

On Saltburn, Integrity, & Class



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## 74% of students say Oxford University is not inclusive: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Oxford

**Éilis Mathur** reports.

Less than ten years ago, Oxford University came under fire for its lack of diversity. The former Minister for Higher Education David Lammy accused the University of “social apartheid” after Freedom of Information requests revealed that nearly one in three Oxford colleges failed to make a single undergraduate offer to a black British A-level student in every year between 2010 and 2015.

Since those remarks, the number of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students at Oxford has risen by nearly ten percent. The last seven years have seen an increased University focus on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) with new targets, new policies, and new committees. The situation has certainly changed, but exactly how much progress has been made? And how much more needs to be done?

### Oxford's EDI policies

All EDI policies and strategies are overseen by Oxford University's Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU). The Unit is headed by Vernal Scott, who was recently appointed to the role in October after previously leading Diversity and Inclusion for the Essex police. The EDU works to create an inclusive culture and a respectful environment for both students and staff alike. Professor Tim Soutphommasane, the University's chief diversi-

ty officer, told *Cherwell*: “Our efforts on this are about ensuring we attract and retain the very best students and staff, from all backgrounds and from all parts of the world.”

The University's EDI policies are rooted in the 2010 Equality Act, which protects identified groups from discrimination, harassment or victimisation. In accordance with the act,

Oxford University holds five Equality Objectives: 1) Diversify the University's governance structures, 2) Increase the proportions of women and minority ethnic staff in senior roles, 3)

Promote the visibility and inclusion of LGBT+ staff and students, 4) Widen undergraduate access and admissions, 5) Eliminate attainment gaps

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Image credit: Julian Herzog via Wikimedia Commons CC-BY-4.0

### Oxford launches new Vice-Chancellor's Colloquium programme

**Alice Robey-Cave** reports.

Oxford's Department for Continuing Education launched a new interdisciplinary extracurricular programme, “The Vice-Chancellor's Colloquium,” this term. The programme was first announced at Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey's 2023 Oration speech last October and aims to bridge the gaps between humanities and STEM subjects through “an experiment in helping students learn from each other across the divide.”

The Vice-Chancellor's Colloquium is offered to all undergraduates currently studying at the University and comprises keynote lectures and talks, interdisciplinary projects, and a panel which comes at the end of the term. The programme also offers summer internship opportunities to support “the University's goals for local and global engagement.”

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## Oxford releases new guidance on AI use for students

**Joseph Rodgers** reports.

The University of Oxford has released new guidance on the use of artificial intelligence

(AI) tools for students. The guidance, published 8 January 2024, comes following significant interest in the promises and dangers of AI, including the 2021 launch of

the Oxford Institute for Ethics in AI and the continued advertisement of the Saïd Business School's Oxford Artificial Intelligence Programme.

The guidance permits students to

“make use of generative AI tools [...] in developing [their] academic skills and to support [their] studies.” They are warned, however, that “AI tools cannot replace human critical think-

ing or the development of scholarly evidence-based arguments and subject knowledge that forms the basis of [their] university education.”

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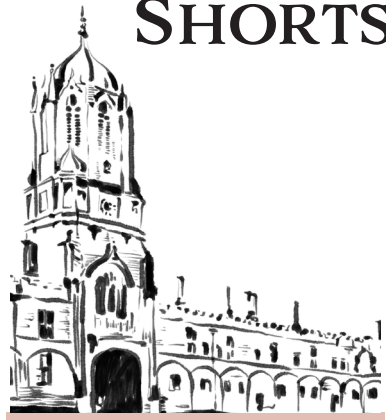
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## NEWS

## SHORTS



### Students evacuated from Gladstone Link due to toilet plumbing troubles

Oxford University temporarily closed the Gladstone Link – an underground library connecting the Radcliffe Camera and the Bodleian Old Library – on 17 January due to minor flooding inside. A staff member told *Cherwell* that it was caused by a “massively flooded toilet.” A student told *Cherwell*: “Genuinely the world’s most underwhelming flood – like someone spilled their keepcup level of flooding.”

### Faith communities join national friendship initiative

Following the conflict in Israel and Palestine, faith leaders from Oxford will host a community appeal for peace on 21 January in the Town Hall to “draw together our communities in friendship, understanding and peace” and stand together in solidarity. The event is part of the Together for Humanity initiative supported by the Together Coalition, which aims to “tackle the causes of social disconnection” with partners such as the NHS, Scouts, and British Red Cross.

### Two colleges host Saltburn-themed bops; controversy unfolds on Oxfess

Brasenose and Magdalen, both of which served as shooting locations for *Saltburn*, have hosted bops themed on the film, featuring the song “Murder on the Dancefloor.” However, these parties were not without their controversies, being called “out of touch” and “morally corrupt” on Oxfess. Not everyone held such strong opinions, though. In the words of one Oxfesser: “saltburn this saltburn that. i’m saltburnt out at this point.”

## Oxford begins human vaccine trials for deadly Nipah

Ellie Yau reports.

The first in-human clinical trial of a vaccine against the deadly Nipah virus has been launched by Oxford. The Nipah virus is fatal in up to 75% of cases, with outbreaks occurring across Southeast Asia; the WHO labels it a “priority disease requiring urgent research”. This trial marks a groundbreaking milestone after 25 years without any vaccines or treatments approved for the virus.

Nipah virus was first identified in 1988 after an outbreak among pig farmers in Malaysia and Singapore, with 100 out of 257 cases resulting in death and the culling of over a million pigs to control the spread of the disease. Since then, there have been outbreaks in Bangladesh and most recently in Kerala, India.

The disease is carried by fruit bats and is spread to humans through contact with infected animals such as bats and pigs; it can also be transmitted from person-to-person contact and via contaminated food. The virus causes moderate to severe brain swelling, which results in death in about 40-75% of cases. Dr. In-Kyu Yoon of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the sponsor of the trial, shared that Nipah had epidemic potential due to the densely populated regions fruit bats are found in – includ-

ing areas home to over two billion people.

The trial is developed as part of the Pandemic Science Institute’s Henipavirus Programme, which targets diseases in endemic countries and works with local partners to develop preparation tools for future outbreaks. Development of the vaccine made use of the same platform as the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, ChAdOx1. The Oxford Vaccine group will lead the first trial, comprised of 51 participants, aged 18 to 55; over the project period of 18 months, further trials will be conducted in a Nipah-affected country. Dr Yoon also stated that the insights gained from this trial could inform the development of countermeasures to common viruses such as measles and mumps.

Additionally, the project could help shed light on the public health ethics involved in current preventive measures. A paper by the Ethox Centre at Oxford Population Health brought into question the relevance of some methods used by the local public health authorities during the 2023 Kerala outbreak, which included introducing a lockdown for the first time despite the virus’ low transmission rate. Dr Euzebiusz Jamrozik, a postdoctoral research fellow at Oxford Population Health, addressed whether such extreme measures were “ethically justifiable for Nipah virus”, given

the differences from previous responses which had “focused more on contact tracing and other traditional infection control measures”. He mentioned that the design of future vaccine trials “should also be informed by ethical considerations, including the results of local community engagement activities”.

The researchers believe that as the virus gains more attention in discussions of epidemic preparedness, work on the public response to the disease must follow suit.

They stress that the development of intervention measures should consider all “ethically relevant factors” through consultation and collaboration with local biomedical experts and communities most likely to be affected by the virus. More extensive bioethics work could improve research and interventions for the disease to be “ethically acceptable and more [...] effective.”

Image Credit: Spencerbdavis / CC BY 4.0 Deed via Wikimedia Commons



## New Mental Health Hospital planned for Warneford Park

Kyra Radley reports.

Plans to build a new mental health hospital in Warneford Park, at the site of the existing hospital, are progressing after partners signed redevelopment plans – a collaboration between Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, the University of Oxford, and philanthropist Ian Laing.

A hospital has existed on the Headington site for over two

hundred years and mainly provides mental health services today. The new plans present a refurbished and modern hospital that will provide healthcare targeted towards mental health, alongside a new separate centre for brain-related research and a new postgraduate medical college.

Grant Macdonald, Oxford Mental Health Foundation Trust Chief Executive, said in a press release: “Warneford Park will help us deliver this aspiration alongside

an outstanding facility that will foster the development of world-class healthcare, research and innovation and education. This will be an attractive place to work and deliver excellent services for our patients. In addition, it will offer study at a world class university, accelerated leading edge and impactful research, and the preservation of our historic buildings and landscapes.”

Oxford University Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey stated:

“While there is still much to be done, we are keen to make this important project a reality so that our researchers and clinicians can translate scientific discovery – from better understanding brain illnesses, including mental health, to finding the most effective treatments – into benefits for patients, their families and communities, as quickly as possible.”

Image Credit: Lilypad.ua / CC BY 4.0 Deed via Wikimedia Commons





# Oxford research finds financial sector unprepared for climate lawsuits

**Daniel Thomas** reports.

Research by the Oxford Sustainable Law Programme (SLP) found that investors and regulators have seriously overlooked the risk of potential climate lawsuits. In the near future, companies responsible for pollution and greenhouse gas emissions could be held legally liable for trillions in damages, but this is rarely accounted for in climate risk analyses.

Nearly 2,500 climate lawsuits seeking legal restitution for ecological damage perpetrated by business-

es and organisations have been filed worldwide to date, with potentially serious consequences. For investors and regulators, this research presents a number of possible solutions investors and regulators might adopt to properly evaluate climate litigation risk.

SLP director and the study's lead author Thom Wetzter told *Cherwell*: "The research is relevant to all investors, including the University of Oxford. I am not familiar with the details of the University's investment process, let alone with their treatment of climate risk, so I cannot comment

on specifics. I hope they read the article and thought, 'we already do this!'"

In 2020, the University announced ambitious plans to divest from the fossil fuel sector wholesale, and to cut its emissions down to 50% by 2030 at the latest.

SLP, a joint venture by the University of Oxford's Faculty of Law and Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, operates a multidisciplinary research centre that focuses on developing legal solutions for global sustainability challenges. Wetzter told *Cherwell*: "Some of the problems we are investigating

transcend individual disciplines. To study them, we draw on deep domain expertise in various areas and synthesise what we learn. People who can do that multidisciplinary work sit at the intersection of two or more fields. They can translate insights between these different fields of expertise and spot connections — that's multidisciplinary research at its best. We need more recognition of that type of work in academia, and luckily for us Oxford is at the vanguard of that development."

*Image Credits: Chris LeBoutillier via Pexels*



## Oxford releases new guidance on AI use for students

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This advice is particularly stern toward students who might pass off AI-generated text as their own: "Unauthorised use of AI falls under the plagiarism regulations and would be subject to academic penalties in summative assessments."

The guidance does provide examples of where use of AI is both helpful and permissible, such as in producing a summary of an academic paper, providing feedback on writing style, or listing key concepts likely to appear in a forthcoming lecture.

In all cases, however, it is stressed that use of AI should not be seen as a substitute for developing an individual's capacity to learn and that any facts given by AI should be cross-referenced with traditional scholarly sources. Even if students follow these guidelines, the policy maintains that students "should give clear acknowledgements of how [AI] has been used when preparing work for examination."

This is consistent with the University's guidance on plagiarism, which states that students "must clearly acknowledge all assistance which has contributed to the production of [their] work." This same guidance states that "AI can only be used within assessments where specific authorisation has been given, or when technology that uses AI has been agreed as reasonable adjustment for a student's disability."

It is not clear in which cases such specific authorisation has been given; of the five most studied undergraduate courses (Medicine, Law, History, PPE and Chemistry), only the Faculty of History includes reference to specific authorisation of AI use in its Undergraduate Handbooks, and this is simply to restate the same conditions from the University's overall guidance on plagiarism.

The use of AI in education is sure to be an ongoing point of discussion among all universities as the technology develops, and there are clearly points of controversy among Oxford faculty which the guidance seems to obscure. While some faculty members signed an open letter calling for a six month pause in AI development (as reported by *Cherwell*), the Department of Computer Science understandably has "Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning" as a key research focus.

In response to these disputes over the role of AI, the Russell Group published a joint statement on 4 July 2023, stating five principles for the use of AI in Education:

These principles are very clearly mirrored in Oxford's advice. They are reworked into the newly published guidance as questions for students under the heading "Five things to think about when using generative AI tools," although the guidance does not include any acknowledgement of the joint statement or its five principles.

## Oxfordshire County's funding gap reaches £11.2 million

**Selina Chen** reports.

Following the central government's annual allocation of funding to local councils, Oxfordshire's projected £9.1 million budget shortfall has grown to £11.2 million for the 2024/25 financial year after the county did not receive as much grant support funding as expected.

Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Dan Levy, said in a statement: "The government has spoken widely about a 6.5% increase of funding to local government. Sadly, this is a case of smoke and mirrors...Local government as a whole has expressed its deep disappointment. We are clearly now going to have to take some really tough decisions."

Levy said that the local government already feels "great concern" about the upcoming year's finances and the government's allocations "did nothing to alleviate those concerns."

Previously, in November, the county published the first draft of its budget proposals, anticipating a shortfall of £9.1 million due to

inflation falling slower than forecasted whilst costs continue to rise.

According to a press release, the county faces "demand-led pressures and the effects of the growing nationwide costs of supporting children and young people; the rising cost of social care and care placements for both children and adults; and a national shortage of social care workers leading to reliance on agency staff and higher costs." Oxfordshire's growing and ageing population adds to this pressure.

The overall projected budget for the next financial year is over £614 million. It was drafted based on consultations with residents and a council tax rise of 4.99% – less than the current rate of inflation – with two percent of this increase being ringfenced for adult social care. The changes are expected to save £9.8 million but are insufficient to cover the council's growing deficit.

The council continues to work on balancing its budget and will come to a final decision on 20 February.

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## CROSS CAMPUS



### Students sue Harvard over "rampant" anti-Semitism

The lawsuit, launched by a student at the Harvard Divinity School and the group Students Against Antisemitism, alleges that the Ivy League university violated the civil rights of its Jewish students by enabling racial discrimination on campus. The students seek monetary damages and a court injunction for Harvard to cease its alleged violations of Jewish students' civil rights. The lawsuit comes just weeks after the resignation of its former President Claudine Gay. Harvard has not yet commented on the lawsuit.

### Alan Turing memorial sculpture at King's College, Cambridge sparks controversy

The sculpture made to honour one of King's College's most famous alumni, Alan Turing, has been criticised for a plethora of issues. Many have expressed their dismay at its design, with a student calling it "ugly" on Camfess for its modern design. Historic England was not pleased either, claiming that the sculpture would "detract from the architectural landscape and the aesthetic significance of the college". To top it all off, its placement deep within the college's grounds has also made it difficult to access for visitors.

### Bed bugs in Columbia libraries?

A Columbia University announcement on 18 December informed students that there had been a case of bed bugs in Avery Library during exam season. The reported infestation led officials to shut down Avery at a time when students were already struggling to find study space in the packed libraries. A report released last week, however, contradicted the earlier announcement and revealed to students that the original claim about bed bugs had been wrong all along.



# Oxford researchers unearth evolutionary origins of multiple sclerosis

Ellie Yau reports.

An Oxford team led the research, published in *Nature* on January 10, that uncovered the origins of multiple sclerosis (MS). Affecting 1 in 1000 people, MS makes the body's immune system attack its own brain and spinal cord; however, the team found that many genetic variants of MS had originally developed to provide protec-

tion against diseases. This discovery helps reframe the cause and treatment of MS, marking a key milestone for doctors and patients.

The international team of researchers is composed of scientists from Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Copenhagen, and California (Berkeley). To identify the introduction of MS genetic variants to Western Europe, they analysed the DNA from samples of human bones and teeth held in museum

collections across the region. In addition, to trace the differences between ancient and modern DNA, they compared data from a unique gene bank of ancient DNA to the UK Biobank, a biomedical database containing information and biological samples for over half a million UK participants.

Professor Lars Fugger of Oxford told *Cherwell*: "Ancient DNA is more fragmented than recently sampled DNA because it is older and clearly not kept under optimal conditions. Yet with new technology it is still very useful."

The origin of these variants was found to be a migration of the Yamnaya people, herders from the Pontic Steppe (a region spanning parts of modern Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan) 5,000 years ago. At the

time, the new variants might have provided protection against infectious diseases from their domesticated animals; however, in our modern environment they only increase the risk of developing MS.

Understanding the origin of MS will help medical scientists develop a more effective treatment for the disease, Fugger explains. Historically, MS has been treated with drugs targeting the immune system, but there is a risk in suppressing the immune system "so effectively that patients are less well equipped to fight infections." Instead, Fugger believes scientists need an approach that "re-calibrates" the immune system in patients to suppress the disease.

Overall, the success of the study also shows the promise of analysing large data sets of the ancient human genome in gaining new understandings of diseases. The team now plans to continue investigating conditions such as ADHD and Alzheimer's, and they hope to apply this method to study diseases across the world.

*Image Credit: geralt /CC0 1.0 via Wikimedia Commons*



## Oxford launches new Vice-Chancellor's Colloquium programme

*continued from front page*



The Vice-Chancellor's oration centred on progress, and her introduction of the program notes the changing world the university is working to keep up with. Interdisciplinarity has been emerging across other universities across the UK: Oxford follows in the footsteps of other Russell Group institutions such as University College London (UCL) and the recently formed London Interdisciplinary School (LIS), which provides undergraduates with the opportunity to study a Bachelors of Art and Science (BASc).

*Image credit: Kendrick Chen via Pexels*

# Oxford University receives millions of pounds from arms companies

Samuel Williams reports.

An openDemocracy investigation has found that over the past five years, UK universities received over £100 million in donations, funding, and sponsorships from arms companies. According to the investigation, Oxford University has taken approximately £17 million, with the lion's share of this money from Rolls Royce.

This is not the first investigation into the University's accepting funds from arms companies. In 2021, an investigation by Action on Armed Violence found that from 2013 to 2021 the University received almost £20 million from Airbus, Lockheed Martin, and Rolls Royce.

**"...from 2013 to 2021 the University received almost £20 million from Airbus, Lockheed Martin, and Rolls Royce."**

The full extent to which Oxford University receives funding from arms companies is difficult to gauge, as many donations are kept private despite ongoing FOIA requests. What is equally, if not more difficult to gauge, is what arms companies get in return for their donations.

OpenDemocracy found that 36 arms company officials sit on advisory boards to twelve Russell Group Universities. Arms companies also fund specific projects at universities, such as the Tempest engineering project at Oxford, funded by Rolls Royce. The Centre for Doctoral Training is also often funded by arms companies.

As the International Court of Justice hears the case of South Africa v. Israel, with South Africa accusing Israel of perpetrating a genocide against the Gazan population, the conversation around complicity in possible war crimes has intensified. Lockheed Martin, the American company that produces F-35 fighter jets for Israel as well as numerous other countries, has stated that roughly 500 UK-based suppliers are involved in the production process for the F-35. Amongst these suppliers are companies such as Rolls Royce, BAE systems, and Airbus.

Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank are not the only war zones where British and American arms companies have been implicated. Lockheed Martin has been supplying Saudi Arabia with arms while the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen launches airstrikes described by Human Rights Watch as indiscriminate and disproportionate. Lockheed Martin has also been supplying the Turkish state with high level fighter jets, despite decades of Turkish military aggression towards Kurdish people and support of the Azerbaijani militaries.

Organisations such as Action Against Oxford War Crimes and Disarm Oxford have been outspoken against the involvement of Oxford University with these arms companies. On their website, Action Against Oxford War Crimes claims "the University is complicit in death and destruction," and in a press release from last year stated

"we will not give up our fight until Oxford University cuts all ties with [...] arms dealers."

Oxford University spokespeople have responded to these accusations by saying investments from arms companies "advance general scientific understanding, with subsequent civilian applications including climate change

monitoring, earthquake detection, energy efficiency and humanitarian relief, as well as potential application by the defence sector."

As protests concerning the Israel-Gaza War continue to be held in London and Oxford, it is likely that dialogue will continue surrounding the University and its ties to arms companies.

## Analysis: "Money can buy anything"

Alicia Martínez Patiño comments.

Oxford is no stranger to controversy over funding. We have been here before: from the Blavatnik School of Government to an Earth Sciences lab funded by Shell, this University has a history with questionable donations. Most readers will likely remember the fate of the Sackler Library. A name change, which was perhaps intended to do too much of the heavy lifting, is no more than a laughable effort where donations are to be "retained by the University for their intended educational purposes", per the official statement. They may try and keep appearances, but it is naïve to think that Oxford intends to seriously consider the ethics of their income. Accepting large sums from arms companies may be particularly shameless in the current climate, but it is really

just an example of an overall unscrupulous policy.

The optimist may argue that this is only the result of financial hardship, merely a sacrifice of trivial moral considerations (what are those?) in order to keep Oxford going. It's just a library name, or a plaque, or a short acknowledgement. Unfortunately, Oxford's relationship with donors is more long-term than that. We must draw the line somewhere: arms companies have no business sitting on the advisory board at any university. Nor does an opioid magnate, or an oil company. It is useless to pretend like these kinds of industries do not have set ideologies behind them, whether you ascribe to them or not. This becomes difficult to ignore when looking at Leo Blavatnik's financial contribution to Donald

Trump's inauguration committee. It might be redundant to say this, but universities, as I understand them, should be primarily a place for learning. Not to say they shouldn't be political – in fact, a student body that isn't political seems almost unnatural. But it is precisely for this reason that the politics found at a public university should be independent, not tainted by corporate agendas imposed from above.

The University's policy on donations undermines its status as an institution dedicated to independent study and research. If it were up to the central administration, it appears that Oxford would very much fight for King and Country if he would just make a little extra contribution.





## 74% of students think Oxford University is not inclusive: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Oxford

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In July 2018, a strategic plan was developed to improve attainment of these objectives over the next five years, but its execution time was extended by an additional year due to pandemic-related delays in funding and resources.

The Strategic Plan includes 17 commitments and 29 priorities in the themes of education, research, people, engagement and partnership, and resources. Increasing the numbers of students from underrepresented groups, reducing gaps in attainment relating to gender and ethnicity, and achieving a more diverse staffing profile are just a few of the Plan's aims.

The achievement of these commitments and priorities has been the responsibility of various committees and bodies, made up of the University's most senior officers, including Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Proctors.

### Have EDI policies been a success?

In many ways, Oxford's EDI policies have achieved a lot. The proportion of BME Oxford undergraduates has increased from 18.3% to 27.8%, falling in line with the nationwide student population.

The makeup of the University's staff has also diversified. Since 2011, the number of women in the most senior academic grade, Statutory Professor, nearly doubled, and there was a 2% increase in the proportion of BME senior researchers

between 2020 and 2022. The proportion of students from different ethnic groups at other UK universities and at Oxford do mostly line-up: 12% of all UK students come from Asian backgrounds and 14% of Oxford students do as well. Much of this progress can be credited to the development access programmes, such as

## There is no doubt that extensive attainment gaps still remain.

Opportunity Oxford and UNIQ.

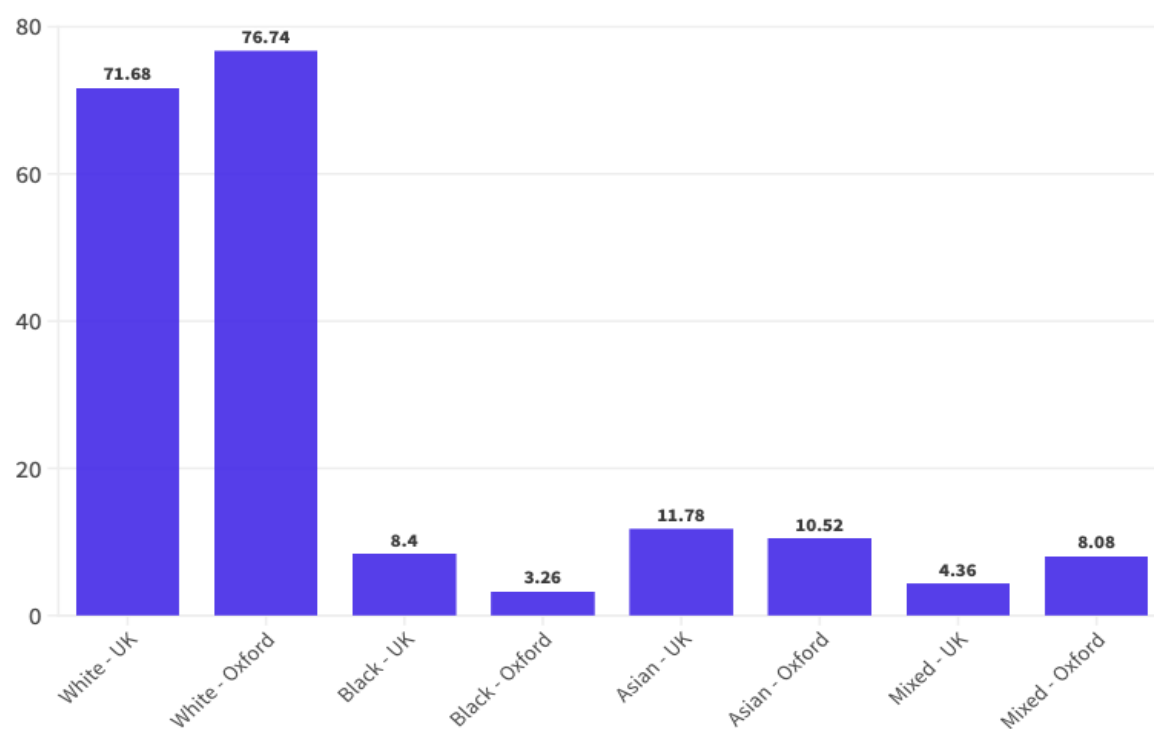
However, there is no doubt that extensive attainment gaps still remain. For example, only 3.3% of Oxford's undergraduate admissions are of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage, while the nationwide average across all universities is 9%. Furthermore, The Times Good University Guide ranked Oxford as the 13th "whitest university" out of the 24 Russell Group universities.

The proportion of disabled students at Oxford also continues to lag behind the rest of the country. While 17% of UK students have a disability, only 12.8% of Oxford students do.

The University's Equality Objective to increase the presence of women and ethnic minorities in senior roles has only been partially achieved, falling short of its original goals. As of 2022, 10% of academic staff were BME, compared to a target of 15%. Similarly, women only compose 39% of governance structures, which falls short of the 40% to 60% goal.

While the Strategic Plan has made progress on many of the

■ 5 year average of admissions by ethnicity



Equality Objectives – a University Staff experience survey did find that 83% of staff felt they were “able to be themselves” at work – some still have a long way to go. The lack of progress on many issues can be explained by difficulties posed by the pandemic and a lack of finance. The progress report in 2019 noted: “Securing funding for planned activities is the major challenge across the Strategic Plan priorities.”

Some have also wondered whether the disjointed and broad nature of the Plan, with numerous priorities covering issues from student diversity to research investments, complicated its implementation and fulfilment of objectives.

When asked if the aims of the Strategic Plan were realistic, Professor Soutphommasane told

*Cherwell*: “We are resolved to build on our progress. That is why we are developing a new collegiate University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategic plan that will guide the next state of our institutional efforts.”

### What do students think?

A recent *Cherwell* survey of approximately 200 students found that 74% do not think Oxford is an inclusive environment. When asked whether the University's approach to EDI was effective, only 11% voted “yes,” with 53% voting “only partially.” So despite convergence in admissions statistics and near completion of most objectives, overwhelming student opinion suggests Oxford still has a long way to go toward total Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

## When asked whether the University's approach to EDI was effective, only 11% voted “yes”.

One issue seems to be the lack of engagement with students in the implementation of many EDI policies and commitments. All college JCRs have BME or Ethnic Minority representatives, who might be interested in communicating about and providing feedback on the University's EDI policies as the spokespeople for the students of colour in their colleges.

The University of Oxford seems to agree with this approach. It told *Cherwell*: “Students are central to the University's EDI approach and Equality Objectives.” Yet only half of surveyed college representatives had heard of the Equality and Diversity Unit, which

is responsible for fostering an inclusive environment at Oxford.

One BME representative told *Cherwell*: “Our work as BAME Reps is often isolating...I receive no dedicated support or resources from the University or my college.”

The LGBTQ+ Society President had a different perspective. She told *Cherwell* that, although she had once been a harsh critic of the University's approach to EDI, she has “since worked with them and realized there is a lot of goodwill and desire to do better.” She further stated the EDU helped facilitate three meetings with the VC which led to tangible results.

The broader difficulty of achieving a unified policy partly stems from Oxford's collegiate system. With 39 different colleges that each have their own independent governing body, it often seems impossible to expect uniform change.

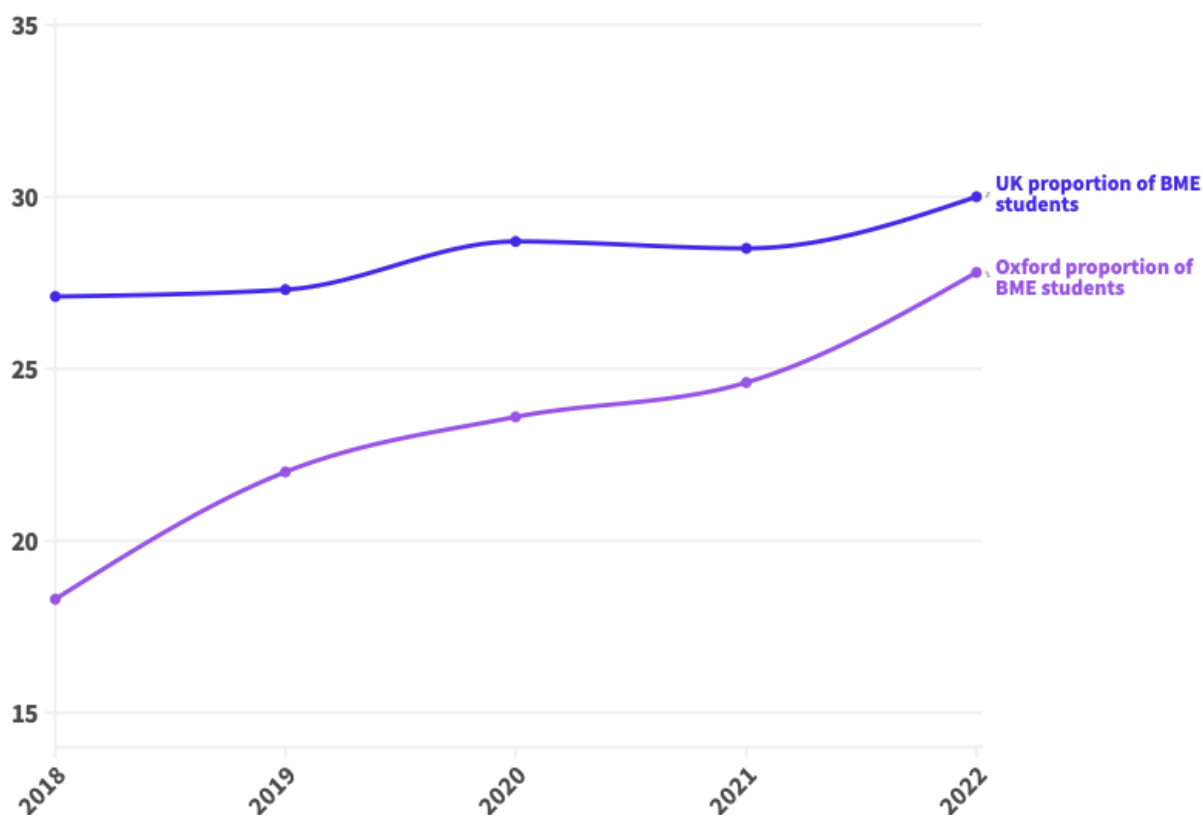
To combat this, a University Joint Committee on EDI has been established, about which the University told *Cherwell*: “There are efforts to join-up the work that students and staff are doing across colleges, departments and divisions.”

Over the last decade there has been a concerted effort to improve Oxford's EDI policies, which has led to undeniable progress. The success of new access schemes and increased attention given to improving this area of University life have led to statistically significant growth in diversity among staff and students.

However, equality, diversity, and inclusion do not just lie in the numbers. Diversity is a step in the right direction but our investigation confirms that there is still a lot of work to do to make Oxford a fully equal and inclusive place for all.

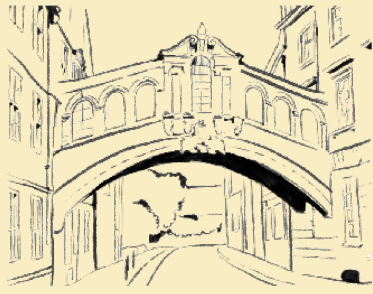
*Image Credits: Cem Kozanoglu*

### Proportion of BME students (%)





## Is there too much pressure to get an internship whilst at Oxford?



## We're too focused on work anyway

Morien Robertson

We all know those people obsessed with LinkedIn, constantly posting sickeningly clichéd congratulations and liking every post they see. But most of us are more interested in managing the mountainous Oxford workload. If you have that much free time, you're either productive enough to walk into any job, or so disorganised that no amount of internships will help. When finals come around, you'll probably appreciate the hours spent revising more than the weeks in the City.

## How badly do you want a job?

Martin Conmy

When I got my Oxford offer, I thought that was it. I was a made man – I could graduate with a 2:2 and every manager in the country would be falling over their feet to try and hire me once they read “Oxford” on my CV. But in today's ubercompetitive work environment, a good university isn't enough. The internship game may be a toxic, but it is a game worth playing if you want a good job. It's internships, not tutorial essays, that pay an average of £12 per hour, with 70% of interns hired on a full time basis.

## The pain is never-ending

Raghav Chari

In truth, what is too much pressure? If we say we face 'too much' pressure, we're probably talking about a level that's harmful to our mental health. An omnipresent spectre of job insecurity and career anxiety is certainly not good for our stress levels. But at the same time, it is, honestly, that tough to get a good internship these days. You want the best internships to secure the best jobs in the best industries, and none of that comes easy. Perhaps the ordeal is a necessary evil to get what we want.

# A survey a day keeps ignorance away

Mahdi Ghuloom

It is very easy to extrapolate from the 'bubbles' that we live in and assume that most of society thinks just like the people around you. We can mislead ourselves into believing we are witnessing objective reality from our subjective points of view. I have often thought about how I form my understanding of public opinion and sentiment in the two countries I have called home: the UK and Bahrain. Often, my understanding conforms with that of my friends and network. For example, my impression for a long time was that Rishi Sunak's persona appeals less to the British public than the dry wit and humor of Boris Johnson. That may be stemming from the views of some of my British peers. Some of my other 'international' friends disagree, as they think the British public may respond better to the coherent and slick nature of Mr. Sunak. Still, all of us are basing our opinions on our impressions of our differing British friends.

Similarly, back in Bahrain, I have often thought that the public responds well to cosmopolitan parliamentarians, but other friends believe that the politicians that are divisive are actually more popular. Again, we are basing our conceptions off our own individual social circles, and perhaps the comments and engagement we witness on our social media feeds.

This habit is clearly flawed, given one of the best ways of exploring public opinion is through science. Surveys and polls that ground them-

selves in the scientific method paint a different picture of society that is often overlooked by the general public. However, it is much easier to form our perspective from the experiences and opinions of our network, than it is to research the findings of surveys that we deem credible.

Perhaps that is the problem: is trust in surveys low? Does the criticism of survey sampling methods and analytical models confuse us to think they are less credible than anecdotal evidence? I am not sure, but Pew Research Center asked that very same question: can we still trust polls? For good reason, they concluded yes, but they did acknowledge that polls have rightly come

**“...one of the best ways of exploring public opinion is through science.”**

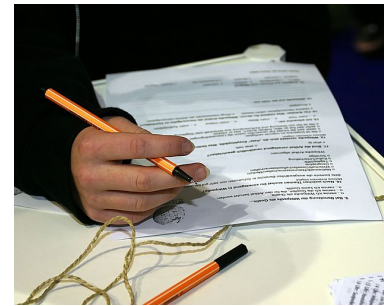
under scrutiny for having failed to predict the results of the consequential in the 2016 US Presidential Election and 'Brexit' Referendum.

With that said, the onus of popularizing surveys does not fall only on us, the consumers; it also falls on the producers of these surveys. Apart from a few well-known companies, such as YouGov, most polling organizations do not regularly release the results of their surveys to the general public. They are hidden behind pay walls and are often only accessed through contracts with those with heavy pockets.

It is about time for open survey re-

sults to become the norm. At the very least, if detailed analysis is deemed too valuable and time-consuming to share for free, then high-level summaries of the findings would be a step in the right direction.

Data points have social value, and though comparisons have been made between data with other valuable materials such as gold and oil, the latter should not be treated as a commodity. Just like the landowners above oil wells received their share



of the profits globally, the owners of datums should be able to extract value from the information gathered about them. That value could lie in the social good produced from data analysis. If shared appropriately, the 'bubbles' we find ourselves constrained within may well burst.

Moreover, given their social value, why are governments not doing more to improve access to survey data? Through financing via grants, and marketing via government open data portals, governments can play an integral part in providing clarity over the sentiments and opinions of the population on various issues. Furthermore, International organizations, could use their immense leverage over governments on matters of credibility and governance,

to incentivize survey provision by ranking countries based on the availability of public opinion survey results.

Perhaps the easiest solution to implement is for media organizations, the most accessible distributors of information, to commission surveys more regularly, and to purchase distribution rights from scientific papers and polling organizations.

**“It is about time for open survey results to become the norm.”**

Understandably, the media tends to 'self-censor' when it comes to technical readings, as graphs or numbers may scare away readers, or bore them to another subscription. That is understandable, but if these media companies do not take a bet on even trying to pierce the bubbles each and every one of us exists within, then the future of surveys is insecure and our ability to garner more representative data will remain limited.

Individuals, governments, and companies can play their part to ensure our societies understand the distribution of opinions across the communities they care about and are part of. It is essential we are aware of the of the diversity around us; surveys help us do just that.

*Image Credit: Raimond Spekking / CC BY-SA 4.0 (via Wikimedia Commons)*

## The Debate Chamber

### Violet and Alfie go head to head, debating whether bad habits are easier to pick up at Oxford

It's no secret that at every university the drinking culture is over the top, people's sleeping habits are terrible and healthy meals are neglected.

However, there's something specific to the way work dictates life at Oxford that exacerbates these problems. The University claims you should treat work like a full-time job, with a 40 hour working week. Whilst I'm not reaching those expectations, I still spend most weekdays, from morning until early evening, in the library, hunched over my laptop. By Week Seven I tend to feel like I'm living in *Groundhog Day*.



And so, it's easy to get into the routine of going to the pub after a day of work and having a couple of pints, or tak-

ing a quick break from a screen by grabbing some fresh air and having a cigarette. It's not that I intentionally strive to make these behaviours habitual, but when downtime is sparse and stress overwhelming, a pint with friends can be the perfect escape.

This becomes particularly pertinent during Hilary Term, when the weather is cold, the sun sets early, and you'd have to be mad to go for a picnic in Port Meadow or a swim in the river near Hinksey.

It's easy to slip into unhealthy habits at Oxford, so I find trying to plan a coffee or a walk with friends in the day helps so I can still socialise and relax without a pint in hand. But, undeniably, the long work days call for coffee from 8 til 8, meal deals and ready meals, and all nighters in your college library. Whilst this isn't totally unique to here, I haven't heard the same frequency of complaints from friends beyond Oxford.

University life is hard – it's meant to be – and while Oxford might provide more deadlines and a more intense tutorial system, it isn't the only place where hard work happens.

When speaking to my friends at other universities, I sometimes find myself slipping into the assumption that I work infinitely harder, neglecting the fact that they also experience work pressure, deadlines and long hours in the library. When it comes to the winter period, the freezing temperatures in Oxford would be laughed off by most of our friends at Northern universities. The fact we have the promise of those summer strolls in Port Meadow and morning swims in Hinksey is a rarity we can cling onto during Hilary that others can't.

At least for second-year humanities students, the workload is actually much more forgiving than other universities who tend to split their final exams between the last

two years. I may resent that come next year, as I find myself only having the time to think about dissertations and revision, but at least for now, the Oxford system appears to be comparatively kind.

In response to the pressures of Oxford life, I have implemented a highly elaborate 'Big Day Off' (BDO) system. This means each week I will designate a day to spend completely to my hearts content. I am still working to convince my friends to incorporate it, but at least for me I find my life has some more structure and balance, something I probably wouldn't have achieved without the pressures of a weekly essay. While planning my week to fit in the healthy, sociable moments is maybe more imperative here, that's only a skill we will be grateful to have learned early.





# On Saltburn, integrity, and class

## Mor Stinchcombe

I feared the day that the Film Studies people would touch Saltburn, largely because the stubborn thorn of 'but sometimes the curtains are just blue!' remains firmly, and unfortunately for an English student, fixed within my attitude towards film.

However, the overarching reason why I wanted Saltburn to remain far from academic busybodying is that Saltburn, for myself, is a profound testament to the ability of directors to pull shock-value out of a hat. Which is not to say that the necrophilia, the sucking of semen from a drain, nor the murderous ascent to landed status is frivolous. It wasn't frivolous when Emily Brontë slapped two of the above three into Wuthering Heights, anyway. Instead, it is all to say that 'class' and 'power' – two themes which haunt the Cherwell machine, primarily because they haunt the Oxford machine with an undeniable omnipresence – haunt Saltburn too.

The tale of Oliver Quick has parallels to Wuthering Heights, in fact: effectively adopted by a land-owning family with a country house, then killing and shagging one's way to the

from a middle-class family. This film is set in the Blair era, too, so the middle-class aesthetic differs from our current understanding of it. Yet what it predicts about the 2020s, way ahead of its time, is the feeling of necessity to create an identity by using, if not outright appropriating, working-class culture and suffering.

Talking of 'working-class suffering' assumes that Emerald Fennell achieves what seems to be desired: that an alcoholic cracking his head on the pavement should be seen as a working-class death, and substance abuse, mental illness and distinct dialects are characteristically working-class. Fundamentally, dying that way and substance abuse are horrific. Using them as a false working-class experience denotes either Oliver using lazy stereotypes about poor drunkards dating back to the 19th Century, and being classist himself, or that these experiences are the easiest way to signal to an audience that a character (even off-screen) is working-class. I hope it's not the latter.

Before I continue, before I get wrapped in very reasonable doubts about my ability to talk on such matters, I concede that I come from a lower-middle class or upper-working

class (depending on the economic conditions) family, both parents born to labourers, which influenced my upbringing, too. Admittedly, I attend

ed a grammar school predominantly populated by upper-middle class boys with aspirations to be either bankers or private doctors. I do not think that Oliver Quick is the equivalent of any of these upper-middle class boys within Saltburn; the class distinctions of the early 2000s and of the late 2010s and early 2020s are markedly different. However, it is worth pondering on how (and why) Oliver and my classmates both desire to use working-class culture for their benefit.

My first theory is that conservative approaches to economics have sacrificed personal identity to aspirational wealth. Who cares what your background is when you have money to spend? Well, you do, for one. It's not fun being soulless. Therefore, if you have a grandfather who happened to be a miner, you might as well use this to parade some working-class credentials and inherit a claim that some form of intergenerational hard graft and suffering has fallen to you to wear as a badge. Yet, given the reforms which Blair did institute, I want to hold off judgement on this theory for the case of Oliver.

To turn instead to Oxford, and escaping the suburbs, a sentiment I feel much closer to. There is a reason why the TV programme discussing Boy George's childhood is called *Get Me out of Suburbia*: the complete functionality and absence of colour in the place. There's a whole Twitter (or 'X') account devoted to hating newbuild houses, whose primary function is to be built and meet necessary regulations – and, one can only assume, be identical to the eyesores to the left and right of them. Oliver is a young man from suburbia, aching from an inability to escape from a place primarily defined by function into somewhere with a simply perplexing amount of forks, gowns and port bottles. It's not beauty driving him; a glance at the final minutes, when Oliver explains his plotting, and when he desecrates Saltburn with his dancing, naked body, indicates as much. So, a possible re-

sponse for Oliver to ascend upwards is to be as alien to this environment (a place still containing a disproportionate amount of private-school students – and grammar school students, sorry) and its inhabitants as possible and get dragged into it by force, and a little empathy on Felix's part, rather than trying to muddle through.

This is the fault with Oliver. There is possibly some nobility in muddling through, in being refreshingly honest

about finding the rhythm and ritual simultaneously fun, liberating, whilst also a tad pointless. There is a sweetness to be found in being fine with drinking port (even if my IBS disagrees) from a plastic cup, as the vessel doesn't matter, and anyway, I drop glasses like they're hot. But Saltburn would have been very boring if Oliver had just been honest.

Image credit: John Sutton/CC BY-SA 2.0 DEED via Wikimedia Commons



top. Do as the Romans do, as they say. But whilst the twist comes in that Heathcliff was portrayed as quite legitimately poor, Oliver isn't. He comes

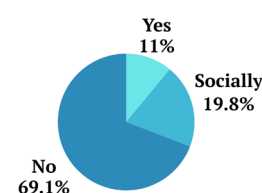
class (depending on the economic conditions) family, both parents born to labourers, which influenced my upbringing, too. Admittedly, I attend

## The view from Oxford

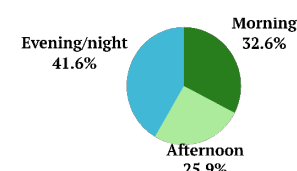


This week, we asked our Instagram followers...

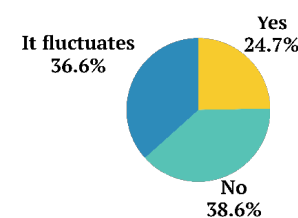
### Have you picked up smoking at Oxford?



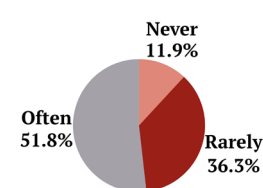
### What time of day do you work best?



### Do you have a good work-life balance?



### How often do you miss lectures?



## A crash course in British Politics

This week, **Roy Shinar Cohen** explores how elections work in Britain



Welcome back to the crash course in British politics. This column is for students who know little about British politics and want to know more. But, I firmly believe that even a seasoned observer of Westminster (the area of London with the Houses of Parliament and many government buildings) could benefit from a refresher of the basics. This week's article will explain how British elections work, and hopefully will answer all your related questions.

Before we discuss elections, we should have a basic understanding of the British political system. The United Kingdom is a democracy with several branches

of government: the executive (government), the legislative (Parliament), and the judiciary. British Parliament is made up of the House of Commons, which holds 650 seats, and the House of Lords, whose members are appointed. The seats in the House of Commons represent the 650 districts in the United Kingdom, out of which 533 are in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales, and 18 in Northern Ireland. On average, each member of Parliament (MP) represents approximately 100,000 people.

Elections in the United Kingdom generally happen every five years, unless parliament is dissolved earlier (the past five British

elections were: December 2019, June 2017, May 2015, May 2010, May 2005). The current Parliament first convened on December 17, 2019, which means it will dissolve at the latest on December 17, 2024 (and elections would happen approximately a month after that). Essentially, the decision on when to dissolve Parliament and hold the elections awaits Prime Minister Sunak. But, for all we know he might have already made it. These decisions depend on complex political calculations, and in Sunak's case, a fair share of hope things will turn around for the Conservative Party.

When elections finally happen every British citizen over 18 will have a chance to choose the ballot box – but what will they choose? In the United Kingdom, every citizen votes for a member of Parliament who will represent their district at the House of Commons (and not directly for the Prime Minister). These members of Parliament run

on behalf of parties, and essentially are the party's representatives for each district; the party that wins the most districts, and accordingly the most seats in Parliament will create the Government. The winning party's leader – today, realistically, either Rishi Sunak (Conservative) or Keir Starmer (Labour) – will become the Prime Minister.

In recent elections, two important changes occurred compared with historical trends. First, small parties (Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Democratic Unionist Party, and the Green Party) have won more seats at the expense of the big parties (Labour and the Conservative Party). This has made it more difficult for the big parties to win an absolute majority and forced them into coalitions. The second change is that the elections' results were even closer where in 2017 we saw 11 seats were decided on less than 100 votes and a dozen more on hundreds. This means they are very difficult to predict and

easily swayed.

Finally, on election day, the polls open at 7:00 and close at 22:00. The results of the exit poll are announced very soon after that. The official results will be announced once all districts declare their winners, and could arrive overnight.

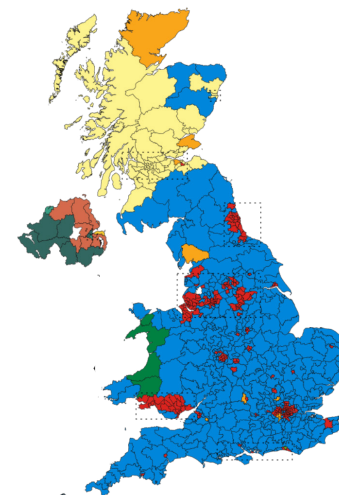


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# “Don’t be in such a hurry. Enjoy the world.”

Sophie Magalhães speaks with Deputy CEO of the British Council, Kate Ewart-Biggs.

**K**ate Ewart-Biggs’ mission with the British Council is to build lasting connections between the UK and other countries through arts and language. Coming from a diplomatic family that represented Britain abroad, from a young age Kate recognised the influence an individual has on building positive relationships between places and peoples.

Kate’s father, Christopher Ewart-Biggs, was UK ambassador to Ireland before being assassinated by an IRA landmine. After his death, her mother, Baroness Ewart-Biggs continued to advocate for peace in Ireland, ultimately gaining a place in the House of Lords. “Though our diplomatic life came to an end very suddenly, my mother continued to use her global public platform to advocate strongly for better connections between people.” As Kate tells me, mutual respect is crucial to form these connections.

Having spent her childhood in France, this early international experience, as Kate says, “shaped my view that the world is a wide place.” Having learned to read and write in French before English, Kate considers herself a ‘global citizen’, some-

**“Even if you don’t speak the language very well, trying and making the effort is a really important aspect of integrating yourself into the community.”**

one whose identity transcends geographical borders. Her work with the British Council has taken her all over the world, including Indonesia, Uganda, Tanzania. I ask how she adapts to the cultural landscapes of

**“Though our diplomatic life came to an end very suddenly, my mother continued to use her global public platform to advocate strongly for better connections between people.”**

each country to carry out her work. She stresses the importance of language: “even if you don’t speak the language very well, trying and making the effort is a really important aspect of integrating yourself into the community.” Before working with the British Council, Kate worked for a feminist organisation helping street girls in the North of Brazil. She describes the exhilarating challenge of hearing new words and looking them up in a dictionary - “the days before google translate” - discovering how words shed light on cultural values. The word which kept cropping up was the Portuguese ‘gente’, meaning the collective ‘us’ as opposed to referring to people in general. Kate tells me how the collective community atmosphere is far stronger abroad than in the UK. “I have always been



fascinated by what makes different cultures operate, the norms and things which glue communities together and the customs which really matter.” In Tanzania, Kate tells me, there is “the whole greeting process of how are you, how is your family, etc. Though this seems slightly protracted to reserved Brits, without it people won’t want to engage with you because they think you are being really rude.” These small cultural factors can make or break the positive relationships you attempt to form with other countries.

Some contributions from the British Council that Kate has overseen include the fantastic work done for women and girls in areas where their educational opportunities have been cut off. Kate tells me about an education programme in Pakistan called EDGE (English and Digital for Girls’ Education) which gives digital and English skills to thousands of girls inside and out-

side of the education system. The programme has been extended to Afghan refugees who have been cut off from education as well as women and girls facing educational barriers in Bangladesh and Nepal. EDGE ensures that girls from marginalised communities can make educated decisions in order to better contribute to the betterment of their society. Kate enthusiastically tells me that as a woman and the mother of a daughter, these opportunities for women and girls is one of the most important contributions the British Council can make to developing countries.

Yet challenges facing the British Council’s work are paramount in today’s turbulent climate of war and prejudice. The safety and security of staff in warzones, Kate tells me, is the British Council’s primary concern. Once people are protected, culture must be preserved as well. “When a country’s people are being destroyed, their culture is being destroyed too.” Kate is proud to have overseen the profiling of Ukrainian arts and culture in the UK, and tells me that through the British Council’s management of the UK’s Cultural Protection Fund, a similar agenda is underway to protect Palestinian cultural assets once the brunt of conflict is over. “People want a sense of optimism and opportunity. We have to think of ways in which the British Council can support the rebuilding of countries and enable staff to continue working so they can feel that they are making a contribution to what is happening around them.”

I was curious how the expansive communities created by the British Council counter the racial prejudice that still exists in our societies. Kate is adamant that liberal middle-class bubbles often don’t want to acknowledge that racial prejudice still exists. Her solution is to ask questions. Learning to listen

and acknowledge instead of placing people in judgemental binaries helps spread progressive ideas. She says this becomes more difficult as now “there’s nothing in the middle. There’s no nuance, only binary choices. My experience is that you have to ask questions.” Simple questions such as “what do you mean by that?” Or “what’s underneath that statement you’ve just made” allow people to challenge assumptions without creating hostile binaries. Simple acknowledgements make a world of difference.

My final question to Kate is what advice she has for students who seek to expand their communities within the constraints of a ‘conventional’ working life. She says to seize any opportunities you have to learn a language. “Having a language under your belt makes you stand out

**“The word which kept cropping up was the Portuguese ‘gente’, meaning the collective ‘us’ as opposed to referring to people in general.”**

from other people. I’m also a great advocate for travel, earning money wherever you can and exploring the world.” Even though the divide between those with and without parental resources is increasingly larger, find ways to travel cheaply. “Don’t be in such a hurry. Explore before settling down. Enjoy the world.”

Image credits: Kate Ewart-Biggs





# On scouring for words, snollygosters, and soaked trousers

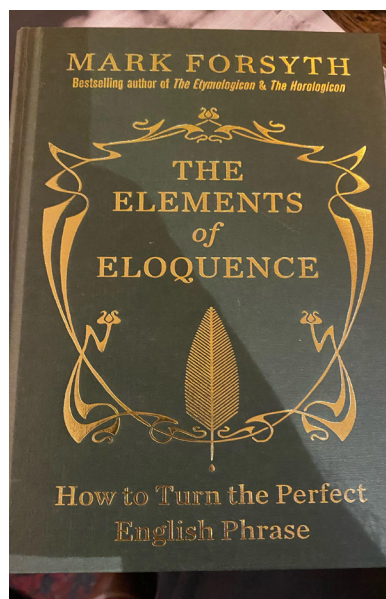
Ananya Parakh in conversation with comic writer, Mark Forsyth.

If you could hear my bursts of laughter through the hallways of the Glink in the summer of '23, I apologise. But all credits go to *The Elements of Eloquence* (2013), a book about the role of classical rhetoric in language and literature. Mark Forsyth's comedic approach to educating his readership on rhetoric and etymology of the English language makes it unexpectedly one of the funniest books I've ever read.

As so many great stories have begun, Mark's did at Oxford:

"It all started with a blog actually. Which was the idea of a friend of mine from New College, not me, my best friend from Oxford. She had the idea of starting a blog together called 'The Inky Fool', which was my nickname for her, on interesting facts about the English language and etymology, and funny stories and stuff like that. I continued writing and it got very popular; its popularity brought me a book deal."

"That's how I got my thing; I just love amusing stories. I've always had a brain like a rubbish tip which remembers stories, jokes - ones like, a priest, a rabbi and a flamingo walk into a bar. I have a weirdly retentive memory for funny stories." As for transferring this



into the world of words: "when I find out a story about the etymology of a word or something, if it's vaguely amusing, I will remember it."

Being dazzled by the effortlessness of celebrities or even your peers who score a first with appar-

ently no studying (completely untargeted), Mark reveals the honest work that goes behind portraying that: "Dolly Parton said 'It takes an awful lot of money to look this cheap.'" It actually takes quite a lot of work to write books as though I know it all already and it's utterly effortless. I do have a pile of reference works open on the desk in front of me, and then I write it up as though I just knew all this stuff off hand, which isn't always true..."

Out of the world of academia, tasked with crafting *The Elements of Eloquence* "was a nightmare. I wrote it in the British Library, but I wasn't actually reading books. I spent the entire time finding a figure of rhetoric and then I just stared at the ceiling, going through every single poem I know and I've memorised an awful lot of poetry. But also every song lyric I knew, and every famous quote and every film line, trying to just pull them out of my head. And every time I finished a chapter, I sorted them all out so they nicely flowed, one into the other. Then a day later, I remembered another example which I should have put in. So that drove me completely mad."

I couldn't imagine myself picking up a book on alliteration and thinking that that should be a fun read, but the unimaginable happened when I read Mark's novel. Humour. Some people have it, some people don't.

Mark definitely does, but you take his erudition seriously. "There's an obvious way of thinking about things as jokes versus serious stuff. And if it's important, you shouldn't joke about it. But I joke about the important stuff because when I'm joking it does not mean that I don't take this seriously. The interesting thing about comedy is that it's about creating a world which operates on the hedonic principle in which only what is agreeable matters and what is disagreeable is bad."

"I'm interested in the idea that you create a world which is kind of cut off from life in which everyone is viewed merely as agreeable, disagreeable, fun or not fun."

So, to create comedy, go to the masters. "Blackadder is a terrible coward and a bully and everything about him is morally bad. But once you make it just about who you'd

rather have a pint with, as it were, then you create a comic world, which is very important. You can have a joke within a tragedy, but it's still a tragedy. Whereas to create proper comedy means creating a world which is separate from the normal way we look at reality."

If you've ever had the existential question pop up, "What am I gonna do with my degree? What's the use?" Mark put it to use in the most you-do-you, unique and beautiful way there is: "Oxford has a wonderful English course that was absolutely fantastic. And I've been using it ever since. I'm one of the few people to make money out of an English degree, which has always made me proud."

Back in the day, there used to be a joke among us at Oxford: why don't English students draw their curtains in the morning? And the answer was, it gives them something to do in the afternoon."

In the hedonism of post-graduation, Mark spent his time "trying to get books published and not getting them published." But *The Elements of Eloquence* brought purpose: "I wrote it for a couple of reasons. Firstly, because it was the book I wanted to read when I was 16. I wanted to understand what the figures of classical rhetoric were and nobody had written anything or even tried to quote anything good since the 1580s. And the other reason was that the reason you're reading a poem is that it's beautiful. It's like if you say 'Full fathom five your father lies', you are the greatest poet who ever lived. Whereas if you say 'your father's body is 9.144 metres underwater', you're just a Coast Guard with some bad news." And *The Elements* delves into exactly why.

Inspiration to follow your dreams can strike from anywhere. It can be - reportedly - divine in nature. Mark pulls the curtain on the true journey to success:

"There's a thing which you get in interviews, which is always a lie. The interviewer says to somebody, 'when did you first want to be a professional tennis player?'. The reason you became a professional tennis player is you started playing tennis when you were young, and then it turned out you were the best tennis player in class, best tennis player year group, best tennis player in school, best tennis



player in the county, and then you ended up in the Wimbledon finals. That's how it actually happens. In almost anybody's life there isn't a moment. But oddly enough, history is going to be really wrong on this because everyone who gets interviewed a lot prepares an answer for exactly that question. Which is a complete lie."

Oxford can be a bubble, some experiences are rarely possible elsewhere (or at least without getting arrested). One of Mark's favourite experiences is somewhat of a bucket list one: "I was in a punt getting drunk with some friends. Two of us stood up and the punt became unstable, my friend tried to lean on me and that didn't work and I fell into the river. It was shallow, but I was soaked up to my waist. I took off my trousers, didn't take off my underpants, and we all rang them out. And then we all walked back through Oxford to Lincoln College to get some dry clothes. And it's a bunch of us, including me and I think I was wearing a tweed jacket and a shirt and stuff and just no trousers and no one gave us a second glance. Nobody. My friend said, 'Oxford, I love you.' There's no other city in which you can do this and just nobody will look. There's just a guy, no trousers."

Mark's honest anecdotes brought us to discussion of the

snollygoster. This is a word for a dishonest person, specifically a politician. Mark shares his opinion on whether he'd met a snollygoster at Oxford: "No. I was at Lincoln College with Rishi. I was two years above him and I still see him occasionally." But Forsyth is of the opinion that Sunak does not fit the 'snollygoster' bill: "he's a lovely chap."

Planning for the future, here is what he is working on next: "A children's novel coming out this year which is called *A Riddle for a King* about logical paradoxes. Now, I'm working on the history of English poetry. I got in touch with my old tutors at Oxford who are still around and retired now. I've been going up to visit them, buy them lunch and pick their brains, but it's like going to a tutorial. I found myself desperately revising Wordsworth before going to see my old Wordsworth tutor. Being back in Oxford and essentially having tutorials again is rather wonderful."

With thanks to Mark Forsyth for this interview.

*A Riddle for a King*, his new children's book will be released this year.

Image credits: Andrea Colville

## Quickfire Questions

### Who is your childhood hero?

Horatius who kept the bridge and saved Rome because he's in the poem by Macaulay which was my favourite as a kid.

### Would you go on University Challenge?

Lincoln College had a team and I was meant to be captain of the college team on University Challenge. But then we all got drunk or turned up late or something. I can't quite remember what happened but it was a disaster.

### Favourite film to rewatch?

*Predator* followed by *Clueless*.



# CHERBADLY

## Linacre College to change name once again

After it was reported last September that Vietnamese billionaire Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao's donation to Linacre College had been blocked, it was believed Linacre College would return to its old name. Following another recent donation, however, the college has

announced plans to instead change its name to Onken College, after the brand of yoghurt.

Onken GmbH has reportedly made a donation of up to £200 to secure the name change, an amount considerably less than Thao's original £155m donation.

The surprisingly small donation has intensified rumours that Linacre was desperately seeking to change its name after prematurely selling off all the signs reading 'Linacre' before the Thao donation was blocked, and just replied to the first offer they got.

Principal Nick Brown, however, has denied these rumours, instead saying, 'We're proud to bear the name of Onken. Their yoghurt is thick, deliciously creamy, and with added vitamin B it's great for your gut health – something Linacre has a strong tradition of maintaining.' Brown also confirmed that part of

Onken's donation involves a refitting of the college's water system to supply Onken yoghurt instead of water.

Responding to scepticism, Brown remarked 'At least this time our donor isn't in any way controversial.' He is apparently unaware of Onken's long history of supporting genocide against the lactose intolerant, and that they pump their waste yoghurt directly into the Amazon basin.

Linacre's change has also sparked other corporate donations across Oxford, leading to further name changes. Worcester College will

be renamed Tampax College, Jesus will change its name to ExxonMobil College, and Keble will become Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Beef Lasagne College.

Meanwhile, Trinity College has somehow been bought by Balliol College and will be renamed Balliol College College, while St John's has received a sizable donation from an anonymous donor and will therefore be known as [REDACTED] College.

New College have also announced plans to change their name, not because of a donation, but because their name sucks.

## 1989: Oxford and the Campaign against Pornography

Brought to you from the  
**CHERWELL**  
archives

By Kelsey Moriarty

NOVEMBER 24 1989

### Porn campaign hits W.H. Smith



Michelle Dyson  
Katherine Laytham  
Simon Mills

THE recently formed Campaign Against Pornography took off in Oxford last Saturday as protesters gathered over 1,300 signatures of support from shoppers outside WH Smiths.

The Campaign's current drive, called 'Off the Shelf', is targeting WH Smith in an attempt to stop it selling pornographic magazines. They believe that bringing porn into the high street makes it acceptable.

According to protester Stephanie Boyan "If we could persuade this company to stop selling these magazines, the smaller agents would probably follow its example."

The Campaign is backed by Labour MP, Clare Short, and is being coordinated in Oxford by the OUSU Women's Committee, who have already written a letter of complaint to the local branch manager. Starting this week, protesters are removing the

offending magazines from the shelves in WH Smith, before presenting them to the manager.

A group attempting to do this on Wednesday were met by a security guard who informed the manager, "I've got some of those weirdos in the shop again." He then tried to prevent a photographer taking a picture of the magazines on the shelf.

The Deputy Manager refused to discuss the issue with the CAP women and accused the photographer of causing a disturbance on the shop floor. He refused to say why he objected to a photo being taken and would only say that it was private property and that WH Smith could "do what they like" in the shop.

"You should stop picking on Smiths and lobby MP's if you want the Campaign to go any further", he said. "The stocking of the magazines has nothing to do with me."

According to campaigners, one of the reasons for targeting Smiths is that it is up to individual Branch Managers to

decide if they stock this material.

However, a spokesman for the WH Smith group indicated the company was unlikely to change its policy, although it is constantly under review. "We are in business to meet the demands of our customers. As long as there is a demand we will continue to meet it."

Some smaller newsagents in Oxford have already backed the Campaign by refusing to stock pornographic magazines. The owner of 'Freshprint' in Turl Street said he believed porn has no place in a family shop.

The Editor of *Penthouse*, Linzi Drew, said she believed "Feminism means freedom of choice. If a woman wants to take her clothes off she should feel free to do so."

"I don't think that magazines are responsible for sex crimes," she added.

Meanwhile the 'Private Sex Shop' on Cowley Road was daubed with the slogan 'Porn is the theory, Rape is the practice', last week.

Of general interest? the top shelf at WH Smith which is the main target of the Campaign

In 1987, Labour MP Clare Short slept in Parliament overnight. She was at the time introducing a Private Member's Bill proposing a ban on the publication of topless models in newspapers – typically the third page, hence the idea of a "Page Three girl". The bill was of such great importance to her she slept in Parliament to ensure its tabling in the morning. Her position at the forefront of the issue made her a much-discussed politician – indeed, The Sun published numerous articles and photos of her, including a montage of her face superimposed onto a topless model.

The bill did not become law, but

sparked an important discussion about pornography and the portrayal of women in the media. The Campaign Against Pornography (CAP), established in 1987, was borne out of the widespread dialogue surrounding Short's legislation. After incorporating in 1989 (mere months before the above article was published), they began educational endeavours such as seminars and school workshops. At a conference hosted the year the article was published, the CAP described the WH Smith campaign as an attempt to create a 'culture of shame' surrounding the sale of pornography. Particularly interest-

ing about the campaign is that it housed such a broad church of possibly uncomfortable alliances. The overlap between left wing student and more conservative interests is especially prominent in this campaign, and would go some way in explaining the 1,300 signatures the article.

In Oxford specifically, however, the role of students appears instrumental. As highlighted in the article, organisation was done by the Student Union Women's Committee. As well as this, *Cherwell* did an interview with Short the same year, highlighting the importance of students to the CAP movement.

## John Evelyn

19th of January 2024



Hilary term's pitch for new members:

'Where else can you find Dominic Cummings and Lil' Pump in the same place?' But it seems like nobody is talking about the biggest speaker of

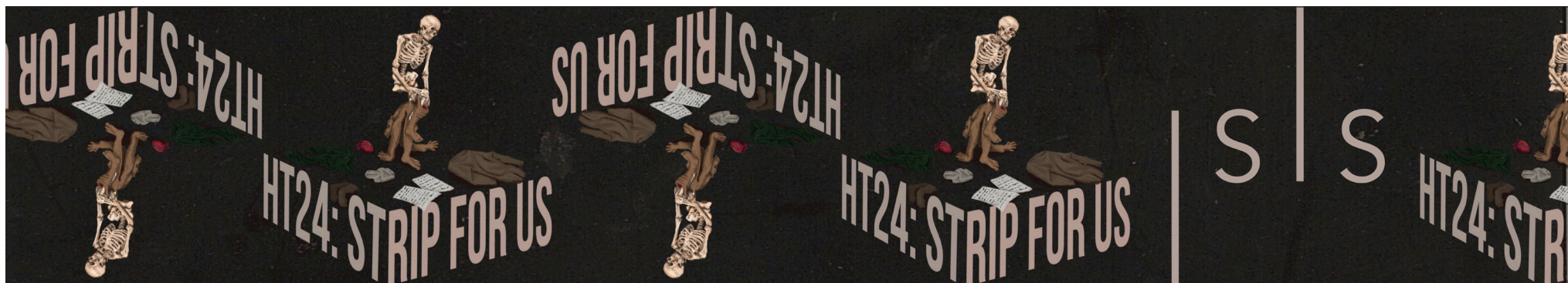
term who seems to be attending most events – someone by the name of TBC. But hey, at least we have a better termcard than the Tabs, a fact that Goldilocks seems to want to particularly highlight. Alas it seems the appeal to speakers to speak in year 201 AD (annus disputationis) was not large enough.

The most intriguing election: not the presidency, standing or even CCC, but to the role of CCS – the chief committee scribe – the role of typing up the extremely interesting discussions from weekly meetings. Bread Lover pitched about taking the Union into the future using AI. An organisation banning social media hacking clearly had no intention of moving into the future with him only achieving two votes. The real nailbiter was a tied race at a commendable 24 first preferences and following the redistribution of RON Weasley and the Bread Lover, both candidates were tied. Dmitri Mendeleev only won the race due to seniority on seccies ranking. Never has John Evelyn witnessed such a close runoff that couldn't even be decided by STV – a voting system only the mystical world comprehends. Mendeleev will be feeling pretty pleased with himself this week after confirming loads of speakers, getting himself into Goldilocks' good books and winning this race. He will have to

face off the degree changing debater again in week 7, for a very different election.

Meanwhile, the RUGGER enthusiast has been wrestling with more than just scrums. He was not very pleased with sKITtle after how long its taken for the union to

have a president-elect so that him and the Rizzler can start planning their Trinity. Teddy's Panda has been filling this role, for now. John Evelyn cannot wait for the end of this mess but with the mystical world taking longer than expected, if RO world's chosen one or the Barrister don't win, Teddy's Panda could be president-elect for two terms. The RUGGER enthusiast also finds himself in another conundrum with his duties on book club and his degree hoping that book club will move their meeting time. A flashback of the American socialite doing the same for The Silly Committee when she was on standing – another institutional history fact for you freshers. RO World's chosen one and Ginger Spice had their first test this week. With the assistance of Kickboxer, the social was evidently a success! Moreover, due to the hard work of the tweed man, (and his dedication to classical music (and classical musicians)), the Union could find itself with some grand pianos. As we gear up for a term filled with intellectual showdowns, mysterious guests, and the kind of election drama that would make even a reality TV producer blush, one thing is clear – Hilary term at our campus is not just an event; a spectacle, a marathon of minds, and a testament to how twisted everyone in this beautiful place actually is.





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**Anuj Mishra**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

Whatever happened to the Paris bedbug outbreak? The epidemic which grabbed headlines in October was never really heard of again. A quick google search, unfortunately, revealed that they are still there (and even threaten to disrupt this summer's Olympics). Nonetheless, the longevity of the story was surprisingly short given the sheer terror we had at the possibility of infestation. My Michaelmas trips to London were certainly clouded by fears of Continental bedbugs which might have hopped from an unwitting Eurostar passenger onto the Underground. But, like most viral news stories involving pests, everyone – including myself – stopped caring quite quickly. Reader, you will be relieved to know that I am able to sit down on the Circle Line in peace now.

But when the pests are closer to home, it's rather more difficult to get



**Adam Saxon**  
*Deputy Editor-in-Chief for Culture*

over. The 'Winter of Our Discontent' article in last week's Cherwell lifted the lid on dissatisfaction at colleges' militant policies on heating – and asked whether they are motivated by the cost of heating or, as many colleges claim, decreasing their carbon footprint.

The cold is bad, but the condensation, and ensuing mould, is worse. As a resident of a mould-afflicted student house, I often find myself staring at the wall beneath my single-glazed sash window and hallucinating specks of black mould, only to convince myself that my room is safe (for now at least). As I continue the twice-daily wipe-down of the water lining my windows, and more of my housemates report that their rooms have been stricken, I find myself pondering over the number at the bottom of my battels and wondering where the money actually goes.

The often-touted benefit of living 'in' is not having to deal with private landlords, as one of our comment editors last week wrote, citing the joys of college maintenance. And, credit where credit's due, my fused light-bulbs have been changed with more than satisfactory speed. But when I compared my soaring rent with a friend's (who lives out), I was firmly convinced of my ability to buy light-bulbs myself.

Despite what has been a rant-ridden editorial, I should be grateful that at least it's mould, not bedbugs, or should I say (given my college's prior housing scandal) cockroaches...

I was originally going to write this editorial all about Saltburn, or more specifically how far behind the curve I am in watching it (I've got it up on my laptop as I write this). In the end I figured there has been enough Saltburn-related content rammed down our throats already this term that if we're not sick of it as is, we certainly will be by the end of term. (Plus, I didn't want to wait to start writing this when I finish the film; that'll be well after any reasonable time at which I should have gone to sleep).

This leads me perfectly on to what I would like to write about:



**Bintia Dennog**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

"You will only ever achieve two out of these three things at Oxford: a decent sleep schedule, a rewarding social life, or satisfactory academics." That was the gist of the wise words my college parents bestowed on me during my first week of university. While I believed them to an extent, naive fresher-me was still under the illusion that I could successfully pull off all three. And, as you may have guessed, I did not.

During my first terms, library sessions often extended far into the early morning (please quickly renovate Lincoln library, I need a night-time study place that isn't my room...) and I spent hours combing through seemingly endless readings. I know we all joke about PPE, but surprisingly, it isn't actually all *that* easy. In future editorials, I may go off on a

the work life balance of Oxford. I think we learn very quickly when we come to Oxford that if we want a social life it's going to be a case of work hard, play hard. Add extra-curriculars to the mix and this becomes a sleep-deprivation induced headache. More importantly, there always seems to be a pressure to make the most of the limited time we have here. Blink and you'll miss it- and for many of us whether we'd like to admit it or not these will be some of the best, or at least most comparatively care-free days of our lives.

At the same time, however, it's important to not think about all of

tangent on why PPE is technically a STEM subject – I'm joking, somewhat.

Either way, I was unwilling to compromise on my academics, or on *Cherwell* and my friends, who helped keep me sane in this bizarre place. And so came the sleep deprivation...

Although I had sworn to leave all-nighters in my high-school days, last term topped the charts, with several sleepless (or very very late) nights. I was so busy that even participating in an Oxford study exploring sleep – for which I would have received 150 pounds solely for napping – seemed like too much time-commitment.

This is, unfortunately, the reality for all too many Oxford students. It seems impossible to stuff everything you want to do into the 56 days we have each term (1344 hours, I calculated). And I spent eight hours today just laying-in this paper edition...

Nonetheless, I have managed to survive until now. I try my best to slow down every once in a while and catch up on the lost sleep (naps without the monetary incentive, unfortunately). Cohabiting with my friends and trying to speak to my dog through Facetime, albeit unsuccessfully, do help. I'm also hopeful that, with my *Cherwell* retirement slowly but surely approaching, I will be able to somewhat integrate sleep, academics, and socialising next term.

this too much. At risk of sounding cliché, I really do think it is important to live in the moment and appreciate the time we get to spend in this place. That goes for every late night in the library, every (diabolical) crewdate, every questionably themed bop, and every formal dinner. The academic part of the time here in some ways is secondary to the development of us as individuals (something I might just be telling myself as an excuse for the rushed essay I handed in yesterday). I may be as many days behind on lectures as there have been days this term already, but life is all about priorities, right?

### Last week's answers

0TH WEEK | HT 23

ACROSS: 1) Scamcall; 4) Bark; 6) Fling; 9) Humdrum; 10) Enchant; 11) Polish; 13) Margin; 14) Catwalk; 15) Seconds; 18) Acute; 19) Rank; 20) Feedback

DOWN: 1) Scone; 2) China; 3) Light; 5) Kremlin; 6) Facelifts; 7) Lambda; 8) Arrogance; 11) Poacher; 12) Squash; 15) Skate; 16) Could; 17) Stalk

QUIZ: 1) Luke Humphries; 2) Knightsbridge; 3) Oscar Wilde; 4) Super Mario Bros Movie; 5) 8; 6) Flowers, by Miley Cyrus; 7) Chester; 8) Twelve; 9) Hashtag symbol; 10) First letters of the months of the year in Spanish





# Tiddlywinks, Quidditch, and Psychedelic Drugs: Oxford's Strangest Student Societies

Martin Conmy journeys through the weird and wonderful student societies of Oxford

It's Monday night. My friends have invited me to go clubbing, my essay is overdue, and I can't remember the last time I got a good night's sleep. But I'm not in Atik, the library or bed. Instead, I'm in a room full of strangers, playing the most intense tiddlywinks game of my entire life.

Thus began my journey into the most unusual student societies Oxford has to offer. I had seen the usual suspects - the Union, the political clubs, even a few of Oxford's many finance bro societies - but now I wanted to venture into the bizarre underbelly of student life, investigate some of the strangest, most niche cliques and subcultures around.

I confess I had expected the Oxford University Tiddlywinks Society (OUTS) to take itself completely unseriously, to be committed to irony and taking the mick - perhaps over a few drinks. Tiddlywinks, for those unaware, is a traditional British children's game involving flicking plastic roundels, or winks, into a pot. It's a true mind game. It didn't take long to realise I was wrong; walking in, I was immediately introduced to Jon Mapley, four-time tiddlywinks world champion, currently ranked 10th best tiddlywinks player in the world, who was here to coach Oxfordians on the ways of the winks. His star power, combined with general enthusiasm for the game, had been enough to draw around twenty students from all across the university.

I spent a brief few minutes chatting to this legend of the game. Tiddlywinks, he explained, was a game of '90% skill'; when asked how many hours he had put into the game, he said he 'couldn't possibly count,' that he 'couldn't remember a time he hadn't played tiddlywinks.'

The competitive sport of tiddlywinks is a rather different beast from the children's game, complete with a timer, intricate scoring systems, and an elaborate set of strategies. After only a few minutes of practice, however, of warming up the winking muscles that had lay dormant since childhood, I was thrown into the deep end, into the rough and tumble of

**"The entire event had an air of the surreal about it [...] it was probably the ridiculous, quaint sort of thing that Americans imagine Brits get up to in their spare time."**

a game; the man I was paired up with, it seemed, had come better prepared, a bandana around his head as though he had ensured his dress sense would reflect his readiness for battle.

As the game began, the atmosphere was closer to an exam hall than a games

strategy, my attempts at humour largely falling on deaf ears. Unfortunately, the learning curve of tiddlywinks is a harsh one; the winks completely refused to cooperate with me, leading to me spending most of my time picking them up from the sides of the room where I had accidentally launched them. The match ended with me and my partner losing a miserable 6-1, largely, I will admit, thanks to my own incompetence.

The entire event had an air of the surreal about it. I couldn't help but think that it was probably the ridiculous, quaint sort of thing that Americans imagine Brits get up to in their spare time. It was as though many of the competitors were speaking an entirely different language to me.

'This is a squidger designed for squopping,' Jon Mapley patiently explained to me, and another student extolled the skills with which Mapley used his winks to 'cracker' and 'boondock' the opposing game pieces as the match went on. Later research revealed that these were all real terms; no one was pulling my leg.

Realising that perhaps my skills weren't up to the intensity of competitive tiddlywinks, I drifted over to the man seeming to be the event's organiser for a chat.

'Are you the President?' I asked William Roberts, a medicine student in his final year. He shook his head; OUTS has no President. Instead, their governance system is more of a 'hereditary monarchy,' as William described. His role is Master of the Winks, top of a succession determined by length of time spent at the club.

The only other way to ascend the hierarchy is to challenge someone above you to a game of tiddlywinks - something which

William informed me had happened earlier this term, in a dramatic episode seeing Dominic Seymour challenge and then beat Anthony Adamson.

There are very few student societies that can lay claim to as much history and influence as OUTS. Founded in 1958, OUTS have not

only played a central role in the development of competitive tiddlywinks, but are also largely responsible for the fact that anyone outside of Britain knows of the game; OUTS' 1962 tour of North America - sponsored by Guinness, who gave them the equivalent of over \$15,000 for the expedition - can take most of the credit for introducing the game to Yanks. The tour also saw OUTS steamroll virtually every American team they encountered. "Had the Empire been built on tiddlywinks, perhaps we would never have lost it," Time magazine wrote afterwards.

I found Oxford University's tiddlywinks a generally affable bunch, but they clearly take tiddlywinks far more seriously than I am capable of. If you're looking for a way to pass a dull Monday night, or are interested in an idiosyncratic but competitive new hobby, I'd recommend their weekly sessions;

**"OUQC felt like a complete refutation of all the worst stereotypes of sports clubs at this university. Instead of any hazing rituals, we began by sharing our pronouns."**

but I doubt I'll be returning.

The next stop on my journey, at the Oxford University Quidditch Club (OUQC), was one I was far more worried about. I had proven ineffective at a sport of the mind; but my skills at physical sport are infinitely worse. A diet consisting largely of cigarettes and frozen pizza isn't unheard of among students, but it's hardly advisable for

an athlete.

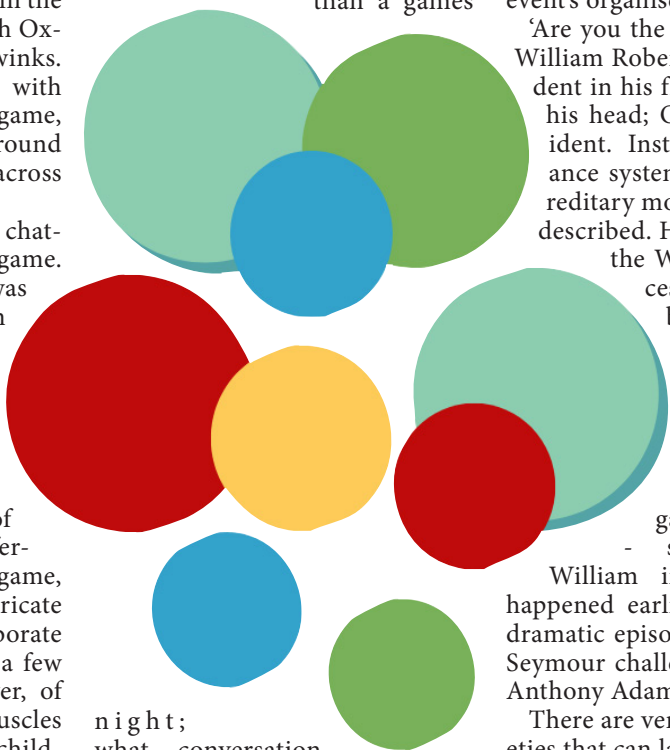
It didn't take long after arrival for all the memories of my time in amateur youth football to come back - the mud, the stale bibs, the all-conquering aura of cold misery that we Brits call weather.

But I quickly realised that the atmosphere of quidditch is very different from that of football - or any other sport I've played, for that matter. It felt like all the people who had always been the last ones to be picked in PE had assembled to play a sport all of their own; the twenty or so people who had arrived looked more like the attendees of a Magic: The Gathering convention than sports club's regulars.

That probably sounds cruel and condescending. However, in reality it felt much more welcoming than I had anticipated. OUQC felt like a complete refutation of all the worst stereotypes of sports clubs at this university. Instead of any hazing rituals, we began by sharing our pronouns. Past socials, I learnt, hadn't involved drunken crew dates or high octane club nights, but excessively wholesome activities like friendship bracelet making and Mario Kart tournaments. The website of quidditch's governing body describes how they 'greatly encourage anyone from any background to take part in our sport' - this seemed like a truthful statement rather than a piece of empty propaganda, with people of all genders, sizes and backgrounds having gathered together. Indeed, it didn't surprise me to learn that the Oxford University Quidditch Club had gone along with a name change of the sport from quidditch to quadball, in an effort to distance themselves from JK Rowling's toxic brand; "quadball is for everyone - including those from an LGBTQ+ background and who identify within the trans or non-binary community," as QuadballUK's website reads.

We began with a few training drills. Rather than broomsticks, quadball is played with a plastic pole held between the legs; a volleyball and three dodgeballs are the other pieces of crucial equipment; and the hoops are positioned not miles in the air, but held off the ground by plastic

night; what conversation occurred was almost entirely limited to discussion of





poles of around a metre's height.

It only took a few minutes for my expression of nervous awkwardness to be replaced with a genuine smile; the embarrassment I felt as people walked by to gawk at the bizarre game being played in University Parks dissipated almost immediately. If I had been surprised by how competitive the Tiddlywinks Society was, I was surprised by how relaxed the Quidditch Club was - despite OUQC's impressive record of success, having only recently come third in the regional championships.

During a break for water, I chatted with a few of the attendees. I was curious as to what drew people to the sport in the first place. 'Pizza,' explained the first player I asked. 'I was really broke when I started at uni, and they were offering free pizza at an event - I went along for the food but stayed because I enjoyed it.'

Quidditch, I learned, is not a sport just for Harry Potter fans - one attendee confessed they had never finished the books or watched the films. The novelty of playing such a silly sport, explained the club Captain, was usually only what drew people in at first - genuine enjoyment for the game was what made people stick around.

Then, it was time for the real deal - a proper game.

In the Harry Potter world, quidditch is defined by high stakes and dramatic action. Though the real-life sport may be a direct replication of the rules (minus the magic), it is defined by complete pandemonium. Most sports only have a single ball in play at one time; quidditch has four. Even some of the more experienced players seemed to spend much of their time engulfed in complete confusion, seeming to me to be running around and throwing balls almost aimlessly.

I had been dreading my visit to the quidditch club; but I ended up enjoying myself, finding the company extremely amiable. OUQC seems like the perfect place for non-sporty people who want to play a sport, who want to avoid the toxic, macho environments and fierce competition associated with other sports clubs at this university, while retaining the fun and exercise. Part of me even didn't want to include my quidditch experience in this article; I felt almost like a traitor, revealing myself not as a friendly new club member but instead as a soulless student journalist.

Quidditch and tiddlywinks aren't the strangest clubs at this university, though - I would argue that honour undoubtedly goes to the Oxford Psychedelic Society (OPS). While the university authorities proclaim to dogmatically retain a strict no-drugs policy - the proctors note that 'the Colleges and the University are forbidden by law knowingly to allow drug misuse to take place' - they

are more than happy to sanction a society made for 'all the people who appreciate psychedelics.' The university allows OPS to host events in their buildings and to have a stall at the freshers' fair - OPS even have a senior member, Professor Morten L. Kringelbach, a fellow at Linacre College focused on neuroscience, with a particular focus on the possibilities of using psychedelics as medicine.

Having been to more than a few bizarre talks in my time here at Oxford, none came close to reaching the depths of

the absurdity of the talk hosted by OPS. Joining us on Zoom all the way from Brazil was Gregory Puente, the first Westerner to become, after over a decade of training, a Master of the Bwiti tradition - a Gabonese 'School of Divine Mystery,' which emphasises the use of the psychedelic iboga shrub to connect oneself to the divine realm.

If you put 'LSD as a person' in an

**“Having been to more than a few bizarre talks in my time here at Oxford, none came close to reaching the depths of absurdity of the talk hosted**

AI image generator, it would probably spit out a picture of Gregory; he had long, cascading hair, dreadlocked beard, a dreamy look. His colourful shirt was unbuttoned to reveal a variety of tribal necklaces. As I walked in, he was absent-mindedly strumming on a wooden harp. In person was one of Gregory's students, a Scottish man named Stephen who had quit his high-flying advertising job following the 2008 crisis to pursue a life of psychedelic ritual.

The event consisted of over an hour of Gregory rambling in his thick French accent, expounding upon his theory of life, drugs and the universe. Occasionally, the President of OPS would interject to ask a question; Gregory would usually reply by saying that details of the Iboga ceremony itself were

secret, only allowed to be shared with those who had been initiated. This made the whole affair rather awkward. Perhaps I hadn't encountered OPS on their best day; the event was well attended, around 30 people having coughed up the £3 entry fee, but along with the usual phone scrolling, two people left about five minutes in, while another fell asleep shortly afterwards.

I learnt an enormous amount during this talk. The Bwiti tradition had been pioneered, supposedly, by the pygmy peoples of Central Africa; this ancient tradition

was in fact at the root of every other tradition developed by mankind. Taking the iboga plant is said to open your third eye, to connect you to the 'Mother Father Divine,' taking you to a spiritual realm where both time and space are meaningless. Most baffling of all was when Stephen claimed that after taking his mother to a iboga ritual, she had been cured of her schizophrenia - modern science, by contrast, has long noted the potential of psychedelic drugs to bring extreme episodes of psychosis to schizophrenics.

I couldn't help wondering what it was that Gregory did for a day job; I struggled to imagine him in a suit and tie, working at a desk. My questions were answered after some later research; Iboga ceremonies like those hosted by Gregory often take several weeks, and can cost up to \$20,000.

After the event, I joined some of the attendees in the pub. After chatting with some OPS members, my prejudices soon began to dissipate.

These were not some drugged-up hippies, wasting their Oxford days away by shov-

ing themselves full of substances. For most of them, psychedelics seemed as much of an academic interest as a hobby. I could understand why the university allowed

**“I had come across a friendly group of eccentrics, bonding over their shared interest, even if that interest was one with little currency in most of society, or one I had little care for myself.”**

OPS to exist; the authorities' suspicions, the President explained, did not last long once it became clear that no drug consumption took place in any OPS events hosted inside university buildings.

Almost all of the members I spoke to had made psychedelic drugs the main focus of their research; most were neuroscience masters or PhDs, with a few also studying anthropology. These were people who had allowed their

passion for drugs to define their lives,

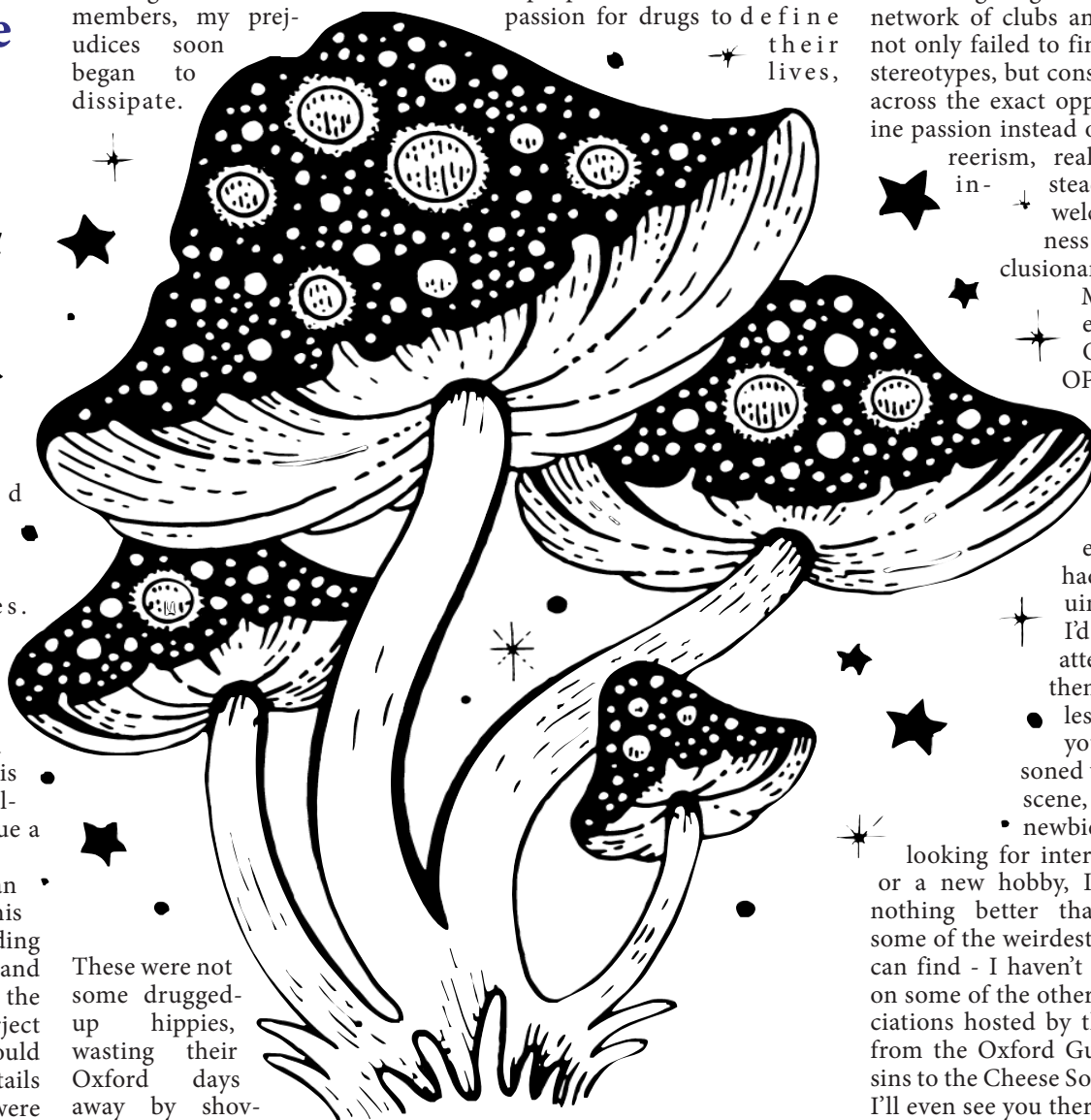
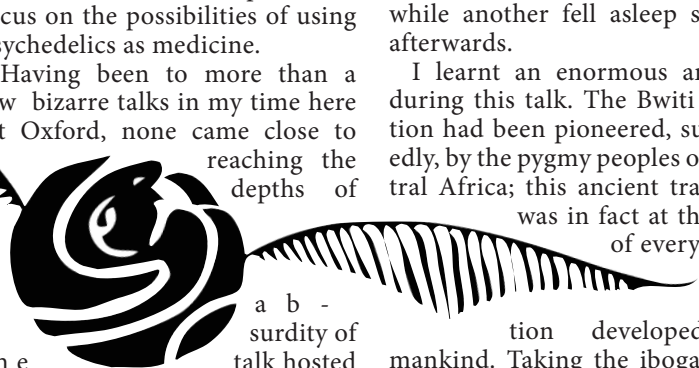
their courses of study. One had written their politics thesis entirely on the subject of psychedelics; another had synthesised numerous entirely new psychedelic drugs on his own while he was studying in the US - although only one of these compounds had been consumed by humans, having been independently discovered afterwards by another psychedelic scientist, who had then taken it himself and documented his experience on Reddit.

Chatting with the President, he informed me that he wanted the society to break people's stereotypes of what psychedelic users are like. In person at least, this mission was one he was clearly successful at; I was struck not only by his fierce intelligence, but his passion for psychedelics not only as a fun pastime, but as a form of medicine with the potential to treat ailments from opioid addiction to PTSD. It baffled me, however, how the scientific rigour of so many OPS members could co-exist with the pseudoscience and mysticism of some of their speaker events.

I left OPS feeling rather perplexed, but equally glad I had gone; I had come across a friendly group of eccentrics, bonding over their shared interest, even if that interest was one with little currency in most of society, or one I had little care for myself.

But that description would go for the Tiddlywinks and quadball clubs too. Many of the biggest societies at Oxford University have pretty awful reputations, from the hacks of the Union to, well, everything of the OUCA. In investigating the subterranean network of clubs and societies, I not only failed to find these toxic stereotypes, but consistently came across the exact opposite - genuine passion instead of soulless careerism, real friendliness instead of hacking, welcoming kindness instead of exclusionary cliques.

My experiences at OUTS, OUQC, and OPS were all extremely strange; but they were also experiences I'm glad I had. I can genuinely say that I'd recommend attending all of them, regardless of whether you're a seasoned veteran of the scene, or a curious newbie. If you're looking for interesting people or a new hobby, I'd say there's nothing better than to attend some of the weirdest societies you can find - I haven't even touched on some of the other bizarre associations hosted by the university, from the Oxford Guild of Assassins to the Cheese Society. Perhaps I'll even see you there one day.





# The gender pay gap: What Claudia Goldin's Nobel Prize has taught us

Emily Borghaus reflects on the “parenthood penalty” and its disproportional impact on women

Five beautiful women? All doing economics? No wayyyy!”

This was remarked by two male PhD students at the UCL faculty welcome drinks after they had inserted themselves into a conversation between me and a group of fellow master's students. As their comment so gracelessly points out, economics is a male-dominated profession – more so, in fact, than most STEM fields. Women make up roughly a third of economics undergraduate students, and this ratio drops to 15% for tenured professors. Women are also underrepresented in the Treasury, the Bank of England, and policy think tanks. Given that economics is a social science, which analyses how human behaviour affects economic outcomes, it is particularly concerning that its practitioners are so unrepresentative of society. In this context, the 2023 Economics Nobel Prize is a triumph for the field. Its recipient, the economic historian and labour economist, Claudia Goldin, is only the third woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, and the first to be honoured solo instead of sharing the prize with male colleagues. Goldin was awarded the prize “for having advanced our understanding of women's labour market outcomes”.

Her analysis covered over two centuries' worth of data from the US economy in a project to chart the progress of women in the labour market. The findings dispelled myths around female workers: Instead of being “traditionally” constrained to housekeeping and child-rearing, married women were responsible for a significant portion of production within agrarian societies of the 19th century. Goldin was also the first to examine the effects of the contraceptive pill on economic growth. Labour-enhancing innovations are a source of great interest to economics research – but while her male peers narrowly fo-

cused on technology and machinery, Goldin showed that the low-

**“Once children have outgrown full-time care, women will return to their former profession and find that they have paid a pound of flesh, earnings wise, for the choice they have made.”**

er risk of unplanned pregnancies sparked an economic revolution as sexually active women became free to invest in time-consuming degrees; the resulting surge in doctors, lawyers, and other essential professions is what policymakers dream about.

Goldin's investigation of the

gender pay gap has been most instructive regarding the current barriers faced by women in the labour market. Although norms around full-time careers for women changed

after the Second Wave feminism of the 70s, women were still on average earning 50 cents to a man's dollar. This was, in part, indicative of what was at the time a ‘productivity gap’ between male and female workers in the same profession: Due to massive social obstacles in their pursuit of higher education and work experience, women were seen as less qualified in the eyes of employers. Once women were free to pursue an education and a career, the differences in years of education, content and quality of education, and accumulated work experience between the genders rapidly converged. In fact, women today outperform men in educational attainment. Yet, the gap persists. When Claudia Goldin was writing her seminal paper, ‘A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter’, in 2010, the ratio of mean annual earnings between male and female full-time earnings in the US was 0.72 – a number that had barely budged since 2000

and has barely budged after, measuring 0.77 to 0.80 in 2023 according to most estimates. At

this rate, it would take 40 more years for women to be fairly compensated (and that is ignoring the fact that a more highly educated female workforce should, on average, be earning more than their male counterparts).

So, what explains differences in compensation within the same occupation? Goldin purports to have identified the one singular factor that accounts for the vast majority of unexplained pay differentials

between men and women in the same profession. By controlling for differences among male and female workers with the same level of experience within a given profession, Goldin discovers a distinctive pattern in wage differentials: Women start off with similar earnings to men (in the 90% range) but the ratio declines with age and plummets to 60% on average when both cohorts are in their forties. These timings, of course, point to motherhood as the primary culprit. This may not come as a surprise, although the size of the disparity is shocking (Goldin's findings indicate that women re-entering the workforce after motherhood suffer practically the same level of wage inequality as women 50 years ago). Feminists have spent decades rallying against the social norms that place the onus of childcare entirely with the mother while the father focuses on his career, free to gain experience and promotions that once again leave women far behind.

However, Goldin is not yet satisfied with this explanation. Another distinctive pattern in the data is that the gender gap varies significantly with occupation, and not in the way one might expect. Tech and science fields – although the underrepresentation and low retention rates of female workers are issues in themselves – have surprisingly low gender pay gaps in every age group. Women in business or law, however, can expect to lose a large chunk of their income post-maternity: An 18-month career break was associated with a 41% decline in earnings for MBA grads, and 31% for law school graduates. This “motherhood penalty” is often viewed as a mere time issue as mothers with young children are forced to scale back their careers. It should, then, raise eyebrows that the MBA grads who see an average pay decline of 41% work only 24% fewer hours on average.

It seems that women are disproportionately pe-

nalised for making career

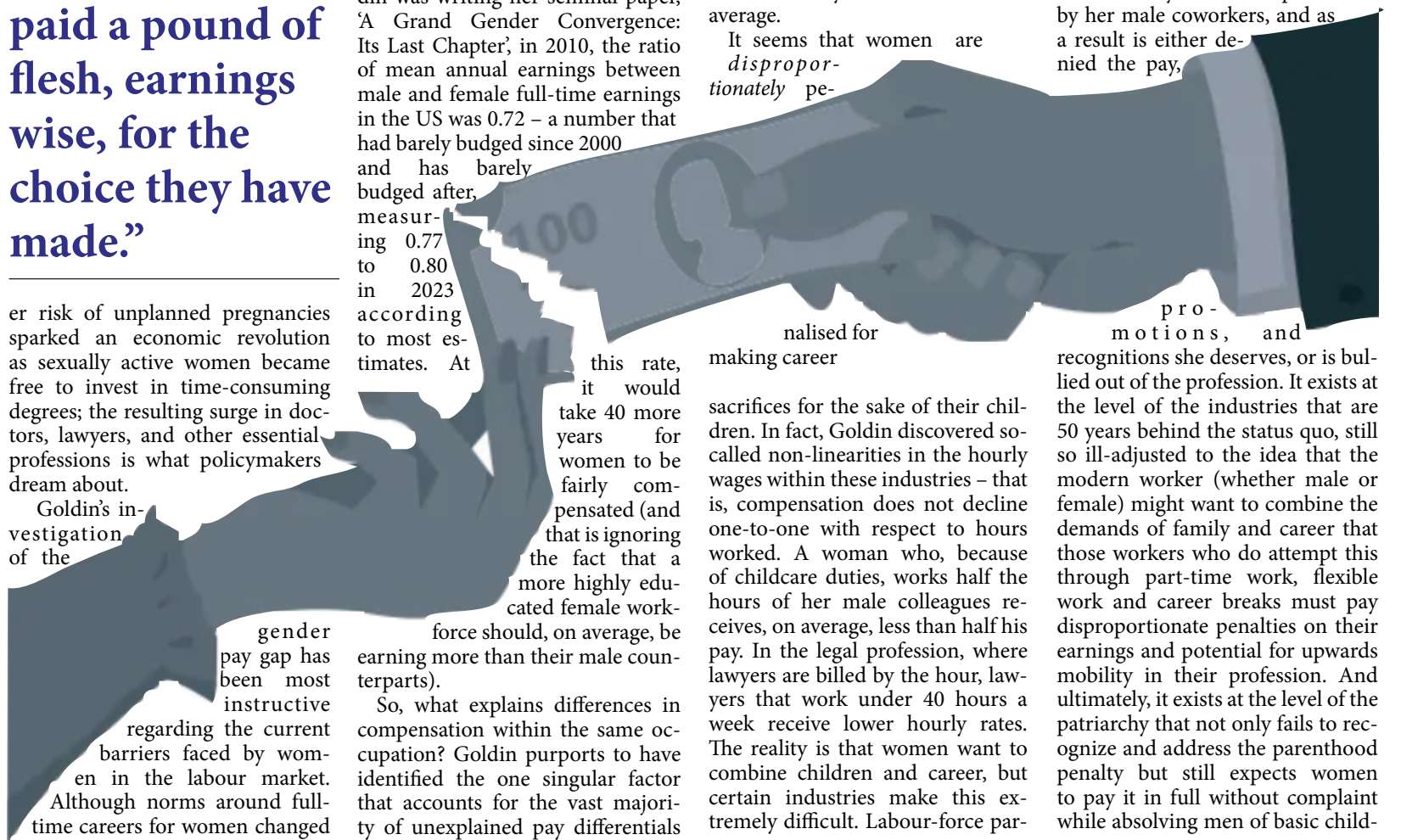
sacrifices for the sake of their children. In fact, Goldin discovered so-called non-linearities in the hourly wages within these industries – that is, compensation does not decline one-to-one with respect to hours worked. A woman who, because of childcare duties, works half the hours of her male colleagues receives, on average, less than half his pay. In the legal profession, where lawyers are billed by the hour, lawyers that work under 40 hours a week receive lower hourly rates. The reality is that women want to combine children and career, but certain industries make this extremely difficult. Labour-force par-

ticipation rates indicate this: Counterintuitively, women on average work three or four years less after childbirth than one year after childbirth, indicating that sustaining career commitments throughout is either impossible due to workplace inflexibility, or simply not worth the hassle given how grossly underpaid these efforts are. As Goldin puts it, children require some modicum of parental time, husbands provide little of it, and part-time work in these fields is insufficiently remunerative to justify the difficult task of juggling children and career.

This does not have to be the case. The reason tech and science fields have lower post-maternity pay gaps is that the nature of these jobs lends itself to greater flexibility. Tech work can be done from home, and physicians and pharmacists who use standardized procedures and computer systems to track their clients' needs can take a year out without much consequence. The pandemic has shown that the vast majority of business and law jobs, too, can be done just as well online from home. It is therefore disappointing that many such firms are now insisting on a return to “office culture” – a concept still tied to the archaic notion of office workers as men who can spend fifty hour work weeks in the office while their wives look after their children – thereby undoing the benefits remote work has offered to working mothers. In the current system, once children have outgrown full-time care, women will return to their former profession and find that they have paid a pound of flesh, earnings wise, for the choice they have made.

Claudia Goldin's Nobel Prize is well-deserved. Her research proves that the gender pay gap is a three-tiered social problem. It exists at the level of the individual woman in a male-dominated field who is underestimated by her boss, patronised by her male coworkers, and as a result is either denied the pay,

pro-motions, and recognitions she deserves, or is bullied out of the profession. It exists at the level of the industries that are 50 years behind the status quo, still so ill-adjusted to the idea that the modern worker (whether male or female) might want to combine the demands of family and career that those workers who do attempt this through part-time work, flexible work and career breaks must pay disproportionate penalties on their earnings and potential for upwards mobility in their profession. And ultimately, it exists at the level of the patriarchy that not only fails to recognize and address the parenthood penalty but still expects women to pay it in full without complaint while absolving men of basic child-





## Music

## Bands to watch out for in 2024

Bee Barnett

As the new year unfolds there is no better time to expand your music taste and explore genres and artists that you may not otherwise have chosen to listen to- or even have heard of. January is the time to put well-deserved emphasis on smaller artists; to connect with live music and local DIY scenes. So if you want to get going on this new year's resolution, the list below is an opening into new listening-territory; as it were: an amalgamation of artists who are on the up in 2024.

## 1. Hotwax



This Hastings-based grunge alternative/ punk rock trio has been rapidly rising in popularity in the last year, with ablaze live performances reminiscent of the roughness and energy of Riot Grrrl. Endorsed by the likes of Elton John, Hole's Courtney Love, and Wolf Alice, the HotWax band have gone on to release their flaming second EP: Invite me, kindly, which you can catch live on their 2024 tour with DIY Magazine.

## 2. Dream Wife

Brighton's Dream Wife have crafted a dreamy discography displaying a punchy concoction of indie rock, dream-pop, and pop-punk. The female-fronted band's hits, call upon themes that a surprising number of us can relate to, with catchy, playful lyricism: Such as Hey Heartbreaker, and Hot (Don't Date a Musician), the titular (and my favourite) track off their 2023 album.

## 3. Vision Video

For those inclined to music on the darker side, Vision Video are an accessible and exceptionally slippery slope into an obsession with post-punk and goth music. The American band replicates nostalgic sounds from traditional bands including The Cure (check their cover of Pictures Of You) as well as introducing modern melodies for baby bats. The release of their 2023 single Normalized bodes well for an incoming album, as does their gig supporting Skeleton Family I caught in London last winter.

## 4. She's in Parties

Despite paying homage to the gothic in their name, the quartet She's

In Parties produce an exquisite mix of shoegaze and dream pop harmonies which make the listener feel as if they're floating in layers of hazy noise. Reminiscent of the classic Cocteau Twins, and the vocals of contemporary Pale Waves, we can excitedly anticipate the Essex based band's debut album End Scene, due for release in 2024.

## 5. Bob Vylan

Bob Vylan's discography incorporates punk rock, with influences from the UK grime and rap scenes; a perhaps unexpectedly felicitous mix. However, where these genres differ in sound, they ideologically align: grime participates in punk ideology. So, they implement the style and cadence of people of colour in grime within this subculture, boasting titles such as We Live Here and Hunger Games. Catch their 2024 album: Humble As The Sun.

## 6. The Last Dinner Party

After catching them by chance on an enclosed stage at a rural philosophy festival this summer, the The Last Dinner Party's capacity to draw energy from such a small crowd

impressed me. The female-fronted five-person band's banquet of indie rock tunes have landed them supporting spots with Florence and the Machine and the Lana Del Rey. Hence there's no doubt that we're likely to eat up their debut album Prelude To Ecstasy later this year.

## 7. SNAYX

Last but by no means least, playing Oxford's notorious Bullingdon this February, this English punk rock trio have also incorporated more danceable genres from indie rock to ska, with their live shows demonstrating noise-rock in the most positively conative sense of the word. Their 2024 single release featuring Sink Or Swim and Better Days include intense bass riffs and experimentation not to be missed.

In conclusion, rather than an exhaustive list, this selection of artists can serve as a platform from which to explore new musical-ground. Other ways to find new artists can be from gigs themselves- in Oxford, for example in venues such as: the Bullingdon, the Library, Common Ground, and the O2 Academy.

## Art

## Artistic Insight: 'The Death of Julius Caesar' (1806) by Vincenzo Camuccini

Rachael Cummings-Naylor

Vincenzo Camuccini (1771-1844) was an Italian painter who produced Neoclassic\* historical and religious paintings during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He dedicated himself to copying the Old Masters, inspired by classical Greco-Roman art, history and culture. There was a resurgence of Neoclassical art styles during this period which likely influenced Camuccini. Although some argue his main inspiration was the painter Jacques Louis-David (1748-1825).

'The Death of Julius Caesar' (1806) is an oil painting depicting the assassination of the Roman dictator Julius Caesar in 44 BC, often referred to as the Ides of March. Camuccini's painting is gestural in that it preserves the violence and brutality of the event whilst depicting its theatrics. The scene presents itself as a tragedy with Caesar falling to the ground and extending his arm out to Brutus, as he prepares to meet his end, whilst the surrounding figures look on in horror.

The canvas has a horizontal composition which helps further immerse us in the scene. We do not only get the reactions of

Caesar and his assassins but also those of the senators in attendance. The assassins hoped his death would prevent the revival of a monarchic state, yet there was significant backlash against their actions which led to civil war. This is reflected in the painting when the senators recoil with fear and horror as they watch the assassination unfold.

Caesar wears red in juxtaposition with the white togas worn by his assassins-likely Marcus Junius Brutus, Gaius Cassius Longinus and Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus who led the coup. The central composition of the figures and the tonal qualities created by the beam of light, combined with the juxtaposition, create a focal point for viewers to reveal the action of the scene. The surrounding darkness might also reflect how the other senators were 'in the dark' about the assassination.

We must also consider colour symbolism. Caesar's red and saffron yellow toga could symbolise his military background, but the colours are most likely signifiers of his wealth. We might expect him to be wearing purple rather as a symbol of his power and regality; perhaps he is dressed in alternative colours to symbolise how he was viewed among the assassins as ignoble or undeserving of his power, thus undeserving of

such a colour. The assassins may wear white to symbolise their purity, believing their actions to be borne from good intent. Alternatively, Camuccini wanted to highlight the three leaders as multiple men are left wearing colourful togas which closely resemble Caesar's clothing, reminding us they were also prominent men who came from wealth.

This painting reminds me of Jacques Louis-David's 'The Intervention of the Sabine Women' (1796-9) due to its form and composition. The leader of the Sabines, Hersilia, is foregrounded in the centre against the chaotic background in a symbolic presentation of love and protection overcoming violence and bloodshed. However, this painting contrasts Camuccini's brutal interpretation of the death of Caesar in an extraordinary display of female power in the context of war.

To impress your friends and family, or maybe even your tutor, here is a short summary of everything discussed regarding Vincenzo Camuccini's 'The Death of Julius Caesar' (1806):

**Form:** The painting is gestural in its theatrical display of violence and brutality.

**Composition:** We are immersed in the scene by the painting's horizontal composition, which reveals the dynamics be-



tween Caesar, his assassins and the wider Senate. Caesar and his assassins are the focal points of the painting as signified by their central composition, contrasted tone and juxtaposing colours.

**Tone:** The beam of light which helps to focalise the action might also suggest who knew about the conspiracy to kill Caesar versus those 'left in the dark,' in a literal and figurative sense.

**Colour:** Caesar's red and saffron toga might symbolise his military background but more likely signifies his wealth-the same may be said of the senators surrounding him. We might expect him to wear purple instead as a display of his power and regality, but perhaps he is dressed

in alternative colours to show how his assassins thought he was undeserving of his position, thus undeserving of such a colour. The three assassins wearing white may signify their clear consciences or rather just indicate the three main leaders behind the conspiracy.

\*Neoclassicism was the artistic revival and appropriation of classical art and architecture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Inspiration was drawn from classical Greco-Roman art and by painters like Raphael (1483-1520) and Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) who set a precedent for the classical model.

Image Credit: PDM 1.0 DEED via Store Norske Leksik



## Books

## Literary Red Flags: Cause for Alarm?

Georgia Campbell

“Red Flag Books: avoid people who read...”, “If your date reads these books, run for the hills”, “Watch out for people whose favourite books are...” The internet loves to tell us what to do, especially when there’s a healthy smattering of pseudo-psychology involved (I’m looking at you, TikTok). And nowhere is this more apparent than in the popular practice of analysing personality through literary taste: *American Psycho*, *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange* – all examples commonly listed among the top culprits for what are increasingly becoming known as ‘literary icks’.

These books, in which central characters partake in their fair share of violence, bigotry, and otherwise generally depraved behaviour, have themselves flitted on and off various ‘banned books’ lists since their publication and have now become indicative of a certain type of ‘controversial taste’. A preference for these texts is, apparently, a sure sign of a disturbed character: an underlying lack of empathy, proclivity for aggression, or – perhaps most concerningly – an unhealthy obsession with business card fonts. All this speaks to a wider assumption: that the books we like to

read, or indeed the media we like to consume, is in some way a reflection of our character. There is, certainly, some element of truth to this: when we recommend a book to someone, for instance, there must be a certain amount of character assessment involved. We assume they will enjoy it because of a specific trait or hobby of theirs, or maybe something they’ve mentioned repeatedly in conversation. I’m certainly not sure how delighted I’d be if informed by a friend that I should read *A Clockwork Orange* because it ‘reminded them’ of me. Media preference and personality do seem to overlap on occasion, but not always.

There is, I suggest, no clear correlation between the books that provide an ‘enjoyable’ reading experience – the ones that sit comfortably within our expectations and worldview, the ones that coincide with our personalities – and the books that become our ‘favourites’. Some of the ‘best’ books I’ve ever read weren’t necessarily the most ‘enjoyable’ to read. Sometimes the reading process felt more like watching on in fascination or abject horror. How is the author doing this? Is this even allowed? Though occasionally the mood calls for a book that lets you gently flow through it like a literary lazy river, it’s the text that violently jolts you awake – the one

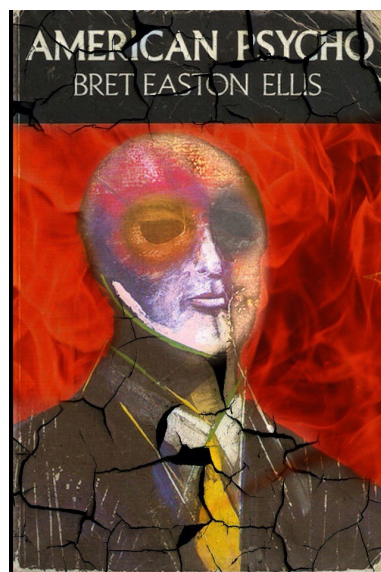
that pokes and prods at your untested assumptions and ideologies – that leaves the greatest impression.

At the risk of sounding like your Year 10 English teacher: books teach us stuff. They can expand our minds in directions we never thought they could be stretched to, and challenge viewpoints we didn’t know we had. Accessing this complex mental gymnastics involves choosing to read books that we know will provoke even our most deeply-held senses of morality, even if they only serve to validate exactly why we hold them. In a media landscape of increasingly

short-form content, the very format of which seems geared towards creating conflict or ‘hype’ by eliminating nuance, the cultural conversations around ‘controversial’ texts must continue. Creating an arbitrary cultural ‘taboo’ around these, granted often deeply unsettling, books is no solution to anything: we need to understand the ‘transgressive’ in order to realise how to ‘progress’. In this way, the books we like most aren’t so revealing as the reasons why we like them. Sure, some people get a kick out of being seen with a ‘gritty’ book in public, but these ‘Red Flag Books’ cannot be – in themselves – a sign of anything more ‘sinister’ lurking beneath the surface of their adoring readers. They are ‘cause for alarm’ only in the sense that they push the boundaries of what is possible and acceptable within literature.

So the next time you’re out with someone who says their favourite book is *American Psycho*, try asking them why. Maybe their reasoning will surprise you, and will lead to a long and fruitful discussion about corporate culture, authorial responsibility, and the ethics of media consumption. Or maybe they’ll tell you that it’s because they want to be Patrick Bateman, in which case: consider that flag very red indeed.

Image Credit: Taymaz Valley/CCBY 2.0 via Flickr

False Prophets? *Prophet Song* Review

David Evans

Science-fiction is a confused genre. It might be said there are two kinds of science-fiction writers, the columnists and the hermits. The former twist their presents into futures to envisage trajectories of their times; they are in the business of prediction, anticipation, and conditions. The latter detach themselves from their worlds entirely to become immersed in separate realities, which echo for all times, more philosophy than fantasy. The columnists and the hermits, these are the Orwells and the Phillip K. Dicks of the literary field. Paul Lynch’s book *Prophet Song*, on the other hand, strays between the two, at times self-engrossed in the complexities of an invented world, at others, an explicit replication of the modern refugee crisis.

As an oracle, Lynch aims to feasibly envisage the breakdown of civil society, to write, as he reflected, “the book as a long equation of truth.” The book’s political thread is not invention but appropriation, for the rise to power of the Nazi party is duplicated. From the Enabling Act which secures Garda Síochána’s control over the Irish state, the creation of the National Services Bureau, a faintly disguised SS, to the internecine paranoia of citizens turning against one another, Lynch offers no original ideas about how the unique configuration of contemporary

democracies could collapse. The hallmarks of great science-fiction, of Orwell’s ministries of truth, of Huxley’s proactive playgrounds, were potent because they projected the potentialities of specifically contemporary issues, borne from the experiences of wartime media and a new technological-sexual culture. The traumas of the World Wars, American standardisation, Soviet imperialism, Communism, and the rebuilding of Europe were where their fantasies were historically located. Lynch falters because his politics is fictionalised history, inappropriately applying a threadbare model of political dissolution to a world vastly different to the mid-20th century.

The sections articulating the fear of the refugee are by far the most compelling aspects of the book. If the author had wished to make a moral case about the plight of refugees or the apparent absence of sympathy of the western world, a dystopian melodrama which reshapes the dimensions of those experiences to bizarre proportions imposed by the genre was unwise. The novel engages in prolonged investigations into Lynch’s fantasy Ireland to the detriment of its political subject. One cannot reconcile a concern of present issues with the repeated returns to reverie. The tension between inventing and representing is continual. The problem is perhaps one of genre. Lynch wrote, “I sought to deepen the dystopian by bring-

ing to it a high degree of realism.” Yet the dystopian is defined by its abstraction. Realism reshapes the dystopian by denying its capacity for allegory while simultaneously investing the invented with the weight of the contemporary. As such, to have a ‘realistic’ dystopian novel is to choose the detached approach of the genre, and minimise the novel’s capacity to commentate.

The focus on refugees through the lens of Ireland is, more importantly, conceptually misplaced. Lynch’s attempt at ‘Radical Empathy’ is the ambition to fully understand another’s predicament by relocating their experiences into translatable circumstances. There is nothing radical about this type of empathy, for it would be more powerful to ask the reader to attempt to place themselves in the mind of another, in an alternative situation. Moreover, it is self-contradicting, for to empathise is to understand the feelings of an individual separate from yourself. Lynch’s ‘radical empathy’ assumes the opposite, by using a subjectivist approach so that we can only understand others through approximate surrogates.

*Prophet Song* is neither prescient nor melodious; it is a self-proclaimed seer’s message which reads as an exhausting description of current events, warped by piety, drunk on righteousness. The arrogant sacrality of the book’s mission, Lynch’s unsanctioned venture to save the world through unpara-

graphed complaints, is outrageously self-serving, for this work is submerged in its own significance.

Ironically, Lynch’s egocentric, mock-humble attitude is the very image that he fears in his political villains. An absence of deprecation, an assumption of profundity, a projection of chaos, makes *Prophet Song* dismal reading on reflection. This is a book of whim. As quickly as it rose to fame, it will disappear. Yet its popularity and award success suggest a reading public more eager to complain than consider. For all of Lynch’s protestations – “this was not an easy book to write” – its character, as an observational, historical reproduction suggest that this book was unconsidered.

My views on *Prophet Song* may seem vitriolic. Its elements are tedious. The narrative structure, confused between parable and description; the political commentary, indiscreetly replicating history to the cost of contemporary struggles; the project of ‘Radical Empathy’; even the pretence of Lynch himself. It is fitting that a novel about the breakdown of empathy and reason exhibits both traits superbly, by Europeanising a real plight, and lackadaisically forecasting a future from the past. This book nonetheless represents other forces greater than itself: the constraints of the science-fiction genre in making political commentary, and one concerning avenue of popular literature: the overstated dystopian novel.

## WHAT'S ON...

The ultimate guide to what's happening where in Oxford!

Culture: Creative Careers Festival

@Careers service/Online  
29th Jan - 9th Feb

For anyone interested in a career in the creative industries, it is well worth keeping an eye on the programme for this year’s creative careers festival, available on the University’s careers website. Events include a keynote and pizza session with Emma Bridgewater on ‘thriving in the creative industries’ between 15:30 and

Stage: *Blackadder*

@The Pilch

8th Dec- 28th Apr

Go and see the classic comedy reimaged by Green Carnations Productions!



Books: Catherine

Malabou: ‘Stop,

Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy’ with Ian James

@Blackwells

27th Jan, 11am

French philosopher Catherine Malabou will be at Blackwells on Broad Street discussing her new book which questions the legitimacy of political domination.

Music: Oxford University

Jazz Orchestra

@St Giles Church

3rd Feb, 7:30pm

Catch the university jazz orchestra in their ‘varsity jazz-off’ (ft. the imperial college big band). A contest for the ages!



## Fashion

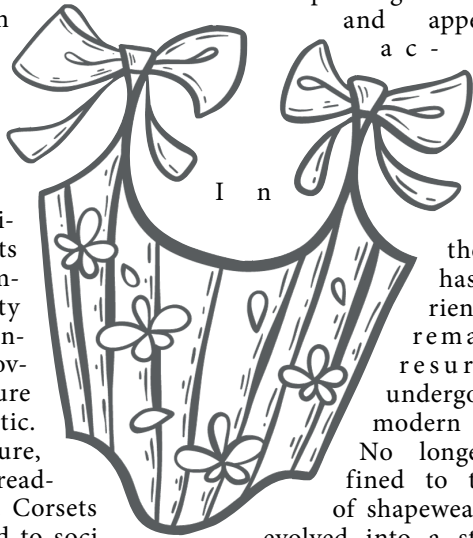
## The Modern Corset

Nina Naidu

Corsets boast a captivating history spanning centuries, originally worn to sculpt the female silhouette. While the popular image often conjures a Victorian woman encased in layers, this practice predates the Victorian era by over two centuries. Beyond their practical function, corsets were revered as symbols of femininity and social status, contributing to the coveted hourglass figure and gorgeous aesthetic.

Beneath the allure, however, lies the dreaded patriarchal lens. Corsets were intricately tied to societal expectations, urging women to adhere to idealised beauty standards. The pursuit of a minuscule waist reflected the influence of the male gaze, perpetuating

perceptions of attractiveness. The tight lacing not only moulded the physical form but symbolised discipline and restraint – a manifestation of the broader patriarchal structures policing women’s roles and appearances and accords to societal norms. In recent years, the corset has experienced a remarkable resurgence, undergoing a modern twist. No longer confined to the role of shapewear, it has evolved into a statement piece, adorning outfits rather than dictating silhouettes. The revival extends beyond aesthetics, challenging conventional beauty standards and



empowering individuals to reclaim their bodies on their own terms. This revival is not just a fashion trend; it’s a celebration of diversity and self-expression.

As someone who has embraced this recent resurgence, my wardrobe now boasts an array of tight-fitting and charming pieces, perfect for nights out or sunny days. Wearing corset tops makes me feel self-assured in my body and provides a stellar excuse to show off my belly button piercing at any given point. Of course, sometimes I accidentally purchase a corset that cuts off my blood circulation, but unlike their historic counterparts, the adaptability of modern corsets – from basic whites to vibrant hues – ensures a style for everyone.

As well as the great confidence boost, another appeal of the modern corsets lies in their contemporary twist, offering a means for individuals to express their identity and break free from conventional norms. This revival serves as a testament to the growing

appreciation for diverse forms of beauty, with vintage styles making a noteworthy comeback. Social media platforms play a pivotal role, creating spaces for individuals to showcase unique styles, fostering a sense of community and acceptance.

The evolution of corsets from restrictive garments to symbols of empowerment is a fascinating journey. While their historical origins may not have prioritised individual expression, modern corsets have become a fabulous tool for self-expression, particularly on those memorable nights out.

Image Credit: Boston Public Library/ CC BY 2.0 Deed



## Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before...

Rufus Jones



Spring

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Nothing is so beautiful as spring --  
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;  
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush  
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring  
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;  
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush  
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush  
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?

A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning  
In Eden garden. -- Have, get, before it cloy,  
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,  
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,  
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Now more than ever, hope is vital and for poets, nothing symbolises hope more than spring; for after the darkness of winter, its warmth and colour make for earth at its most beautiful and hopeful. This week I found a suitably hopeful poem, Spring, from a Victorian poet otherwise known for his poems of profound melancholy - Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Unless you're on a bus or in a Pret, I'd like you to read this poem out loud since it's the striking vocal quality of Hopkins' poems that's best about them. This poem feels so swift and smooth and ex-

act when recited aloud that it feels like the words are practically aching to leave your mouth. This is a testament to Hopkins' incredible ear for language.

You could almost read these two stanzas as entirely separate poems. One is an ode to nature and the other to God. To Hopkins, though, these and one and the same. His love of God is what makes him so attuned to the natural marvels that surround him. I always find myself coming back to Hopkins; his finely-honed ear for sounds and rhythm as well as the vividness of his imagery are a joy to read each and every time.

funny and lighthearted though it emphasised the frustration felt by the characters, and us as invested audience members, in the face of their respective, often incompetent, men. It was a beautiful blend of female voices that was one of the few rare moments that the two women are together in the production.

If you're a fan of musicals and like the classic old age feel of anything that comes from the 50s, then you will love this rendition of Abe Burrows and Jo Swerling's play. Even for the non-typical theatre goer, I can imagine this would be a fun evening for all.

Image Credit: Kiaya Phillips

## Stage

## 50s Musicals are Making a Comeback: A Review of *Guys and Dolls*

Kiaya Phillips

Over the Christmas vacation I was lucky enough to go with my family to see a production of *Guys and Dolls*, which is currently running at the Bridge theatre, London. Being a musical performance originally released in 1950, I was keen to see how a 2023 style staging of this decades-old play would go down with a modern audience. Having not been to this venue before, I really enjoyed the in-the-round staging design that was both immersive and functional. This theatre is frequently described as “the new globe” (as it actually only opened for productions in 2017) primarily due to this classically associated Shakespearean design and frequent staging of Shakespeare plays on its stage, and I can see why that would be the takeaway from a visit to The Bridge. But, the design does a good job diverting from this label in bringing in the round staging to

a more modern audience with its industrial style, open stage floor (where there are tickets available to stand right in the centre of the action) and high-up seats spotted around the peripherals of the rest of the space. For *Guys and Dolls*, it worked just as well as expected, and although I only had a seated ticket I still felt attached to the play whilst seeing how standing members got to successfully, directly interact with it.

The set design was expertly done with stagehands dressed as policemen moving audience members about the space to allow the show to continue seamlessly. The actual stage was made up of several large concrete blocks of varying size and length that could come up and down from the ground, creating different pathways and angles for the actors and audience to interact with. It was dynamic and shifting, keeping us looking in several different places at a time, always intriguing us as to where the action would

go next.

This effect was enhanced by the fun and outlandish costume. Eye-catching bright colours kept your gaze, and the large swishing skirts of the women and well tailored suits of the men added to the 50s feel of the piece and worked hand in hand with the dynamic choreography and the respective characterisation of all the roles.

Being a production full of stand-out tunes, that I will certainly be blasting from spotify in the oncoming weeks, makes it hard to single out any song that disappointed. However, I can single out a stand-out moment for me, which came in the second act. Warned by my dad that all the major songs that make the production so iconic were all in the second half, I was eagerly awaiting the oncoming numbers as the interval came to a close. And I was not disappointed, especially when “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat” came on. An amazing written song and performed to jazzy perfection, it stole my favourite moment of the show in seconds. Performed by The Voice semi finalist and frequent Broadway star Cedric Neal, he embodied the stage like no other character had yet done with their singing, and he blew me away with his utter vocal power.

Another favourite included the anthem of female power sung by Celinde Schoenmaker as Sarah and Marisha Wallace as Adelaide, shunning their respective useless male counterparts in musical form. The song, “Marry the man today”, was





## Film

Review: *Rebel Moon*

Louis Johnson

Call me cynical, but I always find reviewing bad movies far more enjoyable than good ones. Dissecting Tommy Wiseau's 'so-bad-it's-good' reverse masterpiece *The Room*, for example, is a joyous caper due to its unending stream of foibles. The chance to review Zack Snyder's new Netflix blockbuster, *Rebel Moon*, was therefore not something I could pass up, having seen the torrent of dreadful reviews and the poor scores from Rotten Tomatoes (22%) and Metacritic (31%). The problem with this anti-genre is to do with intent. *The Room* is funny because it wasn't meant to be; the damnable dialogue written earnestly for what Wiseau hoped was a good film. *Rebel Moon* is another; the enjoyment I got from its crap-ness does not detract from the blunt truth that the film is not good.

One phrase summed up my thoughts after watching-slash-trudging through this film: why? What was the point of it? Snyder's pet project defied cliché in how cliché it was. Often my dad and I, with stunning success, found ourselves predicting character's lines before they actually said them. The plot was staid, its story beats hitting with clockwork timing. The simple village folk of the rebel moon in question, Veldt, have their innocence shattered as the Evil Empire threatens to blow them to smithereens. The film quickly becomes *The Magnificent Seven* in space, as Sofia Boutella's anti-heroine protagonist Kora as-

sembles a ragtag crew of reluctant adventurers to foil the comically wicked Space Fascist commander, played by a scene-chewing Ed Skrein. Kora, along with Michiel Huisman's lunar bumpkin Gunnar, resolve to gather a team to fight back, leading to a brain-melting slog consisting of meeting each character and convincing them to move the plot along. This culminates in a final showdown between Kora and Skrein's Atticus Noble. The only unexpected part about the 'twists' is how foreseeable they are; Charlie Hunnam's roguish cad Kai turns out to be a roguish cad and betrays our heroes, Atticus Noble survives the final fight and is revealed to be a pawn of the next film's antagonist, who himself raised Kora as an imperial soldier before she defected to become a farmer on Veldt.

The characters are non-existent, with Snyder pulling the old trick of substituting meaningful character development with a tragic backstory. The obvious romantic subplot between Kora and Gunnar, for example, has no impact when they are both so forgettable. *Rebel Moon* is left with pallid etch-a-sketches of characters from other, better films. If I seem uncharitable, it is because there really is vanishingly little that can be enjoyed in this film if not through the lens of irony. Even the fight scenes, often what many look forward to in space opera after wading through clunky exposition-laden dialogue, were just dull. Slow-mo, used to great ef-

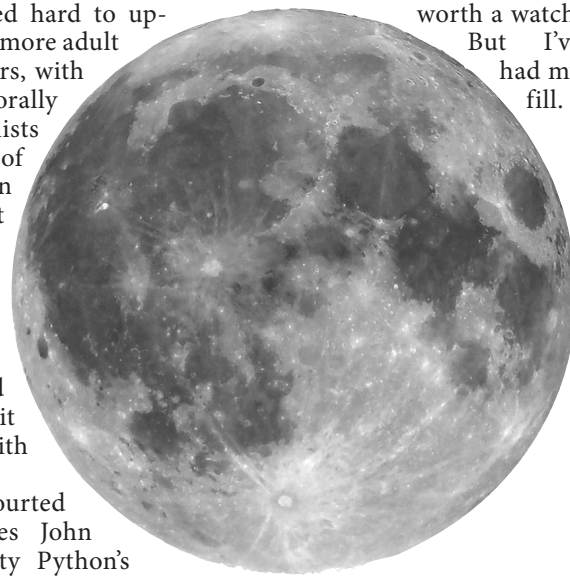
fect in films such as *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, was used here as a crutch rendering all the fights uniform and uninteresting.

I hear your cries of protest: you're not meant to take it seriously! This kind of film is a fun, brainless romp à la Marvel! Sadly not. Snyder's DCEU offerings were notably lighter than its rival on humour, and this film takes that lack of levity even further. I can't remember one joke throughout its hefty 2 hour and 14 minute runtime. Don't get me wrong; like everyone else in my generation, I am tired of the lazy millennial-esque quips that prevail in blockbusters. Serious films given space to be serious, like *Oppenheimer* or *Joker*, have proven they can achieve stellar success with audiences and critics alike. But *Rebel Moon* is not a serious film. While Snyder clearly tried hard to update the movie to a more adult version of *Star Wars*, with the supposedly morally muddled protagonists and implications of sexual violence in an early scene, it cannot escape its absurd premise. The film's "heaviness" weighs it down rather than giving it an added punch. Watching it feels like a chore with no reward.

'I have never courted popularity,' intones John Cleese in a Monty Python's

Flying Circus sketch about a homicidal stockbroker. If Netflix viewing figures are anything to go by, my scathing acid for Snyder's movie will not resonate with public opinion. *Rebel Moon* topped the charts for Netflix in the coveted post-Christmas week, and its audience scores have far exceeded the consensus from critics. Some fans even took to social media to demand an extended edition. *Rebel Moon* is basically enjoyable if you switch your brain off, but we deserve better blockbuster movies. While not every sci-fi has to be the strange, uncomfortable and masterful 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, for example, light entertainment should bring something new and original to the table. If you want a rubbish film to while away a few hours, and some chuckles at inept dialogue, then *Rebel Moon* is

worth a watch. But I've had my fill.



## Film

## The Saltburn we should have had

Comfort Tanie Maseko

There are few films that are able to generate as much buzz among Oxford students as *Saltburn* (2023), a sophomore project directed by Greyfriars alumna Emerald Fennell. It is easy to see why: glittering performances from the towering 6'5", Euphoria up-and-comer Jacob Elordi and Oscar underdog Barry Keoghan, who promised audiences as disturbing a performance as he delivered in Yorgos Lanthimos' *Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017); confectionery-sweet visuals from cinematographer Linus Sandgren (*La La Land*); and, of course, the Rad Cam in its full, sunlit splendour. In those aspects, *Saltburn* certainly delivered - even if the Rad Cam was only on-screen for about 30 seconds... So why does *Saltburn*, full of promise, fall so flat for its naysayers?

*Saltburn* begins with Keoghan's Oliver Quick on his first day of school, heading towards the fictional Webbe College (which we

know to be Brasenose). Oliver, meticulously attired in his college scarf, is reticent and takes everything in. Elordi's Felix Catton, on the other hand, has all the makings of a college BNOC - except that he is a little bit more charming and a lot more generous (as we come to know). Oliver and Felix, through a series of plot contrivances, become unlikely friends. Then we are treated to a beautiful montage of fresher shenanigans, with shots in flashing neon lights from the club floor; and images drenched in sunset hues which paint the skies of the rooftop scenes. It's nostalgic. It's ephemeral. The honeymoon of their new friendship ends once Oliver tells Felix that his dad has just died. The prospect of going up 'North(?)' to Prescott to return to the broken home that awaits him once term ends is so undesirable that Oliver doesn't think he'll ever go home again. So, Felix invites him to stay at Saltburn.

A ham-handed reference to Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*

(a lot of Waugh's characters are based on my family, actually), and plot points liberally borrowed from *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, are early hints at the flaws in Fennell's screenwriting. Once the Saltburn Manor chapter of the film commences, it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore just how much rot there is in this film's woodwork.

There is a level of *Skins*-type cringe here that is forgivable. *Saltburn* is bookended with Oliver's 'Was I in love with him?' (I don't know, but I have a feeling you're about to tell me) monologue. It also features one of the most guffaw-inducing lines of dialogue, which comes (again) from Oliver before having oral period sex with Alison Oliver's Venetia, Felix's sister ('It's lucky for you, I'm a vampire'). We can laugh or roll our eyes at these moments while also seeing what Fennell was trying to achieve, even if she goes about this with painfully little subtlety. Similarly, the most shocking scenes designed to get everyone talking and tweet-

ing were handled with a Lars Von Trier level of pretension and bravado. These scenes were every bit as subtle as a melancholic woman faced with the threat of death by a rogue planet named 'Melancholia.' But Fennell's most egregious sin is the bait-and-switch that occurs just over halfway through the film, when we find out that Oliver's broken home is in fact...a red-brick detached house? More than that, his dead dad is very much alive, and his mother seems more likely to watch the dog-show Crufts for recreation than to take any drug stronger than Yorkshire Tea. At this point in the film, the viewer is violently removed from what seemed to be Oliver's perspective, and is forced instead into the third-person. Any motivation that we may have discerned from Oliver's backstory is stripped away, making us dependent on what Oliver tells us his motivation is. It leaves us at the mercy of Emerald Fennell's writing.

Read the full article online at [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org)

## Forget Her Not: Rediscovering Women in Music

Keziah McCann

At fifteen, I was fully and completely obsessed with the Californian soul/alternative R&B/jazz/funk band The Internet. It is for this reason that I can (attempt to) claim to have known Steve Lacy before everyone else. But alas, he is now a huge music sensation (as he should be, to be fair. I could not gatekeep him forever).

But Lacy is not the only great talent to come out of that band. The Internet's lead vocalist and R&B, Soul and Hip Hop master Syd, AKA Syd tha Kid (short for Sydney Loren Bennett) first started making music at 15. She learnt how to record, engineer, and produce music from home, which also quickly became the hub for the hip hop collective Odd Future. In 2011, she started the band The Internet, who went on to produce four critically acclaimed albums. My personal favourite is groovy, avant-garde and grammy-winning *Ego Death* (best songs on there: Gabby (feat. Janelle Monáe), Penthouse Cloud, Just Sayin/I Tried, and criminally underrated *Palace/Curse*, featuring the one and only Tyler the Creator).

Since the band split up (following their fourth studio album, *Hive Mind*, in 2018) to focus on individual projects, Syd has produced two albums. The first, *Fin*, is a triumph of romance, soul and sensuality, combining stylistic syncopation with Syd's trademark pensive, sultry lyricism. *Got Her Own* playfully subverts gender stereotyping, an ode to an independent, ambitious woman. Here, she characteristically directs lyrics of love and desire to a woman, as usual open, bold and honest in matters of sexuality - "I'm not going to sing about men when I don't date men - and I'm also not not gonna sing about love" she told *The Guardian* in 2019, maintaining "I don't feel like a part of the gay community I'm the only person like me that I know".

Syd's second album, *Broken Hearts Club* meditates upon infatuation and heartbreak, slipping between rapture, optimism and insecurity. She handles both sides with delicacy and warmth, yet her honesty still shines through, the opening track *CYBAH* a "quiet storm", dreamlike, rhetorically questioning "could you break a heart?" By the end of the album, of course we have our sure answer: *Missing Out* confirms "it wasn't always perfect/but now it's nothing".

Syd's voice spellbinds, her storytelling enchants and intrigues. Fingers crossed for another album soon!





# New Year's Resolutions: pointless or powerful?

**Phoebe Walls** weighs up how empowering resolutions really are

New Year's resolutions: Are they truly transformative or just a setup for disappointment? January 1st arrives amid lingering holiday indulgence, often leaving us with hangovers and half-hearted promises of change. We vow to cut down on screen time or go to the gym, only to find ourselves still glued to screens and a lazy article.

The period between Christmas and New Year leaves the days blending into one, which can spark the desire for reinvention amid a loop of lazy days.

Do resolutions really work? Many people don't set them because they don't want to make promises they can't keep. The onset of the January blues can make goals feel impossible

to achieve. Online rhetoric about "cutting toxic people" sounds like a melodramatic soap opera script rather than a realistic life strategy. I've heard

online that people are in our lives for a reason,

Setting an arbitrary fitness goal will not solve all your problems either. I've seen many melancholy runners pounding the pavements, lighting up the dreary days in brand-new fluorescent gear. What exactly are you running away from or towards?

Nevertheless, I've always enjoyed setting New Year's Resolutions.

However, I think it's more efficient to set achievable goals rather than to seek a personality transplant. Last year I wrote down that I wanted to secure my year abroad placement through the British Council and improve my essays at Oxford; these were both achieved. I think the key is to treat resolutions as aspirations. The connotations of the word resolution are too daunting for a very disciplined decision to firmly do or never do something again. However, a list of goals and small new habits can create a sense of organisation and inspire a fresh start to the new year.


This year I want to cut down on

my phone screen time. Rather than automatically opening Instagram

**"I want to talk to myself with the kindness and compassion I would a friend."**

or even worse TikTok as a reflex, I'd like to be more mindful about how long I spend on my device. So, I've set myself the challenge of not looking at Instagram or TikTok for January. Most importantly this year I'd like to talk to myself with the kindness and compassion I would a friend. Instead of spiralling, I hope to write in my diary every day. I think the new year allows us all to turn over a fresh page in

our lives; to me, that's the magic of it. So rather than running away from your problems and towards a stitch, pick up a pen and ideally a new notebook and set some goals. January is an opportunity for self-reflection that can never be pointless, so there is power in striving for self-improvement. It's just important to remember that at its very core time is elusive and therefore humans have found ways to measure it. So try not to put too much pressure on yourself to become a different person just because of a new calendar year. Fresh starts are possible any day of the week.



## Cherpse

Cherwell sent two lucky readers on a blind date, here's how it went...

ROMEO	JULIET
<p><b>First impressions?</b> Really fashionable and sort of intimidating. Seemed super cool though.</p>	<p><b>First impressions?</b> Not what I had expected but was really friendly and open.</p>
<p><b>Did it meet your expectations?</b> Yeah, we had quite a few things in common which was helpful.</p>	<p><b>Did it meet your expectations?</b> I guess so. They were really lovely but the conversation didn't really flow, but I wasn't expecting to meet 'the one' anyway!</p>
<p><b>What was the highlight?</b> Finding out that we both worked at the same chain supermarket. Trauma bonding.</p>	<p><b>What was the highlight?</b> We did share a delicious cake.</p>
<p><b>What was the most embarrassing moment?</b> I made a bad joke that they didn't get. I had to spend about 5 minutes explaining.</p>	<p><b>What was the most embarrassing moment?</b> Tripping up on the way in - they definitely saw me!</p>
<p><b>Describe the date in 3 words:</b> Interesting, friendly, surprising.</p>	<p><b>Describe the date in 3 words:</b> Platonic, calm, awkward</p>
<p><b>Is there a second date on the cards?</b> Probably yeah.</p>	<p><b>Is there a second date on the cards?</b> No, I don't think so.</p>

## Looking for love?

Email [lifestylecherwell@gmail.com](mailto:lifestylecherwell@gmail.com) or fill in the form in our bio!

## The patience of ordinary things

**Evelyn Power** discusses one small, mundane pleasure of life... This week, *she discusses finding new and unexpected perspectives...*



Recently, a friend of mine (whose name has been omitted in order to preserve his privacy, his room deposit and the sanity of our college's poor, long-suffering porters) has figured out how to reach the rooftop from his room.

Far more recently, I (a self-professed coward) have been persuaded to venture onto this rooftop - rather than remaining seated inside, assuring that no, I do not want to come out, I can see the view perfectly from where I am, it's actually far warmer in here, maybe we should all come inside and watch a movie.

And I am now a rooftop convert. My friends will most likely dispute this, (given my staunch refusal to actually stand up for fear of being blown over by a gust of wind, instead opting for a weird hobble-crawl at everyone else's knee level) but, having seen Oxford at a bird's eye view, I can now confidently admit that I may soon be turning in my acrophobic badge.

There is a strange sense of wonder that arises from being in a place where you should not really be, seeing things that you should

not really be seeing. A different perspective exposes something new in Oxford's tangle of streets and colleges; from afar, students on bikes and tourist groups and traffic disputes stop feeling like a nuisance, revealing instead a quiet, understated sort of loveliness. Here, two friends run into each other on the street; there, someone laughs down the phone, smiling in a way that spills into their voice. Elsewhere, my college cat (whose name is also omitted - I do not want to give him the satisfaction) relieves himself onto my bike, and cannot hear my screams at him to stop.

Not every view is a winner. Nevertheless, the world seems kinder when it's teeming underneath you, full of life and noise and conversation and people. You become kinder too, to others and yourself.

Imagining your own laughter as you walk down this street, knowing the times you have fumbled for your Bod card by that gate and squinted in the waning November sun in this alley, the world seems to be a grand and lovely thing, and

you just another grand and lovely part of it.

As much as I would love to recommend everyone put down this paper and immediately clamber up onto the nearest roof, that is not advice I wish to be caught on paper extolling, lest I be held responsible for a slew of tragic and whimsical deaths. Rather, I suggest looking for new angles wherever you can find them, because the thing about perspective is that it sticks with you.

The world, as it seems then - compact, precious, living - doesn't disappear when you awkwardly force yourself back through the windowframe and head to a tutorial. Instead, it lingers; such goodness, however briefly revealed, can be found nearly anywhere.

You can see it in the conversations outside your window while you stress over deadlines, in the light that streams through library windows on the worst day, in an extra shake of cinnamon on your coffee when it feels like the world is ending. The world, made small, is suddenly a lot more manageable.



# How to have a 'Hot Girl Hilary'!

Christina Kurian

**H**ilary is grey. It drizzles, it's cold, and all the trees are bare. Caught between the post-Christmas blues and the happy warmth of Trinity, the term can sometimes feel like an endless period of waiting and misery. Hilary often fills me with a deep desire to go to bed and stay there. Set against this backdrop, the concept of 'Hot Girl Hilary' seems like a complete contradiction. How can you feel 'hot' when even the weather seems to have a personal vendetta against you? When the only thing anyone wants to do is cuddle in the warm confines of a duvet and pretend that tutorial essays don't exist? Answering this question starts with determining what exactly Hot Girl

**"There is no predetermined check-list of activities that defines a Hot Girl Hilary"**

Hilary is. You might have seen it on Instagram, or splattered across Oxfess, but is there anything to the statement beyond quirky caption material? Or is it just another Oxford myth?

My personal interpretation of Hot Girl Hilary is that it's a feeling. There is no check-list of things that

have to be completed to achieve a 'Hot Girl Hilary'. Rather, it's a feeling of self-confidence and self-fulfilment, which is made all the more empowering because life just seems so very difficult during this term. There are plenty of challenges to overcome in forcing yourself to even get out of bed, let alone endeavouring to feel



empowered by taking on new tasks. I think this self-fulfilment can come from whatever area of your life that you choose to prioritise - whether that's trying something new to discover new experiences or indulging in some self-care by returning to tried-and-tested ways of feeling happy and relaxed.

Feeling 'hot' doesn't necessarily mean dressing up, clubbing till 3 am, and having one-night stands, even though that's what Hot Girl Hilary might appear to mean at

first glance. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that - and if it's what makes you feel most self-confident, then obviously you should take yourself to Bridge every Thursday.

But you might also feel self-fulfilled and content when you learn a new recipe, or read a book that's finally not taken from your reading list, or watch a movie with your

friends that you'd been planning to see for

ages but just never did. You might feel happiest when you're cozying up with your girlfriend, or thrift shopping online (I probably spend more time on Vinted than in the library) or organising society events. In any case, these are all achievements which are equally worthy of being celebrated, and all equally able to generate satisfaction.

The point is: there is no predetermined check-list of activities that defines a Hot Girl Hilary. Rather, it involves every person who decides that this Hilary isn't going to

be spent waiting for Trinity to roll around, to find out what enables them to achieve these elusive concepts of 'satisfaction' and 'self-fulfilment'. Then the second step is to actively embark on these tasks

**"Maybe this term will be more than wishing for bluer skies..."**

- and persevere even when it's difficult to continue. After all, we're all unique people who achieve satisfaction by different methods. A part of growing as young adults is discovering the ones that work best for each of us.

So this Hilary, make use of the opportunity for self-fulfilment! Look beyond the grey drizzle outside your window, and consider what will best help you combat the inevitable onslaught of stress. It's Oxford - who isn't stressed? But when you feel empowered and satisfied, maybe you'll begin to appreciate that Hilary isn't all that bad. Maybe this term will be more than just wishing for bluer skies and picnicking on the warm grass. Maybe you'll see beauty in the clouds, in the resilience of the first flowers that poke their heads above the frosty ground.

Then you too can post a picture of yourself on Instagram with that oft-used caption: Hot Girl Hilary.



At the beginning of a new term, make sure to keep doing what you want. You're a master at it already.



At the next formal, treat yourself to dessert. There's always room for dessert.



Strike a conversation with that college friend. You can't continue being your own best friend.



Why go out when you could just stay in? Avoid being misunderstood by avoiding people, simple!



It's not you versus the world: go to the Oxford Union events to feel humbled. Not everyone likes you as much as you think



You're always giving the best advice, now time to give yourself some. Stay away from your posh bestie and do not fall for them!

## Dear Cherwell, how do I have a dry January?

Dear Cherwell, Happy week 1! I'm trying to stick to my new year's resolutions this year, and one of my goals is to have a dry January. However, I feel that I'm at a crossroads since coming back to Oxford. As a fresher, the social life revolves around college bars and going out. I don't want my choice to be sober to make me a social outcast, but equally I want to try my best to cut out alcohol. I feel terrible when I go out loads, and I know it will be beneficial for my physical and mental health. What should I do?

- Confused at BOPs

Dear Confused at Bops, I hear you, and you're not the first student I've heard wanting a change in their drinking habits in January. Well done for sticking to your guns! Imagining just a few weeks of your uni life without al-

cohol might be tricky, but no booze needn't mean no fun!

Here are some of my tips for being - and staying - boozeless in an otherwise decidedly boozy world: ask for a cocktail with no alcohol - any bar worth visiting can shake you up a treat! It also won't look like you're drinking a mocktail. Alternatively, grab yourself a non-alcoholic beer and soak up the uni vibes! It's the people and the places that make the term fun after all, not the alcohol (or the hangover...).

Think about how much you will gain. It requires some foresight and a sprinkle of discipline, but think of the quality time you'll gain - be it for studying, spending time with friends - and other benefits like having clearer skin, improving sleep and anxiety levels, not to mention the money you'll save!

Reading between the lines, one always benefits from addressing their

relationship with alcohol, you and me included! Peer pressure is something we've all experienced at some point in our lives, and if you're a people-pleaser, as we all can be sometimes, it can feel like you're disappointing your friends. But this needn't be the case - your close friends shouldn't kick up a fuss. If you're worried about what people will say, a short response about your resolution is enough. You never owe anyone a long answer to be honest. It's even possible that your new behaviour could cue a deep meaningful conversation and inspire others to reevaluate their alcohol habits in a safe discussion. It's always important to keep in mind that if people give you a hard time about your desire to cut down on drinking it is almost always a them problem, and remember, cutting toxic people out is IN for 2024.

Wanting a change doesn't mean you're wanting a personality trans-

plant, and, from the sounds of it, it's not a permanent change either. In fact, dry January couldn't be easier since half of January has already passed! There are only two weeks left for you to reach your goal. If you're struggling, an easy compromise is a 'damp' January - intentionally drinking less while still raising a glass for example at a friend's birthday, or celebrating a milestone. It has gained popularity because many people have found totally cutting alcohol out too difficult, or unnecessary - you don't have to go cold turkey to re-evaluate your relationship with alcohol. The bottom line is that you're using what is left of January to be curious about your relationship with alcohol and it may make you consider implementing positive changes around drinking long-term

A (non-alcoholic) cheers to your New Year's resolution!  
Love Cherwell

**Got a problem? Need some advice?**

Email [lifestylecherwell@gmail.com](mailto:lifestylecherwell@gmail.com) or fill out the form in our Instagram bio!



♎ Libra



Try not to people-please this term, Libra. If you run into problems, consider using your fists.

♏ Scorpius



Be prepared to realise that people can be better than you, including at rowing.

♐ Sagittarius



Don't hold back your Sagittarian taste for adventure! Run for a committee role.

♑ Capricornus



Don't be so self-focussed - go to Specsavers so you can actually see the bigger picture.

♈ Aquarius



Like the Air you're ruled by, your attention span can come and go. Make a plan! Just try to stick to it a bit more.

♊ Pisces



Get tested for STIs. Everyone should, but you should go now. Like, drop everything you are doing and get tested.

# In defence of living out

Grace Allen

Living out is dying. More and more colleges are building new accommodation to keep their undergraduate students living "in". My college, St Peter's, aspires to house nearly all of its undergraduate students in college-maintained buildings; in fact, it just unveiled two new buildings after almost a year of construction delays. Castle-Bailey Quad, nice as it is, got me thinking: if I had to make the choice between living out and living in, would I really choose to live out? I'd like to think so - but allow me to explain.

Sure, living out sucks sometimes. List the cons and it's hard to understand why anyone would willingly do it. House-hunting is notoriously stressful, the houses themselves are poky and poorly-furnished (not to mention often riddled with mould), and landlords and property managers will do everything they can to avoid spending money on, well, anything.

But if you put all of that aside, it really does have its draws. Take the practicality aspect: you don't have to move everything you own in, then out, then in, then out (ad infinitum) with the vacations. If you're a collector of textbooks, proud owner of a substantial wardrobe, or budding interior decorator, this is ideal - and it wouldn't typically be allowed under a 27-week lease for college accommodation.

But there's more to living out

than just the practical benefits. I think it improves your student experience. It's important to experience Oxford outside of term-time; when you're focused on essay deadlines, tute work and labs, it's hard to see just how much the city has to offer. Live out and stay over the vac, though, and you can spend all the time you like visiting museums, exploring Christ Church Meadows, or in the pub with friends. If you're stuck with vac work, living out can somewhat sweeten the deal - after all, finding a seat in the Rad Cam is never as easy as it is in week -2.

This disconnect persists into term-time. Living out in deepest Cowley, far from college's reach and faculty libraries, allows you to actually destress. It's far easier to forget about collections, overdue tute work and overbearing tutors when it's just you and your housemates in a kitchen-diner extension in Cowley than it is when you're living in college, surrounded by tute rooms and stressed coursemates. To me, living out doesn't feel like being an Oxford student - it feels like being a university student. The boarding school vibes of first-year college accommodation melt away, replaced by real independence: cook for yourself, learn how to live on your own, break free from the college bubble and figure out what it is to be an adult.

Living out is about independence, but it's also the furthest thing from isolating. There is a feeling of community with other students at your college

who are living out that transcends physical proximity. You can create your own spaces outside of your JCR. In Michaelmas, when my housemates and I hosted friends to watch the Rugby World Cup, it occurred to me that it just couldn't have happened in college; a student house is not just a location, but it also offers total privacy from college oversight (crucial when you're loudly cheering Ireland on to victory against South Africa). Forget entz reps and junior deans: socialising happens on your own timetable. And when it comes to friendships, it's more than likely that you're living with at least one close friend, which can have a transformative effect on your relationship.

If you weren't living out with your best mate, how would you ever have learned that they need to listen to 90s trip hop to study, or that they're deathly scared of spiders? There's an intimacy in knowing someone's sleep schedule and what their favourite cereal is. Living out fosters this connection - a deeper connection than you would experience without living together. I've never felt so secure.

All things considered, then, I'd still choose to live out. Maybe it isn't perfect, but living out has been a staple of Oxford student life for decades, and it's one of the only similarities it has to the typical student experience at any other university. It would be a real shame to see it disappear.

## Lessons from the landing...

Katya Ferrier brings you a musing and a meal... This week, she asks, 'is there mushroom for failure?'



Like many returning students, I have spent the past week either bitterly cold (apologies to those who gave me concerned looks on the high street as I chattered my teeth obnoxiously), or miserably staring at my screen in the library. Certainly not an appealing dichotomy of being to come back to. I think I speak for nearly every single Oxford undergrad when I say 'OXHATE to collections, HATE HATE HATE!' (thanks #oxfess2879 x)

As I sat down for dinner on my beloved landing on Wednesday of 0th week, one of my friends, amongst conversations of bop costume ideas and vac debriefs, exclaimed: 'I used to get so stressed during exams that I would cry before every single one.' I sat and chewed on the creamy grains of my comforting lemon, mushroom, and chicken orzo as I thought of what to say next. My friend then muttered, almost as an afterthought, 'I just think I'm so frightened of things not going to plan, like all my hard work is going to waste.' I nodded compassionately in agreement. The unknown IS scary.

Inevitably with large, rowdy discussions, the moment slipped away almost as quickly as it came into being. Nonetheless, her comments stuck with me as I, in a near trance, spent most of 0th week memorising quotes, writing essay plans, and reading for my next essay... How do we cope with the thought of failure?

It's an undeniable truth that this university is filled with individuals who always want to be at the top of their academic game.

I'm not going to sit here and tell you it's ok if you fail your exams because I hardly believe that myself. Rather, in the era of #girlboss and goal-setting frenzy, it's perhaps worth considering what to do when exams, grad schemes, or just life doesn't go to plan.

Thousands of self-help books have tried to answer this question (I should know, I've read most of them). Take deep breaths. Sleep. Drink water. Exercise. But do these simple lifestyle fixes really remedy the existential fear of our lives taking a U-turn? I mean in some ways yes. Keeping our bodies healthy is not only important for everyday well-being, but it can also ensure that in the face of 'failure' our bodies are physiologically prepared to cope with the mental stress of it all.

But what about taming our inner thoughts?

My college wife introduced me to 'underthinking', the notion of attempting to eliminate one's inner thoughts by focusing on the here and now, switching off the hyper-active 'what if' of our brains.

This works for me (most of the time). But in the face of failure and the unknown, work on your own, healthy, personal routine. Prepare yourself for the big jump. Ultimately, to soothe the fear of failure, we need to de-stress both physically and mentally. So, go dance, run, watch reality TV - whatever suits you. When facing the unknown, it's important that we maintain our sanity through mental and physical breaks.

## Cherwell's Checklist

New term, new me: our life editors' suggestions for how to make the most of Hilary term...

**1** Tired of being tired? Perhaps you no longer feel the effects of caffeine. Try going to bed before midnight. Fully rested, who knows what you could achieve, world peace? Or just better essays.

**2** Meal-prepping. There is no better feeling than opening the fridge door and popping one of a series of lovingly pre-made meals in the microwave. Granted, it can all get a bit samey. But it creates the illusion that you have your life together. Tupper-warded to the nines, you can do anything.

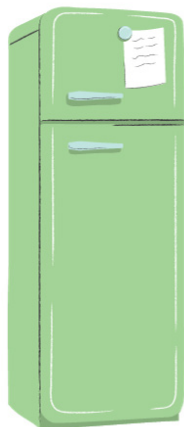
**3** Exercise! No, don't get that gym membership. But yes, do try something different

that gets you moving. From MMA to society quidditch, why be a gym bro when you can find some niche Oxford activity to carve a personality out of? Have you considered rowing?

**4** Essay crisis? Stop procrastinating. Heck, stop reading this now (or at least after you finish the Life section).

**5** Making friends, or enemies? Approach that person you see on your morning commute. Talk to your lecture crush. Or maybe call out your noisy

neighbour, that tute partner who always leaves you hanging. Meet new people, air your frustrations. Oxford's 8-week terms are too short to hold back.





# Five reasons to eat the whole apple

## Monty Pierce Jones

I'll admit that there's nothing quite like that first bite into a crisp apple. Crunching off the overhang you've made as you've gone around the fruit is almost as satisfying. Which begs the question: why on earth do we stop there? When we throw away the core, up to 30% of an entirely edible apple is lost.

I'm an all-apple advocate, I'll eat the "core", the seeds and even the blossom end. So, I've come up with the top five benefits of eating an apple properly to try and convince you to, too:

### No waste

Have you ever eaten an apple with nowhere to throw it away? Maybe you've forgotten it on your desk, or in a pocket - later discovering a browning, decomposing, sticky mess. If you eat the whole shebang you are left with nothing but the stem!

Also, apples are terrible for the envi-

ronment when sent to a landfill. There is hardly any oxygen inside landfills, due to the compacting. When apple cores are left to microbially degrade in these conditions, instead of producing some carbon dioxide, they produce a lot of methane (which has a 100-year global warming potential 20 times worse than that of CO<sub>2</sub>).

### More bang for your buck

Let's do some maths. As you now know, throwing away the core means throwing away 30% of the apple. Say you've bought 6 apples for £3. If you aren't eating the full monty you're basically throwing away a pound! "Okay, what's a pound?" you might say. Well let's expand our little calculation to the global scale, shall we?

If we all had an apple a day, to keep the doctors at bay, only to throw the cores away (much to my dismay) - that's the equivalent of 15p gone astray. Get a calculator out. Times

that 15p by 7.9 billion people. Times that number by 365 days. You'll end up with £433 billion, that's like Ireland's GDP in the bin. Just because of the social constructs that (1) apple cores aren't edible and that (2) seeds are scary!

### Immunity to cyanide

Okay, maybe I went overboard on the calculation, not everyone likes apples. But seeds aren't scary. Yes, they have a little cyanide in them in the form of amygdalin, but the poison only emerges after amygdalin is metabolised, and to be metabolised it has to be released from the seed. Thankfully, seeds have evolved to pass through the digestive system unscathed, so that they can be shat out in ready-made soil to become mystical trees.

Even if you do decide to meticulously crush each one with your molars, you'd have to grind and ingest roughly 2000 of them in one day to

get cyanide poisoning. So, anything less than that and you are partaking in mithridatism, the practice of protecting oneself against a poison by gradually self-administering non-lethal amounts. Ever seen *The Princess Bride*? That could be you if you ate the whole apple.

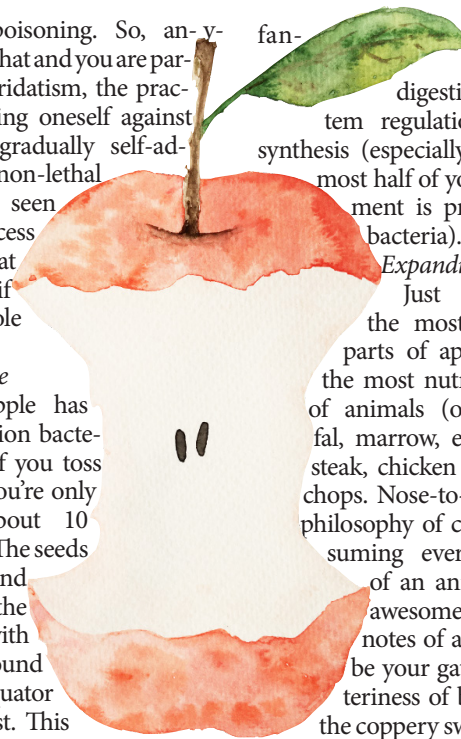
### Probiotics galore

A single apple has about 100 million bacterial cells, but if you toss out the core, you're only consuming about 10 million of 'em. The seeds and each end have most of the good stuff, with the peel around the apple's equator having the least. This

fan-tastic gut flora helps with food digestion, immune system regulation and vitamin synthesis (especially Vitamin K, almost half of your daily requirement is provided by these bacteria).

### Expanding your palate

Just as we discard the most nutrient dense parts of apples, we discard the most nutrient dense parts of animals (organ meats, offal, marrow, etc.) in favour of steak, chicken thighs and pork chops. Nose-to-tail eating is the philosophy of cooking and consuming every possible part of an animal. It's kind of awesome, and the almond notes of apple seeds might be your gateway to the butteriness of beef marrow and the coppery sweetness of chick-



## Ancient Recipes

### Sick of having pesto pasta everyday? Try some ancient Chinese soup...

*Yinshan Zhengyao* is a Chinese cookbook which connects food to healing and medicine. Created by therapist and dietitian, Hu Sihui of the Yuan dynasty in 1330.

Mutton is mentioned over one hundred times. So, if you happen to get your hands on any, try this wintery 'Sundry Broth':

"It supplements the center, and increases *qi* [energy of life force]."

Mutton (leg, bone and cut up), saoko cardamoms (five), chick-peas (half a raw meat, pulverized. Remove the skins). Boil ingredients together into a soup. Strain. Cook together: two sheep's heads (clean), two sets each of sheep stomachs and lungs, one set of white blood, paired sheep intestines. When done cut up [and add to soup]. Then use three *jin* [unit of measurement] of bean flour to make noodles. Stuff with half a *jin* of mushrooms, half a *jin* of apricot kernel paste, one *Hang* of black pepper. Fry with coriander leaves. Adjust flavors with onions, salt, and vinegar."

Translation by Buell & Anderson. Image credits: Wikimedia Commons



## A New Yorker reviews Oxford's Shake Shack

### Amanda Li

Shake Shack is more than a fast food restaurant to me. I'd go there on half days with friends or eat and talk for hours with my teammates after our last practice of the year. My parents would always take me out for burgers there when we went out to the Museum of Natural History. So when the chain opened a new location on Cornmarket Street last month, I was relieved to be able to cure my homesickness with a late-night black-and-white milkshake.

Walking into the restaurant the day after arriving in Oxford, there were high expectations. The goal was clear: emulate the food and experience I've had for years in New York without breaking the bank. And, with their earliest closing time at 11:30 PM, I was excited to finally have a non-kebab option for a late night dinner in uni.

Originally, the founders intended to only run restaurants in NYC but decided to expand in 2010. With their first UK location only opening in 2013, it's certainly newer than most American fast food exports.

The menu has always been basically the same—burgers, fries, ice cream, shakes—but there are rotating specials seasonal to the menu. When I went, a pistachio shake was on offer. The burger offerings are plenty, so it's easy to find something you'd like: besides the "Shackburger" with their delicious house sauce, a bacon cheeseburger, shallot burger, and chicken burgers, for the vegetarians, there's a scrumptious mushroom burger as

well as veggie burgers. The crinkle cut fries also had the option of an added cheese sauce and/or bacon. They tend to be in the conversation when discussing the best fast food French fry, so I never miss out, even if I'm never hungry enough to not have to share. The hot dogs, which shot the restaurant to fame, are less-ordered, though people still got plenty of shakes in classic flavors like vanilla, chocolate, caramel, and strawberry. There's also alcohol, ice cream with a twist ('Concrete'), and even dog treats.

I got my usual: a Shackburger, cheese fries to share, and a black and white milkshake. It was a bit pricier compared to at home, especially with the conversion rate – £8.95 for a burger and £4.25 for a portion of fries.

So, in all honesty, I was dismayed at the results when taking a bite. The burger tasted fine: well-seasoned and fresh, with crunchy Romaine and tomatoes to cut through the heavy meat and brioche bun. My one

quailm was the absence of delicious tangy sauce. The fries were crunchy and salted just right with a fluffy, warm middle – a reliable buy. The cheese sauce, though, tasted different from the one at home – blame British cheddar – and it was much thicker and cold. And the texture was hard to dip and often broke the fry I wanted to eat. I blamed it on the cold day and moved on. The shake gave me mixed feelings. I was used to super-thick shakes that were more like ice cream than shakes, and it certainly tasted the same – sweet vanilla ice cream with hints of fudge sauce swirled throughout. Yet the texture felt wrong – too runny and only at the bottom did it

start to get thick enough to feel right.

Essentially, this Shake Shack was not the Shake Shack luxury I'm used to. It felt just like any other part of my experience at Oxford – similar enough to what I knew that I understood what it was supposed to be, yet different enough that it could never be like my expectations. The sit down experience upstairs, with its cute bookshelves and view of the street, truly had high yapping potential. The food was good, though not worth a

daily visit (especially with those prices!)

If you really want a burger, Shake Shack's is so much better than McDonald's, Wendy's, and Five Guys, and it's worth the extra pound just for that sauce. If you're ever craving cheese fries with a real sauce rather than shredded cheddar or a shake when Najar's machine is broken, Shake Shack is the place to go.

Image Credit: Amanda Li



## To all the pubs we've loved before

### Susanna Elliot and Reka Sztaray review two more iconic Oxford pubs...

Today we are putting two classic favourites, the Crown and Turf Tavern, head-to-head. Turf is arguably the most famous pub in Oxford. It was a gambling house (now a Greene King) in the heart of Oxford - though as two people who live above the alley, people really need to stop reading the "education in intoxication" sign out loud... The Crown is slightly less famous, but equally convenient being just off Cornmarket Street. As a Nicholson's pub, the Crown's is the ideal destination if you're looking for the classics, with their house and Camden pale ale being the most popular. Turf was slightly more unique, and we couldn't pass up the opportunity to try a pint of their house bitters and their own pale ale, both of which were delicious. For food, we ordered nachos from both, and the Crown came out the clear winner, with Turf's



somehow lacking cheese (?). Though Turf's chicken kiev that our friend Gabriel ordered was incredible (narrowly beating out the chicken schnitzel at the Crown)! Overall, with their central locations and similar prices, neither pubs are ones to miss. We have to give the win to the Crown, simply for the cosier atmosphere (the fairy lights are a big plus!) and it was a bit less busy than Turf - Réka had to sprint to occupy a table that was being vacated... If you go to either, you will certainly not be disappointed.

Image credit: Madeleine Storer

C. vs T. Pints: 3/5 vs 4/5 Food: 5/5 vs 4/5 Price: 3/5 vs 3/5  
Ambiance: 5/5 vs 4/5 Overall: 4.5/5 vs 3.5/5 - Crown wins!



# The effects of media attention on upcoming sports stars

Rosina White Belchere

Media brings people together, as does sport, and young people are the figureheads for combining the two and creating something extremely powerful.

Having grown up as consumers of media themselves, more so than the generations that came before them, young sportspeople today know how to use it to their advantage. This is especially prominent with the use of social media, such as Instagram, X, and Facebook. I mean, hundreds of influencers are earning livings from posting videos and photos on TikTok and Instagram - posting frequently, thanking one's followers, and even interacting with them can go miles. Young sporting stars, bursting into the sporting world and breaking world records, draw crowds of fellow young people to them and their sport. They are supporting their sport with their ability to understand social

media and its audiences, using their own publicity to draw as many people to the sport as they possibly can.

Luke Littler is one such example. At only 16 years old, he was the first dart player in history to gain 1 million followers on Instagram, with the world champion Luke Humphries even asking him to share the love. He interacts with his audience and loves the strength that their support can give him. Whilst watching the recent darts World Championship, one moment during the Quarter Final came to mind. Playing against Brendan Dolan, Littler decided to go for the 'Big Fish', a very difficult and impressive move - a game winner. After the first two hits, both in, he turned to the crowd and was rewarded with the loudest roar from the hundreds of supporters filling the Alexandra Palace, before turning back to the board

again for his last throw. Even the commentators were shocked and impressed at this small act. He was using the crowd to urge him on, performing for them, and having the time of his life whilst doing so.

Another recent young face is Emma Raducanu, US Open Winner of 2021 at only 18. Over a span of three months in 2021, her Instagram following went from 10,000 to 2.1 million people, currently sitting at 2.4 million. Living nearby Bromley at the time, I remember the pride my family immediately took in her despite never meeting her. Britain was so proud to have such a young talent in tennis, especially following Andy Murray's earlier success. She soon appeared on the Met Gala red carpet, became a Tiffany and Co. ambassador, and starred on the front cover of British Vogue fashion magazine in September 2021. This photoshoot consisted of her wearing designer outfits by Alexander McQueen, Gucci and Louis Vuitton paired, perhaps surprisingly, with Nike trainers. She jumps out of the page, right arm swinging back holding a tennis racket and shoes picking up orange dust from the clay court surface. She brings youth to some very mature pieces, appealing to fellow young people with her radiant smile

and youthful energy. In fact, one video which has appeared several times on my Tiktok feed is the moment a young fan sitting in the audience asks to marry her - preparing to serve, she turns around and plays it off beautifully with a laugh.

The audience's thirst for drama and success can however become too overwhelming for the players. There is now somewhat of a precedent of young stars warning the next upcomers about the danger of reaching fame at such a young age. In the music world, Justin Bieber showed concern and care for Billie Eilish through her rise to fame, who then passed that concern on to Olivia Rodrigo. Many celebrities announce that they will be taking time off from social media to re-focus on themselves, such as Selena Gomez, Tom Holland, and Shawn Mendez. This is no different for celebrity sportspeople. Raducanu showed her concern for Littler in his rocket launch to fame, as did snooker world number one Ronnie O'Sullivan who started his career in snooker at a similar pace. Fellow darts player George Anderson warned the media in an interview following a match that if Littler's current course through the sport became unstable and he crashed just as quickly as he gained his fame, it would

be the media's fault themselves.

Media sets unrealistic expectations for these young stars. They train so hard as kids because they simply love the sport, they love the thrill of the competition and the reward of the win. When they begin winning on a professional level however, their audience grows from supportive parents, friends, and coaches to a global viewership. If you follow an upcoming athlete based on the knowledge of that person's age and miraculous talent, and not because you know them personally, it creates a significant first impression and sets a high expectation for them to continue impressing you. Some people cannot refrain from the opportunity to anonymously express their disappointment on social media when their followed sports-stars perform less than a miracle, and this only elevates the pressure. Even the pressure to upkeep their social media profile, post frequently and meaningfully is a lot to handle. Eventually, their priorities change. Once, they loved the sport - now they're terrified of it. In a world concerned so much about mental health, especially in young people, why does the media still create so much damage?

Image credits: Kved/BY-SA 2.0 DEED via Wikimedia Commons

## The Spartan attitude of Tennis to its young

Krishna Gowda

The year is 2018. Greek 20-year-old, Stefanos Tsitsipas, has won the NextGen Finals, the tournament for breakout tennis stars and a promising sign of things to come. Just a year later he wins the ATP World Tour Finals, the highest accolade in tennis after a Grand Slam, to become the youngest winner of the championship since 2001. Eager anticipation began to brew from the giants of the sport, tipping Tsitsipas to be the successor of men's tennis and usher in the new era.

Four years after this triumph, in 2023, and Tsitsipas' career paints a starkly different picture to the one many envisaged. No longer viewed as a threat to the throne of tennis in the way he once was and with his prospects of a slam diminishing, at twenty-five years old, he, and other players in a similar position such as Andrey Rublev and Alexander Zverev, have been supplanted by the 'next generation' of talent following them. Scrappy, unrefined, but defined by an insatiable hunger to win that outweighs all else, the next generation of teenagers and twenty-year-olds are still at the stage where inexperience is overshadowed by an obsession to prove themselves. They are also faster, possess unwavering courage on court and have a plethora of potential still to tap into. And they are now the players that are being heralded as the heirs to the tennis world.

The fact of the matter is that the optimal window for Tsitsipas to win

a slam has come and gone. No longer a starlet himself, buoyed by dreams of slam wins that seemed in touching distance just four years ago, the harsh reality of the tennis world has set in and established that every year that he failed to meet the dream of a grand slam was a year closer it would be for someone younger. The problem doesn't exclusively affect Tsitsipas; Eugenie Bouchard reached the Wimbledon finals aged twenty but has since declined in form and is now ranked outside the top 200. Madison Keys reached the 2017 US Open final aged twenty-two, having cracked the top fifty as an 18-year-old, but saw a stark drop in performance over the next few years, which she only saw end in 2023. Outliers like Djokovic and Williams who were winning titles in their thirties do exist, but the odds aren't in most players' favour.

Tsitsipas himself seems to have recognised his fading chances of achieving the dream he's worked his whole life for: "There was a gap roughly, between 2018 and 2020, before Carlos Alcaraz, Holger Rune and Jannik Sinner. Then all the spotlight was on me... Now the scene has changed, we're not so young anymore. Young players have tremendous energy, thirst and no fear... A grand slam title and world number one? It's something I think about a lot but it's not everything". His candid words acknowledge the uncertainty of his prospects, but are tinged with regret - the goals he has aspired to realise his whole life are dwindling out of sight.

Experiencing high levels of suc-

cess at an early age followed by years of failing to live up to the hype aren't coincidental; a combination of factors can play into this dreaded experience. The turbulent nature of junior tennis cannot be understated, a period where form fluctuates and both mental and physical strength are developing, making progress here an unreliable indicator of future success. Learning to acclimatise to the sporting scene is also highly challenging; perpetual travel and a consequent inability to settle down takes its toll, with many players citing burnout for the decline in their careers.

Injuries are commonplace too, as in the case of Hyeon Chung, who reached the 2018 Australian Open semis and was similarly touted for greatness before suffering unrelenting injury crises. Mental struggles play their part as well, especially when juggling the effects of personal issues, fame, and the insidious attitudes of the media with the pressures of meeting expectations. The result of this concoction of challenges can be a player who realises that their childhood entrenched destiny of winning tennis' greatest accolades will go unfulfilled, a curse that has plagued many players and will afflict many more.

There's still a flicker of hope for Tsitsipas though: he has around a decade left of his career, leaving copious chances to finally fulfil his ambitions, buoyed too by reaching a slam final last year. Tennis has a vicious cycle with young players, but its curse can still be broken - whether Tsitsipas will win a slam is dubious, but not entirely out of the question.

## Captain's Corner

Cherwell spoke to the new Blues captains of OULTC, Jack Pickering, captain of the men's team, and Sama Malik, captain of the women's team.

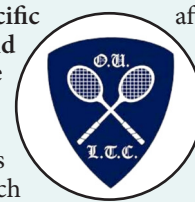
Were there any specific goals for this season and how has the season gone so far?

J: The main goal for the tennis season each year is to win the varsity match against Cambridge which takes place at the end of Trinity term. We also play BUCS most Wednesdays and we're aiming to finish in the top half of the league. It's currently very close in the middle of the table of our division with a few important matches to come.

S: This season a key focus has been to have high levels of commitment from team members in training, matches and to also spend more time as a team off the court, with socials and team dinners. The season so far has had lots of close matches with three close draws, one loss and one win in the BUCS league. With a few matches left to play, the league's standings are still undecided and all to play for as a lot of the teams are equally matched.

How did varsity go last year?

J: The 2023 Lawn Tennis Men's Varsity was a very close match last Trinity term, with the Oxford team unfortunately losing 11-10



after two long days of matches. A special mention has to go to Brendan Emmanuel who won all five of his matches for us.

S: Varsity last year was definitely one of the highlights of the year - dominating the weekend and getting the win over Cambridge. Although it was sad to see a significant number of teammates graduating and leaving the team, this year I'm excited to take on the challenge of retaining our win with some new faces in the team.

What has been the biggest sporting success in your time at Oxford so far?

J: Winning the European Universities Clay Court Invitational tournament at the Monte Carlo Country Club earlier this year was big success for the men's and women's Blues after reaching the semi finals in 2021 and the final in 2022.

S: In terms of sports successes, the commitment, energy and mindset of the team in all aspects on and off the court has been great to be a part of.

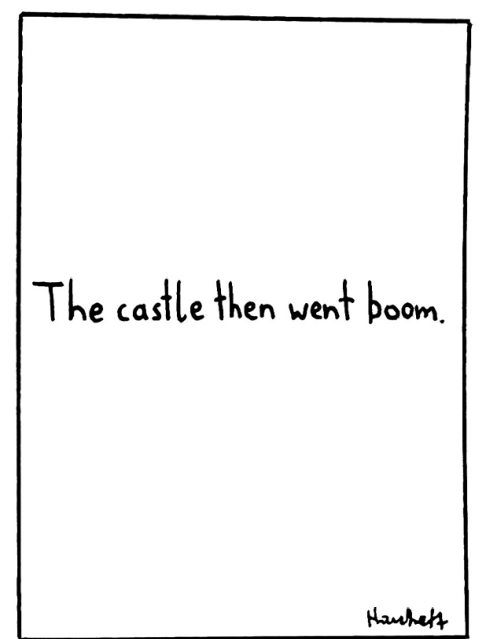
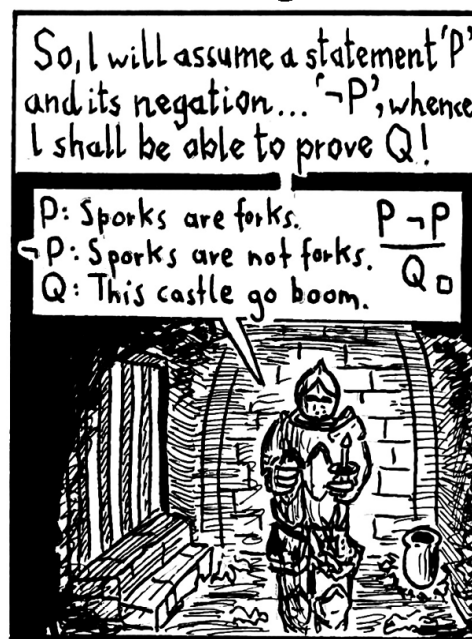
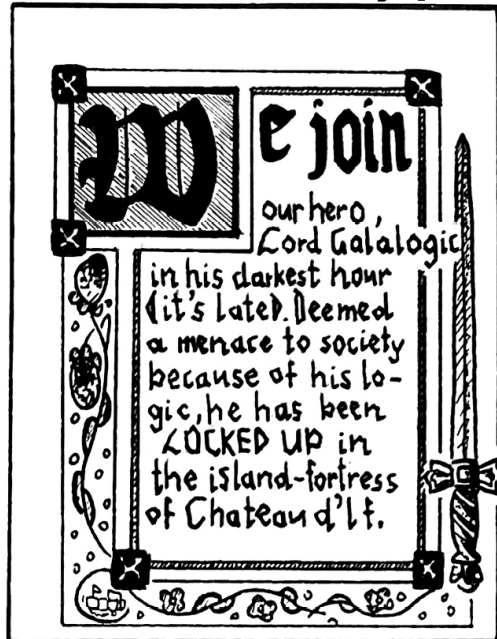
Read the full interview at [Cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org)

Image Credit: OULTC

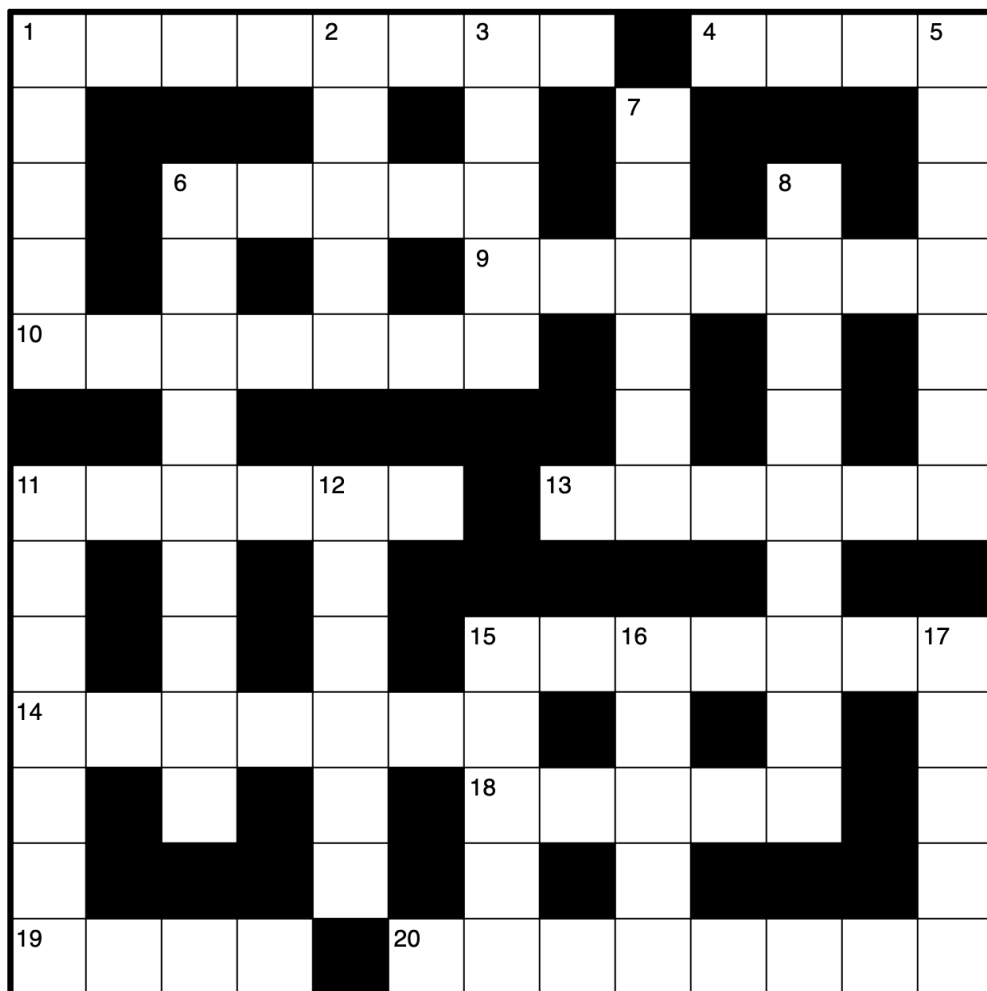


# Kevin and Timmy present: The Adventures of Lord Galalogic II

by Sean Hartnett



## Cryptic Crossword by Sarah Beard



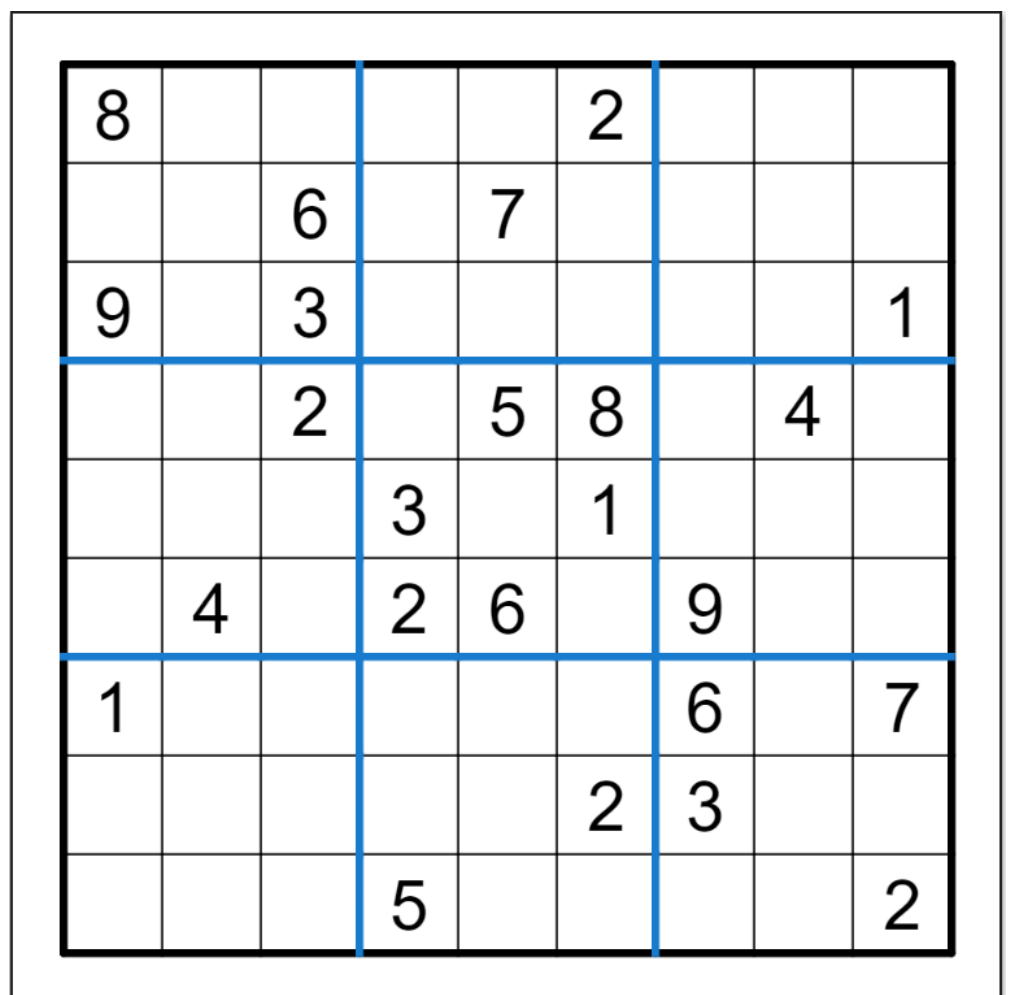
### ACROSS

- 1. Phoney (4, 4)
- 4. Balliol's ambitious rave kick starts a loud noise (4)
- 6. Love affair of fire (5)
- 9. Everyday nasal sound instrument (7)
- 10. Hench ant conceals charm (7)
- 11. Gloss over Gdańsk (6)
- 13. Spoil alcohol's rim (6)
- 14. Feline movement shows off latest styles (7)
- 15. Up for more, don't last very long (7)
- 18. Mostly adorable but altogether severe (5)
- 19. Revolting class (4)
- 20. Returning dinner for criticism (8)
- 14. Onion hiding constant belief (7)
- 16. The Spanish need thirty-one days to make a sauce (4)
- 19. Hairy pirate's shout in bed (5)
- 20. Draw out in favour of length (7)
- 21. Domination makes me wet? (5)
- 22. Resting ends with first half of a table tennis game (7)

### DOWN

- 1. Fraud hidden in food with debated pronunciation (5)
- 2. Dishy and known for a very long attraction (5)
- 3. Weightless glow (5)
- 5. Russian government: introducing golf and losing a kilo changes you into a little monster (7)
- 6. Cosmetic procedures confront elevators (9)
- 7. Little sheep starts measuring between troughs (6)
- 8. Orange car breaking down, what hubris! (9)
- 11. Immoral hunter conceals pain inside (7)
- 12. For crush - just add water! (6)
- 15. Winslet takes up most of slide (5)
- 16. Alternatively, can you order the Union about later, please dear? - indicating possibility (5)
- 17. Track down and shoot!

## Oxdoku by Lewis Callister



## Quiz by Misha Pemberthy

- 1 What Oxford College is an anagram of "cruel ecologist chirps"? UK?
- 2 Which country is hosting the Africa Cup of Nations this year?
- 3 Mike, Noel, Fergal, Niall and Dolores make up what band?
- 4 Which is further north, Calgary, Canada or Oxford, Devon villages or former poet laureates: Colley Cibber, George Nympton, Peter Tavey, Thomas Warton?
- 5 What is the only number to have all of its letters in alphabetical order in english?
- 6 What is the highest rated movie on IMDB with a rating of 9.3?
- 7 How many Labour PMs had the first name James?
- 8 Are each of the following
- 9 What colour is the hat of the Mr Men character Mr Strong?
- 10 Besides Hawaii what is the only US state to have more than half its population on an island?

Looking for last week's answers? Check page 11!