

# Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

VOLUME 303, ISSUE 5

SATURDAY 8TH MARCH 2025

7TH WEEK, HILARY



## Ever wondered about the man singing on Cornmarket? Meet Richard.

PROFILE – PAGE 13



## Unhappy feet: Oxford on thin ice over welfare penguins

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## Classics exams moved due to concern over protests

By POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

This year's Classics Moderations exams, which began on Monday 3rd March, have been moved to Ewert House in Summertown from the usual Examination Schools. Two students from different colleges independently told *Cherwell* that Classics faculty tutors said that the exams have been moved in order to avoid disruption from potential Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) protests; however, the University attributed the change to 'operational reasons'.

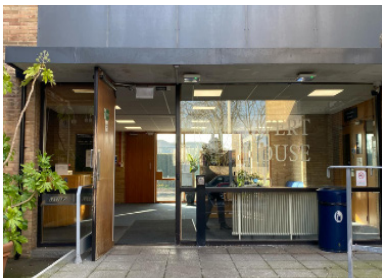
A spokesperson from Oxford University told *Cherwell*: "For operational reasons, Ewert House will be used for exams taking place in Weeks 7 and 8 of Hilary term. Further exams will take place in the Examination Schools in March, and Trinity term exams are scheduled in both the Examination Schools and Ewert House, as is standard."

The University also emphasised the fact that Ewert House is used routinely for examinations, with just under 5,000 exam sittings taking place there in 2023/24.

A Classics student told *Cherwell*: "The reason for all this venue change is apparently OA4P... It was told to us by someone high up in the faculty verbally [instead of via email], but my whole class can attest to the information being true."

When protesters occupied a hall in the East School of Exam Schools on 13th June 2024, some exams scheduled to take place that morning were cancelled, and students were advised to "put tissues in [their] ears" by invigilators. OA4P said on the day of the occupation: "the action was unaffiliated with OA4P and was undertaken without OA4P's knowledge."

Image Credit: Sebastian Page.



## Oxford Union: 'Two years of operations' left until insolvency



Oxford Union, the self-proclaimed "most prestigious debating society in the world", has attracted thousands of members and international interest throughout its 200-year-long history, hosting figures from Michael Jackson to Malcolm X. The society is an unincorporated organisation, officially governed solely by elected Committee members, who are more often than not students of the University of Oxford.

According to a balance sheet and accompanying commentary for the 2024/25 academic year authored in January 2025 by the Union's externally-employed bursar, The Oxford Union has two years of operation remaining at the current rate of operational losses. The full year budget forecasts a loss of over £358,000 by the end of budgetary year. *Cherwell* spoke to several current

By EUAN ELLIOTT,  
ARINA MAKARINA,  
and MARTIN ALFONSIN-LARSEN

and former senior Union committee members, who were granted anonymity to speak frankly, to gain a comprehensive view of the systemic problems underpinning the Union's financial circumstance. Additionally, *Cherwell* asked them about the key donors preventing the society from going under, including an adviser to a Saudi-Arabian minister, who has overseen more than 80% of fundraising for a key Union initiative.

### The accounts

The Oxford Union Society is in a precarious financial situation, with its bursar and head of finance stating that

the society "has two years of operation remaining" until the society is "no longer a going concern". A company is a going concern if it is able to continue operating and meeting its financial obligations for the foreseeable future. The Union's funds are needed primarily for administrative and operational costs, including paying staff, maintaining the society's buildings, and funding meals for guest speakers and Committee. According to company management accounts and an accompanying commentary seen by *Cherwell*, the Oxford Union made a loss of over £99,000 in the first half of the 2024/25 budget year. Accompanying commentary notes that as the Union has a cash balance of £718,000, it could remain financially viable for only two more years if it sustains those same losses.

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## 68.1% of SU's proposed budget goes to unelected staff costs

By ILA BANERJI, EUAN ELLIOTT,  
and BRYN MOLLET

*Cherwell* has obtained documents which outline the SU's draft financial plans, expenditure, and income for the 2025-26 budgetary year, presented to the board in January 2025.

The SU projects an income of over £1 million, of which 68.1% is planned to go toward staff or administrative costs, including 52% in unelected staff burdened salaries, whilst the rest has been allocated toward development, legal fees, office equipment, and other administrative costs. Meanwhile, student projects are expected to receive 15.0%.

Separately, £59,054 was projected to be spent on "settlements" during the current budgetary year, according to a version of the 2024-25 budget updated in November 2024.

Of the anticipated 2025-26 income of over £1 million, a projected amount of £911,921 will come from the annual grant from Oxford University and its colleges, and the rest from Freshers Fair, partnerships, and other sources.

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## Uber to begin operations in Oxford

By GRACE KYOKO WONG

Uber, the largest ride-hailing app globally, has been granted a licence by Oxford City Council to begin operating in Oxford. Prior to this development, Uber had already established a presence in Oxford in August 2021, when it began connecting customers with local licensed taxi operators through the app's 'Local Cab' feature, an event that was met with protests from local drivers.

This announcement has been met with opposition from some local taxi operators and drivers, although there have been no demonstrations similar to those that took place upon Uber's initial involvement in the Oxford taxi market.

The secretary of the City of Oxford Licensed Taxicab Association (COLTA), Sajad Khan, told the BBC about the challenges Uber might face on entering the Oxford market, particularly the reliance on students, saying: "If students are away, it gets very quiet". He added "Our trade is going through a bad patch since COVID. This includes

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## Sextigation 2025: 1% of students responsible for 15% of all sexual encounters

By CHERWELL FEATURES

*Cherwell*'s fourth annual Sextigation has found that just four respondents out of 445 found themselves involved in 15% of all unique sexual partnerships. Nearly a quarter of all partnerships involve the top 2% of shaggers, one of whom reported 90 sexual partners at Oxford.

There are severe college disparities also. It was a good year to be at

St Edmund Hall. Buoyed, perhaps, by their alumnus Keir Starmer making it to Downing Street, they self-reported an average of 7.1 sexual partners. But, like most group projects, this was mainly the work of two dedicated individuals, with a combined Oxford body count of 140. When they were removed, the college average was 2.4. Without them, Trinity's 4.5 average was the highest, followed by Queen's and LMH.

But all that sex didn't make people better off. On average, people with no

sexual partners at Oxford reported the highest satisfaction with their sex lives and people with one reported the lowest, but beyond that there was no correlation whatsoever between number of partners and satisfaction.

Though we only had a couple of respondents, Maths and Computer Science came bottom of number of sexual partners, with a whopping average of 0. Computer Science, despite the potential future earnings, really does seem to be neglected: last year, Computer Science and Philosophy came

in at 0.75. Other low ranking subjects include Maths (1.2), Geography (1.4), E&M (1.5), and Biochemistry (1.6).

And despite what you might expect given the waves of secularisation and increasingly liberal social attitudes, fully 72% of our respondents said that marriage was their desired form of future relationship. 55% said that their main goal out of dating in Oxford was 'finding the one'; only a meagre 7% said it was casual sex.

Read the full story on pg. 8

## BMW freezes investment at Cowley electric vehicle plant

By LAURENCE COOKE

German carmaker BMW Group has paused a £600 million investment in its Cowley factory. The project was expected to create 4,000 new jobs and expand the plant's production capacity for electric MINIs. The factory still remains the largest industrial employer in Oxfordshire.

BMW said that a reason for this is the "multiple uncertainties facing the automotive industry" as the UK is seeing weaker demand for electric vehicles at a time of rising consumer costs. The site is still earmarked to only produce electric cars by the year 2030, and for now, the production of internal combustion engines will continue. BMW had previously received funding from the UK government to help enhance its electric vehicle production but now will no longer be able to accept a previously announced UK government grant for the project. For now, electric MINIs will continue to be produced in China.

Automobile manufacturers have precise quotas on the amount of non-electric cars they can produce. The UK government plans to prohibit the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030. The electric quota increased this year by 6% to hit 28% of total production, with companies fined for non-adherence.

Business and Trade Minister Sarah Jones also reiterated in the House of Commons that the investment plans had been "delayed, not cancelled".

A BMW spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Plant Oxford is at the heart of MINI production, manufacturing and exporting a range of models sought after in the UK and around the world," adding that the company is only "reviewing the timing" of the investment.

BMW continued: "Much of the investment is progressing with construction well underway to make the plant future-ready." This includes a "state-of-the-art logistics facility."

In response to BMW's decision, a spokesperson for the Department for Transport said: "We recognise the global challenges car manufacturers face and have listened to their concerns by consulting on reinstating the 2030 EV deadline whilst also protecting jobs – a decision supported by a majority of manufacturers who have been working towards this date, and are on track to meet their ZEV mandate targets."

"We're investing over £2.3 billion to support industry and consumers make the switch, tapping into a multi-billion-pound industry that will create high paid jobs for decades to come, make the UK a clean energy superpower and help deliver our Plan for Change."

Image Credit: MINI UK



## Unpaid internships benefit the middle-class

By IONA MANDAL

Earlier this year, The Sutton Trust published a report on unpaid and underpaid internships, concluding that the current access to internships disproportionately benefits middle-class graduates over working class graduates and arguing that unpaid internships exclude young people without pre-existing financial support.

The report, published in January, recommends that unpaid internships over four weeks in length should be outright banned, and that all internship positions should be publicly advertised, rather than informally offered – only 1 in 10 internships are found through open advertisement. It also recommends that HMRC should promote information on internships, and conduct an information campaign to inform young people of their right to pay.

More than half of graduates aged 21-29 who took part in the research reported completing at least one internship, an increase of 12% from 2018. 59% of employers – rising to 80% in London – who took part, reported offering internships, which is an increase from 48% in 2018.

However, one in five internships currently do not offer any financial compensation at all, and 40% of unpaid

interns rely on financial support from parents or relatives. There has also been an increase in the gap between those participating in internships from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The number of working-class graduates taking part in internships has risen from 31% to 36%, whilst the percentage of middle-class graduates has grown from 43% to 55%.

26% of respondents from a working-class background said they could not afford to take an internship, compared with 15% from middle-class background. 44% of those who attended private schools said they had completed multiple internships, compared with just 18% from state schools.

Nick Harrison, Chief Executive of The Sutton Trust, said: "Internships are an increasingly critical route into the best jobs, and it's shocking that in this day and age, many employers still pay interns below the minimum wage, or worse, nothing at all. They should be ashamed."

He added: "As well as paying interns properly, there's also a whole lot more that employers must do to make sure they're accessing a wider pool of talent, such as advertising internship opportunities rather than taking in family and friends of their existing staff or biggest customers."

## Hundreds of women call for inquiry into Oxford maternity care

By NOAH ROBSON

Hundreds of women who faced issues with maternity care at the John Radcliffe (JR) Hospital in Oxford have created a campaign group to share their experiences. The hospital is run by Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH), which also oversees three other hospitals in the Oxford and Banbury area.

New mothers have complained about the treatment they endured whilst in the JR maternity ward, describing how they felt "highly vulnerable". One woman, Oria Malik, told the BBC: "I just felt really isolated because I couldn't communicate to anyone how much pain I was in."

She went on to recount "humiliating" aftercare, being dealt with in such a rough manner by a nurse inserting a cannula that she "ended up with a blood clot". Ms Malik also spoke of how a worker would leave the curtain open to

her bed, explaining that "[t]here were people and families in the beds opposite who could see me laying in bed – I didn't have any clothes on".

Others in the group described similar experiences, with one of the founders of the group, Rebecca Matthews, saying she had endured "inhumane" care at the JR Hospital. Having spoken to other mothers who had also faced such treatment, it was then that she "realised how serious the issues were with OUH's maternity services more widely".

OUH told *Cherwell* that their Birth Reflections service offers women who have had difficult birth experiences the opportunity to raise concerns with them. However, Ms Matthews and others in the group – which contains the experiences of over 320 families – are calling for a public inquiry into what they describe as "systemic failings, cover-up culture and the extent of avoidable harm" within maternity care at OUH's hospitals.



Yvonne Christley, the Chief Nursing Officer at OUH, told *Cherwell*: "The safety and wellbeing of mothers and babies in our care is central to our maternity services. We are very sorry that some women have not experienced the quality of care they should expect."

"Each year, OUH delivers approximately 7,500 babies and provides specialised care for women with complex pregnancies and who require specialised care. Most patients who give birth at our hospitals report a positive experience."

Image Credit: Steve Daniels / CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

## University redevelopment plans may force Common Ground to relocate

By CONOR WALSH

Plans submitted by the University of Oxford to redevelop their Wellington Square buildings could see the closure of Common Ground, a popular cafe and work space for students. The development work would see the rebuilding of 25 Wellington Square, the refurbishment of terraced buildings for graduate accommodation, and a new "state of the art" academic facility.

Common Ground is a coffee shop, community arts and co-working space in the heart of Little Clarendon street, known for its distinct and creative identity. As well as serving refreshments, Common Ground also sells second hand clothes, vinyls, exhibits local art, and hosts live music and comedy nights. Developing 25 Wellington Square will require Common Ground to relocate whilst construction takes place. Although the new building includes plans for a cafe on the corner of Little Clarendon and Walton Street, it remains unclear whether Common Ground itself will have a future at the site.

Little Clarendon Street which runs behind 25 Wellington Square has a reputation for being one of the "coolest" places in the UK. One local resident told *Cherwell* that: "I've lived in Oxford my whole life. Little Clarendon has always been a vibrant, bohemian community

with lots of quirky shops. It's already lost a lot of that over the years and this development will yet again swallow up more community spaces like Common Ground."

Managing Director of Common Ground Eddie Whittingham told *Cherwell* that the new development "endangers our mission. We are hoping to work collectively with Oxford University to preserve Common Ground's spirit and what it means to our local community."

"Common Ground has always aimed to bridge the schism between Town and Gown, and we believe that with the right attitude and an effective approach, this redevelopment could do just this."

Common Ground is currently in discussions with the University and hopes that it will be provided with a temporary home whilst construction is underway, as well as a permanent home once the redevelopment is completed. Whittingham added: "although it is fairly early on in quite a long-term process, we have been very impressed with Oxford's engagement with us".

One student who frequents the cafe told *Cherwell* that: "Common Ground has a really nice vibe. It adds something unique and special to Oxford that it would really miss if it were to go."

A second public consultation on the University's plans is open until 10th March and takes place ahead of a

formal planning application in Spring. If approved, construction will commence in two phases beginning mid-2026 with completion planned for 2029. The first phase involves demolishing and rebuilding 25 Wellington Square. The new building will house teaching and administrative spaces, alongside retail units and public spaces.

In the second phase, University-owned terraces on Wellington Square and Walton Street will be refurbished for new graduate housing. These buildings will be more accessible with street-level entrances. Communal gardens will also be re-landscaped and additional bicycle parking spaces will be installed.

At the consultation, a local resident told *Cherwell* "this is just another case of the University taking over again. [They] haven't been particularly engaged [with us], and even if [they] were it would be a paper exercise. This development feels like a foregone conclusion."

The proposed design of the new building seeks to respond to the surroundings of Little Clarendon Street and to enhance the public realm through wider footpaths. Both phases of the development will also have sustainability in mind, including features such as solar panels and energy-efficient lighting.

The University did not respond to a request for comment.

Image Credit: Bex Walton/// CC BY 2.0 via Flickr



## Uber set to begin operating in Oxford

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people working from home, financial difficulties, [and] not many people coming off the train station – which is the main rank for us.”

An Uber spokesperson emphasised the potential benefits of Uber’s launch in the city, citing “new earning opportunities for local drivers”, giving people more choice and flexibility in transport, as well as boosting the local economy. They added: “Uber’s industry-leading safety features will give passengers the ability to book safe trips to wherever they want to go, in particular the city’s students and tourists.”

Oxford City Council said: “A new operator will give residents and visitors more options for moving around the city safely and conveniently.”

Khan also pointed out environmental concerns surrounding Uber’s operations in Oxford, stating that granting this licence contradicted Oxford City Council’s plans to reduce congestion and emissions: “I’m not sure how this will help the local authority... more cars are going to be introduced to Oxford.”

In response to such concerns, an Uber spokesperson said that the company offered an “important” alternative to driving for customers and that they were aware that Oxford was “heavily focused on congestion”. They added: “Uber has operated in London for many years, which is also focused on important issues such as congestion and Electric Vehicles (EVs), with London now Uber’s global leading city for EVs.”

This comes following Oxford City Council’s announcement of plans to expand the Zero Emissions Zone. In January earlier this year, the Council voted against a motion to publish data on the air quality of proposed areas for the ZEZ’s expansion. Data from a Source Apportionment Study published after the meeting revealed that road transport was the largest contributor to nitrogen dioxide emissions, making up 32% of all releases.

## Palestine Action protesters vandalise Blavatnik School of Government

By ILA BANERJI

The Blavatnik School of Government was vandalised in the early hours of Friday morning by Palestine Action. Glass was smashed in the windows and doors of the building and some of the damaged glass was sprayed with what appeared to be red paint.

The Blavatnik told *Cherwell*: “The vandalism will not impact the opening and operations of the Blavatnik School. We remain open for students and staff through the back entrance.”

The Blavatnik has been a target of pro-Palestinian protest before, with Oxford Action For Palestine (OA4P), protesting outside the building as former Governor of South Carolina, Nikki

Haley, spoke inside.

Palestine Action too, has vandalised University buildings in a similar way, smashing the glass of the doors of the University’s Wellington Square offices and spraying them with red paint in October of last year.

In an Instagram post, Palestine Action said: “Oxford University targeted again over ties to genocide, including investments in Elbit Systems, Israel’s largest weapons manufacturer.”

“Last night’s targeting of the Blavatnik School of Government sends a clear message to the board of governors: End your complicity or expect direct action.”

“Rishi Sunak is due to take up his new position on Blavatnik’s board soon. Under his direction, Britain participated in the genocide of Palestinians.”

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The University is working with the Police to identify those responsible.”

A spokesperson for Thames Valley Police told *Cherwell* that they had “received reports of criminal damage” but that “no arrests have been made at this time [and] an investigation is ongoing”.

Whilst OA4P claimed they were not involved in the action, they posted a statement on Instagram in “solidarity” with the action. A spokesperson told *Cherwell* that “OA4P was not involved in but stands in solidarity with actions calling out Oxford University’s complicity in Israeli genocide, apartheid, and occupation”.

Image Credit: Leon Moorhouse



## Pakistani government supports six new STEM scholarships

By CHERWELL NEWS

Pakistan’s Sindh government, in collaboration with The Oxford Pakistan Programme (OPP), has announced it will provide six scholarships for students pursuing graduate studies in STEM at Lady Margaret Hall.

The merit-based scholarships will cover tuition and living expenses, with preference given to PhD students. Last year, OPP awarded scholarships to three students: two from Sindh and one from Balochistan.

Three will be awarded to men in honor of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and three to women in honor of Benazir Bhutto. Benazir Bhutto (LMH, BA PPE 1973) was Pakistan’s first female Prime Minister and her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Christ Church, BA Law & LLM 1950), also served as Prime Minister and founded the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP).

The scholarship program was announced by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, son of Benazir Bhutto and current Chairman of the PPP, during a lunch hosted by LMH Principal, Professor Stephen Blyth. At the event, they were briefed on OPP’s initiatives to expand educational access for Pakistani students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The event was attended by prominent figures, including Dr. Mohammad Faisal, Pakistan’s High Commissioner to the UK, Imran Zarkoon Khan, Secretary of Finance for Balochistan, Sanam Bhutto; historian Victoria Schofield, and senior officials from Sindh and Balochistan.

Speaking at the Benazir Bhutto Memorial Lecture at the Oxford Union, Bhutto-Zardari reflected on his mother’s legacy, emphasised the significance of women’s participation in higher educa-

tion, and reaffirmed his belief that “democracy is the best revenge”.

Beyond the scholarships at Oxford, the Sindh government has approved 3,157 additional scholarships for the 2023-2024 academic year under the Sindh Education Endowment Fund. These scholarships are intended to support students pursuing higher education, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Commenting on this broader initiative, Murad Ali Shah stated: “These scholarships will enable students from Sindh to study at one of the world’s finest institutions. Not only will they benefit from this opportunity, but Sindh as a whole will gain as these scholars return with knowledge and expertise to uplift their communities”.

In an Instagram post, OPP stated: “The establishment of the scholarships was supported by Israr Khan, President of the Oxford Union,” who is a Pakistani scholar from Balochistan.

The OPP was founded and is led by a team of Oxford professors and alumni. Since its launch, it has provided over £600,000 in financial aid, supporting 48 Pakistani graduate students at Oxford. Funded by donors like the Malala Fund, the British Council, and the Pakistan High Commission, OPP follows a spend-down model, pooling small donations for high-impact initiatives.

The program emphasises the limited representation of Pakistani students at Oxford, noting that in 2021, only about 12 undergraduates and 45 graduate students from Pakistan were enrolled, despite the country’s population exceeding 220 million, with over 60% under the age of 30. Furthermore, British Pakistanis remain the most underrepresented BAME group at the graduate level within the University.

Image Credit: Muhammad Umair



## NEWS SHORTS

### Blenheim Palace toilet thief was ‘stressed’

It was revealed in court on Tuesday that the man who stole a golden toilet from Blenheim Palace worth £4.75m said he was “stressed to death” whilst trying to sell it. Stolen during a raid in 2019, the 18-carat gold toilet was broken up into pieces to sell.

### Emma Watson staying for a DPhil

Emma Watson is set to begin a DPhil at the University of Oxford, following her master’s in creative writing at Lady Margaret Hall in a doctoral program spanning three years. Watson was named the highest-grossing actor of the decade in the Guinness Book of World Records in 2009.

### Cherwell deputy editor trapped in a lift at Weston Library

*Cherwell*’s Head of Features was left trapped in a Weston Library lift for over an hour on Monday evening. The esteemed writer of this year’s Sextigation (see page 8) was left distraught at being unable to send over his section of the paper. In exclusive comment to *Cherwell*, the library security guard claimed it was “better to be a man than a woman in this situation”.

## CROSS CAMPUS

### Imperial College allows AI in essay writing challenge

The Royal College of Science Union’s (RCSU) annual Science Challenge now allows entrants to use AI in their written submissions for a new challenge called “AI Innovation”. The winner will receive a paid internship at Compu.J, an IT company, working with the Machine Learning research and development team. The business’ founder, Dr Jad Marrouche, established the Science Challenge in 2007.

### Stanford students are bad at cycling

Due to increased bike collisions and complaints from nearby residents, Stanford University Department of Public Safety is now offering bike safety classes. The online classes will cover navigating roundabouts, proper helmet use, and cycling at night.

### Dutch rowers break St Peter’s College Boat Club world record

St Peter’s College Boat Club’s (SPCBC) world record for “continuous rowing on an ergometer in a large team” has been broken by Dutch rowers from TU Eindhoven. SPCBC set the previous record in January 2024, with 83 participants rowing 1,628 miles (2,620,930 metres) across 10 days. The Dutch team beat the record by rowing for 10 days and 7 hours. SPCBC’s message to Theta is: “Enjoy the record while you have it!”



## Plans for a new cinema to open on Magdalen Street

By JOSHUA MCGILLIVRAY

The creation of a new cinema on Magdalen Street has been proposed through a licensing application that has been submitted to the Oxford City Council. The proposed movie theatre will, if approved, replace the Odeon on the street that closed in 2023.

The original cinema first opened in 1924 and was built by the theatre conductor business Frank Matcham & Company. It was later bought by Odeon in 2000, before closing in 2023.

Alejandro Whyatt, who runs a cinema in Burnham-on-Crouch, has proposed to transform the vacant site of the original, into a multiplex with two screens capable of hosting over 700 people and a café. He registered a new company named Roxy Movies (The Oxford Cinema) Limited in January and has applied for the proposed venue to be open every day each week from 8:30am to 11:30pm.

This proposal follows the closure of the Odeon on George Street last month, which had been operating as a cinema since 1936. The council plans to replace it with a £37 million

“aparthotel” containing 145 rooms, a bar and a café, which a spokesperson said would likely take three years to complete.

The council stated that Odeon did not wish to renew its lease of the location and argued that the building’s demolition and replacement with a hotel area would increase tourism, although the plan faced 97 formal objections from local residents.

As a result of its removal, the only remaining cinemas in Oxford currently are the Curzon in Westgate, Phoenix Picturehouse in Jericho, Ultimate Picture Palace on Cowley Road, and Vue on Grenoble Road.

There are fears, moreover, that a proposed redevelopment project, ‘Ozone Leisure Park Reimagined’, will cause the Vue to be reduced to contain only three or four screens. The proposal for the Park contains new labs, offices and community facilities.

The planned cinema on Magdalen Street may therefore compensate for the increasingly reduced opportunities for public film-viewing in the city. Oxford City Council has yet to either approve or reject the proposal.

*Image Credit: Bryn Mollet*

## Fem Soc condemns Union’s invitation of rapper convicted of assault

By NOAH ROBSON

Oxford Feminist Society have condemned the Oxford Union for their invitation of convicted domestic abuser Dizzee Rascal. The rapper, whose real name is Dylan Mills, is due to appear at the Union on Wednesday for a Hip Hop panel event, followed by a concert later that evening.

Oxford Feminist Society told *Cherwell*: “The Union’s unwillingness or inability to withdraw its invitation, apologise for extending it in the first place or publicly condemn the actions of Dizzee Rascal contradicts its ability to be the bastion of free speech it claims to be.

“It is an insult to the victims of domestic violence and to women in general. The lack of repercussions faced by these men then resulting in career promoting opportunities minimises the violence that women face, mainly at the hands of men.

“Violence against women is a national and international emergency, and the Union is complicit in perpetuating an environment that supports it.”

Dizzee Rascal was convicted in 2022 of assaulting his former partner, losing an appeal against the judgement a year later. He was given a one-year restraining order and a 24-week curfew, following a trial at which he denied assault by beating.

In an Instagram post on Sunday, Oxford Fem Soc demanded that the Union withdraw the invitation, issue an apology for “normalising such individuals”, and update their guest policy “to ensure no further abusers are invited”.

Fem Soc also told *Cherwell* that their “contact and discussion with the Union’s Press Team has been transparent and in good faith, helping [them] outline internal and external means of redress.” However, they raised concerns at the “apparent lack of internal ability for individual Union committee members to take action towards either disinvitation, or a statement of recognition or condemnation on behalf of the Union.”

One Union member, Emily, who did not want to give her full name, told *Cherwell* that she had raised issues with the invitation for some time, but had not received any response to her concerns after contacting the Union on social media. She told *Cherwell*: “I was very vocal about my upset over the Union inviting a convicted domestic abuser to speak. I contacted all of the current committee, the Union social media pages and an internal Union group to no reply.

“Inviting Dizzee Rascal is not only invalidating for students who have experienced abuse but it is also upsetting to give him the honour of speaking at the Oxford Union. It is wrong, and the committee has failed to address my concerns as a member at all.”

The panel at the Union on Wednesday evening is set to discuss Hip Hop and its impact on youth, with other guests including Tajai, MC Serch, DJ Yoda, and DJ Bonds.

The Union was approached for comment.

*Read the full story at cherwell.org.*

## Oxford Union standing committee could face criminal liability amid ongoing counter-terror investigation

By CHERWELL NEWS

Students on the Oxford Union’s governing body have been advised that they could face “liability, jointly, and severally” amid an ongoing counter-terrorism investigation, according to minutes from several meetings viewed exclusively by *Cherwell*. Police have been conducting enquiries since the Union’s hosting of a debate titled ‘This house believes that Israel is an apartheid state responsible for genocide’ last term.

The Standing Committee, the Union’s governing body, is made up entirely of Oxford University students elected by members. According to minutes from several behind closed doors meetings in early December, the Committee was informed that legal advice had been sought that had concluded “members of the Standing Committee (as of today) would be liable, jointly, and severally, at the point at which an investigation takes place.”

In these meetings, the President stressed that any members of the Standing Committee implicated in an investigation would be supported by the Union.

Minutes also reveal that the President said members “should exercise their right to remain silent if approached by the police”. The same advice was offered for approaches by the press.

During the debate which prompted the investigation, a guest speaker in support of the motion, Miko Peled, described the terrorist attack carried out by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 as an act of “heroism”. Opposition speakers at the time suggested this could be considered a criminal offence because it supported a proscribed terrorist group.

Counter Terrorism Policing South East told *Cherwell* they are “aware of reports of a person expressing support for a proscribed organisation, namely Hamas, at the Oxford Union on Thursday 28th November and enquiries are ongoing”.

The event led to protests and complaints from both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian activists. It also saw members and guest speakers removed from the chamber amid the tense atmosphere.

One current member of Standing Committee, speaking anonymously, told *Cherwell*: “I don’t think members of

Standing Committee are fully aware of the level of liability they face because of the negligence of others.”

The risk of criminal liability comes at least in part from the content of some speeches that were previously uploaded to the Union’s YouTube channel, though it is unclear which specific speech has prompted the investigation. In early December, the Union deleted and re-uploaded videos from the debate in a partially edited form, saying in a statement at the time that they were “mindful of potential legal concerns”.

This prompted criticism from both sides, with Susan Abulhawa, an opposition guest speaker, claiming on X, that the Union had “agreed in writing” that her speech should “not be altered in any way” and urged the Union to “reverse this ignominious decision”. Minutes from a separate meeting state that: “We [the Union] have received notice from one of the speakers to sue us. We have informed our insurers but nothing at this time is that concerning.”

The Union did not respond to requests for comment.

## 68.1% of SU's proposed budget goes to unelected staff costs, 15% to student projects

*Continued from Page 1*

£560,560 is projected to go toward burdened salaries for unelected non-student staff, which includes CEOs, two ‘Advice Advisors’, and various full-time or part-time roles. The burdened salaries, alongside other staff and administrative costs, will take up 68.1% of the proposed budget. Meanwhile, the four elected student sabbatical officers will be paid £158,607 altogether.

Fifteen percent of the proposed budget will go toward student projects. The majority will be allocated to the Freshers Fair which brings in a profit. 4.9% of the total budget will be allocated to the SU projects not aimed at making profit, including *The Oxford Student* newspaper that is expected to cost £23,575.

The proposed budget will allocate £500 to each of the ten SU Campaigns. Campaigns are one of the main ways the SU interacts with students and includes projects such as the Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality, Class Act, LG-BTQ, and Suspended Students. A further £5,000 is projected to be spent on elections, the latest of which saw a turnout of 1471 voters out of 26,000 eligible students. Student meetings, which also witnessed low engagement recently, are projected to receive £3,400.

This comes after the SU recently dis-

continued campaigns in favour of individual ‘community officers’; as such, campaigns will “cease to exist as democratic structures” at the end of this term, according to a statement from the Disabilities Campaign (DisCam).

The campaign wrote: “You may have seen the SU’s all-student announcement confirming the Trustee Board decision to discontinue minoritised student representation via Campaigns at the end of Hilary, in favour of an individual ‘Community Officer’ structure. DisCam was not informed of this decision before it was sent to all students, nor were we consulted by SU in the decision-making process. The SU also had made the decision to prohibit Campaign committee officers from participating in University working groups, committees or liaising with University staff on behalf of the disabled student community during the Transformation period.”

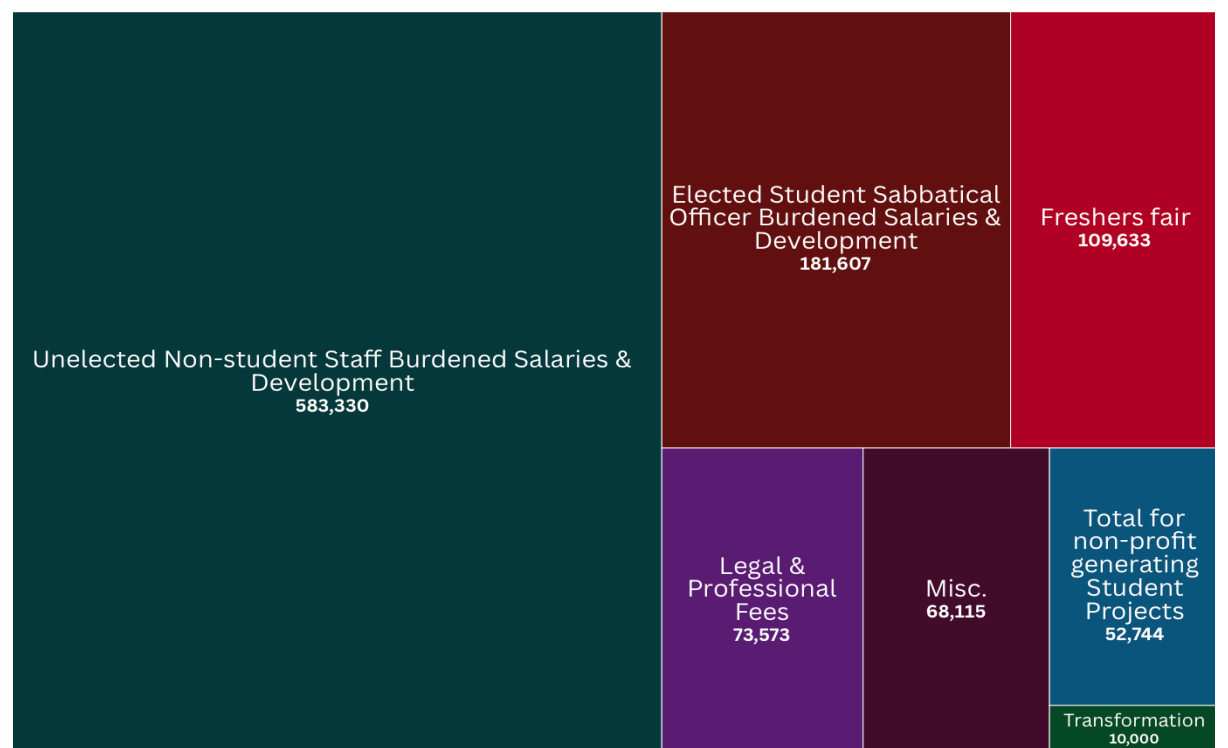
The 2025-26 budget suggests that the SU is due to adopt a Co-CEO model with two full-time contracts with burdened salaries of £98,236 and £89,591 each. The role of CEO was previously held by one person with an unburdened salary range of £53,348-£61,818, according to job advertisements posted on LinkedIn for 2022-23, which did not factor in cost-of-living and other changes. (The burdened

salary refers to the total cost to an organisation for hiring and maintaining an employee beyond their direct compensation in wages.)

The fully burdened cost (including indirect costs) of the two Co-CEOs is projected to be £196,000, whereas in 2022-23, the Senior Leadership Team comprised three people with a fully burdened cost of £208,000.

In response, solicitors for the SU provided the following comment on their behalf: “The Oxford SU’s priority as a charity is to support all our students through our in-person and online services throughout the year. Our work includes primary purpose representation through student advocacy, supporting student-led campaigns, liaising with colleges to support student welfare and delivering independent student advice services. Our staff are focused on supporting student officers to deliver student representation, enhancing student projects and improving overall student life at our university. We rely on grants and income-generating activity to cover our overheads (including benchmarked salaries for staff across the education and charity sector) and our spending is audited each year within our publicly available accounts.”

*See the full breakdown of the SU budget at cherwell.org.*



# INVESTIGATIONS

## “Two years of operation remaining”: The Oxford Union’s financial state and the donors keeping it afloat

Continued from Page 1

The majority of this deficit comes from “exceptional costs”, including a £137,000 toilet renovation and £39,000 window repair. Additionally, the roof of the Union building requires around a million pounds to be repaired, according to the estimate of one former senior committee member. An additional sum of around £11,000 was spent on legal and consulting fees, in part to address the legal aftershock of the Israel-Palestine debate. *Cherwell* recently revealed that the Union’s standing committee was advised in December that it could face criminal liability amid an ongoing counter-terror investigation into comments made at that debate. Excluding these exceptional costs, the accounts still forecast an operational loss of over £148,000. These issues have arisen from a fatal coincidence of falling income and climbing costs.

Besides donations, the Oxford Union’s accounts project membership, debating competitions, and events as its three routes of income. Membership accounts for half of the Union’s income. However, the Union is forecasted to reach just 90% of its membership goal this year, falling short of its budgeted membership income by £80,000. Commentary authored by its bursar noted, “[We] are not sure if the decline in membership enrolment in MT24 [Michaelmas Term 2024] is a trend, a result of Union activity in MT24, or lack of effective marketing for MT24”, but emphasised the urgency of rectifying the issue. Michaelmas Term 2024 saw unprecedented turmoil in Union politics, with debates frequently derailed by student political manoeuvring. The result was debates that were often delayed by more than an hour, with one source saying: “I think people came and they saw that in the environment, and they didn’t want to spend 300 [pounds] to join it.” In addition, debate competitions are projected to generate just 16% of their budgeted income, a disparity of £54,000.

The society’s 2024/25 budget anticipated that it would also generate income in published videos and food and beverage sales. However, these are both projected to be sources of significant financial loss, with the latter suffering from a variance of -1579.9% between its budgeted income and forecast loss. Additionally, despite recent price increases in the Members Bar, the accounts project a £9,000 loss due to food and beverages, despite the yearly budget expecting it to break even and make £600. Further, the Union produces YouTube videos of debates and speeches with the intention of attracting international attention and generating additional funding via advertising revenue. Whilst the accounts leave it unclear how much expenditure can be attributed to video production, the commentary notes that “this year the filming costs are greater than the revenue generated from the filming”, and “a model that costs the Society ~£100k per annum is not sustainable”.

### No sign of stopping

Despite recurrent losses, the Union has displayed little urgency in reducing its expenditure, evident in its Hilary Term Ball. “We spent £5000

on Bollinger champagne [...] there was £1,800 [spent] on peacocks, £750 [spent] on an ice sculpture”, one former senior Union committee member told *Cherwell*. Usually the Union’s student committee works at the balls and receives free tickets in exchange. This time, external staff were hired for around £3,000. A Union source added that two weeks before the ball, only 300 tickets of the 600 person capacity had been sold. Around 70 committee members still received free tickets, valued at £110.

**“Standing Committee continually approves loss-making budgets, because it’s never been at the point where those people are the people who actually need to reckon with the consequences.”**

Several sources stated that systemic short-termism is a major source of the Union’s financial problems. One former senior Union committee member asserted that in the span of eight weeks,

The source added: “When the annual budget is presented, depressingly, there’s 10 minutes of discussion, and that’s it [...]”.

Consequently, multiple sources agreed that the current state of the Oxford Union was such that students engaged in front-of-house political activities, often discussing the positions that students would occupy. Meanwhile, significant decisions regarding finances and governance were made by donors behind closed doors.

Further, personal politics take precedence over the endurance of the society’s financial sustainability. Multiple sources stated that standing committee fails to scrutinise the society’s finances, making key decisions based on their slates and the minutiae of Union politics.

### Reliance on donors

Due to the failures of fundraising and development channels in the society’s current governance structures, the Union relies extensively on donors to keep its doors open.

In particular, the Union has relied on a former Union president turned adviser to a Saudi minister, Michael Li. Li has personally donated more than £50,000 to the Oxford Union, and helped raise more than 80% of the money for a key fundraising drive.

fund is intended to “prevent the closure of the independent buildings” and ensure that the Union can continue to be the “last bastion of free speech”. Over 80% of these donations have come from the US Oxford Union Foundation (OXUF), a US-based non-profit established in 2023 that was set up to process fundraising for the Union in the United States.

The brochure notes that Michael Li, a former Union president from Trinity Term 2017, is the chair of OXUF, and recognises Li’s efforts in supporting the Union financially throughout. The rest of the fundraising comes from OLDUT, a financial trust that owns the Oxford Union’s buildings and grants the Society a licence to operate on its premises.

Li was previously pictured signing a deal between the Oxford Union and the Saudi Arabian think-tank, the Future Investment Initiative. In a brochure for an Arab-China business conference, Li is described as an adviser to a Saudi minister in the Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia.

A previous standing committee member described Li’s role primarily in terms of securing high-value donors and speakers for the Union. A senior former Union officer told *Cherwell* that Li was involved in the invitation of the Saudi ambassador to speak to the Union in 2022 about the country’s Vision 2030 programme. Former Union pres-

formal role and his influence within its financial and governance structure. In response to a press enquiry from *The Oxford Student* newspaper, Li was said to have no role within the society, its spokesperson stating in September 2023 that Li “does not represent the Society in an official capacity”. In response to earlier comment requests, however, the Union had asserted that Li was “chair of US fundraising”, with Li “giving up his time to focus on US development”.

Multiple sources attested that they were unsure of Li’s formal role in the Union’s governance. Discussing Li’s role, the former Union committee member said: “He very clearly has a very large amount of influence despite not having any formal role, let alone any elected authority.”

**“The people who do have formal roles and elected authority have no idea what is going on [...] decisions that should be made by Standing Committee are not made by Standing Committee; they’re made by OLDUT or Michael Li.”**

An article by *The Oxford Student* reported that Li an agreement on behalf of the Union with the Future Investment Initiative (FII). The FII was set up by Saudi Arabia’s main sovereign wealth fund, and became notorious after it was blacklisted by major companies as a result of the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Li represented himself to the FII as the Union’s Chair of Development Board, a position that the Union then confirmed did not exist.

OLDUT told *Cherwell*: “OLDUT does not take, and has never taken, decisions that should be taken by the Oxford Union Society’s Standing Committee. The Oxford Union Society, as a members’ club, is governed by its members and its rules.”

“Michael Li, ex-President, is Chair of OXUF, the Oxford Union Friends, and liaises with potential donors in the US. He takes no decisions on behalf of OUS or OLDUT.”

### An uncertain insurance

Multiple Union sources told *Cherwell* that “unceremonious conduct” in the Oxford Union may, however, have deterred donors, which most visibly manifested in Lord Heseltine’s walk out during the 7th November debate. Multiple sources told *Cherwell* that the Union was expecting to be signed into Heseltine’s will, though that now seems unlikely.

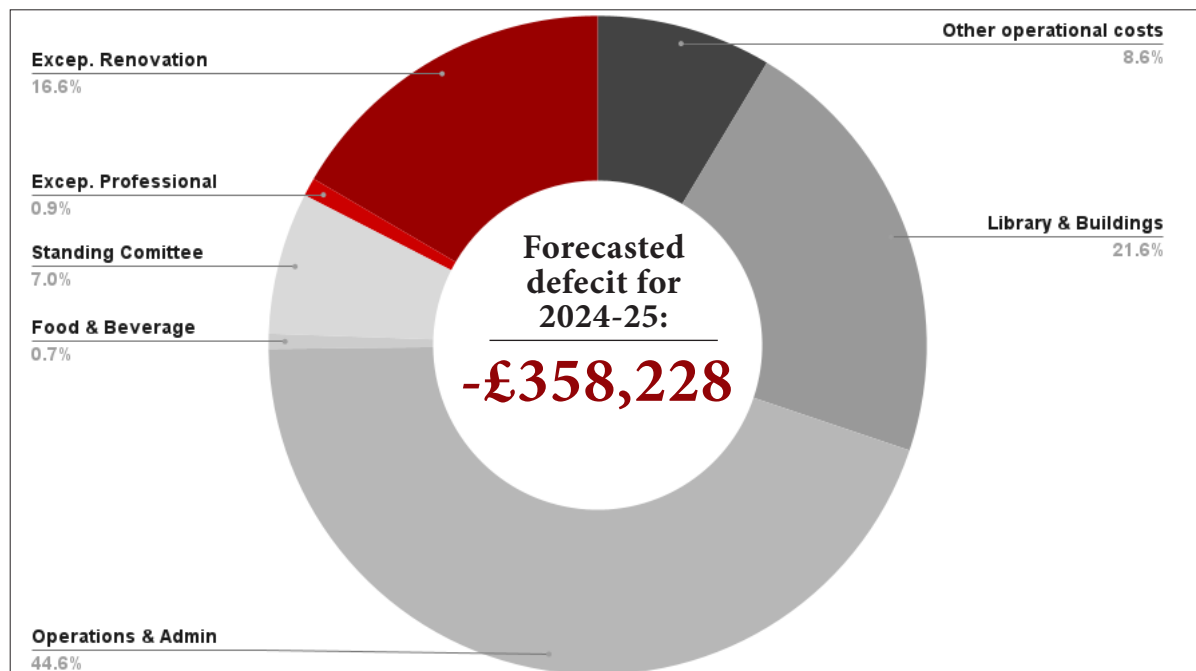
Multiple sources told *Cherwell* that if the Oxford Union does not address its financial issues by becoming incorporated or fundraising, there is a plausible scenario where it ceases to exist. A former Union committee member told *Cherwell*: “I see [a bail out by donors] not necessarily happening this time around, because the Union has gotten into all these controversies”.

A current Union committee member summed up the financial state of the society: “Ultimately, it is a student run society [...] there are permanent staff that have far greater capacity to deal with these issues than a lot of us”. Internal politics and financial irresponsibility on the committee’s side pose a major threat to the Oxford Union’s immediate future.

The society’s prospects are perhaps not so bleak, however, with options including a transition to an incorporated company with a permanent board of trustees to prevent a future financial crisis. Alternatively, the Union may remain dependent on figures like Michael Li and other donors, though the past year’s turbulent Union politics do not serve well to attract more patrons and maintain old beneficiaries. Whether or not the Oxford Union will continue to operate for more than two years remains to be seen.

The Union did not respond to *Cherwell*’s request for comment.

## The Oxford Union’s forecasted sources of overall loss for 2024-25



it is difficult for presidents to make sustainable change beyond organising debates and events. “It’s very easy to come in and look at the accounts and think, ‘Well, there’s a problem, but it’s not my problem, because I’m only here for three months,’” one source told *Cherwell*.

In March 2024, the Union published the Minute Book, a fundraising brochure aimed at alumni and prospective donors. The brochure outlines a fundraising goal of £5,000,000 by the end of 2025, of which £1,600,000 is said to have been secured at the time of publication. The Minute Book states that this

ident Charlie Mackintosh also previously told journalists from *The Oxford Student* newspaper in 2023 that Li had passed on invitations to the ambassadors of the UAE and Bahrain on his behalf.

However, the Union as an organisation has appeared unaware of Li’s

# OPINION

## We should all be more grateful

ZAGHAM FARHAN

This term has been by far the hardest of my degree. Having chosen a slightly nightmarish paper combination, I have been forced to spend far more time in the library than ever before and to significantly cut down on my extra-curricular activities. Combined with gloomy winter weather, and a seemingly ever-worsening disability, it has hardly been the most joyous seven weeks.

But within that misery, there are always moments of joy and opportunities to be grateful. The point I wish to make here is simple: that regardless of how bad life gets, there is always something to be grateful for or to take solace in. This is especially pertinent in the Oxford context. When we arrive for our first open day, or offer holder day, or even our first day of our first Michaelmas, almost all of us are struck with something of a sense of awe.

But as that first day gets further away, that sense of awe quickly fades. Bound up in endless essays, dinners and stressful tutorials, we start to forget just how lucky we are to be

at this University at all – and to be afforded the opportunities that we have. We live in an ever-competitive world. There is always another rung to climb, another Committee position to apply for, another mark to be gained in an exam. Looking at the range of

**“You have a responsibility to acknowledge the thousands of people who would want to be where you are”**

things I’ve achieved over the first half of my degree, I am confident that fresher me would have been extremely pleased – but second year me still wants to achieve more and more.

If you choose to, you can always be looking to the future – endlessly seeking some endpoint that you’re sure will satisfy you. But almost certainly once you get there, you’ll choose a new endpoint. Or, you can choose to be present and grateful – to acknowledge just how awesome a privilege it is to be at this University at this present moment. You can acknowledge how special it is to have access to the best academics, the best libraries, and

the best classmates.

I would argue also that you have a responsibility to acknowledge the thousands of people who would want to be exactly where you are right now.

In 2023, Oxford gave offers to 16% of those who applied for undergraduate courses, which means that every year, thousands of students across the country are told that they can’t have what you have right now. This was brought home to me when I was discussing with my girlfriend whether we should go to watch the Union debate one night, and I realised that there were likely thousands of young people across the globe who would give so much to have the opportunity to sit in that chamber once – a privilege I enjoy on a weekly basis.

Of course, sometimes you must complain – and rightfully so. The world is only made better when we challenge the status quo. But I would also challenge you to be a little more grateful. Next time you struggle with a paper, think about how incredible it is that you even get to study that paper. Next time you get rejected from a Committee, think about what a privilege it is to be eligible to be a member of that society in the first place.

Life is hard, I don’t query this in the slightest. Nor do I query that for many of you reading this, it will seem hard to be grateful for the life that you currently lead, and I acknowledge that the challenges you have faced likely far outstrip mine. Put simply, however, to live in the modern western world means you are one of the luckiest humans ever to be alive; and to be at this University makes you even luckier.

## Letters to the Editor:

Readers of *Cherwell* respond to articles from throughout Hilary term

### Unboxing the past: Snapshots of self-reflection

**MADAM** - You talk about welcoming the future, but do you have the space for it? While you’re stuffing metro tickets into your phone case and filling those LoveSpace boxes, don’t forget to notice that the room is already full. Nostalgia for a time that hasn’t yet passed is a dangerous game – we get so caught up in contemplating what’s to come or mourning what’s already gone that we forget to just be. So reminisce about cursed glam nights and existential crises over closed-book literature finals, but don’t let nostalgia trip you up. Go out and get those Ben’s cookies without mourning their future absence.

Your walls might be covered in memories, but are you in the pictures too? Those of us subjected to your stream-of-consciousness Instagram posting – thank you for documenting our lives, but make sure you get in the frame too. After all, even Zola knew the importance of seeing things as they really are, not just preserving them for later.

So keep posting 50 times a day on your spam, keep hoarding every concert ticket. Let the boxes overflow – but maybe when that happens, you can throw a few things away and take refuge in the present.

**Éilis Brito**

*French and History, Queen’s*

### Oxford’s ugliest architecture

**MADAM** - Oscar Whittle is certainly right to note that the ground-breaking, inclusive ideology of brutalist architecture deserves to be recognised and celebrated. But his depiction of the ugliness of the buildings surely goes too far. Brutalism can be beautiful too. Perhaps as a pampered John’s student he has yet to venture into OX2. My own college, St Hugh’s, has Kenyon Building, a Grade II listed block that mixes a zigzag of generous windows with charming red brick that complements the surrounding buildings. Another gem is the (also Grade II listed) much-hated Wolfson and Rayne buildings of St Anne’s, which unfairly graced Cherwell’s accommodation investigation, despite the striking nature of the effortlessly-futurist convex exteriors enriched with trapezoid balconies.

However, the crown jewel of this constellation is undoubtedly the (Grade II\* listed) Hilda Besse building, St Antony’s College. It houses the common room and a dining hall which, with its airy and spacious feel, tessellating ceiling, and breathtakingly simple walls, rivals any portrait-bedecked gothic tower.

**Morien Robertson**

*PPE, St Hugh’s*

### Oxford now has the right approach to animal testing

**MADAM** - Having had the privilege of being invited to debate the issue of animal experimentation at the Oxford Union debating society, I can vouch for the intellectual brilliance of the students. What I find wanting, however, is the element of critical thinking, not only at Oxford, but in many university courses in different countries. Having questioned the use of animals as models for the study of human disease and drug development since I was a young veterinary student 45 years ago, it is difficult to understand how students who study evolutionary biology and complex systems still fail to challenge a paradigm that is out of step with current knowledge of living systems.

**Andre Menache MRCVS**

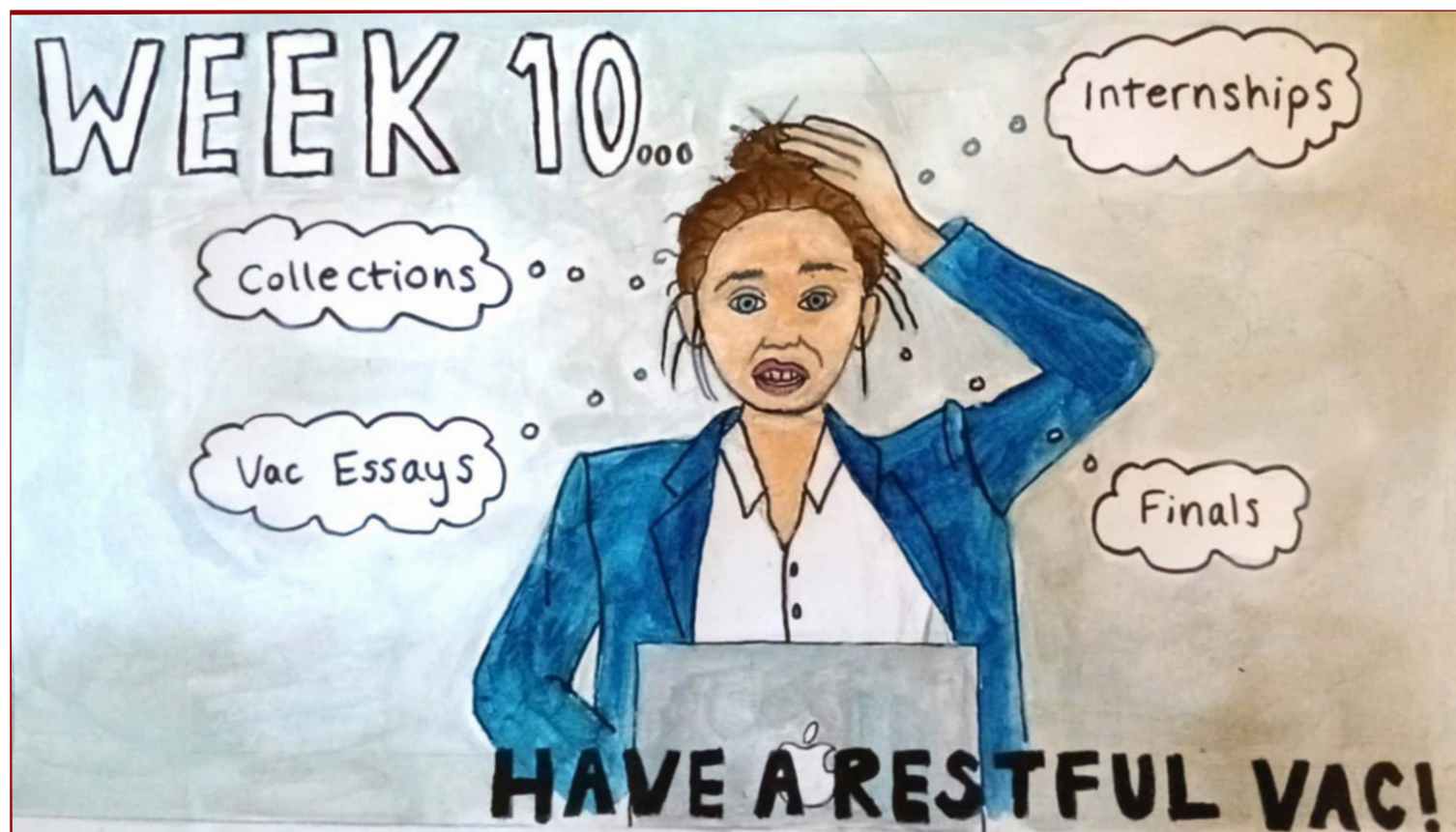
*Director, Progressive Veterinary Association*

### Shakespeare’s ‘dark lady’

**MADAM** - I very much enjoyed Maddie Gillet’s article. In 1973 A.L. Rowse of All Souls proposed Æmilia Lanyer as “the Dark Lady”. One of his arguments was that she appeared in Simon Forman’s Diary in the Bodleian as “brown in youth”. Reggie Alton, a hand-writing expert at St. Edmund Hall, rapped him over the knuckles and said that the text read “brave in youth”. When you think about it “brown in youth” is very odd.

**Bernard Richards**

*Emeritus Fellow, Brasenose*



## Protect the organ scholarship, protect Oxford’s traditions

CALVIN CHAN

Should the organ scholarship be abolished? At the time of writing, 23 of the 43 colleges in Oxford offer organ awards. These consist of a mixture of funding, housing privileges, and symbolic perks such as the right to don a scholar’s gown.

It is no secret that those who secure the scholarship are likely to have been educated privately. Partly due to the nature of the instrument, opportunities to learn and master the organ are rare for state-educated pupils in the UK, and the primary use of it in church settings has also meant that students brought up without that background are effectively excluded. Putting these together, it becomes clear that while the award is competitive, it is heavily skewed in favour of families with wealth and ties to the Christian tradition.

Seen under this light, the organ scholarship predictably attracts the ire of those who preach the gospel of equal opportunity, sincere in their belief that rewards are undeserved until the mechanism for securing them can be reformed to eliminate such biases. If we cannot, for whatever reason, eliminate the biases, then justice requires

that we eliminate the award.

One thing to notice about this kind of argument is the way it’s designed to mirror arguments against the more familiar kind of biases that no one would defend, such as biases against people on the basis of their race and gender. The move is rhetorically effective, since no one would think to defend a system that excluded women and ethnic minorities. If the organ scholarship’s exclusion of state-educated pupils is comparable, then nothing short of its abolition would seem to be in order.

Perhaps the most obvious objection to the analogy is the way in which the “bias” in question relates differently to the objective of the relevant contest. Whereas race and gender bear no relation to a person’s ability, those who took advantage of their background to excel at the organ are, by hypothesis, better at playing the organ than others. It is not “bias” for those who are better at the organ to be appointed to the organ scholarship, anymore than it is bias that those who sprint the fastest are given Olympic gold medals for the hundred metre race.

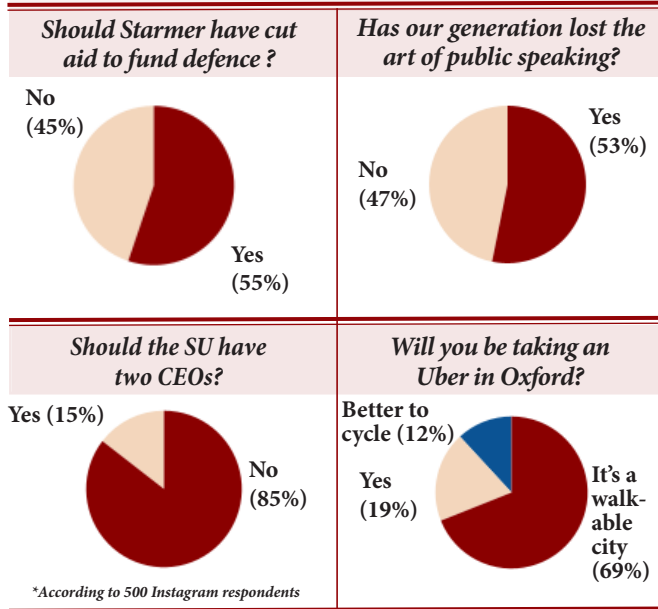
This observation clarifies the nature of the objection raised against organ awards: it is not that those who object to the award are in doubt

as to whether organ scholars are indeed good at the organ, but rather that they do not see why being good at the organ should entitle anyone to the benefits associated with the award mentioned at the outset. No doubt hard work goes into acquiring such a skill, it is arbitrary nonetheless that students skilled in this rather random and idiosyncratic way should be able to derive advantages over others because of it.

Once we recognise that this is the sentiment behind the unease some feel towards organ awards, we realise that it is a complaint that no reform can satisfy. This is because there is no principled way of distinguishing between arbitrary and non-arbitrary talents, and it is not at all clear whether justice will be served when benefits thus derived are redistributed. It is arbitrary that being skilled at kicking balls, for instance, can in our society earn you great money and power and prestige in a footballing career, whereas being skilled at juggling balls – which may have required just as much talent and practice and discipline to develop – condemns you to the fate of a circus clown. It is no less arbitrary, however, to decide therefore to abolish football, or to subsidise jugglers in an effort to mitigate our knee-jerk disquiet.

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

# THE VERDICT



## Tutorials are the antidote to declining public speaking skills

*It is crucial that the University's model gives us the chance to articulate ourselves beyond St Michael's Street*

SOPHIE PRICE

You find yourself nestled in one of the cosier armchairs of your tutor's office on a bright afternoon, your gaze momentarily drawn to the familiar wall of books opposite. Just as you manage to refocus, you are prompted to respond to a question – an intellectual challenge you are more than capable of meeting. In fact, you have a brilliant idea, one that is coherent, creative, and even exciting to articulate. Yet, as you open your mouth, an incoherent jumble of half-formed sentences and stammered repetitions emerges, a shadow of the argument you had so confidently formulated in your mind.

This struggle is not uncommon in an era where much of our most important communication takes place in writing – whether through emails, essays, or carefully crafted messages. For many, proper comprehension of an issue only emerges as we speak or write about it. What begins in your mind as a vague idea of belief can become refined or even changed once articulated into words. However, the written word offers the luxury of time: the ability to meticulously select words, refine phrasing, and anticipate responses. While writing remains a crucial skill, it represents only one side of the coin; the art of effective spoken communication has been relegated to the background.

In contrast, spoken communication demands immediate articulation, often under pressure. It is not uncommon to begin articulating a point, only to realise, mid-sentence, that your argument is nonsensical. This process – of thinking aloud, refining opinions, and learning through dialogue – is fundamental to intellectual growth. Constantly rephrasing arguments, taking a half-formed thought and articulating it to a full one as it moves from idea to speech, is a skill that requires practice and fine-tuning.

When considering public speaking at Oxford, one's thoughts will likely stroll down St Michael's Street to the debating epicentre of the city: the Oxford Union. The Union has long been a breeding ground for passionate speakers, boasting a formidable list of alumni who have gone on to hold significant positions in politics and beyond. Admittedly, speaking in the chamber is not without its challenges: instances of speakers talking over one another and bringing forward rash claims culminated in a particularly eventful Michaelmas this year. Yet, setting politics aside, the Union provides a valuable space where students can hone their public speaking skills in a structured environment – whether they choose to participate or simply observe from the chamber benches. Unlike aspiring politicians emerging from a day of PPE lectures, I find equal value in listening to my peers' perspectives and analysing seasoned speakers' techniques.

However, not all Oxonian public speaking occurs within the context of the Union. There is a vast difference between delivering a speech to a chamber and presenting an argument in a tutorial or JCR meeting. Context is crucial: human nature dictates that we assess the stakes of our actions, and public speaking is no exception. The fear of judgment, the unpredictability of live discussion, and the absence of a backspace key all contribute to the apprehension and 'word-vomit' many experience when asked to speak in front of others.

***“Spoken communication demands immediate articulation, often under pressure. It is not uncommon to begin articulating a point, only to realise, mid-sentence, that your argument is nonsensical”***

However, attributing the decline of public speaking to the pandemic would be an oversimplification. Like the wider world, university life has been undergoing a slow but steady digitisation process for decades. Every generation of students has lived through its own version of the most technologically advanced society to date. I have no doubt that the students of our children and grandchildren's era will have a whole host of technologies available to them that we couldn't even dream of. Yet, despite the shift towards digital communication, our tutorial system ensures that spoken discourse remains an integral part of academic life. While one can research, write, and submit an essay without uttering a single word on the subject, the following day's tutorial offers no such refuge. The tutorial system is an intimate form of public speaking that cannot be opted into or out of here at Oxford. Unlike the Union, participation is not voluntary; you must be prepared to articulate and defend your ideas in real-time discussion.

So, while the Union-esque rhetoric of practised debaters may remain the domain of a select few, communicating with clarity and confidence is a skill that Oxford's academic framework ensures no student can avoid.

# Unhappy feet? Oxford on thin ice over welfare penguins

Heythrop Zoo offered penguin 'welfare visits' across Oxfordshire, including to Oxford colleges. This is inhumane and must stop

DPhil Zoology students: NATALIE DUFFUS, TOM PAVEY, and WILL PAINE

To encourage students to complete the Bodleian Reader Survey this year, a prize was offered to the college from which the most students responded to the survey – a visit from one of: an ice cream van, welfare alpacas, or welfare penguins. This offer generated a buzz, and we saw students expressing their hopes that their college would choose the penguins. Following a letter from ourselves and others in the Biology Department, the Library decided to remove penguins as a prize option and committed to not using wild animals in this capacity again. But what's the problem with welfare penguins? And where does such an idea come from in the first place?

The concept of welfare animals is not new, with dogs, goats, and alpacas being the staple of many student union events across the UK. Penguins, on the other hand, are a less typical choice of animal for this role. Heythrop Zoological Gardens, however, regularly provide Humboldt penguins for 'welfare visits to sites across England including universities, care homes, hospitals, shopping centres, ice rinks, and to Harris Manchester College in 2024. Three penguins were held on a small, fenced square of astroturf with a tent for cover and a paddling pool for water, while students loomed above them.

***“As zoologists we believe that these reasons are inadequate”***

A letter from members of the University condemning the action was met with a response from the College stating that Heythrop had the appropriate licences to undertake such activities, and that “these particular penguins are used to human contact”. However, considering the welfare of the penguins, as zoologists we believe that these

reasons are inadequate.

Animal welfare is a complicated subject, as most animals cannot express their needs, and we frequently misinterpret their behaviour. Currently, the Five Domains model is the best-established model for assessing animal welfare. The framework accounts for both positive and negative welfare effects, and by assessing the animal's nutrition, physical environment, health, behavioural interactions and mental state we can assess how well their needs are being met. This means that animals require not only food, water, and shelter but also environmental enrichment and the potential for social interactions with their own species.

The situation at Harris Manchester will likely have resulted in an overall negative impact on the welfare of the penguins for several reasons. Studies have shown that penguins respond slightly more positively to bigger spaces, room to 'escape' from humans, and access to larger water bodies, but have elevated stress levels when humans get closer than 2m to their enclosures. This is particularly true for Humboldt penguins, who may perceive humans as potential predators. As seen in social media coverage of the event, these conditions were not met for the Heythrop penguins at Harris Manchester.

It could be argued that penguins can become habituated to human contact, and to some extent this is possibly true. Some zoos have designed penguin-visitor interactions, with neutral or even slightly positive responses from the penguins, but these encounters were carefully controlled. Penguins had the option to leave the area with humans at any time, were provided with enrichment such as laser pointers, and the humans sat quietly on a bench, did not interact directly with the penguins and did not take photos. This is a far cry from what the Heythrop penguins experience when they are handled by many unfamiliar people. Furthermore, the penguins must endure the stress of transportation between these locations, with birds known to be very sensitive to noise disturbance.



Heythrop Zoological Gardens, when contacted for comment, stressed that the penguins were trained and used to human company, and have become “gradually desensitised to any possible stress” from these interactions. They said the penguins were in a temporary enclosure for “a maximum of three hours”, that they are familiarised with transport, and that all handling is through experienced penguin trainers. Heythrop argued that such experiences help conservation and “a sense of connection with nature”.

Yet we argue that this exploitation of animals by Heythrop Zoological Gardens is completely inappropriate and results in poor welfare for the animals. Welfare opportunities for humans do not need to come at the expense of animals. Contact

with nature provides multiple benefits for human health and wellbeing. This could involve visiting a nature reserve, tree planting, or outdoor meditation, all of which are more immersive than ogling at some fenced-in penguins.

We commend the Bodleian Library's decision to remove the penguin 'prize' as an option. If the wider University and colleges truly care about welfare – both human and animal – then a policy should be developed ensuring that the needless exploitation of animals for student's entertainment no longer occurs on campus.

Harris Manchester did not respond to request for comment.

Image Credit: owamux/ CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

# FEATURES

## Sextigation 2025: Top 1% of Oxford shaggers do 15% of all shagging



By CHERWELL FEATURES

The results of *Cherwell's* fourth sextigation are in. The top shaggers are at St Edmund's Hall, the most attractive students are at Balliol, and relationship goals are surprisingly traditional. Dating apps divide opinion, and none of us can look at the SSL bathrooms the same way again.

**Y**ou may have seen the headlines about income inequality – the top one percent in Britain earn somewhere around 15% of all income. *Cherwell's* fourth annual Sextigation has found an inequality just as yawning in Oxford's sex scene: just four respondents out of 445 found themselves involved in 15% of all unique sexual partnerships. Nearly a quarter of all partnerships involve the top two percent of shaggers, one of whom reported 90 sexual partners at Oxford.

### The new college disparities report

It was a good year to be at St Edmund Hall. Buoyed, perhaps, by their alumnus Keir Starmer making it to Downing Street, they self-reported an average of 7.1 sexual partners. But, like most group projects, this was mainly the work of two dedicated individuals, with a combined Oxford body count of 140. When they were removed, the college average was 2.4. Without them, Trinity's 4.5 average was the highest, followed by Queen's and LMH. But it bears remembering that these were self-reported, and a different question revealed which colleges respondents had hooked up with.

On that metric, Keble was the most promiscuous – 16.6% of respondents had got with a Keblite (or potentially a KCFC player). Following closely was Balliol with 14.7%. One Hugh's student spoke of a

hookup refusing to go home with them because of the astronomical distance. This doesn't quite seem to be borne out. The college was tied with Brasenose in third, proving that, whether you're on Radcliffe Square or St Margaret's Road, you too can find love at Park End.

But all that sex did not necessarily leave people better off. On average, people with no sexual partners at Oxford reported the highest satisfaction with their sex lives and people with one reported the lowest, but beyond that there was no correlation whatsoever between number of partners and satisfaction.

### What should you study?

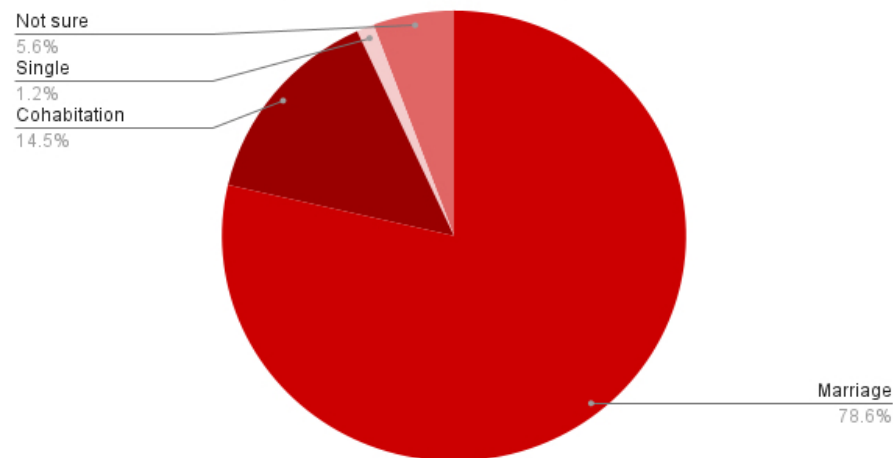
Most Oxford students are not very promiscuous at all. Only half of respondents reported having had multiple sexual partners at Oxford. Though we only had a couple of respondents, Maths and Computer Science came bottom of number of sexual partners, with a whopping average of 0. Computer Science, despite the potential future earnings, really does seem to be neglected: last year, Computer Science and Philosophy came in at 0.75. Other low ranking subjects include Maths (1.2), Geography (1.4), E&M (1.5), and Biochemistry (1.6). This should be particularly disappointing for the geographers, who in 2024 were one of the highest performers – either

the first years have lost their way around the place or the recent grads really knew their subject was 'where it's at'.

By contrast, Chemistry, ArchAnth and AMES came out on top, but all were bolstered by individuals reporting far higher figures – removing

these anomalies puts the subjects in low-to-average terrain. More convincingly, Earth Sciences, MML, Biology, Human Sciences and Materials Science all did well, with figures ranging from 4.5 to 5.9. No matter how cool Humanities students think they are with their tute essays and no lectures, there's no

### What would be your ideal form of long-term relationship?





good evidence that they're the preferred domain of 'the two cultures'.

### Nowhere is safe

Nearly a third said they had had sex in a public place. Chaplains, shield your eyes (and turn to page 10) – there were tales of sex in an organ loft, a room dedicated to a Bible clerk, on a church altar, and in quite a few chapels. Academic places were scarcely treated with more respect. Various libraries, the New College belltower, and bathrooms of academic buildings were all shagging sites as well. Wheeled desk chairs apparently present logistical troubles. On the pastoral side, parks and forests were very popular locations – the presence of a few bushes seems to provide the mirage of privacy (even if you're going at it in university parks at midday, as

**“But attractiveness brings its own issues – Balliol students had the lowest satisfaction with their sex lives, with an average of 2.7 out of five.”**

one admitted).

One place that doesn't get the blood flowing though is the nightclub. 38% of respondents “couldn't say” which club was the best for casual sex; 12% bluntly said: “none.” If they had to pick, Oxford students would go for Bridge, with a quarter of respondents putting it as their top location, followed by Push at 19%.

It was a particularly surreal experience for the Features Team, going over the responses in the Social Science Library, all too aware of what had gone on in its toilets. And we hate to confess, dear readers, (somewhere in) the office of this venerable publication has not remained untainted.

### Partners for life?

For those who do like sex, there's one big question: how do you keep getting it? Unless you have some miraculous pick-up talent, the answer for many is, of course, to get in a relationship. But is this all that that relationships are for? You might think so, with the endlessly cynical claims about Gen-Z having no capacity for attachment – no doubt as a part of the woke crusade against all things good and proper. But in fact, our data shows that Oxford students are serious about their commitments, and traditional in their wants.

Second-wave feminists: bad news. Despite what you might expect given the waves of secularisation and increasingly liberal social attitudes, fully 72% of our respondents said that marriage was their desired form of future relationship. (We aren't sure how they intend to square that one with certain acts in certain college chapels...) 55% said that their main goal out of dating in Oxford was ‘finding the one’; only a meagre 7% said it was casual sex. JD Vance can sleep tight, undisturbed by nightmares of “childless cat ladies”: 63% want to have children in the future, though the proportion is bigger amongst men than women.

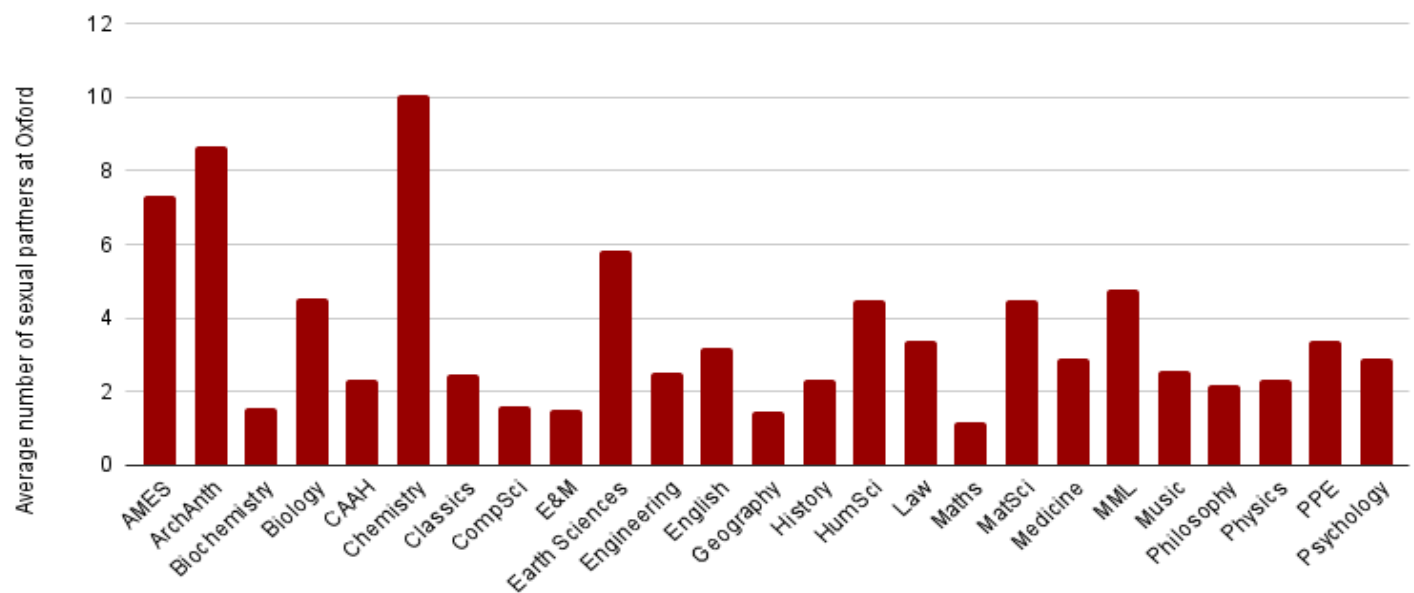
And lest you think this is purely idle speculation from those dreaming of a non-existent lover, an impressive 57% of people currently in a relationship said they thought it would last ‘all my life’. Unfortunately for some, 7% admitted that their relationship wouldn't make it past the end of this term. (If this is you, it's time to send that ‘we need to talk’ message; don't prolong it any further.)

### Looking in from afar

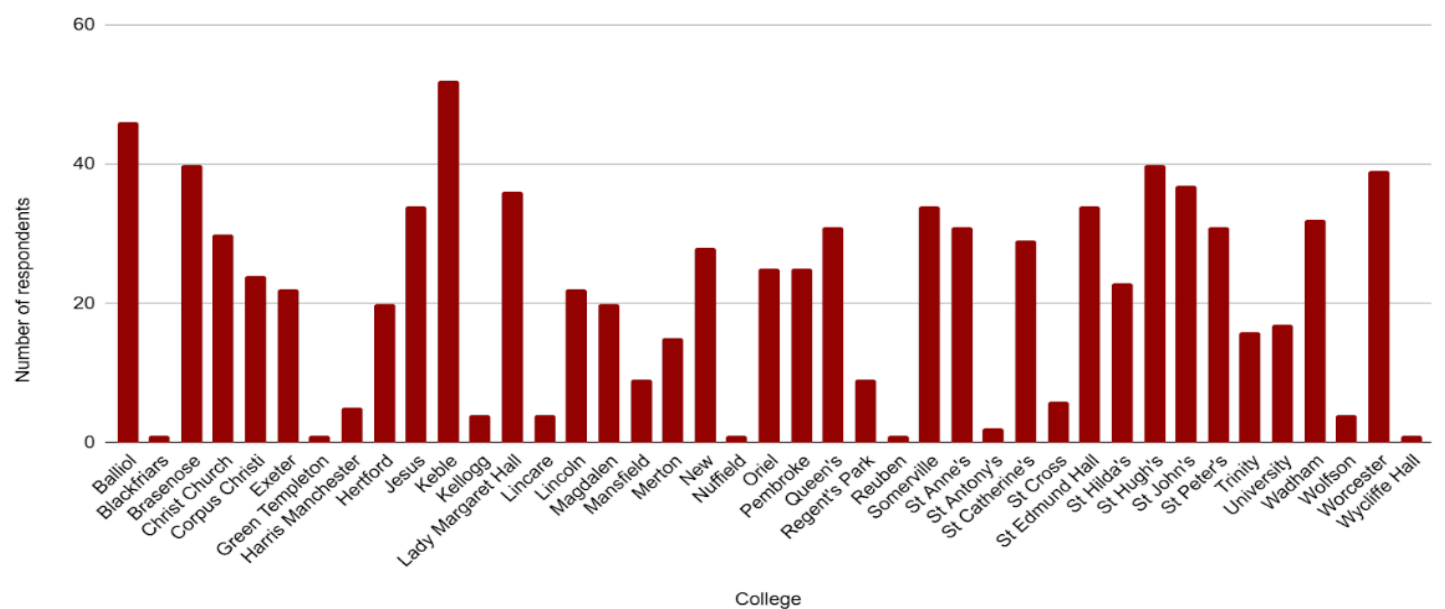
Appearances are everything, and just as important as who is actually having the most sex is who everyone thinks is. In that vein, if personality isn't exactly your top quality in a partner, you might want to head over to Balliol, Worcester, or Keble, the three most attractive colleges, according to our respondents. It bears taking with a grain of salt, though. 79% of those who said Worcester was the most attractive were from the college itself, which begs the question of whether they are particularly incestuous, or just have average Oxford levels of arrogance.

But even they were outdone for self-admiration by Lady Margaret Hall, with their 83% college representation. All the way in OX2, it's highly likely

## Average number of sexual partners at Oxford, by (undergraduate) subject



## Which college have you hooked up with?



that this result is influenced by never even catching a glimpse of someone from another college. For others, distance attracted. Of the three respondents that put Lincoln as the most attractive (0.8%), not one actually attended the college, but two went to Somerville. Maybe Lincolniters are only tolerable from afar.

When same-college respondents were removed, Balliol still came out on top, so it's possible that there truly are some Adonises hiding on Broad Street. Equally impressive were New and St Catherine's, neither of which had more than two respondents from their own college, but came in at second and third with 15 and 13 responses respectively. But attractiveness brings its own issues – Balliol students had the lowest satisfaction with their sex lives, with an average of 2.7 out of five. All that glitters...

### The apps: “Just try someone on and discard them”

Where can you find the top one, two, or ten percent of shaggers? Dating apps are a good bet. Only a quarter of all respondents have used the apps, but this included almost all of the top shaggers. One student who claimed 50 sexual partners in Oxford lamented that it's “extremely easy to meet people, but sex becomes commodified... real conversations beyond the surface level are hard to find.

That's a common complaint: dating apps make the whole romantic experience superficial as people become commodities to browse through, with a better option always potentially being one more swipe away. 71% of students said the apps had not improved the dating experience.

But most respondents had nuanced feelings. A St Hugh's student wrote that “dating apps are extremely superficial and overwhelm you with too much choice, encouraging people to think of each other as merely ‘options’. However, in some ways they're a necessary evil with the lack of third spaces to find dates.”

The apps seem to be especially helpful for those seeking same-sex partners. 58% of gay and lesbian respondents had used a dating app, while only 18% of straight respondents had. 54% of gay and lesbian respondents said that the apps had improved the dating experience, while only 21% of straight

respondents said the same.

While a Keble student said that “deep down, no one on Hinge wants to meet someone through Hinge, myself included,” a Lady Margaret Hall student said that she met her “boyfriend of over a year on Hinge and am embarrassingly in love with him, hate to tell ya.”

**“Chaplains, shield your eyes (and turn to page 10) – there were tales of sex in an organ loft, a room dedicated to a bible clerk, and in quite a few chapels”**

### The darker side

CW: *Unwanted Sexual Advance*

It's not all fun and games, though. Nearly 30% of our respondents said that they had at some point felt pressured into sex, the majority of whom (54%) were female. Another 6% said they were not sure if they had or not. This is just slightly less than the 35% of a national survey of 16-24 year-olds (and the same if you include the unsure category), suggesting Oxford is not much better than anywhere else. Additionally, 16% of respondents said they had felt pressure not to use contraception during sex.

Oxford is also not immune from what has been called ‘the phenomenon of sexual strangulation’. Unwanted behaviour, such as choking, as sexual strangulation is known, has become increasingly recognised as a national and international issue,

with research finding that more than one in three Britons aged 16-34 had experienced unwanted choking during consensual sex.

Our survey, which asked about unwanted behaviour in general, found that Oxford came in below this result, but still had 21% of respondents having experienced choking or slapping. A further 4% said they were not sure. Some respondents told us of dehumanising behaviour, such as damaging lip biting, being slapped in the face, and being groped whilst asleep.

### Data and Methodology

Lastly, a word on the results. Cherwell's Features team did the best it could to make our results as wide-ranging and representative as possible, but we recognise the limitations of the survey. With over 440 respondents including virtually every college and course, we cover the whole ground. But for some of these subcategories, like less-common subjects, we end up with only a few respondents in each, and hence averages are easily skewed by a single person.

We also recognise that, as a survey very clearly to do with sex and sexual activity, even despite our emphasis that we wanted respondents with or without experience, there may be a skew towards those people who have got more experience than average, as they self-select into participating. Nevertheless, of all our respondents, roughly half had had 0 or 1 sexual partners, with the other half having had two or more. There is also of course the possibility of exaggeration, underreporting, or preference-falsification. However, as our respondents were anonymous, we hope that there was little incentive to do so.

In choosing what questions out of the myriad possibilities to go for, we aimed to preserve the essence of previous iterations of this survey, in looking at the all-important numbers on how much sex people are having, but expand the scope to incorporate wider attitudes and beliefs. We did also, as one perceptive respondent noted, drop ‘the masturbation question’. Apologies for the disappointment.

Artwork by Joe Walford

# “All faiths and none?”: What college chapels can offer their students

*College chapels have a long and complex history, and can feel like a relic from another era. But they are adapting to a changing world and can provide relief from the stress of term.*

By ARCHIE JOHNSTON

The rustle of a scholar's gown. Dappled evening light glowing behind a stained-glass saint. The crackling of a candle being lit. The college chapel can easily feel removed from the 21st century university that surrounds it, with its breakneck pace and crushing deadlines. The robes, Latin hymns, and retention of original features from centuries long gone by can almost convince the casual chapel-goer that they have stepped back in time... If they can ignore the digitally printed service card and electric lighting, that is. The chapel is a distillation of that special appeal of Oxford; surrounding oneself with that which is medieval, time-weathered, enduring.

That appeal, of course, raises a question: what is the place of the college chapel in the modern University of Oxford? In a community of which Christians, particularly Anglican Christians, are a minority, why does this particular set of religious forms and norms have an institutional place unlike any other? Chapels and their chaplains purportedly serve the multiplicity of faiths and belief systems Oxford houses – the phrase “all faiths and none” is beloved by Oxford chapels when describing their communities. At a glance, however, the Oxford set-up is an incongruous one: a largely non-religious population with a pastoral and welfare infrastructure which involves religious ministers.

## How did we get here?

College chapels have been a part of Oxford life almost since the start of the University itself. The academic community in Oxford began to formalise its organisation in around 1249, with the founding of University College, originally intended to support masters of arts studying divinity. However, it was Merton College that first constructed its own purpose-built space for its academics to pray, sometime in the 1280s. Only later would the modern Christ Church College spring up around the older site of St. Frideswide's priory. It became the city cathedral in 1546 at the order of King Henry VIII, head of the newly established Church of England.

The histories of Oxford University and the English Church are pretty inextricable. After all, Theology was one of three subjects awarded its own degree in the early University, alongside Medicine and Law. In the medieval period, scientific and theological knowledge were not distinct. When Philip Pullman chose to begin *His Dark Materials*, a story about an all-powerful world church, in Oxford, it wasn't just because of his familiarity with the scenery. It was because the idea of the University being at the heart of the Church was drawn straight from history.

Oxford was a site of high drama in the formation of Anglican Britain. A cobbled cross built into the pavement on Broad Street marks the spot where prominent Protestant theologians were burnt alive during the reign of the Catholic monarch Mary I. The city housed the ‘counter-Parliament’ of Charles I during the English Civil War, a conflict with heavy religious strains. During the 19th century, it was the centre of the ‘Tractarian’ movement, which argued that the Anglican Church was not unique, but a

branch of the historic Catholic Church. Throughout most of the University's history, the chapels were not spaces peacefully removed from the political upheaval of the day. They were at its core.

## A changing landscape

Today, however, the picture is very different. Conflicts within Christianity are no longer a major factor in politics or academia. Furthermore, people's personal beliefs have greatly changed. According to data collected by the University in 2020, 55.4% of its undergraduate population had no religion. Of the 32.7% who professed to have a religion or belief, only 22.9% were Christian. Of these, given the proportion of Anglicans in the British Christian population, less than a third are probably adherents of the Church of England, especially when the University's large international population is taken into account.

It's hard to get a sense of the significance of these figures, as historical statistics on religion are tough to find and dubious at the best of times. However, the British Social Attitudes survey, which put the Christian population of Britain at a little over 60% in 1985, would indicate a marked decline, even if Oxford is more diverse than the country at large. The predominance of Anglican forms among college chapels, then, is a little at odds with the population of the University as it exists today.

## A home for all?

Most chapels are very explicit that their services and other events are open to people of “all faiths and none.” The diversity of college chapels and their chaplains means that it is impossible to generalise the experience of chapel life for students. While older colleges are bound by their royal charters to provide ‘divine service’ in accordance with Anglican liturgy, they are by no means the only model. More recent additions have brought variety to Oxford's chapels.

Harris Manchester College has a Unitarian chapel. Mansfield College roots its chapel in a nonconformist tradition, advertising talks on queer spirituality and social justice issues. At Somerville College, chapel service is centred around ‘Choral Contemplation’. It reimagines the Oxford choral tradition, aiming to make it a place for “all faiths and none”. Somerville's present chapel scholar and director, Arzhia Habibi, is of the Bahá'í faith, which emphasises the oneness of all religions. Though Anglicanism predominates in Oxford chapels, their gatherings can be a space for a wide range of students.

The brick and mortar of the chapels reflect historical faith movements just as much as their service cards. Student opinion on their suitability varies. In response to a *Cherwell* survey, some students said that the Anglicanism of a college chapel doesn't necessarily impede its ability to be a space for all students. One respondent, not themselves a Christian, argued that “we shouldn't let this traditional aspect... be an issue.” Others were more concerned. Several believed that, while non-religious students might not be put off participating in chapel life, students belonging to a religion other than that of their college chapel might be more alienated. One said that their chapel, as a “decidedly Anglican” space, was “exclusionary as a place of worship to non-Christian students”, while



another pointed to the history of discrimination against non-Anglican Christians in Britain. According to them, a “hegemonic, institutional view of organised religion has no place in the modern university.” Chapels might welcome visitors from a range of religious backgrounds, but students seem ambivalent on whether this affects their actual impact.

## A world away

Perhaps such concerns might be balanced out if the chapel is treated as more than just a religious space. Most chapels are designed to make the visitor feel as if they have stepped into a demarcated area, away from the parts of the college focused on education. The ante-chapel, the cross at the top of the capital T that forms the basic plan of several college chapels, marks a transition from the humdrum to the profound.

This intangible quality was a common response to the question of the college chapel's place in the modern university. One student called their chapel “an escape, a place of calm and peace.” In an environment like Oxford, oriented so completely towards productivity, this is a valuable thing. In the words of another student, “in a university where studying can feel endless and hectic and weeks seemingly merge into one another, college chapels (or at least my college chapel) offers an opportunity for reflection and stillness.” The Revd Dr Jane Baun, chaplain at Wadham, told *Cherwell* that during the COVID-19 pandemic, she was concerned to protect the chapel as a non-educational refuge, against thoughts of deploying it as a socially-distanced lecture hall.

However, some found it off-putting that such relief was only offered in a religious context. One respondent made the case that while they tried “to appreciate the ‘peace’ and ‘vibes’ of these visually appealing historic buildings”, they were perturbed by their knowledge of the “tainted history” of the Church. For many students, Christian iconography signifies long histories of colonialism, patriarchy, and racism, although Christian ideas have been re-appropriated by movements for the liberation of marginalised people as well.

In fact, one Harris Manchester student saw their chapel as a catalyst for social consciousness. They spoke of the ethos of Unitarianism as a commitment to “truth and justice.” The range of speakers that are invited to address college chapel services indicate an effort to move away from a solely religious space. Representatives of various clergies appear, but artists, poets, scientists, and historians are often equally welcomed.

Still, chapels can't be totally separated from the knowledge factory of Oxford. In many colleges, chaplains are a part of the infrastructure provided to students for pastoral and welfare support. Knowledge with religious bases can be helpful in day-to-day wellbeing, and chapel life seems for some to be a way to focus on mental, and spiritual, wellbeing in an environment that too often neglects it. However,

there is something of a tension between the relief that a chapel is supposed to provide and the welfare system at Oxford, often focused just on restoring the student's ability to work. Dr Baun told *Cherwell* that she was glad that welfare services are becoming more professionalised, so that full-time, fully secular members of non-academic staff are there for the student body.

The chapel can offer a space in which knowledge is absorbed, rather than reproduced around a tight tutorial deadline. Such opportunities should be extended as far as possible, and perhaps, in order for them to be extended to the non-religious or non-Anglican, beyond the chapel and into a wider variety of University spaces.

## Common ground

There is no way to find the common thread connecting every person's experience of chapel life. For some, the cold glare of a saintly statue and heavy-handed liturgical references to the virtue of virginity will be too much. For others, even those who are not religious, there is meaning in coming together with others on a Sunday evening, in the same way as people have gathered in that same space for centuries. Dr Baun lightheartedly referred to Wadham's Sunday evensong as a ‘gathering of the tribe’.

Perhaps that is the most meaningful contribution of the college chapel. It is imbued with the generations of scholars and students who have passed through Oxford, each with their own ideas and inner lives.

*“The chapel can offer a space in which knowledge is absorbed, rather than reproduced around a tight tutorial deadline.”*

Every worn-down step or smoothed pew is a reminder of being a part of a greater whole, and not just in the college or university. Not every historical legacy associated with world religions is a comfortable one, and no two people will quite agree on the best way to reconcile tradition with modernity. Other parts of the built and lived-in environment might offer the same feeling. But if something can remind you of your own smallness, even just with its bricks and mortar, then maybe you can allow yourself to take a breath. Against the weight of time that these architectural relics represent, that deadline seems a little less crushing.

Image Credits: David Hays



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Lost in The Massey Room and Punter-in-Chief

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Pie Chart Protester, Cowley Crusader, NS's Biggest Op, "My mum's a lawyer...", Simp 4 Varsity, Stuck in a Lift, "I have a friend...", Gracie Abrams, Cherwell > OSPL, Cambridge Trip Dropout, and Indesign Wizard

### NEWS

Cowley Crusader and NS's Biggest Op with IK's worse nightmare, Anti-cycling lobby, Final form, Silly fresh, Defector, Crime buster, Mair not mair, and UNC

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Simp 4 Varsity with Happy feet, Impromptu Interviewer, Trump-Putin mural enjoyer, Cherwell > Guardian, Loudest laugh in the lib, and Mods victim

### FEATURES

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Gracie Abrams with Father of the House, Mrs O'Connor, Choirgirl, Defector, A Level Textbook, Goat, House!, Morien 2.0, Long Shift, Puzzling, The Manager, Ex-Isis, Arty Type, Orwell in Cherwell, Resend the InDesign!, [section editor deleted], Michael Corleone, Hugh'sician, and Lara Al Murrani (x5)

### LIFESTYLE

Cherwell > OSPL with Spreadsheet Matchmaker, Zodiac Shutterbug, The Problem Solver, Miss Hot Girl Hilary, and Brunch Buff

### SPORTS

Cambridge Trip Dropout with Bryn and Euan's Prodigy, the Professional, and the Convert

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*Video team:* Inspirational Speaker, Nominative Determinism, ChatGPT

*Illustrator:* Obgyn, Rishi Caricaturist, Blavatnik Snapper

*Archivist:* Accidental Kiss Bar Photographer

With warmest thanks to Kilt Guy's Neighbour, ChCh Trousers, Amal Clooney, Wordpress Ninja, and Canadian Ski Slopes

# John Evelyn

*Editors' Note: We bid a (somewhat disgruntled) farewell to Jevelyn II so soon after their brief appearance in place of Jevelyn I, whose whereabouts are to this day a mystery. Such is the flakiness of hacks, that the promised Tuesday turned to Wednesday, and the promised 5pm turned to midnight, and...At this ungodly hour of need, Jevelyn III heroically comes to the rescue (allegedly in a state of drunkenness in a pub).*

*We hope to see your honest ranking of our myriad of Jevelyns on Union Memes for Power Hungry Teens.*

Come one, come all: your fifth (?) choice Jevelyn is here.

And what a week to arrive, with the future of the Union resting on a choice between Snow Plough and OUCA's Uncle. Both sides have made the most of their final days of campaigning, wining and dining their respective heroes, with the latter hosting our newly-elected Chancellor,

and the former welcoming the definitely-not-abuser Dizzee Rascal.

With more seccies than allegations, Snow Plough still looks to be the front runner as we head into Friday's showdown, and the Colonel has been doing everything in his power to make sure it stays that way. His use of Oxfess Admin Pals (OAPs) has seen the contest explode into new territory

(something Counter-Terror will no doubt add to their list of charges against the Sitting Committee), with the Overhyped Ugly Cretin Association facing more pressure than the President's chair during debates last term.

OUCA's Uncle, meanwhile, has been doing his best Zelenskyy impression, claiming he has enough fighting resolve to win alone, whilst relying on an entirely unrealistic coalition to see him across the line. His slate – consisting of an officer team including Banquo's Ghost, the long lost member of The

Chainsmokers, and PnP – has been on a European tour this week, finding less success on the continent than Wales in the Six Nations.

Snow Plough's line dancing has reached new heights as he aims to follow in the footsteps of the Colonel, directing orders at a team of soldiers only marginally more loyal than Banquo's Ghost's ex-fling. His officers have infiltrated so many Grad Group Chats that the Karate King has started to question his status as Post Grad Pariah, with their hacking more aggressive than their leader after one trip to the bathroom.

Either way, dear reader, there is no doubt that whoever is proclaimed triumphant on Saturday will be set up for a barrage of attacks sure to last long into Trinity. Her MAA-jesty's successor will surely be hoping for a tranquil eight weeks, but if the last two terms are anything to go by, she ought to strap in – and not just because Snow Plough could be in the driving seat. Happy voting all, and have a restful vac.

Yours unseriously,  
Jevelyn



## A note from the Editors-in-Chief



**Georgia Campbell**  
The Queen's College

When Oli Sandall – EiC TT24 – signed off in his Week 7 editorial, he said of his *Cherwell* role that 'in many ways, it is a very thankless job'. Now, I hate to bash a fellow Northerner, but as I approach the end of my own tenure in that very 'job', I'm convinced that I couldn't disagree with him more.

Just a few days ago, Selina and I beamed with pride as we watched the cascade of eleven Student Publication Awards nominations roll in (a jaw-dropping three of which were earned by Selina alone). It is testament to a year of hard work by *Cherwell* journalists, and I'm in little doubt that we'll have at least a few trophies to add to the Choffice mantelpiece after Easter.

As Selina's note has so eloquently suggested, this role has given us access to Oxford in its entirety: one of the beauties of *Cherwell* is its range, and it has been a unique privilege to be privy to the various inner-workings of this city as they happen (and sometimes before). More than I could have expected, it has been a ridiculously interesting twelve weeks.

But I don't mean to be blindly optimistic about what is undoubtedly a challenging role. Selina and I did not know back in Michaelmas, for

instance, that we would be embarking on what Peter Chen – our General Counsel – has called the most 'legally turbulent' term he has ever seen at *Cherwell*. We have had some seriously difficult decisions thrown our way, and at times it's been impossible to know if we've made the right ones. But such is the nature of journalism. Such, as they say, is life.

And by way of reward, we have produced hard-hitting stories on not one, but two of this university's 'esteemed' unions; a RadCam occupation; a Chancellor inauguration, and much more besides. We have seen coverage in *Sky News* and *The Times* (twice!), including one byline for a Section Editor in her very first term at *Cherwell*. At this point I would be remiss not to thank the Senior Editorial Team, who have been tireless in their work to bring these stories to readers. Selina and I are so grateful to have had such a committed, insightful, and genuinely fun group to take this term on with (Cambridge punt fiasco notwithstanding). Relieved as I am to be taking a step back – though perhaps not as relieved as my tutors – I will miss working with them next term.

We leave the role in the supremely capable hands of Phoebe and Laurence ('Phlaurence' hereafter). I cannot wait to see where they take it. Far from 'thankless', I hope they find the job to be – as I have – one of the most rewarding experiences of their university careers to date.

**Selina Yu Chen**  
Corpus Christi College



Late night walks around Oxford feel increasingly different the more I've worked on *Cherwell*. Michaelmas of fresher's year, I'd look up at the dreaming spires with a love more informed by novels and myths than by reality. But now, memories linger around each corner and knowledge curls around each building. They greet me on my walks.

Passing by Wellington Square, I recall the first time I believed I'd witness death: A police van advancing towards students sitting on Little Clarendon Road. I wasn't sure if I was going to cry out or vomit or – the van stopped centimetres before protesters' bodies. I exhaled a choked breath, reported what I saw to my editors, and etched the moment into my memory.

Worcester Street, St Michael's Street, Radcliffe Square... Tidbits of information tug at my sleeves, beckoning me to remember the scandals I've learned during my many terms on News. It is the nature of this section that we uncover the hidden face of our lofty institutions. Some nights, walking is heavy.

But scandals could not have been reported without the courage of sources who dare to speak out – the individuals, JCRs, and societies who stand up for what is right.

## Cherwell Archives 1993:



While we may have all heard one "when we were at Westminster togethaah's" too many, most haven't gone as far as Wadhams JCR, attempting to ban public school students altogether in 1993.

This move was relatively reasonably criticised by Brasenose, and perhaps overcorrected by Worcester, who passed a motion decreeing all students should come from public schools.

The phrase "looney left" is used frequently by non-Cherwell writers to describe Wadhams across the 93/94 academic year. I would like to hope these students opted for a thesaurus rather than JCR meeting minutes at some point, however, looking at the wit and vocabulary of current political commentary, I can only presume they did not.

by Emily Henson

## PROFILES

“Being at Oxford was a double-edged sword.”

*Cherwell* spoke to the award-winning author and St Anne’s alumna, **Samantha Shannon**

By CHARLIE STEVENS

**S**amantha Shannon is a New York Times and Sunday Times bestselling author, and an alumna of St Anne’s College, Oxford. She is the author of two ongoing fantasy series: *The Roots of Chaos*, and *The Bone Season*, which includes five novels with the latest being *The Dark Mirror*. Her debut novel, *The Bone Season* (2013), was first published just after she finished studying at Oxford at just 21 years old, and its ten year anniversary was celebrated in 2023.

The novel, set in a dystopian fantasy world in the year 2059, follows 19 year old Paige Mahoney – a dreamwalker, a powerful kind of clairvoyant, whose ability is punishable by death. A large part of the novel takes place in Oxford, reflecting Shannon’s time as a student at the University while she was writing the first book. *Cherwell* spoke with her to discuss these influences, as well as the release of *The Dark Mirror*.

**Cherwell:** How are you feeling about being over halfway through *The Bone Season*? Are you looking forward to wrapping everything up, or is it going to be hard to leave your protagonist, Paige Mahoney, and her world behind?

**Shannon:** I have mixed feelings. Part of me does look forward to writing the final book, because I’m excited to show readers how all the threads come together, but I’m also dreading the prospect of leaving the series behind. I’ve been working on this story since I was 19, and it’s been a mainstay in my life ever since; no matter what else I write, I’ve always had the reassurance of knowing I can go to *The Bone Season* series. I don’t think I’ll ever really leave it behind – I love the characters and the story too much. Even after I’ve finished the main series, I’ll find a way to keep playing in that world.

**Cherwell:** Have you found yourself wanting to deviate from the original outline of the seven books, or has the majority of the plot stayed the same since you initially planned it?

**Shannon:** The majority of the plot has stayed

the same, aside from a significant thread I decided to cut from *The Dark Mirror*, which didn’t end up suiting the person Paige has become. Last year I went back and revised the first four books in the series, creating the *Author’s Preferred Texts*, but that was more about the writing style than it was about the story.

**Cherwell:** Your writing covers a lot of different styles, including a unique blend of genres just within *The Bone Season*. Could you tell us more about how you developed that approach?

**Shannon:** I think there are two basic ways of writing a long series. You either use a repeating structure, so readers know roughly what to expect from each book – that can be fun and comforting – or you shake it up to keep things fresh and interesting. I chose the second option. Each book has its own distinct flavour and aesthetic – the first is a jailbreak in Oxford, the second is a murder mystery in London, the third is a heist across multiple cities, and so on. This approach makes it difficult for readers to predict what will happen in each instalment. My mantra with the series is ‘don’t be afraid to take big risks’ and so far, I’ve stuck to it.

**Cherwell:** One of the interesting things about *The Mask Falling*, the fourth book in *The Bone Season*, was the exploration of the French language in the context of Scion, the oppressive empire in the series. With the setting of Italy being key to *The Dark Mirror*, have you taken a similar approach with Italian? How have you found working with these different languages while building an alternate world?

**Shannon:** I didn’t take the same approach to Italian because Italy isn’t part of the Republic of Scion, the empire that Paige is trying to defeat. The reason I tweaked French specifically was because Scion, despite being oppressive in other ways, is not a patriarchy; therefore, certain rules of the French language, such as the masculine gender always prevailing over the feminine, simply didn’t make sense in that context. The Italian in the book, on the other hand, is true to the present day. You’ll also see some Neapolitan and Venetian.



**Cherwell:** Another interesting aspect of the series as a whole is that it takes a global perspective on the dystopian genre, rather than focusing only on one country. What were your motivations for taking this approach, and what are the rewards and challenges this angle brings?

**Shannon:** As you say, dystopian fiction is often focused on one place, whether that’s a city or a community. It can be an effective way to explore a suffocating, tightly controlled environment. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is set entirely in London; most of the *Divergent* trilogy takes place in Chicago. But I was fascinated by the idea of showing a dystopia from both the inside and the outside, contrasting it with the rest of the world. When I read *The Hunger Games*, I was always wondering what other countries were doing while Panem sacrifices its children. Are they watching in horror? Do they have their own copycat versions of the *Hunger Games*? Do they even exist any longer, or is Panem the last civilisation left on Earth? With *The Bone Season*, I wanted to answer those burning questions that might occur to a reader. I show the capital of Scion, but also other cities and countries it controls, as well as those that lie beyond its

influence. Paige herself was also born outside Scion, in a country Scion later conquered, and remembers what it was like to be a ‘free-worlder’ before she was forced to move to London. *The Dark Mirror* is the first book in the series to step outside the empire.

**Cherwell:** Fortune-telling, especially tarot cards, play a significant role in the series, and they also seem to be gaining popularity among Gen Z and Millennials. Do you have any personal experience of these practices, and has it influenced your inclusion of them in your writing?

**Shannon:** I actually never had my cards read until last year, so I can’t say that personal experience went into its inclusion in *The Bone Season* – I just loved the idea of using divination and fortune telling as the basis of a magic system. Even though I’m not generally superstitious, I was fearful of getting a ‘bad’ spread and having it play on my mind. Now I’ve had a reading, I can see why it’s so popular, as I found it a useful tool for self-reflection.

**Cherwell:** Readers might come to your work with an expectation of LGBTQIA+ characters, especially after the success of *The Roots of Chaos* series. How have you found including LGBTQIA+



characters in *The Bone Season* in comparison?

**Shannon:** *The Bone Season* series is centred on a relationship between a man and a woman, so I think some people miss the queerness at first, but it does have a lot of LGBTQIA+ representation. The Republic of Scion is a queernorm society, and several of the main and secondary characters are queer, including Nick, Arcturus, and Maria. While the *Roots of Chaos* books are also queernorm to a degree, they do touch on what I might call structural homophobia, while *The Bone Season* doesn't.

**Cherwell:** How did your experience as a student in Oxford shape your ideas for the first book in the series?

**Shannon:** Oxford was a double-edged sword for me. I'm so grateful for the opportunities I had there, but I felt overwhelmed, racked by imposter syndrome, and generally out of my depth in the bubble. It didn't help that I had undiagnosed anxiety. It's become a source of regret in the twelve years since I graduated. I often wish I could repeat my degree in a better mindset, perhaps after taking a gap year, as I know I would have enjoyed it far more if I hadn't been so burned out from my A-Levels.

I have such a hunger for knowledge these days, and I'm far more confident and comfortable in my own skin. In hindsight, I needed a breather from academia before I dived into the pressure cooker.

**Cherwell:** What were your favourite parts of being a student in Oxford? Are there any particular shops, cafes, restaurants etc. that you'd recommend to current students?

**Shannon:** I didn't go to Magdalen, but I've always loved that college, which is why I set most of *The Bone Season* there. It's so beautiful – I always visit when I'm in Oxford. I was a Stanner, so my usual student haunt was St Anne's Coffee Shop, but I loved Manos in Jericho for a Greek takeaway, and I remain a big fan of Queen's Lane Coffee House for slap-up brunch. Finally, the milkshakes at Moo Moos in the Covered Market always hit the spot. I'm so glad all these places are still going strong.

*The Dark Mirror* by Samantha Shannon is out now, published by Bloomsbury on 25th February 2025.

[Read the full article at cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org)  
Image Credit: Samantha Shannon

## Oxford spotlight: Ever wondered about the man singing on Cornmarket? Meet Richard.

*A staple of Cornmarket Street, Richard spoke with Sydney Walter about unconventional life paths, magic mushrooms, and daily routines*

CW: Substance abuse

**Y**ou may not know him by name, but you've definitely heard him. If you picture the Wasabi on Cornmarket street, what may also come to mind is a man in front with a microphone and a speaker. On most days, you can find him with a black speaker and a microphone playing karaoke backing vocals to which he sings along with his whole body. People have variously described Richard's singing as "punk", "hysteria", or "literally screaming", none of which are necessarily meant to be malicious descriptions. There is admiration when people speak about Richard – his presence is iconic.

I went up to Richard one day after he finished a rendition of Amy Winehouse's 'Valerie' and asked if I could interview him. Even though he agreed to an interview, he didn't give me a place or time until the day of. We ended up meeting in Common Ground at 11.30am, and he sat on an orange sofa closest to the door.

Thirty minutes into our conversation, Richard leant forward to the table in between us, grabbed his green tea and let out a heavy sigh. He'd just finished telling me how he arrived in Oxford in late 2020, which is also when he started busking.

When COVID-19 first hit, divorced from his wife and without any reason to anchor himself in one place, he was out traveling. He rushed back to the Cotswolds to see his ex-wife and kids "just in case we all died... but we didn't". During his time in the Cotswolds he found no sense of community, so Richard moved to Oxford to be around people who were more his "spiritual age". Before the pandemic, Richard had managed bars and restaurants, so once he was in Oxford, he went for a couple interviews to try and get back into the motions of life. However, when the interviewer would ask if he really wanted the job, he would grit his teeth: "I would say 'yeah, yeah of course', but in my head I was thinking nooooo."

Richard partly aligned himself with the idea of 'punk'. He told me that "proper punks are real lunatics" in reference to a street fight he once had with a 'proper punk' in Florence. While he did not self-describe as a "lunatic", he did describe himself as a "nutcase", but one with drive and passion. No matter how unconventional his life path, it is one that Richard took ownership over. Throughout our conversation, his sense of ownership became apparent through the various interjections he made of his theories on life. Take theory one, which he told me after describing his aversion to working in restaurants again:

*Richard's theory of life #1: You're not really required to do any work. We've got enough humans doing work all the time for existence to continue perfectly adequately for everyone's needs. So there really is no requirement for everyone to work all the time. If you're out of work, there's no guilt associated with it.*

Not wanting to work in hospitality, and not knowing entirely what to do, Richard lived in Oxford at the backpackers hostel by the train station, and did, in his words, "nothing". This nothingness consisted of sleeping, going to coffee shops, exercising and meditating, "mainly to block out the voices in my head saying, 'What are you doing, you lazy bum?'"

At the backpackers hostel, he met a man who, for anonymity purposes, we'll call Danny. Danny was busking and told Richard that if he liked singing, he should try busking too. Richard told Danny off: "I was like, 'Man, fuck you. Like, you're a bum. You stay in a fucking hostel."

You got no fucking money, you don't have a fucking house. Like, you know, you're drifting around and you're, like, kind of depressed.' He's like, 'Yeah, but I got issues.' I mean, he was telling me to do what he was doing! Man, it's fucking insanity. He's like, 'Fuck you, man, my life's great'. And I'm like, 'Yeah bullshit, your life's great, you're just lying to yourself [sic].'"

Richard thought about it: he did like singing. At his third university, Richard had run two small record labels but felt that to be a singer, you really had to commit. "I guess I started to think about, yeah, you know, busking was something that possibly I could do, and then I started to think about how to do it, and then there was a fear aspect to actually being able to do it."

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



# Advertorial: In Conversation with Giles Jackson, founder of Liberation Kilts

By Billy Jeffs

**Cherwell:** Can you tell us a bit about yourself, and the story of how Liberation Kilts came about?

**Jackson:** I'm a professor by trade. I teach courses in sustainable business strategy and my dissertation, which I completed a very long time ago, was in the area of sustainable development – that was back in the early 1990s. I started to get involved outside my university in various campaigns, including with a group called Chesapeake Climate Action Network. It's a Mid-Atlantic organisation, a really well-run organisation. Back in 2009, I started to get involved in some of their direct actions on climate change issues, and just for the hell of it, decided to put on a kilt to one of these marches – I have some Scottish ancestry. So I put on a kilt and showed up at this demonstration. A Scotsman recognised me. He was also wearing a kilt and tapped me on the shoulder; we started talking about the power of tartan, its symbolism, the history of tartan, and we had this random idea that we could create a tartan for the climate movement, which seemed very fragmented. You had so many different campaign organisations, but no unified identity, no unified message.

That's what really got the ball rolling, this idea of a 'climate change tartan'. Historically tartans were made using whatever local ingredients were available for dyeing wool, because it was before synthetic dyes were invented. I took it in a slightly different direction with more intentional, deliberate designs, using colours and lines to represent ideas. So what came to be known as the Keeling Tartan symbolises the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy – I was looking for the right person to name the tartan after, and struck upon Charles Keeling, without whom we wouldn't know about CO<sub>2</sub> rising in the atmosphere. He was the one back in the fifties who really designed the technology for measuring atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. So I contacted his widow and she gave us permission to use her husband's name for the tartan.

Everything really began to flourish from the Keeling Tartan. At that point I began to think about, well, this is kind of an interesting idea: using tartans as a way of symbolising the hopes and fears of different social causes. Perhaps we could take that same logic and apply it to some other causes that we're concerned about. At the time, one of the metaphors that was really playing in my head was from one of the

first movies that really made an impression on me, Star Wars. In that movie there's the scene of the trash compactor in the Death Star where you have Han Solo, Leia, Chewbacca and Luke Skywalker in this space with these walls closing in, and they've got a time limit where they have to figure things out, rust one another, and find a solution. I've always thought of that as a good metaphor for the place we're in with the walls enclosing, with climate change being one of them, as well as biodiversity loss and impending ecosystem collapse. On the other side, I see the walls as being oppressive authoritarianism, tyranny, autocracy; the march of this pernicious movement across the globe.

Here, we're sort of trapped: we're finding our physical freedoms are being limited, but also our psychological ones, our sense of agency and our sense of future possibilities closing in. So I think when you peel away all the tartans and everything else, it's really driven by this sense of constraint, the sense of entrapment. And unfortunately now we have these monsters lurking in the waters – of disinformation, and to put it bluntly, fascism – and other movements which are undermining our ability to deal with these crises that we commonly face.

**Cherwell:** You've spoken about how that ethos exists inside the design of the kilts themselves, but beyond that, how do you infuse that ethos into all the business practices of Liberation Kilts?

**Jackson:** I would say that our role model is definitely Patagonia, the iconic outdoor brand, because Yvon Chouinard has really gone to great lengths to do things right. I've always sort of held them up as the gold standard. If you look at the t-shirt collection, for example, we branched out beyond tartans to do other things that are a little bit more accessible, a little bit more affordable, and fun. For example, in the case of our Ben Nevis collection – the barmy collection of t-shirts featuring the Kilted skeleton – those t-shirts are all OEKO-TEX certified organic. They're also made in a Fair Wear certified factory, which is a UK NGO which actually conducts audits of these factories. They're printed on demand, which means you don't have a lot of unsold inventory, which is the huge problem in the fashion industry: they try to predict demand, they print to lower the unit costs, they print massive amounts of merchandise which they then either end up incinerating or sending to landfill. So printing on demand eliminates that problem. We

also use biodegradable inks. On the economic side, a portion of the proceeds go to a student run project called the Rebel Tartan Project, which you may have seen on our website. This is something that I started with Juliana Sissons, who's a lecturer in the UK at Nottingham Trent University, but she lectures all over the country. We began this project where students from fashion and design programmes use the tartans as a springboard for their own creative explorations into issues. From 2015, for the first five years, it was all around human trafficking because I had just registered the Blue Heart Tartan, which symbolises the collective heartbeat of victims of human trafficking. Groups of students from various universities around the UK basically created their own portfolios, did their own prints, their own knits, their own weaves, and did their own research in local cities where they lived around the issue of trafficking and how it was impacting the UK. So to answer your question, I've been striving to sort of tick the box ecologically, tick the box socially, and tick the box economically; the triple bottom line, you could call it.

**Cherwell:** In seeking to meet those goals, what's the biggest challenge you've faced since you've set up the company?

**Jackson:** The biggest challenge really has been financing it, because up until now, really, it's all been pretty much self-financed. I was able to get one seed investor, who is the director of Luton Town Football Club. That helped me tremendously, because there are a lot of moving parts and it takes investment. To be honest, our priority for the first few years was not doing anything commercial. It was all artistic. So the projects with the students, all the other creative projects with the tartans, were all done with the purpose of fleshing out the ethos and building a creative portfolio. It's only really in the last year that we've started to focus much more on the commercial side to create a sustainable business model. I'm not going to lie, it's been tough at times keeping all of these things going, but I'm excited about the fact that we are about to launch and we do have some exciting products, which I hope will interest students and get the word out.

**Cherwell:** You've told us about the t-shirts – for our readers, can you tell us some more products that maybe a student audience would be interested in, at their price range?

**Jackson:** There's two sets of t-shirt collections.



First is the Ben Nevis collection; the other one is the Flower Power Collection.

The Flower Power Collection is, at a time of rising illiberalism, a way of giving some encouragement and hope to people. Historically the thistle was a symbol of resilience, so we produced this beautiful thistle design with the Latin inscription 'floreas si supersis', which means 'if you can survive, you can thrive'. Beyond the T-shirts, we are also doing greeting cards. The greeting cards also feature the Ben Nevis collection, except with captions on them. These are made from 100% recycled cellulose and again, water-based inks, and packaged in biodegradable sleeves when they're shipped. So that's an affordable item and they're blank inside, so you can use them for whatever purpose you want.

For the greeting cards we also have the Flower Power Collection, which features the thistle and the Latin inscription. The other products which I'm excited about are jigsaw puzzles, which tell the story of the founding of the company in the 1700s by our muse, Loftus McLeod of Skye. Part of the motivation here is to get people together, to talk about issues, but to have fun, and puzzles are a very social activity. I joke in our product page that puzzles are a cunning way of getting humans together in the same room for the purposes of what anthropologists call 'social bonding'. In our age of atomization and spending seven hours a day on our digital devices, I think there's this yearning to reconnect with one another and to enjoy one another's company. This provides a way to do just that. We have six different puzzles in the collection which go up to a thousand pieces, and they are printed in the UK.

**Cherwell:** If there's a student reading this, how can they support Liberation Kilts outside of just buying your products? Do you have any ongoing projects that are engaging with students around the UK?

**Jackson:** First of all, I would love to get some writers, I haven't really had time to do that myself. Also, I'm really looking for younger people to give them a voice or a platform to express their views. I'm perfectly willing to entertain opposing points of view too, but we'd have to put the opposing points of view together on the same article. But I am looking for people who would enjoy exploring the issues relating to all the things that we are confronting with the company through our various products: social, environmental, economic issues. So that's one way to engage.

The other way to engage is getting involved in some way with the Rebel Tartan project. It's this arts project which has been around now for 10 years and involves students not just in the UK but also in Japan, in India at Pearl Academy, and at Donghua University in China – those are the main institutions. So if students who are interested in doing something really creative, then we could create a local chapter, and provide materials, support, and some funding for students to do something creative. Ultimately, what I really would love to do, because I'm a great proponent of debating and I know that Oxford has a tremendous history with the debating society and everything else, I would love to sponsor debates if that ever becomes possible.

I'm also looking for brand ambassadors who would be interested in wearing kilts. I have some kilts that I'd be willing to loan out to students who might want to wear them with a t-shirt and help spread the word in a kind of organic, fun way.



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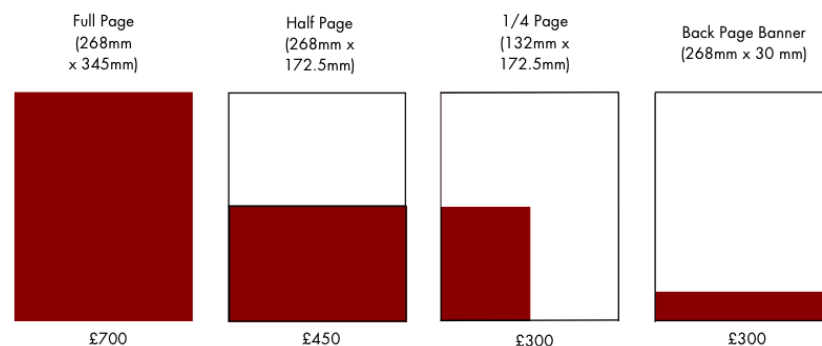


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## Review: *Julie* – ‘Free shots and immersive theatre’

# STAGE

With this adaptation, Labyrinth Productions thrusts the audience into the remnants of a drunk, coked-up house party

By ADAM SAXON



My ticket to see *Julie* resembled an invite to a birthday party, promising a live DJ and that I would be greeted by ‘partygoers’ upon entry to the Pilch. This was the first play I’ve ever been to where I was offered a ‘free shot’ on entry (I politely declined). Combined with the muted thumping of the DJ set spilling out of the Pilch, it added to the feeling of arriving at a lively house party.

I was a few minutes early to the show and one of the first people to enter. I was greeted by a stage flanked by a dance floor. Some of the cast members were eagerly getting into the DJ set, moving between the stage and the dance floor, clearly acting out the drunken latter stages of a house party. They encouraged me to get involved, dance, and generally enjoy myself.

As this pre-show ‘party’ continued and more guests arrived, I began to lose track of which dancers were cast members and which were people here to see the show; the cast members glided effortlessly from group to group, remaining in character, asking people to dance with them, and repeating the question: have you seen Julie? – before drifting back over to the alcohol cupboard to grab another drink.

Of course, generating an exciting atmosphere in such a situation relies on the audience being willing to get involved, though a strong cast would be expected to create an atmosphere in which being immersed feels like the default. They did this well, encouraging those who remained seated to come and dance, get involved and loosen up. Given this was opening night, too, I am sure they will develop new tricks to build the atmosphere as the week goes on. Overall it was a fun idea, and a novel approach that tests the boundaries of student theatre. *Julie*, though, is not for the faint of heart. Or the socially awkward.

The play itself does, admittedly, fall flat in some respects. The dialogue takes a while to get going, and while the most emotional scenes are delivered with passion and gusto, unfortunately some



stretches of the play feel a tad dragged out. Much of this, though, probably falls at the feet of the writing of the play, an adaptation of Strindberg’s classic *Miss Julie*, and are complaints that have been levelled elsewhere.

The lively pre-play atmosphere is also absent most of the way through, as much of the action takes place away from the main party and the music becomes muffled. Our one return to the lively houseparty, despite being well choreographed, does feel a tad random and out of place in the context of the story. Where it is used though, the music is used well; when it finally turns off, the silence we experience is an eerie reminder of the intimacy of the situation.

What Rosie Morgan-Males’ interpretation of Stenham’s play does do excellently though is use

the Pilch’s space. We remain immersed in the party throughout, despite feeling like unwelcome onlookers on a private affair, via the ensemble’s occasional off-stage hysterics, which serve well to remind us of the secretive nature of the action we are looking in on. Further to this, the audience being on all sides means that Julie (Catherine Claire), Jean (Rufus Shutter), and Kristina (Hafeja Khanam) face an uphill battle to ensure that all onlookers get a true sense of what our characters are going through. They do well, constantly turning to face different corners of the audience. The Pilch is a perfect venue for such a play so reliant on feeling close to the characters and their emotions.

Special commendations must go to Khanam, who steals the show in her eviscerating monologue towards the end of the play. She captures

excellently the frustration of the one character we feel some sympathy towards by the end of the night’s events. The chemistry between the characters throughout the play is also strong: Claire and Shutter, as the only two people present for most of the play, are convincing in their execution of the descent of their relationship into toxicity.

The play is a chaotic watch, too. Possibly in a similar vein to *Saltburn*, Julie plays on the stereotypes of the excesses of the upper classes, with its fair share of out of touch comments and jaw dropping scenes (don’t ask me what happens to Julie’s bird). All in all, *Julie* is fun and unique, and the take on Polly Stenham’s play provides an atmosphere that is a blast if you are willing to make the most of it.

Image Credit: Freddie Houlahan

## Public persecution and propagandist plays

By NANCY GITTUS

It would appear that nothing is immune to propaganda, not even your favourite productions. Drama can be easily manipulated to hint at messages that their writers never intended

The play as propaganda has a long history. From the regime-affirming productions of Hieron, tyrant King of Syracuse, to Lucy Prebble’s play *The Effect*, we can understand that theatre has consistently been used throughout history to promote ideologies and propound beliefs. In the case of Hieron, he was attempting to promote cultural unity over conquered peoples. Prebble, somewhat less tyrannically, aimed to provoke thought over medical ethics. However, from these examples a question immediately arises: what exactly defines a play as a piece of propaganda?

The term propaganda often evokes connotations of tyrannical government, press censorship and blatant political messaging. These ideas are

clearly represented in some works focused on specific regimes. For example, after Mao’s revolution many propagandist plays were performed, such as *The White-Haired Girl*, which criticised exploitative landlord classes, and *Dragon Beard Ditch* in which communists save the characters from neglectful and corrupt government officials. However, this kind of propaganda was rarely effective. The idealisation of the communist government was immediately recognised as just that, an idealisation, unrelated to and unappreciative of the real problems people faced.

The actual definition of propaganda according to Oxford Languages is “information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view”. This defini-

tion complicates matters somewhat. Take Nazi Germany’s emphasis on staging the German ‘greats’. Repeat performances of Kleist’s *Prince of Homburg*, Beethoven’s *Egmont* and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* filled stages across the Third Reich. However, these plays and operas are not in themselves ‘biased’ or ‘misleading’ nor do they promote the Nazi ‘political cause’. Could the case therefore be made that this was not propaganda? Probably, but perhaps not very well. The key lies in the term ‘repeat’. The constant staging of the classics of German theatre, and only German theatre, meant there was an emphasis being placed on the ‘greatness’ and ‘superiority’ of German culture throughout history.

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



# FILM AND TV

# REVIEW: A REAL PAIN

By JANIK PEETERS

## Editor's Picks

### IN THEATRES



#### I'M STILL HERE

Based on Marcelo Rubens Paiva's 2015 memoir of the same name, Walter Salles latest film follows the activist Eunice Paiva as she copes with the disappearance of her husband.

### TO STREAM



#### 1923

Taylor Sheridan's sequel to 1883, starring Helen Mirran and Harrison Ford, follows the the Dutton family's struggle through Prohibition, drought and the Depression.

Image Credits:  
[I'm Still Here] - Harald Krichel / CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons  
[1923] - Harald Krichel / CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

It doesn't take much to make the premise of Jesse Eisenberg's *A Real Pain* sound like a very standard road trip movie indeed.

Two cousins, Daniel (Jesse Eisenberg) and Benji Kaplan (Kieran Culkin), fly from New York to Poland to reconnect with their family's Jewish roots, and maybe rekindle their childhood friendship along the way.

Of course, it isn't that simple. *A Real Pain* takes the path less-travelled among its road-trip-drama compatriots, eschewing the clear personal growth of leads in films like *Green Book* to leave us arriving somewhere a little uneasy, never quite reaching that moment of glorious freedom we all long for from films like these.

The reason for that is the relationship Eisenberg and Culkin so powerfully build up, from the film's opening seconds. While Benji people-watches at the airport, Daniel adds voicemail after voicemail to his cousin's inbox (which fills up completely during the course of the film), before running into him at the gate in a moment of complete bafflement.

Eisenberg adds a wonderfully-realised physicality to Daniel's social awkwardness, a shuffling, asymmetric walk that leaves him always hunched inwards, and which draws a stark contrast to Benji's exuberance, always just a little too close to overwhelming loudness for Daniel, or us, to feel comfortable around him.

The cousins' relationship continues throughout the film in an ebb-and-flow pattern of cringy

unease and deep kinship. Part of the brilliance of Eisenberg's writing is a refusal to placate the cousins' profound differences in character.

Eisenberg (in his writer hat) has delivered one of the signature features of the road trip film with exceptional ease: the odd couple, the pair who the audience longs to see learn from each other, but who would never allow themselves to do so if they weren't locked in a car (or coach, or train) together for weeks on end.

We see it when Daniel winces at Benji's insensitivity around Elogé, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and part of the heritage tour group they'll be joining to visit historic Jewish sites across Poland.

We see it when Benji, facing the Warsaw Uprising Monument on their tour of the city, convinces his travel companions to join him in a reenactment, and Daniel is left taking pictures on each of the many phones he's been handed, too hesitant to join in himself.

It's a funny, light-hearted moment, and this disconnect between Daniel and Benji is at the heart of much of the film's comedy. Here, *A Real Pain* is taking advantage of integral elements of the road trip: the constant travel, the defined stops, the distance from home; they combine to create the perfect atmosphere for short bursts of comedy.

The turbulent emotional landscape of the Holocaust tour adds to this instability of context. The protagonists' dislocation allows Daniel to

act in ways he never would in New York. Time and again Benji is able to talk him into wild, crazy behaviour: smoking weed on a hotel rooftop; fare dodging on a train back to Lublin after they miss their stop. No need to worry about consequences if you're never going back, after all.

But Eisenberg doesn't let that freedom stop us seeing the ways this disconnect drags both Daniel and Benji down. Those highs are always followed by a comedown, and over the course of the film what we see is not the slow growth of a connection between two people who weren't expecting it, but the attempts of two men to return to a past they've already lost.

Benji remains infuriatingly capable of souring the mood of the whole group just as quickly as he can inspire them to joyous laughter; Daniel, though he comes out of his shell somewhat in revealing the toll his relationship with Benji takes on him at dinner one night, is unable to commit to meeting his cousin on his terms, outside his life in New York.

Both of them are unable to rid themselves of the baggage of their past. The film's closing shots are a mirror of its opening, Benji sitting alone at the airport, looking out for 'the weirdest people' again.

As the title card appears on the right side of his face, rather than the left, we are forced to confront the fact that he and Daniel are going to continue to be *A Real Pain* to one another for many years yet.

# Oxford's Short Film Festival, in conversation

By LARA MACHADO

**R**ichard Kuehl and Molly Scales, the director and assistant director of the Oxford University Short Film Festival spoke to Cherwell about student films, their festival and why you should submit a film or at least come along to watch them.

**Cherwell:** For those who don't know, what is OUSFF and how did it start?

**Richard:** OUSFF is a student organised and run film festival that takes place once a year here at the University of Oxford. We screen student short films to members of the university and the general public. The festival was founded two years ago as an initiative by the Oxford University Filmmaking Foundation to give budding Oxford filmmakers a venue to screen and promote their work and meet other people who share their passion for filmmaking.

**Cherwell:** Why do you think it's important to have student-led short film festivals?

**Molly:** Getting into film is daunting, even in student-scenes... But it's a little less daunting to be able to submit your work to your peers (and fellow filmmakers). For that reason, I really believe in student film festivals being student-led: those submitting can rest easy in the knowledge that yes, they are being judged, but they are being judged by their peers, who share the same values (and are well aware of the challenges!) of student film. The flip side is that it's important to have student-led short film festivals for the judges', or rather the festival's, sake: allowing students to curate the

films shown at festivals means that we can get a selection of shorts which, hopefully, represent specifically student short-filmmaking.

**Cherwell:** Why would you encourage students to submit their films?

**Richard:** I believe the festival is an incredible opportunity for young filmmakers to find not only an audience who appreciates their work but also a space for them to meet other creatives and exchange ideas. Submitting their films will also give filmmakers critical feedback on their work and a way of potentially improving their craft.

**Cherwell:** How would you describe the film-scene at Oxford?

**Molly:** Bustling! As last year's OUSFF demonstrates, there's masses of talent in Oxford's student film-scene. What it also demonstrates, to my mind, is the wide-ranging nature of that talent: OUSFF award-winners like *Nighty Night*, *Dear, Je Veux Danser*, and *BNOC* couldn't be more different, but they all have a place (and found the time and funding amidst busy degrees!) in the Oxford film-scene.

**Cherwell:** The festival also accepts films from other UK universities as well as internationally. What do you think are the benefits of mixing films made in different languages, with different filmmaking traditions and different levels of experience?

**Richard:** I believe in variety and showcasing how film can be used in all kinds of ways. This is what we are trying to do at this year's festival. Although Oxford productions will obviously remain our focus I believe it is important to highlight the fact that cinema is a language that

has no borders and is universal.

**Cherwell:** Finally, what are some short films that you find inspiring and might recommend to budding filmmakers?

**Molly:** Short films get to be bamboozling, even alienating, without the same risk of their viewer turning off – after all, they're likely already most of the way through your piece. On that theme of weird, I've been really enjoying two of David Lynch's short films (of wildly different natures, but joined in their bizariness), *The Cowboy and the Frenchman* and *The Alphabet*. Some of my other personal favourites

include Sophia Coppola's *Lick the Star* (1998), Hayao Miyazaki's *Yuki's Sun* (1972), and Jan Švankmajer's surreal *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1983). Changing tack completely, another great source of inspiration is to look to other budding short-filmmakers. The Iris Prize always has some excellent submissions: *Sister Wives* (2024) was an Iris-nominee, and well worth a watch.

*This interview was edited for clarity.  
Read the full interview on [cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org).  
Image Credit: Sophie Maris via Oxford University Short Film Festival*



# The Headington Shark and the world's strangest statues

# ART

*Atticus Evans-Lombe asks what legacy will be left by our most unusual artistic monuments, from Oxford and beyond*

It's gone. He has been taken." These words may sound familiar to aficionados of the Liam Neeson *Taken* film series, which features the actor demolishing a sequence of criminals across three separate movies. Alas, they in fact do not belong to Neeson's lethal protagonist Bryan Mills, but a humble resident in the town of Mostar in Bosnia. The abducted in this case was not some president's daughter but it was still very Hollywood: Bruce Lee had disappeared. Not the legendary actor himself – he unfortunately passed away back in 1973 – but a life-sized bronze statue of the kung-fu icon.

Twenty years ago, in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars, the statue was set up by the Mostar Youth Movement as a symbol of friendship and unity. The logic of using Lee, the star of several extremely violent action films, as an emblem of peace was not questioned by locals: "One thing we all have in common is Bruce Lee." Earlier this year the effigy was tragically kidnapped, the bronze likely melted down for scrap. The mystery had been solved, but the question of how the star made it all the way to Southern Bosnia in the first place remained. Monuments have been around as long as humanity itself: the Moai of Easter Island, the pyramids of Giza: these sites astonish as reminders of the ancient world. Yet if a mighty pharaoh of yore was able to witness the modern concept of a monument, he would likely leave more in confusion than in awe. What would he make, of Cesar Baldaccini's *Giant Thumb*, a 12-metre monolith in the centre of Paris? Several questions beg to be asked.



What is our generation leaving as a monument to posterity? What will distant generations make of the giant stainless-steel fork on the banks of Lake Geneva? Monuments, like all art forms, have long been fascinated by the absurd and the bizarre. The Czech artist David Cerny has made a life in this field, and Prague is littered with the extraordinary products of his mind: Sigmund Freud hanging from one hand atop a busy street; an enormous, mechanical London bus doing endless press-ups (to celebrate the

2012 Olympics).

In many ways it is perhaps the total incongruousness of such commemoration that deserves to be celebrated. Take the case of Sergei Bodrov Jr. Star of the beloved *Brother* film series, he was tragically killed in an avalanche in 2002, at the age of just 30. While he remains somewhat of an icon in his home country, it would seem unlikely that almost anyone across the world who is not a fan of Slavic gangster films has even heard of him. And yet, just two years ago, the Central Af-

rican country of Cameroon minted a silver 500 franc coin in his honour. If anyone can explain what led this Russian actor to become so deeply embedded in the national consciousness of a sub-Saharan principality, I am all ears.

It is tempting to question what such monuments can tell us about ourselves and our modern societies. When Bristol's statue of the slave trader Edward Colston was torn down in June 2020, the very concept of history and the way we view it in Britain came under serious interrogation. What do these bizarre monuments have to say for themselves? Will Baldaccini's *Giant Thumb* or the *Headington Shark* come to symbolise the moral depravity of modern life? Or will they become pagan idols, venerated in sacrificial rituals by the cults of the future?

These are fascinating questions. But maybe we should simply appreciate these things for what they are, symbols of the beautiful randomness of life. Indeed, given the current war in the arts world over the ever-expanding role of AI, we must make sure we do not take the very human nature of these monuments for granted. If you were to plug in a request for ideas for a symbol of Balkan unity into the computer, it seems impossible that Lee would come out. Thank goodness no one tried, it was the unique choice of Lee that brought so many across the world together, to witness him in Mostar until his tragic abduction. Bruce, wherever you've gone, you'll be missed.

*Image Credit: Balon Greyjoy/CC0 1.0 Universal via Wikipedia Commons*

## ARTS CALENDAR

# What's On.

### STAGE

**King Lear - Root Ginger Productions (Keble O'Reilly, 5th-8th March)**

Desperate for your theatrical dose of manipulation, cruelty and delirium this term? Root Ginger Productions is proud to oblige with this new production of Shakespeare's classic tragedy, showing at the Keble O'Reilly soon.

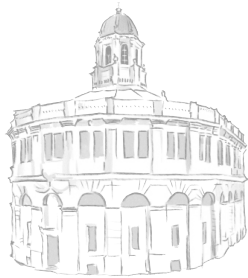
**Pride & Prejudice\* (\*sort of) (Oxford Playhouse, 10th-15th March)**

"It's the 1800s. It's party time. Let the ruthless matchmaking begin! Men, money and microphones will be fought over and the romance stakes couldn't be higher. This multi-award-winning production features a string of pop classics including 'Young Hearts Run Free', 'Will You Love Me Tomorrow' and 'You're So Vain'. A joy for Austen and non-Austen fans alike."

### MUSIC

**Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra: Mendelssohn Violin Concerto (13 March, Sheldonian Theatre)**

"After its pious opening, Mendelssohn's 'Reformation' Symphony explodes into a declaration of faith and equality – an image of the Lutheran Reformation as one of fortitude, industry, democratisation and joy, all of which permeate the composer's best-kept symphonic secret. Before the embracing energy of Mendelssohn's symphony comes the composer's supremely elegant Violin Concerto in the sensitive hands of Antje Weithaas and music by Mendelssohn's beloved Bach."



## Review: The Dark Mirror by Samantha Shannon

By Charlie Stevens

Shannon's *The Dark Mirror* remains just as sinister and intense as the previous books in the series, although its tone is more aligned with its predecessor *The Mask Falling* (2021) than the other instalments. For the first time in 13 years, Paige finds herself outside the Republic of Scion, grappling with both serious trauma and significant memory loss. She continues to learn about the complex web of espionage networks working both for and against the empire, and her journey takes her to Italy, where she reconnects with some familiar faces, and continues the fight against Scion. True to its title, this book forces Paige to reflect on her past and identity, including many things that she would rather keep buried – especially as she faces a formidable opponent who represents the darker side of her potential.

This step into the free world outside the tyrannical Republic of Scion gives Shannon an opportunity to explore one of the hallmarks of the dystopian genre. Outside Scion, the world is much more like our own, with the key differences being that clairvoyance exists (though is not always recognised), and the threat of Scion's empire, as it gradually encroaches on other countries' territories. We follow Paige through multiple cities and countries, providing greater context for the restricted world explored thus far. Seeing the wider world through Paige's fresh perspective calls into question certain things that many of us may not question, such as her confusion as to why people in the free world seem to be addicted to their phones. Broader themes underpinning the series – such as the restricted freedom of movement and information endured by the characters, and the unjust criminalisation of

Paige's sheer existence – also stand out more when juxtaposed with the free world which more closely reflects our own. Shannon harnesses the dystopian elements of Scion more profoundly in her latest book, displaying them sharply. Although the title, *The Dark Mirror*, holds its own significance to the story, it also rings true to the way Shannon's writing acutely reflects the injustices of our own world back to us.

Shannon also uses *The Dark Mirror* as an opportunity to develop supporting characters, largely through their relationships with Paige. I particularly enjoyed the heartfelt development of her connection with Ognena Maria, and the tentative growth of her relationship with Terebell Sheratan as they work towards common goals. Jaxon Hall undoubtedly remains one of the most complex, unscrupulous and unpredictable characters I've ever encountered. Although it's certainly action-packed, *The Dark Mirror* also gives Paige more time for rest, recovery, and rebuilding of trust, in comparison to the preceding novels. This is not unlike *The Dawn Chorus* (2024), a Bone Season novella, which explores Paige and Acturus's relationship in the immediate aftermath of book three – but *The Dark Mirror* does feature Paige's inclination to jump head-first into danger to a greater extent. Perhaps, as the series nears its conclusion, Shannon is choosing to open up space in between the plethora of heists and battles to ensure that readers have a deep connection to and understanding of all the characters. Undoubtedly, this closer familiarity will maximise the devastation of any future twists and losses.

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

# BOOKS

# FASHION

## Oxford Fashion Gala: A sneak peek

By Martha Gathercole

Save the date: 14th May. Designers will be working their magic over the Easter Vac creating garments to adorn models in the Oxford Fashion Gala. *Cherwell* speaks to Iggy Clarke, the president of the Gala, for an inside look on preparations and predictions for what promises to be the unmissable night of Trinity term.

**Cherwell:** Can you tell us what the theme metamorphosis could look like?

**Clarke:** We chose metamorphosis because it offers an exciting range of scope. It can be quite a physical theme, looking at form and shapes, but also offers literary allusions, for example to Ovid or Kafka. I think there'll be lots of natural imagery on the runway, with the idea of metamorphosis into the butterfly. Designs may play with shape and subvert ideas of the basic categories of clothing.

**Cherwell:** What makes this Gala different from a normal high fashion show?

**Clarke:** Unlike in high fashion, all these designers are working independently. The ideas I've seen are so diverse it's impressive. One designer

*“What’s different about the gala is the lack of conformity; you see things you wouldn’t expect”*

has taken inspiration from his studies of the conception of metamorphosis in Chinese literature. Whereas designers of a brand would constantly be in conversation about a fashion line, these students all have different inspirations and backgrounds. What's different about the gala is the lack of conformity – you see things you wouldn't expect. It's also great to celebrate a different side to the students in Oxford. Students can put elements of their studies, be that literature and science, into the designs. It's also a chance to get everyone involved with music, modelling, and designing. Any talent, we're trying to cater for it.

**Cherwell:** Should people who aren't interested in high fashion still come?

**Clarke:** Of course, it's a fantastic event! It will be a lovely summer evening in the Town hall with friends and drinks. We've got music from the Booksellers, a student band.

The runway will also feature brands No Emotions and Minka Dink, and there will be the chance to purchase their clothing afterwards. I like the idea that you can see something on the runway and buy it. It celebrates fashion, both as an art form and as a practicality. This will also promote sustainability, as they are committed to reducing waste and maintaining ethical working conditions. It's like having a mini pop-up in Oxford which is a rare opportunity.

**Cherwell:** What would you say to those who want to get involved?

**Clarke:** I would say go for it! Its not too late to be involved however you can - it'll be fun I promise!

## Blackwell's Short Story Prize

Winner: *The Ghosts She Felt Acutely* by Polina Kim



Artwork by Joe Walford

*This year, with the inaugural Blackwell's Short Story Prize, Cherwell aimed to reconnect with its roots as a literary magazine in the 1920s, when our undergraduate contributors (including Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and W.H. Auden) showcased the best of Oxford's creative talent. In 2025 we received nearly 30 entries: they were all of an exceptionally high standard, which made it very difficult to pick a shortlist, let alone a winner. The winning story, printed below, received this acclaim from the judge, Dr Claire Morgan, Course Director of the MSt Creative Writing at Oxford: “The assured grip on form and tone, combined with an acute eye for detail, swayed me, alongside a wry and self-deprecating sense of humour.”*

Was it after all of substance, she wondered, meandering towards Holywell Street, was it after all of substance: her notion that love inevitably came to inexplicable ends, and people somehow went past her; was she spiteful, or accustomed to finding that her solitude never ended more than temporarily? Come what may, in the winding streets of Oxford, in the comings and goings of tourists whose ghosts she felt acutely, admittedly not at this hour of the night on a Wednesday; only occasional weary professors and overworked students rubbing their eyes flowed around her, here, there, she continued to wonder. His memory lived not wholly, how inadequate, in her, hers she was positive less than that in his mind, after all it was but a brief meeting, covering the edges of her conscious in a way reminiscent of the fog draping across the tower of All Saints Church, which she could see now in her mind, even without turning her head ever so slightly in the direction. Still, what was she contemplating as she looked into Blackwell's store front? What was she trying to remember, her eyes fixed upon the latest release and the newest of the endlessly creative displays, but those numbers in rushed scrawl across a hastily grabbed napkin?

More than the companionship she sought in those elusive digits, the hints of a three, the curly tail of a two, the impossibility of recalling the sequence after a dashed through seven, she hungrily pursued the sentiment in her mind, ruminated if like Proust, all it would take for the memories to return would be a familiar taste, for her the taste of the semi-sweet hot chocolate and the feel of the cardboard takeaway cup before the fogged up window of Jericho Coffee Traders. The moment played in her head, her impatience at the ever ostentatious conversations of the undergraduates, the affected indifference of their older counterparts while name

dropping the latest big names in cinema, art, literature, the grandiose, I'm a big fan but they're somewhat niche, counting down, anticipating the moment when the pink haired barista would turn her way and she could finally take her order, to go. A gust of coolness then, Oxford as ever windy in February, the door swinging open tentatively, she noticed, how could she not, a step in her direction, such a graceful movement yet somehow shy, and then the coat, the coat she saw first, a grey woollen trench, and the tattered copy peeking out of the pocket. If not for that tattered copy, none of this reflection now, but there it was, that pale off-white corner, the faint turquoise of the l and the f, the more assured dark of the a and the y, and then he shifted slightly, and her hopes were confirmed, it was indeed a copy of *Mrs Dalloway*, and how could it not be fate then?

How was it that the quote went? “Absorbing, mysterious, of infinite richness, this life,” she had muttered, and he turned around then, he couldn't not have heard, in the narrow corners of that white High Street building, and gave a private nod directed at her, and asked what it was that filled her with “extraordinary excitement,” and then of course the decision was sealed, to ask what Peter had asked, so quietly, yet so earnestly, the drink was not to go after all. Thursday, four hours into the afternoon, and her day was brightened by the discussion of the great English tragic genius, and woe the bodies taken by the sweep of the tide, Ophelia certainly with her heart break and loss was worthy to be considered, and what of Dazai across the world? Lost in the discussion, with a stranger who was not a stranger so much as unexpectedly a kindred soul, she remembered very little of him, snippets of detail really, the dark brown eyes, the way they matched his coffee, the leather strap of the camera he had bought on a whim outside The Ballroom Emporium, and had she read Susan Sontag, and what was her own “arm of consciousness” and then just as abruptly the awkward apologies of staying until closing time, and the buttoning of her jacket, and the wrapping of her scarf and the frantic grabbing of tissue.

Then, awkward tender silence, the sound of his pen scratching the surface, hers likewise struggling to find grip on that hastily seized tissue, after that exchange, the temporary brush of their hands, what a cliché to call it scalding, and yet, and then the walk back which proved to be so fatal.

If fortune had looked favourably upon her, it seemed she had exhausted fate's patience the moment they exchanged those unwilling parting words, for the sky began to swiftly cause a tantrum, why was it that things in Britain closed at five, an hour was not enough, and

her own, disastrously unsuitable jacket, her own fault for scorning modernity's love for the waterproof really, she vowed never to look down on polyester again. The digits disappeared, or rather came together into an indecipherable mess, and since then it seemed so did her mind-pouring over the pages of her latest legal case, the names blurred into absurdity, the rationale became irrational, or perhaps irrelevant, “what was it all for,” how could it be she had in that brief instant cared about him more than she ever cared for justice? She should not have thought that, she went too far, Sally in the novel was positive, and she was too, “what a lark” indeed to have such feelings for an hour-long encounter.

Clearly this could not be described as more than a destined disaster, a defeated idea, a fiasco, a mocking of the young woman with a hardened heart who somehow gave way to sentiments, beside the novel was not the epitome of happiness either, so how could she expect a meeting that began over a shared love for sadness and tragedy to end in any other way? That novel – a constancy of feelings and sensations, the story unfolding in Clarissa's mind, more than on paper – and what irony for her life to mirror it so closely, beyond fictitious reverie nothing else had transpired, no further developments, chance meetings, engrossing conversations, assuredly solitude remained the fixed option. A role “one must respect”, which previously she had accepted, yet now the notion lodged unpleasantly in her throat, and somewhere in between the third and fourth ribs.

Third, fourth, again those ubiquitous numbers, certainly incorrect, she had never been much of a stickler for Freud's belief of the subconscious, but ought she find a specialist, she was sure somewhere in one of Oxford's winding streets and tucked away suburban areas, there would be a passionate believer claiming to recover the eleven necessary numbers for the small sum of at least a week's worth of rent. Irritated she shook the idea off, glancing up again at the tantalising countdown from fifty one to forty eight, and took a step forward, she had been rooted here long enough, much in the style of Estragon and Vladimir, except she knew not even the name of whom she was waiting for, and with her dim reflection in the storefront, after a brief delay, gracefully, yet shyly, moved another. A dash of grey and a line of brown, and then in the window her own dark silhouette became starker still in the outline of a hesitantly approaching other, and if Clarissa's darkness had been profound, hers abruptly became considerably lighter.

Runner Up: “Letter from the Orient” by Dara Mohd  
Read all shortlisted stories online at [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org)

## Battle of the College Brunch: Brasenose vs St John's

Amandi Li debates the brunch merits of two Oxford college giants

**B**runch is an Oxford institution. It was to my surprise, though, that when chatting about what the best brunch in Oxford was, it was not a unanimous vote for Brasenose College. Instead, when asked about their favorite place to be on a weekend from 11am to midday, some actually answered "John's" without even a hint of hesitation. Are you kidding me? My John's friends were especially keen on ruining my love for my college and invited me to brunch one weekend, just to prove how much better it was. So there I was on a Sunday morning at John's plodge at the much too early time of 9.58am in the morning.

BNC brunch is from 11-12pm. Every Saturday and Sunday, we see a completely packed hall, with the line starting strong at 11, and becoming half an hour long by 11.10am. You have to order in advance on UPay, and I will admit that searching for your tickets as you wait on that infernally frustrating line, and ordering separately for each guest is annoying. It may or may not be a little bit easier to be whisked into a three minute line at John's, immediately grabbing a glass of juice and being tempted by a leftover dessert from last night's formal.

Oh, and the menu... besides all the trappings of an English breakfast, John's had salmon bagels, French toast, Belgian waffles, and fruit salad. Fresh fruit, guacamole, and both apple and orange juice? Insanity. I will admit that there was something nice about having the fancier options. Though BNC has its own share of options, with Alpen granola, pancakes, chocolate bars, yogurt, chocolate and banana milk, toast, juices, and fruit, John's made the experience more homely. The juice was in a jar instead of a single serving to help with food waste, and we could serve ourselves as we wished. How lovely it is

to be in Oxford and have the brunch of your dreams for about 5 quid!

The dining experience was unusual. One pet peeve at BNC is that the beans are plopped on top of the other food, leaving you unable to escape the taste of beans. John's does not fall prey this faux pas. Bagels, the full English and sweet things are all separated. As a frequent pancake orderer at BNC, I was disappointed that there was no real maple syrup in John's, but I was able to happily smother my waffles with chocolate sauce and berries.

BNC brunch will always dominate in cost, however. At BNC, pancakes, a poached egg, a tomato, mushrooms, hash browns, and two slices of bacon comes to £2.97. At John's, I paid a whopping £6.95 for apple juice, a poached egg, a tomato, a piece of bacon, hashbrown, a mushroom with guacamole, and a waffle. Not a bad price compared to outside, but I was frustrated that we had to pay for tea in John's. BNC has complementary drinks, and the free coffee has often fuelled a library day and is honestly not bad— and their lemon squash is delicious.

BNC brunch also just tastes better. John's poached egg was overdone, whereas ours is perfectly runny. The mushroom I had in John's still was watery, ours is perfectly cooked. BNC brunch dominates cost- and taste-wise but John's certainly comes closer than I'd like to admit.

Image Credit: Amanda Li



## Reflecting on the perils of overthinking

Meg Howard considers how her friendships keep her grounded

**T**here is a lot to be said for blind positivity. On a good day, I'm a manifester, a big believer in my ability to speak things into existence. During my A-Levels, I had complete confidence that the crystals hidden in my bra would be enough to snag me an A\*. I put great faith in words, relying on the same 'I can do it' which gets Olympic athletes across the finish line. I'm also no stranger to stationery covered in positive affirmations. Blind positivity can be harmless fun, but to be honest? I'm beginning to think it doesn't work.

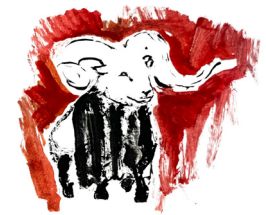
It wasn't until the beginning of Hilary that I recognised its limitations. Once again, I found myself lying on my friend's bedroom floor in the midst of an essay crisis, convinced that everyone secretly disliked me. I was annoying, I was an ogre in a cardigan, I was 100% failing my degree, and I'd never get a job. "You can do it!" was the last thing I wanted to hear. My usual deep breaths and rose quartz didn't help. In fact, with every proposed solution, I felt myself getting closer and closer to tears. All I wanted to do was look at the disco ball hanging from my friend's ceiling and melt into the carpet.

Without looking up from her laptop,

she agreed with me. Yes, I was destined for perpetual unemployment. Yes, it was time for me to rusticate, preferably forever. Yes, I was really, really ugly. Yes, I should book a one-way flight to New Zealand. By the time she was finished, I was completely paralysed with laughter. There's nothing like hearing your thoughts out of context to make you realise how ridiculous overthinking is. I was reminded of the uninspiring quotes in Times New Roman with backgrounds of waterfalls and clouds, which are reassuringly popular. They might even be one of the most effective ways to stop 'deeping it'. In the mouth of another person, or typed out on a page, your inner thoughts likely sound insane, not to mention cruel. This breaks the cycle of introspection by forcing you to get a bit of perspective.

This is not to say that positivity doesn't work, and there's certainly a bit of a fine line between poking fun at yourself and actively reinforcing your harmful narratives. But when all else fails, although getting your friends to bully you for a bit might not be as 'wellness aesthetic' as repeating a set of mindless platitudes in the mirror, I'm willing to bet that it's far more effective.

## HOROSCOPES



**Aries**

Walk through Oxford and let your radiance shine.



**Taurus**

Thank your favourite tutor. Curse your least favourite.



**Gemini**

Pivot. It's time for a new you.



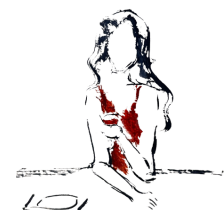
**Cancer**

Reduce, reuse, recycle



**Leo**

Breathe. No rush. It'll work out.



**Virgo**

Visit a museum with a friend!

## The Lifestyle Editor's 'Ins and Outs' from Hilary

By Lifestyle Editors

The Lifestyle Editors are ready to shake things up next term! They reveal what they're bringing into sunny Trinity and what's staying behind in the depths of Hilary.

**Phoebe**

**In:** 5pm pints, going to lectures, frolicking, creating more art, email reactions, smiling at strangers in the street, tennis, garden plays, and wild swimming.

**Out:** Dressing for the weather, Bridge, slow walkers on Broad Street, Hinge, people oversharing on Instagram,

The Bear's Head, internships, doom scrolling.

**Victoria**

**In:** 3pm Aperol, magnolia trees, giant pickles at The White Horse.

**Out:** Windswept hair, puddles, sensible shoes, the Taylorian.

**Amy**

**In:** John's Kendrew chai latte, park runs, the Lamb & Flag.

**Out:** Study playlists (I need deathly silence), actually attempting to cook, busy Cornmarket Street.

**David**

**In:** Actually enjoying walks outside, double-digit temperatures, and passing exams with flying colours.

**Out:** Sunset before dinner, having to bring my umbrella everywhere, and my godforsaken dissertation.

**Rhiannon**

**In:** Hinksey dips, outdoor picnics and summer cycle rides, outdoor pints at the King's Arms, Swoon ice cream, budgeting (and sticking to it!)

**Out:** 3am library seshes the night before an essay deadline, coffee after 7pm, college puffer ruining ever outfit, doom scrolling on TikTok, and procrastination.

**Amanda**

**In:** Sunny fifth week days, smoothies – not coffee – from Cafe Creme, eating cherries on the grass, barbecues, winning varsity again, daffodils.

**Out:** Cold, dark, and rainy Isis Farmhouse balls, vitamin D supplements, muddy Sambas, '\_\_\_ as \_\_\_ freshers' posts, fast flowing rivers, scarves unraveling onto the floor.

## HOROSCOPES



### Libra

It's time. Stop talking about it and do it.



### Scorpio

Your future spouse isn't at Plush... get a grip.



### Sagittarius

Take a real break this Vac. You've earned it.



### Capricorn

Take a step back to admire your progress.



### Aquarius

Pay attention to the signs.



### Pisces

Mind your greed. You want a first and a life?

## The fourth year: Returning to Oxford after a year abroad

*Josie Thornton*

It's 9pm on a Monday night and here I am, nestled among a heap of pillows, watching *Gilmore Girls* for the fifth time, and making my way through a tube of Pringles. Rather than suffering from the legendary fifth week blues, I tend to struggle my way through sixth week, a chunk of awkward days floating in the abyss between the start and end of term, an unwanted reward for having survived fifth week.

It's been a bright, crisp day, and as I walked through University Parks this morning, there was a distinct ring of spring in the air. I removed my headphones to better enjoy the twittering of the birds and the rustle of the wind in the trees. The grass was peppered with snowdrops and lilac crocuses, and the river gently swelled against the banks. And, as I've found so often recently, a beautiful day in Oxford made me feel sentimental; the loveliness of this historic city is never more apparent than when its golden stone is glowing in the sunshine, and the dreaming spires are silhouetted against a carpet of light blue.

I'm now in my fourth year, and as such, must grapple with the reality of my Oxford days drawing to a close. I watched on as most of my friends graduated last summer and bade a fond farewell to this city where our friendships began. Yet there is something about the fourth year which makes the final year even more strange: a sense of something already lost, of living in a moment that has already passed.

Speaking of moments passed, these nostalgic moods so often make me think about the year I recently spent living abroad in Spain. My camera roll from February of last year stands in stark contrast with the three or four photos I've taken this month: a bowl of pasta I was particularly proud of, snowdrops in the park, and a blurry capture of a library book reference on SOLO. Tonight, as Lorelai Gilmore chatters on in the background, I find myself scrolling back to last year, looking through seemingly endless pictures of bright sunny Spanish streets, beers sparkling in the Plaza Mayor, and big groups of international students smiling in the Portuguese countryside.

I didn't take photos of the mornings

when I was struggling out of bed for my 9am class, nor of the lunchtimes I spent in the canteen, failing to form sentences in Spanish. There's no evidence of the homesickness I felt as I saw photos of my friends attending formal dinners and dressing up for bops, or the way that I missed the patchwork English countryside in early spring. Instead, the photos that I did take form a seemingly perfect grid of adventure and delight, making me long for an experience that I will never be able to relive. Now that I look back, listening to the section of my playlist which corresponds with those foreign months, I forgive the difficulties and am grateful for all that my Spanish adventure offered me – the lows, just as much as the highs.

When I miss Salamanca, it is not only the golden streets, the stunning plaza and the beautiful cathedral that come to mind: suddenly I am hearing the chatter of the Rúa Mayor, being hit by the cool air of Mercadona. I picture twenty-somethings singing karaoke in the Irish Theatre, drinking cherry red tinto de verano. I imagine all the conversations I had, the people I met, and all the friendships that began in those bars and classrooms.

*“And funnily enough, when I miss Salamanca, I begin to miss Oxford: this place which has given me some of the best years of my life.”*

And funnily enough, when I miss Salamanca, I begin to miss Oxford: this place which has given me some of the best years of my life and introduced me to the friends whom I will always cherish. A city of unwritten essays and impossible translations, seemingly unending walks through the Lamb and Flag passage-way to get to Wellington Square. Thursday nights at the Turf and quizzes in the JCR on Mondays. The top of staircase 25. Duets from the noisy neighbour and his keyboard. The quiet of the EFL at six thirty.

A place which, this time next year, will also be waiting for me as a set of smiling photos in my camera roll.

## CHERWELL-FED

### An Evening at Pierre Victoire: French Bistro Dining at Its Best



By **AMANDA LI**

Pierre Victoire has been here on Little Clarendon Street for decades – one of our porters even worked there before coming to college. So I was delighted to try their menu for a second time, after the arrival of Chris Prow, who had 2 AA Rosettes at his last restaurant in London.

We arrived that evening to a slightly packed bistro and an immediately homely atmosphere, with warm lighting and candles. Though we were near other tables, they never bothered us, so we were able to enjoy our bread basket in peace.

The menu is prix fixe: there's a choice of two or three courses without drinks, where certain menu options (like escargot) have a small additional surcharge. Two courses are £29 and three courses £36, a decent price comparable to some college formals. The menu is filled with classics: moules-frites, duck leg, French onion soup, steak frites, the list goes on. We decided to share escargots and mussels for the starter, with venison and sea bass for our mains. The vegetarian options were decent in the starters, with fried Camembert or chicory salad, but risotto or a mushroom tart were the only veggie mains.

Starter wise, we were decently satisfied. The first time I was here (pre-chef change), I found the garlic in the escargot almost

overwhelming; today, it brought a nice kick of flavor without overpowering the parsley and butter. The mussels weren't sandy and the sauce was runny, but light.

The mains certainly didn't disappoint either. The venison was knife tender; the burgundy sauce blended together with the horseradish creme fraiche and added a bit of a kick to the otherwise less seasoned meat. The sea bass itself was well-cooked and perfect with the hit of salt from the capers, with the beurre blanc adding a nice citrusy hit from the lemon.

For dessert, we ordered the creme brûlée and the dense chocolate marquise. My brûlée came freshly torched with a hot dish. The relative runniness of the custard was relieving and the dish as a whole was not too sweet. Though small, the marquise was dense, easily filling us up. There was a nice balance with a good blend of chocolate in the dessert.

I wasn't disappointed by the night, but considering our student budget, we found that the restaurant was not perfect. It depends on the menu at the time, but Pierre Victoire had certainly improved from the last time I was there. The cozy atmosphere proves perfect for anniversaries and other one-offs where the tight knit French experience is allowed to be truly appreciated. We certainly had fun!

*Image Credit: Amanda Li*

## Agony Aunt:

I've somehow landed an insane housemate, who went to the extremes of getting their mum to drive down to Oxford to personally tell us off. How do I survive the rest of the year?



Dear Angry at Anne's, There's nothing worse than living with someone you cannot see eye to eye with. This seems an especially tricky case. Still, you've got to stumble through somehow. The key to surviving the year is learning to tolerate the person.

A frank conversation is the best way forward. Sit down with them and explain your perspective. But also listen to theirs, don't make them feel ambushed or outnumbered – that will put them on the defensive and you'll have another parent intervention. It won't be easy, especially as they clearly opt for bold and extreme gestures to convey their emotions. But no tensions can be resolved without some sort of open conversation.

Even if you do all of this the right way, it might just be the case that the two of you spend the rest of the year playing hide and seek, desperately trying to avoid each other around the house. If so, there are other places to spend the day and other friends to hang out with. You don't need to be best friends, you don't even need to like them. As long as you can stand to be in the same kitchen while a pot of pasta boils for ten minutes, you will hopefully survive the next term.

Lots of love,  
Your Agony Aunt

Sincerely,  
Angry at Anne's

## BOOZY BULLETIN

### Bridge Alternatives

#### 1. Bully

The Bullingdon is all about the music, it's massive back room perfect for bands and DJs. The cooler older-brother to Bridge.

#### 2. Martian Moves

Whenever these guys host a club night, it's sure to be a hit. Get ready to be transported to some intergalactic realms.

#### 3. Hipshakin'

Get yourself down to the Harcourt Arms to shake those hips to some rockin' rhythm, soul and blues. This only happens once a month though, so make the most of it!

#### 4. TuesGays

Wherever this is hosted, head to Plush afterwards for the time of your life. Challenge: Make it to the stripper pole.

#### 5. Indie Friday

If Oasis and Arctic Monkeys are your thing, a Friday pilgrimage to the O2 Academy might be worth it.

## SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT

### ISIS x STAR x OUEMS



Last week, The Isis mag broke it down in Bully back room with DJs provided by Oxford's Electronic Music society.

Good vibes, good people and, even better, all booking fees went to Student Action for Refugees. 10/10: our editors would go again.

## Being Cupid isn't easy, but it's a valuable lesson in student psychology: Cherpse MT24 tells all

Last term, I began my second year here at Oxford, and my first in *Cherwell*. I distinctly recall the elation I felt while I waited for the onboarding meeting to start, sitting at a battered wooden canteen table in the verdant lobby of a hostel I was staying at in central Berlin. The meeting began with slides detailing our roles as part of the paper, and there was a brief mention of the blind dating section, Cherpse, which needed someone to run it. I figured between that and the Agony Aunt, vicarious involvement in people's dire dating lives sounded far more amusing. Although it was certainly not how I envisioned my very, very serious career in journalism starting, I was determined to make the most of it; after all, I've always felt there's something about the odd Oxford dating scene that's worth investigating (what with my entire friendship group's 0% dating success rate, despite us being what I'd consider a very normal bunch of people.)

Sunday of Week Zero rolled around soon enough. Armed with a trench coat – worn frequently enough to expose my unfulfilled investigative student journalist fantasy to the entire student body – I was ready for a rigorous term of intense matchmaking, poem writing, diplomacy work, Oxfess mentions, and dating scene analysis. Now, having exhausted myself with these relentless pursuits, the job has been passed on to a new bright-eyed Cupid, and in my retirement I've become fondly reflective, and decided to curate my insights into this list:

1. Next to nobody wants to date union hacks and rowers. That said, I have a friend who said she'll occasionally agree to go for coffee with a hack just to feel like she's going on a date.

2. Don't be shy to sign up for a blind date. The people are generally very normal; only one person requested someone with a 'massive c\*ck'. Not sure how they expected me to know that... my passion for investigative journalism certainly doesn't extend that far.



3. Corpus is the illuminati of Oxford. It's a college no one's ever been to, but if you look closely there's definitely an underground network of Corpuscles running the University, and I fear my work has only entrenched this. Maybe having no grass in your front quad will do that to students.

4. There's a concerning amount of third and fourth years who are willing to date freshers. At one point I had to start recruiting non-first years to match up with all the sharks in my (Google) sheets. Shameless.

5. Your chances of being set up with the president-elect of OUCA are slim, but never zero. Especially if you're one of the co-chair elects of OULC. According to her, it was 'not exactly a love match, but definitely a plot twist'. A plot twist indeed, as she was expecting a woman but discovered that her blind date was with OUCA's male pres-elect. Still, he informed me that they've organised a joint event in Trinity, so I guess I can list 'Diplomat' underneath 'Cupid' on my

Linkedin.

6. Poetry is the best way to entice people to do anything – especially attend a blind date. Having spent many hours crafting couplets, it would seem I've mastered the art of rhetorical poetry. Although Walt Whitman claimed that 'The greatest of thoughts and truths are never put into print', clearly I did what he could not – my poems not only provided the much needed spark of romance for Oxford's lovebirds, but also solidified my legacy as the Michaelmas '24 Cupid.

I hope these insights are as valuable to you as they have been to me. I can't recommend being an anonymous, irrelevant third wheel to over 50 couples enough – really. Although I have come away with even less faith that I will ever find a partner here, it's nice to know we're all having the same experience.

*Individuals referenced in this article consented to the use of their information.*

*Image Credit: Romeo and Juliet, Frank Bernard Dicksee // Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons*



# Cherpse.

*Oxford blind dating.*

*[A sunny walk in Christ Church meadows. Will these lovers stroll off into the sunset or part ways as the sun goes down?]*

**Miss Tutor Trauma :**

**First impression?**

We found each other pretty easily, and he had a really nice smile.

**Highlight?**

When we found out we had both had the same slightly eccentric tutor last term.

**Most embarrassing moment?**

I misheard something he said and laughed at what I thought was a joke... but it wasn't. He was confused, and I was mortified.

**Did it meet your expectations?**

I went in with an open mind, and I'd say it was about what I expected, nice and chilled.

**Will there be a second date?**

Maybe but as friends, there was nothing wrong, but I didn't feel any real spark.

**Mr History Buff:**

**First impression?**

She had a really friendly vibe and made me feel comfortable right away.

**Highlight?**

We ended up laughing a lot over stories about a tutor we both had last term.

**Most embarrassing moment?**

I completely blanked on her name, even after she told me twice

**Did it meet your expectations?**

Yes! I wasn't sure what to expect, but she was easy to talk to, and the conversation flowed better than I'd hoped.

**Will there be a second date?**

I don't know. I'm not sure there was a romantic spark, but I'd be open to seeing her again.

# SPORT

## Varsity Matches

### ROWING: Bumps, slumps and eleven-spot jumps at Torpids



● **CLEMMIE EWINS** writes from River Isis

**T**orpids: the bringer of cult-collegiate support, unironic unitards, and this year: the first blue skies in what has felt like an eon. Torpids sees colleges qualify as many boats as they can in both men's and women's divisions and enter them into four days of bumps racing. From the bung lines at Iffley Meadows it's a mad dash to the finish just before Folly Bridge; battling to bump the boat in front, avoiding being bumped by the boat behind and as was painfully reminded to the St Cath-

erine's College and St Hilda's College boats this year, evade swans that should happen to cruise into the racing line.

Torpids 2025 provided a turbulent competition with immediate disappointment for the lower-half divisions who missed out on racing altogether due to the high stream. It was up to the top 37 men's and women's crews to carry to competition for their respective colleges.

Crews across the divisions were gunning for blades, an honour only bestowed upon crews who bump every day of Torpids: Hertford College maintained consistently high performances as

their W1 and O1 both secured their set, with W1 even jumping up into the top division. Men's Division III saw blades for four of their twelve crews; St Hilda's, Oriel College, Wolfson College and Worcester College, rendering it the most fruitful division of the competition, closely followed by Women's Division II in which three sets of blades were won by Hertford, Exeter College and Somerville College. The college who gained the most places at Torpids was Worcester, with an increase of eleven; six places gained by the men and five by the women.

But as some colleges soared, others (almost literally) sunk, and we had no shortage of spoons this year. Women's Division I dished out three sets of spoons to Magdalen College, Trinity College and Lady Margaret Hall, as these three boats had fallen into the division below by the end of Saturday. Linacre College suffered a huge dip in the position of their O1 boat as they dropped eleven places down the ranks. It was only their women's crew that prevented total annihilation by gaining two places overall. The most catastrophic spoons recipients of this year's Torpids were St Anne's College. Starting at a comfortable 20th, the week saw Anne's only qualified boat, their W1 crew, plummet down to 33rd. Perhaps the lack of lower-half divisions was a blessing in disguise, as it prevented any further spiralling...

[Read the full article online at cherwell.org](#)

Image Credit: Olivia Brown-Mazzoni

## MATCH OF THE WEEK

**Centaur's defeat Falcons in Varsity classic**

Eight goals, at least one absolute screamer, and a last-minute, Agüero-esque celebration - these are the ingredients for a top quality game of football. This is exactly what the crowd at the Tristel Global Stadium in Newmarket witnessed on Sunday evening, as the Centaur's and the Falcons, Oxford and Cambridge's men's second teams, faced off in a Varsity clash to remember.

After a back-and-forth opening half hour saw both sides get on the scoresheet, a stunning long-range effort from Iván Mahoney found the back of the net to give Oxford a slender 2-1 lead going into the break. The Centaur's added two more goals in the second half, but C\*mbidge responded instantly on both occasions to make it 4-3 in the closing stages. Enter Alex Feldman, who cut through the Cambridge defence in the dying embers of the game and coolly slotted the ball past the Tabs' keeper to seal victory for Oxford.

[Read a full report online at cherwell.org](#)

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

**Vasco Faria, Charlie Callaghan shine on Dogs' Day**

Dogs' Day was a resounding success for Oxford this year. From an emphatic 50-12 win for the Whippets to a nail-biting 32-27 victory for the Greyhounds, both games were full of scintillating moments. For the Whippets, fly-half Charlie Callaghan took centre-stage, knocking through five conversions and scoring two tries of his own, one of which was a beautiful chip and chase for himself near the Cambridge line.

For the Hounds, Vasco Faria controlled the game from fullback, but honourable mention should also go to Pat Meigh who dinked a drop goal off the post to stem the bleeding in the second half and Will Powell who turned the tide of the game late, as he picked off a Cambridge pass and took it the length of the pitch to score. Evading tap tackle after tap tackle, he weaved a powered his way to the line for the decisive score. Despite the efforts from both of these two, returning Blue Vasco Faria was imperious under the high ball, and played a key role in rounding off the day of shoeing.

### BASKETBALL: 'Get your brooms out!': Oxford go 4 for 4

● **SEB PAGE** reports from Iffley Road

**A**s the automatic doors to the reception creep open, you're greeted by Nas' 'The World is Yours' - there's no need to read the signs telling you where basketball varsity is taking place. Overflowing rows of fans line the railings after the crowds of players who had already played their game had descended on the few chairs behind each hoop. Chants of 'defence, defence' ring out loud enough to drown out the silky voice of the announcer at mid-court, while the cries of 'MONEY' upon each made three-pointer are louder still. In this moment, it doesn't feel like a cramped sports hall somewhere near the Cotswolds, but an arena fit for gladiatorial duel. But Oxford switched out their swords, spears and nets for brooms and buckets, as all four teams competing against Cambridge walked away victorious.

While some games were more one-sided, the day was littered with dramatic moments from beginning to end. None more so than the conclusion of the game between the women's second teams. After what had been a low-scoring defensive thriller in which momentum had fluctuated to and fro throughout, Rebecca Smausz came up clutch to secure the win for Oxford. Her baseline floater looked to wrench the game in Oxford's favour, but the real final moment came after she covered Cambridge's fastbreak and stole the ball back. The buzzer sounded and jubilation ensued.

Both men's teams blew Cambridge comfortably out of the water, with a combined +32 point differential between the two as M2 walked away 74-60 winners and M1's offence put up 87 on a Cambridge

side that battled hard owing to the efforts of Alex Ramsay. But as I mentioned before, basketball is a sport where games can be decided when one player takes over, and it was a 'masterclass' from Brian Amabilino-Perez that took the game away from Cambridge. Although Amabilino-Perez stole the headlines (at least on the official Oxford basketball Instagram account), he was supported well by captain Justin Hadad and Martin Moreno Delgado.

The final game of the day was between the Women's Blues, Oxford being led out by captains Lauryn Foster and Ruby Luzzatto. With the sweep on the line, and chants of 'get your brooms out' repeated by M2 players on both sides of the court, it fell to the women to get it done and wrap up the day.

That they did in style. Tahri Phillips and Lorenza Prospero immediately took over the game, and while the whole team put in a fantastic shift to keep Cambridge out of touching distance, it was those two that were swarmed at the final whistle with chants of 'MVP, MVP'. Sienna Tounger flew under the radar for parts of the game, but came through with a momentum-grabbing three that stemmed the flow of what had been a concerning run for Cambridge in the fourth quarter.

While she may have put one team to the sword on the court, both sides owe a lot to Tahri Phillips. From DJs to Kappa-sponsored limited time stash, she was critical in the day's organisation.

Image Credit: Seb Page



## SHOE THE TABS

**Oxford swimmers make a splash away from home**

It's been a week of Varsity victories for Oxford, with thrashings across a wide range of sports fixtures on home turf and in enemy territory. Or should I say in enemy waters, with both Oxford swimming sides emerging victorious against Cambridge.

The Dolphins - OUSC's second team - set the tone at Parkside Pools, dominating their Tab opposition. Records tumbled in the individual events, before they sealed victory in the relays. Then, it was up to the Blues to follow suit, which they did in some style. OUSC held a lead of 14 going into the relay races, and the swimmers in Dark Blue trunks extended their advantage. Oxford's Jonathan Rutter was named swimmer of the meet, before the Blues' overall victory was announced to the delight of the travelling swimmers.

# Coffee break with *Cherwell*

CLASSIC SUDOKU

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

## Cryptic Crossword by Alessandra Edwards

1	2		3		4		5		6		7		8	
9									10					
			11											
13									14				15	
17													18	
20			21											
23														
25														

- Across:**  
 1) Gets ready for 2 or 3 e.g. (6)  
 5) Central to creed is a testament overturned and saved for another time (3,5)  
 9) Dirty fuel surrounds airway, getting hectic (8)  
 10) Number one fixture (6)  
 11) Pleasant shoot but accidentally hit your side (8, 4)  
 13) Evidence for this autology? (4)  
 14) Beat, screw and sleep with after the last left (8)  
 17) Stupid tory put forward contract (8)  
 18) Open falafel stand owner loses capital (4)  
 20) Spread generously to make flatter? (3, 2, 2, 5)  
 23) Approve of then point fingers (6)  
 24) Arcane dodgy erections, not new (8)  
 25) Regarding the tittle precisely (2,3,3)  
 26) Get three strikes in game (6)
- Down:**  
 2) Please reply to the 1st, 3rd, 9th, and 4th letters respectively (1,1,1,1)  
 3) College offers male dominated subject (9)  
 4) Before 9, time left to cram, add it onto the end (6)  
 5) Therapy where no one talks? (6,9)  
 6) Right between annoyed A-lister giving film tasters (8)  
 7) Eat and react negatively (5)  
 8) Spinning meat supplier and critical hun on the phone (5, 5)  
 12) A spot outside, lake and allotment (10)  
 15) Infamous pirate deserting daughter to a wild animal instead of a man (5, 4)  
 16) Supported some friend or seductress (8)  
 19) Gorge on pie, cutting third gram but not first! (3, 3)  
 21) Said to a genie, kind of whimsical and not calm? (1,4)  
 22) Secondary team (4)

## Just Right by Zoë McGuire

Individual cells in this crossword come in a variety of sizes. Find the ones that aren't too short or too long and rearrange them to spell out a thematic term from astronomy.

1.		2.	3.		4.
	5.	6.			
7.			8.	9.	
10.		11.	12.		
13.					
14.			15.		

- Across:**  
 1) An apple a day keeps one away  
 3) Standoffish, resistant  
 6) Foot refurbishment, perhaps  
 7) Grain storage device  
 8) Noble gas used in lighting  
 10) Bristol's secret spray-painter  
 12) Little blue fellow created by Pierre Culliford  
 13) Australian predatory dogs  
 14) One who might ride a horse or go between bars  
 15) Harbinger, omen
- Down:**  
 1) Splitting up, as a music act  
 2) Missile  
 3) Explain the meaning of  
 4) Fifty, when compared to five  
 5) Uses an udder, perhaps  
 9) Rice-like pasta  
 11) Fungus that drives alcoholic fermentation  
 12) Squeeze or compress (colloq.)

## Alphabetic Connections by Cecilia Villalpando

Each word in the grid below has a hidden word that accompanies it in a two-word phrase (e.g. the word 'whale' might be accompanied by 'blue'). The hidden words are related to each other in 6 distinct groups, like the NYT Connections (so if you also see the word 'clockwork', that could be accompanied by 'orange' and the category would be 'colours'). The words in the grid below are sorted alphabetically by their hidden words when read line by line. Can you complete the grid?

GAME	WRESTLE	ASTEROID	EFFECT	COPY	BURGLAR
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
CASH	DAY	HOT	GREASE	HOOR	FOOD
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
WALL	FORCE	BOX	COMEDY	TRICK	YELLOW
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SANDWICH	PENCIL	TREE	NAVY	SPLIT	HEAVEN
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
COLD	VALLEY	SCREEN	SENSE	PUPPET	BIRTHDAY
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SHIRT	WHEEL	FOIL	TURN	NECK	LONE
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Solve our weekly mini crosswords on [cherwell.org](http://cherwell.org)  
 Follow us on Instagram @cherwelloxford

Week 5 Answers:  
 Cryptic:  
 Across: 9) Youtubers, 10) Elite, 11) Tau, 12) Opportunity, 13) Publish, 14) Session, 16) Compose yourself, 20) Revisit, 21) Thimble, 23) Word of mouth,

25) Mid, 26) Lucid, 27) Tremulous  
 Down: 1) Dystopic, 2) Suburb, 3) Autopilots, 4) Tempeh, 5) Espresso, 6) Menu, 7) Minimise, 8) Rely on, 15) Straight up, 17) Maverick, 18) Estimate, 19) Fiendish, 20) Rewild, 21)

Toupee, 22) Bambo, 24) Odds  
 Printers Devilry:  
 Across: 1) Bare, 6) Edifice, 7) Teatime, 8) Sate  
 Down: 2) Animals, 3) Elitist, 4) Exeter, 5) Merton

Acrostic:  
 THERE IS PERHAPS NO BETTER  
 DEMONSTRATION OF THE FOLLY  
 OF HUMAN CONCEITS THAN THIS  
 DISTANT IMAGE OF OUR TINY  
 WORLD. CARL SAGAN