

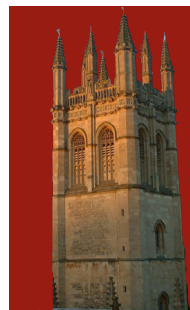
Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

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0TH WEEK, TRINITY



Your essential guide to the music of May Day

Daniel Burns in CULTURE – PAGE 19



Finding Common Ground

Sara Rourke in FEATURES – PAGE 10

UN judge studying for Oxford DPhil convicted of enslaving woman

PETER CHEN

A United Nations judge studying for a DPhil at Oxford University has been found guilty of modern slavery, witness intimidation, and immigration offences at Oxford Crown Court.

The prosecutors alleged that Lydia Mugambe, who also served as a High Court judge in Uganda, held her victim as a slave in Brasenose Drive, Kidlington, just a few miles north of the city centre.

The victim, who cannot be named for legal reasons, worked as an unpaid maid and nanny whilst Mugambe studied for a DPhil in law at Pembroke College. In the College's 2021 MCR Freshers' Guide, when asked what advice she would give to new students, Mugambe said that they should "live in the moment".

The jury heard evidence that the victim worked from 5am to 10pm doing school runs, making dinner, and putting Mugambe's children to bed without compensation, as Mugambe kept her passport to prevent her from leaving the UK. It was also alleged that Mugambe pressured the victim into dropping the charges against her.

According to the evidence, the then Ugandan Deputy High Commissioner, John Mugerwa, sponsored a visa for the victim to work at the embassy, which he was entitled to do as a diplomat, after agreeing with Mugambe that she would work for the judge as a slave instead. In return, Mugambe agreed to use her influence to assist Mugerwa with legal troubles back home.

The jury unanimously convicted Mugambe of conspiring to facilitate the commission of a breach of UK immigration law by a

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Attainment gap in finals results worsening since 2017 across ethnicity, gender, school type



- **Cherwell reveals private school advantage widening from 1.7% to 11.5%**
- **Finals attainment gap flips early prelims parity for BME students**
- **Men awarded more firsts than women in both prelims and finals**

EUAN ELLIOTT

the past eight years, with the latter increasing by almost ten percentage points. Additionally, looking at the average across the last eight years, BME students marginally outperform white students in prelims. However, in finals, a considerable attainment gap opens between the number of firsts awarded to white and BME students.

Between the 2016/17 and 2023/24 exam cycles, the proportion of firsts awarded has inflated by 18.8% in prelims and 14.5% in finals. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic had polarising effects on the 2019/20 exam cycle results, with the first rate crashing to 22.5% for prelims and climbing up to 47% for finals. Averaging across all eight years, the proportion of candidates awarded firsts at finals (38.0%) increases from prelims (27.5%). This regular increase is visible when comparing the first rate at prelims and finals for nearly all demographics, but it affects certain groups disproportionately.

Ethnicity

Contrasting students identifying as white with students grouped by the

University as 'BME' (encompassing students identifying as Black, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, 'Other Asian', and Mixed Heritage), at prelims, a higher proportion of BME students (29.0%) are awarded firsts than white students (26.8%), on average – a 2.2 percentage point attainment gap.

This was the case for all exam cycles except 2020/21. The trend flips, however, in finals where a higher proportion of white students receive firsts (40.0%) than their BME peers (33.1%), with a much wider attainment gap of 6.9 percentage points. This was the case for all eight exam cycles, with the most recent 2023/24 cycle seeing the largest attainment gap (8.1 percentage points). In fact, whilst the attainment gap was steadily closing until the 2020/21 cycle, it has been gradually opening again since, as both the proportion of BME students receiving firsts has decreased and the proportion of white students receiving firsts has increased over the past two years. On average, white students experienced a much higher rate of growth in the distribution of firsts between prelims and finals (48.6%) than BME students (12.3%).

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University set to adopt non-binary inclusive Latin in ceremonies

AMELIA GIBBINS

Oxford University is set to adopt gender-inclusive Latin in its official ceremonies. The move has been described as "necessary" to better represent those who identify as non-binary.

Members of the Congregation, the governing body of the University, will vote on the proposed changes in April. The modified Latin will apply to degree ceremonies, as well as the admission of University officers.

The gender-inclusive Latin will replace addresses such as "domini" and "magistri" with "vos", the neuter plural pronoun for "you". The gendered term "qui" will also be replaced by the neuter term "cum".

The Latin speeches date back 800 years, when the University was formally established in the 13th century and Latin was the language of learning across Europe. Though Latin has faded out of use, university conferrals and ceremonies still use the language as a traditional formality, in combination with spoken English.

Additionally, English used in the admission of University officers, such as the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, will also

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What's inside?

Number of undergraduate Oxford students declines

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Infantilising young people in politics has to end

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Star pieces from Oxford Short Film Festival

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Lessons from Cowley's street art

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Are you balancing your studies with your menstrual cycle?

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Queen's plan to add names of German soldiers to WWI memorial provokes backlash

GEORGIA CAMPBELL

The Queen's College has submitted planning applications to add the names of five soldiers to its World War I memorial – including one Polish and three German soldiers. The memorial, carved into the outer wall of the college's library, currently only recognises the college members who fought for the British side.

Planning documents show that the five names will be carved into the panels upon which the 121 names are currently engraved: four on the left panel, preceded by the word 'Also'; one on the right panel. The memorial was originally designed by the renowned architect Sir Reginald Blomfield in 1921.

Queen's would not be the first college to recognise all old members who died in WWI. New College honoured non-Allied soldiers in a 1930 memorial, Merton and Magdalen in 1984, and most recently University College in 2018. The "appropriate and unobtrusive" additions, Queen's stated in planning applications, are "justified by the need to remember all members of the College community who died in the First World War

irrespective of nationality".

However, the plans have recently been opposed by the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical society, who suggest that the German names should be added on a separate memorial plaque, as was done by New College in 1930.

In a letter to Oxford City Council the society stated: "To add the memorial in the way proposed would be to rewrite this history and diminish the impact of the sacrifice that so many men made for this cause."

"A separate plaque would avoid the need to make an irreversible change to Sir Reginald Blomfield's carefully crafted panels of 1921."

The names which the College have proposed to add are Carl Heinrich Hertz, Erich Joachim Peucer, Paul Nicholas Esterházy, Emile Jacot, and Gustav Adolf Jacobi. The latter's name is already present on an existing war memorial in Oxford at Rhodes House.

Amongst the wider public, the Council has received strong statements both for and against the plans. The Council is expected to announce its decision in the coming weeks.

Image Credit: Pjposullivan / CC BY-SA 2.0 via Flickr



UN judge convicted of modern slavery

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non-UK national, requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour, and conspiracy to intimidate a witness.

An investigation was also launched against Mugerwa. However, he could not be charged, as the Uganda government refused to waive diplomatic immunity, which protects him from criminal proceedings in the UK.

Mugambe has served as a judge for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals since 1st July 2024.

The Mechanism serves residual functions for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, including conducting investigations and prosecutions against war criminals who were not apprehended during the existence of those tribunals. Mugambe's term is scheduled to last until 30th June 2026.

During the arrest, Mugambe repeatedly claimed that she too holds diplomatic immunity by virtue of her appointment to the Mechanism. According to Thames Valley Police, any immunity was waived by the Office of the United Nations Secretary General.

Mugambe matriculated in 2020 to read for a DPhil in law at Pembroke, where she served as treasurer of the College's Middle Common Room. Whilst she was a student, Mugambe was also involved with the Oxford Human Rights Hub, whose mission is to "strengthen and develop international human rights law through the exchange of knowledge and best practice".

Reacting to the news, one current Pembroke student told *Cherwell* that he was left "shocked and surprised", adding that it was "completely unexpected" something like this could happen at Oxford.

Commander for Oxfordshire, Chief Superintendent Ben Clark said: "Lydia Mugambe is an extremely qualified lawyer, a Ugandan High Court Judge and a UN Criminal Tribunal Judge."

"Mugambe used her position of power as well as her knowledge of the law to take advantage of the victim, ensuring that she would become her unpaid domestic servant."

"I want to appeal to anyone who is a victim of modern slavery or suspects that modern slavery is being committed to contact Thames Valley Police. We will listen and we will help you."

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

Appeal to fund improvements to women's homelessness services

ARCHIE JOHNSTON

Homeless Oxfordshire has announced an appeal for donations to improve its provisions for women experiencing homelessness. The Her Way Home appeal hopes to expand the charity's women-only accommodation and enable them to provide round-the-clock support, therapy, and counselling services. In a new webpage dedicated to the appeal, Homeless Oxfordshire also outlined its aspiration to provide women with the tools they need to find stable housing.

Gender-based violence is a critical issue among women experiencing homelessness. The homelessness charity Single Homeless Project calls domestic abuse a "near-universal" experience for

homeless women. In addition, 64% of women experiencing homelessness face mental health problems. Verity Wootton, a manager at the Women's Project, Homeless Oxfordshire's women-only property in Oxford, called the proposed "24/7 wraparound support" a "lifeline" for women using the charity's services.

The proposed funding would aim to address the issue of understaffing, particularly at weekends. This problem has previously forced the charity to refer some women, including those escaping domestic abuse, to mixed-gender hostels.

The National Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023 found that gender bias in existing government counts meant that women were likely to be "significantly underrepresented in rough sleeping data". For example, women experiencing homelessness are more likely to find



shelter in "hidden", indoor spaces than men. The Single Homeless Project found that the Government's rough sleeping count might only account for one-ninth of women sleeping rough in England.

On a local level, figures released in 2024 revealed that the number of people sleeping rough in Oxford had risen 70% in the previous year. The increase across England was only 27%.

Image Credit: Lucie Fellwock

EDI report reveals less than one in ten Oxford University professors are BME

AMELIA GIBBINS

Just 9% of professors at the University of Oxford identify as BME (Black and Minority Ethnic), according to a recent report. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Report provides an insight into the diversity data held by the University.

The report additionally reveals gender disparities at the top level of the University, with women making up just 22% of statutory professors, a figure that has remained stable since last year. Statutory Professors are the most senior level of academic appointment at Oxford, providing academic leadership within departments and in the wider University.

Diversity statistics on the attainment of first-class honours also feature. It shows that the first-class attainment rate for white men is 19% higher than that of BME women. Across the board, the University aims to reduce the attainment gap between all men and women to 4.4% by 2025 – the current figure stands at 10.2%, higher than the University of Cambridge's gap of 7.0%.

On the shortcomings represented by the data, the Student Union (SU) told *Cherwell*: "While gaps, such as the gender attainment disparity, remain concerning, we will continue to work with the University – through initiatives like the Access and Participation Plan – to ensure meaningful action follows."

The EDI Report is part of the University's long-term commitment to meeting its Equality Objectives. Oxford launched its EDI Strategic Plan in October 2024, as a roadmap to improve representation and inclusivity at the

University. The plan was drawn up on recommendations from staff, internal research, and other institutional change programmes.

Dr Mahima Mitra co-authored the Breaking Barriers report, which has proposed recommendations to the EDI approach taken by Oxford. Mitra told *Cherwell* that one area of notable progress has been "improved reporting and support in relation to bullying and harassment," as well as perceived improvements in gender representation.

The report reveals disparities in representation across departments, with BME academics making up just 12% of humanities staff, yet constituting 24% of those in the medical sciences. Additionally, the representation of women is inconsistent across divisions. For instance, women make up just 18% of associate professor applicants in the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division (MPLS), whereas they constitute 39% in the Humanities Division.

On the need to achieve better representation at top levels, Mitra explained: "One of the biggest challenges is a narrow diversity pipeline – insufficient representation in the talent pool and on the early and mid-career pathways that feed into the top level roles at Oxford". The act of "hiring in your own image," even if unconsciously, perpetuates the lack of representation on the career ladder, according to Mitra.

Mitra and her co-author Sue Dopson's research expressed a need for better accommodation of individual needs in the workplace, specifically in relation to adjustments, support services and signposting – this is an area in need of

"further attention", she explained.

Age is another characteristic where representation gaps persist. Just 3% of all staff are aged 65 and over, with 1% of all women belonging to this age group, and 2% of men. The 65+ age group made up 0.3% of academic and research staff applications, with an offer rate of just 6%. Under 30s, by contrast, had an offer rate of 21% – over three times higher.

Oxford has previously been scrutinised for its Employer Justified Retirement Age Policy (EJRA), which had set a mandatory retirement age for academic staff. A tribunal in March 2023 ruled against the University, finding that the dismissal of four professors was unfair and showed evidence of age discrimination. The policy was later revised, though at the time, one of the four professors told *Cherwell* that the lengthy process had made his research prior to the ordeal difficult to restart.

The report comes amid debates over the importance of EDI initiatives in the US, where Trump has scrapped existing policies, threatening funding cuts to universities enforcing them. Drawing on the situation across the pond, the SU told *Cherwell*: "Now more than ever, we want to see EDI remain a clear priority at Oxford, especially at a time when such commitments are being rolled back at our American counterparts."

On the SU's role in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion, they added: "We will continue to champion student voice in EDI, with our VP for UG Education and Access, Eleanor Miller, being featured on the panel of the next University EDI roundtable."

Image Credit: Mark Neal via Pexels



University set to adopt non-binary inclusive Latin in ceremonies

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undergo changes, with all gendered language set to be eliminated.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The proposed changes before Congregation create a single text for each ceremony, covering all options students now have for registering genders in line with legal reporting requirements for higher education.”

The proposed changes come amid accusations that the University recently undermined inclusivity during LGBTQ+ History Month. In a statement made in response to the invitation of various controversial speakers last month, Oxford University LG-BTQ+ Society accused the University of “repeatedly elevating anti-trans campaigners without meaningful opposition” and requested that the University “enforce its [equality] policy”.

According to a *Times Higher Education* survey in 2022, approximately 0.2% of UK university students identify as “other gender”, marking a 42% increase from the previous year.

The proposals were approved by the University’s Public Orator, though there has been a mixed reception among academics. Professors of classical languages at both Jesus College and Christ Church College told *The Telegraph* that they welcome the changes, as it means the University can “move with the times”, and after all, it is “perfectly good Latin”. Other academics, however, have been more dismissive of the changes, with one Cambridge professor calling the update an “attempt to address the latest fad and try to impose it on an ancient tradition.”

The proposed changes will come into place in October this year, subject to a vote by Congregation on 29th April.

New medieval manuscripts to be digitised by Jesus College

ARINA MAKARINA

Jesus College has announced plans to release a digital version of Jesus College MS 94, the oldest known set of Oxford lecture notes.

An article posted on 1st April on Jesus College’s website announced that MS 94 will be accessible “for the first time to readers around the world” through the Digital Bodleian website by the end of April. This was enabled by alumni support and money from Jesus’ Development Disbursement Fund.

MS 94 is a collection of working papers and notes by Alexander Nickham (1157–1217), the first known “master” to “read publicly” or lecture in Oxford. It includes lectures from the 1190s on the Psalms and Treatise on the Strong Woman, a work on the roles of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary in the

medieval church.

Staff from Jesus College, the Bodleian Libraries and the Oxford Conservation Consortium performed conservation treatment to prevent damage to MS 94 during digitisation. The Consortium received the manuscript with a few edge tears, pleated pages and a detached upper board.

Efforts to digitise medieval manuscripts at Oxford are, however, not new – Early Manuscripts at Oxford University was one of the inaugural projects, wherein almost 90 manuscripts written between the 9th and 19th centuries were photographed. These photographs are now available to view on Digital Bodleian and they include some of the oldest manuscripts in Oxford libraries.

In addition to MS 94, the Duke Hum-

frey New Testament, a 13th-century translation of the New Testament into Old French, will be accessible to the public on Digital Bodleian. The manuscript, previously owned by King Jean II of France and members of the English royal family, was held in private ownership for 300 years before being acquired by the Bodleian.

The Bodleian Libraries unveiled this copy of the New Testament in March as part of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Weston Library. The National Heritage Memorial Fund and Art Fund, with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation, Friends of the Nations’ Libraries, Friends of the Bodleian and other private benefactors contributed to purchasing the manuscript.

Image Credit: Nikki Tomkins



Jacinda Ardern to join Oxford’s Blavatnik School of Government



GEORGIA CAMPBELL

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Dame Jacinda Ardern will take up a role at Oxford University’s Blavatnik School of Government as a Distinguished Fellow and member of its World Leaders Circle.

The Circle is a global network of former heads of government working to improve governance and pioneer research across the globe. It is a three-year affiliation, which will involve an annual gathering at Oxford. Ardern will join the former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who announced his involvement with the Blavatnik School in January.

Ardern was the world’s youngest female head of government when she took office in 2017, aged 37, as New Zealand’s third female Prime Minister. Her administration helped ensure one of the lowest losses of life during the pandemic and saw a historic surge in female representation in Parliament and government appointed boards, with female MPs holding a majority in 2022.

Since her resignation in 2023, she has focused on various environmental and governance efforts, and she was awarded dual fellowships at Harvard’s Kennedy School later that same year.

She has previously worked with the Blavatnik School through the Christchurch Call – a political summit initiated by Ardern alongside French President Emmanuel Macron in 2019 to eliminate terrorist and violent content online.

Ardern wrote on Instagram on 25th March: “Really excited to be join-

ing Oxford University’s Blavatnik School of Government World Leaders Circle. Oxford has created this bipartisan network of leaders to share lessons learned, and contribute to thinking around the deep challenges we face as a global community.

“Joining this group will not only provide an opportunity to strengthen these connections, it will give me a chance to work alongside a new generation of leaders - students from over 60 different countries - interested in enhancing governance through empathetic leadership.”

Dean of the Blavatnik School, Professor Ngaire Woods, added: “We are delighted to welcome Jacinda Ardern to the Blavatnik School as a Distinguished Fellow and member of our World Leaders Circle. Her leadership in times of crisis, commitment to public service, and deep understanding of governance will bring invaluable insights to our global community.

“By bringing together leaders with such diverse experience and insight, we aim to strengthen our mission of a world better led, served, and governed. The aspiring public leaders we train, this year hailing from over 60 different countries, are eager to follow in their footsteps of public service.”

Ardern will visit Oxford in June of this year to give a talk at the Sheldonian Theatre, in conjunction with the release of her memoir, *A Different Kind of Power*.

Image Credit: Governor-General of New Zealand / CC BY 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

NEWS SHORTS

Cherwell wins big at the SPA awards

Cherwell won two awards at the Student Publication Association National Conference, including best website, and best news story for Éilis Mathur’s piece on Lord Mandelson announcing his candidacy for the Oxford Chancellorship. *Cherwell* also received highly commended for best overall digital media, best interview, and best lifestyle piece.

Oxford leads UK cities in AI tool searches

Students in Oxford were the most likely in the UK to search for AI-based academic tools. The number of monthly searches for terms like “AI essay writer” from Oxford was 117% above the national average at 582.33 per 100,000 people each month. In contrast, Cambridge ranked 77th out of 78 locations surveyed.

Seagulls strike Blatavnik School

The Blavatnik School of Government was evacuated after seagulls shattered a central pane of glass. The birds had reportedly been bouncing large stones against the roof. Avian experts suggest the seagulls may have thought the rocks were either eggs or shellfish, and were trying to break them open. They succeeded in closing Blavatnik, resulting in the cancellation of a heat pump summit.

Canadian PM accused of plagiarising his Oxford thesis

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney faces accusations of plagiarism in his 1995 Oxford thesis. The thesis, ironically titled ‘The Dynamic Advantage of Competition’, shows 10 potential instances of plagiarism, according to a review by university academics. In response, his thesis supervisor, an economics fellow at Nuffield College – Carney’s alma mater – has spoken out in defence of his work.

CROSS CAMPUS

Trump pauses Harvard funding

The Trump administration has stopped over \$2 billion in multi-year grants for Harvard. The pause came after the University’s president declined to adhere to the administration’s demands to abolish diversity programming, ban masks, and cooperate “fully” with the Department of Homeland Security.

PETA urges Cambridge dictionary to change ‘derogatory’ rat definition

PETA have requested that the Cambridge Dictionary change the entry for “rat”, following World Rat Day (5th April). They take issue with defining the word as “an unpleasant person who is not loyal,” as it misrepresents the rats’ “natural intelligence, communication skills and empathy”. They argued that it “promotes speciesism”, which justifies practices like animal testing.



St Hilda's opens May Morning event to public for first time

LILLY LAW

St Hilda's College will host a May Morning celebration on the Regina Pisa Rooftop. Tickets cost £90 and include a performance from Hilda's music students, a champagne breakfast, and an address from the Principal. Most importantly, it includes a view of Magdalen College's Great Tower, where its choir will sing on May Morning.

This is the second year that Hilda's will host this rooftop celebration, and the first time that members of the public will be able to purchase tickets. The event is among many celebrating May Day, which begins from around 5.00am at Magdalen Bridge.

After Magdalen's choir sings the Hymnus Eucharisticus and three madrigals, there is a procession from the bridge up High Street and into the city centre. Throughout the city, Morris dancing, Highland dancing, and folk singing can then be found.

A donation to the St Hilda's Music Fund is included in the price of the ticket. The College is hoping to raise £500,000 by the end of the year to further its reputation as "one of Oxford's

top colleges for the arts".

Marking 30 years since the completion of the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building (JdP), the music fund will go towards upgrading the building's audio-visual equipment, expanding community engagement, and supporting student music activity. The College is also launching an 'artist fund' to encourage a broader range of musical projects, particularly collaborations between guest artists and students.

The JdP was opened in 1995 as the first purpose-built concert venue in Oxford since the Holywell Music Room. Jacqueline du Pré was an honorary fellow of the College, considered one of the greatest cellists of the 20th century.

The College recently announced a new partnership with Music at Oxford (MaO), with the organisation to relocate into the JdP from 2nd May. Rebecca Dawson, Artistic and Executive Director at MaO, said: "We are thrilled by the possibilities that our new home will offer us: the Jacqueline du Pré Music building is a wonderful venue with excellent facilities, and we have held many successful concerts there."

Image Credit: Steve Cadman via Flickr CC BY-SA 2.0

Number of students enrolled at Oxford declines for the first time in a decade

LAURENCE COOKE

Fewer undergraduates enrolled at Oxford University in 2023-24 than in the previous reporting year, new data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reveals. A decline of 500 enrolled undergraduate students compared to 2022-2023 was partially offset by a modest increase of 320 in the postgraduate student total.

Nonetheless, the overall number of matriculated students across the University fell for the first time since 2015/16.

The rate of increase in the number of undergraduates was already beginning to plateau since a jump of over 1,000 students following Covid-19 disruption to A-level marking in 2020. The total number of Oxford students in 2023/24 stood at 27,160.

Elsewhere in the country, it was postgraduate numbers which declined, with undergraduate attendance seeing a very minimal increase. Just over 30,000 fewer students were enrolled overall at UK universities, in the wake of university leaders highlighting the financial challenges facing the sector in the wake of dwindling numbers, with critical implications for the government's stated growth mission. This is the first decline in student numbers in the UK higher education sector for a decade.

Director of Policy at the Russell Group, an association of influential

British universities, Dr Hollie Chandler, told the Education Select Committee on 8th April: "We're trying to protect the quality of our education and our research activities. The scale of the deficits we're facing are so large that efficiency measures alone are not going to be able to address them."

The government raised tuition fees last year in an attempt to solve part of the funding problem. This was a move supported by the Russell Group, with the Vice-President for Universities UK, Professor Malcolm Press CBE, saying: "We have to recognise that we do have a high-quality system which carries cost."

Meanwhile, demographic shifts are changing the financing landscape. The Office for Students (OfS), which regulates universities in the UK, recently warned that the reduced number of international students posed a threat that could see some institutions at risk of bankruptcy.

Last year, the number of UK-domiciled students decreased both at Oxford and across the country. An especially large drop was also observed in the number of EU students, the number of whom studying in the UK has halved since 2020.

Oxford continues to have the fourth most EU students, only behind UCL, Edinburgh, and King's College London. For the number of international students in total, Oxford ranks 19th in the UK.

Oxford scientists receive £1 million for motor neurone disease research from foundation set up by Dottie Weir

MAIR ANDREWS

Oxford scientists have received £1 million in funding for motor neurone disease research.

My Name's Dottie Foundation announced the launch of a multimillion-pound Discovery Network on 31st March to accelerate the search for effective motor neurone disease (MND) treatments. A project led by scientists at the University of Oxford has been awarded £1 million of this budget.

The Network is based on the principles of collaboration and "open science" inspired by the Michael J. Fox Foundation's success in accelerating Parkinson's research through the ASAP initiative and similar approaches to bipolar disorder in BD2. It encompasses projects that focus on identifying therapeutic targets and disease mechanisms for MND.

Lead of the Oxford project, Dr Martina Hallegger, said: "the Discovery Network funding is a game-changer for MND research, enabling us to

strengthen collaborations and establish new ones within an open science framework.

"By working closely with teams across the UK and internationally, we can align methodologies, share expertise, and accelerate progress in understanding this devastating disease. This commitment to collaboration ensures that discoveries are more accessible, comparable, and impactful for the entire MND research community."

The foundation has committed almost £20 million to MND research since its launch in 2017. They are the first to apply this model to motor neurone research in the UK after the late Scotland rugby player and MND campaigner Dottie Weir set up the Foundation.

After being diagnosed with MND in 2017, Weir dedicated his final years to raising awareness and funding for this research. In the UK, MND affects around 5,000 people at any given time and currently has no effective treatment.

Research Programme Manager at

the Foundation, Dr Anna Motyl, who is leading the Discovery Network, said: "This network is about thinking differently and acting faster. By making research findings openly available and providing substantial funding to teams spanning multiple institutions and fields of expertise, we're helping scientists build on each other's work rather than duplicating efforts."

"We've seen this approach drive breakthroughs in conditions such as Parkinson's and bipolar disorder – now, it's time to bring that momentum to MND."

The Foundation's investment includes a total of four £1 million grants for multi-institutional teams of researchers. As well as Oxford, teams from King's College London, University College London and the University of Edinburgh have been awarded funds. Each project underwent a thorough and rigorous selection process to ensure that funding is channelled into the most promising research.

Two additional projects are expected to join the Network in the next year.

Proposed new rail service to link Oxford and Cowley backed by East Oxford MP

HASSAN AKRAM

A new campaign group has been established aiming to restore a passenger rail service from central Oxford to Cowley.

The Cowley Branch Line has been closed for passengers since 1963 and has since been reserved for freight trains.

The newly established Campaign for Cowley Branch Line has supported the planned creation of two new stations, which would allow for a nine-minute journey time between Oxford central and Cowley. According to the group, the restoration of a passenger rail service in east Oxford would provide a "fast and reliable" transport link to the city centre.

The campaign promises that the project will be complete in years, not decades, create up to 10,000 new jobs, enable over 1 million journeys in its first three years, and allow for the development of 2.5 million square feet of new workspace.

The two new planned stations would be Oxford Cowley (for Advanced Research Computing Oxford and Blackbird Leys) and Oxford Littlemore (for the Science Park and Littlemore). Regular services would go

to the city centre, while twice-hourly trains would also run to London Marylebone.

Oxford City Council gave £500,000 to a project to help design the new branch stations. Currently the only passenger rail services in Oxford run from Oxford Station in the city centre, and from Oxford Parkway Station in the far north of Oxford.

The detailed business case for the Cowley Branch Line is due to be submitted to the government this spring, and Oxford City Council and Network Rail have said that they will work to progress the reopening as quickly as possible.

Oxford East MP Anneliese Dodds, who has campaigned for the project, said: "It's important to deliver this project because it goes beyond just a transport measure and helps us deliver much needed housing for Oxford residents as well as creating a new expanded hub for innovation and economic growth."

Dodds told *Cherwell*: "I have campaigned for the reopening of this line to passengers since I first had the privilege of being elected ... The biggest benefit of reopening the line is that it would slash journey times for people living in Blackbird Leys, Cowley and Littlemore travelling into the

city centre.

"I have to say that I've very rarely found anyone who isn't hugely positive about the idea of opening up the line for passengers. Every year I arrange a 'Cowley branch line walk' to show support for the reopening, and every year even more people are keen to demonstrate their backing."

A consultation carried out by the local authority, external in November reported "overwhelming support" for the reopening proposal.

Student reaction to the news has been mixed. An undergraduate student told *Cherwell*: "The college takes the mick with second- and third-year accommodation already. But if the commute time became quick with this planned train, I wouldn't put it past them to start building far-out accommodation in Cowley and making it a commuter town."

"Cycling in from Summertown is bad enough: Cowley would be a nightmare."

The Cowley Branch Line last saw passenger trains in 1963, with services being withdrawn to cut costs at the time. Since then, the line has remained open for freight purposes, nowadays being primarily used in order to serve the BMW Mini factory.

Image Credit: Lucie Fellwock



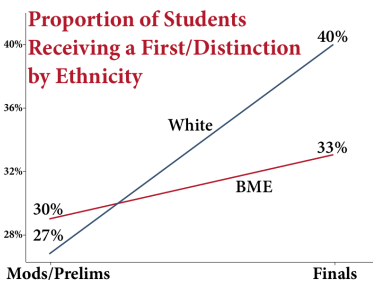
INVESTIGATIONS

Mind the attainment gap: Finals disparities between social groups increasing since 2017

Continued from Page 1

An article published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) suggests a relation between the widening attainment gap to the success of access and participation schemes at the admissions level. “When a much larger proportion of any group enters university, that group may naturally include a broader range of academic ability,” the article notes. “If mainly the top third of White students attend university, but nearly half of ethnic minority students do, we would expect to see differences in degree outcomes – even with completely fair teaching and assessment.” In Oxford’s case, we would expect to see these effects manifest as an attainment gap in prelims results. On the contrary, since the attainment gap only opens in finals, the issue seems to lie beyond the admissions cycle, and in Oxford’s teaching and environment itself. Last December, Oxford Student Union’s (SU) Welfare Survey found that 20% of respondents identifying as BAME had faced discrimination in the last academic year, compared to 12% of white students.

Breaking ‘BME’ up into its constituent groups, Black students experienced the highest increase in firsts between prelims and finals (87.4%), yet still proportionally were awarded the fewest firsts in both prelims (8.9%) and finals (16.6%). Inversely, Chinese students were awarded the greatest number of firsts in prelims proportionally (42.7%), but were the only group to experience deflation in finals, experiencing a 7.2% decrease in the proportion of students awarded a first (39.6%).



Gender

A higher proportion of students identifying as male are awarded firsts in prelims (33.0%) than female students (22.2%). The same is true in finals, with 42% of male students receiving firsts compared to 34.4% of female students. Averaging over all eight years, this means female students have experienced a higher increase in firsts between prelims and finals (55.4%) than male students (24.3%) and the attainment gap has closed by 3.2 percentage points during the course of study.

More troublingly, whilst the attainment gap has fluctuated for both prelims and finals, it has increased between 2016/17 and 2023/24 for both prelims (by 3.1 percentage points) and finals (3.2 percentage points), reaching a total gap of 12.6 and 10.1 percentage points respectively. Further, over the past three years both sets of exams have seen a steady increase in the attainment gap year-to-year. As a result, Oxford is not

on track to meet the goal set out in their 2022/23 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity Report to reduce the first class degree gender attainment to 4.4 percentage points by 2025.

“Both sets of exams have seen a steady increase in the gender attainment gap year-to-year.”

The disparity is visible across subject divisions, and a 2024 report by HEPI found that nearly all Oxford courses have a first awarding gap favouring male students (bar geography and medical sciences), including courses where women represent the majority of the student body, such as English, as well as those where they are underrepresented. By contrast, the report noted that female students generally outperform their male peers across the rest of the UK education system.

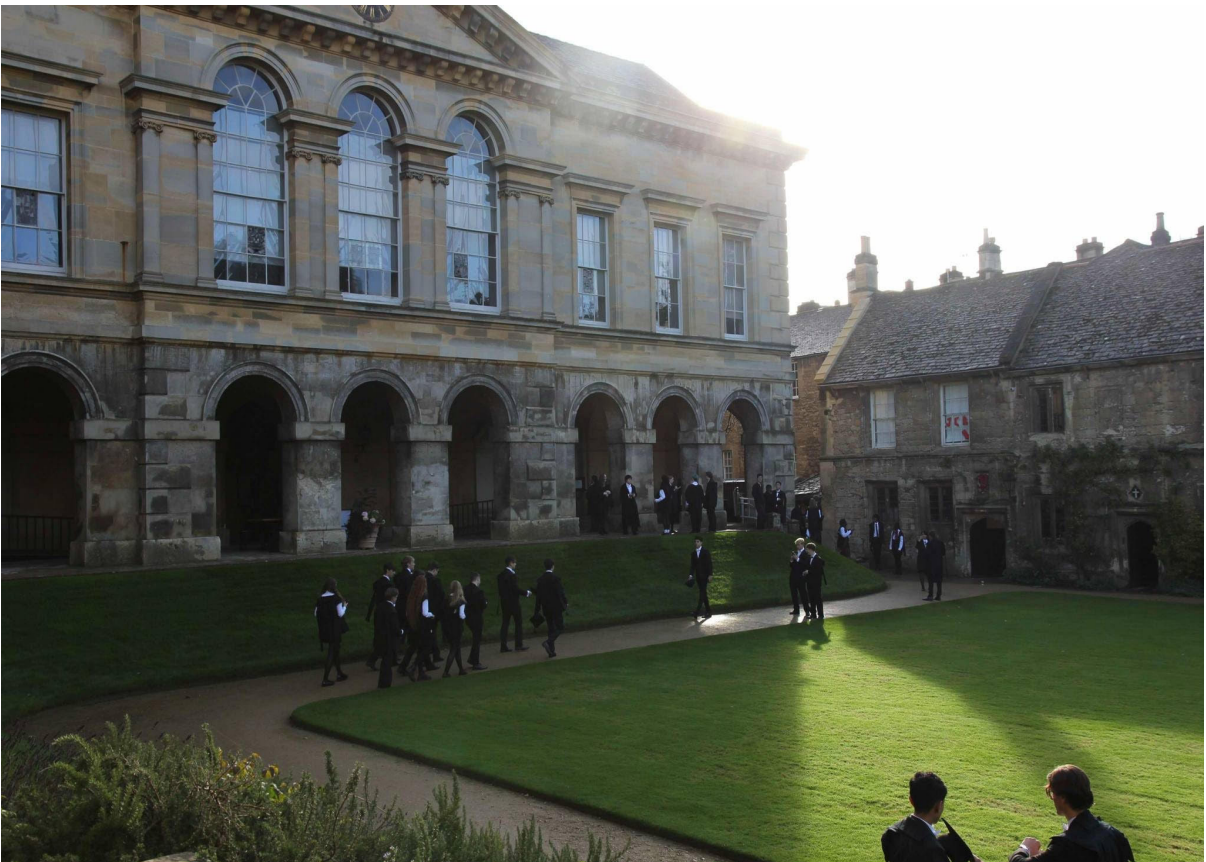
The SU’s welfare report found female students were significantly more likely to have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour, worsening mental health, low self-esteem, anxiety, and loneliness than male students. Additionally, the HEPI report points to several Oxbridge-specific factors which may impact female students’ assessment results. The tutorial system is brought into question for potentially “favouring ‘combative, rather than co-operative [behaviours]’” as female students at the University of Cambridge reported that “discussions were frequently thwarted by the domineering practices of male students”. Further, Oxford’s examination methods themselves could be further opening the gap. It is suggested that short exam periods with high grade-weighting disadvantage female students who are less predisposed to take the risks needed for a first-class grade, instead working consistently over three years. The report continued that female students may be additionally impacted by Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) during the highly concentrated course of their exams.

Data points for individuals identifying under the University’s classification of ‘other’ did not exceed five individuals, and hence were redacted to avoid these individuals being identified.

School background

Privately educated students are more likely to receive firsts in prelims (29.9%) compared to 21.7% of their state school peers. This disparity continues in finals, where 39.9% of independent school students are awarded firsts, while the figure for state school students stands at 35.7%. Generally, the attainment gap almost halves between prelims and finals, reducing to 4.2 percentage points as state school students experience a prelims-to-finals increase rate (64.7%) nearly double that of private school students (33.5%).

The attainment gap for finals has



steadily increased by nearly ten percentage points between 2016/17 (1.7%) and 2023/24 (11.5%) to an overall disparity of 9.8 percentage points. This was the widest attainment gap of the three analysed for the last exam cycle. Crucially, until 2019/20, the attainment gap remained below 2 percentage points, with a higher proportion of state school students receiving firsts in 2017/18, with a marginal gap of 0.4 percentage points. Over the past four years, however, the gap has been steadily opening as the proportion of state school students receiving firsts consistently decreases. Though less uniform, a similar trend occurs in prelims, with the attainment gap increasing by 3.8 percentage points since 2016/17. During this period, Oxford has also been admitting a decreasing number of state school students.

“The gap has been steadily opening as the proportion of state school students receiving firsts consistently decreases.”

Looking forward

A University spokesperson told Cherwell: “The University is committed to addressing gaps in exam and degree outcomes where they exist. Progress has been made in some subject areas, but the reasons for these gaps are varied and highly complex. We are working hard to understand this issue through extensive engagement with students as well as data provision to enable us to better target support, and we are introducing a programme of measures including flexible teaching, mixed assessment methods, and study skills support, to deliver a more inclusive learning environment in which all students can perform to their full potential.”

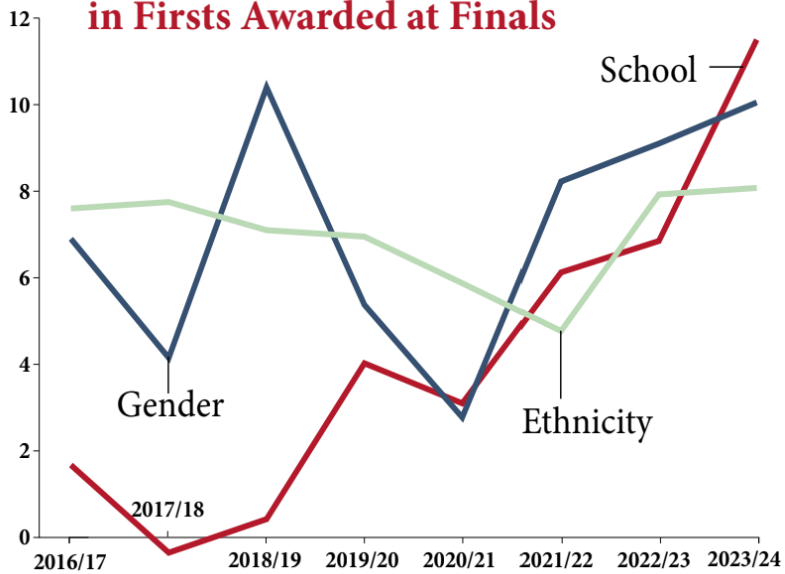
The University recently announced a new Access and Participation Plan for 2025-29 in order to combat attainment gaps. The plan aims to “expand the range of summative assessment available to departments” beyond traditional exam formats. The HEPI report urged Oxford and Cambridge to ensure that while such reforms should seek to eliminate “systematic disadvantages”, they should “refrain from scaling back the ‘academic rigour’” of employed assessment methods. The report further insisted that

the “awarding gap is symptomatic of a broader institutional problem” which requires “bold reforms” catered to the specific needs of each disadvantaged group, in place of “catch-all solutions”. The University has additionally allocated £12.9m to funding transitional programmes for undergraduate students, in addition to £3.3m specifically for BME students. With Oxford graduates going on to fill many top roles in government and industry, attainment gaps do not only suggest that certain demographics are being snubbed in their education and assessments, but will also have

rippling social effects. The coveted Oxford first class degree offers a seal of approval, which the data suggests more often than not finds its way to those who fit the historic Oxford image. Most startlingly, it seems that these trends are not merely the result of the University failing to keep up with changing times or undo wider societal inequalities; rather, they are unique to Oxbridge, and currently getting worse by the year.

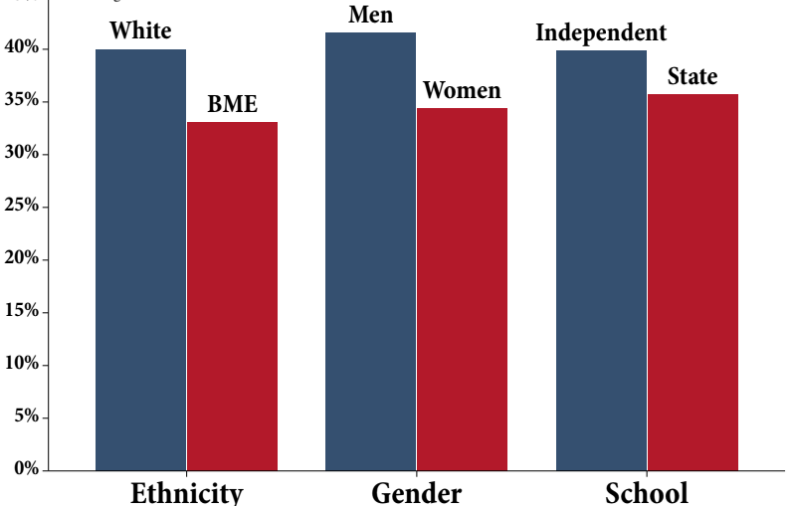
Image Credit: Indiana Sharp

Percentage Point Attainment Gap in Firsts Awarded at Finals



Proportion of Finals Awarded a First

Average from 2016/17 to 2023/24



OPINION

Why are we so financially illiterate?

DONOVAN LOCK

Ask a typical Oxford student about their academic course, and they'll happily ramble about the things they've learnt in great, riveting depth. Ask them instead about their intended career path, or how they plan to repay their student loan debt, and suddenly their response will be entirely unsure.

Young people have the lowest rates of financial literacy in the UK, and students are particularly imperilled by the £236 billion of outstanding student debt looming over graduates. Moreover, 35% of students who began their studies in 2023 are forecasted to never fully repay their loans. Yet all too commonly I meet students who deem financial planning a secondary worry, something they'll simply contemplate later. How on earth have we allowed such a disastrous attitude to spread unchecked?

As with most social phenomena, society's upper echelons are far more responsible than they'd wish to admit. Few events in recent history embody 'financial illiteracy' quite like 'Liberation Day', wherein the US government raised tariffs to their highest effective rate in over 100 years. Aside from the following market crash and trade war, I recall being astounded by the government's last-ditch attempt to justify their trade strategy; as economists swiftly noticed, the tariffs

were entirely based on trade deficits, contradicting the narrative that these rates were reciprocal. In fact, I urge all readers to give the official methodology a read, as an exercise in sifting through substanceless, vaguely-economic gobbledegook. If this isn't financial illiteracy at its worst, then God help us.

Domestic readers should keenly note that the future looks just as economically undisciplined within the UK. More than half of industry professionals have expressed no confidence in Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves, due to her documented inability to navigate the nation's economic landscape. Aside from her quantitative failures, recall that our Chancellor is someone who lied about how long she worked at the Bank of England, plagiarised her book from Wikipedia, and claimed to have worked as an 'economist' within Halifax despite serving instead as a complaint-handler. Suddenly this lack of confidence makes more and more sense.

This is the stark reality for current students: by the time you graduate, the economy will almost certainly be in the hands of people who blatantly mismanage public funds, with painful consistency. But this should not be surprising – those that sway economic policy most tend to be politicians who are trained to win votes, not manage fiscal rules. Who could possibly blame students for expressing a little financial apathy, when our leaders rampantly prioritise their image over our livelihoods? If we were governed by professionals with a little more monetary finesse, I strongly doubt that it would be so culturally acceptable to be clueless with regard to finances.

Apart from lousy actors within politics, Britain is particularly riddled by poor mathematical ability, with half of the working-age population having the numeric skills of a primary school child. Mathematical capability is strongly correlated with sensible financial behaviour, yet when Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

briefed the nation with plans to teach mathematics to every student up to the age of 18, many rushed to 'defend' our youth, with fears that we'd be transforming an entire generation into soulless data analysts (which was neither correct, nor particularly frightening).

This country has a serious cultural problem with numeracy. An inability to think mathematically should be treated with the same care and urgency as an inability to read, rather than brushed off as a non-serious quirk. Again, I hold our political leaders largely accountable for normalising the trend: one third of politicians are unable to calculate averages, and half cannot grasp extremely basic probability (flipping coins, specifically).

The path to financial literacy will, sadly, remain an extra-curricular one. With this country's bafflingly complex taxation system, it is clear that financially illiterate workers make the most gullible taxpayers; the same is naturally true for those who have not been provided with an adequate mathematical education. Speaking cynically, banks and governments are incentivised by higher levels of personal debt (by profit and economic growth respectively), so they benefit from mass financial illiteracy. If you wish to improve your financial knowledge, the blunt truth is that you cannot depend on your country to honestly educate you.

This should only encourage, not deter, your own pursuit of financial acumen: financial literacy is no unattainable mystery after all. In fact, it has never been more accessible: all Oxford students happen to have free subscriptions to the *Financial Times* and *The Economist*. It's up to you, dear reader, to make the effort. By all means, feel free to continue spending idiotically like most students – I was fined £150 for littering a cigarette end while drafting this very article – but invest some effort in educating yourself. You will only thank yourself in the years to come.

Letters to the Editors:

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

Protect the organ scholarship, protect Oxford's traditions

SIR AND MADAM – Calvin Chan makes a provocative argument for why Oxford's organ scholarship system ought to remain exactly as it is. The objection to it, they note, is that while the scholarship "is competitive, it is heavily skewed in the favour of families with wealth and ties to the Christian tradition". The system provides benefits even when equal opportunity is violated and hence is unjust. Chan mistakenly suggests an analogy between this and arguments against other forms of discrimination: "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."

But wait – the objection was concerned with equal opportunity, not comparing on a basis of actualised merit under an unlevel playing field. Applying Chan's logic to the former case would mean that, for instance, assuming educated men would be better teachers than women who have been denied access to schooling, it would be fair that men are entitled to higher compensation based on their pedagogical skill.

Dismissing the absurd, conspiratorial suggestion that opposition to the scholarship may be an effort to "erase those final vestiges of Christian faith", instead one might prefer that significant student benefits are allocated on a basis which allows anyone the possibility of getting them, not just those born playing the keys.

Morien Robertson
PPE, St Hugh's

Meet Richard

SIR AND MADAM – I adore Syd's profile of Richard the Cornmarket busker. Weeks after reading it, I listened to an astounded student question another, "How do you not have LinkedIn? You go to Oxford!". I thought of my friend arranging flowers, writing anonymous poetry, and singing on the college piano. I thought of my illiterate grandmother who nurtured a farm and a family. I thought of Richard, who "got all of about three pounds ninety nine and no house" but sings his heart out so we can "act like fools on High Street and jump around and dance and have a moment of escapism".

As Oxford students we are taught to pin so much of our self worth on academic and professional achievements. But then we hear Richard's voice and see his smile, and somehow we fall in love again with this extraordinary world. He reminds us that there is worth in simply feeling joy and bringing joy to others. That there is worth in his dream of becoming a country singer in America. I hope he does.

Selina Chen
PPE, Corpus Christi

Abolishing tuition fees would be a middle class cash grab

SIR AND MADAM – While Oscar Reynolds' article "Abolishing tuition fees would be a middle class cash grab", makes valid points about who benefits from the education system, it completely neglects the systematic problems of tuition fees. The government should be cutting expenditure, not increasing fees. Over half of British 18-year-olds now go to university and the government pays £22 billion per year to fund their studies. Yet dozens of 'degree-awarding' institutions in the UK take £9,250 a year from students and much more from the government, in return for vocational and technical qualifications which should really be given out by polytechnics. We should stop funding unproductive universities and conning young people into attending them. That way we will also stop having to pay enormous and rising tuition fees, and young people can get the qualifications they deserve without paying exorbitant prices. By slashing the number of universities, the government can spend the same money on fewer institutions, promoting quality over quantity. As it is, if you can get a 'degree' in Medicine from Imperial College London and a 'degree' in Computer Games from the University of Bedfordshire, what meaning is there in the word 'degree'?

Anonymous

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



College chapels in progressive Oxford: A surprising remnant?

ALEXANDRE GUILLOTEAU

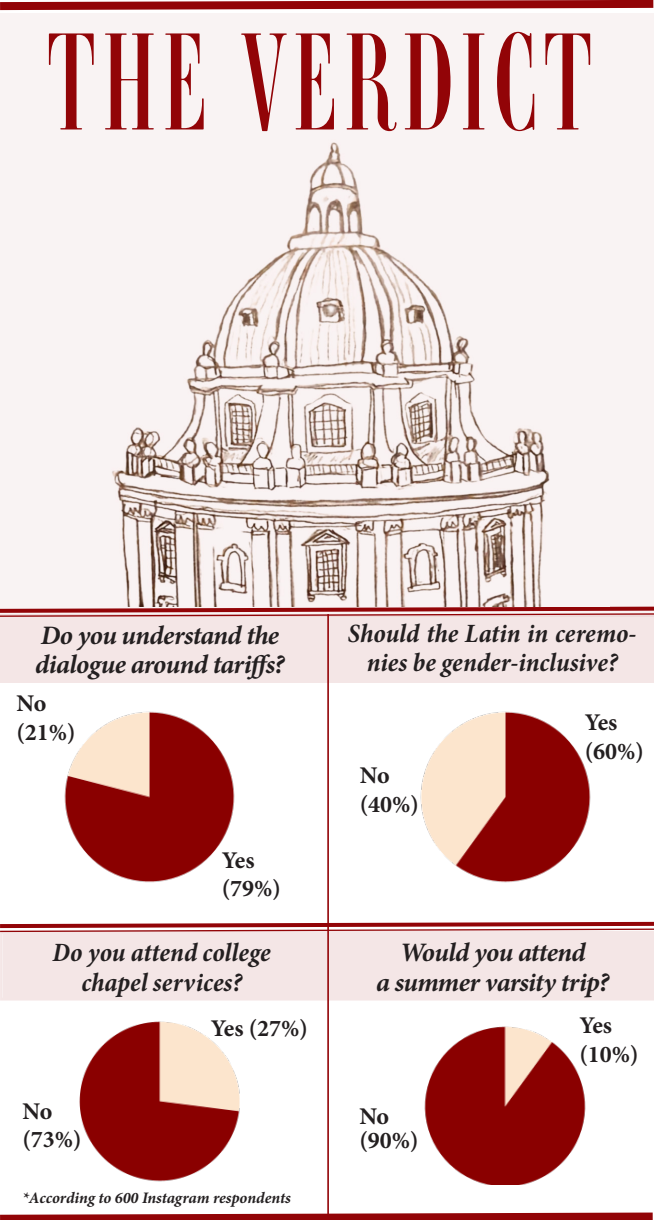
News abounds of the imminent death of the Church of England. Unable to find a new Archbishop and tearing itself apart over same-sex marriage, the established Church can only muster 1% of the country to regular attendance and the fate of famous cathedral choirs is uncertain. Yet amongst this sea of secularisation, Oxbridge is a lonely island of resistance. The choral foundations continue to be some of the finest choirs in the world, singing every day; almost every college puts out at least a weekly Evensong. Attendance seems much stronger than in the average parish church – and certainly much younger: there can be few places with a higher density of churchgoers. Why is it that hubs of progressive student politics end up being the last bastions of this most quintessentially conservative tradition? The most obvious reason is the aesthetic advantage that Oxbridge chapels have: the quality of the music and the architecture. Every day of the week in one college or another is a wide selection of some of the finest music written – from intricate Renaissance polyphony and classic Victoriana, to contemporary pieces commissioned by the colleges, and this all sung by excellent choirs. While this is primarily music written for liturgical purposes, there can be no doubt that its appeal extends beyond the devout, whether

one treats services purely as an irreligious concert interspersed by some priestly waffling, or an aid to an undefined spirituality not necessarily tied to formal Christian dogma (hence why this is frowned upon by stern low church types). Similarly, the chapels that are the focus of Oxbridge religious life are architecturally appealing: the warm, wood-panelled intimacy of a Corpus or Pembroke, the radiant stained-glass splendour of Merton, the filigree intricacy of Magdalen or New are a feast for the eyes as well as the ears.

But there is surely one other dimension which is important. After all, there are beautiful churches and good choirs outside of Oxbridge, with minimal attendance. There exists the community aspect of college chapels: rather than the city's cathedral or the forbidding building at the end of the road, the chapel is ensconced within the college socially as well as physically: preached in by a chaplain you know (perhaps the college's Head of Welfare), sung in by friends; a part of the college as much as the Hall or quad. This is an attractive quality for the religious and non-religious alike: but it is for those not from a conventionally practising Christian background that this welcoming atmosphere makes the most difference. To walk through the chapel doors feels less like a declaration of faith; it is less of a step, less of a risk, less of an intrusion to peep one's head in and listen – and perhaps be entranced. For after all, who would

not be entranced sitting in King's College Chapel by candlelight as dulcet treble voices soar up, wafting, curling like incense to the strain of Howells' Collegium Regale? At its best, the Oxbridge chapel can provide music and architectural splendour on a level with a cathedral, but social familiarity and intimacy on a level with a village church.

So will this vibrant tradition continue at Oxford and Cambridge? It could be that we are just a few decades behind the rest of the country, with nice choirs and spires mere glossy paper covering the cracks of a crumbling Christendom. Fewer and fewer people at Oxford come from a religious family, and fewer from a religious or educational background that promotes choral singing. But there is reason to be optimistic. Traditions die slowly at Oxford. New choral foundations have been set up (Merton in 2008, for example); colleges certainly take pride and, dare I say, competitiveness in their choral offerings. But above all what is so attractive – the music, the architecture, the community – remains attractive regardless of religiosity. On the contrary, my own observations at Merton suggest that this has had the effect of drawing non-Christians into the church. It should not, in the end, be a great surprise that the offer of non-judgmental spirituality, safety and community is one which draws in the young. The yearning for this is a universal one, and we should be grateful it is so well catered for at Oxford.



Oxford’s strange social scene

OSCAR WHITTLE

For many freshers arriving at this University, the biggest question playing on their mind is not ‘what is a collection?’ or ‘how do I pay my battels?’ but rather ‘where am I going to fit in?’ It is a natural fear. It is not new, however, to note that the fact this University is steeped in centuries of eccentric archaicism results in many students feeling switched-off, alienated and so I will spare you, dear reader, the uninspiring challenge of reading an article that you have read a thousand times before.

Instead, I am interested here in the opposite reaction to this feeling of insecurity. Having spent the best part of two years getting to grips with the various opportunities this University offers, I suggest that the bizarre insularity and cliqueness of the world of the Union, the student papers, and JCRs is the result of students desperately searching for their place here. And that, often, this insularity results not from students naturally fitting in, but rather falling victim to the same feelings of being out of place that so many of us feel.

I remember how I felt before I came up in Michaelmas of last year. I will not pretend that my feelings were especially remarkable nor especially unique – a mix of trepidation, excitement (I am sure you get the idea). I was the first in my family to attend Oxford or Cambridge (apart from a somewhat estranged uncle who read for a DPhil here) and I knew that the three years were going to fly by.

I also new that there was going to be an immense number of opportunities confronting me. Given the most interesting thing that ever happens in the particularly sleepy corner of rural England I live in is someone’s cat going missing, I also began to feel this creeping sense of urgency, perhaps even a pressure, not to perform academically, but to (for want of a more interesting phrase) ‘get involved’. In retrospect, it seems ever clearer to me that this impulse was probably rather unhealthy, but it has taken me the best part of two years of ‘getting involved’ to see that, and this is what I am interested in exploring here. Why did I and (not to be too presumptuous) so many of my peers, feel this pressure?

Of course, I am no psychologist, and I will avoid undertaking the petrifying task of attempting to psychoanalyse the mind of the average Union hack or *Cherwell* geek (nor would I, for my own sanity, especially want to). However, looking at the ‘big tree’ University societies (the triumvirate of the student press, the Union, and JCRs) it does not take a genius to see a remarkable overlap between those who get involved with the largest (and frequently the most toxic and cliquey) societies on offer at Oxford. You can bet that the average Union hack has tried at least once to get onto their JCR or that a solid number of student journalists take up positions after having (dis)gracefully retired from a Union career.

The overlap is clear and suggests that regardless of whether it is the Union, one of the papers, or a JCR, there is an underlying reason as to why certain people get involved.

My contention is that the overlap in those who get involved is the result of, if not an insecurity, then a somewhat unnatural desire to ‘know stuff’ in order to compensate for a general feeling of being uncertain of one’s place. And furthermore, that this desire to ‘know stuff’ stems from the same anxieties that cause other people to decide that University societies and culture is not for them. While for some the feeling of being out of place results in either isolationism or antagonism towards the largest University societies, for others it elicits some strange urge to greedily gobble up every rumour, take up every position on every committee, or dress up in black tie and swan about the halls of the Union – or better still, all three.

“*I felt this creeping sense of urgency, perhaps even a pressure, to ‘get involved’*”

There are many students who will have never felt this impulse, and quite frankly, credit to them. The gossip and pressure that comes with the unhealthy overlap between the student papers and the Union is not one of Oxford’s most healthy or productive elements. And yet, in spite of so many of us who are involved in these societies knowing that we are indirectly or directly contributing to this atmosphere of pressure and rumour, we find ourselves hooked to getting involved, and crucially, staying involved (perhaps past what is good for us). We get our fixes in different ways, of course. Whether its hearing tid-bits of gossip about other students or (better yet) some scandalous comment made by a tutor, seeing our names in the papers or the YouTube recommended section after delivering a speech at the Union. We are addicts for involvement.

Of course, this is a generalisation, and to argue that anyone who is not involved in these societies is simply insecure (or indeed, that anyone who is involved is equally insecure) is plain wrong. However, in the opinion of this ex-Union *Cherwell* writer who is his college’s JCR secretary, the overlap between the student press, the Union, and JCRs, and the culture of gossip and rumour are the consequences of an insatiable desire that exists within many of us to be in the know, and to feel like we have managed to find our place at this University.

The infantilisation of young people in politics must end

Despite centring conversations around them, Westminster is following the US into ignoring and isolating entire generations

ANISH KUMAR

Westminster, ever-consumed in the buzz of its own bubble, has settled on a new topic to centre its weekly debate on: the new Netflix show *Adolescence*. On both left and right, politicians and journalists have sought to find the answer to the questions the show poses, and while, unsurprisingly, the answer is often a mere repackaging of party dogma, the most worrying trend is the nature of the discussion itself. British political coverage now functions as a dialogue between TV dramas and the faux-concern of the tabloid press, with very little input from the young people they make the subject of their coverage. No one seems to have thought to ask the group that has grown up using social media and can now reflect on the consequences – those in their twenties and thirties. The Prime Minister has coupled his support for playing *Adolescence* in schools with a pledge to reform planning laws and reform the university funding model – evidence that British politics might escape the vice grip of gerontocracy. This is, unfortunately, yet another example in a long line of patronising experiments on an age cohort which once contained statesmen. This decline in political significance for those in their twenties from leadership to a pitiful election-day turnout statistic will only be resolved by a rethinking of how we view age and experience in politics.

A lesson must first be drawn from the United States, where the disconnect between government and young people has reached a particularly alarming extent, and the consequences have manifested themselves in the rollback of the liberties that most Americans of working age have no memory of fighting for. By the end of his term, Donald Trump will be the oldest president in the country’s history, beating his predecessor, and has, in his short time in office, enacted the biggest rollback in economic and social progress for decades. He has introduced the highest tariff level on goods since the 19th century, causing a stock market crash which will disproportionately affect lower-income workers, who are more likely to be

under the age of 30. The Republican-appointed majority on the Supreme Court reversed *Roe v Wade*, and according to the Reagan-appointed judge Clarence Thomas, “should reconsider” the rulings that protect the rights to contraception and same-sex marriage. All of these were monumental victories of civil rights advocacy groups that have been reversed at the whims of an entrenched conservative majority, and this is a clear warning to us in the UK. Turnout among 18-29 year olds dropped from over 50% in 2020 to just 42% in 2024, and this has contributed to a politics dominated by the elderly and their interests.

The political climate in the UK has not reached the same level of polarisation and disillusionment, but with both major parties polling in the mid-20s and the populist Reform party up double-digits on their 2024 performance, it may not be far off. While Westminster politics continues to fracture, matters that affect people trying to start their careers and get on the housing ladder remain sidelined in favour of discussions affecting pensioners, who are the wealthiest age cohort in Britain. This is the result of a potent combination of infantilising attitudes towards those under 30 held by the media, and a lack of agency from young people who refuse to participate. The former can be seen clearly in how forward-thinking economic policies are presented in comparison to wealth transfers to pensioners: the WASPI campaign, which is centred on the claim that its members remained unaware of widely publicised changes to the state pension age for women to bring it in line with that for men for 16 years, and therefore compensation of £36 billion is owed. This naked entitlement is accompanied by the furore which accompanied the means-testing of the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP), despite the state pension increasing by a greater figure than the WFP. These two policies attracted a far greater share of media outrage than the cancellation of HS2 beyond Phase 1, for which costs have spiralled as a result of endless regulatory barriers and legal challenges. It is these planning and building regulations that most impact people in their twenties and thirties today: house prices have soared when compared to real wages, and the wealth of the country is



now increasingly concentrated in the hands of the elderly. Refusal to build houses and infrastructure, and to tackle energy costs on which the former is dependent, will mean that achieving home ownership and career advancement will become more dependent on inheritance, or ‘the bank of Mum and Dad’ – a sad reflection on a society now trending towards gerontocracy. A further warning is the attitudes that young people in the UK now hold towards democracy. According to a poll carried out by the University of Glasgow, only 57% of people 16-29 said they preferred democracy to a dictatorship – this is the worrying outcome of disengagement and a lack of political education.

This requires change: the first is a re-evaluation of how issues facing young people are discussed. One of the country’s great Prime Ministers, Pitt the Younger, was just 24 years old upon taking office; the current Baby of the House, Sam Carling – 22 when elected – was described in a Telegraph

article as “displaying nerves”, described as having a “lack of life experience”, and exuding a “particular kind of frenetic energy that is most commonly found in A-Level exam halls”. This is infantilising rhetoric for a major broadsheet publication, and reflects a sad imbalance in the priorities that exist in Westminster. However, if participation does not improve, then there is no reason that outcomes will either. It must be remembered that the right to vote is one that was hard-fought for over more than a hundred years, and should not be seen as an optional activity with little impact over one’s own life. The current rollback of rights in the United States, and the ongoing conflict between the Trump administration and universities, may be replicated in the UK if current political trends continue – an end to patronisation from the media and the agency of young people is the only way in which this might be averted.

Image credit: Muhammad Umair

FEATURES

Orange paint, green promises: Oxford, Just Stop Oil, and the climate conundrum



VICTORIA MCKINLEY-SMITH

Oxford says it has fulfilled its 2020 commitment to divest its endowment from fossil fuels. Some activists see hypocrisy in its millions of pounds of indirect investments in the industry. Where does it go from here?

When Oxford University made its grand declaration that it would divest from fossil fuels in 2020, it seemed like the academic world had just notched a major win in the fight against climate change. A world-renowned institution, famed for producing groundbreaking research and celebrated as a global intellectual beacon, was taking a bold stand – announcing that it would withdraw investments from the industries largely responsible for the climate crisis. Its massive endowment fund, managed by Oxford University Endowment Management (OUem), would, it seemed, put into practice the University's aspirational goals of sustainability

and environmental stewardship, with claims of 'robust mechanisms' in place to ensure responsible investment. Environmental groups praised it as a step toward setting a new precedent for universities, businesses, and institutions worldwide, urging the rest of the academic world to follow suit.

But as 2022 drew to a close, a startling revelation emerged: despite those lofty promises, Oxford's fossil fuel investments had actually surged. The 2022 OUem report showed that between 2021 and 2022, the University's indirect investments in oil and gas companies increased from 0.32% to 0.52%.

These figures may appear relatively modest,

but less so when placed within the context of the University's endowment, which totalled £5.7 billion in 2022. For some students and climate advocates, there is an apparent contradiction between the University's vocal commitment to sustainability and its millions of pounds indirectly invested in fossil fuels. For an institution that prides itself on its intellectual leadership, what explains this apparent gap between moral rhetoric and financial reality?

Progress or Greenwashing?

Oxford's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, targeting net-zero carbon emissions and a biodiversity net gain by 2035, sounds

ambitious on paper. The University's roadmap involves reducing carbon emissions in its academic buildings, investing in sustainable food sources for its vast college kitchens, and enhancing biodiversity across its grounds. But members of Oxford Climate Justice Campaign (OCJC) have claimed that these good intentions seem hollow when weighed against the backdrop of Oxford's continuing investments in fossil fuels.

The head of sustainability for OUem told *Cherwell*: "The University has no direct holdings in fossil fuels [ie.] it owns no fossil fuel companies; and indirect exposure (ie. through funds) to fossil fuels is about 0.5%

(when last reported).” This might seem like a minor concern on the surface, but still leads to ongoing scrutiny as institutions try to align their financial practices with evolving environmental commitments.

OUem also told *Cherwell*: “OUem has fully implemented the University’s 2020 divestment commitments. The Oxford Endowment Fund has no direct exposure to fossil fuels and indirect exposure is a fraction of a percentage. This will fluctuate for a variety of reasons on a year-by-year basis.” Indeed, from 2021 to 2022, investments in tobacco companies declined

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Now with around £6 billion in assets, Oxford’s wealth is staggering – and so is its responsibility

more than investments in fossil fuels increased. Still, the financial decisions of Oxford’s endowment fund often seem out of step with its public climate commitments. This is precisely where the accusations of greenwashing stem from.

Environment and Ethics rep and climate activist Oliver Ray told *Cherwell*: “The University’s actions clearly show a blatant disrespect for its own researchers and students as well as contempt for global ecosystems.”

There’s also the fact that when institutions like Oxford make public promises to divest, they send a signal that reverberates beyond their own financial portfolios. Divestment campaigns have long been one of the most effective ways of pressuring institutions to act more responsibly. When Oxford promised to divest, it not only committed to curbing its own impact but also positioned itself as a model of responsible investment for other major educational and financial institutions. Now, its reluctance to fully divest is perceived as undermining the very cause it once championed.

This leaves Oxford in a precarious position. It is caught between competing pressures: on the one hand, it wants to maintain its reputation, on the other, it is bound to the financial realities of managing an enormous endowment. These realities include the need to generate stable, long-term returns to fund scholarships, research, staff salaries, and infrastructure. It would present genuine difficulties to divest from all of the University’s shares in every fund that has any exposure to fossil fuels. It’s a tightrope walk that many universities and other financial entities face. How much sacrifice is too much when it comes to realigning investment strategies with the pressing need for climate action?

Now with around £6 billion in assets, Oxford’s wealth is staggering – and so is its responsibility. While divesting from fossil fuels is undoubtedly a noble goal, it becomes far more complex when that money is tied up in industries that generate vast sums of revenue. The question is not just one of principle; it’s also one of practicality. Can an institution like Oxford divest fully without risking the financial stability it has built over centuries?

The End of Just Stop Oil

Meanwhile, a significant moment in the climate justice movement has come and gone: the announcement that Just Stop Oil (JSO), the UK-based climate protest group known for its disruptive direct-action tactics, will disband at the end of April. Founded in 2022, the group became synonymous with high-profile stunts – from throwing soup on Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* at the National Gallery to gluing themselves to roads and disrupting major sporting events. Many criticised their methods as overly aggressive and damaging, but JSO’s goal was clear: stop fossil fuel extraction and halt new oil and gas licenses.

Indeed, Oxford felt the full force of this activism on a very public stage when, in the autumn of 2023, Just Stop Oil activists made headlines for spraying the Rad Cam with orange paint. The move was blatantly disruptive and



impossible to ignore. Two men have been charged and are due to stand trial in August.

After a little over two years of often controversial actions, Just Stop Oil has declared a victory of sorts. The UK government’s recent pledge to cease issuing new oil and gas licenses – a demand that the organisation had vocally championed – has been hailed by the group as a hard-won success.

So, has JSO’s campaign ended in triumph? Well, sort of. While the group can certainly claim a victory in forcing the UK government’s hand on oil and gas licenses, much of the climate movement has been left pondering the next steps. And as JSO disbands, one (non-fossil fuel) burning question emerges: what’s next for activism? What happens when the loudest voices in climate protest go quiet? And perhaps more importantly, will institutions like Oxford, which have felt the heat of such movements, finally feel compelled to act with urgency?”

A growing call for change

Though it may be the end of Just Stop Oil, other student climate protests will surely go on. In

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When institutions like Oxford make public promises to divest, they send a signal that reverberates beyond their own financial portfolios

February 2023, members of the Oxford Climate Justice Campaign organised a rally outside the Rad Cam demanding that the University follow through on its 2020 divestment promise.

The University’s failure to fully divest from fossil fuels has become a rallying cry for students, with many now seeing their activism as a necessary counterpoint to institutional inertia. By holding protests, writing letters, and joining environmental campaigns, students are showing that they will not accept the hypocrisy of having a university invest in fossil fuels while promoting sustainability.

The internal conflict is becoming more pronounced as the student body grows increasingly aware of the power it has to pressure the administration. The Oxford Climate Justice Campaign is not alone in pushing for stronger action. The very prominence of the movement for fossil fuel divestment, and tactics such as divisive actions at the Rad Cam, likely contributed to similar demands and tactics since the outbreak of the war in Gaza.

A chance to lead?

The pressure on Oxford’s endowment managers could increase further. In June, the University is partnering with UN Human Rights to host the Right Here, Right Now summit on climate change. The summit, organised by the International Universities Climate Alliance and spearheaded by Vice Chancellor Irene Tracey, will convene global leaders, activists, and academics to collaborate on real solutions to the climate crisis. For Oxford, this will be a defining moment.

Timed to coincide with UN World Environment Day, the summit will serve as the perfect stage for Oxford to announce the kind of forward-thinking policies that match its public environmental commitments. However, if the University doesn’t act now – if it continues to drag its feet – its credibility as a climate leader could be irreparably damaged. The University has the power to push the needle in the right direction. But it’s up to the institution to decide: exactly what example will its leadership set?

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OUem also told Cherwell: ‘OUem has fully implemented the University’s 2020 divestment commitments. [OUem] has no direct exposure to fossil fuels and indirect exposure is a fraction of a percentage.’

How do we ensure with the current political climate and volatile global conditions that climate action remains a priority, not a casualty of distraction? In times of crisis, it’s all too easy for environmental concerns to slip down the agenda – but the climate emergency isn’t on hold. If Oxford wants to retain its position as a global intellectual leader – and not just another relic of ivory tower idealism – it’s time to stop talking about change and start making it. Only then can it prove that, as one of the world’s most esteemed universities, it still has the vision and willpower to shape a sustainable future, not just teach about it. The world is watching, and Oxford’s next move will define its legacy.

Image credits: Archie Johnston [Left], AFirehawk via Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 4.0 [Right]

Oxford's shrinking common ground

The University wants a better building for staff and students on Wellington Square. Where does that leave a community-oriented café?

SARA ROURKE

Common Ground, a café and community hub at the heart of Little Clarendon Street, is – as its name suggests – one of the few remaining places in Oxford that brings together both town and gown. Yet its future remains uncertain as Oxford University's plans to redevelop its administration offices on 25 Wellington Square would mean Common Ground losing the building that it currently calls home.

Located behind the offices, in one of the shop units leased by the University, Common Ground moved into a space, formerly a Barclays bank, that had been unoccupied for several years.

Common Ground was founded in 2018 by Jake Bacchus, a visiting senior member of Linacre College and Piotr Drabik, a barista and coffee machine mechanic. Bacchus and Drabik had a vision of creating something Oxford notably lacks – third spaces, away from home and work where people can spend time and socialise for free.

Primarily a café and co-working space, Common Ground is often bustling with students and locals working on their laptops, surrounded by an eclectic mix of furniture and art. It also houses second-hand clothing, book, and record shops, and plays host to live music, comedy nights, life-drawing, running clubs, student magazine launches, and a range of other events that would take the length of a second article to cover.

The new plan for Wellington Square

The proposed plans for the redevelopment of Wellington Square were first made public by Oxford University Development (OUD) in October 2024, citing the need “to replace a life-expired and poor performing building”.

Divided into two phases, the first phase would involve the demolition of 25 Wellington Square, a concrete brutalist building that stretches the length of Little Clarendon Street and is home to Common Ground. 25 Wellington Square will then be replaced by “a brand-new state of the art academic facility” which will accommodate “existing university departments that need to be relocated from elsewhere in Oxford”.

Plans for a “publicly accessible café” are included in the design. However, it is not clear if Common Ground will be permitted to occupy this space in the future, or indeed if it will be able to, after having to relocate for three years during the building's

construction, which would begin in 2026.

The second phase of the redevelopment would consist of the refurbishment of the western terraced houses bordering the square, which would create 100 new rooms of graduate accommodation.

In December, OUD held its first public consultation on the plans, which gathered responses from the public, showing that nearly two-thirds of respondents felt negatively towards some aspects of the redevelopment. The most popular aspect of the redevelopment was the energy and sustainability of the new building. Over 64% of respondents raised concern about “the risk to Common Ground, viewed as a vital community hub and cultural venue, one of few remaining in the city.”

(Such samples and public consultations often over-represent the most vocal members of a community who oppose new development, not representing the people who would benefit from it or the community at large).

Common Ground responds

Cherwell spoke with Common Ground's Managing Director Eddie Whittingham and Operations Manager Alex Chesters about Common Ground's role in Oxford.

Chesters told Cherwell: “It's huge that this is a place right now where anyone from any walk of life – students or professionals or even homeless people – can come in and just chat to someone who works here and everyone is treated the same and everyone gets the same coffee and the same level of care. And in a place like Oxford where so much of it is closed off and only students can go in those parts.”

Whittingham agreed, adding: “I think hosting a whole range of different things means that the town and gown can mesh a lot more easily. If a student comes to see their mate play in a band, they might think, ‘well what other gigs have they got on? Oh, there's this other gig that has been organized by Divine Schism, a local promoter.’ And they come back into the space.”

Chesters told Cherwell: “During the first [OUD] consultation, we were packed for the whole day. And since then, we pretty much at least once a day have someone come up and ask when they get a coffee, what's going on? Have we heard anything else? It's very few spaces that people feel so passionately about and are so invested in.”

When focusing on their interactions with the University, Whittingham stressed that University

leadership had been receptive to some of their ideas and was hopeful that an agreement between the sides could be reached. They hope to be able to move into a University or college-owned space, and perhaps act as a channel for the University's community engagement in the long-term.

What began as responses to the OUD's consultation questionnaire quickly became personal testimonials on the importance of Common Ground to both students and locals alike.

To Daria Tkachenko, who came to Oxford as a refugee from Ukraine three years ago, Common Ground is “a community that accepted me with open arms. It's a reminder of what home can feel like, even in the most uncertain of times.”

One student told Cherwell: “As someone who grew up in Oxford, I have been going to Common Ground long before I was accepted into the University. It would be a terrible loss; it's somewhere I go all the time in the vac to study with friends who come back home from other unis and can't access the libraries here.”

Developments in town vs gown

The divisions between town and gown are a well-documented part of the city's history, with disputes between townspeople and members of the university leading several scholars to flee Oxford and found that other university in 1209.

In more recent times there have been a series of disagreements between residents and the University over the approach to urban planning.

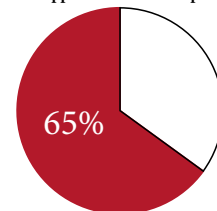
In 2016 the University's sale of its Wolvercote Paper Mill site caused criticism from residents when it rejected a bid by Homes for Oxford, an alliance of community-led housing groups, focused on affordable housing and instead sold it to the highest bidder, a private developer called CALA.

As by far the largest landlord in Oxford, the University has disproportionate influence over determining the building and future of the city.

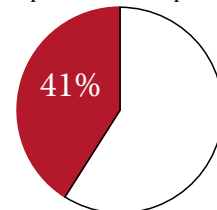
An investigation by the Guardian in 2018 revealed that Oxford and Cambridge colleges combined own more land than the Church of England, making them the largest private landowners in England.

Developments are always needed, especially in a dynamic and changing city like Oxford – or as the OUD's Wellington Square redevelopment poster put it: “Modern facilities are essential to attract and retain staff and students in a highly competitive academic world.” New housing developments are

Proportion of respondents that felt negatively or extremely negatively about some aspects of the approach to redevelopment:



Proportion of respondents that welcomed some aspects of the redevelopment:



especially pressing, given that Oxfordshire is at the centre of Britain's housing crisis and has fallen badly short of its government-mandated building targets.

The plans for the redevelopment emphasise the increased sustainability and energy efficiency of the new building. For phase two, the 100 new graduate rooms will be important “in helping to reduce pressure on private rentals” and aim to improve housing affordability in the city.

Such tensions show that there is no perfect

“
It's huge that this is a place right now where anyone from any walk of life – students or professionals or even homeless people – can come in and chat to someone who works here and everyone is treated the same and everyone gets the same coffee.”

answer in how to prioritise the needs of different parts of the Oxford community.

With the newly created role of Local and Global Engagement officer in 2023, perhaps the university is beginning to turn a corner in its relationship with Oxford residents. A report published in January, ‘Beyond Town and Gown’, outlines the University's “plans to support positive social, economic and environmental change in the city”.

Both the city and the University are dependent on one another to function, and are most effective when they work cooperatively. As students we hold a privileged position, although most of us are only in Oxford for half the year, with our Bod cards we have access to much of the city that remains closed off to people who have spent their entire lives here. Unrestricted spaces like Common Ground, where town and gown can meet, are special. A more modern, efficient building with additional housing would be a good thing. But, with the University having outlined a mission to integrate more meaningfully with the local community, its ability to preserve spaces like Common Ground will be a litmus test for that commitment.

Image Credits: Oscar Reynolds [Top] and Lucie Fellwock [Bottom]



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Archives: Presumed *Isis* writer tells *Cherwell* to 'piss off'

With a *Cherwell* and *Isis* EiC now flatmates, let's relive some of the highs and lows of this relationship.

In 1986, *Cherwell* launched what may have been the only "Megaforum," introduced with founder Edinger's claim that *Cherwell* was started because "Isis was completely out of touch with the university". He collected the opinions of his allies and rivals.

One writer (presumably from *Isis*) declared: "Cherwell hacks are less intelligent, more ugly," and "generally less pleasant," ending with: "I hate Cherwell. Piss off." Suffice to say, relations weren't exactly friendly.

Admittedly, a few pages earlier, *Cherwell* had published a formal "apology" to *Isis* for implying the mag wasn't a "bad old rag" and would probably even 'knock up a few Guardian Student Awards'. They clarified that *Isis* was "about as interesting as watching a horse secrete," and apologised again for suggesting the *Isis* Editor had any journalistic ability whatsoever.

Fast-forward over 30 years, and relations, although at times tense, are undeniably warmer. *Cherwell* editors now see *The Isis* differently – a magazine arguably better at themed dress codes. The main point of contention is who left dishes in our office sink.

Reptiles by Toby Young
"THE DIFFERENCE between Cherwell and Isis is that Cherwell is a newspaper and Isis is a magazine. That is to say, Cherwell-hacks are less intelligent, more ugly, less informed, more lower class, less pleasant and more socially inept than Isis-hacks. That is why Cherwell-hacks go on to edit News of the World and Isis-hacks go on to edit the Tatler and that is why Britain has the worst newspaper and best magazine industry in the world. And that is why I hate Cherwell. Piss Off."

John Evelyn

Welcome, dearest hacks, past, present and future, to the House of Fun. Jevelyn is proud to celebrate the coronation of our Glorious Empress-Regent, Prime Minister without Portfolio, to reign over us for so long as she isn't given a bogus Corporate Complaint.

Change is afoot in Frewin Court; it is time to welcome back some old faces. ACS Jay Cartwright has made a triumphant return, clearly bored of sidequesting in Brookes fresher halls. He is met in the PO by Perunemployed and Rachel Reeves, who, much like her government counterpart, somehow hasn't resigned yet.

Vac days have gone swimmingly, with one notable exception. It appears The Mary Celeste has gone adrift for a second time. Bondage Baby has completed her requirements in lieu, wearing the

trousers for perhaps the first time in his life.

Elsewhere, Sensei Wu has handed over the CCC Keys to the Power Couple (Under Duress), who Jevelyn is sure will save the term, like last time, and the time before that. With the Thirteenth Duke of Wybourne MIA in the Balkans, Obi Wan has tried to teach Changé how to organise a social, to limited success.

The end of the "Barrister's" reign and the Free and Fair election (pending ODC) of King Lear has ushered in a power vacuum. In the blue corner, Goneril the Scarecrow, and in the red corner, Regan the Barbie, both convinced that the entire University is on their slate. Jevelyn reminds them that delulu is often but not always the solulu.

Finally, the "Barrister" has come to a realisation. Instead of frivolously sending lawsuits on TSC



mon-ey, why doesn't he invite the rest of the world to sue him? Introducing Varsity Summer Trip, where you pay £760 to see King Lear and Regan make out in public for five days. On an island. What could possibly go wrong? Did I mention that it wasn't a scam? Because it's not. The President of Malta said so.

Editorial



Laurence Cooke and Phoebe Davies
Editors-in-Chief, Trinity 2025

Welcome back to Oxford, and another term of *Cherwell*. We are Laurence and Phoebe and we are excited to be your Editors-in-Chief for this Trinity. It's been a vac of preparation from us and our wonderful team of Deputy Editors, and we hope you enjoy reading this week 0 edition.

Whether it's exam cramming in the college library long into the night or leisurely afternoon picnics in Port Meadow that await you this term (or perhaps a mixture of both), *Cherwell* has you covered for the latest eight-week Oxford rollercoaster. You'll find an expanded Culture section from page 16 with more space for book reviews, fashion tips, and fresh music takes. Our Features team (pages 8-11) are gearing up for the BNOC list coming later this term but bring analysis of protests and community spaces in the meantime. On our front page, you'll find startling revelations from our Investigations team about widening disparities in exam performance. And as usual, our Puzzles team will stretch your brain in all kinds of new ways on our back page. Perhaps it's best not to mention our performance in this year's Boat Race, but if you want the full write up you can find it in Sport on page 23.

It's been a busy vac for *Cherwell*, and not just in preparation for the exciting projects which lie ahead. We sent a delegation to the Student Publications Association National Conference, where we took home a fantastic number of prizes and commendations at the annual ceremony. Not only were our website and digital rated the best in the country, but many *Cherwell* journalists picked up individual awards in categories as varied as News, Profiles, and Lifestyle. Congratulations to them and here's to more great work in the future!

With the newspaper in such an exciting place, there has never been a better time to get involved with writing for us. Follow our contributor groups on Facebook, check out our Instagram story highlights to hear from each Deputy Editor, or just pitch to us at editors@cherwell.org and we can point you in the right direction. Send us a letter on page 6!

Everyone at *Cherwell* has to start somewhere, so whether you're certain a journalistic career lies in wait, or you just want to write about an Oxford topic you're passionate about, there's a place for you here.



Faye Chang
Deputy Editor, Culture

Trinity is, in my opinion, one of the most exciting terms to be working with the Culture section. From the grand musical traditions of May Day, to the Oxford Fashion Gala, to, of course, the myriad of garden plays that will abound, these warmer months have so much to offer in terms of student creativity and culture.

That's why we're aiming to recentre our focus on what students are putting on this term, amplifying and showcasing all the amazing things that students around Oxford are up to. We want articles on the most niche and experimental student plays, the most underground fashion subcultures, the most indie student bands, and everything in between. For a university that is so often focused on academics, taking the time and having the passion to pursue what is most creatively enriching is not only brave, but necessary for keeping the sense of Oxford community alive.

As a student publication, I think *Cherwell* – and in particular, as the Culture section – also has an important role in sustaining this creative ecosystem. Just as newspapers review blockbuster films, or famous authors get extensively interviewed, I believe it is our duty at *Cherwell* to take the student endeavours in Oxford seriously, and treat them not just as hobbies, but as genuine pursuits, born out of people's love and passion for their chosen creative medium.

I'm looking forward to a wonderful term of making that vision happen.

PROFILES

“Because I’m conservative about morals and culture, it doesn’t mean I want to grind the faces of the poor.”

Cherwell spoke to broadcaster, author, and journalist Peter Hitchens

HASSAN AKRAM

It is a smoky January morning outside Taylors deli on St Giles. Peter Hitchens padlocks his bicycle to a lamppost and accompanies me indoors, where we sit down with a pile of his books on the table between us. He is polite, knowledgeable, and articulate, but having been a journalist for over fifty years and reported from as many countries, the weariness has set in. “I used to think that if you wrote intelligently, you spoke intelligently, you argued intelligently, you came up with sensible ideas, and were civilised in discourse, then people would think, ‘Oh, gosh, here is someone who has something to say’, but actually all I got were insults.” When I comment on this pessimism, he replies, with a good-humoured flutter of the eyelids, “pessimism is what keeps me cheerful.”

He was first on the *Socialist Worker* in 1972 as a student radical, and then, following three years on the *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, worked briefly for the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, from which he was almost fired for refusing to write an article denouncing the activities of his former left-wing comrades. Having broken with Trotskyism he joined the *Daily Express* in 1977. Stints followed as an industrial, a parliamentary, and a foreign correspondent. In the latter role he witnessed first-hand the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the USSR. His first book was *The Abolition of Britain* (1999), but his best works are *The Abolition of Liberty* (2004), a polemic against legal and constitutional changes; *Short Breaks in Mordor* (2014), an anthology of his foreign reportage; *The Phoney Victory* (2019), a revisionist account of the Second World War; and *A Revolution Betrayed* (2022), a spirited defence of the old grammar-school system.

One instinct underlies all his political philosophy and all his books. This instinct is conservatism – conservatism in the literal sense of love of the past and suspicion of change. It is not that he is averse to all change, simply that he rejects what he sees as change for the worse. Like Edmund Burke, he possesses an

instinctive preference towards ideas and systems which have evolved naturally, over time, from the bottom-up, and he views with suspicion their shiny premanufactured counterparts. Thus, common law, imperial measurements, grammar schools, and the first-past-the-post system are always preferable to civil law, metric measurements, comprehensive schools, and proportional representation.

No doubt his conservatism leads him to many conclusions which I would dispute, but on other issues it gives him a valuable insight. In his upcoming book *The Madness of Cars* (expected 2026), he argues that motor-cars damage our health and environment, and are largely unnecessary given the alternatives of travelling by foot, cycle, train, or tram. Who else would be sufficiently immersed in the memory of the past to make this unheard-of but completely valid point? By ruling out conventional perspectives and accepting that not all progress is good, Hitchens attains a clear-sightedness which more mainstream commentators have missed. His stance on education is another example of what I mean:

In *A Revolution Betrayed* he argues passionately

“All I got were insults [but] pessimism is what keeps me cheerful.”

for the merits of the old grammar-school system (1944-65), and explains how it was abolished by egalitarians who disliked selection by merit. The greatest success of the grammar schools was social mobility: the most striking statistic in the book is that, by 1962, both parents of two-thirds of grammar-school pupils had left school at fourteen. This sort of intergenerational mobility has become almost impossible in state schools today. Selection by merit has given way to selection by mortgage. Affluent, well-educated neighbourhoods contain affluent,



well-educated schools. Deprived, crime-ridden neighbourhoods contain deprived, crime-ridden schools. Parents with enough money or knowledge of the system can in any case send their children to privates or to comprehensives in wealthy areas. Who suffers? Families on benefits or low incomes, residents of council estates, ethnic minorities. The system is dysfunctional but almost nobody in public discourse points out or even acknowledges the disaster. Nobody, that is, except Hitchens.

If Hitchens’s defining trait is love of the past and suspicion of change, then his great inestimable merit is the moral sense which in *The Rage Against God* (2010) he attributes to his Christianity. “Because I’m conservative about morals and culture, it doesn’t mean I want to grind the faces of the poor.” In too many cases the two things go hand in hand, and this is what marks Hitchens out from the crowd. It also explains why, as well as being a Burkean conservative and an Anglo Gaullist, he is a social democrat. He believes in a strong welfare state and trade unions, and in so much of his writing he takes care to stick up for the underdog. As one reviewer of *The Abolition of Liberty* put it, no other commentator of his ilk is “so obviously more interested in the welfare of the common man than in the approbation of his peers.” Morality overrides political affiliation.

This same moral clarity allows him to take intellectually honest stances on foreign policy. He has opposed the bombing of populations by the West not only in the last quarter-century in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Gaza, but in historical cases such as the Allied bombing of German civilians during the Second World War. To deflate a national myth for moral reasons is the kind of thing usually applied to colonialism and usually described as “woke”; for Hitchens to do it is another example of his moral sense overriding his political grouping. In the most recent example of civilian bombing, Israel’s destruction of Gaza and its killing of over 50,000 Palestinians, his opinion is even more noteworthy, because this is a war which the right-wing press in this country has ruthlessly supported, usually by trying to change the subject or by dismissing the casualties as fabrications. Politically Hitchens is a supporter of Israel, but his politics appear to melt away beside disgust at the killing of innocents:

“I am against the bombardment of populations, it’s just morally indefensible, you cannot under any rules of law justify it. It’s wrong. Just like Putin’s invasion of Ukraine it’s not only morally wrong but stupid.” He jumps up in his chair in emphatic frustration. “Why do we keep doing things which are both wrong and stupid? But in the British



(Ex)Student spotlight: Catherine Hoskyns on 1950s Oxford and the Mau Mau rebellion

A former Cherwell writer, journalist, and academic speaks to Billy Jeffs about her international career

C*herwell:* What was your experience like as a woman at Oxford in the 1950s?

Hoskyns: Well, I was there from 1953-56 and they did have women students, so we were quite privileged. I was at St. Hilda's, and there were I think four women's colleges, but it was a kind of carved-out space for women in a male-dominated world. We went to lectures with male students and I had some tutorial sessions with C.S. Lewis. He was a very strange person. He was very monosyllabic. He wasn't at all chatty. The women's colleges were separate and we were locked in about 10 o'clock, but there was a lot of climbing over the walls, in both directions. And a friend of mine actually got a key cut to the side door. That was useful. There was a bit of intermingling, as you might expect.

Cherwell: You worked at Cherwell at university - what was your experience like with that?

Hoskyns: I was the film and theatre critic and reviews editor. There was a really funny occasion where I got what I thought was a very good review of a book and I wanted to put it in full, but there wasn't enough space. So I left out the cinema times - we had what the different cinemas were showing, and I left that out in order to include this review in full. And the editor sent for me and he said, never do that again. He said, don't you realise people only read the paper to see what's on at the cinema? They don't really read it for these intellectual reviews and so on.

Cherwell: Moving beyond your time at university, you worked for a long time as a journalist. Could you tell us about that?

Hoskyns: Well, I went to Africa because I got interested in Kenya (a British colony) while I was at Oxford and soon after. Kenya was in a real crisis then because of the Mau Mau rebellion - there was a revolt among the Kikuyu tribe, which was very violent and was repressed with extreme violence by the British.

The British army was out there, but there

was a lot of sympathy for the Kikuyu in other areas because they'd been so severely repressed. They couldn't grow cash crops. They were very poorly paid. They'd been excluded from their land, so they were often working as labour on territory that they thought was theirs. And they were given no representation, and nobody would listen to them. So they took to violence in order to make a point. And a number of white settlers were killed, farms were destroyed. And then it was repressed by the British.

So when I came out, that was more or less finished, but the question was what to do. And it was clear that the British had to give some representation to Africans. They couldn't just go on treating them as slaves and giving them no possibility of political or legal action. And so I came in just that stage when other African politicians were beginning to emerge and when it was agreed that there would be some African representation in the legislative assembly, and there would be elections.

So it was quite an exciting time to come. I got a job on a paper called *The Colonial Times*, which sounded very right wing, but it was actually an Asian paper, which was quite radical. It was run by a Gujarati family, and had had a tradition of siding with the Africans against the British.

Cherwell: You have also worked as an academic on the evaluation of women's unpaid work.

Hoskyns: Yes, that's right.

My nephew Nicky was working in the cooperatives in Nicaragua and when I visited, I think in 2010, we got *The Body Shop* to actually include a component for the women's unpaid work in the cooperative as one of the costs of producing sesame. I think this issue is a good one to take up as a feminist, the unpaid work that women do, which is not counted or valued. It's actually a subsidy to capitalism.

But that was a bit later. I became a feminist because of having a baby and being cut out and being treated as a non-person. My daughter was born in 1968, and the early seventies were a time when feminism was really taking off and a lot of small groups were formed. And I was at a very famous conference in Oxford held first in Ruskin College and then in the Oxford Union - it was the first National Women's Liberation conference. That was very energising. When I was at Oxford as a student, women weren't allowed to be members of the Union.

Image Credit: Catherine Hoskyns

media and politics there are only two sides to this: either you're supposed to be howling for Hamas, or you're supposed to be cheering on Netanyahu. I do neither. But there's almost no point in speaking. The right response to the October 7 atrocities is not to respond in kind; if you respond in kind nothing will be gained. There is no hiding the fact that the bombardment of Gaza has killed huge numbers of innocent people. Why do we defend it? Why did Biden not put a stop to it? What has happened to conservatives in the West that they allow themselves to be so uncritical of Netanyahu? My stance is what it always has been. It doesn't put me on the side of the Left, I wouldn't go on a pro-Palestinian march or anything like that, but it just means that I have no camp."

The retention of a single principle, that the killing of civilians is wrong and must never be allowed to happen, can place one on the right side of history in so many cases. (In the case of the Second World War, he says that though it was necessary for the Allies to fight, we used the wrong tactics and remember the war in the wrong way). Hitchens' foreign-policy positions contain enough moral sense in themselves to counter the allegations of malice with which he is often, wrongly, charged. On the one hand there are torture camps, regime change, forced displace-

ment, detentions without charge, the plundering of national oil reserves, the annihilation of defenceless communities from the sky - all of which he regards as inexcusably wrong, although countless observers would defend these things if committed by the "right" side. On the other hand, he has personal, honest but not ill-natured opinions on multiculturalism or divorce which might offend some people. Which is the lesser evil? Which is a better gauge of genuine moral courage?

In 2010, Hitchens won the Orwell Journalism Prize for his foreign correspondence. The judges cited a passage from Orwell's essay "Charles Dickens" (1940), in which he visualises the face of Dickens. The judges thought his description was just as applicable to Hitchens. The passage runs:

"He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is generously angry - in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls."

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Hassan Akram





WOMEN IN FILM

A day celebrating the incredible
women shaping the film industry

Monday 12 May

Featuring

Dr. Stacy L. Smith
(USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative)
in conversation with

Simone Ashley (*Bridgerton*)

Gugu Mbatha-Raw (*Surface*)

With more special guests to be announced

Produced by the Cultural Programme at the University of Oxford
in partnership with Dr Stacy L. Smith, the University of Southern California's
Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, and Ghetto Film School

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Photo Credit: Lauren Leakey (Simone Ashley), Michael Wharley (Gugu Mbatha-Raw)

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Theme:

Get Out!

deadline: Friday 2nd may
@ midnight

scan
here



Reviving the dead: The joy of *The Little Clay*

STAGE

An unconventional cast help resurrect this millennia and a half-old play, bringing together the Oxford community

FAYE CHANG



As students left Oxford on the last weekend of Hilary, I visited St John's College's auditorium to witness the final hurrah of term: the biennial Sanskrit play. This year, the play of choice was Śūdraka's *Mrcchakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart*), directed by Ricardo Paccagnella and delivered entirely in Sanskrit, with surtitles translated by Professor Toby Hudson and Dominik Tūma. Both the Saturday and Sunday night performances were almost entirely sold-out, making the event a joyful reinvigoration of Sanskrit literature and legacy, bringing together long-time learners of Sanskrit and the completely uninitiated alike.

The play follows the folk tale, formalised in verse by Śūdraka, of the generous and impoverished brahmin Cārudattah (Lucas Ali-Hassan), as he falls in love with the highly-respected, wealthy courtesan Vasantasenā (Althea Sovani). However, their romance is threatened by the king's arrogant brother-in-law, Samsthānakah (Riccardo Paccagnella), who pursues Vasantasenā despite her refusal of him, believing that if he can't have her, no one should.

Given that the original play would have been performed for at least six hours, Paccagnella and his crew did an impressive job of cutting down the runtime to just over two. Yet, what impressed me even more was that the actors were able to deliver all their lines over the course of 150 minutes with little falter, including the song-like classical *rasas* ('poetic sentiments', as explained by the brochure). The first strain of this metre, put to melody, was slightly jarring to hear – the only contemporary theatre we really see songs in is musicals, after all – but it didn't take too long to attune. Particularly commendable in this respect were Paccagnella's and Althea's performances: their deliveries were effusive and evocative, clearly expressing the snide plotting of Samsthānakah and the joyful wit of Vasantasenā. Not only did they bring their characters to life, but it was clear to me – despite my complete lack of Sanskrit knowledge – what part



of the line they were delivering.

This play and its characters were also surprising in just how familiar they were. Despite being written one and a half millennia ago, many of the elements of *The Little Clay Cart* are still highly recognisable to a modern audience: the scheming villain with unguarded ambition; the down-on-his-luck hero, noble to a fault; the plucky, irreverent best friend – known here as Maitreyah (Vishal Rameshbabu). Its themes of jealousy, adoration, slighted masculinity, poverty, corruption – all these are timeless and endlessly explored. Even the comedy of errors that drives the main action of the plot seems to foreshadow Shakespeare by almost a thousand years; equally, the moments of pathos and genuine shock from the audience as Samsthānakah seems to succeed in his goal,

demonstrates its lasting resonance.

Throughout the play, the ingenuity required of all student productions also came through in many ways. While on stage, the costumes were flawlessly executed – striped dhoti, transparent veils, and loose, looping fabrics, in the style of paintings found in the Ajanta caves – the behind-the-scenes of the costuming revealed a flurry of activity. The brochure for the play showed reams of fabric laid out in college JCRs and gardens, waiting for the stripes of paint to dry; as housemates with one of the costumers, Benjamin Atkinson, I was a first-hand witness to the time he spent on this project; from whittling spears for the guards to tie-dying fabric. The eponymous carts rattling familiarly across the stage were themselves the trundling trolleys used

for transporting Merton College's vacation storage. Knowing the secrets behind the aesthetics of the play didn't ruin it by any means – it only made it all the more spectacular to see it come together.

More than that, the play was also a bringing together of people. On entry, I noted that the audience was predominantly made up of relatively older attendees – townspeople, without direct affiliation to the University, who might have already come to see previous Sanskrit productions before.

It's clear that a lot of heart went into *The Little Clay Cart* – the love that the entire ensemble had for the language shone through the whole production. It's definitely worth keeping your eye out for the next time that one of these Sanskrit plays, just like a little clay cart, rolls around.

Image Credit: *The Little Clay Cart*

Staging the radio play: The audio-visual world of *Under Milk Wood*

RHYS PONSFORD

The great Welsh poet Dylan Thomas used his famous "play for voices" to bring to life the eccentric inhabitants of a fictional Welsh village. But does it work best on stage or radio?

"Love the words!" That was the crisp command from Dylan Thomas, the 20th-century Welsh poet, to the cast of his radio play *Under Milk Wood*, just before a rehearsal in New York in 1953. Not long after, Thomas was dead. His entreaty to "love the words" is a fitting legacy. Thomas was a writer enchanted by the sound and song of language. He infused his work with the Anglo-Welsh rhythms absorbed during his childhood in Swansea and among Welsh speakers – despite not knowing the language himself. It is this unique brand of poetry that sings throughout *Under Milk Wood*.

Under Milk Wood is an idiosyncratic blend of verse, radio, and theatre of the mind. It captures

a day in the ordinary life of the fictionalised Welsh village, Llareggub (spelling "bugger all" backwards), featuring an ensemble of eccentric characters. We hear the gossipy repartee of neighbours, the Reverend Eli Jenkins' "greenleaved sermon on the innocence of men", and the musings of Captain Cat, still haunted by the ghosts of companions drowned at sea.

The most famous and beloved version was the 1954 BBC radio broadcast, with Richard Burton as the First Voice (one of two narrators). It invites listeners to conjure their own version of the "lulled and dumbfound town" from the musicality of Thomas' words and the sound design. The radio version is intimate; the narrators entreat us to "look", "listen", and "come closer now", assuming

a new joyful urgency via their direct address.

On the other hand, one of the most innovative stagings came in the National Theatre's (NT) version in 2021, directed by Lyndsey Turner. Turner largely maintains the pace of Thomas' roving narrators, the First and Second Voice. Yet these transitions are seamless in radio. In this sense, a staged version may always be trying to chase after audio's aural echoes.

The radio version is not bound by the logistical constraints of the stage. Yet the play has also been performed in theatres countless times, and even adapted into film. So in which form can we "love the words" best – radio, or the stage?

Guy Masterson's performance of *Under Milk Wood* will be at the Oxford Playhouse on 15th July.

FILM AND TV

Editors' Picks

IN THEATRES



BRIDGET JONES: MAD ABOUT THE BOY

The fourth and final installment of Helen Fielding's beloved film series sees Bridget navigate new challenges of widowhood, parenting, and modern dating in a warm, bittersweet conclusion to Bridget's story.

TO STREAM



THE WAILING

Directed by Na Hong-jin, *The Wailing* follows a string of gruesome deaths, in a small South Korean town – a thought-provoking, sinister, and outrageously tense

Image Credits:
[Bridget Jones: Mad About The Boy] - Siebbi / CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons
[The Wailing] - Harald Krichel / CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

REMEMBERING DAVID LYNCH

ARTHUR MEYNELL

In a behind-the-scenes clip from David Lynch's final project, *Twin Peaks: The Return*, a crew member tells him that they only have two days to shoot a scene. Lynch frowns, and searches his pocket for another cigarette.

"Why?" he demands.

Someone mumbles an explanation about someone else's schedule, but the nasal tirade is already underway. "This is absolutely horrible." In his fury, it's difficult to say whether he stops to smoke or to speak. "We never get any extra shots; we never get any time to experiment." He pounds the table. "We never get to, you know, go dreamy or anything."

This is not the only video of Lynch going berserk when someone interferes with his process. How maddening this must have been for the auteur, when the free and slow approach to filmmaking, the chance to "go dreamy", had won him overnight success (literally, at first). His feature film debut, *Eraserhead*, premiered at the 1977 LA Filmex Festival as a midnight movie, a slot reserved for independent, avant-garde filmmakers with a budget as spare as their audiences. These were films that could afford to flop, and usually did. But with lighter pockets, directors were free to experiment – no big-bucks producer was around to stub their cigar on the final draft.

Only in a sparsely filled theatre, in the early hours of the morning, could a 'cult-director' like David Lynch have been conceived. And his conception was unforgettable. The opening

scene of *Eraserhead*, shot in shadowy black and white, depicts a spermatozoon uncoiling from the protagonist's mouth; after a buboed man pulls a lever, it wriggles through space to make cinematic legend.

As with all great art, there is no single explanation for Lynch's popularity. The first episode of *Twin Peaks*, aired in 1990, is among the most watched TV pilots in history. Sitcoms like *Cheers* and *The Cosby Show* had dominated ABC in the 80s, and *America's Funniest Home Videos* played immediately before Lynch's network debut. Perhaps, fed up with canned laughter and neat narrative, the nation wanted to feel disturbed. If the storyline of who killed Laura Palmer was the hook of *Twin Peaks*' velvet visuals, oddball characters and general weirdness of the show which kept its audiences transfixed. In a miracle of modern television, Lynch made the avant-garde conformist.

But the show's prime was brief. Early into the second season, producers became paranoid they would lose their audience if the mystery remained unsolved, and Laura Palmer's killer was revealed earlier than Lynch had intended. Only then did ratings drop, and *Twin Peaks* was cancelled. The director's work had suffered from executive meddling before. Deeply humiliated by the comprehensive failure of *Dune* in 1984, he had his name credited as 'Judas Booth' for its TV run. But it was Lynch, not the producers, who had betrayed and killed his art. After ceding the director's cut, he trusted that the studio would realise his vision – if his vision existed at all. "I

started selling out even in the script phase," he confessed to Stuart Mabey in 2006. Lynch was sorely punished for his leniency, along with the production company, which lost at least \$15 million at the box-office, over a quarter of its budget.

Even with autonomy, Lynch would frequently make losses on his films. But if fortune would be fickle, he would be unbending. Lacking the funds to advertise *Inland Empire*, he ruled out negotiating with Hollywood moguls for aid. Instead, set up on a Los Angeles street corner, he sat between a cow and a huge poster of Laura Dern, promoting the film alone. "Without cheese, there wouldn't be an *Inland Empire*," read his placard.

I've watched the film: with a runtime of 197 minutes, all handheld shots and trauma-montage, it dehydrated and depressed me. Yet there was no doubting that each scene belonged entirely to Lynch. Whether I enjoyed it felt irrelevant; this was a vision uncompromised, and to slate the film as obscure or impenetrable would be to assume that he owed us something.

Major studios still try to predict our wants and needs, but Lynch seemed to know our darker desires. It's unsurprising that his most popular films, *Mulholland Drive* and *Blue Velvet* among them, are like broadcasts from the subconscious. Deeply haunting and oddly beautiful, they lurk just below the intellect, but are no more exasperating than a nightmare. For Lynch, going dreamy was not just an aesthetic – it was a responsibility.

Star pieces from Oxford's Short Film Festival

TOMAS OVERTON

The Oxford University Short Film Festival took place at the end of last term in Keble O'Reilly Theatre. Each day featured a variety of well-crafted student films, and day two was no exception.

Almost all films were shot in 4:3. Almost all used a retro, nostalgic colour grade. Almost all, with notable exceptions, attempted a form of social realism, mostly through the use of minimal dialogue. As you would expect given the age range, most explored themes of fleeting youth, university life, or failing love. They were curated based on the theme of 'interpersonal relationships', which makes sense; most were interested more in exploring the relations between individuals rather than any wider social concerns.

Skelter: The first film of the night, directed by Max Morgan, depicts a girl moving on from her summer job at a fairground and all the emotional disconnection and reorientation that entails. It's set on her last day of work as she says goodbye to a close friend. The film mines a similar economical, hesitantly emotional vein as the films of Colm Bairéad and Charlotte Wells. Its storytelling is assuredly minimal, preferring to hesitate on shots of the environment and pitch its conversations in a place of naturalistic awkwardness. This approach allows the film to ascend towards a moment of thematic unity as the protagonist descends the eponymous helter skelter for the last time. This scene, enhanced by Aris Sabetai's overwhelming score combined with the laconic images of

the disassembly of the fairground, leads to a moment of poetic insight as we watch the pair of friends recoiling from and parodying their previous emotional closeness. On a more critical note, though the writing is for the most part subtle, it at times felt a bit obvious. Stripping it back even further and leaning into the Hemingway-esque economy, even extending some of the environmental storytelling and slowing the pacing (as in the films of Béla Tarr) would accentuate what is an interesting style.

Bright Young Things: The second film, directed by Katie Burge, centres on the relationship between Pia and Soph as they struggle to negotiate youth and morality. The film opens with a dreamlike sequence as Pia sparkles in a black void, fluttering around a star. We wake up on Pia's 20th birthday as the two friends plan the party they will have that evening. Pia speaks in Waughian lyrics and half-finished ideas, relishing the confusion of her interlocutor. Soph is excited and happy, a lamb for Pia to lead, a dream for her to invent. When Pia kisses the boy that Soph likes at the party, the two fall out. Pia's self-conscious charisma is imitated by Soph, who then undermines it and exposes its artificiality.

Soph emerges as the emotional core of the film amidst a world of sparkling appearances and inauthenticity. Meaning or morality is banished by a set of glimmering ideals, and youth is something illusory and performative. The film's dialogue, while contrived at points, is spaced out to allow ambiguity to emerge. Defying any easy resolution, the film's pessimism is itself unsure and seems to seek for some fragile

humanity in its characters.

Cloud Nine: The third film, directed by Theo Shorrocks, is a Richard Curtis-inspired portrait of contrasting experiences of love. A real interview of an older couple is juxtaposed against the trials and tribulations of a pair of young would-be lovers. The use of the interview footage really elevates the film as their genuine and naturally complex dynamic sits on top of and shifts perceptions of the secondary storyline. This contrast makes the young lovers seem one-dimensional, but in the same way that Richard Curtis' characters are deliberately

one-dimensional. As such, the film takes apart the Curtis formula, sitting in a place of tension that is at times genuinely heartwarming and at others self-aware of its own limitations. This stops it from synthesising in an emotional conclusion or reaching any final judgement on the theme of love (outside of its precarity), but this is also the film's greatest strength, leading us into a nostalgic place of uncertainty where narratives of love and real love combine and are muddled.

Continue reading at cherwell.org
Image Credit: Richard Kuehl



Reflections on the Oxford Literary Festival

Briony Arnott discusses the process of volunteering at the annual Oxford Literary Festival, and lessons learned from writers Wendy Cope and Alexander Armstrong

The Oxford Literary Festival is one of those events I hear about every year, mark out on my calendar, and never end up going to. Sometimes it's the distance that's daunting, other times, it's the difficulty of traversing the Circle line, finding a hotel without taking out a small loan, and spending between £8 and £10 pounds on every talk. None are insurmountable boundaries, but all kept me from the festival until this year, when insistence from every careers advisor under the sun persuaded me.

The great advantage of being a volunteer, is that I was able to get free access to any talk, provided I was not: a) on dreaded mic duty or b) stationed 20 minutes away from the centre. This led me to be privy to a great many talks I wouldn't have otherwise attended, including Alexander Armstrong debuting his new children's book (my *Pointless*-watching mother green with envy), Bettany Hughes who almost inspired me to become an archeologist and go crawling under the pyramids (she's just that good of a speaker), and Abdulrazak Gurnah, discussing his latest novel (a trip to Blackwells thus ensued).

A stand-out was Wendy Cope's talk – the poet being a favourite of both my sister and my grandmother, the former lucky enough to join me. Or perhaps I should say I was lucky enough to be with my sister. We had planned to go months in advance, and my sister became the first person to show Cope an 'Orange'-inspired tattoo, and then promptly ordered me to take a picture of the two of them (with Cope's permission). During the talk and then the follow up Q&A session, Cope presented reading and writing as entwined acts. While this wasn't necessarily a surprise, it's always something of a revelation to think of one's favourite author as a hunched-over, insatiable reader. After seeing only the finished products, the shining magnum opuses, it's always somewhat unsettling to think of drafts and revisions. What writer wants to confront the fact that the first draft is never actually as perfect as



hoped?

Similar advice was also given by Armstrong, to a chorus of bouncing children, hands reaching for the sky when he asked: "Who here wants to be a writer?"

“These simple joys are often the best. These things are worthy of poems, of commemoration, of being framed and mounted...”

His book *Evenfall* focused on the art and intricacies of perception, and thinking deeply about the world – it is in many ways a how-to for both reading and experiencing. A level of participation is required; one must prepare oneself to be immersed in a text – to be challenged and troubled.

Writing – and reading – for Armstrong and Cope, and even for other speakers like Bettany Hughes and Abdulrazak Gurnah, is a deep engagement in real life. Something which, while often funny, is deeply serious too. I find this is best demonstrated in 'The Orange' where Cope leaves the reader with the poignant ending, "I love you. I'm glad I exist."

The simple joys are often the best – the warmth of sharing food, of an inside joke, of a sunny morning. These things are serious, too. These things are worthy of poems, of commemoration, of being framed and mounted on an office wall. The act of going to a festival lecture and leaving, reminded me of joy.

On the train home that evening, I read my sister's copy of *Two Cures for Love*. She borrows *Richard II*. The sunlight catches on my bracelets. I think, "I love you. I'm glad I exist."

Continue reading at cherwell.org

Image Credit: Faye Chang

BOOKS

Joanna Miller's *The Eights*, reviewed

FREDDY CONWAY-SHAW

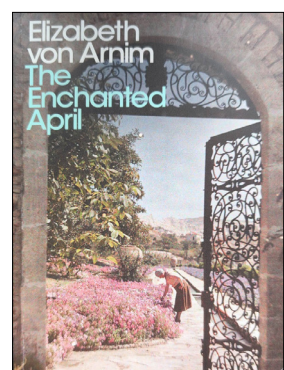
Do not worry: despite the title, this is not a rowing novel. Instead, 'The Eights' in Miller's novel are the four women who populate corridor eight in St. Hugh's College in 1920, making them four of the first women to ever matriculate at the University of Oxford. The novel follows Marianne, Otto, Dora, and Beatrice in their first year, as they bond over excessive reading lists, attend union debates, and panic over formal attire, while also dealing with ridiculous chaperone rules, confronting tutors who refuse to teach them, and obeying strict curfews that cause unceremonious theatre-night exits.

Miller's interweaving of the quintessentially Oxonian with this drastic historical moment lends the novel such charm and interest. It is, indeed, intensely Oxford, surpassing even *Brideshead* or *Salterton*. It does not have Parts I, II, and III; rather Michaelmas, Hilary, and Trinity. Chapters follow weeks, from 0th to 8th. Timeless Oxford sentiments are shared by the reader – the excitement that a scholar's gown comes "with sleeves", for example, or the yawning question, "Is this it?" upon straining to hear May Day choristers. The novel shines in its attention to the historical conditions that inspire it: as an addended author's note makes clear, Miller's research for the novel was far-reaching and rigorous.

The novel does have its shortcomings, however: the quiet, meandering journey through a year at Oxford could be accused of plotlessness, and the resolution tends too close towards fable and fairy-tale. Despite this, Miller's novel is no doubt important and relevant, especially today: *The Eights* combines a critical message with an atmosphere that, for excited offer-holders, wistful finalists, or for nostalgic alumni, will be gloriously, unapologetically, indulgently Oxford.

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What's Oxford reading?



THE ENCHANTED APRIL Elizabeth von Arnim

This 1922 novel follows four dissimilar strangers as they go on holiday to Italy. Over the course of their month-long stay in San Salvatore, Mrs Arbuthnot, Mrs Wilkins, Lady Caroline Dester and Mrs Fisher will regularly try each other's patience and, perhaps, find the transformative experience they all seek.

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE Muriel Sparks

Following an unorthodox teacher and her devoted gang of schoolgirls, this novel solidified Sparks' place in Scottish literature. Its entertaining narrative sheds light on one of the most humorous and iconic characters of its era, as well as mixing in occasional, and effective, doses of pathos.



A Trinity trail of Oxford's best reads and retreats

POLINA KIM

Oxford is truly a literary city, where so many words and stories have begun. In Trinity term there can be no greater gift than reading here, so below is a trail of ideal reading spots in Oxford, with book recommendations to accompany every single one.

First Spot – Vaults and Garden's summer terrace

The University Church provides shade, there's a cool breeze, you can order delicious scones, and you get a view of the Rad Cam; the terrace spots are a must. Speaking of scones and afternoon gluttony...

Must-read: *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde
If you still haven't read Oscar Wilde's greatest comedy, now's the time. Filled with Wilde's classic wit, and endless aphorisms, it's a blend of false and mistaken identities, hastened marriages, and frivolous engagements, served with lots of social commentary and drama.

Second Spot – Under a tree in Christ Church Meadows

If you walk past the river bank where the boat house is, you will get to a bend where people rarely go, except if they're walking the full circle, leaving you largely undisturbed. You can truly return back to your childhood memories of warm days of seemingly endless time.

Must-read: *Mina's Matchbox* by Yoko Ogawa

To make that feeling even stronger, here's a Japanese fiction recommendation that's filled with whimsy, childlike carelessness, and the sense of almost limitless potential. After Tomoko is sent to live with her uncle in a coastal town, she finds herself in a fascinatingly mysterious mansion. Her cousin even rides a Pygmy hippo to school. She's also a pyromaniac. Their house is insanely cool... or maybe just insane. Need I say more?

Third Spot – Port Meadow amongst the horses

To have your 'Disney' experience, simply read in Port Meadow, and the horses will become curious. You might need to sit still though, so you need a book that will truly immerse you, and spark a state of careful, slow reflection.

Must read: *Swann's Way* by Marcel Proust

Hear me out on this one: I know *In Search of Lost Time* is one of the longest books in the world, but reading a volume a year has become my obsession. Let me make it yours too. Proust writes beautifully – every page is filled with sentiment, emotion, and humanity. His slow nostalgic tone and descriptions remind me of waiting for the first flower to bloom just to examine every petal.

These are among a few perfect places to enjoy your book! Maybe, in Trinity, you'll find your favourite read and retreat.

If walls could speak: Lessons from Cowley's street art

Cienna Jennings takes a trip down Cowley Road and its unique art scene, showing how street art reflects the city's dynamic community and evolving artistic expression

ART

Just a five-minute stroll from the imposing spires of Magdalen College lies Cowley Road, the heart of Oxford's urban culture. Oxford, renowned for its grand dining halls and neoclassical facades, is not a place where street art is the first thing that comes to mind. Yet, beyond the grandeur, Cowley Road transforms brick and concrete into a vibrant canvas – capturing the city's community and vitality in bold, defiant strokes.

A striking example is the mural on Stockmore Street, just off Cowley Road, depicting Horns of Plenty – a community street band formed in East Oxford in 2007. Commissioned for their tenth anniversary and the Cowley Road Carnival in 2017, the piece was created with support from Oxford City Council.

This mural, from renowned local street artist Andrew Manson (known as Mani), radiates the community's energy. Its striking contrast of cool blues and fiery reds demands our attention, while its towering presence makes it impossible to miss.

The band dominates the composition, their large figures placed at the top centre, making up over half of the scene. On the top left, one member plays the saxophone while skateboarding, while on the far right, another drums, while crossing the road, adding a playful, lively energy to the scene.

Beneath the band, vibrant shops line the scene, with more musicians scattered throughout, playing saxophones and drums, their lively energy mirrors the booming sounds of Cowley Road's Carnival. The overlapping figures and sur-



roundings further emphasize the city's bustling atmosphere during this time.

A closer look at this piece – now far from the vibrant freshness it once had – reveals peeling paint and signs of decay, a quiet reminder of life's transience. Like the carnival it depicts, the artwork will fade away with time, surviving vividly in the memories of those who saw it. The exposed brick beneath grounds it in the city's fabric, reinforcing its connection to urban life.

Street art now contributes to Cowley Road's

vibrant energy, but it wasn't always so revered. Originating from illegal graffiti, street art formerly faced widespread criticism. However, local artists like the Mes Crew (Must One and Seven) have collaborated with councils and the community to establish the Open Walls Network – legal spaces around Oxford, including tunnels and walls, for artists to showcase their work.

Another striking piece of street art in Cowley is a mural of the Radcliffe Camera, created by renowned street artist Reeves One in collaboration

with the Oxford Street Art Collective. Painted during the 2017 Cowley Road Carnival, it can be found on Moberly Close, just off Cowley Road. The mural reimagines one of Oxford's most iconic buildings in a bold contemporary style.

Set against a mysterious purple background, the Radcliffe Camera is rendered in vivid, unexpected colours – yellow-tinted windows and a turquoise dome – that reimagines its classical form with a bold, industrial aesthetic. The striking palette creates a powerful contrast between tradition and modernity.

The dome appears to hover, with machine-like elements emerging from both the top and base. These details suggest a fusion of past and present: the classical architecture merges with an industrial, futuristic vision, reflecting the changing nature of art and design.

This mural creates a visual dialogue between Oxford's classical heritage and its dynamic street art scene, celebrating the coexistence of tradition and evolving creative culture.

Street art in Oxford is a powerful reflection of the city's energy and culture. So next time you think of art in Oxford, don't just picture the ornate ceiling of the Radcliffe Camera or the marble sculptures of the Ashmolean – consider the street art, created by and for the community. Unlike the permanence of Oxford's historic buildings, its beauty lies in its ever-changing nature, a vibrant symbol of modernity.

Image Credit: Horns of Plenty by Andrew Manson. Photograph taken by Cienna Jennings.

ARTS CALENDAR

What's On.

STAGE

Medieval Mystery Plays – Mystery Cycle (St Edmund Hall, 26th April)

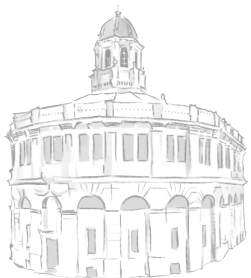
Cyrano de Bergerac – 2046 Productions (Oxford Playhouse, 30th April-3rd May)

MUSIC

Carmen - Oxford Opera Society (Sheldonian Theatre, 3rd May)

BOOKS

Oxford Premier Book Fair Provincial Booksellers Fairs Association (Oxford Brookes University, 26th-7th April)



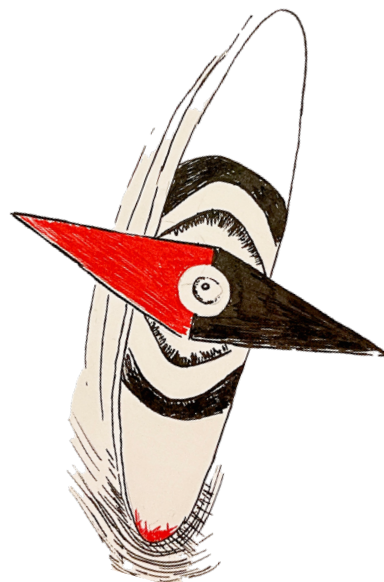
The Source

Hand over Heart

Through the blankets of night
and the soft silk sheets of our bed you slip
out of sight, the door creaking as you ease it open.
I watch as you pad your way to the hall
lioness caged in a fleshy being, long-limbed
and elegant even in haste. You turn,
the moonlight a guilty eye – mine are closed.
Faking sleep in the silence. So bite the heel
that walked you home in the rain,
our skirts half torn and my top undone,
that midnight hour – don't you remember how we ran?
I would give you half of my liver, nearly did
when the doctor pumping your stomach
came out with such a sad, sorry look on his face.
I held your hand so tightly I swear I knew the shape.
My Galatea, refashioned in your image,
marble skin cool to the touch as you change
your colours with ease – flighty as the leaves
on the trees. New green, fresh God. I'll arch my back
for a novel deity this April. I'll hand over
my heart in a basket; my hands too, nearly did –

The door makes such a soft noise when it closes.

BRIONY ARNOTT



An in-depth dive into the music of May Day

Daniel Burns previews the musical classics that make up May Day, and the history behind them

MUSIC

May Day. It's unique, convivial and quintessentially Oxford. Only once a year does the city come together like it, and when that happens, it's not one to miss out on. So, what can you expect to see on the day? When will it all be happening? And, most importantly (in my unbiased opinion), what is the role that music has to play in the history behind the traditions?

Officially, the day kicks off on 1st May at 6am with the annual performance of Magdalen College Choir. From Long Wall Street to the Plain Roundabout, crowds gather all along High Street and Magdalen Bridge in their thousands. Given the popularity of the spectacle though, many arrive earlier at Magdalen Tower to enjoy a closer view. So make sure to get there in plenty of time if you want a good spot!

One might wonder why the early start: May Day celebrates the arrival of summer, and so welcoming in the sunrise has always been a central part of the celebration. For many students at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University however, the festivities begin even earlier. Nowadays, pulling an all-nighter seems a more appealing option than crawling out of bed in the early hours of the morning. Don't be surprised to see some even in formal attire, as all-night balls don't go unheard of.

After all the build-up, the Hymnus Eucharisticus, sung by Magdalen College Choir, marks the beginning of May Day. Music's role does not diminish from there – the choir follows up with a cycle of songs, including the Renaissance-de-

rived ballet, Now is the Month of Maying, a sort of traditional madrigal. First sung in 1595, and featuring a good-old 'fa la la la', it never fails to be an uplifting start to the ceremony. From 'merry lads' to 'barley break', the lyrics send us back to past times while reminding us of the exciting summer ahead.

After their ten-minute show, the bells of the Great Tower ring for another twenty minutes. Meanwhile, some head to Radcliffe Square while others, mostly students, make for Magdalen Bridge, where jumping into the river has become tradition. This happens despite accidents in recent decades. For example, in 2005 at least ten people ignored warnings from police about low water levels. They were soon rushed to hospital after attempting the plunge. Nevertheless, if safe, it can be a highlight of the day for those who take part.

If adrenaline rushes aren't your thing, there's still plenty to enjoy around the Radcliffe Camera. The entertainment that steals the show is Morris dancing. Since the first documented time the city celebrated the festival 500 years ago, it has always been a fan-favourite. With folk music reverberating around the square, the Morris Men of Oxford swing their handkerchiefs and jingle their bells as they execute their time-old choreography. If to be believed, the Morris Men are said to bring magic power to wherever they dance. When Radcliffe Square is as busy and bustling as it is on May Day, it is hard to deny there's something magical in the air.

As the procession moves up to the city centre,

the bagpipes, squeezeboxes and fiddles of the all-in-green Whirly Band can be heard outside Clarendon Building. They never fail to bring the spirit of summer to the city as their viridescent suits symbolise a new leaf. It's their one gig of the year, and their folk songs dating back to the 13th century, like *Miri It Is*, are not one to pass up.

Besides this, general revelry and Highland dancing outside All Souls College are some of the events to enjoy. Be sure to keep a look out as well for the Jack-in-the-Green bush – someone dressed up in what looks like a Christmas tree – which also makes its way round the city centre. The phenomenon originates from a milkmaid tradition of carrying flower-decorated milk

pails, supposed to show the beauty of spring. Perhaps slightly detached from its previous meaning, the Oxford Jack is now a central part of the procession. With 14,000 people behind him, Jack plays follow-the-leader up the High Street.

May Day is full of peculiarities and eccentricities, all of which put the day high on everyone's agenda. Music is a key part of this, with the mix of Latin lyrics and folk melodies characterising the day's unique origins. But it is the camaraderie and togetherness of May Day that make it so special for the city. So, be sure to get up early and not miss out on what is truly an unforgettable day of music and memories.

Image Credit: Matt Unwin



No-buy Trinity: A guide to buying less and creating more

FAYE CHANG

For Oxford students, the start of Trinity marks not just the start of the final term of the year, but also the start of a brand new wardrobe to match the rising temperatures. College puffers and chunky thermals are out – crop tops, linen shirts, and tastefully long jorts are in. With this seasonal rebranding, there's a temptation to buy more to stay on-trend; fast-track shipping, Vinted and Depop, and the slew of local thrifting opportunities make acquiescing to the panic of looking too 'last year' easy to fall into.

However, 2025 has also seen a growing 'No Buy' trend. Participants hold off on buying

strictly unnecessary goods: clothing, home decor, and even takeout. All jokes about recession indicators aside, reducing the rate at which we buy clothes is undoubtedly good for the environment. In this context, the 'No Buy' trend indicates an encouraging shift towards a mindset less based in endless consumption, and more in making do with what we already have in creative ways – like turning an old kurta into a vest, as pictured to the right.

Of course, the hectic pace of terms can make it difficult to invest a bit more time into making this happen. There's also the question: Where do I get the resources? It's tricky enough lugging a sewing machine to Oxford, to say much less of finding where to store it over vacations.



It's here that repair cafes like Share Oxford's come in handy. Running monthly, the 'cafe' brings together community members and volunteers to share expertise on how to fix broken things: anything from clothing to jewellery, bikes to electronics. As a global model that first started in Amsterdam in 2009, Oxford's own repair cafe runs out of 1 Aristotle Lane, just 3 minutes away from St Anne's College.

If you're looking for access to sewing machines

“The 'No Buy' trend indicates an encouraging shift from consumption, towards creativity.”

on a more regular basis, other community groups in Oxford abound. The Hackspace cooperative, also based in 1 Aristotle Lane, runs socials weekly on Wednesday evening, where you can use the sewing machine to your heart's content.

If you need even more regular repairs, the Christ Church art room hosts its own sewing machine. While you'll need to be certified to use the machine, a process which mainly involves proving you can thread a machine and wind a bobbin, the almost 24/7 access is a life-saver for those committed to making their own clothes and doing their own repairs.

For those more uninitiated in the habit of repairing and making their own things, all of this information might look slightly overwhelming. What about getting the materials for repairs in

FASHION



the first place? My answer: Thrift shops. Finding pieces of secondhand or scrap fabric and turning them into something entirely new can produce a unique thrill of its own. However, it's quite likely that you'll be able to find some pieces in your own wardrobe that aren't just getting worn – using these to repair is an equally viable strategy.

The same principle goes for learning how to repair. While online guides can include a tantalising array of measuring tools, embroidery wheels, and felting kits, you don't truly need to buy new things. All you really need to get started is a needle, and some thread.

Image Credits: Malaika Aiyar and Luke Liang

On being a fringe friend

Benjamin O'Brien reflects on the phenomenon of the 'Fringe Friend' – maybe it's not as bad as it seems

The other day when I was scrolling through Facebook I came across something that made me feel sad inside. A friend from back home had invited me to his birthday party. He was a good friend, a close friend, a friend of many years. He promised cake, free alcohol, a small lake to swim in (the party was in a field somewhere), and a DJ. That all sounded great. Only thing was, as it turned out, I wasn't invited to the real party. 'Just to let you all know,' it said at the bottom of the invite, 'a few of us are going for a meal and drinks earlier that day. For reasons of space, only limited numbers invited.' This, from the man who used to spread cream over my back all those years ago when I had scabies! Maybe that wasn't the special bonding moment I thought it was after all.

Imagine my relief when I found that what happened to me isn't actually that unusual at all. Apparently, many people who think of themselves as close friends with someone are really no more than 'fringe friends'. As one study of undergrads shows, whereas most people think their friendships are reciprocal, only about half of them really are. At the same time, another study shows that while the majority of adults are happy with the overall number of friends they have, more than 40% feel those friendships aren't as close as they'd like. Put these two things together, and things look bleak. We'd already like to have more close friendships, and yet even those apparently 'close' friendships might not be that close at all. Reflecting on this, I began to feel better. Gather any random sample of friends together for a party in a field and chances are that most of them don't really like each other that much. It was reassuring to know that it wasn't just me.

I joke, of course, because in reality, the idea that a number of supposedly

close friends don't like me as much as I thought is thoroughly depressing. We all want to be liked, or at least all the humans I've met in my life so far do. Just the thought that a certain number of my close friends think of me as merely a fringe friend is enough to wreak havoc in all my relationships. After all, how am I supposed to know who are the good eggs and who are the bad ones, unless they reveal themselves to me through the medium of Facebook invites? Without solid evidence to the contrary, I might just have to assume that everyone hates me.

On the other hand, though, is the idea of fringe friendship really as bad as it seems? As Miriam Kirmayer, a clinical psychologist and friendship expert points out, while close friendships are essential for our mental and even our physical health, they can also bring with them added pressure and expectation. Put simply, close friendships demand time and energy, and they can often leave us feeling guilty or ashamed when we aren't measuring up to some idealised vision of what the perfect friend would be. We wouldn't even have enough time for that many close friendships, even if everybody did find time in their own busy schedules. All of which is to say, how many non-fringe friends can any one person manage at one time?

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Image Credit: Archie Johnston



Why the rise of digital cameras?

Lara Machado contemplates their popular appeal

I doubt I'm the only person who has recently found their Instagram feed flooded by pictures taken on digital cameras. Low resolution, blurry shots of red-eyed smiling faces, more often than not at night time.

It seems, at first glance, a strange phenomenon. Nowadays, even the most basic of mobile phones has pretty good camera quality. In fact, technology has improved to the extent that award-winning filmmakers, from Sean Baker to Steven Soderbergh, have shot feature films on phones. When looking through old photo albums, parents and grandparents often lament that the quality of pictures was not what it is now. Why, then, has the digital camera market been steadily increasing, particularly among younger generations? It would seem that high photographic resolution has lost some of its charm.

Upon first encountering this phenomenon, I was immediately reminded of Susan Sontag's brilliant essay 'Regarding the Pain of Others'. The text focuses on war photography as an art form – an entirely different topic to the one at hand – and yet one point that Sontag makes struck me as particularly relevant. She argues that we have come to

associate war photography with a certain candidness: uncontrived, spontaneous shots that do not look like they have been pre-arranged or posed for (unlike what we expect from, say, a portrait). If a spontaneous shot looks too clean, we are quick to reject it as posed and dismiss it having been taken 'in the moment'. Obviously, in the case of war photography, and as Sontag argues, this is related to the ethics of photographing and viewing the pain of others. However, I still think it's a useful idea to consider alongside the phenomenon of digital cameras.

We have increasingly become disillusioned with social media and with the overly curated aspect of the images we find on it. We are now suspicious of images that look too good, and moments that seem too perfect. Perhaps it is then, that in its low resolution, we associate digital camera pictures with something more authentic. They give an air of cool unstudiedness, of pictures in which the lack of detail makes it hard for anyone to seem like they are trying to look good. There is an effortless quality to the pictures that seems to send out the message: I am not here to impress.

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Image credit: Gamze Özdemir via Pexels

Staying green in Oxford

MORIEN ROBERTSON

At home, things are quite simple: clearly labelled bins for various types of recycling, a reassuring food waste bin at hand in the kitchen, another bag for the various plastics that can't be recycled from the house. With ample time to spare, it's easy enough to go through the motions of checking the various labels on packages, washing and cleaning dutifully, and ensuring everything ends up where it should. Seeing the nicely-sorted plastics solemnly awaiting collection gives a certain peace of mind; the reassuring

thought that one is doing one's little bit in making the world a better place.

Not so in Oxford. Here everything goes out of the window (almost literally). Yet there are a few reasons – or maybe 'self-justifications' would be a more fitting term to use. First is the waste systems of my own college feeling as if they haven't changed since the 20s: one recycling bin in the kitchen, another big black bin for everything else. Despite ongoing JCR efforts, the concept of a food bin is just as alien to St Hugh's College as the notion of a short walk. The cooking of every meal then ends with a period of moral pain – a momentary resistance followed by inevitable resignation to the inevitability

of dumping the ends of peppers and carrots into the same container as its non-recyclable packaging.

And it's not just the food. A good deal of plastics need to be taken to a larger facility for processing. But this transportation, simple enough when orchestrated by my parents, becomes mentally an insuperable task. It's not even that there's not enough time in between two essays, German classes, and various extra-curriculars, though of course that's a part of it. It's more than that the mental effort required after a full day of work means that temptation to just do the easy thing is practically irresistible. Add to that the (not insignificant) probability

of a scout, through absolutely no fault of their own, mistaking the collected plastic for just another thing to be put in the bin.

There's also the added dimension of the various social problems that invariably arise in shared kitchens. Mine, for instance, shared between enough people to mean the amount of free space is limited, makes carving out a good system for self-organising recycling a challenge. Further, with everyone else equally busy, there's little social pressure to be environmentally disciplined – repeatedly seeing things dumped in a single bin reduces the sense of its wrongness.

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HOROSCOPES



Aries

It's in your stars to confront your haters.



Taurus

Expect some spicy dreams this week.



Gemini

You need a rest...



Cancer

Get yourself to Tuesdays!



Leo

Less yapping, more listening...



Virgo

Keep your friends close.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

Watch out for Instagram story lurkers.



Scorpio

All it takes is one hot girl walk...



Sagittarius

Your chronic people-pleasing is getting old.



Capricorn

It's your time to become a plant mum.



Aquarius

Give yourself a fresh start for Trinity.



Pisces

Speak up in your next tute.

Stuck in a loop: Balancing studies with your cycle

MADDIE GILLET

As Oxford University students, we often feel a pressure to “lock in” and constantly achieve – it is our reputation, after all. Off days are only human, but we cannot have many of them, or afford to notably stray from schedule. However, have you ever noticed that for a week at a time, you might not feel productive at all? While often deemed as minor, many students might not have considered the effects that their menstrual cycle has on productivity. Study guilt is something that most Oxford students will relate to, but this is only exacerbated by the working day being tailored to the male biological clock, where hormones fluctuate on a day-to-day basis. This is not necessarily a disadvantage, though. This article will provide a number of tips for recognising each stage of the cycle and navigating its impacts.

The typical menstrual cycle lasts 28 days, but can normally range from 21 to 35. It comprises four stages: the follicular, ovulation, luteal, and menstrual.

The follicular stage occurs just after a period. This is generally thought to be a time of increased energy, confidence, and motivation, since levels of estrogen and luteinizing hormone (LH) rise. This leads to ovulation, lasting roughly a day. After this, LH levels decline, and progesterone increases, leading to the luteal phase. This is often described as premenstrual syndrome – PMS – and it can be associated with changes in mood and energy. Finally, the menstrual phase occurs, where estrogen and progesterone are at their lowest.

Generally, people who menstruate tend to feel their most energetic, social, and productive in the follicular and ovulation phases. During this time, the brain might respond better to sociable study activities, such as group discussions. While the Oxford workload is not really something that can be negotiated, it might prove beneficial to schedule more intense tasks and distribute higher workloads around these stages, leaving more time

to relax (if only slightly) later in the cycle. This might also be the time to consolidate bigger, more challenging ideas. If exams are on the horizon, it might be tactical to build a good study routine at this stage, when motivation and confidence are generally higher.

By contrast, the luteal and menstrual stages can often be associated with lethargy and mood swings. If possible, this would be the time to lighten the workload. Of course, this is difficult at Oxford. However, tasks with lengthier deadlines, such as extended essays, could be distributed to make certain weeks slightly less intense than others. Turning inward and prioritising your needs can be a helpful way to support yourself during this period; individual study time, using methods such as flashcards and self-tests, can be a much more effective use of your time, while helping to preserve waning energy. Comforts such as study snacks, or a more comfortable study setup, at first seem unproductive and distracting, however, for those who experience discomfort when menstruating, allowing yourself small pleasures might be just what you need in more sluggish moments – within moderation, of course.

“Have you ever noticed that for a week at a time, you might not be productive at all?”

Of course, menstruation is highly individual – some might find that their cycle is incredibly disruptive, while others might struggle significantly less. This makes self-knowledge all the more vital. It is important for any Oxford student to give themselves grace for varying levels of attainment – especially those who experience monthly fluctuations. Understanding this is vital to overcoming those especially tiring weeks, and maximising the more productive ones. The menstrual cycle is not a disadvantage, but understanding and accommodating it can bring huge advantages aside from just academic performance.

CHERWELL-FED

Al Andalus: The restaurant at the tapa-the-game



AMANDA LI

Oxford is not short of tapas restaurants, allowing students to fill their days with tiny plates and sangria as Trinity comes along. My friends and I celebrated the end of winter with a short dinner at Al-Andalus, located on Little Clarendon Street. Al-Andalus is a compact yet constantly busy restaurant, with small, circular tables in dim yellow lighting and a well-stocked bar. They host birthday parties and larger events, but tend to be packed with people on dates or business dinners – book ahead!

Service was a bit slow, but there's a lot of decisions to be made with the menu. We debated getting a pitcher of sangria, but found that we'd rather spend the £15 on some form of tapa – the sangria is fine, but nothing to write home about. Instead, we get five plates of pan catalana. It's literally just toasted bread with garlic, olive oil, rosemary, and slightly sweet pureed tomatoes, but guys... I actually would die for that bread. The parsley may not be for everyone, but if it is for you, be prepared to try and fail to make toast as good as this for the rest of your life. Some dishes take a while to arrive (and are marked as such on the menu), so having something this good to eat while waiting makes it better when you're hungry.

We split the table between vegetarians

and not, ordering three dishes per two people and skipping out on the seafood paella (which is decadent, and the squid is not too chewy, but it's too much effort to pre-order paella, which is required for weekend dinners).

I always hesitate when ordering because of the sheer range of the tapas menu, but my friends always order the same thing without fail: mushrooms, patatas bravas, chicken and ham croquettes, and the spinach. My vegetable and cheese balls with cream and tomato sauce arrived first, however. The bread was crunchy, and the cheese itself was pungent and slightly umami, but I found it a bit heavy even with a bit of tomato sauce. The cream in the spinach balls also added to the feeling of heaviness, which could maybe use an aioli instead, but I quite liked the texture. A better veggie option are the mushrooms, a staple, flavored with garlic and basil. The patatas bravas were crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside, with a creamy and light aioli matching well with the tomato sauce – but it needed a bit of spice.

Continue reading at cherwell.org
Image Credit: Amanda Li

What we ate: Espinacas a la catalana (£6), champiñones al ajillo (£6), patatas bravas (£6), pan catalana (£3.50 each), selecciones de delicias vegetales (£6), seleccione de croquetas de la casa (£6.95), pinchos de chistorra y queso (£6.75).

Agony Aunt:

I want to make friends but I'm an introvert and don't like going out. Do you have any low-key ways to make friends?



Sincerely,
Teacup

Dear Teacup,
I am sorry to hear that you're finding it hard to make friends. They are one sure way to make your life that little bit more enjoyable, even on your worst days. My first piece of advice is that at its core, making new connections with people requires you to open up. If you're not comfortable doing that, perhaps a good place to start is to examine why you feel this way.

Are you self-conscious that they won't like you, perhaps lacking confidence in yourself, and being your own worst enemy? We can often hold ourselves back by listening to our inner critic. Sometimes, it's important to act on what you really want to do, regardless of what the inner voice says. If you succeed, then you'll be more confident to do it again in the future.

You have also asked me for some 'lowkey' ways to make friends. I recommend that you just start talking to people: greet them, asking them how they're doing, and show an interest in them. Not too much focus on one specific person, but to a range of people that you see about college, or at extracurriculars that you're involved in. Let it grow from there – no need for huge gestures, just be a presence that people are happy to see around. Once that's established, opening up a bit more about your interests and sharing your sense of humour helps to solidify any superficial friendships.

Good luck!
Your Agony Aunt

SPORT

Inside the women’s boat: Courage on the Tideway

What it’s like to row with ninety-eight years of history on your shoulders

AISHIA SIMMONS

Both crews get ready please.” Two boats sit on the Tideway, a flotilla of motorboats behind them, led by the umpire Matthew Pinsent giving orders over the speakers. Annie Anezakis grips her blade tightly as her face flashes up on the screen. This is her third year in the Boat Race – her first as president.

Daniel Orton’s hand shoots up. Oxford is not ready.

“Lilli, hold it.” The two seat squares her blade, and the tide swings the boat minimally to stroke side. “Easy. My hand’s coming down.”

“Oxford... Cambridge...” The umpire’s voice booms across the Thames. Sixteen rowers sit at front-stops, their blades slightly over-squared to stop the boats drifting with the stream. Concentration and ambition are written across their faces. This is it.

“Attention” – the red flag is up. The rowers are on the edge of their seats – “GO!”

The flag comes down. Two boats lurch forward as the rowers take their first strokes. The boat is heavy as seven women follow Heidi Long’s rhythm. One stroke. Two strokes. Three. The boat is moving at 43 strokes per minute – it’s fast, but is it fast enough? Adrenaline surges through their veins. Daniel’s voice sounds strong and clear through the boat’s speaker system.

“Lengthen, lengthen!”

The boat starts to run more freely, fuelled by months of training and a boatload of nerves, but the Light Blue boat begins to pull ahead. Still, nothing is won, nothing is lost – every stroke counts.

There is a sense of urgency in Daniel’s voice, nerves channeled into command, tension reframed as pure motivation. Every call is delivered with precision, not a single word wasted, every one laser-focused. Raucous cheers from the riverbank barely register as thousands of spectators scream



out their support for their university. Ambitious young rowers cycle along with the boat, dreaming of one day earning a place among the blues in the boat.

“On the legs!” The blades dig into the water, every muscle in Annie’s body straining. She’s following Kyra Delray and Heidi Long—Oxford’s stern pair. The sun shines as the shell glides away from Putney Bridge. The boat feels heavier than it should – heavier than it did during the morning pre-paddle, which had gone surprisingly well.

“*The flag comes down. Two boats lurch forward as the rowers take their first strokes*”

“It was probably one of the best sessions we’ve ever had”, Daniel will later reflect, “which is really unusual, for a pre-paddle.”

50 seconds in, the rate has dropped to 39, the sprint is not yet over. Pinsent’s voice booms over the

water once more.

“Oxford!” he warns, as the two boats drift closer together. It’s not the rowers’ concern. They move up and down the slide with aching precision, muscles burning and minds going blank from the pain of the lactate searing through their veins. There’s no time for overthinking today; it’s all instinct, muscle memory, and colossal effort, Daniel notes.

“Oxford!” Pinsent bellows again. Bow-side clutch their blades tightly as the boats come ever closer.

“Stop rowing.” Cambridge has caught a crab. “Both crews, stop rowing.”

One minute and 25 seconds in, a restart is ordered – an unusual occurrence, to say the least. The last time the Boat Race was stopped was in 2012, when Zoe de Toledo – ironically now sitting in the commentary box – coxed the Blues to a narrow loss. A swimmer’s head had bobbed up in the waves, right in front of the two boats. Fittingly, it was Matthew Pinsent who decided to stop the race then, too.

The boats line up again, Cambridge sits a third of a length ahead of Oxford. Pinsent lowers the red flag once more. The race is back on.

Eighteen minutes and seven seconds later, it’s all over. The Blue Boat drifts towards Chiswick Bridge. Elated, exhausted cries echo from the light blue boat, lactic acid and emotion surging through every limb. Though Cambridge won by a margin of two and a half lengths, it was by no means a poor showing from Oxford. Having raced in WEHARR (the Women’s Head of the River Race in London), Cambridge had proven themselves the best university crew in the country. Oxford’s time today, just seven seconds behind, would have placed them right behind Cambridge – and that, despite what felt like six months of torrential rain and an unrowable river (at least from a college boat club’s perspective)!

Read the full article online at cherwell.org
Image Credit: Paul Taylor

MATCH OF THE WEEK

Men’s Achilles beats Harvard/Yale for first time in 16 years

Achilles is the combination of Oxford and Cambridge athletics (ew), and every year they do a tour to America to take on Cornell/Penn and Harvard/Yale in an outdoor meet. The trip was full of PBs and Blues Times, and the combination of the two saw the Achilles men become victorious for the first time since 2009.

Having been on tour together, it begs the question whether the athletics varsity will become a psychological affair come May...

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Ten overs and a brisk 30* for Justin Clarke as Oxford take down Teddington CC

Just one week after taking down Cambridge, Teddington are in turn beaten by the men’s Blues in one of their first games of the new season.

While there were multiple contributors – opener Henry Nicholls and last year’s player of the match at Lord’s George Roberts both ventured into the fourties – it was captain Clark that brought the side home, supported by Adam Hassan who ticked the strike over to his skipper. Two fours in the first three balls of the penultimate over brought home the win in the end.

Cambridge played the same Teddington side a week ago and batted for an identical 48.3 overs in their chase, but could neither muster 200, nor stay in, falling to 195 all out. Let’s hope that bodes well for the 8th of May.

HALL OF SHAME

OUAFC struggle at the Abbey

This year saw the return of football varsity to Cambridge United’s stadium - the Cledara Abbey. After a nail-biting penalty shootout at men’s varsity last year, Cai La Trobe-Roberts’ hat-trick downed Oxford, with 4-1 being the eventual result.

The women’s side was much more competitive, as Oxford went 1-0 up early. But in the end, three goals in a row proved insurmountable, and a late goal was only consolation.

SHOE THE TABS

Questionable trims, undeniable result

When my good friend who plays rugby league sent a photo of his hair to our group chat, it made me start to wonder whether this was really a club he wanted to be part of. If any of you are familiar with the ‘monk cut’, you’ll understand what I mean. However, a 20-4 resounding victory over Cambridge does sound pretty enjoyable, made better by the incessant drivel spewing from their mouths before the game. Tabs well and truly shoed.



UPCOMING

Cricket (T20)

Friday, 9th May @Lord’s
Captains: Elodie Harbourne and Justin Clarke

Athletics

Sunday, 17th May
@Cambridge
President: Natalie Groves

Rugby Cuppers

Saturday, 3rd May
@Oxford
Teams: Saints, New, Teddy, Hilda’s/Magdalen

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

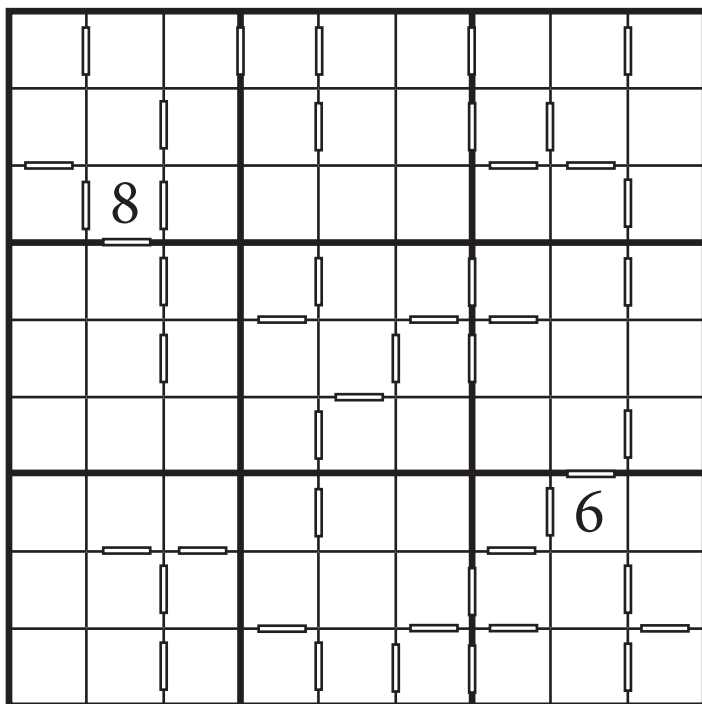


Coffee break with Cherwell



Consecutive Sudoku by Julian Xiao

Classic sudoku rules apply. In addition, white bars between squares indicate that the two numbers are consecutive (i.e. they differ by 1), and any pairs of numbers without a white bar in between are not consecutive.



Malware Mystery by Zoë McGuire

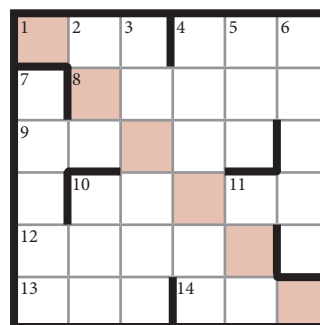
This is a puzzle hunt; it contains a number of small feeder puzzles, each yielding an answer that is word, all linked together by a “metapuzzle” which is solved using the feeder puzzles’ answers.

A number of IT systems around Oxford have recently been attacked by a strange computer virus that, among other issues, causes certain keyboard keys to stop working. The university’s cybersecurity team are sure this was an act of petty revenge. Can you figure out which keys are broken at which colleges, and then work out who were behind all this?

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

CORPUS CHRISTI (2, 11, 13)

All of Corpus Christi’s database got encrypted. The only clue left was this mini crossword.



Across:

- 1) Resuscitation technique (1, 1, 1)
- 4) One ___ time (2, 1)
- 8) Was wearing (3, 2)
- 9) Truck (5)
- 10) Planned robbery (5)
- 12) Hawaiian dances (5)
- 13) Whichever (3)
- 14) Forget-me-___ (3)

Down:

- 2) Vietnamese noodle dish (3)
- 3) Infrequently (6)
- 4) Guardian columnist Chiles (6)
- 5) Yo-yo or Nerf gun (3)
- 6) ___ Ward, “Ring My Bell” singer (5)
- 7) Hawaiian hello (5)
- 10) Attila, perhaps to his wife (3)
- 11) User login account (1, 1, 1)

GREEN TEMPLETON (6, 3, 10)

The attackers left a list of clues. These words seem to fork in two, like the snake’s tongue on the college crest. Perhaps the virus was written in Python?

___ Luther King Jr. • A fight, such as one at Hastings • A four-leaf one is lucky • Bruce Wayne • Excuse; explanation • Having a more shiny head • Hexed • Light on a lighthouse • RuPaul and Trixie Mattel, e.g. • Sentimental song • Sharpie, for example • Shuts • The Grim ___ • Vessel in a chemistry lab • Waited in line • Work at a museum, perhaps

Human 1, Steps 5, Sleep 5, Poetry 2, Nut 6, Earth 1, Spanner 5, Followed 2

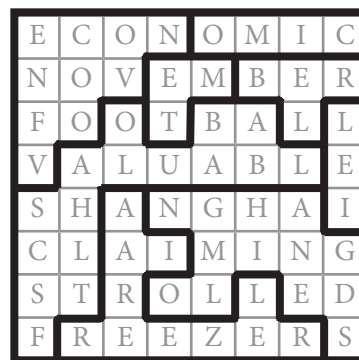
HERTFORD (5, 14, 8)

Not content with the Bridge of Sighs, Hertford have been planning new skyscrapers, but their blueprints were erased. The skyscrapers are arranged in a 6x6 grid, each having a height being a number from 1 to 5. Each number appears in every row and column exactly once, and some squares will be empty and will have no skyscrapers. The numbers around the edge tell you how many buildings are visible from that side of the row or column (e.g. a 3 will be hidden behind a 5). The answer to this puzzle is archaic, so check with a dictionary!

	4	1	2	2	1	3	
2	B	E	R	E	F	T	4
3	O	T	H	E	R	S	2
3	C	U	R	F	E	W	2
2	B	A	T	H	E	D	1
1	C	O	B	B	L	E	3
3	T	O	M	A	T	O	3
	2	4	1	2	3	2	

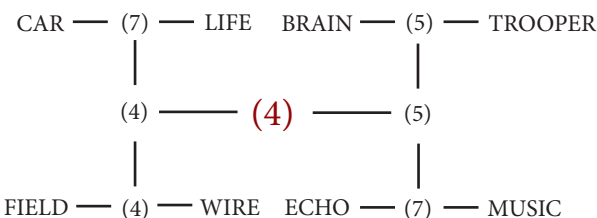
SOMERVILLE (15, 12, 9)

The cybersecurity team think this firewall can be unlocked with a Star Battle. Place exactly one star in each row, column, and region. Stars cannot touch, not even diagonally.

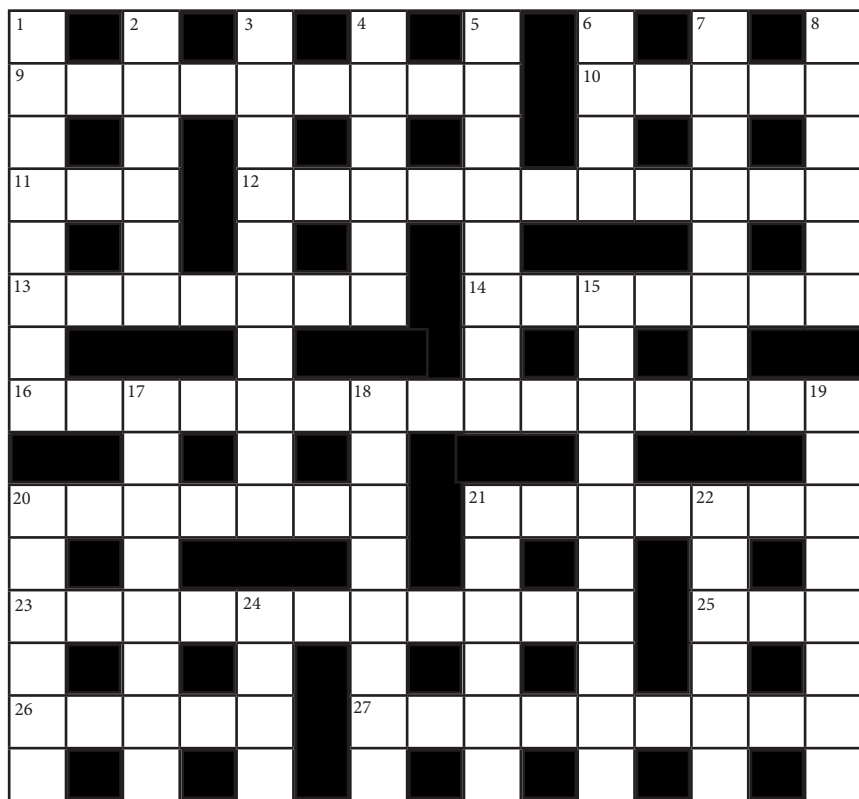


LINACRE (4, 1, 7)

This strange diagram appeared in Linacre’s systems. Perhaps you can spot the connections?



Cryptic Crossword by Alessandra Edwards



Across:

- 9) Tidy dirty room in student’s home (9)
- 10) Sounds like you’re in piss (5)
- 11) I know including conservative is a turn-off (3)
- 12) In musical performance before tango, I’ve become broken (11)
- 13) Motivate acrobatic spin with fury (7)
- 14) Child sitters’ moods keeping up level (2, 5)
- 16) Major heart-break followed by smashing (5-10)

- 20) Two wrongs ... overthink finally processes (5, 2)
- 21) Stumbles to part of UK hosting two democrats (7)
- 23) Tear into Ali nastily for revenge (11)
- 25) Character in Athens imprisoned by Achilles (3)
- 26) Bit of herb in goose and game (5)
- 27) Try out suit, one of a series? (4, 5)

Down:

- 1) Extra moreish, but

- missing bacon stuffing (8)
- 2) Stops being oddly keen amongst supporters (6)
- 3) Declines to provide small variety between courses (10)
- 4) Down second pink wine (6)
- 5) Select according to characteristics? Thank you quirky aspect! (8)
- 6) One, you’re a vibe (4)
- 7) I tear up twice at chili (4, 4)
- 8) Holds off relapse (drunk no alcohol initially) (6)

- 15) “Demon”? “Pussy”? Curious pen names (10)
- 17) Band might be annoyed by phone noise (8)
- 18) Bird group makes union tradition (3, 5)
- 19) Kind of lamp to manipulate (8)
- 20) Cleans hospital uniform (6)
- 21) Fanciful behaviour, why get around? I’m curious ultimately! (6)
- 22) Find the Spanish eating Mexican dish from the south (6)
- 24) Spoils device on the counter (4)

Cryptogram by Julian Xiao

Find what digit each letter represents. Different letters represent different digits.

$$\text{BEERY} \times \text{BLUE} = \text{TRULY} + \text{BLUBBERY}$$

Want to contribute to the puzzle section? Cherwell will accept open submissions for variety word puzzles. We are looking for well-crafted word puzzles with creative rules. To learn more, or to submit a puzzle, email puzzlescherwell@gmail.com.

Solve our weekly mini crosswords on cherwell.org.

Follow us on Instagram @cherwelloxford

HT WEEK 7 ANSWERS: Cryptic:

Across: 1) Primes, 5) Set aside, 9) Eventful, 10) Amount, 11) Friendly fire, 13) Clue, 14) Throbbled, 17) Condense, 18) Ajar, 20) Lay it on thick, 23) Digits, 24) Esoteric, 25) On the dot, 26) Turkey
Down: 2) RSVP, 3) Mansfield, 4) Suffix, 5) Silent treatment, 6) Trailers, 7) Scoff, 8) Doner kebab, 12) Allocation, 15) Black bear, 16) Endorsed, 19) Pig out, 21) I wish, 22) Side

Just Right: letters grouped in parentheses represent letters fit into one square

Across: 1) D(oc)(tor), 3) (Def)(ian)t, 6) (Ped)i(cur)e, 7) S(il)o, 8) (Ne)on, 10) (Ban)(ks)y, 12) (Smu)rf, 13) (Din)(go)es, 14) G(ymn)(ast), 15)H(era)(ld)
Down: 1) Dis(ban)(din)g, 2) (Tor)(ped)o, 3) (Def)i(ne), 4) Tenfo(ld), 5) M(il)(ks), 9) Or(zo), 11) Ye(ast), 12) (Smu)sh
Thematic answer: Rearrange the groups of two letters to get GOLDBLOCKS ZONE.

Alphabetic Connections: in alphabetical order,

A, Arm, Belt, Butterfly, Carbon, Cat, Cow, D, Dog, Elbow, Eleventh, Finger, Fourth, G, Glove, Gold, Hat, Jacket, Knuckle, Lead, Palm, Seal, Second, Seventh, Shoulder, Silicon, Silver, Sixth, Sock, Suit, T, Third, Tin, U, V, Wolf
Categories are “single letters”, “body parts”, “articles of clothing”, “animals”, “ordinal numbers”, and “chemical elements”.