriters Alfred Gough and Miles Millar are at their finest here.

*Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice* is the type of film you'll find yourself rewatching as the leaves continue to fall. It has all the hallmarks of a new classic. One can only hope that it has reignited its audience's appreciation for the 1988 picture.

## FILM AND TV

# Oxford Horror Society, un-earthed

By LARA MACHADO

The Oxford Horror Society is Oxford's first and only society dedicated to the on-screen horror genre. As we near Halloween, I spoke to President, Izzy Reese getting her take on film, the society and all things horror.

*How long has your society been around? Why did you decide to take on the role of President?*

Well, purely from looking back at the Instagram profile it looks like it's been around from 2022 but I'm not entirely sure, it might have existed for a bit longer than that. But, I took it over simply because I was a huge fan of it last year. It was one of the only societies that I consistently went to in my first year and then when I found out that the committee members were all graduating that year, I thought I want to keep it going cause I want to continue my journey exploring horror films. I took it over for purely selfish reasons, just because I like it.

*What is the importance of student film societies, in your opinion?*

For me, specifically for Oxford, it's a nice change of pace from what we are all doing most of the time. Because I study English and German, I can't bring myself to read for fun anymore, especially during term time, so it's nice to be able to explore art and creativity through a medium that is so different. To have a society that reminds you to keep going, to keep enjoying things that aren't just work, it's important for me, at least.

*What do you think makes horror special enough to have an entire society just dedicated to it?*

That's a tricky question but I think that it seems

like a state of mind that you have to get into. I know that's so annoying to say but to be in a sort of mood to have a spooky evening feels a bit different from just a film society where you come to see anything. Also I think we attract a particular crowd of goths and emo. I remember last year I'd sit down to watch a film and there would be so much eyeliner in one room. It's good! It feels like a real community

of people who like celebrating Halloween when it's not Halloween.

*Horror tends to be divisive. It has always been caught up in debates surrounding gratuitous violence and graphic depictions of sexual acts. However, at the same time it has always been a genre that is really effective at transgression. How do you manage these tensions when making a term card? Do you try to achieve a balance between the two ends of the spectrum?*

Absolutely! Because, I think it's a diverse genre in terms of what it means when you're talking about horror films. It does feel important to have a wide range of what we are actually putting on. If I did seven slasher films in one term, it's not even representative of horror films – that would be slasher society, that's a different thing. I think it's good because it means that more people can enjoy it: I know it's one of those few genres where people have an actual limitation: some people just cannot do jumpscare, or really scary stuff so I want to open up the society to like people who don't enjoy being terrified out of their minds. We do like to bring out quite a few different ones so that everyone can enjoy it.

*You are a female-led society, the horror genre is notorious for its abuse of the male gaze. When you are picking films and filmmakers for your term card*

*is this something that you have in consideration?*

Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't call myself an expert in horror films so a lot of the time I'm going into these films kind of blind or with received cultural knowledge. So, as much as sometimes we do try to focus on things that we want to see, which often end up being more female-led or less exploitative films, I think it's unavoidable in the horror genre and part of our society is doing a little bit of discussion about that kind of thing. So, there's an element with horror in which all the things that are happening, completely out-there deaths and things like that. You have to take a step back and sort of think about it as something you are watching, rather than something you are getting too involved in. That certainly helps me when I am trying to reckon with what can be a very misogynist genre.

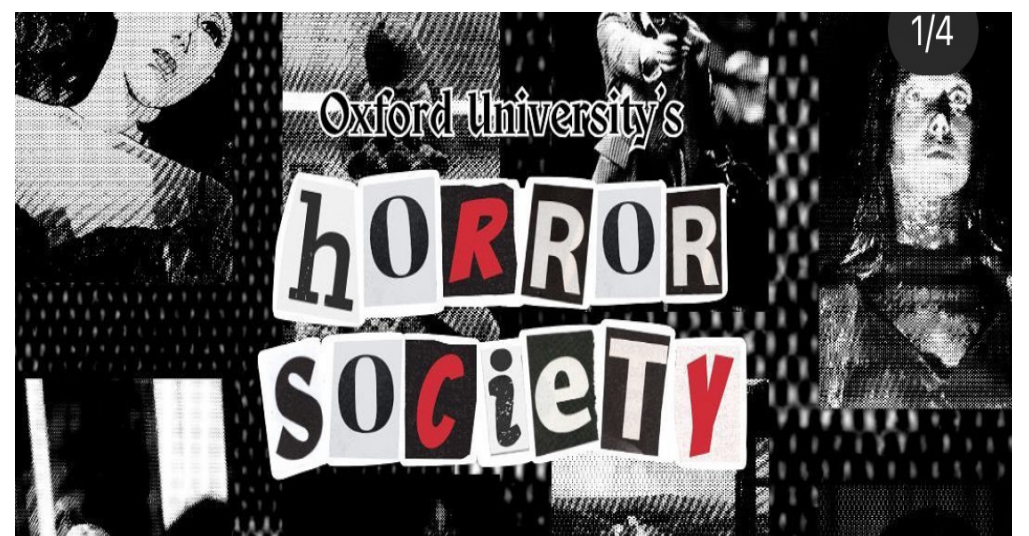
*Halloween is coming up and as the President of a horror soc you are the best person to ask this question. What are some spooky films that you think*

*everyone should watch at least once – whether or not they are fans of horror?*

I think I'd probably just recommend the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) to absolutely everyone, regardless of whether they enjoy horror or not. It's just so perfect as like a fun Halloween film to me, especially to watch with a bunch of other people. And it's one of those films where I've rewatched it a million times and it just gets better every time you watch it. I don't know if I can recommend any of the more classic ones, of the more definitely scary ones, with broad appeal because many of my friends would never watch them, anything that has remotely a jumpscare. I'm trying to think of some more fun ones. I mean we put on *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* (1988) last year. It was completely ridiculous, very camp, so much fun. Anything that just has a ridiculous title I would probably recommend giving a try this Halloween.

*This interview has been edited for clarity.*

*Read the full interview at cherwell.org  
Image credits: Oxford Horror Society*



# The Story of Art: Retold, reformed, re-inspired

# ART

*Ella Machtynger reflects on the launch of Katy Hessel's book, The Story of Art*

[Without Men].

Stories are all we have in the pursuit of history. They have shaped received and accepted versions of history. Art historians continue to unravel the consequences of a selective art history, which are, more often than not, determined by measures other than quality.

Katy Hessel is one such historian. She began her journey into feminist art history after reading Gombrich's *The Story of Art*, a supposedly canonical work which excluded female artists entirely – perhaps unsurprising for 1950, when it was originally published.

Delving into a myriad of female voices from all over the globe in projects from her Great Women Artists podcast to her book *The Story of Art [Without Men]*, Hessel demonstrates that stories of equal value and talent emerge when the narrative is changed. An artist is not a measure of their gender but a representative of its truth.

When asked at her paperback book launch why a feminist art history remains a necessity today, Hessel replied with brute honesty: that the statistics don't lie.

Gombrich's *The Story of Art* excluded female artists until its sixteenth edition was released in 1995; a mere 1% of the National Gallery is attributed to female artists; and the Royal Academy of Art has never hosted an exhibition by a female artist in its main space until 2022.

Again, the statistics don't lie.

There is still work to be done to amend the Story of Art as it has been fed to us.



Hessel targets education as the root of change, and uses her book to bring hundreds of female voices to the forefront of artistic discourse. Thousands of readers have recognised these voices and are finally able to resonate with their work.

By mapping her *Story of Art [Without Men]* onto Gombrich's *Story of Art [Without Women]*, without ignoring more basic details from colour pallet and cover design to chronology and timespan, she has succeeded in creating a second, more comprehensive volume of *Story of Art*.

The main aims that manifest in this story are increasing accessibility, breaking down gender imbalance, and deconstructing deeply embedded hierarchies written into art and its documented history. It by no means depreciates the canon as it stands, but it offers its readers a choice.

The choice to know the Rose Beuets of the world before the Rodins, or else to simply know them independently. Far too often, women are stripped of their identity as artists when involved in the narrative of a male associate. Jacqueline Roque, for one example,

was immortalised as Picasso's muse. Her identity is, according to history, inseparable from his.

Lee Krasner is similarly veiled behind Jackson Pollock's name, for which, ironically, she was creating following his death in 1956. She not only brought his name to every household in America, but also kickstarted the American art economy in the process.

Integrating minority voices into the art world is easier said than done when money and development rest on reinvestment in household names. Despite being unfamiliar, these hidden voices are undeniably sought after. They provide the art world with something distinctive.

As noted in Hessel's book, Hilma af Klint's monumental 2019 exhibition was named an 'idiosyncratic library of ideas' by the Guggenheim, and was so popular that it became the most visited exhibition in the museum's history. How much groundbreaking art is missing from art history?

Previously put down for being inconvenient, unorthodox, and uneconomical, Hessel's work to retell the story of art according to female perspectives has proven fundamental: she has inspired and educated a wealth of people searching for a story of art that aligns with them.

Her work poses the question: what is more valuable? We can reinvest in household names for profit, but it may be worth more, on a human level, to invest in a new generation of names. Often, these are equal in talent and their capacity for innovation (and popular success), yet unique in their artistic understanding of the female experience.

*Image Credit: Hilma af Klint, 1915, Svanen, No. 17, Wikimedia Commons.*

## ARTS CALENDAR

# What's On.

### MUSIC

#### OUO & Rémy Ballot

(Sheldonian Theatre, 15 Nov.)  
The internationally renowned conductor joins forces with Oxford University Orchestra for a night of Scheherazade, Schubert, and Ravel.

#### Les Liaisons Dangereuses

(Oxford Playhouse, 7-9 Oct.)

A spectacular reworking of Christopher Hampton's 1985 play featuring a live, and completely original, orchestral accompaniment. The show promises to be a truly multi-media production.

### ART

#### Saroj Patel's 'Journey of the Blue Sun'

(Old Fire Station, until 16 Nov.)

Intercultural community takes centre stage in this vibrant new exhibition. Through sculpture and installations, Patel explores the realities of migration, belonging, and community.

### STAGE

#### NUTS

(Burton Taylor Studio, 5-9 Nov.)

In this new piece of student writing from Coco Cottam, a mysterious stranger disrupts the otherwise peaceful life of two housemates. Full of secrets, shock, and brilliant student talent. Not to be missed.

#### Endgame by Samuel Beckett

(The Pilch, 6-9 Nov.)

Beckett's 1957 seminal absurdist play is given a new life in this all-student reworking. Devilish Whimsy Productions restores the emotional force to this classroom classic.



# Reinventing the epistolary novel

By ALYSSA GUAN

Traditionally, the epistolary novel – a story told through an exchange of letters – may seem to be a dying genre. In the modern age, most people have traded in hand-written letters for text messages, emails, and DMs. But while letter-writing might veer towards obsolescence, epistolary novels aren't following suit. Instead, they're facing something of a reinvention.

It's natural that authors would incorporate modern digital communication methods into their writing styles and novel formats – much like how movies now feature text message or email layovers. For example, *The Appeal* by Janice Hallett is a mystery novel primarily written in emails and text messages. Like the traditional epistolary form, this story is still told through correspondence – just a different kind.

Epistolary novels also seem uniquely suited to address our ever-diminishing attention spans. Chapters shortened into the length of an email are easier to digest, easier to rattle through, especially to the TikTok-adjusted brain. But do we lose anything in the transition from letter-writing to text-messaging? Does the contemporary epistolary novel still deliver on both plot and prose? Or should writers be returning to the epistolary form in its truest sense?

Whatever you may think of the attention economy, reading something short and snappy is inherently engaging and appealing. I could read a novel purely in YouTube comment section arguments. Contemporary epistolary novels definitely cater to our ever-diminishing attention spans. As such, they are a perfect vehicle for delivering a page-turning plot.

# BOOKS

Mystery epistolary novels do particularly well. Jumping between text exchanges and email threads adds a unique level of reader-involvement in deciphering clues. This works well when the author utilizes multiple POVs, such as in *The Appeal*. Really, it's just internet sleuthing in book format – and who doesn't love a good internet sleuth?

Where the contemporary epistolary novel really struggles however, is in prose. For instance, people tend to write much more lyrically in letters than through text messages. I'd wager that most of us aren't starting off our text messages with "My Dearest Beloved" (though if you do, more power to you). Detailed and creative prose is fitting for letter-writing, but not so much for modern forms of communication where the focus is more generally on brevity and efficiency.

There's also a more general issue created by the speed at which internet vocabulary moves. Considering the amount of time it takes to get a novel published, creatives always seem to be one step behind when it comes to slang. Have you ever cringed at a movie's use of strange, outdated phrases and emojis?

Imagine this same situation, but extended over 300 pages. I would suggest that writers can solve this issue by keeping it light on transient "internet vocab" that may quickly die out, and sticking mostly to "established" slang. In any case, it's a tough line to tow between believable and cringy.

It looks like, then, the epistolary novel isn't dying out completely, just reinventing itself. The contemporary epistolary novels also have a particular appeal to students who want to read more, but have waning attention spans. Isn't it nice that, instead of a "quick phone break" from your half-hearted attempt at reading Utilitarianism, you could instead have a "quick book break"? And though reading three emails may not be the same as reading three chapters, it still – surely – beats watching three minutes of TikTok.

# FASHION

## CHARITY SHOP PIRATES

By MARISOL BOYLE-GOMEZ

**M**y wardrobe is home to a number of second-hand finds that I have bought impulsively, only to discover: it won't pull over my head, or is plagued by a stubborn stain. Buying clothes that you later dislike is not a crime – but an issue certainly arises when this is done constantly and thoughtlessly. For decades, charity shopping has been the most affordable and accessible way to put clothes on your back, but only recently, as vintage has become trendy, has it begun to contribute to our misguided consumption habits.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, a greater proportion of the population found itself reliant on the second-hand market. With the emergence of online second-hand marketplaces, thrift shopping firmly planted its feet in the internet age: Vinted was founded in 2008, followed by Depop in 2011. It almost harks back to pre-capitalist bargaining and trading systems – an expression of disillusionment with the economic reality of the time. Attitudes towards second-hand clothing experienced a shift from being sneered at to suddenly being lauded as chic and unique. Thrift shopping progressed beyond financial necessity into the fashion mainstream, to become an ethically friendly disguise for overconsumption.

*“We are applying a more-is-more attitude to what ought to be a sustainable resource.”*

Pre-worn clothing is cheap, and its stock is unreliable. What is clinging to the racks or listed on a seller's profile one day might be gone the next. Like pirates returning to ship with a trunk-full of shiny rocks, we often bring home pieces of clothing for fear that someone else may grab them before we have made up our minds. Not to mention all the statistics we have been pumped up with regarding the catastrophic environmental and social impacts of fashion conglomerates: buying out half a charity shop now also has a moral incentive. But the term 'fast fashion' does not solely refer to a rapid production time. It's also about the shortened life cycle of clothing: how quickly an item is bought and then discarded. The slower repurposing and recycling characteristics of the second-hand market are morphing into this fast fashion mentality.

From Depop sellers ravaging their local charity shops, to influencers filming immense Vinted hauls, we are applying a capitalist, more-is-more attitude to what ought to be a sustainable resource. The rise of excessive second-hand buying and reselling means that clothes are spending more time collecting dust on overpacked racks than they are actually being worn.

Wanting to own trendy, new clothes is nothing to be ashamed of, but it is now time to adopt a more judicious approach to shopping. Where we source our clothes can be problematic, but how often and in what quantity must also be assessed. A t-shirt from H&M that has been worn and re-worn is ultimately a more sustainable fashion choice than any vintage item that winds up unworn and devoured by moths. The solution is clear: to consider more carefully our own styles and the longevity of the piece of clothing within our wardrobes, before we tap our credit cards.

# Sound is key for student protesters

By SARA LEE

**O**n 23rd May 2024 the University, in a public statement, described the work of certain encampment protesters as contributing to “a deeply intimidating environment”. The words were, no doubt, etched into the consciousness of the 200+ students who occupied an encampment on the lawn of the Radcliffe Camera. It is interesting to consider, then, how much of this ‘intimidation’ was wrought through sound and music. Chants, songs, and a range of live instrumentation – often broadcasted through loudspeakers – were used to create a distinct sonic landscape, but the unheard effects they had on shaping public opinion of the protest should not go unnoticed.

Sonic territorialisation (when sound is used to signal a group's occupancy, or attempted occupancy, of a space) is one of the most powerful forms of protest. By leveraging the relationship between physical and sonic space, an auditory hierarchy is created. The sonic space is ever-present: inevitable in every environment we inhabit. It is also, being immaterial and uncontainable, one of the hardest dimensions to police. In this case, an auditory hierarchy was established when the protesters brought out loudspeakers. Not only could their chants or demands be heard more clearly over the speaker-less authorities, but their means of protest was freed from the constraints of visual reliance. The protesters ascended the imagined hierarchy by dominating their immediate and peripheral space.

When the University recommended that students sit exams wearing noise-cancelling headphones during Trinity Term last year, the institution was forced to acknowledge the auditory force of protesters. Whilst they could still assert dominance over the physical space of the Examination Schools – through police presence and security checks – the institution struggled to

reclaim the sonic landscape, and thus, albeit momentarily, were forced to take notice of saxophone-playing, loudspeaker-chanting student protesters. Anyone who has passed Clarendon Building in Trinity Term 2024 during the callout of names of deceased women and children remembers that the sound does not just travel down Broad Street, but that it echoes against those controversial walls and rings throughout the city. For a moment, the protesters reclaimed some seemingly foreign territory; their monopoly on the sonic space meant that they were in charge of disseminating information to the public. In other words, they were not walled off.

The reworking of Palestinian folk songs also empowered the body of student protesters. The recontextualisation of Zaffa, a traditional Palestinian wedding chant into a ‘Zaffit El Tahrer’, a song calling for the freedom of Palestine, creates a sonic vernacular that is only truly understood by the protesters themselves. The re-working demands a holistic understanding of cultural, historical, and social elements. Kokym, the art-

ist, subverts the typical theme of desiring gifts at a wedding to convey the intensity of his wish to see an independent Palestinian flag wave over an Israeli prison. There is an irony that comes with using musical tropes associated with such jovial themes: the song is underscored by a carefree ukulele strum, whilst a harrowing plea for liberty runs throughout the song. The conflicting tropes in the piece could reflect an emotion that is unique to the protesters, thereby fostering a stronger sense of community through shared experiences. When sung in a protest, its upbeat nature may seem out of place for passers-by. That, however, is exactly the point. It is unassuming to those who are not part of the cause.

Sonic protest capitalises off the unexpected, and that is precisely why it is so effective. It ensures, ultimately, that protester's demands cannot fall on deaf ears.

*Image Credit: D12f05/CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons*



## THE SOURCE

By CASPIAN WAGNER

### The Com(m)e(n)t

Having written out the future in the pages of my book,  
you tear it out. Just before it's distributed,  
officially bound and sealed. Scrunching it into a ball,  
you toss it atmospheric, out of sight.  
Burning up, it is a comet, a flaming talking point  
to those below.

### Candles

The darkest winter sits within a kindly light,  
A candle burning on the inside of a box of matches.

Dreams are made of candles, pinpricks of a deeper light.

The darkest winter is made up of kindly light,  
Harsh reflections in the snow. Dreams of the warmest sun.



## What's your purpose? (In six words or less)

*Amy Seal ditches the career talks and asks the real questions.*

**D**escribe yourself in six words or less. Find your passion. Find your purpose. Have you been thinking about your goals? What is the world issue you most want resolved? What are your hopes and dreams? Can they be succinctly described in 6 words or less? Can they be summed up on a LinkedIn post? Can your passion become your career? Can you monetise this? Can we monetise this? Can you make us money?

Vacations for Oxford students more often than not mean dedicating a significant proportion of your time to an internship. Bleary eyed and exhausted by the term-time workload, we make space in our schedules to write endless cover letters, touch up our CVs, and find tutors who like us just enough to write the perfect reference. We send off our applications and, in short, beg for companies to allow us the privilege of being an entirely insignificant part of their workforce for a limited period of time. Alongside the internship itself will often come endless mandatory careers sessions and talks – motivational speakers with this or that book to promote, who stand up in front of us naive youngsters and promise the much-sought-after key to finding our place in the ever-elusive and seemingly impossible to break-into workforce.

This is an article, more or less, about these careers talks themselves; God knows I sat through enough of them this summer. For the lucky reader who has yet to experience this mind-numbing phenomenon, allow me to introduce it to you. The speaker begins by asking us if we know what our purpose is. Usually, internally answered by each member of the crowd who begins to panic, something along the lines of: "I didn't know I was supposed to have a purpose. What is that? How do I find it? I wonder if everyone else knows their purpose and I'm already super behind?". The speaker will then, graciously, offer to help us out. That's right – by listening to one simple presentation, we will understand the very meaning of our lives, and how we can fit into this world!

But here's the catch. This is not a philosophical exploration, nor a valuable exercise in introspection, nor a spiritual awakening designed to find inner peace. No, this is watered-down psycho-babble mobilised along neoliberal lines. To help us discover our purpose, the presenter will ask us what we dream of. I think. I dream of a pretty house, with lots of natural light. A place where the one I love is just down the corridor. A house that is never quiet – that is brimming with the clattering of our many pets, and perhaps a few kids. A house that smells of the bread I will make fresh every week, and always has a supply of baked goods on the kitchen counters. My friends would come round often and their laughter would fill our halls. My parents and sister would be just a short drive away, and we'd meet often for Sunday lunch. I dream of a home. A place where I

will feel calm, loved, at peace.

Oh, sorry, is this not marketable enough? Okay, then I dream of surfing in the icy Devon sea and feeling that rush of energy when you finally catch a wave. I dream of creating beautiful music, and even not so beautiful music, with my instruments or even my voice. I dream of writing; on my laptop, in a notebook, anywhere I can, I dream of entire days I could spend watching my ideas materialise on the page. I dream of a world and a life without pain, where there is no suffering, for anyone, anywhere. I dream of justice. I dream of dancing, painting, acting, running, singing, screaming, laughing. I dream of joy, pain, beauty, and exhilaration.

Oh, still not what you were looking for? Okay, a word I would use to describe myself is, Amy. I think of all the Amy's I have been, all the Amy's I have yet to be. All the Amy's I am to the different people in my life, all the Amy's I wish I was, and even the ones I wish I wasn't. I think of how every year, month, day, hour, and even second I am becoming an entirely different person to who I was, but I am also, somehow, still the same me I have always been. I think about how none of this can be described in 6 words or less.

Neoliberalism feeds on hyper-individualism. As the government increasingly de-regulates the market and privatises public services, it becomes the individual's responsibility to ensure their own security within this new world. Only the fittest survive – and to do so, you must only think about yourself. Yet, ironically, none of this serves you. You are told that through your hard work, your effort, your sacrifices, you will succeed. But at the end of the day, there is a reason only a few CEOs are household names. And in your tireless efforts to become the 1%, you instead become the product. When you put on your clothes in the morning to fit into this- or that- TikTok "aesthetic", when you eat the breakfast cereal you've had for years because it came up on a TV advert when you were 5, when you visit the gym to conform to the "standard" of attractiveness propped up by multiple billion-dollar industries, when you go on social media and your data is farmed to advertisers, and finally, when you sit in a presentation and your innermost dreams and desires are hauled out of you – everything about you is bought, sold, and profited on. You are the product.

So go on, look inside yourself. Find something within you. Oh but don't look too hard, no don't really consider yourself, your place in this world, and what you actually want out of this life. No. Find something marketable. Find something you could say in a job interview. Find a job. Find something your boss will enjoy. Find something we can incorporate into our company's message. Find something we can profit off of. Find something that makes us look good. Find your place within this system, within this order. Become a cog in our machine. Survive on our terms. Make us money. Succeed.\*



## A month in Berlin: Embracing solitude in the big city

*Sultan Khokhkar settles into a year abroad in the German capital.*

**T**here's something distinctly Berlin about the setting I am writing in. Inside the jazz café, elegantly dressed business people sit next to a table of young men getting ready to head outside for a cigarette. Miles Davis hums in the background, while loud emergency sirens thunder past every now and then (a true Berlin staple). I check the time once more and confirm that I've been here for three hours and written as many lines. There's a comforting quality to the casual cacophony that appears to be an omnipresent aspect of life in a busy metropolis. It's impossible to miss: you feel it on nights out in the city when you see throngs of people whatever the hour, and you feel it in the everyday, the mundane, as you get to the supermarket on a Tuesday afternoon and it's as busy as Magdalen Street Tesco at 6pm.

The similarities with our small university city do end there, though. With all its colleges, clubs and societies, sports teams, and more, Oxford is an excellent place to meet new people and make new friends. The lack of these spaces, even for students, has been perhaps the greatest culture shock that has arisen after moving to Europe. Student-club-culture just isn't as big here. As a result, social occasions are fewer and farther between, indeed the concept of a 'social', just for the sake of it, here feels distant and foreign. And as much I'd like to pretend my German is fluent, a language barrier does still exist too (the time I blanked on the word for 'weight' in the gym comes to mind). This, combined with the relatively fleeting character of social events, has meant it is more difficult to form meaningful relationships with people than what many of us are used to after two years at Oxford.

As my café grows gradually busier, I can't help but notice that a significant proportion of the people slowly trickling in are by themselves. Certainly, there is something to be said for the culture of voluntary solitude that is to be found in so many European hubs today. In the era of remote-working, recorded lectures, and Instagram reels, it comes as no surprise that so many people seem to go it alone. One friend, who grew up and completed his undergraduate in Berlin,

told me that most of his friends here today are those he went to school with. Platforms like BumbleForFriends and Meetup also lack the popularity they enjoy in places like London.

I hope I have not soured your impression of Berlin too much thus far. Of course, I would be completely remiss to portray the city as some sort of unwelcoming wilderness, populated by lonely creatures bent on ceaseless, solitary social confinement. In fact, after a little over a month living here, I've come to appreciate the desire to enjoy one's own company. There's a distinctly freeing quality about being beholden only to one's own interests and ideas. To be able to make plans that suit only you, and that can be broken on a whim with no hurt feelings. And there is a unique sense of excitement and discovery that accompanies trying out things you have done a thousand times with others, alone. My first museum trip in Berlin saw me taking the time to really engage and enjoy the 80 years of recent German art history on display before me, strolling through the exhibition slower than a tourist on Broad Street – I spent three hours at the Neue Nationalgalerie that afternoon.

Feelings of isolation are almost inevitable at the start of a year abroad. Rather than viewing this as a setback though, the best approach can be to embrace the unfamiliar social landscape as an opportunity for growth. Stepping outside your comfort zone can be a positive, enriching experience. Simple things, like reading at a café, can be opportunities to explore the diversity of one's local area and to discover something new about yourself. In some ways, going it alone can be the most rewarding, most organic way to meet new and interesting people. Last week I connected with a pair of literature students in a coffee shop I'd decided to try over my copy of Fitzgerald's 'Tender Is The Night'.

As the honeyed tenor of Davis' trumpet begins to grow louder, and the lights dim to a soft, mellow gold, I can't help but think that going it alone isn't so bad.

*Image Credit: Ejov Igor/Pexels License via Pexels*

## HOROSCOPES



**Aries**

You don't have to follow the clocks. Regain your footing and move forward.



**Taurus**

Apologise to your tutors.



**Gemini**

Have you heard what the freshers are saying about you?



**Cancer**

The best night of your life will start at Bridge this week.



**Leo**

Value the alone time. Become comfortable with yourself and the silence.



**Virgo**

The internships are calling. Pick up the phone.

## HOROSCOPES



Libra

A stream of firsts is on the horizon. Push through!



Scorpio

Quit. Cold turkey. Today.



Sagittarius

Someone new will enter your life. Tread carefully.



Capricorn

Treat yourself to an early night.



Aquarius

Don't be too trusting.



Pisces

They know.

## Re-understanding my Nan

By **TED HOLBROOK**

**S**o, you study Geography? Did you bring your colouring pencils to university with you?"

During my time at Oxford, I've heard this joke more times than I can count. I take it in my stride, but it's become clear that most people have, beyond oxbow lakes, little idea what studying Geography at university actually entails. The simple answer is: anything. Geography is a discipline defined by its unapologetic breadth, using this diversity to apply an interdisciplinary lens to the world. This diversity became particularly evident when we began planning our dissertation research, as we were told there were "no limits" on topic or focus. I knew this was my chance to study something meaningful to me beyond academics—something that affected my everyday life.

Like many, my grandparents have been incredibly important in my life. More than this, though, they are like a second set of parents, caring for me throughout my childhood – from picking me up from school each day to teaching me how to tie my shoelaces, often stepping into a parental role when challenges arose. As I grew older, however, so did they – leaving us to confront the everyday realities of my nan's Alzheimer's diagnosis. Just as she had stepped up for me, I, in turn, stepped up for her, taking on the role of one of her primary carers whilst balancing the demands of studying and paid work. This continued until I began my studies at Oxford, when we made the decision to move her into a residential care home. Since then, every day as a family has felt like an emotional battle – between guilt, comfort in knowing she's safe, and ongoing worry. Not a week goes by at Oxford without a FaceTime call existential crisis as we discuss what's truly best for her while hearing about her increasing anxieties.

After learning about the flexibility I'd have in choosing my dissertation topic, I knew I had to do something for my nan – to create a project for her and for myself as part of my Geography degree. Seeing her challenges in the care home, while my peers took on internships or travelled the world, I decided to take a position as a healthcare assistant to support my dis-

sertation research. In this role, I aimed to observe the everyday lives of care home residents, examining their agency, power, and resistance within a space that is both caring and necessarily controlling. While completing my caregiving tasks, I also got to know the residents on a personal level – hearing their stories, listening to their experiences, laughing with them, and comforting them in moments of distress. Connecting with people who have had such incredible lives is an experience I'll never forget. In many of these residents, I also saw glimpses of my nan, realising she wasn't alone in her inner conflicts between feeling cared for and feeling controlled. I also connected with the residents' family members, relating to their struggles as I shared their sentiments.

As I completed my role, each visit to my nan felt completely different. Each difficulty I witnessed reminded me that she is not alone in her experiences. My research has shown me that care homes are spaces of deep contradictions: they are places of care and protection, yet they impose isolating limitations to achieve this. Many residents, like my nan, quietly struggle with the loss of autonomy in ways that aren't always visible; it's an emotional adjustment to live in an environment where even the smallest decisions are often made by others. And while dedicated staff work hard to provide the best possible care, the structure of the environment can create a sense of isolation for residents who remember the freedoms they once had. Studying these experiences through Geography and my research has been essential in helping me come to terms with my nan's everyday reality, because now I truly understand it. This doesn't change her experience, but it has given me a more informed perspective, helping me to recognise that, despite her challenges, she is in the safest place possible.

So, the next time you think about making an innocent joke about colouring pencils, I hope my story reminds you of what Geography can encompass. My nan is always on my mind while I'm in Oxford, and I'm deeply grateful that Geography has allowed me to bring her experiences to light.

## Dishoom's Permit Room brings the spirit of Bombay to Oxford



By **AMANDA LI**

**C**herwell Food attended the press night of Dishoom's first restaurant in Oxford: a Permit Room based on Bombay restaurants where alcohol is legal. An all-day cafe, they also have plenty of unique cocktails at the bar. Dishoom already has two across the UK, one in Cambridge (disappointingly). We were delighted to sample an expansive range of their cocktails and main menu.

We arrived to a packed bar: incense brightened the room and with the peppy music and chatter, lit with warm lamps, the place felt more akin to a living room. The cocktails, though pricey, were great. Highlights included the spicy guava frosé, frozen kiwi colada, orange wine margarita, and mango lassi punch. We'd heard good things about the spinach chaat and weren't disappointed. Our waiter said it was rarely offered due to the effort needed to make every leaf crispy. Other vegetarian highlights were the jackfruit puff, which we liked more than the chicken version because of its pulled-pork-like texture. The prawn recheado was tender and the chili garlic masala added a kick without being overpowering.

Our mains were equally as flavourful, with large portions. We had the black daal, chicken ruby, prawn moilee, jackfruit berry pulao, and chicken tandoori special, with broccoli and both plain and garlic naan on the side. The jackfruit berry pulao with jackfruit hidden under a pile of saffron-coated rice was great on its own and with a curry; the pomegranate seeds were crunchy and juicy and the jaggery added a tad bit of sweetness that cut across the spices. The chicken in the chicken ruby was fork tender, and our chicken tandoori with green chutney very flavorful. The tomato in the vegetarian daal was extra flavorful when dipping a naan or garlic naan in it. The turmeric's warmth in the prawn moilee offset by the coconut milk made all the curries bomb. Mango lassi soft serve and sweet malai toast with milk solids on crunchy toast were a sweet way to end the night.

It wasn't the food that stood out the most, but the atmosphere and community we felt during the meal. We chatted with the Thakri cousins, two of Dishoom's founders, who took inspiration from their times in Bombay permit rooms. They carefully picked every detail of the menu and restaurant, and took the time to explain the history of permit rooms and their role since independence as a gathering place to drink alcohol as it slowly became permissible. Shamil, an Oxford PPE graduate himself, told us he saw similarities between a university student culture bringing peers together over conversation and drinks, and the way Dishoom's cocktails facilitate gatherings. The sense of family, care and warmth at the core of the Dishoom brand is completely at odds with sometimes impersonal experiences you'd expect at a restaurant chain. We even got to go behind the bar and make martinis.

The night was as cozy as the food, with a twist uniquely Oxford. We'd go again – for their bacon naan breakfast roll.

Image Credit: GoodBrew Inc

## Agony Aunt:

I think I've met the love of my life. I've never felt this connected before and really we hit it off from the first date. But he's graduating, and I have another year at Oxford. What should I do?



**D**earest OxInLove at Queens,  
Ah, love. The sweetest, most joyous, most potentially destructive and agonising force there is. But what to do when one's love appears destined to be the one that got away (quite literally)? Never fear, concerned student, for your Agony Aunt is here!

And, because connection has, quite frankly, never been easier than it is today. Substitute your emotional connection for a wifi one, and strap in for what will be a long year of text messages. Though it is, understandably, less than ideal to render one's love no less than an online friend, a tiny voice in your phone which (I hope) says "good morning" and "goodnight" each day. Keep up the effort. If I don't see you two winning the Guinness World Record for longest continuous FaceTime call, then quite frankly what was it all for?

As the old adage says, distance makes the heart grow fonder. If you happen to lose what you had, then perhaps you didn't have all that much (ouch, sorry!). And if he can't reciprocate (or just doesn't want to), then drop that sorry fool and move on. At the end of the day, he's only a man.

Lots of love,

Your Agony Aunt

## PORTER'S PICKS

### Top 5 Most Insular Colleges

#### 1. Queen's

Don't be fooled into equating insular with boring. Queens are a vibrant bunch who assertively enjoy their own company.

#### 2. Lincoln

Verging on incestuous. A tight-knit community, that may at times be a little too tight...

#### 3. Merton

Merton qualifies here given they don't socialise at all. Even within their college. Leaving one's room is a big deal.

#### 4. Corpus Christi

They're soooooo tiny. How could they ever fill their own boots and make it out in the big wide world?

#### 5. LMH

Yonks away. Unlike their outgoing neighbours at Hugh's, North Oxford seems to have stranded them. The college is melancholy and placid, and they're not known for their ragers.

## NIGHT OUT SPOTLIGHT

### The Isis' Bully Bash



Our lovely sister mag got spooky on Tuesday night in the Bully back room. Edgy was the name of the game, and the bully-goers met the challenge in their niche-not-like-other-girls indie film character costumes. All our editors were in want of were some lyrics.

## Guess who's coming to dinner? Politics.

**Madelina Gordon** offers a guide to translating your politics from a tute to the dinner table.

I am not American. I'm actually not even British. Nevertheless, US elections tend to take on their own significance in popular political discourse stretching far beyond American shores. For this reason, until the impending moment when the votes are in, it seems that attempting to avert political discussion is an impossible task.

I can attest to such being the case within my family. This summer, I attended a fair few family gatherings. At one, the briefing my parents gave me before politely knocking on my aunt's door was: "For god's sake, don't bring up politics". And mind you – I was certainly of the opinion that this was warranted, reasonable advice definitely worth following to keep the peace.

Alas. Politics was indeed brought up.

First, I tried to zone out. That lasted about ten minutes. Once I got started, I was arguing till the cows came home. My mum later said I had been a little, well, hostile.

Exasperated (and sometimes appalled) as I was by the conversation and opinions of my extended family members, the experience was an important reminder of exactly how much of an echo chamber Oxford is. The sensitive, nuanced disagreements with peers at Oxford usually about how to achieve some agreed upon goal are minor and superfluous in comparison to the cataclysmic political schisms that existed between the opinions of myself and my family members. Specific, delicate political discussion is a product of the Oxford bubble that always, sadly, pops.

So with the US election on the horizon and political contentions bubbling just below the surface of so many interactions – how ought we to approach political disagreement? To add flames to an already daunting task, how does one approach political disagreement with family members and turn outbursts at the family dinner table into constructive, meaningful conversations?

As someone who has all too often fallen in the camp of outburst, I do not pretend to know all the answers to this question. But I can speak from experience on just how difficult this task is, and what often works for me to ease some of its pressures.

I think knowing when to shut up is definitely a good start. Pair that with the patience to actually listen to what your rogue cousin has to say – and taking the time to hear why they think that can often can be remarkably



insightful. For me, listening to my grandma reminisce that JFK was the best – most handsome – US President, and then go on to announce that Donald Trump would have her vote were she born in the land of the free, feels important.

My grandma is a hard working, optimistic and kind-hearted Italian nonna who makes the best gnocchi. For her, politics has never been the kind of philosophical moral discussion as it is for Oxford students. She'll still come out with outlandish statements about sexism or climate change that I'll be dumbfounded by, but that doesn't diminish my impetus to speak with her, to learn about why and where her ideas come from.

These kinds of experiences tend to be completely off limits to the average Oxford student circulating amongst the academic elite. Whilst Oxford provides us with rich academic opportunities to grow and learn, our time away colours often abstract and intangible academic discourse with the diversity and complexity of real people that live and exist in the wider world.

When voicing one's own opinion at the dinner table – something that you shouldn't be dissuaded from merely

in lieu of disagreement – my advice would probably be to do so a little tentatively, being prepared to explain and back yourself when asked why exactly you find that to be true. Sometimes when doing this, I am confronted with questions to assumptions that I wouldn't normally think twice about. This can trigger an introspection and self-awareness that isn't always initiated when learning alongside like-minded peers and tutors. If you take disagreements as that – catalysers of introspection – political conversations become far more attractive, far more interesting, and not something we ought to shy away from.

So with things really heating up on the US election front, which may or may not entail a similar heating up on the family political turf for you, I would be an advocate for not leaving politics at the door before attending a family dinner. By inviting in politics and letting disagreements come out, a whole lot of self-reflection becomes possible. Talking about politics outside the bubble makes what you learn inside it all the more relevant.

*Image Credit: Daniel Frese//Pexels License via Pexels*

# Cherpse.

*Oxford blind dating.*

*[A Wednesday morning at the Swan & Castle over unlimited coffee for £1.50. Did it get steamy? Or did the date run out of steam?]*

#### The Swan:

##### First impression?

At the start he seemed pretty normal. A bit shy, but still had good chat.

##### Highlight?

Not sure if it's really a highlight, but he climbed up onto some scaffolding on Cornmarket street which was pretty impressive but also embarrassing for me (and everyone else) watching.

##### Most embarrassing moment?

The scaffolding incident.

##### Did it meet your expectations?

Yeah, I knew that going on a blind date could take a bit of a turn for the worse so glad I was prepared, lol.

##### Will there be a second date?

I don't think so, unfortunately.

#### The Castle:

##### First impression?

She looked really nice, I was a bit nervous but we had a good conversation which took the edge off a bit.

##### Highlight?

We had a long chat comparing colleges, and I learned that my college is strange because it doesn't have a cafe?

##### Most embarrassing moment?

I walked her back to her college and we had a slightly awkward hug, nothing too bad.

##### Did it meet your expectations?

Yes.

##### Will there be a second date?

She was nice but she didn't seem that interested, so no.



# HOLDING DOWN THE FORT(RESS)

*Cherwell* spoke with Ian Madden, a groundsman of 17 years for the St John's ground (also known as the Fortress).

By LAURENCE RARAN

**T**his week, *Cherwell* reached out to a titan of St John's, and indeed, Oxford sport: Ian Madden. Madden has been a groundsman at Oxford for over 40 years now, and he's seen Oxford sport transform. Currently, he's Head Groundsman at the St John's ground.

**Cherwell:** *What does being Head Groundsman involve?*

**Ian Madden:** Being Head Groundsman involves getting pitches ready for students: football, rugby, tennis in the [winter], cricket in the [summer] and looking after the hard tennis courts. It also involves general maintenance of the pavilion, changing rooms and making sure everyone is happy on the day of a match!

**Cherwell:** *What is your favourite memory as groundskeeper at the Fortress?*

**Ian Madden:** For me, it has to be 2014 [Rugby] Cuppers Victory at Iffley Road, sticks in my mind all the time – we've made the finals three or four times since then, but the victory stands out as a highlight. But everytime we get to a final, it's always a highlight.

**Cherwell:** *What's the craziest thing you've seen happen at the Fortress?*

**Ian Madden:** We used to have welcome drinks here in many, many years ago. And it was a situation where we had won a big rugby match and the boys had a couple of drinks and got a bit merry! I looked out the pavilion and they were doing naked wheelbarrow races up and down the field, it was the funniest thing I've ever seen!

**Cherwell:** *What's the best part of your job?*

**Ian Madden:** The best part of my job is seeing that at the end of the day, everyone's leaving the ground happy. With the pitches being presented in top-quality condition and providing that we play, doesn't matter whether we win or lose. Ensuring that everyone has had a great day – that's all we're interested in here.

**Cherwell:** *What's the worst part of the job?*

**Ian Madden:** Obviously losing in the Cuppers Final, in sport, rugby or football.

**Cherwell:** *You run the current T20 cricket league. How did that come to be and what system existed beforehand?*

**Ian Madden:** Going back 10 or 12 years ago, there was a league which was held on Wednesday after-

noons. That always tied up students and if it was raining, the game was just called off. So when the groundsman who was running the league decided to call it a day, I set up what we call the Fortress T20 League. It's a flexible league: both captains agree on when to play, it's all T20s, and it just runs smoothly. It's the 8th year coming up and we've produced quality wickets, medals and trophies, so there is something to win at the end of the day; unlike the University Cup, where you win nothing. Going back 30 years ago, there was no real league structure for cricket whatsoever. Mainly, cricket was played in friendlies: touring teams and colleges against each other. A chap called Graham [Savin] decided to set up the cricket league. This ran most afternoons, Monday to Friday, with a 40-over format. But with work commitments these days, people just do not have time to play a 40-over format, which is a real shame. That's what we really should be aiming at, if people are looking to make it into the Blues; they need to be playing a longer game of cricket.

**Cherwell:** *How much has changed since you first became groundskeeper?*

**Ian Madden:** The job has changed completely. Years ago, the groundsman was in charge of everything on the sports ground. St John's is very liberal with me, and they allow us to do what we really want to do. Back in the day, your wife would help set the tea for the cricket matches, and we used to have bars in the pavilion. These days people have moved on, and most grounds have lost their drinking licenses. It's been a big change from the heyday to now. It is still good, but the social side after matches is gone, which is a real shame. I believe you do lose part of the Oxford experience by not having a social get together after a match, revolving around a pint or two.

**Cherwell:** *Anything else you would like to tell us?*

**Ian Madden:** When I first came to St John's 17 years ago, it was the [most] prestigious job to get out of all of the colleges. It's always been rated as the best ground; the rugby pitch is superb and we're very fortunate as it is one of the flattest pitches in Oxford. We've won awards from the groundsman at Twickenham [Rugby Stadium] a few years ago on the ground's presentation and won two tickets for England v Australia with free pizzas and champagne. Didn't see much of the game, must admit! Yeah, St John's has been pretty good to me over the years, and can't really fault them!

*Image Credit: Laurence Raran*



# SPORT

## MATCH OF THE WEEK

# 7-1

**Catz 2s brush aside Anne's 2s to go to the top of the Reserves Division I**

**F**ledgling captain Ben Murphy may not have expected to be down 6-1 at half time, but a 1-0 second half wasn't the improvement he was looking for either, as Catz waltz to the top of the Reserves Division I table. The New College captain must have been surprised to see themselves at second after winning their game 7-3, but that's the beauty of college sport. Anne's will look to put things right against Jesus in the next match week.

## HALL OF SHAME

# 7-32

**Tough start for Oxford in Waterpolo**

**T**he term has started out rough for Oxford's Waterpolo Club, with challenging match ups for the W1 team against Bristol – the strongest team in the league – losing 7-32 to them on the 18th October 2024. Another tough game was played on the 26th October where the M1 team with lost out 11-18 to UWE.

## SHOE THE TABS

**A**fter losing the Men's Blues football varsity on penalties in their own city, you would assume that the Tabs might try to break some rules to get their own back this year. I wouldn't recommend trying any Maradona nonsense though, as the Oxford Handball Men's Blues dominated Cambridge 39-7. With Oxford dominating over hands and feet, it begs the question of what limbs do Cambridge have left to compete with? Personally, I'm looking forward to seeing what they come up with next year, but at this point I can't think of anything that can help except evolution.

# COLLEGE MATCH HIGHLIGHTS

## RUGBY

### Saints off to a strong start

In a rematch of last year's Cuppers 7s final, the Saints (St Johns and St Anne's) steamrolled St Peter's in a 29-0 rout. The tries were equally distributed throughout the team as Bowkley, Breeze, Ejovi and Hall all got on the scoresheet.

Last year's captain Jacques described it as "extremely village" under the miserable conditions, but in the end, strong discipline in the (uncontested) scrums meant an overwhelming final score.

## NETBALL

### Promoted LMH loving life in Division I

After promotion from Division II last year, LMH netball go top of the league after a second consecutive victory in Division I this year.

After beating St. Catz in match week 1, they took home the win over Jesus in a tight 8-7 contest. Playing their games at Worcester, it begs the question as to whether the hosts, who find themselves in Division 2, should start watching and learning...

## FOOTBALL

### JCR Men's Cuppers bracket is released

The first round of Cuppers has produced some very interesting ties: top of the Premier Division St. Peter's take on top of Division I Worcester in a clash of whose form will prevail. Peter's will be looking to bounce back after a first round knockout last year, while Worcester will want to replicate the kind of football that took them to the final 8.

Less glamorous may be Trinity vs. Corpus Christi, in a battle for who's the best at losing...

## HOCKEY

### Catz/Somerville and Brasenose/Anne's stay unbeaten

A closely-fought contest between New and Brasenose/Anne's sees the latter come out 2-0 winners, meaning just two teams are left on winning streaks in Division I this year, as Catz/Somerville pick up three points by way of a Christ Church/Hugh's forfeit.

Only goal difference separates the two, after Catz/Somerville put seven past Merton/Mansfield.

