

Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

VOLUME 303, ISSUE 2

SATURDAY 25th JANUARY 2025

1ST WEEK, HILARY



Succession's Brian Cox on method acting, nurturing new talent, and his co-stars

PROFILES – PAGE 12-13



Sanskrit drama returns to Oxford

CULTURE – PAGE 16

Rishi Sunak to take up role at Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government

By BRYN MOLLET

Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is taking a job at Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government as a member of the World Leaders Circle and Distinguished Fellow after he resigned as the Conservative Party's leader last July.

Sunak posted on X: "Excited to join @BlavatnikSchool at Oxford and @HooverInst at Stanford."

"Oxford and Stanford shaped my life, and I look forward to contributing to their world-class work addressing the challenges and the technological opportunities of our time."

The Blavatnik School of Government is a department within the University with a mission of inspiring and supporting better government and public policy around the world. Professor Ngaire Woods, Dean of the Blavatnik School, said: "We are looking forward to welcoming Rishi Sunak to the Blavatnik School... Bringing together a global network of leaders with such rich experience and insight will strengthen our mission to foster a world that is better led, better served, and better governed."

"His expertise will shape our work

Continued on pg. 4



Permanent Private Halls behind closed doors



Blackfriars Chapel. Image Credit: David Hays

In its early days, the University of Oxford was largely constituted by private religious halls, which post-reformation provided a space for Catholic and non-conformist Christian denominations to study at the University. In 1918, Oxford gave some of these halls permanent status, affording them lasting membership of the University, without needing to receive a royal charter to achieve full collegiate status. These halls remained partially responsible for their own governance, and held onto their religious identity beyond that of the University.

Today, there are four Permanent Private Halls (PPH) in Oxford University. The largest of the four, Regent's Park College has aspirations of joining the ranks of Oxford colleges, and is often confused for already being among them.

By EUAN ELLIOTT and NATASHA DRAKE

Next door, Blackfriars Hall, which shares a site with the a priory under the same name, is home to the brown-robed friars spotted throughout Oxford. Wycliffe hall, on Banbury Road, is largely a hub for ministerial training, with 40% of students studying for ordination. Finally, Campion Hall, tucked away behind Pembroke College, is distinctive for its humble size, housing only 20 students. These PPHs are collectively home to just over 500 students

PPHs are an area of mystery to most Oxford students and often subject of various myths. With some students previously having rumoured that "PPHs are cults", and "Regent's is being bought by

St. John's", *Cherwell* spoke to the heads of all four PPHs to shed some much needed light on the smaller cousins of Oxford colleges. In looking at the governance, finance, and culture of PPHs, *Cherwell* found that while they formally and academically align with the University, some students are left feeling more pressured than welcomed by their hall.

Ownership & Governance

All four PPHs are either governed independently, or in part by a religious institution. Between PPHs, the specific role given to the governing institution varies. For the two largest PPHs, Regent's Park, affiliated with the Baptist Union,

Continued on pg. 5

Student Union abolishes the role of president

By CHERWELL NEWS

Oxford University Student Union's board of trustees has abolished the role of president, opting instead for a "flat structure" of four officer roles. This decision was made by the board which at the time had a student-elected majority, but follows an SU survey in which 86.2% supported keeping the role of president. The sample size of the survey, however, was too small to be conclusive. As part of the same restructuring, a new "Conference of Common Rooms" model will be implemented by the SU to mirror the University's collegiate structure.

Nominations opened to elect four roles: Undergraduate Officer, Postgraduate Officer, Communities and Common Rooms Officer, and Welfare, Equity and Inclusion Officer. The SU announcement does not explicitly mention the removal of the presidential role.

Continued on pg. 2

Re-introduced Free Speech Act to support controversial speakers

By SHAHAR EYAL

The government has recently announced the reintroduction of the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act (HEFSA), after the act's introduction was suspended by the Labour government in July 2024. The revised legislation has removed provisions allowing individuals to sue universities and has exempted student unions from direct legal responsibility for breaches of free speech.

The Freedom of Speech Act grants the Higher Education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), the power to investigate breaches of free speech and issue fines for non-compliance. Under the act, universities must also publish and uphold a code of practice for promoting free speech on campus.

Oxford University's published code of practice on free speech, developed in response to HEFSA in 2024, states that the legislation "does not change the university's pre-existing position that freedom of speech and academic freedom are central tenets of university life." It also specifies that commitment to free speech exists with "appropriate regulations on the time,

Continued on pg. 2

£450k for a two-bed in Cowley: Oxford at centre of UK's housing crisis

By SATCHEL WALTON

A two-bed, one-bath home in Cowley is currently listed for £450,000. In 1998, it sold for just £85,150.

While wages have also grown over that time period, they haven't grown nearly fast enough to keep up with rising housing costs. Across England, housing prices have more than doubled relative to wages since the 90s. In 1997, the median home cost about three or four years of median wages. Now, the median home in Oxfordshire sells for over ten years of wages, and in London it's nearly 13.

The decline of homeownership

Across the country, rates of homeownership have declined, especially for young people. The homes people are left in are smaller: smaller than they were in the past, smaller than homes elsewhere in Europe, and a lot smaller than homes in other English-speaking countries. The average home in Britain is smaller than the average in New York, America's most crowded city.

That house in Cowley, which costs over five times as much in nominal terms today as it did in 1998, was an average-

priced house in Oxford in both years.

Why has home ownership become so much more unattainable in the UK? It's no great mystery. Across the political spectrum, there is a broad consensus: for decades, Britain has not built enough housing.

In 2004, a government report found that England needed 270,000 new homes per year to keep up with demand. Every year – under Labour, the Coalition, and the Conservatives – the real number would fall short of that – sometimes far short. Every year, outside the pandemic

and 2007-2009 financial crisis, housing prices rocketed ever upwards.

Finally, in 2022, the government didn't fall short of its target. Unfortunately, that was only because Rishi Sunak scrapped the government's target of 300,000 homes per year after years of Conservative indecision.

Labour's 2024 manifesto promised 1.5 million new homes in England over the next parliament. The Conservatives one-upped them by promising

Continued on pg. 8

Anti-social behaviour spurs Hertford and Exeter's plan to refurbish sports grounds

By ISAAC GAVAGHAN

Following repeated reports of anti-social behaviour, Hertford and Exeter colleges have submitted a planning proposal to Oxford City Council to revamp their sports grounds.

In the planning application to Oxford City Council the colleges propose to build, “new sports facilities including a light weight canopy and enclosure housing padel tennis courts, outdoor padel courts, cricket nets and the creation of a new basketball and netball hard surface court.”

The colleges plan to repurpose “Exeter squash courts for use as a golf simulator and the change of use of Hertford squash courts to café, changing facilities, sports hub reception area, and community facilities.”

In their planning statement, the colleges described how, “the site has struggled over time with instances of antisocial behaviour and vandalism. This issue has been the main driver of these proposals.” The statement also detailed that, from November 2021 to November 2024, the most common crime reported on this site and in its immediate surroundings were violent

or sexual offences, with 31 incidents. The second most reported was anti-social behaviour, with 26 incidents.

Local resident Elaine Welsh told *Cherwell*: “It’s not very nice to walk past badly damaged and treated pavilions. I think the local teenagers who I have seen hanging out there need something more constructive to do.”

“I think they’ve got nowhere else to go where they can hang out with their friends and if we had more youth workers to work with them to create something that they wanted we might see a reduction in the anti-social behaviour. They need to be part of local facilities so that they feel that they have an investment in it rather than feeling so alienated from it that they actually destroy it.”

In Hertford and Exeter College’s planning statement, the colleges wrote that “the new sports pitches and sensitive lighting at the site will address historic issues of antisocial behaviour and vandalism which is known to the applicants and neighbours as a long-standing issue which has resulted in the underuse of this site.” They added that the project aimed to create “a vibrant, year-round sporting ‘hub’ for use by both residents and students.”

Image Credit: Isaac Gavaghan



Oxford researcher awarded £2m to build arthritis risk calculator

By POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

A prestigious award of £2 million over five-years has been awarded to Professor Laura Coates, Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, as part of a National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) research professorship. As the first ever rheumatologist to be awarded this research professorship, Coates plans to develop a risk calculator for arthritis.

Only 73 people since 2011 have succeeded in obtaining this award, many of whom have since become senior research leaders. The award entails three support posts, research costs, and access to a leadership and development programme.

Professor Coates’ research focuses on psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, a chronic inflammatory variant of arthritis from which approximately 640,000 people in the UK suffer.

Around one-third of those with the skin condition psoriasis go on to develop psoriatic arthritis. Professor Coates plans to develop a risk calculator that would estimate the risk that people with psoriasis have of developing arthritis.

Professor Coates said: “I will also design a new national study to test personalisation of treatment for those

who do develop arthritis. I will work with people living with psoriatic arthritis and medical teams to design this study using digital supports like apps and we will be able to test different treatments and personalise these for different people.”

The NIHR website details the eligibility criteria, requiring applicants to “have an outstanding research record of clinical and applied health care research”, and to “have demonstrated effective translation of research for improved health and care.”

Other research topics that the recipients of this award plan to explore include independence for older people across community and hospital settings, improving care for children with life-limiting conditions, and a prediction tool to streamline diagnostic pathways for suspected endometrial cancer.

Professor Lucy Chappell, Chief Executive Officer of the NIHR, underlined the honour of this research award, saying: “The NIHR Research Professorship is one of our most prestigious career awards. The award funds outstanding researchers to help address the major health and care issues of today and in the future, strengthening health, public health and care research leadership at the highest academic levels.”

Free Speech Act reintroduced

Continued from Page 1

place, and manner of events”.

In response to the reintroduction of the legislation, an Oxford University spokesperson told *Cherwell* that the code of practice “will be reviewed and updated as appropriate in light of further information from the Government about planned changes to the legislation.”

Student protests and demonstrations are also subject to regulations as outlined in the code. Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P), has criticised the code, telling *Cherwell* that it “does not trust the University of Oxford or the OFS to dutifully protect the right to student protest.”

Last term, Brasenose College’s last-minute announcement of a talk by former Israeli government spokesperson, Eylon Levy, sparked a protest of students who blocked the entrance of the college. Under

HEFSA, such speakers would gain stronger legal protection against being “no-platformed,” and the University would be obligated to uphold their right to share their views, regardless of how contentious they may be.

HEFSA has divided opinion within Oxford’s academic community. Among its supporters are over 60 Oxford academics, part of a larger group of over 500 signatories to an open letter urging the government to reinstate the legislation. The letter denies that the act would threaten the safety of minority groups and emphasises its importance in safeguarding intellectual diversity.

Opponents of the act warn that it may shield hate speech under the guise of free expression, with antisemitism being raised as a key concern, as some claim the act could open the door for Holocaust deniers in universities. The government



said that the revisions made to the act protect minority groups and the Union of Jewish Students has welcomed them.

In response to the proposed legislation, one student told *Cherwell*: “I think there’s been a change in attitudes at universities recently in favour of more free debate, so it’s a tentative step in the right direction.”

Image Credit: Cherwell News

Student Union abolishes presidency

Continued from Page 1

After the SU entered its transformation period last year, it conducted a “Democracy Consultation” to explore student support for different structures for the organisation. Survey respondents were asked for their thoughts on the roles of sabbatical officers.

According to internal documents viewed by *Cherwell*, only a small sample of 61 respondents answered this question, and of this only 29 offered specific feedback. The “flat structure” being implemented was favoured by 4 respondents (13.8%), whilst 25 respondents (86.2%) supported a presidential model.

In 2022, however, former SU president Anvee Bhutani conducted a consultation with “hundreds of people – including JCR and MCR Presidents, Campaign Chairs, University staff and many more” to find that the role of president should be retained. The review argued in favour of having a president because

“it is good to have a central point of contact administratively”, according to a *Cherwell* story from the time.

Last week’s SU announcement also includes a restructuring toward a “Conference of Common Rooms” structure, which coheres with the findings of the consultation. The new model would gather JCR and MCR presidents as the main democratic decision-making body of the SU.

According to the consultation, 61% of 217 students supported or strongly supported the model, with responses saying that it seemed the best suited for Oxford’s collegiate system and that common rooms receive higher levels of student engagement.

The SU will also re-introduce part-time Community Officers to represent “marginalised students” whom the SU recognise “may not always feel an affinity to their common room”. The consultation found support for this change with 76.8% of 194 respondents in agreement with it.

The plan for the “Conference

of Common Rooms” started development in Trinity Term 2024. In comparison, the plan to abolish the presidential role happened over a shorter time frame, with a single open-ended question in the “Democracy Consultation” survey in Michaelmas Term 2024.

In a press release, the SU stated: “We hope and believe that these changes will address some longstanding challenges, and establish a precedent for a more inclusive and accountable primary purpose.”

The creation of the role of president followed a period of student protest by the SU’s forerunner, the Oxford University Student Representative Council (OUSRC), including a seven-day long sit-in on the issue of a Central Students Union building in 1973. The first president of Oxford students to be recognised by the University was elected in 1971, three years before the SU was recognised.

Image Credit: David Hays



Oxford team unveils AI-powered blood test that detects cancer early

BY CHERWELL NEWS

A team of researchers from Oxford University has used machine learning to develop a new blood test, called TriOx, that can detect 6 forms of early stage cancer. This breakthrough enables the detection of multiple cancers at their earliest and most challenging stages. Early detection is crucial as it allows for easier treatment and can reduce the financial burden on the healthcare system.

The study focused on six cancer types: colorectal, oesophageal, pancreatic, renal, ovarian, and breast. It showed the capacity to identify cancers, including early-stage ones, and differentiate between individuals with and without cancer, with a sensitivity of 94.9% and a specificity of 88.8%.

Scientists combined an advanced DNA analysis technique called TAPS with machine learning to analyse various characteristics of the DNA circulating in the bloodstream. This approach significantly improves the detection of small amounts of cancer DNA, making it highly effective in identification.

There has been a growing body of research on “liquid biopsies” as a more non-invasive option compared to traditional diagnostic methods. However, while other liquid biopsy tests are limited by only looking at certain parts of the genome, Trioxide allows scientists to look at the whole genome. Dr Dimitris Vavoulis, co-lead researcher, said: “Current screening methods are limited to a few cancers and are often invasive, deterring many from regular checks.”

Dr Vavoulis continued: “We envision that a simple blood draw could eventually be all that’s needed to screen for multiple cancers, giving patients and doctors a faster, more convenient tool to stay ahead of the disease.”

The research team is now developing and validating the test across more cancer types and larger patient groups. While the test is still currently in development, co-lead researcher Anna Schuh says it “has the potential to improve survival rates for millions worldwide.”



Oxford professor awarded highest astronomy honour previously held by Einstein and Hawking

BY HOLLY ERRINGTON

Professor James Binney, Emeritus Professor at the University of Oxford’s Department of Physics, has been awarded the Royal Astronomical Society’s Gold Medal for his work researching the structure and evolution of galaxies. Previous recipients of the award include Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, and Edwin Hubble.

Professor Binney completed his D.Phil. at Christ Church, Oxford and has held a postdoctoral position at the University since 1981, where he was a lecturer, fellow, and tutor at Merton College. He has previously been awarded the Maxwell Prize of the Institute of Physics and the Isaac Newton medal.

His influential work focuses on early galaxy formation and his re-

search on the importance of cooling gas in forming dark matter halos, which determine the structure of different galaxies, is an integral part in galaxy formation models. Binney’s research has also shed light on black holes, star formation, and the chemical evolution of galaxies.

He calls our galaxy “the complicated beast”. Having contributed significantly to producing the standard model for the mass distribution of the Milky Way, he is now working with data from the Gaia observatory to revise this model using the theoretical methods he himself helped develop.

Several textbooks written by Binney are now considered a standard work of reference and are widely used in the field. He has authored over 200 articles and served on many funding bodies both within the UK

and overseas. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society, one of the world’s oldest and most influential scientific institutions.

Binney said: “I am delighted to be honoured by the RAS by the award of this year’s Gold Medal. It was my great good fortune to be a theorist at a time of extraordinary progress in astronomy, mostly driven by spectacular advances in instrumentation.

“Most of what I’ve achieved has been in collaboration with generations of brilliant students and post-docs – this honour must be shared with them.”

Previously, Binney has said “it’s a miracle that, and a mystery that, the material world can be described mathematically” and that “learning physics changes and enriches your outlook on anything.”

Image Credit: CC0

Magdalen’s new student accommodation garners complaints from Oxford residents



BY CONOR WALSH

Magdalen College’s proposal to redevelop its Waynflete site student accommodation, situated beside the Cowley roundabout on St Clement’s Street, has received criticism from local residents in a recent public consultation, despite initial changes to the proposal to appease residents.

The reconstruction would replace the current Waynflete building, constructed in the 1960s, and see 76 new student accommodation rooms being built. Magdalen describes the project as aiming to deliver a “high quality, truly sustainable student accommodation development.”

The College amended their original proposal to overcome initial objections from residents, shortly after planning was first submitted in June 2024. Since then, a letter submitted by the York Palace Residents Association as part of the consultation said that the building “would replace a poorly designed building with another which in no way respects the historic character of the locality” and that they are “deeply dis-

appointed by the lack of contact from the applicant”.

The Bursar at Magdalen College told *Cherwell* that: “The College has undertaken an extensive engagement strategy from the beginning of the project, and we have consulted with neighbouring residents and community stakeholders in addition to local and national authorities and consultees. We are excited at the prospect of this development. The new building will develop a sense of community, greatly enhance the quality of student accommodation and deliver significant public benefits.”

Conservation groups have largely approved of the project. A letter from the Georgian Group, a charity promoting the maintenance of Georgian buildings in England and Wales, said that “the proposed new buildings respond to this sensitive site much more thoughtfully than the existing structures.”

Construction of the original Waynflete building coincided with Magdalen’s 400th anniversary in 1958, and was completed in 1963.

Read the full story at cherwell.org
Image Credit: Ila Banerji

NEWS SHORTS

Extinction Rebellion announce new ‘XR Singers’ choir

An Extinction Rebellion press release marked “immediate” has announced that XR will be launching a new choir: the XR Singers. The XR Singers will be rehearsing with both new and experienced singers in preparation for public events.

Cherwell publisher wins lawsuit against Hank’s

Cherwell’s parent company, Oxford Student Publications Limited (OSPL), won against Hank’s Bar after the establishment refused to return a £450 deposit. Hank’s has since returned the deposit as well as £200 for the ‘Legal Counsel’ (an undergrad lawyer)’s time and £70 in legal fees.

CROSS CAMPUS

Cambridge climate change activists project message onto Senate House

The words “1.5 is dead” were projected onto Cambridge University’s Senate House building on 17th January. Activists were commenting on the fact that global temperatures have risen by 1.5 degrees despite the need to prevent such a rise being included in the 2015 Paris Accords. Activists also distributed leaflets calling for a public information campaign and encouraging students to sign a parliamentary petition.

Yale students protest New Haven’s homelessness policy

A group of protesters including students from Yale University gathered in the City Hall in response to changes to New Haven’s policies on homeless encampments. The Unhoused Activists Community Team alleges that the city has removed the previous 72 hour window allowing encampments to be vacated, and are providing no time to vacate after issuing a sweeping notification.

Unknown white bags dropped by helicopters near Edinburgh University

Students and locals expressed confusion on social media this week about why helicopters were dropping “white bags” onto Arthur’s Seat, which overlooks the university’s Pollock Halls accommodation. One commented that they might be used to feed the “giant granite guzzling haggis”. It turned out the bags contained materials to restore one of the hill’s footpaths.



Keble ball proposal rejected twice

By MAIR ANDREWS

Keble College's Governing Body has informed students that it will not host a ball in 2025 after a student-run committee submitted two separate and complete proposals. An "informal" go-ahead was given to the drawing-up of a second proposal, which was a collaborative ball with St Catherine's College, but was vetoed before being presented to the Governing Body, which usually confirms such proposals.

Last year, Keble interviewed and selected a committee to create a proposal for a ball in Trinity 2025. Over 15 students helped draft a proposal that included arrangements for food, security, and entertainment providers over the long vacation. However, when the proposal was sent to the college's Governing Body in Michaelmas for final approval, it was rejected.

In an email announcing the rejected proposal, the JCR President cited the recent appointment of a new bursar as the main complication: "While the Ball Committee handles most of the work to put on a Ball, there's a certain amount of unavoidable extra strain that it puts on College staff, particularly the bursar who is ultimately liable for ensuring events like this run smoothly."

In an effort to overcome the diffi-

culties a ball would place on the college in this situation, the Keble Ball President proposed a collaboration with St Catherine's College in late Michaelmas, who are currently without a location for their summer ball due to construction work. This idea was taken to both colleges and they were given an "informal yes" to create a joint proposal.

Over the winter vacation, another committee of over 30 members was formed and a proposal was written up for a joint Keble-Catz Ball. The proposal included plans for Keble to host the ball with St Catherine's to take legal and financial liability, and the colleges employed lawyers to draft contracts to ensure the viability of the plan. St Catherine's told *Cherwell* that "the proposal was simply not taken forward".

Before the final proposal was taken to the Keble Governing Body meeting last week, committee members received an email from the Ball Presidents explaining that the proposal never made it to the Governing Body, "citing issues with college administration as the key deciding factor in their decision." The email went on to say that "these are the unfortunate realities of dealing with instability in the college administrative system."

Cherwell has reached out to both St Catherine's and Keble for comment.

Image Credit: Mair Andrews

Rishi Sunak gets job at Oxford University

Continued from page 1

to equip today's public leaders around the world with the urgent skills they need to tackle evolving global challenges, as well as seizing the opportunities."

As part of the World Leaders Circle, Sunak will join a global network of former heads of government in order to exchange policy ideas and promote international cooperation.

MP for Richmond and Northallerton, Sunak studied PPE at Lincoln College and graduated in 2001. He said he holds "huge affection for Oxford" and that studying here "shaped [his] life and career."

In 2022, Sunak became the first British Asian to hold the office of Prime Minister, as well as the youngest Prime Minister in over 100 years. Whilst in

office, Sunak oversaw the negotiation of the Windsor Framework, a trading agreement with the European Union regarding Northern Ireland. He left office after Labour won a landslide victory in the summer of 2024.

Newly-elected Chancellor Lord William Hague, who was also Tory leader, said: "Rishi's connection to Oxford University runs deep, and it's great to see him coming back to his alma mater to contribute in such a meaningful way. I have no doubt his insights will inspire the next generation of leaders who are starting their journey here at Oxford."

Sunak will also be taking up a role at Stanford University's Hoover Institute.

Image Credit: Simon Walker for UK Prime Minister//CC-BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Off-license on Park End risks losing license for illegal tobacco

By CHARLIE BAILEY

Uni Food and Wine, an off-licence on Park End Street, is at risk of losing its license after 81 illegal vapes and 169 non-compliant nicotine pouches were seized during an inspection by Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards.

An investigation into the shop's illegal sale of tobacco products has been ongoing since the seizure in November. The Trading Standards team is responsible for confiscating non-compliant tobacco products as it aims to regulate the "supply of age restricted products." Illicit tobacco is a priority nationwide, whilst tobacco control is a specific priority for South East England.

The products were confiscated for not complying with Trading Standards regulations as they did not display instructions for use and some were not

labelled in English. Products at the shop were also displayed at the point of sale, which has been forbidden in the UK since 2012. Some products failed to display a text warning and colour photograph that, according to law, must be on every product.

The shop failed to respond to the Trading Standards officers by their stated deadline, triggering a further search in December, in which the team noted that "tobacco blunts, cigarettes, hand-rolling tobacco and tobacco snus were all on open display."

The Trading Standards report recommends a period of suspension of up to twelve weeks, and suggests that further action against the shop would "promote the crime prevention objective" and "protect the needs of the wider community". Oxford City Council's licensing panel will decide on the 11th

of February whether the shop will keep its license or not.

Reports on changing national trends from 2023 suggest that students turned to e-cigarettes as their preferred nicotine source, with one study surveying 15-30 year olds, finding that one in ten participants use nicotine daily. Despite government regulation against the open display of vapes, four in five children reported seeing vapes promoted.

A second year student at Keble College told *Cherwell*: "I feel like vaping is everywhere. People are more relaxed about it because it seems less mature than smoking, so a lot of young people do it. When these illegal ones get mixed in, it's more dangerous, as vaping is so normalised".

Cherwell has contacted Uni Food and Wine for a reply.

Council creates 140 new bike rack spaces across city centre

By JOSHUA MCGILLIVRAY

Oxford City Council is installing 140 new bicycle spaces across the city centre in partnership with Oxford Direct Services in an effort to support increased cycling in Oxford. The project will see the installation of 70 new Sheffield hoop-shaped cycle racks and is due to be completed by the end of this month.

The project is funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which is established to finance cycling infrastructure. According to figures by the Department of Transport, 35% of people living in Oxford cycled at least once a week in 2023.

This figure was the second highest of any local authority across England. Oxford's strong cycling culture means that there is a paucity of secure parking spaces in the city, with cyclists resorting to chaining their bikes to

railings, drainpipes, and lampposts, which exacted frustration from some local businesses and members of the community.

Bike thefts in Oxford are a considerable problem. From September 2019 to September 2020, Oxford had the second highest rate of bike theft in the United Kingdom, with just under eight thefts occurring for every 1,000 citizens. The council hopes that the installation of new, secure bike spaces will help abate this problem.

New cycle racks are due to be installed on: Broad Street (5 new cycle racks), Ship Street (6), Queen's Lane (21) and Leopold Street (7). Suggestions for future bicycle parking locations can be made through the FixMyStreet website by submitting a bicycle rack report.

In a press release, Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning at Oxford City Council,

said that: "I am delighted that we are creating 140 new cycle parking spaces. Oxford is a hub for cycling, but with so many people using their bikes every day to come in to the city centre there are often bikes attached to all sorts of inappropriate things like railings and drainpipes. To encourage more people to cycle, with all the health benefits that brings, it is important that we increase the provision of bicycle parking across the city."

"We often hear from existing and potential cyclists that it is really difficult to find places to lock bikes securely. I am looking forward to using these new racks myself, and to seeing other people using the new racks throughout the city. If anyone has ideas of where new cycle racks are needed, please do share your suggestions."

Image Credit: Kenneth Wong



INVESTIGATIONS

Permanent Private Halls behind closed doors

Continued from Page 1

and Wycliffe Hall, linked to the Anglican Church, their association starts and ends with their accreditation to train ordinands, ministers of the Church. The two halls are registered as their own charities, in effect existing and operating similar to other colleges. Emphasising their independent nature, Regent's Park Principal, Sir Malcolm Evans, told *Cherwell*: "There is no sense in which the College can be said to be subject to any form of 'religious governance' or external influence beyond the University".

By contrast, Blackfriars, affiliated with the Dominican Order, and Campion, affiliated with the Jesuit Order, exist under respective parent-charities which hold trusteeship. Accordingly, these PPHs give a greater degree of governance to the religious orders with which they identify. Blackfriars' Senior Leadership Team is partially composed of members of the Dominican Order, and Campion's Governing Body includes a permanent representative of the Jesuits in Britain.

The governance of PPHs is twofold, however, since they are all subject to Oxford's "Regulations governing the Permanent Private Halls" in addition to their independent governing body, which includes stipulations such as as each fellow must be approved by the relevant faculty or department, as well as being subject to the University's general policies on good practice, like all other colleges. As Blackfriars Regent, Fr John O'Connell explained, Blackfriars Hall "first and foremost" complies "with the letter and the spirit" of University policy.

Finances & Security

As subsidiaries of larger charities, Blackfriars and Campion lack their own endowments but receive funds directly. The Master of Campion, Rev Dr Nicholas Austin, told *Cherwell* that this arrangement affords them greater financial security than they would as an independent hall, like Regent's Park or Wycliffe, since their patron charities have additional funds which may be allocated to the hall in times of need. The Regent of Blackfriars also agreed with this view, explaining that whilst the Hall primarily generates its own income, the Dominican Order offers additional financial support by, for example, investing in premises that the hall can use at subsidised prices.

The financial situations of the independent Regent's Park and Wycliffe are less favourable. Since they lack full college status, PPHs did not receive the same attention in 2024's Disparity Report. For the year 2023/2024, Regent's Park reported an endowment of £4.8 million, a mere 2.9% of the average endowment amount at each Oxford college for 2023/2024 (£160.2 million). Similarly, Wycliffe's endowment of £561,000 weighed in at only 0.3% of the college mean. Taking into account the comparatively small student bodies of PPHs, Regent's Park's endowment-student ratio of £22.7 thousand and Wycliffe's £7.6 thousand were eclipsed by the college mean of £324.7 thousand.

The comparatively precarious situation of these PPHs is due, in part, to their exclusion from the College Contribution Scheme, a University-wide fund collected from colleges proportionally to their wealth, from which poorer colleges can apply for grants. When the Scheme was redrafted in 2019, Regent's Park JCR advocated unsuccessfully for PPHs to be included, despite motions of solidarity being passed by colleges such as New College and Merton College. In his proposal, the then Regent's Park JCR president, Noah Robinson, wrote "[the Scheme] seeks to help poorer colleges, but ignores the poor-

est of all".

Whilst the Principal of Regent's Park told *Cherwell* "the College copes perfectly well without these benefits", a 2024 report on the experiences of students at PPHs noted that budget constraints impact the living standards of PPHs, visible in "the absence of gyms, bars, and sports facilities on-site... a lack of variety in dining options" and "fewer and less elaborate" social events. Further, the "book grants, travel grants, accommodation bursaries or other financial support" available to students at colleges remain inaccessible to those at PPHs.

Overall, students believed that these financial disparities impacted their social and, to some extent, academic experience. Whilst the report recognised that poorer colleges face similar challenges, it held that "these problems can feel more pronounced within PPHs due to their particularly small student populations and unique religious ethos".

Culture & Environment

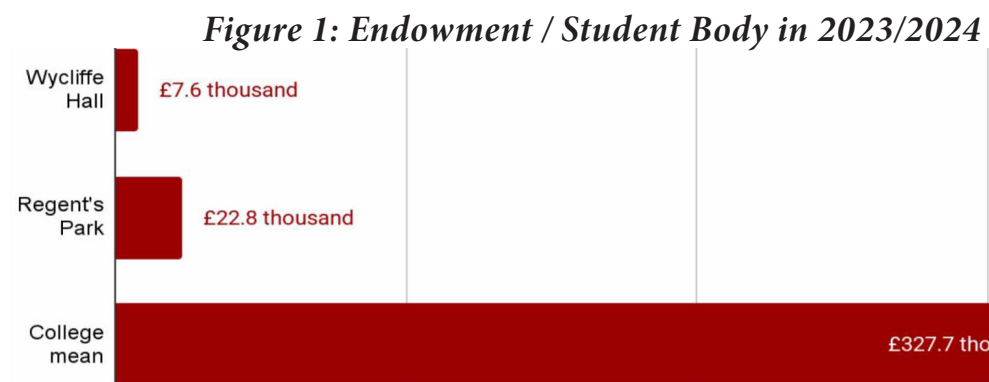
Whilst Regent's Park rivals other colleges in size, with a student body just slightly larger than Harris Manchester College, the other three halls are distinctive for housing a comparatively few students – most markedly Campion, with a student body of only 20. These smaller PPHs agreed that their modest size was a strength, attracting students seeking a more community-oriented Oxford experience. "It thus allows us to offer highly personal services", Blackfriars' Regent told *Cherwell*: "students are known by name, not only by other students, but also by the staff".

These three PPHs also saw the religious principles of their halls as an attractive feature for applicants, including those who identify with a different religious tradition, or none at all. For example, Rev Dr Nicholas Austin, Master of Campion Hall, explained that the Jesuit Order's central value of cura personalis, or pastoral care, long precedes the University's recent increased recognition of the need for student welfare support.

All four heads were keen to point out the religious diversity of their hall, as well as the lack of faith requirement for applicants. The heads of Campion and Regent's Park told *Cherwell* that students who identify with their respective religious orders represent a minority in their halls, and the other two affirmed that their communities are by no means defined by a singular religious background. Nevertheless, they did not see this diversity as cause for secularisation, as other Oxford colleges have tended to. Instead, Campion, Wycliffe, and Blackfriars have an opt-out system in place whereby all candidates who applied to other colleges, but were pooled to them, are offered the opportunity to decline the PPH and be considered by a different college.

Rather than changing their culture to accommodate a wide variety of students, these halls instead ensure that all students are there of their own volition, though the SU raises concerns that the opt-out system does not do enough to ensure that applicants feel that they have full agency over their choice to study at a PPH. Blackfriars told *Cherwell* that in returning to the offer pool for consideration by another college, these students are not disadvantaged whatsoever in their overall application to the University. However, the SU report found that some applicants doubted this assurance, as one student accepted a place at Campion, having been pooled there from Blackfriars, and felt pressured to accept the place, recommending a consistent, University-wide opt-out system.

Regent's Park differs from the others in this respect, since it lacks that opt-out system for pooled candidates. The Student Union recommended that these students should be given the choice to be reallocated in their report, recognising that "the smaller size and strong religious ethos [of PPHs] may not align with [pooled applicants'] expectations or personal interests". As well as providing non-Baptist students with the option of a secular Oxford experience,



and an opt-out system would ensure "that these communities are filled with individuals who are excited to contribute to and benefit from the experience".

Despite the recommendations of the SU, Regent's Park decided against implementing an opt-out system, and students continue to be pooled to the PPH, without the choice to be reconsidered. Regent's Park Principal disagreed with the SU's view that students at the hall are denied a secular experience, since "coming to Regent's does not make a student subject to any form of governance or influence other than that of the College and University", defending the position that students may be readily pooled to Regent's, just as they would to other colleges.

One undergraduate at Regent's Park who spoke to *Cherwell* defended the decision, since the choice to opt out may result in diminished student numbers and diversity.

Tolerance & Inclusivity

The SU report continues: "Rather than an opt-out provision, undergraduate students conveyed that they would like Regent's Park to adopt a more inclusive atmosphere to other religions and beliefs, rather than an atmosphere of simply tolerance." Whilst there is no pressure to engage in religious life at PPHs, many non-Christian students felt marginalised, feeling merely "allowed" rather than genuinely welcomed". As well as a lack of Halal and Kosher provisions, students reported that non-Christian religious events across PPHs receive comparatively meagre funding and support.

Recently, Regent's Park saw an incident of antisemitic graffiti. In his statement condemning the act, the principal wrote: "Mutual respect and toleration and the freedom of religion or belief is a central pillar of Baptist identity and thus foundational to the ethos of Regent's". One Jewish student at Regent's Park told *Cherwell* that the statement's emphasis on the Baptist identity only left him, and other Jewish students, feeling more isolated, since "they once again centred Christianity even when the matter at hand was about an antisemitic hate crime".

In response, the principal told *Cherwell*: "Whilst fully respecting this point of view, this was not the general reaction to the statement: indeed, many students and staff expressed quite the opposite view, commending the College for the support which it offered and the open and transparent stance that it had taken."

The same Jewish student, who is also trans-

gender, told *Cherwell* that their experience made them feel that the PPH prioritises a certain "religious identity and experience above others". The student eventually negotiated a switch to Linacre College to complete their postgraduate degree, following the PPH's handling of incidents which left them feeling "marginalised and excluded on the basis of [their] identities".

Regent's Park Principal told *Cherwell*: "we reject the suggestion that we only 'tolerate' those of 'other religions or beliefs'. The very suggestion implies that there is a bias towards those of a particular faith or belief tradition, which is simply not the case. It is just plain wrong to suggest that those of some faith traditions, or of no religious faith, are prioritised over those of others, as generations of students who have studied at Regent's can attest. We seek to provide for the needs of all our students." Additionally, he drew attention to Regent's Park being unique among Oxford colleges and PPHs for issuing a specific Trans Inclusion Statement. Blackfriars' Regent also stated that the hall welcomes students and fellows of diverse sexual and gender identities.

Not all student experiences are uniform, however, as one Muslim undergraduate at Regent's Park told *Cherwell* that the PPH's religious associations have fallen in the background of their experience. Despite being the only undergraduate wearing a hijab in their matriculation photo, she said "I don't feel bothered or ushered into the corner", adding that the PPH accommodated her request for a room close to a bathroom for religious reasons, as well as a dedicated prayer room. Other than saying grace before formals and hearing the echoes of the chapel choir across the quads – trademark signs of any Oxford college – she found that Regent's Park's religious associations are, simply put, "not in your face".

(Im)permanent Private Halls

For some PPHs, these financial and cultural tensions have reached breaking point. Greyfriars Hall, governed by the Capuchin Franciscan Order, closed in 2008, citing an "unsustainable level of investment required... both in personnel and finance". In 2022, St. Benet's Hall, governed by the Benedictine Order, found itself in the same position, as the University decided against

renewing its PPH status due to financial inviability, and its buildings were sold to St. Hilda's College.

The following year, St. Stephen's house gave up its PPH status, in order to be able to award the Church of England's Common Award, transitioning to an Anglican theological college which only takes on ordinands and those already ordained.

By contrast, St. Peter's College, Harris Manchester College, and Mansfield College were once all PPHs before they received collegiate status. Regent's Park's Principal expressed the hall's ambitions to make the same transition. For him, the question was not 'if', but "how and when this is to be brought about".

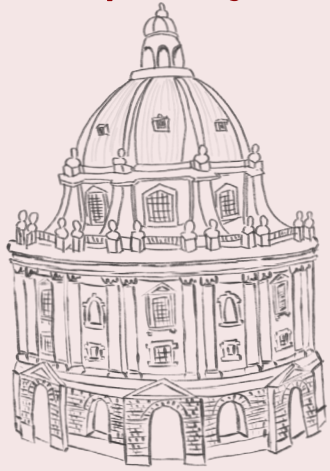
The heads of Wycliffe, Blackfriars, and Campion were comparatively content with the middle ground that PPH status affords. For Campion and Blackfriars, the arrangement allows them to benefit from the academic offerings of Oxford, whilst still existing as subsidiaries of their parent charities. Any perceived tension, they insist, is mistaken since the orders' values complement those of the University. For the independent Wycliffe Hall, Principal Rev Dr Michael Lloyd explained the value of PPHs in terms of a symbiotic relationship, whereby "ordinands help keep Wycliffe the Christian community that the vast majority of our non-ordinands are looking for", whilst non-ordinands "help our ordinands to stay 'normal'".

PPHs stand with each foot in a different world: one in the modern, secular University, and one in the religion-centred religious communities. Whilst some, like Regent's Park or St. Stephen's, opt to commit to one over the other, for those stuck in the middle, the compromises leave a distinctive mark on their students' experience.

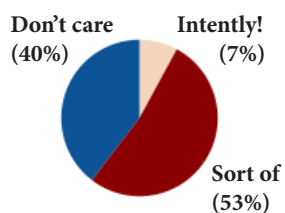
Image credit: adapted from Edwin Lutyens CC BY-SA 2.0 Campion Hall.



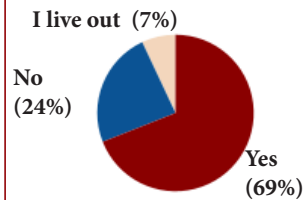
THE VERDICT



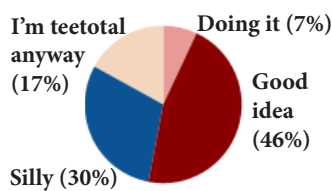
Have you been following the SU situation?



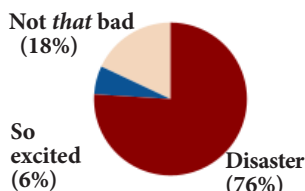
Are you satisfied with your college accommodation?



What's your view on Dry January?



What is your reaction to Trump's inauguration?



*According to 600 Instagram respondents

Abolish private schools, and all Oxford students win

A state comprehensive education would enhance most people's experience of university, boosting their self-worth

LAURENCE COOKE

It could be in *everyone* at Oxford's interests if private schools were abolished. This includes the interests of the privately-educated themselves, and therefore at least a third of people reading this. That's provided *Cherwell's* readership precisely mirrors Oxford's demographics, but that's an investigation for another day.

We certainly know one case for abolition: the notion that private schools exacerbate social inequality. It was sufficiently compelling to make Labour Party delegates vote to end them in 2019 and motivated Keir Starmer's promise to end the VAT exemption on private school fees. As it happens, I agree with this view, but I will use a different strategy here. For it's plausible that you could think that, whatever the social impact, it is nonetheless the right of parents to choose what is best for their children. Personally, I even think this 'right' is on a pretty shaky peg, but here's another thought: what if private schooling isn't best? In some ways, it seems like it may be better to be a state-educated Oxford student.

I will assume that most people believe that they got into Oxford on the basis of their academic merit. This would certainly be supported by the rigorous tests, interviews, and submissions that the University puts candidates through in equal measure, regardless of their origin. The parameters of admissions are quite clearly defined, given the sheer amount of tasks you can have to accomplish to be even in with a chance. The days of tutors seeing the words 'Eton' or 'Harrow' on a personal statement and waving the applicant through are certainly over.

If academic merit means something like having a certain gift or ability, say to be good at maths or able to digest and analyse a text at speed, then the following hypothetical should hold. If those Oxford students who were privately educated had been educated at a non-selective state school, then they would have got into Oxford anyway.

If we deny the conditional – perhaps by saying that it is through having significantly more academic support that a disproportionate amount of private-schoolers go to Oxford – we're left with the pretty controversial conclusion that those who made it to Oxford through a state comp are *just better* than their privately-educated counterparts. They had fewer means yet still got to the same place.

Let's say that's not true. What are the consequences? Well, it means that going to private school doesn't advance your prospects in higher education. The same reasoning applies for the world of employment – since you were a brilliant mind who would have secured that great job regardless of your schooling.

That would mean that the benefits of private school are not instrumental, but intrinsic: going to private school is a better experience in itself than state. You might cite the better facilities, fewer behavioural issues, and greater amount of personal attention afforded to each student.

On the downside, you've never lived in the real world. Oxford is a happy bubble of privilege that I stepped into when I first came here. Yet I am grateful for my previous education in the most bog-standard of schools. While it can be hard to stay grounded in the dizzying cycle of dinners, tutorials in beautiful offices, and countless other nice things, I know that I have some sense of perspective. I was reminded of this again the other day when I rediscovered an Instagram meme page associated with my old school, full of secretly-filmed videos of students assaulting teachers and crass jokes about paedophiles. To say I went there and then to Oxford is quite some contrast.

I felt quite sad when I passed Magdalen College School's hall (we – Oxford University students – still use their badminton courts) and saw children standing before a formal dinner. Their parents watched on proudly, knowing that their sons and daughters were already at the pinnacle of the British schooling system. If you were raised to expect this kind of thing and have it reinforced every day, I don't think you appreciate it in the same way as me. In fact, anything less than Oxford is a failure. I've heard course-mates talk about how their friend "fumbled" Oxford, when the rest of them all got in. If this doesn't convey the sense of a well-defined rite-of-passage, I'm not sure what does.

Some might say I'm painting all private schools with the same brush. It's not all fancy dinners and 'Oxbridge coordinators' and ten or twenty pre-made friends before you even arrive. There are still a lot of people like this, though.

The chance to start afresh, to not be known for who I was before, to have known that I'd gone it (more or less) alone is far more deeply rewarding. To have known the kids setting off the fire alarm during A-level exams, the shortage of glue sticks, teachers' gratitude for your genuine interest in the subject, all of this just makes Oxford far more special. And if admissions tutors see enough ability and potential in you, they'll let you in anyway.

To me, an Oxford where all students can celebrate with the same sense of achievement, having 'made it' to this special place through adversity and the perspective that gives you, is surely a better Oxford. A truly meritocratic Oxford where all students – regardless of their schooling – can hold their heads equally high. That's why, although it is far from the reality, we should all cheer on the abolition of private schools.

How far has Oxford come since the millennium?

The past 25 years of the University's apparent technological, political, and financial development may be deceiving

DONOVAN LOCK

Unless you're among the pedants who insist that the millennium began in 2001, this year marks a quarter-century since humanity celebrated the second millennium of the Gregorian calendar. For the world, these 25 years have been defined by key developments such as the September 11 attacks, the sudden spread of mobile phones, and the COVID-19 pandemic. For Oxford, however? At first glance, little has changed: it remains a world-class university as it has for centuries. But on closer inspection, there exist many noteworthy changes less visible to students; after all, the typical reader is under 25 years old and leaves Oxford within half a decade. Just how has the 21st century treated one of the world's most ancient universities?

Perhaps it is the misleading allure of attending a college over twice as old as the United States, but I find it staggering how much of Oxford is still physically evolving. This quarter-century has given us two new colleges: Green Templeton College was established in a merger, rising from the ashes of Green College and Templeton College in 2008, and Reuben College started accepting students just a few years ago in 2021. Conversely, permanent private halls (PPHs) have thinned in number, with Greyfriars, St Benet's Hall, and St Stephen's House each losing their PPH status in 2008, 2022, and 2023 respectively.

Department buildings tell a similar story. The past 25 years have given us superb educational facilities, such as the Andrew Wiles Building, the Blavatnik School of Government, and the current site of the Saïd Business School. But a crucial distinction sets the former building apart from the latter two. Sir Andrew Wiles, a professor of Mathematics at Oxford, famously proved Fermat's Last Theorem – a problem that remained unsolved for centuries. Appropriately, the Andrew Wiles Building (home to the Oxford Mathematical Institute) bears his name in recognition of his extraordinary academic achievement. On the other hand, Leonard Blavatnik and Wafic Saïd are billionaire philanthropists, known for questionable ties to governments worldwide. Blavatnik has faced scrutiny for his associations with Russian oligarchs,

and is the recipient of personal sanctions imposed by Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy; Saïd is known for the lucrative Al-Yamamah arms deal between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, worth £40 billion.

Indeed, morally dubious donors have proven to be a trend in recent years. The list does not end with Blavatnik or Saïd: the Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities was funded by £185 million in donations from the eponymous patron, best known as the CEO of Blackstone. Accordingly, the student body has exhibited a keener awareness of the University's funding and investments, throughout the quarter-century. From protesters occupying the new Saïd Business School building upon its opening in 2001, to students pressuring the University to divest last year, financial scrutiny has clearly become more prominent than ever. The student body composition provides intriguing statistical trends: in 2006, around one eighth of undergraduates were international students, a figure rising to one fifth by 2023. Moreover, the proportion of non-EU students approximately doubled from 8% to 16%. Whatever the next quarter-century holds for Oxford alumni, its reach will certainly be felt worldwide. Apart from the sustained level of prestige (people are impressed when you tell them where you study, yes?), the perception of Oxford has jumped rather sporadically these past 25 years. Consider the medium of film: the year 2001 commenced the *Harry Potter* film franchise, which has given us many a gaggle of tourists, and at least two merchandising shops. Within the same period, Oxford was painted in a somewhat less pleasant hue by *Salzburg*.

This aptly captures the dichotomous public perception of Oxford – on one hand, it is a place of academic excellence and the quaint city of dreaming spires, yet on the other, it is an incessant sleazefest for the elite. Given that the modal Briton has not attended a university, who could blame them for thinking such a reasonable thing? Across the quarter-century, Oxford produced 15 Nobel Laureates from its alumni and staff, and one Fields medallist. Billions of doses of the Oxford–AstraZeneca vaccine were distributed around the world. And yet, a commonly parroted perception of Oxford has little to do with



academia.

The elephant in the room is a matter of political leadership – this nation has had eight prime ministers since 2000, and seven of them are Oxford graduates (in case you're wondering, Gordon Brown earned his MA and PhD at Edinburgh). Few things can spell out a university's prominence as blatantly as a history of national officeholders. Perhaps more interestingly, Oxford was where several prime ministers earned their political stripes: notably, Boris Johnson – via ruthless campaigning – was president of the Oxford Union, and Liz Truss was president of the Oxford University Liberal Democrats within her first year.

This remains a constant in British politics. Since 1945, every prime minister that graduated from an English university was once an Oxford student. Last decade, 'elitism' became a particularly touchy subject for our politicians, with haunting tales of the Bullingdon Club reminding the nation just how

out of touch our leaders can be. It did not matter to the public whether or not 'Piggate' happened, it was simply believable. However, this streak of Oxford alumni will likely break soon; Keir Starmer and Ed Davey are the only party leaders with an Oxford education, after all.

So, the quarter-century largely ends as it began in Oxford. An Oxonian is prime minister, the University's Chancellor is a baron, academic accomplishments remain superb, and our financing is still amoral at best. If any change naturally occurs at Oxford, it will inevitably be slow; the University's history of success ensures that the status quo is peculiarly treasured. But a resistance to change comes with the concomitant risk of falling behind. Oxford is an establishment that highly benefits its students; it is our moral obligation, as future alumni, to uphold a legacy we can be proud of.

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

OPINION

Response: Tutoring can be a force for good

PETER BROOKES, private tutor

Oxbridge admissions results have re-alerted many to the problem of access, as Rizina's article – "Admissions tutoring proves that money beats merit" articulates – and rightly so. Given this, private tuition gets a bad rap, but what is it doing? At times, in the furore one reads about this 'fault line', one would think private tuition is some evil magic powder that confers special luck in interviews!

Working in the tutoring sector, I help students improve their knowledge and skills. This raises the general level of education for the good of society as a whole. Those who have greater knowledge and skills will go on to become more productive citizens.

Of course, the problem of access has two components: a) there is the matter that a well-functioning meritocracy ensures that the best talent is fully utilised for the benefit of all, and b) there is the matter of the unfairness that opportunities are tied to one's background. My

point that tutoring raises skills only answers (a) in suggesting that tutoring can develop talent and therefore also improve results for society.

To resolve the problem posed by point (b), we'd need to consider what the biggest obstacles to greater fairness are. In an arms race of tutoring vs access measures, it is unclear what the net effect of these two interventions are, especially since admissions tutors take pains to select on merit. It is also unclear who gets left out, since access measures imperfectly measure disadvantage. However, it is self-evident that knowledge of what interviews are about will affect a student's capacity to show their potential.

I was shocked to hear that some teachers offered the advice that a student should shoehorn their reading of *War and Peace* in the interview to impress the admissions tutors. This shows the extent to which teachers – and therefore applicants – in the country do not understand the format of an Oxbridge interview, nor for which traits admissions tutors look.

Such an information gap means that many go into interviews not in the frame of mind to even show their potential. Targeted tuition to schools is a remedy, contrary to what Rizina's piece claims. I've personally tried to help in this matter. Last October and December, I organised a series of free webinars for state school students, particularly in rural areas which often receive a lower share of access attention. Many students did not know what interviewers wanted, and then they were in a better position following these sessions.

Yes, this does little to address "fundamental ethical questions" – but it does improve people's

ability to showcase their potential to the benefit of themselves and wider society. A refusal to engage with the potential of tutoring more widely applied to equalise the playing field amounts to a focus on an ethical intuition over prioritising improving lives.

However, I agree with Rizina that a yet fairer approach would be the systematic provision of these services in schools across the country. However, it is uncertain that this would be effective if attempted by decree. Many schools in the country do not have any teachers who went to Oxford or Cambridge themselves. The majority are great teachers who deliver a great service to their students and country. Nonetheless, they are not best placed to prepare students for Oxbridge applications.

An approach that avoids this pitfall would provide information to ensure that students know how to prepare. I am drafting documents at present to distribute freely to state schools. These documents will target different ages of students with the sort of thing they should be doing to develop their intellectual skills ready for Oxbridge applications. If a large part of the problem is gaps in the likes of intellectual discussions around the meal table, then students can take proactive steps earlier on to nurture the same skills that those from more academic backgrounds receive – but only once they know that this is a worthwhile endeavour.

It is through *more* provision of information, including tutoring, that the lives of people from all walks of life will prosper.

Letters to the Editor:

Readers of *Cherwell* respond to articles from Week 0

SU abolishes the role of president

MADAM – The SU's "democracy consultation" was rendered meaningless when the overwhelming majority was disregarded in favour of a restructure that abolishes the role of president and replaces it with a flat hierarchy of four officer positions – a change supported by less than 14% of respondents. Whatever the merits of this change may be, the core issue lies in the arbitrary and undemocratic nature of the decision. By dismissing the only clear outcome, the SU has lost the little trust it arguably had, further alienated its members, and reinforced its reputation as a body disconnected from those it claims to represent.

The total number of respondents to the consultation was small; however, this only makes the SU's decision more perplexing. In a consultation with low turnout, the rational approach would be to either uphold the majority opinion or maintain the status quo – which, in this case, are one and the same – not to impose the least popular option, backed by just four people. Imagine a national referendum with minimal participation, only for the losing side to be implemented. It defies all reason.

This reflects the accusations of obstructing student engagement and eroding democracy made by the recently resigned SU President. The SU's so-called "transformation," including the consultation, was marketed as an effort to create a "student-led union where every student feels heard and represented"; in reality, it has done precisely the opposite.

Shermar Pryce
PPE, Univ

Admissions tutoring proves that money beats merit

MADAM – Private tutoring is undeniably a problem for Oxbridge admissions. Access to coaches, mock interviews, admissions test training, and general guidance on the process further exacerbate the gap between the wealthy and the not so wealthy. Tutors make a sizeable difference in a process that is complicated, drawn out, and unfamiliar to so many. Oxbridge applications are formulaic to a large extent. Knowing what to write, what to study, and how to tackle the admissions test can be and arguably is the difference between getting that interview, and from there, getting that offer.

As a state-educated student from Coventry, I benefitted hugely from having a head of sixth form who had been to Oxford and was extremely clued in on the process. That was pot luck. Without her guidance, I am doubtful I would have ever got an interview, let alone an offer. Outreach programs like Zero Gravity and the Oxbridge Launchpad are making progress in increasing access and awareness of the Oxbridge application process. And as a Zero Gravity mentor, I have mentored students who knew extremely little about the process, and who were unfairly at a clear disadvantage compared to those who had been receiving extensive tutoring throughout the process.

Patrick Dale
PPE, Wadham

It's time for a new view on college disparities

MADAM – I disagree that the logical end of the argument in favour of some redistribution of college wealth is the redistribution of money from Oxford to other universities. A student who earned a place at Oxford benefiting from the University's wealth is a far more meritocratic result than one benefiting from their college's relative wealth. The University continually stresses that college assignment is not based on academic strength, whereas admission to Oxford itself certainly is.

Secondly, while the University is happy to advertise its overall wealth relative to other universities to prospective students, it deliberately obfuscates the disparities in college wealth and their consequences. This reduces the proportion of applicants who make an informed decision as to which college to apply. It would be sensible for the University to end its insistence that 'colleges have more similarities than differences' as a first step to begin to address the issue of college disparities.

Nick Lang
Physics, Keble

Got an opinion on this print's Opinion?
Submit a Letter to the Editor via:
comment@cherwell.org



Don't let the chatbots win

Any use of artificial intelligence strips back the soft skills from most degrees: the safest policy is to steer well clear

ALEXANDER PRVULOVICH

Rejoice – we were lucky enough to be born just in time for ChatGPT to write a solidly 2:1 philosophy essay. With tutorials and a focus on in-person exams, Oxford has probably been less impacted by the boom of artificial intelligence chatbots than other universities, but AI can still be used for tutorial essays. To me, this is a bit embarrassing. There's almost always an element of deception involved, even when you're not submitting an AI's output directly. Where use is forgivable, it's just a bit sad.

Obviously, not all AI use is the same; there are levels to it. The paradox of AI is that almost everyone thinks it's wrong in some circumstances, but can excuse their own use. You might never dream of submitting an entirely ChatGPT essay, but having it rephrase your argument is barely using it. If you do use it for all of an essay, it's because of exceptional circumstances, and not for an important topic. And if you are regularly turning to it, it's because you're at Oxford, and two essays a week is an absurd standard anyway.

Most people understand the case against using

AI content word for word; you're submitting something that you didn't produce as your own. As a student who went through however many tests and into however much debt for a degree you presumably (somewhat) care about, you should feel at least a bit embarrassed throwing in the towel. Still, people probably feel the force of this argument less than they would for using essay mills (who must be the real victims of ChatGPT) – perhaps the burden of writing a prompt makes people feel like they contributed more.

Beyond just copy/pasting AI's words, you can use AI to rephrase your writing, provide a structure or argument, or summarise articles. All these uses involve much more of your own work, and are certainly not as bad as entirely parroting AI. But an essay isn't just the words on the page, it's the whole process of research and writing, the argument and response to the literature. Besides, part of a degree is learning to investigate, to understand jargon and evaluate arguments, to structure cogently and express clearly. If you're a humanities student, these soft skills are probably most of your degree's value.

The freeing part of the Oxford system is that

weekly essays just don't matter that much. If you submit a bad essay, you've submitted a bad essay. You might have a rough tute, but nothing will follow you to next week. If you are stressed and time-pressured, you can rush it. It may not be recommended, but it's feasible to write an essay on the morning of the deadline. Using AI is crumbling under imaginary pressure.

This still leaves some uses of AI that aren't really deceptive, like using it to explain a concept or test an idea. Using AI like this is not necessarily wrong, it's not really more deceptive than talking to a friend about the topic. But why not talk to an actual friend? Oxford is an academic community full of people who love to talk. Why replace human interaction with a chatbot gobbling resources to do its best impression? The unique value of AI is preventing you from leaving your room.

Everyone draws the line of permissibility just below what they do. You can always imagine someone doing something worse, someone relying on AI more, or more often, or for an easier degree at another university. The fact is that if AI is doing any work, you're passing that work off. If it's not, then what's the point?

FEATURES

£450,000 for a two-bed in Cowley: Oxford is at the centre of the UK's housing crisis



By SATCHEL WALTON

The gap between incomes and house prices in Britain has doubled in just a few decades. It is at its highest level since 1876. The difficulty of development in Oxford puts it at the centre of one of the world's strictest planning systems. The new government must ask – how much of this status quo is worth preserving?

Continued from Page 1

1.6 million (but only in the “right places”, like cities). Now, the Labour government has revamped the housing targets for local areas. It says the targets will be mandatory for councils, which are required to approve major development projects.

But it is still to be seen whether they have the political will to give teeth to this “mandate” – and how much of a dent it could put in a housing crisis that is 40 years in the making.

Oxford prices “excruciatingly high”

Over the last decade, rents in Oxford have been consistently higher than in the rest of the country, and is the most expensive city to rent in outside London.

Even for students seeking a shared house, it can be pricey. A survey conducted by Oxford Brookes' Hybrid Magazine found that most students there were paying at least £800 per month for rent.

Omer Mihović is an undergraduate studying Biochemistry. As a second-year at St. Edmund Hall, he does not receive college accommodation. Mihović is satisfied with the Cowley house he lives in with five housemates; his only complaint

Median Home Price Relative to Median Wage

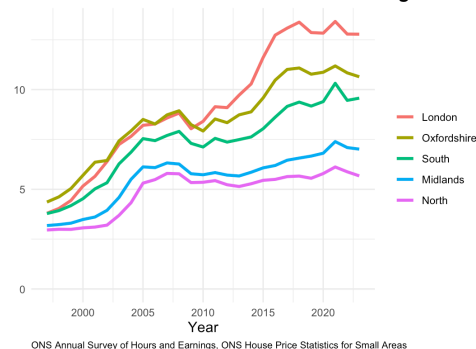


Figure 1

is the price.

Mihović told *Cherwell*: “As a foreign student, I generally find these rent prices excruciatingly high. But as far as I’m aware, the rents in Oxford are also considered a bit above average compared to pretty much everyone in the UK as well.”

Oxford City Council set an ambitious plan for local housing construction in its Oxford

Local 2040 Plan. But the Planning Inspectorate rejected the plan for proposing too much housing – it relied on Oxfordshire’s rural councils to do much of the building in their own districts.

Oxford City Council notes what anyone who has walked across town might realise: except for the floodplains, the city itself is pretty filled up. Short of putting a subdivision on Christ Church Meadow or a skyscraper on a college quad, where is new housing supposed to go?

Choking off development

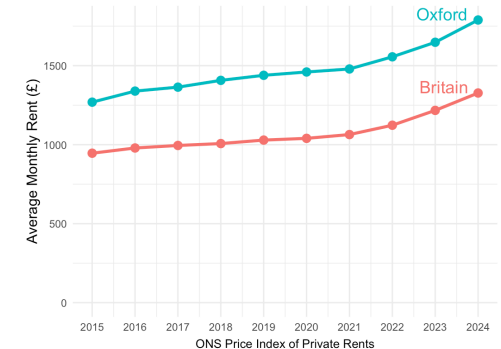
In many parts of the world, the answer would be obvious: sprawl outward. If there is demand to live in the city, it should just get larger. But Oxford’s growth has been intentionally choked by the green belt which surrounds the city – and takes up ten times more land than the built up parts of the city itself. Before the green belt came into effect in 1975, Oxford could grow as more people wanted to move in. But since 1975, the city limits have remained almost exactly the same.

The green belt is a popular idea, and it has succeeded at preserving the rural character of the surrounding countryside. But despite the ‘green’ in the name, much of the land is not particularly natural, and green belts can cause as

much environmental harm as they prevent. With many Oxford workers priced out of the city, they have to move beyond the green belt and often commute by driving long distances across it. While many commute from Oxfordshire towns on the other side of the green belt like Didcot and Bicester, others commute from as far as Bournemouth. At times, Oxfordshire councils

Figure 2

Rents in Oxford consistently higher than GB average



have offered to move residents to Birmingham and Cardiff due to lack of affordable housing here.

Even on vacant parcels of land inside the green belt, development is incredibly difficult. Local residents have been organising for four years against a plan to build 32 homes in Iffley, arguing that it would damage the rural character of the area and harm one family of badgers.

Even once the council approves a development, it's not smooth sailing. A mixed-use development near Thornhill was approved by Oxford City Council in 2022, with every member voting in favour, but it still wasn't signed off until October 2024.

Local residents often object to new housing development in their area for a variety of reasons, sometimes getting labelled as 'NIMBYs' (for Not In My BackYard). New development can

“If the British people want to prioritise other values over affordable housing, faster trains, and a more prosperous society, they are free to do so. But they should be clear-eyed about the trade-offs they are making.”

increase noise and traffic, potentially decrease the property values of existing property owners, and lead to change that residents just don't want to see in their area.

But when every local council can veto new development which benefits the country as a whole despite imposing some local costs, housing doesn't go anywhere. And the British planning system gives local residents some of the most power in the world to veto it.

The world's strictest planning system?

In London, extraordinarily high prices are driven both by planning constraints and a lack of new land to develop in the city centre. There, so little land is open for redevelopment that Nazi bombing raids actually helped long-term economic growth – though this is partially due to historic preservation laws that prevent redevelopment. But in the rest of Southern England, where land is more plentiful, it is entirely planning constraints, and not a lack of land, driving up prices.

Peter Kemp, a professor at the Blavatnik School of Government, studies housing policy.

Kemp told *Cherwell*: “The house building targets now are being seriously thought about, and the government has talked about what it can do as part of its growth agenda. But the problem is planning in this country. In Britain, we have one of – if not the – most strict planning systems in the advanced economies.”

Unlike countries with by-right development and zoning – where housing development does not require approval in areas zoned as residential – councils in the UK individually scrutinise and can vote down every major development. This can lead to years of delays in planning. In both Oxford and England as a whole, about 30% of planning applications for housing were rejected from June 2023 to June 2024.

But Kemp also sees other challenges for the targets, including a strong “NIMBY lobby”, a shrinking and ageing construction workforce, and lack of funds for building social housing. Kemp says that while private developers are building about as much housing today as they were in the 70s, construction by local authorities has fallen dramatically.

Kemp continued: “If we really want to get anywhere near the level of housebuilding that the government wishes us to get to, we will need an expansion of building of social housing, particularly by local authorities.”

Even if England's building targets are met for one year, or over the course of this parliament, it's not clear that housing would become much more affordable anytime soon. In recent years, Oxfordshire has been fairly close to meeting the new targets set out by the government (Figure



3). Still, it is tens of thousands of units short of where it would be had it met its targets throughout the century.

Kemp told *Cherwell*: “If you've got a shortage that's taken 40 years to build up, it's going to take you many decades to solve that problem, and only if you're determined and keep going through whoever is in power.”

Wider problems

The same local veto points and anti-development attitudes that have strangled housing construction have also hounded just about every construction project in the UK.

HS2, which is proposed to run 134 miles between London and Birmingham, has been under planning or construction since 2010. Over the same time period, China has built 24,000 miles of high-speed rail. You can travel between major cities in Italy, Spain, and France on high-speed rail. Meanwhile, HS2 is working through its 8,276 separate consents and spending £100 million on a structure that may or may not help to protect bats.

If you want to get to Cambridge, your best bet

currently is to take an expensive train to London, or to hack the local bus routes by making a stop in Bedford. East West Rail plans to re-establish a direct connection between the university cities, but there is no set date for the line's completion, and it is currently being held up because of worries about... bats and water voles.

Britain's reservoirs are drying up as demand for water increases, but a new one hasn't been built since 1991. Local opposition has rallied against a proposed reservoir in Abingdon even while demanding that something be done to protect the water supply (something else, that is). Winter fuel payments and the cost of electricity have been a major political hot potato. But under the Conservative governments, wind farms were effectively blocked if there was any local opposition at all, and solar farms were banned from most agricultural land.

Add this all up, and Britain's sclerotic approach to building explains much of the cost-of-living crisis. Without being able to build a functional rail network, it can be cheaper for friends to meet in Spain than buy a train ticket from Newcastle to Birmingham. Without building housing,

prices go up. Without building renewable energy sources, energy prices hit record highs.

Britain must pick a path on building

I have a confession to make. Despite having a strange interest in British planning policy, I am actually American. I'm just a wonkish Anglophile who happens to be a visiting student for one year in this fine country.

When I return to the University of North Carolina next year, it will be in an area that has made very different decisions about these matters than the UK has. The 'Research Triangle' area of North Carolina has nearly 2.5 million people today, up from just 700,000 in the mid-70s. Where there were tobacco fields just a few decades ago, one can now drive through 50 straight miles of low-density suburbs. This growth has been driven by tech jobs, the region's universities, and the largest science park in the US.

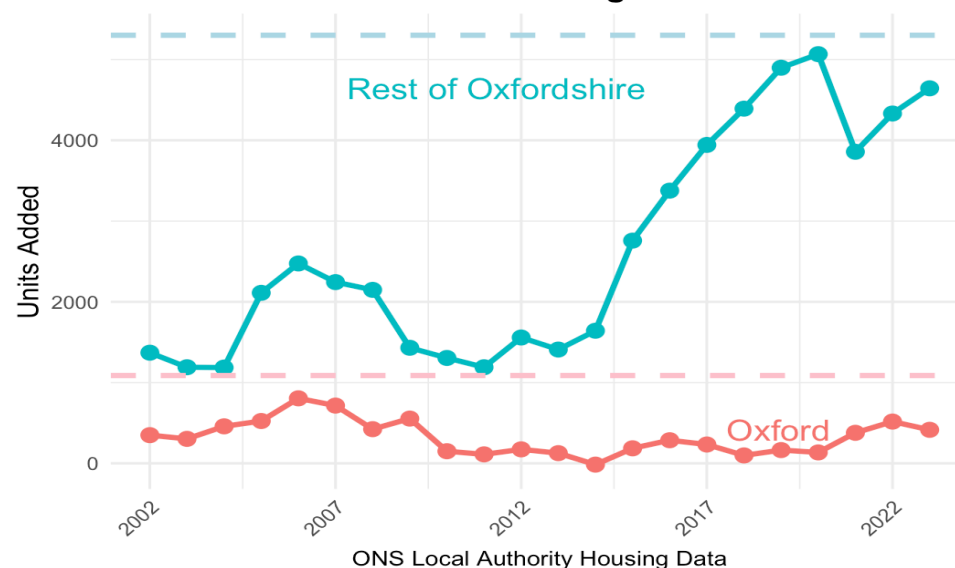
Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire could have followed this path – and in some ways it's an enviable one. I will love paying much lower rent for a much larger house next year. But it would be a travesty to see all of England's green and pleasant land paved over with American-style subdivisions.

Thankfully, that is not the only option. Oxford's green belt is ten times larger than the developed parts of the city, and is itself surrounded by more protected land in the Cotswolds and Chilterns. With high-density development, even a small chunk of underutilised green belt land could go a long way towards alleviating the housing crisis and improving people's quality of life.

Of course, there is no objectively correct way to measure the value of badger families and rural preservation against housing sizes and economic growth. If the British people want to prioritise other values over affordable housing, faster trains, and a more prosperous society, they are free to do so. But they should be clear-eyed about the tradeoffs they are making. In an era of stagnant real wages, rising homelessness, and eye-watering housing costs, it is right to wonder how much of the status quo is worth preserving.

Image Credits: David Hays [Left] and Kenneth Wong [Right]

Figure 3 Housing Units Added Annually and New Targets



MLK Day: Anti-Blackness isn't just a Western problem

Anti-Blackness is a very real problem and can be observed both subtly and overtly within Arab, Asian, and even African communities.

By MICHAEL-AKOLADE AYODEJI

As Martin Luther King Jr Day rolls around on another 20th January, we are reminded of his enduring legacy: a dream of equality, justice, and a world free of prejudice. His vision transcends boundaries, resonating not only in America but across the globe. Yet, as many celebrate Dr King's vision, one uncomfortable truth keeps gnawing at me: the assumption that racism is a uniquely right-wing, Christian, Western or white problem.

Having spent most of my formative years in Africa, I grew up surrounded by a shared identity. But when I moved to a multicultural UK, I encountered an assumption that lingers in many conversations: the idea that oppressed or marginalised groups can't be racist. For many, especially outside Africa, it's hard to fathom that racism could exist within communities that have faced discrimination themselves. But that's a myth – one I've seen unravel in painful and personal ways. Anti-Blackness is very real and can be observed both subtly and overtly within Arab, Asian and even African communities.

This MLK Day, I want to challenge that assumption and shed light on why it matters. Dr King's call for unity reminds us that confronting biases within our own spaces isn't just necessary; it's urgent. It's uncomfortable but an essential first step toward change.

Anti-Blackness today

The struggle against anti-Blackness is both historical and contemporary. Lasting from the 16th to the 19th century, the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade are well-documented and critiqued. Less discussed, however, is the trans-Saharan slave trade – a system of human trafficking that spanned from the 8th to the 19th century. This trade involved the capture and transport of enslaved individuals from sub-Saharan Africa. It left a deeply troubling legacy, where Blackness became associated with subservience. Even today, remnants of this mindset persist, with terms like "abd" (slave) casually used in some Arab and North African communities, perpetuating systemic bias and cultural prejudice.

This legacy is starkly evident in the

marginalisation of Afro-Iraqis and Black Moroccans, for example, who still face challenges from political representation, educational opportunities, to erasure in mainstream media. But perhaps the most grotesque contemporary manifestation of this legacy is through the re-emergence of slavery itself.

In 2017, reports from Libya – a country grappling with political instability after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi – revealed the existence of a modern slave trade targeting Black West African migrants. These vulnerable people traversed dangerous routes, only to be intercepted and held captive and sold like animals to the highest bidders across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Despite the gravity of these atrocities, the global and regional responses remain alarmingly indifferent.

My experience with anti-Blackness

Growing up in Nigeria, I didn't think much about race – Black faces surrounded me. My experiences were far removed from the brutalities of slavery, but the cracks were still there. Colourism, for one, was everywhere. Lighter skin was celebrated, and fairness creams were treated like a golden ticket to beauty or success.

When I moved to the UK, I found the same issues reshaped in different forms, particularly within other POC communities directed against Black people. This became clear after transitioning from a 95% white primary school to a much more diverse secondary school in the West Midlands. Children of Caribbean descent would distance themselves from Africans, mocking my accent and calling us "fresh off the boat". East Asian children, often discouraged by their parents from befriending Black children, avoided us entirely, citing fears of "bad influence". South Asian and Arab classmates would crack "jokes" about Black people being lazy or aggressive. I saw a social hierarchy emerge, where every minority group seemed to position itself closer to whiteness as a marker of superiority.

And it didn't stop there. This wasn't just playground banter – it followed me into adulthood. Even at university and the Oxford Union, I've seen how deeply these biases run, often cloaked in intellectualised rhetoric or empty attempts at justification.

I've experienced these biases firsthand during my own presidential campaign at the Oxford Union. In student politics, the usual stereotypes – aggressive, lazy, or lacking competence and professionalism – were often also wielded as campaign tactics by other minority groups, even when blatantly disproven by facts. When coupled with misogyny, however, these prejudices form an especially toxic and damaging mix.

What's most insidious is the contradiction in these attacks. Black people are demonised as aggressive or threatening yet simultaneously reduced to subservient or overly compliant caricatures. Never seen as fully human, trapped in a binary that constantly forces you to navigate perceptions. Over time, the pressure bottles up, and despite your best efforts, it explodes instinctively. Living with this tension for years takes its toll.

The most painful experience came from someone I thought was an ally, a friend who championed anti-racism. During a disagreement about handling an issue, where I suggested a more productive approach, their cutting response was: "[Of course you'd say that] like the good little Black boy that you are." I was stunned. At first, I didn't recognise the undercurrent of anti-Blackness, but in hindsight, their complicity in racist jokes and silence in similar moments became clear. I was an equal, but only so long as I knew my place; being useful in managing their campaign for office and thwarting political measures against them. That betrayal stung, but I'm thankful it shattered my own veil of ignorance, forcing me to confront how pervasive anti-Blackness remains, even within circles of supposed solidarity.

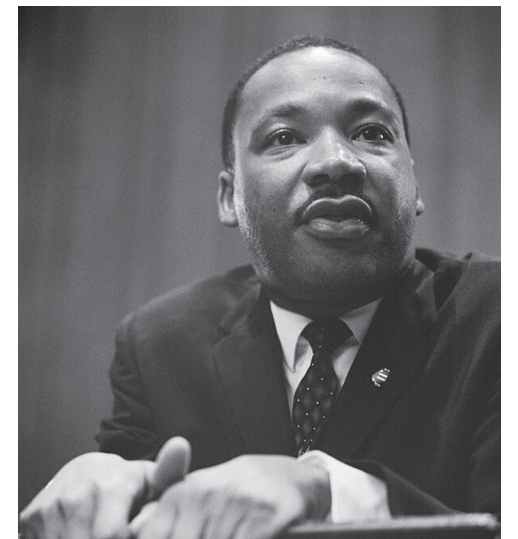
Anti-Blackness isn't exclusive to far-right thugs or historical slavers – it thrives in the most subtle places and mindsets. People who have experienced discrimination and should know better, those who've read the books, delivered the speeches and championed equality, still perpetuate tired stereotypes, exposing the glaring contradictions in their rhetoric.

The persistence of anti-Blackness

Across much of Arab television, Black individuals are often reduced to harmful stereotypes. Slurs such as the N-word are often thrown in, trivialising the humanity of Black individuals. Black characters are routinely typecast as housemaids, labourers, or criminals, rarely depicted as professionals, heroes, or leaders. An absence of positive representation reinforces stereotypes of the inferiority of Black people, creating fertile ground for more troubling forms of anti-Blackness to thrive.

One such is the exploitation of Black migrant workers in Gulf states where institutionalised racism is deeply entrenched. The *kafala* system ties workers' residency to their employers, effectively stripping them of autonomy. Many sub-Saharan African domestic workers endure gruelling hours, physical abuse, and withheld wages. Employers often confiscate their passports, leaving them trapped in exploitative conditions. One particularly harrowing case in Kuwait saw an Ethiopian domestic worker clinging to a seventh-floor balcony in a desperate attempt to escape abuse. Her employer, instead of helping, chose to film the incident – a stark example of the power imbalance and dehumanisation at play.

Language often plays a significant role in normalising anti-Blackness. Terms like "abeed" (slaves) and "Azzi" (a slur akin to "Negro") are casually used in conversations, stripping Black individuals of dignity and perpetuating long-standing stereotypes. Beauty standards exacerbate these issues, with lighter skin often idealised and darker-skinned individuals, particularly women, excluded from mainstream representation. The aggressive marketing of skin-whitening products across the region and the whole of Africa reinforces the belief that Blackness is undesirable. Even cultural traditions play a role in normalising discrimination: in Lebanon, a popular sweet called "Ras al-Abed" (head of the slave) was renamed "Tarboush" due to its racist connotations but similar products elsewhere still retain the original name.



Why talking about this matters

In many places, discussing anti-Blackness remains taboo. Nationalist narratives often erase racial diversity, promoting homogenised identities that leave no room for acknowledging racism. In Morocco, for instance, authorities have historically denied the existence of racism altogether, dismissing it as a Western concept that doesn't apply to their society.

Talking about this issue with some of my Arab friends highlighted just how deeply rooted, yet seemingly innocent, the inability to address

"It is not just a Western or white issue – it is a global one. If we are serious about justice, we must confront anti-Blackness wherever it exists, even when it is within our own communities. The first step is breaking the silence, no matter how uncomfortable it may be."

anti-Blackness can be. Within families and social circles, raising the topic is often met with resistance. Terms like Azzi are brushed off as harmless jokes, while those who push back are dismissed as overly sensitive or divisive creating a stigma around addressing the problem – much like what happens in Western nations like the UK.

Dr Martin Luther King once said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." This truth resonates profoundly because it reminds us that combating anti-Blackness cannot be selective. It is not just a Western or white issue – it is a global one. If we are serious about justice, we must confront anti-Blackness wherever it exists, even when it is within our own communities. The first step is breaking the silence, no matter how uncomfortable it may be.

The FBI labelled Dr. King "the most dangerous Negro," fearing the power of his uncompromising call for justice paired with his extraordinary capacity for forgiveness. His words endured because they didn't shy away from hard truths – they demanded better. If we truly believe in equality, it's time to hold up that same mirror to ourselves and confront what we see. Change begins when we stop making excuses.

Image Credits: J. H. Colton, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons [Left] and Library of Congress, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons [Right]



CHERWELL HT25 STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Georgia Campbell and Selina Chen

SENIOR EDITORIAL TEAM

Éilis Mathur, Ila Banerji, Bryn Mollet, Euan Elliott, Laurence Cooke, Morien Robertson, Faye Chang, Hassan Akram, Phoebe Davies, Seb Page, and Joe Dunn

NEWS

Ila Banerji and Bryn Mollet with Charlie Bailey, Poppy Littler-Jennings, Bella Gerber-Johnstone, Mair Andrews, Vlada Palanciuc, Conor Walsh, Noah Robson, and Ekam Hothi

INVESTIGATIONS

Euan Elliott with Grace Wong, Natasha Drake, Subhan Aslam, Arina Makarina, and Asma Issa

OPINION

Laurence Cooke with Rizina, Alexander Prvulovich, Donovan Lock, Zaghham Farhan, Alexandre Guilloteau, and Stanley Smith

FEATURES

Morien Robertson with Rose Evans, Lilly Law, Janet Lau, Jack Leader, Satchel Walton, and Varjitha Karunaratnam

PROFILES

Faye Chang with Dylan Brennan, Billy Jeffs, Tiwa Ogunleye, and Sara Rourke

CULTURE

Hassan Akram with Matt Unwin, Christina Scote, Juliette McGrath, Emma Heagney, Maya Heuer-Evans, Michelle Jiang, Martha Gathercole, Lara Machado, Gabriella Ofo, Sarah Beard, Olivia Sloan, Evelyn Power, Florence Wolter, Dan Paling, Isobel Estibeiro, Inaya Chaudhry, Maddie Gillett, and Ferdy Al-Qassab

LIFESTYLE

Phoebe Davies with Victoria McKinley-Smith, Amanda Li, David Hays, Rhianon Bradshaw, and Amy Lawson

SPORTS

Seb Page with Jack Danson, Clementine Ewins, and Zach Burgess

PUZZLES

Joe Dunn with Julian Xiao, Alessandra Edwards, and Zoë McGuire

CREATIVE

Photographers: David Hays, Subin Saji, and Kenneth Wong
Video team: Michael-Akolade Ayodeji, Reuben Meller, and Rufus Shutter
Illustrator: Joe Walford, Caitie Foley, and Leon Moorhouse
Archivist: Emily Henson

John Evelyn

Tut, tut, tut my dear hacks:

You may be Gods within the walls of Frewin Court, but to think that you can control me is truly remarkable. Ignore your DI's and Standing Orders, within these 450 words and the court of public opinion, Jevelyn is Judge, Jury, and Executioner.

For all those who missed an exciting 1st Week CC, allow me to catch you up with a truly objective account of what happened. Following a solid round of self-congratulatory pats on the back, His MAAjesty stepped up to the plate, ready to swing for the Lieutenant about the removal of Banquo's Ghost who bravely said nothing throughout the course of the meeting. Clearly impassioned by the virtue of justice, rather than revenge or spite, His MAAjesty refused to step down from the batter's box. In a gentle attempt to look after the elderly, clearly concerned he may have an aneurysm



from all his shouting, Her MAAjesty encouraged him to step down, but to no avail.

With a strong retort from Lame Austen and some enforcement from The Guru, CC survived another round of questions from His MAAjesty. After a final self-congratulation from the Barista, 50p questioned the nature of CC and whether it should be a forum for open debate. With the nature

of CC in question, Monday ended with an army of reluctant secies moving the term cards and the Lieutenant no doubt seeking comfort in the arms of his newly wed Norma Jean.

In slightly less hostile news, the Tuesday comedy debate went spectacularly well; with the Corpus Pope managing to receive a whopping zero dates despite his most desperate of attempts, and Dudley Dursley having to receive welfare from a fresher – something Jevelyn has been assured

remained entirely PG.

The battle for the throne has appeared to heat up as well, with a new competitor entering. 007 himself, (0 vac days, 0 shifts worked, 7 threatened rustications) has decided to break up with the Regents Ruler. Deciding that he won his Standing election by himself, despite not being on St Michael's Street on Friday of 7th Week, he has his GoldenEye on the top job. Look forward to an incredible term card come Michaelmas of three speakers, all listed TBC.

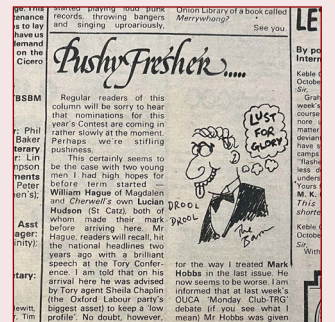
It appears as if one slate may have success ensured for the future. Harvey Spector, the Barista's Baby (who has secured her name due to strong opposition to it, remember no one controls Jevelyn) and the Corpus Pope were mystified by the Lieutenants reading of their futures. Fame, riches, electoral success, and inevitable tribunals no doubt were uncovered by just a look at the palm.

And so the wheel of fortune and time ticks on, hacks rise and fall, and Jevelyn still stands as the last bastion of free speech.

Until next time,
Jevelyn x

Cherwell Archives

1979: William Hague the 'Pushy Fresher'



Once upon a time, before Union and OUCA hacks lawyered up, Cherwell used to spend a term discussing the bane of Oxford life, the Pushy Fresher.

A young William Hague was nominated for the award. In the face of rumours that Hague was advised to keep a low profile, Cherwell concluded "No doubt, however, Mr Hague's rampant ambition will resurface."

President of OUCA and the Union while at Oxford, before cramming his way to a First, Hague's ambition triumphed in the end. Now, being recently elected Chancellor, it seems he might have outperformed even his wildest fresher dreams in terms of the Oxford food chain.

by Emily Henson

Editorials



Laurence Cooke Head of Opinion

Welcome to this, the second of our print editions this Hilary. I'd like to tell you about an Oxfess I noticed recently which went as follows: "do oxford papers have identities? ik [sic] isis is the artsy one, but what of Cherwell and oxstu? do they have ideological leanings? what kind of person writes for/chooses one over the other?"

If it was you, yes you, who wrote this, congratulations - you just made it into the Cherwell editorial. I'd be happy to answer your question.

The Isis is, in theory, the "artsy" one, although you'll find our new short story competition means we hold our heads high on that front. With regard to ideology, Cherwell is mainly just focussed on offering high-quality, independent student journalism. We're not so pretentious as to pretend that we're some kind of leading liberal voice or that we officially nominate a party at each election.

As the person responsible for Opinion, I'm not constantly looking for balance as though I work for the BBC. Rather, I want to publish the best opinion writing that Oxford students can offer.

If you want to make a cogent, articulate, reasonable case for your point of view, you're welcome to write for us. So no, there is no ideology, except that we value being free of all external influence - from the University, the SU, or anyone else.

As for "what kind of person" will write for Cherwell, that's the person who enjoys writing, has an idea, and is happy to work with us to get it published. Cherwell isn't a blog; there is quality control. But if you're good enough to get into Oxford, you're definitely good enough to write for us. So go on, give it a go.

Editors' Note: Laurence is also in charge of socials, and this term he is organising an overnight trip to Cambridge for a 'crewdate' with their newspaper Varsity. This social is exclusive to Cherwell staff, and Varsity will be coming over here in Trinity. So, perhaps another answer to "what kind of person": a fun one. (Apply at the end of this term!)



Hassan Akram Head of Culture

Until fifty or sixty years ago it was a common thing in national newspapers and magazines to find a piece of short fiction presented as a regular supplement. *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, the *Daily Express*, the *Spectator*, and the *New Statesman* all published regular stories by eminent authors. Much of the fiction that first appeared in this form is still read today. For instance, two James Bond stories, *From a View to a Kill* and *Octopussy*, which were later adapted as films, first appeared in the *Daily Express*; *The Living Daylights* in the *Sunday Times*.

Somehow this tradition has died out. Literature and reportage no longer mix. Even the book review sections which used to fill chunks of the dailies have largely given way to specialist publications such as the *Literary Review* or the *London Review of Books*. Likewise *Cherwell*, which was intended from its conception as a literary publication as much as anything else, has followed the same course. For several decades after our establishment the short story was a staple of our content. In the 1920s six of Evelyn Waugh's first short stories appeared in these pages, including the darkly comic vignette "Conspiracy to Murder"

(1923). Other undergraduate fiction contributors included Graham Greene and W. H. Auden.

This year *Cherwell* is launching the inaugural Blackwell's Short Story Competition – sponsored by Blackwell's booksellers – encouraging the submission of short stories of up to 1,500 words in length, from all undergraduates until midnight on 17th February. Documents should be sent as attachments, typed, double-spaced, page-numbered, in 12-point Times New Roman. Entries will be shortlisted by me, the Editors-in-Chief, and other relevant section editors. The winning entry will be chosen by Dr Clare Morgan, Director of the Master of Studies in Creative Writing at Oxford. It will be printed in *Cherwell* and the author will receive a £50 Blackwell's voucher.

This is a fantastic opportunity for undergraduate writers at Oxford to have their work published and recognised, and to earn their place on the long chain of *Cherwell* *littérateurs*. We look forward to reading your contributions!

PROFILES

“The imagination is a flowing thing. It’s not an absolute thing.”

Cherwell spoke to Scottish director and award-winning actor, Brian Cox

By BILLY JEFFS

Brian Cox is a classically trained Scottish actor, known for his roles as Logan Roy in *Succession* and Agamemnon in *Troy*. He has received numerous awards, including a Primetime Emmy Award and a Golden Globe.

Cherwell: *You’ve previously criticised method acting for being disruptive to other actors; speaking to The Guardian about working on Glenrothan, the upcoming movie you’re directing, you said you thought you were more of a ‘curator’ than a director. How do you see the individual vs. the collective in the creative process?*

Cox: Well, I’m a socialist, so I believe in the collective, and I believe that everybody has a role to play in that collective, and everybody brings a different thing to it. I think that’s one of the great things about the theatre.

My problem is with the American system, or ‘the system’ in general. And it’s not so much Stanislavski, it’s this absorption in the role, where it’s a discipline. You have to be absorbed, but you also have to be aware of what’s around you, you’ve got to be aware of the ensemble, because it’s not just you.

Even if you’re playing Hamlet, there’s also Fortinbras you’ve got to think about, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are as important as anything else, and they’re all in their place. A lot of the time with the absorption, say you’re playing Rosencrantz, it becomes all about Rosencrantz. So you forget where your place is within the dramatis personae. It comes out selfish, but it isn’t necessarily selfish at all. It’s actually something else. It’s self preserving, as opposed to selfish, this feeling that you have to preserve your role and have to look after your character in a way, but you don’t have to. You can trust – trust yourself. A lot of it is about not trusting yourself, not trusting who you are within that framework.

I think that’s what people suffer from, that not being able to get the trust that they need.

It goes back to Strasberg too. There was a great story, which is a true story, actually, about Stanislavski. The Group Theatre was a famous bunch of theatre professionals in America in the 30s – there was Elia Kazan, there was Strasberg, there was Cheryl Crawford, there was John Garfield. They were vulnerable, but they discovered Stanislavski, and they loved it. Stanislavski is great. I love Stanislavski as well. With Stanislavski, there was one thing that Strasberg focused on, which was called ‘affective memory’, which he translated as ‘emotional memory’. It was an exercise where he would get actors to relive the trauma of their childhood and how that would affect their acting. Now, it’s a laudable ambition, but it’s kind of pointless, you know?

So Stella Adler, who was an equally great teacher as Stanislavski, a wonderful teacher, she was a little bit worried about the situation. So she took herself to Paris because she knew

“I’m a socialist, so I believe in the collective, and I believe that everybody has a role to play in that collective.”

that Stanislavski always went to Paris for the summer. The Russians allowed him to go there, and he lived in the Bois de Boulogne. So she goes to see him in the Bois de Boulogne, and she asks him about affective memory. And he says, “Oh, I got rid of that years ago. It interferes with the imagination.” The imagination is a flowing thing. It’s not an absolute thing. It flows. He said it stops that. So she goes back to the group, and they’re all there, and everybody asks: “So what did the great man think about affective memory, emotional memory?” And she says: “Well, he doesn’t use it anymore. He thinks it gets in the way of the imagination.” And Strasberg said:



“Then Stanislavski is wrong”, and that’s where the split happened.

So he took it his own way and enabled a lot of actors, there’s no question. The James Deans and the Paul Newmans. You know, Newman had real problems as an actor in himself; he was very beautiful and good looking, but he had problems about his acting, about revealing himself. And he felt that Strasberg released him in a way. That was important, there was an element of that which was good, but also it becomes a sort of ‘thing’. Whereas nothing should be a ‘thing’, it should be a help, and it should have that sense of: you can leave it, or you can take it. But if you get locked into it, you suddenly become dogmatic. It’s like following a religious cult: “This is the right religion, not that”, and that makes a difference.

That’s what caught the American imagination. But it didn’t help the American imagination, because he said he wasn’t interested in the imagination. The imagination is it; when you look at children, that’s all they do. They imagine. They live in the world of imagination. And children are the best actors, to me. I love child actors, because they’re just so committed. That’s the great thing about Kieran [Culkin]. Kieran was a child

actor, and he has that child actor’s enthusiasm, and it would be terrible to in any way curtail that.

Cherwell: *You used the word ‘release’ there, that Strasberg ‘released’ Paul Newman, and it’s the same word you used in your talk [to the Oxford Union]. If a director’s job is to release an actor, how did that affect your own directing of your recent movie?*

Cox: I’m going to take you up on the curator thing. When I started to direct this film – and I never wanted to direct this film, by the way, it wasn’t my idea. I was asked to be in it, but then I was asked to direct it, and I thought: “Oh, I didn’t expect that. But okay, I’ll have a go.” But then I realised there are so many talented people around you, and you have to give them the position. You have to get a group of people who are ostensibly on the same page, but who are allowed to do what they do more than anybody else. I had a wonderful costume guy, I had a brilliant set designer who did the most extraordinary things, she was absolutely amazing. You just say, let people do their job. That’s why they’re there. Don’t interfere. Let it go. Let them do their job. Then, of course, there will always be questions that you can ask, but don’t come



in with a negative. Come in with something positive. Empower. It's important to empower, that's a key for me.

Cherwell: *Do you feel if the collective has been set and the group's been brought together, and for whatever reason the project isn't working, is there a way the director saying no can make a good product, or is it just not going to be good?*

Cox: It depends on casting. You know, the first thing the director has to do is to cast. Some directors are very good at casting, and some are not. I'm not necessarily good visually, but I am good at casting. I know shit from Shinola. I know what an actor is. I had a great cast. I had Alan Cumming, I had Shirley Henderson and the writer David Ashton. I found a wonderful fledgling DP, who did a fantastic job. So there's an element of trust, there's an element of risk, but you also have to do that. It's like my editor, who I loved, who's also great, I just trusted him immediately.

Now the problem with the editing is not necessarily to do with his job. It's to do with the fact that, because we had a tight budget, there's a lot of coverage that we didn't get. I think that what's going to happen is I'm going to be called upon to spend May doing some coverage on the

shoot. But it's about empowering people to do their best, not controlling them or not dictating the odds. If you see a talent, let the talent be. Don't try and make it something else than what it is. You say: "Well, she knows how to do a room like nobody knows how to do a room." So that's a given.

Cherwell: *Of the talents you worked with on Succession, you said [in your Union talk] you'd seen Kieran in A Real Pain. Jeremy Strong just starred in The Apprentice, and Sarah Snook was also in the West End doing The Picture of Dorian Gray. Did you see either of those things?*

Cox: I only saw *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. I've seen *A Real Pain*, which is excellent. It's really good, and Kieran is fantastic. He got the Best Supporting Actor at the Golden Globes, and I think he'll get the Oscar, because it's a wonderful performance, and it's so committed. I'm just so proud of him, because he's so released now as an actor. He just goes for it and does it. He can be naughty, but he's brilliant.

Image Credit: Brian Cox at the 2024 Comic Con, Philip Romano via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0

Student spotlight: Sarah Mughal Rana on the link between poetry and politics in a volatile time

A graduate student in area studies, Sarah Mughal Rana speaks to Tiwa Ogunleye about the links between writing and her degree.

Cherwell: *You studied Asian and Middle Eastern studies as an undergraduate and now you're pursuing an MPhil in a related field in economic policy. Do you feel like your degree informs your writing, or is that something that you view as entirely separate?*

Sarah: I want to make it very clear that my degrees are very separate from my creative writing. However, I think what's so fun about being an author is you will find inspiration from anything and everything. So much of ... the course that I took, contemporary Asian studies under the Asian Institute at the University of Toronto [helped inform my writing]. I took a lot of history and contemporary politics courses, that looked at the economy and looked at modernity and looked at the transition of the political economy from the colonial era to modernity and studied infrastructure projects. It was crazy, kind of three different degrees in one.

But every single one of those really helped me in writing *Hope of Blades* and my other books that will be coming out because you're literally looking at the way that the world developed from, like, the 1800s, all the way to now. It's 224 years of history right there – looking at politics, economy, social life. The troubling part when you're a writer is taking large swathes of information and condensing it. I didn't want my book to sound so preachy and political. So I really had to, like, refine, refine, refine every draft with my editor. Even with my upcoming books, most of what I had to do was just cutting off a lot of information to make it very accessible for the reader.

Cherwell: *Readers have reported being struck by how relevant the central premise became to the events of the 2024 election season – for instance, that the news of Muslim attendees being forcibly removed from Democrat events very closely mirrored the experience of your protagonist. What observations would you say led you to portraying this experience of exclusion in your novel?*

Sarah: It's very interesting that you bring

that up, because I wrote the novel four years ago now. I was very young – I think I was in my second or third year of my undergrad when I first wrote it – so it was long before a lot of what we saw transpire in the recent US and UK elections and in the upcoming Canadian election. What I wrote was not an isolated experience. It's something that many minorities, especially people of colour, and Muslims after the War on Terror and 9/11, went through in virtually every election or any big event that has to do with politics. I experienced that being from Quebec, which has a lot of exclusionary laws targeting Muslims. But I also did grow up in the US and I got to see both dichotomies of that experience. And so I really wanted to reflect that in my writing, and it was just a coincidence that the book ended up debuting in the same year. In fact, I wrote it after Trump was elected and then edited it during Biden's term. It just shows that a lot of these actions repeat, and they're never in a vacuum.

Cherwell: *In Hope of Blades, poetry is both a living force and an integral part of the protagonist's journey, blending personal expression with the magical realist elements of the story.*

The novel also engages deeply with politics. What are your thoughts on the political function of poetry, within your work and more broadly?

Sarah: That's a really interesting question. I think there's a couple ways. Firstly George Orwell said that, and I'm paraphrasing here, that to say that art is not political is in itself a political act. I think this is

true no matter what you write about, be it romance or anything. And so I don't think writers should shy away from talking about political subjects.

I don't think we need to talk about politics for it to be political. In fact, while my book is politically charged, I don't like to just call it a political novel. Because it's a lot of things, you know? It talks about history, it talks about partition, it talks about sedition, it talks about politics, it talks about basketball. As for the role of poetry: it's been used in resistance movements and revolutions, especially in modernity.

Art and poetry is so human that it is used as a tool to appeal to people's emotions and call out oppressors. People use and try to weaponise our bodies against us, but the one thing they can't take away from us is our tongues, and when they try to do that, that's when art pushes back.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image Credit: Sarah Mughal Rana



THEISIS BALL



IN PRINT!

OXFORD TOWN HALL
TUESDAY 11TH MARCH



Industry &
Fashion Soc
presents...



70's Monday and



9-1am
January 28th
at
The Oxford Retreat



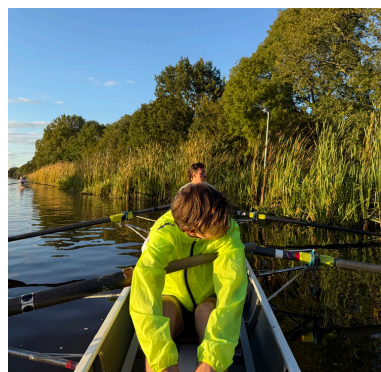
Postcards from abroad



Dear reader,

In addition to my duties as Legal Counsel for OSPL, I am (supposedly) spending a year abroad in Leiden, the Netherlands, as part of my English and European law degree. This isn't my first rodeo—I lived in California prior to my studies in Oxford—but I was still nervous about studying in a country where I couldn't speak the language.

Curiously, my course is the only programme in the entire University (that I'm aware of) that does not require any level of proficiency in the local language prior to going abroad. This is largely because, according to a recent report by the European Commission, over 93% of Dutch people speak English well enough to hold a conversation. However, one would be mistaken to think that the Netherlands is a bilingual country or that English is widespread: fewer than 1% of respondents stated that English was their mother tongue, lower than the



EU average of 2%. This contrasts with the Netherlands' truly bilingual neighbour, Belgium, where about 50% of respondents have Dutch as their native language and 36% French (and even a higher rate of English at 2%).

Therefore, I committed myself to learning Dutch before and during my studies abroad. This proved challenging because, unlike more mainstream languages such as French or German, there is a dearth of resources for people trying to learn Dutch. Fortunately, my college (Brasenose) generously funded some intensive lessons over the summer, which helped me reach approximately B1 level before my studies began. That was tremendously helpful.

One of my other goals this year was to pick up rowing, after much persuasion from my crew-obsessed friends. However, signing up to row turned out to involve much more fanfare than I had imagined. First, all sports clubs (including rowing) are organised into "verenigen" (Dutch for associations or, loosely, frats). Although it's great fun to tell people I joined a Dutch frat, these associations (characteristically) involve quite an intense hazing process. Thankfully, my frat wasn't very *corporaal* (the old-school elite style), so the hazing was tolerable. That said, the whole affair still lasted more than 18 hours and featured activities such as crawling through mud, being shoved into the river, and



Leiden, NL
Peter Chen,
Legal Counsel

climbing a wall of sauce—only to marinate in said sauce while being shouted at in German (apparently, German is more "inspirational").

I also happen to be the only non-Dutch person in this 800-strong frat, so rowing has turned out to be excellent for my language learning. I should add that this experience—like my summer language lessons—was again generously funded by my college.

Best,
Peter



Munich, DE
Eilis Mathur,
News Chair

Dear reader,

I have spent the first half of my year abroad in Munich and now approaching my last month here, I thought it would be appropriate to reflect on what I have learnt so far. While admittedly my ability to speak German is yet to improve, I feel as if I have learnt some key lessons about German, and specifically Bavarian, culture.

Before arriving in Munich, I was warned by tutors, other language students, Instagram reels, and other highly reputable sources about the infamously difficult Bavarian accent. I soon found the rumours to be true. Understanding

Bavarians was definitely a challenge and even now, I only catch about two thirds of what my law lecturer says (although that amount would probably increase if I attended more lectures). Yet I have found my ways to adapt to the dialect, be it greeting people with an impassioned *Servus* (Bavarian for 'hello') or being sure to ask for a *Semmel* and not a *Brötchen* at my local bakery. While I'm still a long way from fluency, I've mastered enough Bavarianisms to make my way through most casual conversations.

I thought I understood how important beer was to Germans before I arrived in Munich. Yet I realised I had severely underestimated its importance on a 6am train journey from the airport where I witnessed three men down two beers each within the 30 minute journey. Despite some initial issues – an indifference towards the taste of beer and an inability to hold a *Maß* (a litre beer mug) without both hands – it has definitely grown on me. The proudest moment of my year abroad (and possibly my life) was finishing a night out with a 7am beer and being told: "You are officially a Bavarian now."

My culinary experience in Munich has also been very enriching. Despite the challengingly large portion sizes, I have enjoyed many plates of *Leberkäs*, *Käsespätzle*, *Kaiserschmarrn* and more. However, I won't be getting over the embarrassment of a German waiter telling me I must have a "kleiner Magen" (small stomach) when taking away my only half-finished plate.

The nature in and around Munich has

most definitely been a highlight for me. While the nearby lakes and mountains are undeniably beautiful and calming, I have most enjoyed the English Gardens, a gigantic park stretching across the whole city. Whether cold dipping in the shallow parts of the river, watching people surf on the *Eisbach*, or reading by the *Monopteros*, this park has been one of my favourite parts of the city.

Munich has been a very easy city for me to fall in love with and while I am very excited about the new experiences I will have in Berlin, the thought of leaving Bavaria behind is not easy. At a New Year's Party held by Bavaria's Minister President, Markus Söder, he admitted that there are many parties and places throughout Germany, but "Bavaria is something special". I couldn't agree more.

Best,
Eilis



Sanskrit drama returns to Oxford

Benjamin Atkinson, costume and prop designer of Śūdraka's *The Little Clay Cart*, discusses the fourth annual production from the Oxford Sanskrit Play project

Building on a strong recent tradition of plays performed in Sanskrit (with surtitles!) we are delighted to present this beautiful drama from ancient India, performed by cast of students and academics in Sanskrit, South-Asian studies, and related fields, and open to a diverse audience of school students, academics, and the public in general – it will be both richly entertaining and educational. Last year, we put on the *Mālatīmādhava* (the *Tale of Mālati and Mādhava*), a very successful production which sold out almost as soon as booking had opened.

We meet Cārudatta, a now-impooverished brahmin renowned for his virtue and honesty – so much so that despite his fall from wealth, he is still visited for his advice and counsel by a lofty clientele. He is the hero of the play, and though happily married with a wife and son, he is deeply in love with its heroine, the famed and beautiful courtesan, Vasantasenā. Vasantasenā is in love with him in turn, but we see her fall victim of a terrible crime, and Cārudatta take the blame for it. Behind all of this, however, lies the heinous prince Śākāra, who also loves Vasantasenā and is furious with her for spurning his advances.

The play is full of political intrigue, subterfuge, romance, and high emotions, but also interspersed with a light comic touch – Vasantasenā is en route to a romantic rendezvous with Cārudatta, and meets his son Rohasena, in floods of tears. As it turns out, his wealthy neighbour's son has a solid gold toy cart, which he used to let Rohasena play with. Now, however, he has started to shun poor little Rohasena, who has only his Little Clay Cart (from which the play takes its name) to play with, so Vasantasenā takes pity on him, piles all her jewellery on the cart – rich, elaborate necklaces and bangles in gold and gems – and goes on her way. It is not Cārudatta she will encounter, however...

The play does not only function as fantastic entertainment, but also serves the vital purpose of bringing our knowledge of Sanskrit and of ancient India to life. Following in the footsteps of our previous Sanskrit Plays, and of course inspired by last term's incredible Ancient Greek Play, the *Orestes*, we believe there is nothing like performing ancient texts in their own language for inspiring students and scholars of those languages, and attracting public interest in



the wealth of literature they have to offer, and their original performance traditions. It will be in Sanskrit (and Prakrit, as was the tradition in Sanskrit drama), but we aim to make this as accessible to all comers, from the expert to the curious, through informative programme notes, and clear surtitles throughout.

It also offers us an opportunity to understand sides of the dramatic tradition which we never encounter through the text alone. Sanskrit drama was very musical, for instance, and our performance will feature musicians rigorously trained in traditional Indian music, and a beautiful musical interlude in the mid-

dle of the play. My own role has largely related to the props and costuming; the other costumers and I have poured days of research into the clothing depicted in the Ajanta caves, the most copious source of information on the attire of the 5th Century AD, when this play was likely written. Their patterning was incredibly rich, and Indian dyes had been renowned even in the early Roman empire and far beyond for their vibrant colours and consistency. They will provide a vivid and visually appealing spectacle for the audience. It has been a joy to design these costumes, liaising with peers and tailors in India to get the

materials we need.

The play will offer a unique opportunity to see an ancient drama come to life before your eyes, and to witness the rare combination of ancient languages, music, and costume. Tickets will be free, so don't miss out...

The Little Clay Cart will show on 15th-16th March, 19:30, at St John's Auditorium.

Image Credit: Newberry Library, 'The Little Clay Cart, Scene 6 Vasantasena enters the bullock cart' via Wikimedia Commons

'To Conform or Not to Conform': The question of theatrical costuming

By Eva Westenberger

Whether you like it or not, costuming is one of the most crucial decisions to be made when staging a show. It holds immense power to capture (or indeed disengage) an audience right from the offset. A commonly-held viewpoint is that costuming is only noticeable when it actively draws attention to itself, often via defying era-specific fashions such as a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in jeans and hoodies. In fact, Shakespeare, it seems, is often the target of such 'modernising' – out with the doublets, hose and corsets, and in with t-shirts, trainers and trackies.

I recently went to watch an adaptation of *Twelfth*

Night at Richmond's Orange Tree Theatre, where, in my opinion, the costume design was no less than flawless. Struck with a disconnect between Shakespeare's original Elizabethan text and this mid-20th century retelling directed by Tom Littler, the 1940s-style costuming perfectly evoked the melancholic undertones of the production – bridging the gap between the eras. Female characters wore sumptuous black silk mourning gowns, and male characters wore dark evening attire, culminating in an experience that transgressed periodisation.

While this may be a surprising thing to note in a play intended as a comedy, the overall effect of the subdued and formal costume style gave greater emotional depth to a play which can, on the surface, seem little more than a frivolous, festive romp. In-

stead, the aesthetic of solemnity, further enhanced by a set design inclusive of a war memorial to fallen soldiers encircling the stage, served to highlight the more moving and sentimental elements of the play that are often overshadowed by its frivolity. Twins Viola and Sebastian's mutual sorrow at each other's belief that the other is dead was cast into stronger relief, as was Andrew Aguecheek's unexpectedly melancholic aside "but I was once adored too", which is often lost amid the overt silliness of the scene.

This is, of course, an effectively attention-grabbing production choice, yet one that is not necessarily a magic formula to success. Good costuming does not always need to be 'subversive' or 'unexpected' in order to complement the show

in question. Indeed, historically accurate costuming can, in certain shows, be an essential element for basic clarity on the audience's behalf. In November I was fortunate to watch the excellent *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* at the Oxford Playhouse, which, quite simply, would not have evoked the world of scheming and inner-circle socialising of 18th century French aristocrats as persuasively without its era-faithful costumes. In the case of specificity within storytelling, historical accuracy delivers the best results. The flamboyancy and elaborateness of their outfits was just right, not only convincingly establishing the setting, but visually reinforcing the upper-class poise of the majority of the characters.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

FILM AND TV

Editors' Picks

IN THEATRES



BABYGIRL

Determined intern Harris Dickinson catalyses the sexual awakening of a high-flying CEO (Nicole Kidman) in Halina Reijn's newest picture.

TO STREAM



SEVERENCE

The Apple TV workplace thriller returns for a long-awaited second season, revealing more of Lumon Industries' secrets and the lives of its employees.

Image Credits:
[Babygirl] - J Harald Krichel/ CC by SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons
[Severence] - CC by 4.0 via Free Malaysia Today

MARIA – LARRAÍN'S GRAB AT 'HIGH ART'

By Emily Arlidge

Countless documentaries have been made, and even more biographies published on the life of Maria Callas (1923-1977). She has become a mythical woman upon whom anyone can superimpose a new story. The 10th of January marked the UK premiere of Pablo Larraín's *Maria* – yet another take on the opera singer's life. The third in his trilogy of biopics about historic mid-century women, this film focuses more on the curation of visually beautiful pictures than it does on opera and leaves the audience wondering where the real Maria can be found.

At music college, 'Callas' felt like a dirty word. Her vocal technique is not one your teachers would want you to copy – it is admired in Callas and only in Callas. To love her publicly would be to divulge a personal secret – that you too, dream of Teatro alla Scala and the tragic diva lifestyle. However, if asked who the greatest soprano of all time was, most would have to answer Maria Callas.

As one of the most iconic and influential opera singers of all time, she became known for her 'big ugly voice', which broke operatic conventions. She sang more gutterally and with a vibrato which oscillated much slower than that of her contemporaries. Even towards the end of her career, as her voice began to fail her, every note she sang was steeped in visceral and

complex human emotion in a way few singers have ever achieved. Callas turned herself inside out before countless audiences, intertwining herself with total strangers as her greatest gift became her life's burden.

Depicting the end of her career and her final days, the narrative of Pablo Larraín's film leans heavily on the physical affliction of her voice. Angelina Jolie, as Callas, combined live singing with lip-syncing to original recordings – both were mostly unconvincing despite seven months of vocal training (that's five minutes in opera terms). In the film's opening moments, she (badly) sings Bellini's 'Casta Diva' to her housekeeper and is relieved to hear her praise. This depiction is inconsistent with what we know of the real Callas. Mezzo-soprano Grace Bumbry reported: "If I followed the musical score when Callas was singing, I would see every tempo marking, every dynamic marking." Callas herself, in an interview, explained: "I don't read the criticisms... I know exactly what I do before anybody tells me." To suggest she would accept false praise is to discredit her intelligence and musicality.

Though Jolie artfully embodied Callas' poised mannerisms and obscure transatlantic accent, her performance couldn't hide the feeling that this was another Hollywood-grab at 'high art' status. Much like *Tár* used a classical music setting as a Trojan horse for a drama about cancel culture, this film used Callas to

access a world of operatic imagery without developing a meaningful appreciation for the art form. It is as if they pillaged Callas' life for dramatic visuals: the grandeur and elegance of La Scala, Aristotle Onassis' opulent party, and Paris landmarks against autumn leaves. Every frame is like a painting – beautiful but static. Despite Callas calling singing on stage "an exaltation and intoxication", which felt as if "the stage itself would burn", the flashbacks to her performances lack the suspended atmosphere of opera as the audience appears unresponsive and portrait-like. As a result, the contrasting shots between her prime and decline are less impactful.

To add insult to injury, the filmmakers directly insert themselves into this narrative. Under the guise of her mandrax-fueled hallucination, Callas is joined by a film crew. Her interviewer (also called Mandrax) appears and disappears throughout to evoke poignant declarations from Callas about her life. These scenes feel clunky and are an insistent reminder of the behind-the-scenes creators of this film – a watermark across Callas' story.

Despite the saccharine imagery on screen (Callas meeting her younger self and the ghost of her past love), the final scene lends some long-awaited focus to the voice of Maria Callas – a glimpse into the rich emotional experience this film could have been.

The Globes and what we're getting wrong

By Molly Scales

Demi Moore told a wildly enthusiastic Golden Globes audience: "Thirty years ago I had a producer tell me that I was a 'popcorn actress' and, at that time, I made that mean ... that this wasn't something that I was allowed to have. That I could do movies that were successful, that made a lot of money, but that I couldn't be acknowledged, and I bought in and I believed that." The antidote, Moore revealed, was the "magical, bold, courageous, out-of-the-box, absolutely bonkers script" – a script which has since transmogrified into *The Substance*.

The irony is Moore's reductive pigeonholing is not dissimilar to the Golden Globe's treatment of *The Substance*. Whilst the film has garnered critical acclaim, it's worth noting two categories for which *The Substance* was in contention: 'Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy' and 'Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy.' Though certain prosthetics donned by Margaret Qualley do indeed defy gravity, I'm guessing *The Substance* isn't hitting the 'Musical' criteria. So it's a comedy? Really?

The Substance hits some wickedly comedic beats. If you've seen the film, I bet you're thinking of the same word I am: shrimp. But what in *The Substance* bars it from 'Best Motion Picture – Drama'? Admittedly, the film was nominated for 'Best Screenplay', with Coralie Fargeat receiving a nomination for 'Best Director of a Motion Picture.' But the damage is done. Horror is not drama. Apparently.

Which is ludicrous, not least because 'drama' encompasses any and all dramatic works. The antithesis of 'drama' cannot be 'comedy' as the

binary so often pedalled would have you believe. Though many might have forgotten it, the opposite of 'comedy' is in fact 'tragedy.' This slippage enforces the common notion of comedy as inferior to tragedy. More concerningly, it implies that comedies and musicals are not drama at all.

Critical snobbery towards horror is rich, varied, and to paraphrase Frankenstein, still very much 'aliiiiiive'. Only six horror films have ever been nominated for 'Best Picture' at the Oscars – and only one was victorious (for trivia fans: *Silence of the Lambs* in 1991). Sure, there's a recent uptick in horror's claim to artistry, courtesy of thematically-minded A24 bludgeonings. But where is mainstream adulation for *I Saw The TV Glow*? Or Robert Morgan's *Stopmotion*? Why was AMC's *Interview with the Vampire* snubbed in yet another awards season? Not only does Jacob Anderson's lack of nominations merit a tantrum of Lestat proportions, it is damning proof horror is still overlooked.

Horror isn't the only dowdy stepsister when it comes to awards season. There is also the tricky Oscar category of 'Best Animated Feature Film.' This was created after more than 60 years, when the rise of Disney's competitors provided a large enough nominee pool. Prior to the category's advent, special Oscars had been bestowed upon exceptional productions such as *Snow White* and the *Seven Dwarfs* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Product of necessity though the category is, it raises the same question as the no doubt belly-laugh-inducing romp *The Substance*: why is genre the be-all and end-all of a piece of art?

In the case of animation, the simple answer is: it shouldn't. 2022 saw the nominations of *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* and inventive mockumentary *Marcel the Shell With Shoes On*.

A regular contender in this category is acclaimed co-founder of Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki. While animation is dimensions away from live-action, the fact remains these exceptional films are excluded from 'Best Picture.' That's 'Best Picture', mind you; not 'Best Live-Action Picture.' I would never advocate for such a rebranding (least of all because it sounds ridiculous). Yet I cannot help but wonder whether making a sideshow of one medium writes inferiority into its DNA. (Besides, given the hoops through which the nimble little shell Marcel had to jump to be considered for this category, one wonders whether blockbusters' reliance on CGI will eventually push so-called live-action into the animated category from which it is supposedly oh-so-separate.)

Moore's acceptance speech warns against

restrictive, binary approaches to film. Someone is one kind of actor and one kind of actor only. A movie is a "popcorn film" and nothing more. If I can add one more lesson to the countless imparted by *The Substance*, it's that such divisions are, at best, irritating, and at worst, obstructive in both the production and consumption of art. In an industry groaning under the weight of tired reboots and 2D that really earns its name, surely strange amorphous films are just what we need? Much like the thing lurking under Elizabeth Sparkle's skin, "out-of-the-box, absolutely bonkers" masterworks like *The Substance* must keep pushing against strictures of genre.

Image Credit: Peter Dutton/ CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons



AI art: A picture is worth a thousand strings of code

ART

Lara Murrani reflects on the state of digital art in a world of AI, and whether we can ever have real art without human artists.

We have have all, at some point, seen art mid-creation. Whether you've had the opportunity to observe a master at work, watched Bob Ross on TV, or just sat next to your friend in maths while she produced her third eye in the corners of her exercise book, the process of the artist making art has long been a romanticised fable: the tortured artist, the artist's studio. We are fascinated with the representation of the soul through the visual medium. This begs the question: can we have art without the artist?

Between 1768 and 1774, Pierre Jaquet-Droz, Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz, and Jean-Frédéric Leschot built three automata. One of these, the draughtsman, was modelled after a young boy. Through a system of cams, the draughtsman was – and is – capable of drawing four images: a portrait of Louis XV, Marie-Antoinette, a dog, and a scene of Cupid. Just short of 300 years later, in 2019, Ai-Da was completed. The world's first realistic humanoid-robot artist, Ai-Da has the ability to draw through algorithms developed by AI researchers here at Oxford University. Today, you can sign up for DALL-E 2 or Imagen 3, input a prompt, and receive a digital picture in return. On the face of it, this answers our question neatly: art without humans is not remotely new. It's older than me; it's older than you. It can create self-portraits (Ai-Da: 'Portrait of a Robot', Design Museum in London), countryside landscapes, royal portraits, and more. If it looks like art and it sounds like art...



Aristotle said: "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." Art is something we, as humans, consider relatively sacred. It would be fine for a robot to build our cars, but the production of art is meant to mean more than just the process of it. Art supposedly has a purpose, a notion, a soul – something to say. It is meant to foster a relationship between the creator and the observer.

We did away with an aesthetic definition of art a long time ago when modern art broke onto the scene. After all, if a banana on a wall is art,

then a painting with six fingers can't be that offensive. However, we retain a belief that art is meant to say something, that artificial mimicry of artistic techniques is just that: mimicry, not creation. Mimicry cannot form a relationship with observers in the same way plastic food cannot fill your stomach. That is why we say DALL-E 2 could never create art, why the draughtsman himself is often considered art, but not his repetitive rote impression of Louis XV. It lacks soul; it's artificial.

Soungwen Chung describes what it is like to work with AI in her art: "In some ways, the

robotic system is a kinetic instrument that I'm navigating with." Last year, Chung was honoured with the TIME 100 AI designation. Chung trained an AI system using neural networks on a bank of her own paintings and used that programming to allow the neural networks to paint alongside her in real-time. When Chung paints, so does the device. It mimics and extends: "What I'm chasing is that surprise and wonder in that machine translation." Chung utilises complex artificial intelligence to combine brushstrokes to the point of blurring the lines between her own work and the machine's.

It's easy to dismiss AI art as prompt-based images that can be found all over Facebook, but that would be wilfully myopic. There exists art that tries to form a connection between creator and mimic, man and programme, the artist and their machine. Chung's AI acts as more than just a futuristic metal paintbrush; it subverts and develops the piece and the artist in its own right. If we follow the logic that art is granted its soulful artistic status through the presence of some sort of intent behind it, is this not art? Is there no purpose, no message, to read into Chung's work? Perhaps it is so easy to dismiss AI art as fake due to a general unwillingness to engage in or learn about the ways it is actually slithering into the artistic scene. So, is it art or is it AI slop? Da Vinci or OpenAI? Does it even matter if we have no interest in actually engaging with it? You decide, observer.

Image Credits: Lennymur/ CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

ARTS CALENDAR

What's On.

MUSIC

Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra, Martha Argerich
(Sheldonian Theatre, 23 Feb.)
"The great Martha Argerich returns to the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra as a concerto soloist, in Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto, surrounded in this programme by orchestral music of brilliance and drama."

ART

Oracles, Omens, and Answers
(Weston, until 27 April)
An exploration of the ways in which humanity has dealt with the unknown. From oracle bones to the life-writings of White House astrologers. Not to be missed.

STAGE

The Shark is Broken
(Oxford Playhouse, Thursday 24 - Saturday 25 January)
"A smash hit in the West End and on Broadway, *The Shark is Broken* celebrates movie history and peeks at the choppy waters behind Hollywood's first blockbuster."

Into The Woods
(29 January to 1 February)
Cinderella wishes to go to the King's festival, Jack wishes his cow would give him some milk, and the Baker and his wife wish for a child. *Into the Woods* features some of the most beloved fairy tale characters as they embark on a journey to fulfil their deepest desires.



BookTok: The last page of the publishing industry?

By Maya Heuer-Evans

The #booktok stands that have become fixtures of bookshops across the country inspire intense feelings in me. It's a mix of guilty curiosity, superiority, and bewilderment. BookTok, of course, encompasses a greater variety of interests than is represented in these displays, whose books are selected on the Holy Trinity of online appeal: 'smut', 'spice' and specific 'tropes'. Yet in doing so, booksellers are (perhaps unwittingly) highlighting a side of BookTok and its audience that are the focus of a furious argument over the diminishing quality of literature being produced by the publishing industry. In the nuanced fashion which is typical of online discussion, critics decry book-tokkers as anti-intellectualist, while book-tokkers condemn its critics as conceited elitists. It certainly makes you wonder: is BookTok's influence on how we engage and produce literature genuinely this impactful?

Influencers that have gained fame by analysing and recommending works online have become the faces of the publishing industry to an emerging generation of readers. Publishers actively encourage this by inviting figures like Jack Edwards, a prominent YouTuber, to attend Booker Prize award ceremonies and literary festivals. However the charge levelled at these individuals is that by engaging in 'trope-ification', they lower standards of engagement to the point where derivative literature – works based on prior books and characters – can be published traditionally and dominate the book market. There are works like *Red, White and Royal Blue*, which demean the quality of publication through a reduction in standards – or so the online critics hold. To them, the similarity of the book covers decorating these #booktok stands is a visual symptom of the homogenisation of literature as Booktok distills novels down to mere checklists of tropes and stock characters. Even the

way influencers market these books is predictable; an individual is framed by bright and bountifully brimming bookcases, identifying 'Five books to solve X', or 'Five books for when you're feeling X'.

Yet the argument that a form of culture can be debased by vacuous work designed to engage the plebeian taste is an old, tired argument, which has been rinsed and recycled since mass literacy became a phenomenon. This specific claim smacks of misogyny too, given that a majority of the authors who are perceived to benefit from this 'trope-ification' of reader engagement are Romance-writing female authors. Derivative literature has existed and enriched culture for decades – think of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which is a partial retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*. Any assessment of the overall quality of published books at any one time would be, by nature, arbitrary and subjective – there's simply not enough evidence to suggest that 'BookTok' is even having a definitive impact on it.

However the popularity of tropes within the online book community has had an effect on the way in which readers engage with works. Because publishing is a market constantly responding to changes in profitability, this has, in turn, led to a reconsideration of how books are marketed. When books are promoted online, it is based on the number of tropes they fulfil, from 'chosen one' to 'one-bed'. They are grouped together with works from completely different genres and contexts, instead united according to these categories. Literary tropes have always existed, but they've tended to be background influences, something rarely used to judge a book's potential success. I'm disappointed to say that I've recently seen *Jane Eyre* marketed as 'enemies-to-lovers' – a particularly low point, in my estimation.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

BOOKS

FASHION

The rise of 'Birkinification'

By CERYS BENNISON

A bag, Birkinified: clad in charms, key-chains and ribbons, a young woman flaunts her newly on-trend Prada tote in front of the camera, zooming in on each kitschy, personal addition. Newly outfitted in the fripperies of individuality, the bag's adornments act much like a luggage tag at the airport – functionally distinctive, but also a possible creative extension of self. 'This is me', it seems to say, 'And I am FABULOUS!'

In this case, the Prada bag is captured on TikTok, the wonderful and wearying workshop of all trends today. The Birkinification craze derives from the 'trinkifying' trend where people personalise their bags in the manner of fashion icon Jane Birkin. Swinging 1960s It-girl, singer and actress, the tale of Birkin's eponymous bag is entrenched in fashion history: on a flight to London in 1981, she unknowingly found herself sat beside the Hermès executive and visionary Jean-Louis Dumas. When her belongings spilled out of her bag upon putting it in an overhead compartment, he declared that he would make her a new one. Birkin was then asked if she would give her name to the bag in return for an annual fee, which she donates to charity. Hence,

"Fashion icons are often eclipsed by the fashions they pioneer"

the world's arguably most famous (and unarguably most expensive) bag was born.

Birkin's Birkin is always smattered with stickers, charms and tags. However, the joyous thing about Birkinification is that you don't need the probably-more-than-£100,000 Hermès to emulate the look. Of course, there are high-end iterations but, as Fiorelli designer Nia Davis has stated, any bag will do. As long as the manner of decoration resonates with that of Birkin – chaotic, fun, personal – then anyone can get in on Birkinification.

Yet in this sense the trend undermines itself: anyone who wants to try Birkinification does, decorating their bag in a way that is supposed to conjure their own individuality, but in the end merely confines them to the herd-mentality nature of a trend. This is even more emphatic when Birkinification becomes subject to any TikTok core currently residing in coreville. 'Coquettecore' and 'balletcore' have both inflicted themselves on Birkinification, meaning that, in reality, the unique personal objects which adorn these bags turn out to all be the same. Who can see where the trends stop and the individual begins?

Birkinification may masquerade behind the premise of individuality, but it is certainly good fun. To make the bag your own: there is something endearingly childish about it. Birkinification shows how trends are themselves subject to trends, and how fashion icons are eclipsed by the fashions they pioneer. At the end of it all, you might lose your individuality to the trend – but hopefully you'll still know which bag is yours.

Finding the future of pop in the 2010s

By GABRIELLA OFO

The early 2010's occupy a curious space in cultural memory, neither distant enough to be considered history, nor recent enough to feel like the present. Yet, this period is enjoying an unexpected renaissance. Chart-topping hits from artists like Miley Cyrus, Bruno Mars, Rihanna and Maroon 5 are re-entering the mainstream, propelled by waves of nostalgia and the algorithmic influence of platforms like TikTok. This resurgence highlights nostalgia's dual role as both a refuge and a creative force, shedding light on the evolving relationship between music, memory and identity.

Nostalgia has always been central to music, offering listeners a sentimental escape from the complexities of the present and a reconnection with what feels like a simpler, more optimistic time. Today, this longing for the past has been amplified by social media platforms that thrive on nostalgia's ability to evoke powerful emotional responses. On TikTok, tracks from the past have found new audiences, becoming the backdrop for viral trends that reshape their cultural significance. These songs, often sped up, slowed down, or remixed, take on new layers of meaning, appealing to younger audiences whilst rekindling memories for older ones. TikTok's ability to seamlessly merge the past with the present has also revived even older tracks such as Sophie Ellis-Bextor's 'Murder on the Dance Floor' (2001) or M.I.A.'s 'Paper Planes' (2008), proving that the platform's influence extends far beyond any single era of music.

This nostalgia extends beyond individual tracks into the very creation and identity of new

artists and their sounds, showcasing a cyclical relationship between influence and reinvention. The girl group FLO, for example, embody the resurgence of girl bands, incorporating the genre-defining harmonies, lyricism and vocal arrangements of 2000s icons Destiny's Child. Such reinvention demonstrating how nostalgia influences the present, as artists channel the past not as mimicry, but as inspiration, creating something new whilst albeit familiar. The dominance of throwbacks in the mainstream are a very revelation of how the sounds of the past can also be a space for creative transformation.

For emerging artists however, nostalgia poses a significant challenge, as they must carve out their place in a landscape where they not only compete with contemporaries, but also the cultural weight of the past. Raising the question, is the resurgence of nostalgia indicative of cultural stagnation, as innovation is overshadowed

by the comfort of familiarity? Or is it evidence of a new form of creativity, where the past is actively revived and reimagined for modern listeners?

In many ways, the very resurgence of throwbacks and the impact of nostalgia can act as a bridge between musical eras.

The soundtrack of 2025 will most likely be defined by this delicate mixture of memory and innovation, as old sounds are reimagined to reflect the identity of a new generation.

Nostalgia, far from being a passive retreat, proves itself to be a defining force that shapes the sound of tomorrow.

Image Credit: Slgckgc/CC BY 2.0 via Flickr



The Source

By ELLA O'SHEA

To Julian

you're enwombed within stone, this anchorhold,
wool on your skin, the draught on your feet
ink on your nose, barley in your teeth.

to look at a hazelnut and see everything — how marvellous
to have eyes filled with wonder, fear, love,
to hold a cat close, press into her flesh,
feel her mothering warmth, as in Christ's side.

it is all that is made: these four walls,
a bed, a pot, the altar through a slice in the brick,
to mumble the soft clothing of prayer
in its comfort-slots every day,

to look up through your small window, and
have your eyes receive the stars,
scattered on the blanket of night,
seeing as God did, in the beginning.

it is very good, it is now
and ever, all shall be
well, in this Word,
this world

without end.



Is Life Meaningless?

David Hays discusses how to create your own meaning and find happiness in an absurd world

Believe it or not, this is an article about hope. For it to last, however, I believe that hope must be earned. We thus begin someplace far from its optimistic light: over the vacation, *Cherwell* reported that 38% of Oxford students have experienced worse mental health since their arrival at the University. To some outsiders, this may seem a baffling statistic. After all, Oxford is one of the best universities in the world. We bear regular witness to thousands of hopeful families making pilgrimages to our city, hoping to manifest erudite futures for their young, impressionable children. What we have achieved, is all they want. So why, once here, in a position of such privilege, are we so unhappy?

Here, many will posit different theories. Some will blame excess workload. I suspect this may play some role, but it's also an easy scapegoat. Some will blame 'impostor syndrome', but I theorise that this is just one manifestation of the greater psychological issue at play.

The issue starts with our personalities (ouch): institutions like Oxford select individuals with higher levels of neuroticism (in the technical sense). This does lend us strong creative and analytic abilities, but it can also serve as a source of great – often unnecessary – stress. This can be bad enough on its own, but luckily for us – it gets worse. In the individual, neuroticism increases the likelihood and frequency with which we become conscious of what philosophers like Camus term 'the absurd': the sense that the human condition is a meaningless, Sisyphean task.

You likely worked hard to get to Oxford. But once you got here, the door opened to yet another application cycle, Russian doll style. Now that you're too caught up preparing for the next stage, you hardly have time to enjoy what you worked for so long to achieve. To make

matters worse, maybe you're getting rejected from internship after internship and don't know why. Or, maybe you have your post-Oxford plans confirmed, but you've grasped that what follows is just another hedonic treadmill, wrapped in postgraduate or corporate packaging. This, you realise, is a cycle which continues until you die.

Bit dramatic, you might think – and what do we do with this information? Fundamentally, it's difficult to argue with the assertion that "nothing matters". I do not, however, believe that this reality constitutes a reason to despair. If life has no meaning, we have the freedom to dictate our own purpose and create our own happiness. The main problem is that we've been conditioned to look for these things in the wrong places. The trap I've found myself falling into time and time again is thinking the external world is solely deterministic of my internal state. Happiness is internally generated; you can create it anywhere.

So, what fills you with joy whenever you do it? Whatever it is, maybe you can join me and try to incorporate a little more of it in your life this year. And full disclosure: if that statistic is anything less than 38% next year, I'll be taking full credit. I close, as promised, with Camus on a hopeful note: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Image Credit: Sunrise, Jeremy Eades, via Flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0



Has Atik's closure cursed Oxford's nightlife?

Rhiannon Bradshaw contemplates the club's demise

In my first year, I was a regular Atik attendee, especially for Park End. Chris Dukes' shout outs, the cheese floor and Ahmed's chips on the way home were maybe not the highlight of my week, but certainly something I looked forward to. Last term, however, I did not attend a single Park End. While this is partly because I'm now in my second year, I do think Atik's closure played a role. Of course, my memories might be clouded by the rose-tinted glasses through which I viewed most of my first year experiences. But I wouldn't be surprised if Atik's closure is the culprit. No one wants to go on two nights out in a row at the same club. But does this mean everyone is going out less? Has Atik's closure cemented the decline of Oxford's nightlife in general?

Part of me does miss Atik. When it was open, it seemed like there was a wider variety of options to choose from on a night out, rather than because I loved the club itself. Let's face it: Atik wasn't exactly Ministry of Sound or Berghain. In fact, I'm sure about half of the student body openly welcomed its closure and its demise has given other venues a second chance. Ever heard of Thirst or Spirit? The only times I'd noticed these two bars was when standing in the queue for Atik, and

they were always eerily empty. But last term, I ended up at a bop at Thirst. It was teeming with people and the DJ was great. Meanwhile, Spirit now offers crewdates, with entry to Bridge included. I don't think we would've seen these bars take off while their neighbour still dominated. Maybe there is still life on Park End Street after midnight – maybe it's not all a picture of decline.

On the other hand, the Oxford nightlife scene can be so much more than just clubbing. Even last year, some of my best 'nights out' didn't involve a foray into Bridge, Atik, or Plush. Bops in the college bar, where drinks are cheap and the whole college turns up are always a highlight for me. Or crewdates, where we end up staggering to Spoons and rarely make it to the club afterwards. From this angle, the nightlife scene at Oxford seems to be as thriving as ever. Besides, for those club rats out there, Cowley still exists, with potentially better clubs than any in the city centre. Hopefully Atik's closure has encouraged more people to venture outside of OX1 on a night out. Either way, the nightlife scene at Oxford is certainly not dead!

Image credit: People Dancing Inside Dim Room, Jerome Govender via Pexels

Chasing BNOC-hood

By Janet Lau

Oxford is perhaps best known for its BNOCs. Upon receiving my offer last January, I was struck with visions of BNOC-hood's biggest names: Johnson riling up his 'Boris cult' at the Union with his funny-guy charm, Gove getting his own feature at *Cherwell* barely a month after his Freshers' Week, Cameron cross-dressing in his many drinking societies. An affinity towards BNOC-hood seems to be an unwritten expectation of the Oxford student – a natural talent for witty pub banter, 'happening to know' someone from

every college, attendance at every Bridge Thursday. But what does it actually mean to be a BNOC... and is it actually worth it?

BNOC-hood seems to come with the expectation to know it all – from Middle Eastern geopolitics, to the rules of cricket, to how to mix every gin-based cocktail – or at least know enough to strike up conversations with everyone at the Union bar post-debate. The BNOC must also naturally possess an endless supply of social energy, being the omnipresent figure at every event you find yourself at. Coming out of Freshers' Week, these expectations seemed to me a description of every person I'd met – everyone was

off to some social all the time and already knew at least 10 people in Spoons on any given night.

I was determined to live up to this ideal. In my first month, I dragged myself to all the events I could find and exchanged Instagrams with too many people to count. Yet sometimes, I found myself struggling to keep up with the chaotic energy holding together a large social group. Doom-scrolling through Reels in bed had never been so alluring.

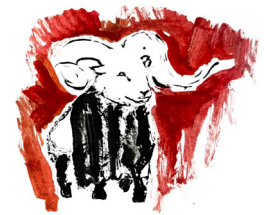
Whenever I found myself alone in my room, guilt would always drift in through the window, along with the enthusiastic chatter of a group on their way out for the night. I started to wonder: where did

this guilt come from? Why did I care so much about BNOC-hood anyway? Why couldn't I keep pace with the Oxford bubble?

Many of the people I talked to also agreed that the BNOC label comes with plenty of prerequisites: social versatility, self-confidence, and a position in the Union/SU/student journalism, to name just a few. Together they make a neat little list to tick off: 70% of the criteria met gets you a First in BNOC-hood. Perhaps, I found, it was our characterisation of the BNOC as a tidy, measurable formula that has shaped the social expectations we come face-to-face with at Oxford.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

HOROSCOPES



Aries

See where the Tescalator takes you – you'll be surprised.



Taurus

The stars want me to tell you to be patient.



Gemini

Hilary doesn't have to be horrible. Pick yourself up..



Cancer

Steer clear of Mertonians this week.



Leo

Visit a new College bar and have some fun.



Virgo

Less than a month to Valentine's... uh oh.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

Avoid the left side of the road.



Scorpio

Use your nice dishes and wear your nice clothes. Live!



Sagittarius

Keep yourself warm – your body and your soul will thank you.



Capricorn

Maybe hot girl Hilary isn't for everyone... focus on your work.



Aquarius

It's not the end of the world. Time to start moving.



Pisces

Get your Scout a gift!

Inauguration Day: 'No one can claim complicity from across the ocean'

By Syd Walter

First, a proclamation: I voted for Kamala Harris in the 2024 US election. Second, a geographical fact: I am from Seattle, Washington. Washington is the only state that got bluer in the 2024 election. My mom and dad are there, living in this blue bubble, running their business, walking the dog. Instead of the shock and horror that characterized Trump's first election, they have grown weary.

To be fair, my mom started with anger, planning to perform a silent protest where she would write on pieces of paper: "This store hates women". She intended to put them inside coat pockets at Anthropologie because the parent company donated to Trump's campaign. But the rage didn't last long, nor did the plan get executed. The weariness took over, and my mom and dad have kept going: running the business and walking the dog, going about life at the pace they want to live it. And they can do this because we live in a bluer-than-blue state, within a blue bubble, and for my family, this is the illusion of protection.

The day Trump won, I still performed the functions of life. I made the trek to college from my accommodation in Summertown and once arriving on college grounds people gave amicable hugs, asked if I was ok, and said "sorry". I moved through the day with a foggy sense of recollection. I lost my fork, a hairband, and misplaced my computer. I developed pink eye in both eyes. I was disoriented and experienced many variations of sadness, but I found odd comfort in the "sorries"; I was saying the same thing.

The first time that Trump won, my school held an assembly to watch Hillary Clinton's concession speech; "This loss hurts. But please, never stop believing that fighting for what's right is worth it. It is. It is worth it." A Trump countdown appeared on my drive to school; 1,460 days left. People mourned, yes, but the mourning dissolved into normalcy and jokes about Trump became common in school and when talking to your neighbours. In my circles, it felt that Trump was an inconvenience, a terrible, horrid one to be sure, but what could one do? And eight years later that feeling

held true; Trump was an inconvenience, a terrible and horrible one, a case for many sorries.

I cling to these facts: The governor of Washington is a Democrat. And to this fact: the former governor of Washington instituted some of the most ambitious climate laws in the country because he knew that Washington could look like California, with over 100,000 people displaced due to fires in the Palisades, Eaton, and Hurst.

And to this fact: That if, for some godforsaken reason, I get pregnant at the end of Trinity, there is an open abortion clinic on East Madison Street. I can walk fifteen minutes from my house to the light rail, ride to University Street, walk five minutes, and be greeted by people who will care for me and support my decision.

And to this fact – which is a fact not just for Washington state but any state: that my parents and I are white, middle class, US citizens. When Trump won, I called my friends from red states and said sorry. I called my friends who are trans, who are undocumented, and said sorry, because I know they don't have the same facts to cling to. But even with facts to cling to, this does not exempt me from claiming the issue, red state or blue state, this is still a country governed by Trump. The illusion of protection is only as salient as those who fight to make those same protections for every person, in every state. And the illusion of protection spans, across oceans, across country lines, because an America governed by Trump is a world braced for unruly potential. And let us also not forget that the following facts: Trump plans to prioritise US production of oil and gas. It was the work of Trump which overturned *Roe v Wade*. And, Trump plans to launch the largest mass deportation of migrants in US recorded history.

Trump is now in office for the second time. Hold your sorries and turn them into rage; do something with this rage. No one can claim complicity, from a blue state or across the blue ocean. Be vigilant. Hold yourselves with gentleness, because rage and gentleness can go hand in hand. First, a proclamation: I voted for Kamala Harris in the 2024 US election. Second, a fact: Trump's policies and political action will impact every part of the globe.

CHER-WELL FED

Take Cover: Sartorelli's Review



By ESME THOMSON

Being handed a pager fills me with panic; I can't help feeling a bit of a rush. I'm handed the black chunk of plastic and nudged on. The shining signage of the 'Sartorelli's' grinning devil stares blankly down. Blue and white tiles envelope an inviting counter stuffed with bar stools – and if one dares, a shelf – inside, which my boyfriend and I quickly flock to. It's a bit stuffy, but in such a limited space, they outperform many of their neighbours in terms of seating. A huge wood-fired pizza oven dominates half the space, but the staff works efficiently around it. Dough is span, mozzarella is sprinkled, tomato is lathered. The menu is simple: a list of ingredients like peppers, mushrooms, and pepperoni, to add as you like. For a location in Oxford, Sartorelli's are also quite reasonable – especially as a margherita girl (boring), I'm covered. Expect to spend £10 on food, and always order takeaway to take advantage of their pizza box loyalty program.

Sartorelli's setting naturally gives it a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and its open plan of localised indoor seating allows you to stare at the kitchen in awe (or if you're on the fussy side, make sure they're cooking everything right). The relatively short opening hours mean dinner is out of the question, which is a

huge shame, as the nearby White Rabbit is always buzzing with customers for a somewhat similar, if not more pricey, pizza.

I'm distracted trying to force open a Sprite when my pager starts buzzing. Sartorelli's prides itself on its sourdough base, which on mine, has stretched out into an awkward rectangular shape. It's an awkward dilemma in pizza – contrary to other foods, neatness and perfect circles is more reminiscent of greasier chains, whereas the messier the more homemade, it seems. The crust bubbled up, and despite being slightly singed, was thick and more than filling. The tomato sauce is spread everywhere on the base, but not too thickly that it overpowers the whole meal. They are also, quite strangely for more artisan pizzas, generous with the cheese. Overall, my pizza filled the plate, quite easily justifying the price. Perhaps a great testament to this restaurant is their ability to actually fill its customers – the thick base and generous helping of cheese and sauce of just half a pizza was enough, making it a great cheap date lunch if you're willing to share. Pizzas are quite simple, and Sartorelli's is simply good. It's not ground-breaking, but in a city full of so much experiment and variety, sometimes the classics shine through even brighter.

Image Credit: David Hays

Agony Aunt:

I've got a bit carried away lying about where I'm from, and think I've accidentally morphed into (a slightly less extreme) Oliver from Saltburn. What should I do? I don't want to seem like a weirdo to people I've only known a term.



My dear Pinocchio,

While most threw themed parties and had *Murder on the Dancefloor* on repeat, you seem to have taken last year's *Saltburn* obsession to the next level. While lying Oliver did get the big estate, the money, and the name, he was also a (fictional) psychopath. Needless to say, I think it's best to steer clear of using film plots as guides to the real world.

Underneath the lies is probably a desire to fit in. This pressure is double as heavy at Oxford, which can feel like a microcosm of life in the 18th century: peers dropping Latin into sentences and flaunting gowns during exam season. It can be hard to effortlessly blend into this world, but the solution is not to create a life for yourself.

Your only course of action is to tell the truth. Maybe the lies can be reworked to reflect the truth, or maybe it will just be an unavoidably awkward conversation. As cliché as it sounds, your true friends will accept you for who you are. Anyway, if you want to form bonds that last beyond university, your friends are probably going to visit your hometown. They're going to see through the lies at some point. The sooner you tell them, the better.

Lots of love,
Your Agony Aunt

BOOZY BULLETIN

Coziest Winter Pubs

1. White Horse

It's always busy, but if you can snag a table, nothing quite beats the cozy interior.

2. King's Arms

Perhaps a surprising pick, but the KA's back area, a bit like the White Horse, is a perfect cozy winter retreat. Plus, their mulled wine brings a little bit of Christmas into Hilary term.

3. Turf Tavern

Their outdoor benches are always cozy and never too cold, but if you tend to freeze, the inside has fun historical decorations and cozy lighting like a cave.

4. White Rabbit

The indoor benches are perfect for a party or a pint, and the outdoor heated seats are always a treat. The pizza's not bad, either...

5. Jolly Farmers

Board games, book nooks, and queer celebration – who could ask for more?

SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT OUEMS X OPS



For the first time, the Psychedelic Society and Electronic Music Society came together in Bully's back room. With an eclectic blend of techno and some funky trance, the night was a huge success. The editors hope that the partnership continues!

The definitive ranking of (most) Oxford matcha

Amanda Li samples the full range of Oxford's matcha lattes and enjoys a week-long caffeine high

Matcha, rich in antioxidants and caffeine, is my go-to when I don't want anything espresso. Not every store in Oxford sells it – rightfully so as I've been a victim of many bad matchas over the years. Here's a ranking of the matcha lattes I've had in Oxford, no bobas or other matchas. For the purposes of this ranking, I ranked lattes with standard milk, which for the most part was whole milk.

10. Pret

Let's get this out of the way. Who on earth decided that the green monstrosity they serve was a matcha? Gentrified or not, a matcha latte should not be closer to white than green. And they only use coconut-rice milk – the worst one. Despite their best efforts to market this as a vegan alternative to coffee, it just tastes like weird water. Ugh.

9. Gail's

I tried to hate it as an opponent of gentrification, but Gail's isn't too bad. There is not too much milk, which a lot of larger chains struggle with. I enjoyed the foam that managed to rise to the top as the barista drew a little heart in the milk. The matcha is of decent quality but not enough to justify the price.

8. Art Cafe

I actually haven't had the Art Cafe matcha yet but have consistently been a big fan of their drinks. My friend said of their matcha latte: "It's as if matcha was gentrified, but it's still pretty good." She likes her matcha more grassy, though, so take it as you will.

7. Oxford Brunch Bar

A little bit on the milky side, but I do really like their matcha overall. Yes, it's always a bit cold, with less foam than I prefer, but it's not bad. The powder they use is good quality, more sage than pastel lime.

6. The Paper Boat Cafe

One of my pet peeves – they called it just "matcha" on the menu when it's a matcha latte. I was hoping for hot matcha tea. But the matcha is delicious: a bit more milk than I like, but rich and warming. They always put it at the perfect temperature. Their matcha is of high quality and the view of the river that you see when having it in certainly doesn't hurt.

5. Columbia Coffee

Columbia Coffee is in a prime spot in the market,



but the prices have always been expensive. This matcha latte is no exception. There's only a hint of bitterness. The color leaves a bit to be desired, but otherwise, perfect if you're willing to dish out a bit more. For the lovers of pure matcha flavor, this one's for you, with just the right amount of milk to keep the drink extra rich.

4. Independent Cafe

A bit more bitter than the Columbia one but equally good. Moved up in the ranks because it only costs £4, but not the highest on this list because the matcha wasn't mixed properly: too much leftover powder in the end. I will assume the best of the baristas, though, who were very busy that day. The strawberry matcha has a hint of sweetness that's perfect for a Trinity revision break. Their turmeric latte also does not miss. This place is generally a hidden gem.

3. Formosan Tea

I know I said no boba, but the matcha (boba or not) at Formosa is really good. Ceremonial grade, grassy without being bitter, and the color is perfect. The one downside is that it's £5 but it comes with

tapioca and red bean if that's any consolation...

2. Society Cafe

When I first told Oxford that this article would be published, the comment said to go to Society Cafe. They were not wrong. It's a very good latte. The matcha there is never too bitter. However, I personally think it's a bit too grassy for me. If you want to try matcha for the first time, be warned if you are unsure about the flavor. However, if you've miss the taste of good, strong matcha, this is for you.

1. Artisan Cafe

Okay, so maybe sentiment blinds me – this is the first matcha latte that I've had in Oxford. It's hit or miss, but even as a miss, it's still OBB-level. The milk is warmed to perfection, and the only hint of powder is on the foam on top. (Plus, their bacon mac and cheese has haunted my dreams for ages.)

Honorable mention: Barefoot Bakery

I haven't had the matcha latte here, but I had their other rainbow lattes – a warm tumeric and a slightly flowery butterfly pea (my favorite non-coffee drink here).

Image Credit: Amanda Li

Cherpse.

Oxford blind dating.

[A cold day in a cafe leads to an unusual detour. Will they end up floating in love, or will one of them be left to drown?]

Lover Girl:

First impression?

Really good looking, very tall, was wearing a strange bobble hat. I felt like I had no idea what would happen.

Highlight?

It has to be the Headington Shark! Not where I thought Cherpse would end but great all the same....

Most embarrassing moment?

At the coffee shop, we were surrounded by a strange acapella group rehearsal. It was mildly awful but did set the tone for the date. Luckily we didn't recognise any of them.

Did it meet your expectations?

It exceeded them, although my expectations were not that high to begin with.

Will there be a second date?

Totally!

Shark Boy:

First impression?

She seemed quite shy, but there was no immediate awkwardness. She stared at my head a lot for some reason.

Highlight?

We bonded over seeing the same band live and took a long walk together.

Most embarrassing moment?

She asked me where I wanted to walk to continue the date and the only place I could think of was the Headington Shark. She seemed up for it, though.

Did it meet your expectations?

It definitely met them! It was funny and enjoyable, and I was pretty relaxed for the most part.

Will there be a second date?

Definitely.



SPORT

Even match on uneven waters: Boat Race trials

The Yank and Anglo Saxon lead 'Gromit' to victory over 'Wallace'

By SEBASTIAN PAGE

Oxford University Boat Club took to the Tideway on 18th December for their one dress rehearsal before the Boat Race – now officially name the 'CHANEL J12 Boat Race'. The rehearsal offers rowers who aren't baptised in the flames of the contest an opportunity to race the course against a competitive – albeit internal – opposition. While Oxford sees many Olympic rowers come and go, the experience on the choppy Thames waters is vital for a winning team. With just three months to go until this year's race, these trials help both the coaches and rowers understand what to work on for the final quarter of the cycle.

Both the men and women's side of the club held two races, with lightweight and openweighted crews battling it out for a seat for the 13th of April. The women's side was somewhat one-sided, as the 'Moto Moto' crew, led by Women's President Annie Anezakis, steamed to an eight length victory over 'King Julien' in the openweighted boats. The women's lightweight was slightly less emphatic (but still convincing), as 'Maurice' ended up beating 'Gloria' by four and a half lengths. A fun tradition of these trial races is the external references used for names: Eagle-eyed readers may have spotted that the Oxford women's teams took inspiration from the 2005 film *Madagascar* for their boat names and the men's openweight team turning to Aardman's *Wallace and Gromit*.

Cambridge women named their crews after A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* and the Cambridge lightweight men went for 'Thunder' and 'Lightning' in homage to the great Lightning McQueen. It was only Cambridge's openweight men who were 'too cool' to represent their childhoods and went for the Greek mythological creatures 'Scylla' and 'Charybdis' that appear in Book XII of Homer's *Odyssey*. Ironically, Cambridge will probably be seeing an eight-headed [rowing] monster devour



them on April 13th, and left wishing they opted for the whirlpool with teeth.

The men's openweight race was the most hotly contested race of the day, with 'Wallace' and 'Gromit' duking it out and exchanging power for discipline to see 'Gromit' walk out eventual winners by two lengths. 'Wallace' showed aggression when approaching Hammersmith Bridge all the way to Chiswick Pier, but difficult conditions put a wrench in their plans, and 'Gromit' rowed through with composure to take what would eventually be a

"I knew that all I had to do was stay in his rhythm and we'd be fine."

winning margin.

The two crews on paper were very well-matched, with an impressive engine in 'Wallace' consisting of 2024 Olympian Nicholas Kohl, 2023 OUBC President Tass Von Mueller and James Doran,

who placed 3rd in the GB trials in April 2024. In the 'Gromit' boat, Olympic Bronze medallist Nick Rusher – an American – was setting the tone at stroke, backed up by a reliable crew with Boat Race experience, including Tom Sharrock who rowed in the Blue Boat in 2023 and in Isis in 2024, as well as Saxon Stacey who did the opposite: Isis in 2023 and the Blue Boat in 2024.

Saxon gave us an insight into behind the scenes and told *Cherwell* "the atmosphere was calm" and that despite the potential selection stakes, crews seemed to focus more on their own rhythms rather than race tactics – the latter of which can make you think too much about what the other crew is going to do. Less weighting was certainly placed on selection based off erg performance this year, with Saxon telling *Cherwell* the "coaches have put less emphasis on telemetry" (ergs don't float) and so rowers could concentrate more on moving together, rather than trying to put out as much wattage as possible.

After losing to Cambridge last year, *Cherwell* asked Saxon if the squad feels like it has a chip on its shoulder this year. He responded that it feels more like ushering in a new era, and that there is a general feeling of excitement around the camp instead. Despite still being an undergrad (with no gap year), Saxon has become one of the more experienced OUBC members, having taken to the Tideway twice in his two years at Oxford for both Isis and the Blue boat. When asked about the responsibilities he feels despite his age, he mentioned that while the Olympians lead the charge technically and athletically, his job is to "help the new guys adjust to the peculiarities of Oxford rowing and to help the coaches avoid making the same mistakes we've made before" although apparently this often ends up coming out as "old biased stories".

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

Image Credits: Pointillist: Row360 (top) and Andrea Clayton, via Flickr CC BY-ND 2.0 (left)



MATCH OF THE WEEK

St. Catherine's 1s catapult to first place in the league after 9-1 thrashing of Jesus

St. Catz 1s overtook Teddy Hall in the Men's JCR League Premier Division. At the top of the table, goal difference has become crucial as St. Catz find themselves on +25, 9 goals ahead of Teddy Hall, who have a game in hand.

The 9-1 result took the aggregate score across both Catz vs Jesus games to 15-1 in the former's favour in the league this year, where a penalty was their only consolation.

Despite having the worst goal difference in the league, Jesus remain somewhat afloat after a crucial victory over Christ Church in their third game of the season.

Catz, who were runners-up in the JCR League Premier Division last year, are looking to go one better, and are poised at the top at the halfway point.

HALL OF SHAME

Oxford Hockey Men's 3s not the only casualty in match against South Berkshire 2s

With collections over and 0th week drawing to a close, the Ianfrequents took to the hockey pitch against the South Berkshire 2nd XI for what turned into somewhat of a bloody loss, characterised by own goals and rugby tackles.

Temperatures were low and hangovers were high, but the Ians gave it their all, leaving everything out on the pitch including the blood of a South Berkshire player who got 'headshotted' by a fresher who shall remain nameless.

Was it the taste of last night's drinks still fresh in their mouths, or the smell of blood on the turf, that saw the Ians suffer an epic 7-0 loss?

Despite this, heads were held high, and the loss was taken gracefully, safe in the knowledge that their fierce competitiveness had landed an opponent in hospital – where he did receive stitches and made a swift recovery.

SHOE THE TABS

Oxford clinch Tiddlywinks Varsity after enthralling draw

Okay, it might seem hard to say that this is a true shoeing at first glance...as after all, the game did end in a tie. But this would be to cast an eye over the past results of the Varsity Tiddlywinks matches.

When you consider past years of demolition at the hands of the Cambridge University Tiddlywinks Club, you appreciate the true magnitude of this result more and more.

To go to Cambridge, the birthplace of modern tiddlywinks, and force the perennial favourites to claw their way back from a twelve-point deficit in the final round represents a staggering upset, especially with Oxford's last triumph coming in 2003.

Belated congratulations are in order for these eternal underdogs, and we're hoping they can go one better in 2025.

UPCOMING Powerlifting

Saturday, 8th February
@Iffley Road Sport Centre

Boxing

Saturday, 1st February
@The Union
Town vs. Gown

Football

Saturday, 1st February
Men's Cuppers Quarter Finals
@Respective Pitches

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

Email cherwellsport@gmail.com to write up a match report

Coffee break with Cherwell

CLASSIC SUDOKU

			8					5
	6	8	5	4	7			
				3	9			
8						9		2
		6	1	7			5	
						8	1	6
	8	2				1	4	7
	5	9			4			3
6	7	4	3				2	9

by Joe Dunn

Cryptic Crossword by Alessandra Edwards

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		8
9					10				
11					12				
				13					
14								15	
						16			
17	18		19					20	
21			22			23			
						24			
25						26			
		27							

Across:

- Burglary of handbag, as Mrs is all over the place (5,3,4)
- Answer within problem unless it's 26A for example (7)
- 51 involved in gang are miserable (7)
- Come about setter getting in behind (5)
- Green promises forgotten? Run away with cover (8)
- Mischievous antics one day will be punished (10)
- Against worker being put before myself (4)
- Some popular church feature (4)

- Only your friends find it funny, ok? (6,4)
- Minion leader urinates for an audience, and they are enthusiastic fans (8)
- Time and hospital with Greek character and another one (5)
- Return late around, er, noon nonstop (7)
- Haptic lattice arrangement (7)
- Compendium about pro doctor illustrating the study of man (12)

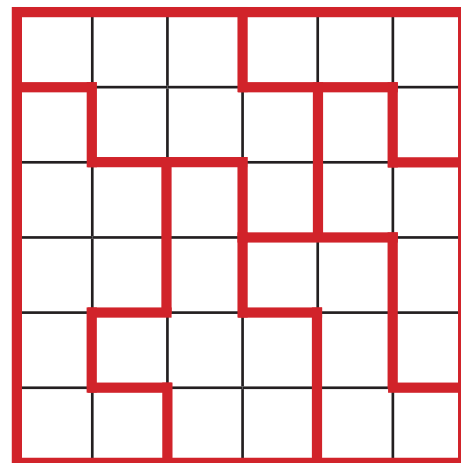
Down:

- Operate echoless noise from below large house (7)
- Pupils of good man (before his retirement) received uniform and shelter (8)
- Belly, heart, inside, funny? Lay on your side (4)
- "Cut off slice of bread" is in her itinerary (10)
- In or out, either way! (5)
- Popper and dance! (with two rounds necked initially) (7)
- Sticky record holds things together (8,4)
- Questionable straps, skewed like the US flag (4-8)

- Shink our con cunningly to be about trade (10)
- Fourth date with Romeo, Victor comes first (voicing interest) but gets stood up (8)
- Bend from the bottom! Covering cavity can cause diarrhoea (7)
- Introduction writing, forgetting name (Oscar) should be put on the front (7)
- Slightly more than three? Not a variety of grapes (5)
- Sinks down, call it a day (4)

Underwater Star Battle by Zoë McGuire

This is both an Aquariums and a Star Battle puzzle, and as such both their rules apply.



Aquariums:

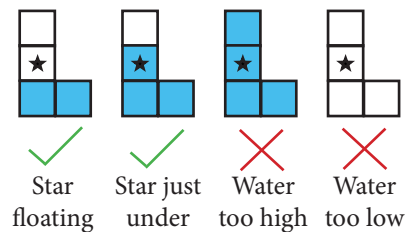
- Each region has an independent "water level"
- Within each region, cells are shaded up to a certain horizontal cut-off point – the water level
- The numbers beside the grid dictate the number of cells in that row or column that contain water
- Regions can also be empty

Star Battle:

- Exactly six cells in the grid contain "stars"
- Exactly one star appears in each row, each column, and each region
- Stars may not touch each other, even diagonally.

Additionally...

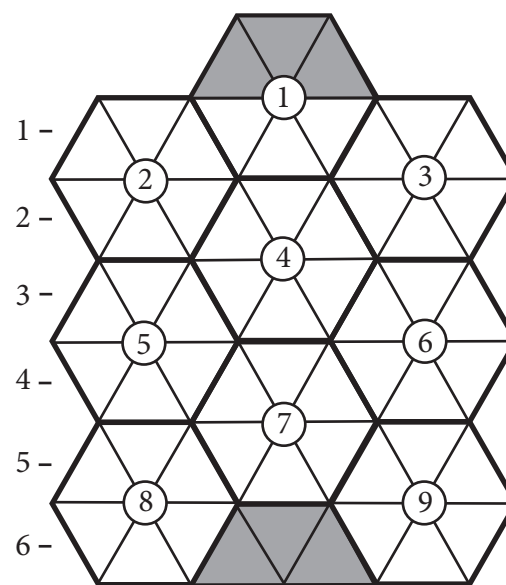
- Exactly 3 stars are submerged
- In any region, that region's star may not appear more than one row above that region's water level, nor more than one row below it.
- In an empty region, the star may only appear in the bottom row of that region



Eddies by Julian Xiao

Here are the rules:

For the rows, answers read across as usual, for the eddies, answers read either clockwise or anti-clockwise within each hexagonal section and can start from any cell. The sets of shaded cells on the top and bottom are the same



Eddies:

- Open _____
- Start being serious
- Make active again
- Not here
- Mathematician with a namesake triangle
- Area
- Cholesterol-lowering medicine
- _____ dump
- Strong

Rows:

- Life hack, sometimes
- Looking to fight
- Coach Customer
- Milk production
- Where you may get off-track
- Mirth

Solve our weekly mini on our website!
Follow us on Instagram @cherwelloxford

Solve our weekly mini crosswords on cherwell.org
Follow us on Instagram @cherwelloxford

WEEK 0 ANSWERS:

Cryptic:
Across - 1) Payback, 5) Cologne, 8) Caked, 9) Leapfrogs, 11) Noiselessness, 13) Eighth, 16) Scabbard, 18) Consider, 19) Gelato, 24)

Nuisance value, 26) Arsenical, 27) Gripe, 28) Ellipse, 29) Re-elect Down - 1) Picante, 2) Yakking, 3) Adle, 4) Killer, 5) Class act, 6) Goods, 7) Essay, 10) Freebie, 12) Trot, 14) Icon, 15) Tuition, 17) Demarche, 20) All time, 21)

Overeat, 22) Scalar, 23) Plane, 24) Nasal, 25) Vogue

Guillotine:

- JAIL OUR ENEMY EMILY

Vowelless Crossword:

Across - 1) NBRNR (no-brainer), 6) STDNTS (students), 7) XTRVGNT (extravagant), 8) PRPRSR (peer pressure), 9) DERSTN (deforestation), 10) TRSTRY (true story), 11) NYSYR

(naysayer)

Down - 1) NTRPRSS (enterprises), 2) BDVRSTY (biodiversity), 3) RNGSTRR (Ringo Starr), 4) NTN-STY (intensity), 5) RSTRN (restrain), 6) STRFRY (stir-fry), 7) XPDTN (expedition).