

Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities opens



- Includes concert hall, theatre, and cinema
- Largest donation in centuries: £185m
- New Humanities Library opens with 410 seats

JOSEPH RODGERS and MORIEN ROBERTSON

The Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities has opened in Oxford's Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The Centre is named after Stephen A. Schwarzman, who made donations totalling £185 million, including a £150 million gift which the University described as its biggest "since the Renaissance."

The new building houses seven faculties: English, History, Linguistics, Philology & Phonetics, Medieval and Modern Languages, Music, Philosophy, and Theology & Religion. It is also home to both the Oxford Internet Institute and the Institute for Ethics in AI. Each faculty has its own dedicated area of the building, including informal social space, a kitchenette, and bookable seminar rooms.

Alongside faculty areas, the five floors of the Schwarzman Centre include the 500-seat Sohmen Concert Hall, a 250-seat theatre for lectures and drama, and an 87-seat cinema and lecture theatre. The Centre will also house a black box

performing space, a recital hall, a white box art exhibition space, and a museum for the Bate Collection of historic musical instruments. The ground floor of the Centre is open to the public. This includes a cafe and the Great Hall, a space designed to echo the Radcliffe Camera.

Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey said: "Its state-of-the-art facilities, reaching out deep into the international cultural community, enables us all to come together in a new dialogue in one extraordinary building befitting of this great and historic University and City."

The main work space for students is the Bodleian Humanities Library, which opened on 29th September. At 2,100m², it has the combined space of the libraries it will replace, housing the collections from the since-closed Philosophy and Theology, English, and Music Faculty Libraries, as well as smaller collections from the History of Medicine Library and the Oxford Internet Institute Library.

The spaces once occupied by these libraries are now being used for a variety of purposes in and around the University. For example, the Philosophy and Theology library, previously on Woodstock Road, will now be used by the Vice-Chancellor's administration.

From 2nd October, the 410-seat Humanities Library will be open to members of the Humanities Division from 9am to 9pm every day. Non-humanities students will have access from 9am to 8pm on weekdays. These are significantly longer hours than most

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Flights, furniture, and five-star stays

AMELIA GIBBINS

Oxford college heads have claimed more than £333k in expenses over the past two years, *Cherwell* can reveal, with tens of thousands spent on travel, hospitality, and entertainment to facilitate fundraising and representation.

There is currently no standard practice governing how college heads use funds and report spending, and the University declined to answer *Cherwell's* questions regarding expense claims.

The combined expenses total for all undergraduate college heads amounts to £333,530, with the office of Dinah Rose, President of Magdalen College, accounting for nearly a quarter that total.

Rose's office claimed £82,239, more than any other college, and more than double the £30,496 claimed by the runner-up, New College, which can be seen on the graph below.

The data, obtained by *Cherwell* through Freedom of Information requests to 33 undergraduate colleges, reveals wide differences in how heads of colleges report their spending. Some provided full, itemised accounts, while others withheld details, obscuring the accountability of money spent.

Magdalen, for example, did not

provide a detailed breakdown of expenses, claiming that it constitutes "personal data" despite the figure constituting the spending of an office rather than an individual, for duties carried out in official college capacity. Other colleges did, however, provide itemised lists of expenses, including the names of hotels and restaurants to the penny.

The figures also show that spending patterns differ sharply across the University. While some colleges reported comparatively low totals, others claimed tens of thousands for international travel and hospitality.

Colleges function as independent charities, relying on their endowments and donations to fund operations. Unlike the central University, colleges are financially autonomous, making fundraising a key part of the job for a head of college. For example, this year Pembroke College announced a fundraising goal of £100 million in order to fund fellowships, a new library, renovations, and outreach efforts.

International trips are among the most common expenses, particularly to Hong Kong. The Warden of New College, for example, claimed over £10,000 for a visit there. A spokesperson noted that such trips can generate significant fundraising returns, with recent donations from Hong Kong alone amounting to more than £30 million.

On a similar visit to Singapore and Hong Kong, Stephen Blythe, Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, stayed at the

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Gazan students arrive in Oxford following evacuation

STANLEY SMITH and CONOR WALSH

Three students from the Gaza Strip have arrived at Oxford University to begin their studies after being evacuated by the UK government in late September. The students are the first of several Gazan offer holders set to arrive in Oxford after the government approved their visas in August.

At least six students in Gaza and the West Bank hold offers to study at Oxford through the University's Palestine Crisis Scholarship Scheme. These students, and other Gazans holding offers and scholarships to study in the UK, had been unable to provide

biometrics necessary for obtaining a valid UK visa due to the closure of visa offices in the Gaza Strip in October 2023.

One of these offer holders, Salam, described leaving Gaza as "a wonderful feeling". She told *Cherwell*: "Words cannot describe the joy I feel for this achievement, made possible with the help of many students from Oxford University, as well as volunteers and lawyers who worked tirelessly for months to make the

dreams of dozens come true."

The students travelled to the West Bank and into Jordan for biometric processing, before flying to the UK. *Cherwell* understands that one Oxford offer holder still remains in Gaza despite having his visa approved earlier in summer. He had been unable to provide biometrics necessary for obtaining a valid UK visa due to the closure of visa offices in the Gaza Strip in October 2023.

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Oxford University first in UK to offer ChatGPT-5 to all its members

JOSEPH RODGERS

ChatGPT-5 will be provided to all staff and students at the University of Oxford, following a year-long pilot involving around 750 researchers and professional services staff. Oxford will be the university in the UK to offer generative AI tools to all of its students.

Students will be invited to join a shared workspace which offers access to ChatGPT-5, the latest model from OpenAI, as well as a limited number of custom GPT models specialised for specific research tasks created by other University members.

The GPT-5 model has been provided through ChatGPT Edu, a purpose-

built version of ChatGPT designed specifically for universities. OpenAI advertises the product as offering "significantly higher message limits than the free version of ChatGPT". ChatGPT Edu also provides additional capabilities compared to the free version, such as increased allowance for file uploads and data analysis.

For universities, a major attraction of ChatGPT Edu is security. OpenAI claims not to train its LLMs using chat history from any of its enterprise models, including ChatGPT Edu. The company also states that, with these models, "workspace admins can access an audit log of conversations" to manage compliance issues.

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Gazan offer holders ‘relieved’ as evacuation begins

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The remaining student, Loay, who holds an offer to study MSc Health Service Improvement and Evaluation told *Cherwell*: “After months of fear, uncertainty, and displacement, knowing that our academic futures may now be within reach is incredibly emotional.”

An Oxford University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The University is part of sector-wide efforts to support the arrival of students from Gaza and are in contact with our offer-holders who are facing the greatest difficulty. We hope to welcome several students from Gaza on full scholarships this autumn.”

In total, the government plans to evacuate around 40 university-funded students living in the Gaza Strip, all of whom hold offers to study at UK institutions. These offer holders include students on the Chevening Scheme, a predominantly government-funded programme for graduate students. The Home Secretary has also approved plans to assist around 30 students on privately funded scholarships.

The government’s plans follow a public call from the UK higher

education sector to remove the barriers students from Gaza are facing, including an open letter signed by members of the Oxford University Student Union (SU) in August.

The letter, initiated by sabbatical officers at the Cambridge Student’s Union, urged the government to “take immediate action to remove the barriers currently preventing Gazan students from travelling to the UK and accessing the education opportunities they have rightfully earned.”

A spokesperson for the Oxford SU told *Cherwell*: “Students from Gaza have overcome unimaginable horrors to secure their places at UK universities, and it is our responsibility, as their (hopefully) eventual representatives, to ensure that they are able to realise those opportunities.”

In response to the evacuation plans, the SU spokesperson said that the “SU welcomes the government’s announcement”, adding that “this outcome underlines the importance of collective action” following the SU’s open letter.

The Home Office declined to comment.

Image Credit: Joshua Fang for Cherwell.



Labour to bring back maintenance grants

ARINA MAKARINA

The Labour party has announced its plans to reintroduce maintenance grants for tens of thousands of students from low-income backgrounds on “priority” courses before the end of this Parliament.

According to Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, the maintenance grants will support “those who need them the most”. At this year’s Labour party conference, Phillipson said: “Time at college or university should be spent learning or training, not working every hour God sends.”

The maintenance grant was scrapped by the former Conservative Chancellor George Osborne in 2016 and substituted with maintenance loans, which students have to repay with interest. During the announcement, Phillipson further commented: “The Tories treated our universities as a political battleground, not a public good. Labour is putting them back in the service of working-class young people.”

What exactly the “priority courses” will include is not clear yet, and will be specified in November’s Autumn Budget alongside other details surrounding the policy. The government said the maintenance grants will be provided for students obtaining Higher National Certificate, Foundation and Bachelor’s Degrees on priority courses. The priority areas will be linked to the government’s industrial strategy.

The Oxford Labour Club told *Cherwell*: “[We are] delighted by the reintroduction

of maintenance grants, a decision which demonstrates Labour’s commitment to a higher education accessible to all, and out of reach for none.”

A spokesperson for Oxford University Student Union (SU) also welcomed the announcement, telling *Cherwell*: “This is a long overdue step in reducing financial barriers and ensuring higher education is an accessible option to all regardless of socioeconomic background, especially at a time where cost of living has posed significant challenges to students entering higher education, and being able to complete their degrees.”

The grants will be financed by the 6% international student levy announced in the recent immigration white paper. The proposed levy has been a contentious issue, with Higher Education Policy Institute estimating it would cost the universities in England over £600 million a year.

Dr Tim Bradshaw, the CEO of the Russell Group, an association of 24 UK universities including Oxford and Cambridge, responded to the announcement, criticising the financing of the maintenance grants.

Bradshaw said: “As yet it is unclear whether the government’s plans would put more money overall into students’ pockets, while limiting grants to certain subjects risks restricting student choice. Depleting vital resources for something that may not materially increase day-to-day support for students would be a short-sighted move.”

The University of Oxford declined to comment.

Oxford announces changes to postgraduate research examinations from 2025

MERCEDES HAAS

Oxford University has confirmed that new rules for postgraduate research (PGR) examinations will take effect from Michaelmas term. The reforms, which apply to all students submitting their thesis for the first time on or after 12th October, are intended to clarify outcomes, standardise procedures, and align Oxford’s regulations with those of other UK universities.

One of the adjustments is the extension of the timeframe for “minor corrections”. At present, students given this outcome have one month to resubmit their corrected thesis; from 2025, this will be extended to two months. The University has also announced that extensions will no longer be available for either minor or major corrections, with only exceptional circumstances considered by the Education Committee.

The category of “major corrections” is also being revised. In future, examiners will be able to recommend either major corrections with a further viva or major corrections without one – a distinction that the University says will provide greater clarity for both students and examiners.

Other changes include a reduction in the timeframe for the “reference back” outcome, which currently allows two years for resubmission but will be shortened to one year. New “indicative criteria” will also be introduced to guide examiners in deciding outcomes, with the aim of ensuring greater consistency across departments.

The reforms further clarify expectations around supervision. Students who set major corrections or reference back should continue to receive the same level of supervision as before submitting their thesis. In addition, candidates who are unable to make progress due to illness or other

time-limited reasons may apply for a suspension of up to twelve months, provided it is at least four weeks in length.

The University has explained that the reforms follow a review process which began in 2019, and that the aim is to improve clarity and support while ensuring that Oxford’s framework remains comparable with national standards. For students on research master’s programmes, such as the MLitt or MSc(Res), the changes will also introduce the possibility of “major corrections with mandatory viva”, bringing their regulations into closer alignment with those for doctoral degrees.

The timing of implementation means that different students will be affected differently. Those who submit their thesis on or before 11th October will be examined under the existing rules, while those who submit on or after 12th October will be subject to the new system.

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

Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities opens

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libraries in Oxford, reflecting a desire amongst postgraduates for opening hours that are the same as term-time weekdays.

The Centre was designed by British architecture firm Hopkins Architects, who have previously partnered with Emmanuel College, Cambridge and Nottingham University. It was built according to Passivhaus principles, which aim to maximise energy efficiency, with strong insulation, solar power generation, and planting aimed to increase biodiversity.

Music spaces in the Centre will only open from April 2026, when a new Cultural Program which “aims to welcome audiences and communities into the heart of the research process at Oxford University through public engagement” will also begin.

As a part of the public Cultural Program, the Schwarzman Centre has appointed ten Cultural Fellows, including artists, musicians, and choreographers, who will exhibit works and run masterclasses in the Centre. The Cultural Programme includes new theatre and dance performances, a series of conversations led by Samira Ahmed on contemporary issues, and a new immersive 360-degree spatial audio experience developed by Icelandic band Sigur Rós. The 250-seat theatre had been due to feature student productions from Hilary Term 2026, but the first slot has since been delayed until Michaelmas 2026.

Stephen Schwarzman, an American

billionaire, is the founder, chairman, and chief executive of Blackstone, an investment firm best known for its private equity business. He had previously donated \$350 million to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for artificial intelligence research, as well as \$100 million to Tsinghua University, Beijing, to build an international scholarship programme inspired by Oxford’s Rhodes Scholarship.

At the time of the donation, Blackstone had recently been singled out by a UN report for its contribution to the global housing crisis. An open letter signed by 27 Oxford academics opposed the University’s decision to accept Schwarzman’s philanthropy, stating that the Schwarzman centre “will be built with the proceeds of the exploitation and disenfranchisement of vulnerable people across the world”. The letter added that: “It is through association with universities like MIT, Yale, and now Oxford, that Schwarzman seeks to legitimise these practices.”

Schwarzman is a committed Republican who has given significant amounts in political donations. In the 2020 election cycle he donated \$33.5 million to groups supporting Republicans. In 2024 he announced his intention to donate to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, and has since supported the President’s introduction of tariffs.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “Oxford University has robust and rigorous guidelines regarding the acceptance of donations and research funding ... All significant new funders

or new gifts or grants from existing funders are reviewed by the Committee to Review Donations and Research Funding (CRDRF) ... Those donating money or sponsoring programmes at the University have no influence over how academics carry out their research or what conclusions they reach.”

The Schwarzman Centre’s website states: “The Committee [to Review Donations and Research Funding] reviews all the publicly available information about a potential donor and can take legal, ethical and reputational issues into consideration ... Auditors have looked at our process and found it to be robust and effective, and we are confident in its ability to determine which sources of funding are acceptable under our guidelines.”

A spokesperson for Blackstone told *Cherwell*: “When approached by Oxford, Mr Schwarzman was proud to support the creation of the new Centre – a major unmet need for the university that will benefit students, faculty and the community for years to come.”

On Blackstone’s housing record, they added: “There has been significant inaccurate reporting on this issue. Blackstone is proud to be part of the solution to the global undersupply of the rental housing sector. In the UK, we created Sage Homes, England’s largest provider of newly built affordable housing for the past four years running, committing approximately £4 billion to deliver over 20,000 new affordable homes.”

Image Credit: Grace Greaves for Cherwell.



Oxford University first in UK to offer ChatGPT-5 to all its members

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Professor Anne Trefethen, the University’s Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Digital, said: “We know that significant numbers of students are already using generative AI tools...through robust governance, training, guidance and support, we are encouraging safe and responsible use within a secure environment.”

Professor Freya Johnston, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, added: “Generative AI is also helping us to explore new ways of engaging with students, alongside our renowned face-to-face teaching and tutorial model.”

An email announcing the wider rollout was sent on 19th September to staff and postgraduate research students. Undergraduates and taught postgraduates received information on Monday 22nd September, as scheduled by the University.

Cherwell can report that several undergraduates received invitations from an OpenAI email address to join the University’s ChatGPT workspace at 11:30pm on Wednesday 17th September. It remains unclear why some undergraduates received this prior to others. The University did not respond to questions on this point.

This wider rollout of ChatGPT Edu follows the August release of a new University policy for the use of generative AI in research. The policy allows for a wide range of uses, including conducting literature reviews, identifying research gaps, and developing hypotheses. It does, however, specify that “users should declare the substantive use of GenAI tools in their work”.

Oriel unveils exhibition to ‘contextualise’ Rhodes’ legacy

NABEED CHOWDHURY

An art exhibition designed to “contextualise” the legacy of Cecil Rhodes will be unveiled at Oriel College on 3rd October. The exhibition will feature sculptures from Zimbabwean artists selected as part of a competition organised by the Oxford Zimbabwe Arts Partnership.

An Oriel spokesperson told Cherwell that the exhibit aims to “deal with our association with Cecil Rhodes, add new layers of meaning to his statue and build a closer relationship with southern Africa”.

The judging panel for the competition included: Norbert Shumuyarira, a prominent sculptor; Be Manzini, a UK-based Zimbabwean artist; Elleke Boehmer, trustee of the Rhodes Trust; and Oriel’s Provost Lord Mendoza. The competition’s winning piece by Chitungwiza-based artist Wallace Mkankha, titled ‘Blindfolded Justice’, will be the centrepiece of the exhibit.

The exhibit offers an artistic perspective on Rhodes’ impact on the people of Zimbabwe whilst tracing the history of the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement, a campaign which began in Cape Town in 2015, eventually moving to Oxford. The movement’s objectives were established in 2020 during the Black Lives Matter movement. They include diversifying the curriculum as well as the removal of the Cecil Rhodes statue at Oriel.

Removing Rhodes’ statue has been a contentious issue for both the Oriel JCR and the College’s Governing Body. Despite the Governing Body voting to remove the statue in June 2020, the College abandoned the plans in 2021 due to “considerable challenges at the planning stage” of taking down part of a Grade II-listed monument.

The College’s spokesperson told Cherwell: “The College has worked to expand its academic coverage of Africa, race and colonialism,

to increase support for academics from Africa, including through the provision of graduate scholarships, and to collaborate on outreach programmes for young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.”

Oriel’s JCR President said that “neither students nor the JCR committee have exclusive influence on the statue or related decisions”, adding that the exhibition is “a small step in the right direction towards achieving a more accurate portrayal of the history and current state of the College, though it is far from exhaustive in addressing the legacy of historical injustices”.

The JCR President emphasised that the JCR is “overwhelmingly welcoming to all students” and “is committed to creating an inclusive community for all students”.

Rhodes studied at Oriel intermittently from 1873 to 1891, soon after which he entered politics,

where he became prime minister of the Cape Colony, a territory of modern-day South Africa. From 1890, he (along with the British South Africa Company) colonised Zimbabwe, with his actions leading to the deaths of over 20,000 people.

After his death in 1902, he left £100,000 to Oriel College and £3 million to Oxford University. The latter donation was used to establish the Rhodes Trust, which provides scholarships for people from the United States, Germany, and the former British Empire. Former Rhodes Trust scholars include US politicians Cory Booker and Pete Buttigieg, journalist Ronan Farrow, and astronomer Edwin Hubble.

The exhibition will be open daily until 8th October, after which it will be moved to the University Church of St Mary the Virgin where it will remain until December.

Image credit: Aury Mosseri for Cherwell.



County Council votes to implement congestion charges in Oxford



LAURA VAN HEIJNSBERGEN

Oxfordshire County Council’s cabinet has approved plans for a £5 congestion charge for drivers on six of Oxford’s busiest roads. The charge will come into force on 10th November and will stay in place until Botley Road reopens in August 2026.

Motorists travelling on Hythe Bridge Street, St Cross Road, Thames Street, and St Clement’s Street between 7am and 7pm will be affected, as will drivers on Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way travelling in the morning (between 7am and 9am) and early evening (from 3pm until 6pm), excluding Sundays.

Once Botley Road reopens, the congestion charge system will be replaced by a traffic filter trial, where drivers will be charged at least £35 for driving on these same six roads.

Anne Gwinnett, Chair of the Oxford Independent Alliance, has criticised the decision to implement the scheme in the face of what she called “a landslide rejection”.

74% of Oxford residents who took part in the council’s consultation said the scheme would have a negative impact, whilst a petition opposing the congestion charge, which started in June, stands at more than 13,500 signatures.

The Open Roads for Oxford pressure group, which opposes the congestion charge, was established in response to the scheme’s proposal.

Emily Scaysbrook, a local business owner and Director of the group, told BBC News that it’s “reckless” of the council to introduce a congestion charge prior to the Christmas shopping season which “so many retailers and hospitality

businesses rely on to survive”.

Anneliese Dodds, Labour MP for Oxford East, also spoke out against the scheme, calling it “extremely unfair”. She added: “Oxford is not London – because of our geography and also because our public transport isn’t up to London’s standard.”

“The county [council] should have focused on improving public transport and other measures in the city instead of this kneejerk scheme.”

Peter Hitchens negatively reflected on the traffic limitation: “What tourists in Oxford actually see when they arrive: Hideous traffic enforcement clutter and surveillance arrays.”

Moves to discourage driving in Oxford come amidst increasing environmental concerns about the impact of pollution from cars. In recent years concerns about pollution have seen the introduction of a zero emissions zone (ZEZ) in the city centre, as well as the electrification of Oxford’s buses.

Responding to criticism of the scheme, County Councillor Andrew Grant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, said: “It will enhance bus services, it frees up road spaces, it makes the air cleaner and it makes the roads safer. The evidence says this will make the city centre more vibrant and a nicer place to be.”

Cyclox, a local cycling group in Oxford, has come out in support of the scheme, with Cyclox member Thalia Carr, saying it would “improve things for people on bikes.”

“Cars that do have to drive will be able to get to their destinations quicker, it means it’ll be safer for bicycles and it’ll be cleaner air for everybody. What’s not to like?”

Image credit: Éilis Mathur for Cherwell.

NEWS SHORTS

Mahnoor Cheema: 23

A-levels later

Mahnoor Cheema, 18, will be attending Oxford University to study Medicine after taking 23 A-levels and 34 GCSEs. She explained her choice saying she would be “bored and under stimulated” otherwise. Her parents told BBC they did not push Mahnoor Cheema and were “very supportive” of a balanced life. Her ambition after Oxford is neurosurgery.

Look out, Bonnie’s about

Bonnie Blue visited Oxford on her “bang bus” tour targeted at freshers on 22nd September. Blue is an adult actress known for reportedly sleeping with over 1,000 men in 12 hours. Labour councillor Susanna Pressel called the appearance in Oxford “sleazy sensationalism”. The tour has been criticised for promoting misogyny and abuse among freshers.

OSPL joins IPSO

Cherwell became the first fully student-run newspaper regulated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). Oxford Student Publication (OSPL), a fully independent student publishing house that publishes Cherwell, joined IPSO to “[hold] ourselves to the highest standards of student journalism”, according to the General Counsel and Strategy Director. IPSO is the largest independent regulator of the UK newspaper and magazine industry regulating papers such as The Times and The Daily Telegraph.

Merton College takes on Durham

Merton College broke through the first round in University Challenge on 29th September. Merton will be the only Oxford college participating in the second round of the quiz programme. The College broke through obtaining a score almost double of Durham. The latter must have dampened Durham’s celebrations of overtaking Oxford in The Times rating and dreams of Doxbridge.

CROSS CAMPUS

Cambridge room key returned 40 years later

Carla Risoldi returned a room key to Gonville & Caius College, which was due in 1985. The College did not impose the £20,850 fine, after Risoldi accidentally took the key home. Risoldi was an American exchange student from University of Pennsylvania. The senior porter on duty presented Risoldi with the key as a memento.

Harvard wins against Trump on pro-Palestine advocacy

A federal judge ruled on 30th September that the Trump administration’s targeting of international students and professors who participated in pro-Palestine advocacy is unconstitutional. Harvard American Association of University Professors filed a lawsuit accusing the Trump administration of First Amendment infringements in July.



Reuben College wins bronze Food for Life accreditation

JULIETTE MCGRATH

Reuben College catering team has been presented with a bronze Food for Life accreditation by the Soil Association, the first of all college caterers to have achieved this award.

The Food for Life accreditation is nationally recognised, and acknowledges the team's persistent dedication to providing environmentally sustainable and healthy food for students and staff. The endorsement encourages caterers to serve fresh food, source environmentally sustainable and ethical food, make healthy eating easy, and champion local food producers.

Catering at Reuben has been run by the Reading-based, sustainability-focused company BaxterStorey since September 2023. This award recognises the on-site team for improving the impact of their food on both health and the environment.

James Baker, BaxterStorey's head of food for the South West, said: "We're chuffed with this award – it's a real credit to general manager Paul and the team at Reuben College."

BaxterStorey provides catering at over 1000 locations across the UK, and is working towards achieving the Food for Life award at all its locations – including the Saïd Business School.

Stephen Purbrick, Reuben's Bursar, said: "We are delighted that Reuben College and BaxterStorey have received this award. It reflects our shared dedication to sustainability, along with

a commitment to providing food to our College community that is nutritional, well-balanced, and delicious."

The standards required to achieve the bronze level include stipulations such as prioritising serving more vegetables, pulses and vegetarian meals, and mandate that at least 75% of dishes are cooked from scratch. Caterers must use free-range eggs, source meat from farms that satisfy UK animal welfare standards, and serve fish that is not on the Marine Conservation Society's "fish to avoid" list. The use of genetically modified ingredients, 'undesirable' additives, artificial sweeteners, and artificial trans fats is prohibited.

Other requirements include that there must be food waste reduction strategies in place, that menus are seasonal, and that catering staff are supported with relevant training in fresh food preparation. Caterers must be able to demonstrate their compliance with national guidelines on food and nutrition, and food suppliers must be verified to ensure that they apply appropriate food safety standards. Information about where food has been sourced from, and which foods are in-season, must be displayed.

Reuben's catering team includes account manager Paul White, general manager Paul Sullivan, and head chef Dom Slee.

They work with suppliers such as Alden's Oxford butchery, Roots of Oxford greengrocer, and M&J Fresh Seafood to ensure sustainable and ethical food production.

Image credit: Reuben College.

Oxford falls from top three in Times university rankings

CONOR WALSH

Oxford University has ranked fourth in *The Times*' 2026 UK university rankings. This is the first year that Oxford has failed to secure a spot in the guide's top three – having ranked third in the newspaper's 2025 ranking and second in 2024.

In the latest guide, The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the University of St Andrew's topped the table for the second year running. Meanwhile, Durham University, which placed fifth in the 2025 guide, ranked third, beating both Oxford and Cambridge University.

Durham's triumph marks the first time in 32 years that neither Oxford nor Cambridge have topped *The Times*' ranking of UK universities.

Helen Davies, editor of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times Good University Guide*, told ITV News "in a very competitive top ten Durham has climbed two places in a year, which is a significant achievement". Davies added that Durham's "stellar academic performance was boosted this year by improvements in teaching quality and student experience".

The Vice-Chancellor of Durham University, Professor Karen O'Brien, said: "Durham is an outstanding place to study. We ensure that every student can grow and thrive here. Our loyal, engaged alumni are testament to the impressive career prospects that await our graduates."

The Times have produced an annual guide of UK universities since 1993, ranking universities based on factors such as student experience and employment prospects. Each university receives a total score and ranking based upon their overall performance.

Despite a poor national performance in *The Times*, Oxford ranked first as the newspaper's regional university of the year for the South East.

Oxford also held on to first place in *The Guardian*'s 2026 UK university rankings, with Cambridge maintaining third place and Durham ranking fourth. Oxford's differing performance in *The Times* and *Guardian* rankings is understood to be a consequence of the different metrics used by each table.

Cherwell has approached the University of Oxford for comment. The Oxford University Student Union (SU) declined to comment.

Proposal for Europe's largest solar farm set to be examined in Oxford next month

GRACE WONG KYOKO

Plans for Botley West, which is set to become Europe's largest solar farm, will be examined in a public hearing held by the Planning Inspectorate next month in Oxford. If the project is approved, Botley West would span an area of around 1400 hectares across the West Oxfordshire, Cherwell, and Vale of White Horse districts in Oxfordshire.

A spokesperson for Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP), the developer of the site, told *Cherwell*: "Botley West will deliver 840 MW of clean, affordable, homegrown, secure power – enough to power 330,000 homes – the equivalent of every home in Oxfordshire. This project represents a £1 billion investment in Oxfordshire's electricity network and a significant greening of its power grid, currently one of the most carbon-intensive in the country."

Botley West is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), and must therefore

be examined and approved by the UK government rather than local councils.

However, objections have been raised to the project due to its potential impact on local communities and wildlife. Alex Rogers, Chair of the Stop Botley West Campaign, a community group, told *Cherwell*: "We are seeking a sustainable renewables project which is smaller and less damaging to our heritage, landscape, green belt, productive arable farmland and to the visual and health benefits residents in the area currently enjoy."

"Our reading of [PVDP's] Environmental Statement and associated documents has revealed many errors, shortcomings and misleading approaches to the analyses presented...they have demonstrated a blatant disregard to the concerns and needs of the estimated 11,000 people living within 1.5km of the proposed Botley West Solar Power Station."

Natural England, a non-departmental government body, has expressed concerns about

Botley West's effect on local endangered bat populations. In a letter to the Planning Inspectorate, Natural England cited concerns on "potentially insufficient survey effort, methodology and interpretation... so the most important areas for bats have not been identified", "insufficient detail on avoidance and mitigation measures", and the "lack of detail on post-consent management and monitoring" of bat populations.

In response PVDP told *Cherwell*: "The project has been calculated by independent experts to produce a minimum 70% biodiversity net gain on the site. The introduction of new hedgerows and community growing projects will also protect pollinators across the site and will help to protect and restore wildlife habitats. The temporary leasing of the land for the development will allow the land to recover from intensive farming, restoring soil quality and fauna on the site."

The Environment Agency was contacted for comment.

University launches changes to disciplinary policies

ARCHIE JOHNSTON

CW: Sexual assault

Oxford University has published a new webpage setting out its "approach to preventing and responding to harassment and sexual misconduct". The page brings together policies and guidance on harassment and sexual misconduct, and highlights changes to key disciplinary policies which will come into effect this month.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell* that its "comprehensive online resource" was published to meet new requirements from the Office for Students (OfS), the higher education regulator, which stipulate that universities "maintain a single comprehensive source of information" on policy relating to sexual harassment from 1st August.

Several key harassment and sexual misconduct policies were recently altered as part of a wider package of changes to Statute XI, which concerns University discipline. The new webpage presents Statute XI as a key source of guidance and also explains the procedure for addressing reports of harassment or sexual misconduct.

The guidance prohibits "intimate relationships" between staff and students where the member of staff has responsibility for the student. If a member of staff develops any other "close personal relationship" with a student for whom they have responsibility, they are required to declare it to their Head of Department or Chair of Faculty.

The page also advertises support services available to students reporting harassment and sexual misconduct and to the subjects of those reports. These include the University's Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, its Harassment Advisor Network, the University Counselling Service, and services offered by the SU and colleges.

One significant change to the procedure concerns police involvement. The University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The changes, which come into effect on 1 September 2025, will allow the University to investigate more cases of serious misconduct (for example sexual violence) without complaints having to be made to the police first, and to align itself with new regulatory requirements, good practice guidance for the sector, and principles

of trauma informed practice."

Changes to Statute XI have been met with criticism during the last two academic years. The changes were originally intended to be voted through by Congregation, the University's governing body, in June 2024. However, they were withdrawn after over 30 academics backed a resolution to form a working group to revise the proposals, following the circulation of a statement which highlighted "illiberal" and "alarming" clauses.

In particular, the statement's authors were concerned about a clause which introduced the power to ban students from University premises for up to 21 days. The amended Statute XI calls this a "precautionary measure", to be used if there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that an individual "is likely or threatens to cause damage to property or harm to other users". Last term, the authors told *Cherwell* that several clauses could still have a "chilling effect" on freedom of expression.

Answering concerns around freedom of speech, the University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The changes are not intended to create any fresh powers for the discipline of students relating to lawful protest. The University is subject to UK law in all its activities, including laws related to free speech, freedom of expression, and protest, as well as the University's own policy on free speech".

A working group was formed to revise

the proposed changes to Statute XI, first meeting in November 2024. During this process, there were opportunities for student feedback. A spokesperson for the Oxford University Student Union (SU) told *Cherwell*: "The SU ran an extensive student consultation throughout the academic year on the amendments to the disciplinary code (Statute XI), offering students the opportunity to provide feedback both through an online form and at an in-person forum. Throughout the year, the former Vice President for Postgraduates sat on the University's working group for the Statute XI amendments to ensure that student voices were represented in the amendment process."

However, the SU's submission to the Statute XI Working Group noted that the tight window they were given to collect student feedback limited "opportunities for engagement". The 2024-25 winter vacation took up a significant portion of the SU's window to facilitate student input, with only 61 responses submitted. Concerns expressed in the earlier statement were repeated, whilst some students questioned the relevance of the proposed changes to issues of harassment and sexual misconduct.

One student wrote in their consultation submission: "If the University wishes to regain the confidence of its student body it must show that it is willing to cooperate, actively engage with, and elevate student concerns."

The SU spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "We remain committed to ensuring that students' experiences and feedback continue to help shape University policy."

Image credit: Feng Ho for Cherwell.



INVESTIGATIONS

College heads' spending revealed

Continued from Page 1

5-star Clan Hotel, and later charged a "champagne event" in New York to the expenses account, as well as a £600 afternoon tea with prospective donors.

A spokesperson for Lady Margaret Hall told *Cherwell* that over the past three years, over £15 million has been raised for the College, and that "fundraising expenses incurred in the course of this work are approved and reimbursed in accordance with College policies".

Colleges often defend expenses as part of their fundraising efforts, which they argue bring in donations

Charitable purpose

Other records, however, show funds from different colleges being used for activities linked to external organisations. This blurs the line between college business and separate commitments, with little transparency about how such expenses serve the college's

charitable objectives.

In June 2023, Clair Craig, then-Provost of The Queen's College, charged £824 for "wine, prosecco and soft drinks" at an event for the International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA), a science advisory network where she serves as Vice-President.

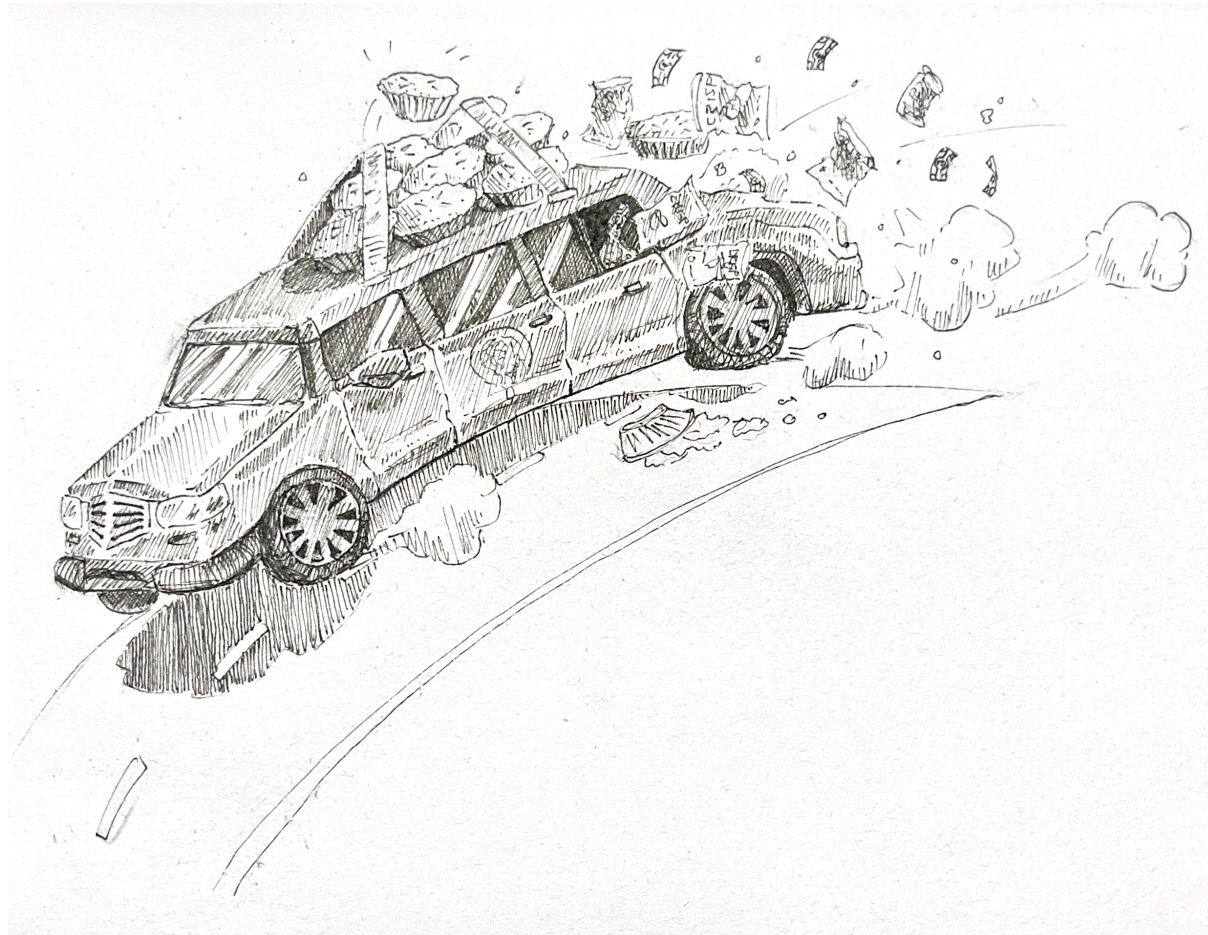
The College covered a further £80 for a Mayfair lounge event with the INGSA, as well as £1,937 for Craig's flights and accommodation to attend the World Science Forum with the organisation in Budapest.

Her expenses also include spending on furnishings, from £282 on flowers to over £300 on photo frames, as well as food bills including £25 at Gail's, £29 at Hotel Chocolat, and £11 on crisps.

Responding to these claims, a spokesperson for Queen's told *Cherwell* that "the expenditure either directly advances or supports the College's charitable purposes." However, they did not respond to questions over expenses related to INGSA.

Other data shows that Nigel Clifford, Rector of Lincoln College, managed to spend £79 in Wagamama at Heathrow Airport on a meal for three. Clifford also charged the College over £276 for a chauffeur service to Heathrow.

The company claims to provide



"luxury" cars to the House of Lords, Whitehall, Government Offices, and importantly, Oxford University. A Lincoln College spokesperson told *Cherwell* that the chauffeur service was "the most practical and economical" means of transport.

Colleges often defend expenses as

There appears to be no standard practice governing how college heads use funds and report spending

part of their fundraising and alumni relations efforts, which they argue bring in donations that benefit students and college life.

For example, Miles Young, Warden of New College, had the second highest expenses tab of the surveyed college heads, though over £3000 went towards the College's choir tour, and over £400 for a Chinese New Year event for students.

However, the disparity in claims raises questions about the transparency of college finances in an unstandardised collegiate system. A spokesperson for Magdalen even pointed out that if New College and Magdalen were excluded, the average expense claim would "not appear to be sufficient to accommodate the travel, hospitality, and entertainment that would normally be expected" of a head of house.

New College, for example, told *Cherwell* that their policy includes one trip to the USA per year, which is "necessary to attend the annual Board Meeting and associated events of the American Friends of New College". There is an additional trip every three years to meet alumni and donors in Asia, including Hong Kong and Singapore, for fundraising and college events.

By contrast, Wycliffe Hall's head reported the lowest expenses of any college head, spending just £52 over two years. The Principal of Hertford College spent £245 over the same period, while Brasenose's President spent a similar £280 on expenses.

The University has an expense policy for work undertaken in the course of University business, though individual colleges have their own auton-

omous policies due to their status as independent self-governing charities. *Cherwell* understands that the University has no official duty under charity law to monitor spending by colleges.

This autonomy applies to how expenses are recorded, with no standardised system governing how colleges track spending by college heads. Some colleges may reimburse their head after they pay personally, while others cover costs directly - this means the same trip could appear differently in separate colleges' accounts. In the absence of consistent reporting practices, comparing spending across colleges is difficult, and accessible accountability becomes practically impossible.

Wealth and accountability

The impact of this spending varies drastically when measured against college endowments, which are the invested funds that generate much of colleges' income. Oxford's colleges vary enormously in wealth, with some holding endowments worth hundreds of millions while others operate on far smaller budgets.

The College Disparities Report, authored by then-SU President Danial Hussain, highlighted the impact of these stark differences between col-

lowndement.

Last year, *Cherwell* revealed that Oxford Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey had claimed £47,564.97 on expenses since her appointment in January 2023.

The figures show the University covered over £25,000 for her flights and £12,000 on rail and car travel, on top of her baseline salary of £573,000, which includes £100,000 for housing. Tracey is the second-highest paid Vice-Chancellor in the country, just behind her Cambridge counterpart, Deborah Prentice.

Prentice's pay package of £577,000 for her first full year as vice-chancellor included a base salary of £409,000, along with £42,486 for relocation expenses, £29,177 for accommodation, utilities and property taxes, and personal travel costs of £22,564.

Shitij Kapur, Vice-Chancellor of King's College London, is one of many university leaders to have called on the government for a tuition fee hike amid the funding crisis in the sector. However, Kapur himself had received more than £35,000 worth of decorations and furniture in a renovation of his university-provided apartment in 2021.

Shearer West, then-Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham University, also took over £86,000 worth of flights over the course of two academic years, visiting Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, Santiago, Shanghai, New York, Phnom Penh and Tokyo.

Senior members of Coventry University have recently come under scrutiny from the University and College Union (UCU) for spending around £150,000 on flights, with the Vice-Chancellor spending £7,870 on one business class flight with Emirates. The Coventry University Group announced in December 2023 that it needed to deliver nearly £100m in cuts over a two-year period.

There appears to be no standard practice governing how college heads use funds and report spending. Though colleges argue that expense claims are a vital part of fundraising efforts and leading alumni engagement, the wide disparities in these sums of money raises questions about the accountability of the money that colleges spend.

Given this inconsistency, it is impossible to effectively compare how money is spent, and unless it is actively sought out, this information is allowed to slip entirely under the radar.

Illustration Credit: Cassian Clifford.
Charts credit: Oscar Reynolds.

Figure 1

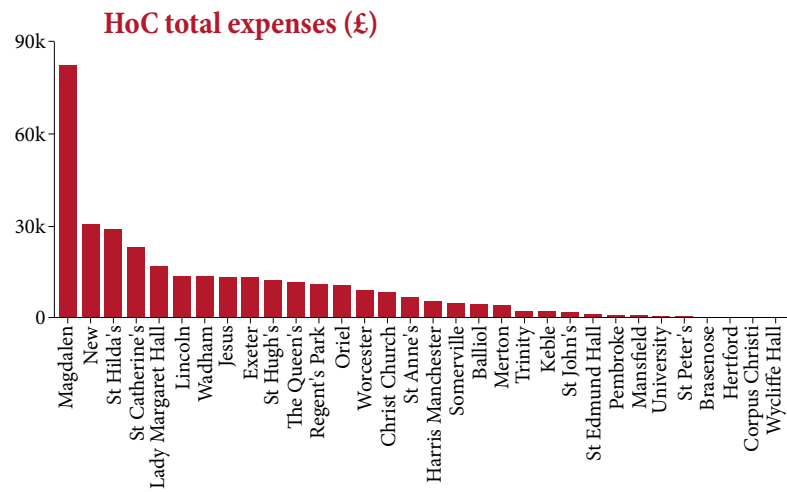
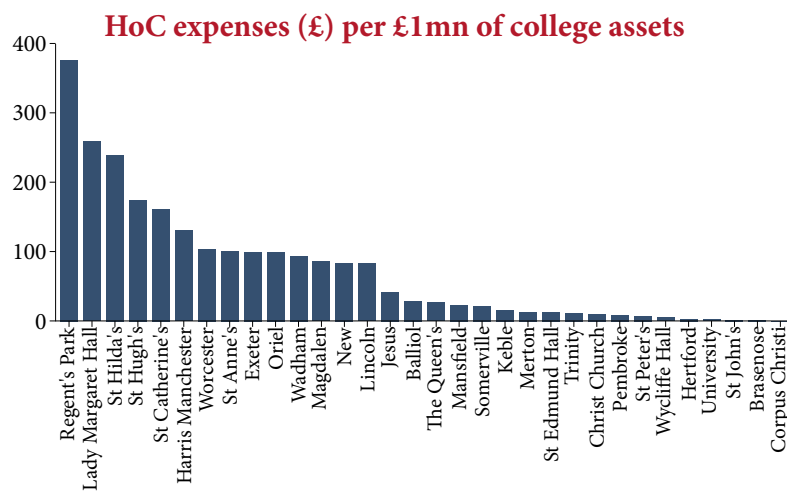


Figure 2



OPINION

Outreach shouldn't stop at Hadrian's Wall

GUUS WIJNNE

I never expected to go to Oxford. As an S4 (year 11) Scottish state school student, the University sprung to mind as a place for the English upper class, not somewhere I could even aspire to. I had assumed I'd go to Glasgow or Edinburgh, or St Andrews if I was lucky. When the time came to choose, my friend suggested applying to Oxford. A decision made partly as a joke eventually transformed into an entrance test, then an interview, then an offer. By the time I arrived at my college, after a 600-mile journey, the first thing I noticed was how rare my Scottishness was.

During the entirety of Freshers' Week, I met a grand total of four Scottish students. This, although low, is actually a high proportion of the entire group at the University. A Cherwell investigation found that only 19 Scottish state schoolers received offers to study at Oxford in 2018; 13 English private schools each sent more than that in the same year. This indicates a massive failure on the part of the University. An Oxford degree can launch one's career far faster than most Scottish universities can, especially in the humanities. Oxford also receives funding from Westminster, to which the Scottish taxpayer contributes. The best Scottish

students fundamentally have a right to study at top universities in England, just as their English counterparts easily can in Scotland.

So why are there so few Scots at this world class university? Beyond the obvious financial disincentive for applying (unlike their English and Welsh counterparts, Scottish universities do not charge for students' first undergraduate degrees), the reason boils down to a problem of perception. Many Scots feel Oxford to be a distant, unaffordable, and isolating place. Many of these concerns are legitimate: living a five-hour (or more) train journey away from university can be tiring. Relationships are harder to maintain, seeing university friends during holidays is near impossible, and students during term are a whole country away from their parents. There is no recourse to a weekend at home, which can be especially difficult in an environment as stressful as Oxford.

Scottish students fundamentally have a right to study at top universities in England

However, much can be done to alleviate these concerns. Scholarships would certainly help tackle the barrier tuition fees represent, as the University has previously attempted in the past. Access to international storage (which many colleges open to their Scottish students) prevents the torturous experience of lugging all of one's belongings through Birmingham New Street. The three-term system also allows students to

return home frequently, and the internet means that parents are only ever a video call away. Life is certainly more uncomfortable, but, besides my little nap on a bench in Crewe after my train was cancelled, it's not too back-breaking.

Clearly, then, Oxford tries to alleviate the concerns of Scottish students. But the issue is one of communication; Scottish preconceptions of Oxford go unchallenged because outreach remains minimal. Unlike every region in England, Scotland has no link colleges and little-to-no outreach programmes. My own admissions process was largely self-driven, apart from some needed advice from Michael McGrade, Brasenose alumnus and founder of the Clydeside Project. Active from 2019-2021, the initiative provided mentoring from Scottish Oxbridge students to potential applicants. With the project no longer accepting applications, there are now even fewer Scotland specific outreach programmes. Within Scottish schools, help for those applying is lacking. I found myself relying on various teachers' personal effort as the structural support simply did not exist.

In a Britain that claims to be a "United" Kingdom, having only around two-dozen Scottish state schoolers at one of its most prestigious and influential universities does much to foster division. Oxford ends up being one of many institutions that is supposedly British, but is really only populated by England's middle and upper class. The University and its colleges ought to do more: commitments to outreach programmes, link colleges, and scholarships would do much to alleviate many of the problems faced by prospective Scottish applicants. It would open the door for those who, like my 17-year-old self, would have otherwise never considered Oxford as an option.

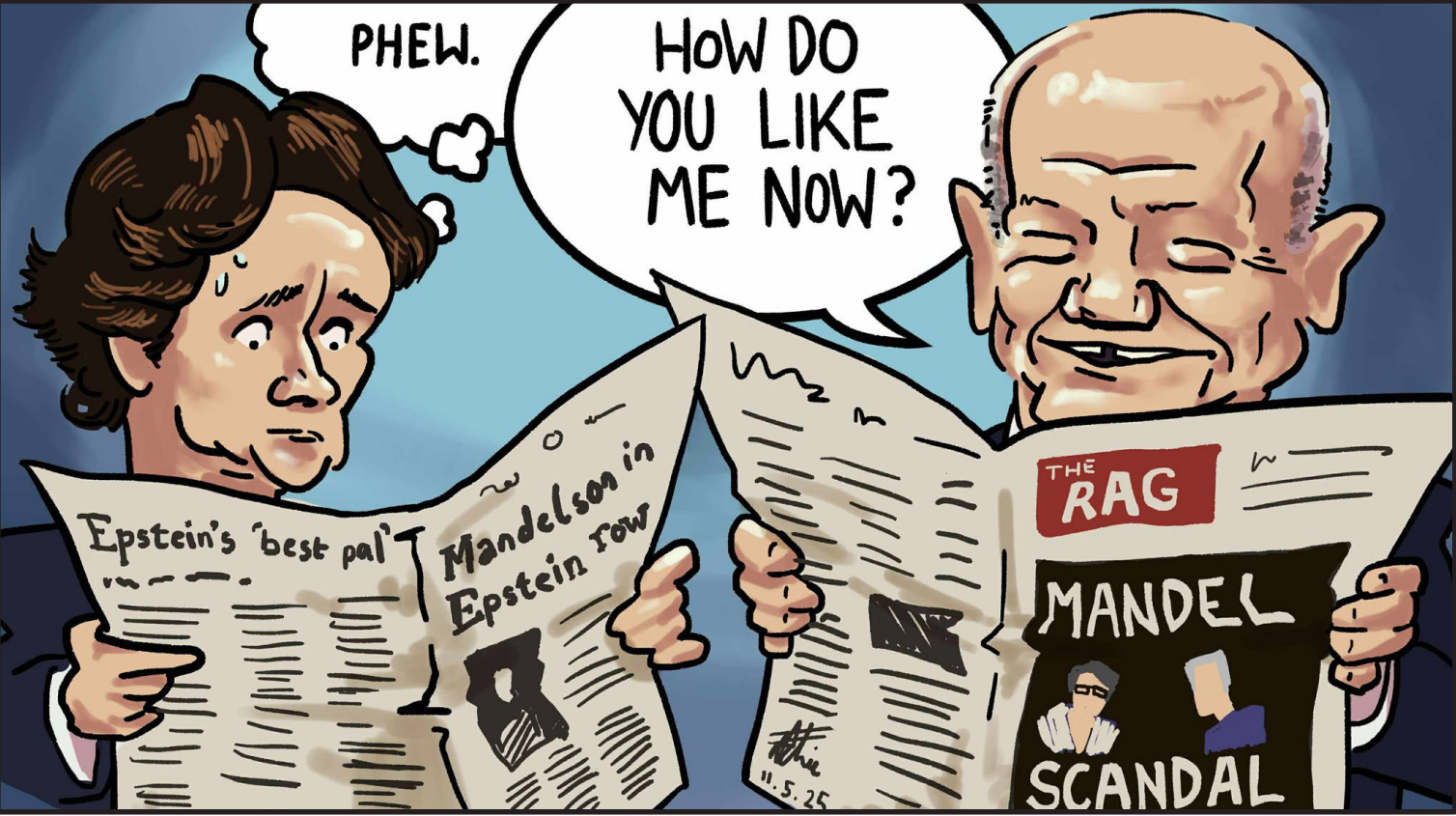


Illustration Credit: Archie Johnston

The 'S' in 'STEM' stands for superiority complex

POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

Having been on the receiving end of a lot of self-proclaimed STEM superiority over the past two years at Oxford, I must admit it gets pretty tiresome. As a French student, you learn to expect a certain amount of "mickey mouse" allegations and light-hearted mockery about spending an eternity on LinkedIn post-graduation. But some students take this hierarchy of disciplines past the point of mere irony – "You know medics learn more words per week than language students" was an oft-quoted adage during my first year.

Much like how Oxford students supposedly all believe their college is the best, we're all inclined to think that our degree is harder than other people would assume. Nonetheless, some STEM students fail to recognise that humanities degrees resemble a Sisyphean task at times: the endless reading lists, the naïve pursuit of fresh analysis (which invariably results in the disappointing revelation that someone has already come up with your "original" interpretation), the solo tutes that leave you neck deep in imposter syndrome. Do I need to go on? And all for a bachelor's that begs to be coupled with a law conversion if you have any hope of employment.

Make no mistake, humanities students can be entirely insufferable too. Whether it's spending hours poring over literature, drawing parallels from Plato's cave to Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, or

agonising over the precise connotations of a singular word to be used in a translation, at the end of the day it's all what we chose to study and what we are passionate about. But it's still patronising to hear that our essays are 'light work', when the reality can feel just the opposite.

As for the value of our respective subjects, students of STEM disciplines might have the likes of Dorothy Hodgkin and Stephen Hawking amongst their ranks, but the humanities realm is equally populated by incredible figures (to name a few, Oscar Wilde, Wendy Cope, Edward Burne-Jones). Countless minds like these have shaped the way we view the world and constructed a mosaic of global culture that everyone, irrespective of their academic inclinations, enjoys. The word "humanities" itself – from the Renaissance Latin "*studia humanitatis*" – says it all: humanity is at the heart of our studies; we examine the inner workings of the mind in an effort to navigate a nonsensical existence.

The widely held view that the sciences and humanities are diametrically opposed to each other is narrow-minded and neglects to address the crossover between these academic arenas. Historically, great philosophers from Pythagoras to Descartes were equally as concerned with science and mathematics as they were with profound existential questions, even using the former to answer the latter. And yet, today, we seem to have imposed stringent separations between such subject areas. The divide between the

sciences and humanities was deplored by British novelist and scientist Charles Percy Snow in the 1950s, who termed the concept of the "two cultures", a phenomenon that he understood to pose a real threat to society. At many universities across the world (notably Harvard University), such boundaries barely exist at the beginning of undergraduate studies, with students able to pick and choose modules from different disciplines. If, elsewhere, areas of study are intertwined and studied in tandem, why do we bother wasting our time arguing over this false dichotomy?

I would also like to question whether the sciences would retain their gilded status if they too were studied predominantly by women. Oxford's 2025 Admissions Report showed that 74% of English Language and Literature students were women, compared to just 19.8% of Maths and Computer Science students. After all, the now-revered genre of the novel was once looked upon with disdain – when, not so coincidentally, it was primarily the domain of female writers. Obviously, not everyone who pokes fun at humanities degrees is a flagrant misogynist, but it definitely feels more than coincidental.

All of this is to say, it's high time we stopped arguing which is more important or more difficult, and instead started asking what STEM and the humanities can learn from each other. And please, next time you find yourself on the cusp of ridiculing your "PHLEGM" friends, maybe reconsider. We've got the job market to deal with – we don't need to battle you as well.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have an opinion on something we've published? Email editors@cherwell.org

Finding humanity on holiday

I agree with Arun Lewis ('Stop sneering at the staycation', Long Vac) that a holiday within Britain is an ethically appealing prospect when we observe the tourism-led flattening of cultures and cities abroad. However, I worry that we too readily accept arbitrary national boundaries if we insist that we only travel within our own. Increasingly, politicians and pundits with Swiss bank accounts and French wine cellars tell us it's our duty to be jingoistically British. If Brits find ways to go abroad while being mindful that the places we visit do not exist for our consumption, we can avoid replicating the hollowing-out that we have wrought on our own seaside resorts. More than that, we might begin to value the interests we share with other people as humans, rather than what divides them from us as Brits.

Archie Johnston, *History, Wadham College.*

Be more like Cambridge

Firstly, if it's okay to hate tourism in Oxford ('It's okay to hate tourism', week 7) then it should be equally acceptable to hate the pseudo-historicised character of the University, and the student body which happily reifies this false identity. Matriculation consists of a ritualistic procession whose participants wear a ludicrous outfit – of course onlookers will gawk. Oxford is the one place where the 19th century bourgeoisie's fetish for public perception seems to persist. If we want to move on from this, we should advocate for the repeal of these anachronisms – a process initiated decades ago in Cambridge. Secondly, as students we are glorified tourists ourselves. Our exploits are supported by the university's disproportionate control of property in the city. To address the issue of mass tourism in this city without bringing this up evinces the very self-aggrandising backwardness and detachment from reality which seems to fascinate more short-term visitors to Oxford.

Mobhí McGinnity, *History, St Catz*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

Oxford is supposed to fight AI, not lick it's f*cking clanker boots! ('Oxford University first in UK to offer ChatGPT-5 to all its members', Long Vac).

Alex Doody on *Facebook*

The most realistic part was the struggling with the suitcase up the stairs on move-in day ('The comprehensive guide to *My Oxford Year*', Long Vac).

jordanparki4 on *Instagram*

The commercialisation of Oxford, first it was conferences, interviews online, I hope it is obvious to others now that Oxford often prioritises finances over education ('Students frustrated over filming at Brasenose College during exam season', Long Vac).

theosergiou on *Instagram*

If you say nothing for two years, if you vote for a party which defended Israel's 'right' to commit genocide, and if you only speak up when it's popular and convenient to do so, you're not brave or on the 'right side of history', you're just trying to save face ('Oxford Labour and Liberal Societies urge Government to be 'on the right side of history' in statement on Gaza', Long Vac).

hatt_mancock on *Instagram*

Reviewer needs a head check with Corpus in hit or miss ('My friends and I ranked every college formal', Week 7).

michaelleslie_ on *Instagram*

Always remember: a ranking is correct if Oxford is number 1, & inaccurate guff if it isn't ('Oxford falls from top three in Times UK university rankings', Long Vac).

oliver.haythxrne on *Instagram*

Embracing AI undermines academia

The University’s decision to give students ChatGPT-5 is an affront to its own values

EMILY HENSON

Intelligence and Oxford are usually synonymous. After a term or two, this idea generally wanes amongst its student population, but there is an underlying truth that people at this University have some idea of how to think. Why, then, is artificial intelligence being repeatedly imposed upon us; arriving in our search engines, eBook services, and most recently, across the entire university? The use of AI is rapidly changing from being a choice, made largely by hungover undergraduates, to an expectation coming top-down from the University administration. This assumes the worst of Oxford’s students – ignoring the genuine desire to work hard and improve – and instead views academia as a means to an end, rather than a worthwhile occupation in itself.

First infiltrated was the eBook services. No person accessing a 1970s monograph on coinage in revolutionary America has any use for a vague and inaccurate summary. There is an immediate assumption of laziness that emerges when this is an unavoidable feature. I’ll save you the tangent on Britain’s anti-intellectual culture, but we live in a world that increasingly caters to the lowest common denominator. Maybe it’s asking too much of online book providers, but one should be able to read and seek information unencumbered by constant simplification.

The most glaring issue with AI is that it is often factually wrong. The University uses literature reviews as an example of AI helping, but it cannot assist if it does not understand the work in the field. An AI summary of ‘Dress and Society: Contributions from Archaeology’ by Toby F Martin and Rosie Wench highlights Virginia Woolf as a “key concept”, having been quoted once. While my grip on medieval dress archeology may leave my tutors somewhat wanting, I can say with some certainty that Virginia Woolf does not play a major role. AI is only capable of clinging to words it has seen a lot, much like a three year old recognising their own name.

While this example is obviously incorrect, had it flagged something more inconspicuous, the error could have easily gone unnoticed. When using AI in the very way the University recommends – which involves aforementioned literature reviews or identifying research gaps – this error becomes a significant issue.

Most disturbingly, the AI writing the summary seems to think that it is the author of the book. Claiming “we seek to promote [dress] as fundamental to...understanding past societies”, appears relatively innocent, if not hugely accurate. However, it is this claim of authorship

which is more worrying. Martin and Weetch did not argue that. It is one thing to have a poor summary, it is another to put words into the authors’ mouths.

Recently, the University has taken the embrace of AI one step further, providing access to ChatGPT-5 for all staff and students. OpenAI – the company behind ChatGPT – has been sued multiple times for using copyrighted work to train its models. While I would not recommend looking to Oxford University governance for overly moral decisions, I had hoped that the ideas of intellectual property and authorial remuneration might somewhat resonate. Instead, the University is funnelling money into a company that undermines these values.

The University is struggling with AI usage. I am not ignorant to

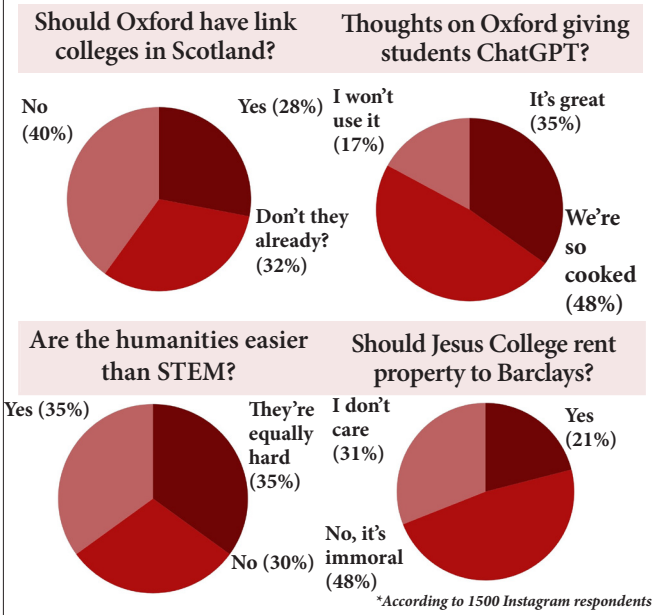
Developing the ability to think critically is the hallmark of an Oxford degree. While an AI chatbot might be able to aid you in reguritating ‘facts’, continued usage undermines the very point of why we are here

that, nor to the idea that by facilitating it, they have better means of controlling the usage. But by embracing AI like this, Oxford University is simply giving up on trying to engage properly with the most pressing issue facing academia today. In doing so, the administration is letting its students down.

Where the University gives advice on AI usage, it is often a direct replacement for actually engaging with another person. In some cases, like working on writing in an academic tone, this may be helpful. In others, like hearing a “range of perspectives” or having “critical questions about a text”, speaking with others and simply thinking can have the same outcome – with the added benefit that the student might actually grow intellectually, rather than just being ready to answer the next question.

I struggle to see how any humanities subject will benefit from AI.

THE VERDICT



Everything that I know current humanities students are asking it to do is harmful to the education we are supposed to be getting. Developing the ability to think critically and understand – rather than just learn information – is the hallmark of an Oxford degree. So while an AI chatbot might be able to aid you in regurgitating ‘facts’, continued usage undermines the very point of why we are here.

A few months ago, a joke of ‘just having a think’ circulated on social media. While light-hearted, it speaks to a wider sentiment. We have not evolved as a species in the past few years to lack the capacity for thought, nor the desire for it. Tech companies and the University treat AI as some inevitable, coveted invention: this is simply not the case. Oxford is full of intelligent and engaged people; people who want to do the work, and want to have opinions on it. By facilitating copious AI usage, the University fails to deliver on its centuries-long tradition of encouraging independent and original thought.

Let’s critique what protestors do, not who they are

We should be grateful that older generations are demanding divestment so that we don’t have to

BILLY ARBER

Two things to agree on: the killing of civilians should always be abhorred and baking the planet and everything on it is a bad idea. I hope that’s not *too* woke of me. This doesn’t mean I’m a pacifist by conviction; studying history here at Oxford has taught me the occasional necessity of war. Likewise, having spent my life in the working countryside of North Yorkshire, I’m a sometimes-critical observer of those environmental initiatives which ignore the very real practicalities of food security and sustainable production. But it is impossible not to agree with the basic points of the protests about Gaza and climate change which have characterised our time at Oxford. I wouldn’t want to attend a university whose investments fund the exploitation of our planet and its people, and I would be worried if anyone else did.

And yet I and many others feel conflicted about these protests. The causes which inspired protests outside the Radcliffe Square, Exam Schools, the dramatic (and, let’s be frank, thrilling) scaling of the Radcliffe Camera last Hilary, and now the demonstrations outside a branch of Barclays on Jesus College property, are certainly worthy. The difficulty lies in gaining publicity for these causes without alienating the very people whose support is essential to force the University to take action. I don’t agree with all of the rhetoric used by those protesting about the genocide in Gaza, which can certainly be troubling, especially to many of those of a Jewish or Israeli background.

The thing which riles many students the most, however, is the idea of activists who are not from the University staging protests that target Oxford students, sometimes at make-or-break moments in their careers. Like many others, I was shocked when friends of mine came back in tears after their prelims were ruined by the Exam Schools occupation last year. Similarly, I felt annoyed when protestors shouted at me to “go home” as I tried to get into the blockaded Brasenose College. “This is my home”, I thought to myself. Of the 13 arrested for the Rad Cam occupation, only one of them was

a current Oxford University student. It’s the idea that these protestors are outsiders who don’t understand (or even care about) our lives and how hard we work that undermines support for their otherwise worthy cause.

But the very fact that outsiders are bothered

I may not agree with all of their rhetoric, but I am grateful for those who take up the cause of ensuring that our University is on the right side of today’s most pressing issues

about what our University does reminds us that Oxford is not beyond the real world of geopolitics, finance, and business. Calls to divest from the oil or arms industries may be disruptive for many, but we cannot expect to be exempted as a special case. Like all major investors, Oxford’s choices impact the world we live in. Unlike many other investors, however, it combines the financial muscle of a £1.3 billion endowment with a global academic and cultural reputation: a position of almost unique influence and authority. Oxford has so often been a role model for other institutions to follow, and it is everyone’s business that this position is used for the good of the whole planet and all people.

The recent Extinction Rebellion and Christian Climate Action protesters were certainly not of the same demographic as the average student. Many of those holding their banners outside the new Barclays branch and calling upon Jesus College to sever connections with the bank (which has been criticised for its investments in fossil fuels and arms



manufacturers supplying the Israel Defense Forces) were white-haired and middle-to-older aged. They were outsiders, just like the Rad Cam climbers and the Brasenose blockers. But in the same way that I wouldn’t expect protests outside the headquarters of a multi-national corporation to include only its employees, we shouldn’t expect that this University, a major public-facing body, will be held to account by *only* its students.

For a student, to protest is to potentially jeopardise our degrees and futures, so I can understand why undergraduates are not always front and centre of these confrontations and why activists from outside of the University feel the need to fill the gap. I always find it admirable that people of an older

generation are campaigning on issues which (in the case of climate change) will only fully impact future generations.

Protests are blunt instruments; they can cause inconvenience or distress. But, when I think of famine-stricken Gaza or parched Tunisia, my own difficulties pale into insignificance. I may not agree with all of their rhetoric and tactics, but I am grateful for those who take up the cause of ensuring that our University is on the right side of today’s most pressing issues. The question of *who* is protesting shouldn’t be relevant if the cause is just. It is *how* they protest which must be the issue, for their sake and for ours.

Image Credit: Stanley Smith for Cherwell.

FEATURES

Half the world away: How regional transport issues impact far-flung friendships



FRANK DUFFY

With a 16 week summer vacation, meet-ups outside of term time are essential. But with the current state of British rail, such meetings are short, stressful, and prone to delay. What does this mean for friendships?

Travelling cross-country has never been easy, but UK transport is, predictably, delayed in its arrival to the 21st century. Long journey times and sky-high fares make travelling difficult, frustrating, and expensive.

With friends spread across the country, students feel this acutely, but not always equally, as regional differences in transport infrastructure inevitably rear their ugly heads. This might be north versus south, or urban versus rural, but the ramifications for friendships, social lives, and wallets remain burdensome.

The poor state of rail travel in the UK is well-known. However, it remains a key method of transport for students. Flights have limited luggage, burdensome security measures, and an outsized impact on the day. Coaches involve excessively long travel times, at almost double that of trains. Driving requires a car and a licence, and right now the waiting time for driving tests is prohibitively high. With all these hurdles, it seems that the railways are the only option that works for everyone. But just how and why is it so difficult to get around? How exactly does this impact students? And is this impact equally shared?

For this article, I conducted a survey on rail

travel, asking students about their experiences and thoughts. 20 students responded, with details of the regions they travelled from, and how issues with trains had impacted their university and social lives. I also asked them how they would suggest improving this.

Higher fees, longer waits

The most striking concerns were the cost of journeys and the unpredictability of travel times. Firstly: the cost. 80% of respondents to the survey reported having been deterred from making a rail journey due to its price. Railcards do little to make journeys more affordable, with train fares in the UK at nearly four times the equivalent flight price. British commuters spend five times as much of their salary on rail fares as their European counterparts. Privatisation of the railways was supposed to bring greater competition and efficiency, but instead, average fares have increased by nearly 25% since the 1990s. A complex mess of many different profit-seeking companies are left charging different amounts at different times for different tickets. Fares are significantly cheaper if booked well in advance, but student plans are anything but organised, and opportunities are often last-minute. Outrageous fares charged for bookings within a month or fortnight present a

serious limitation.

A second key area of concern is journey times and accessibility, which more than 50% of respondents reported as a deterrent to rail travel. A train from Edinburgh to London can take up to six hours (or longer, if delayed). The journey between Paris and Marseille is 100km longer, but at least three hours shorter. According to the Office of Rail and Roads, between April and June 2025, 31% of train services were delayed, creating unnecessary headaches when trying to get anywhere. Additionally, there was a sharp difference between different regional operators for punctuality. Avanti West Coast and TransPennine Express were the least punctual, with 42% and 30% of their services running late, respectively. The most punctual, with 93% of services running on time, were C2C (which serves East London and Essex) and Greater Anglia (which connects the East of England to London).

The UK also lags behind in investment into high-speed rail and other rail infrastructure. The UK has only one rail line with an operating speed of more than 125mph: HS1. Attempts to expand this were an unmitigated disaster in HS2. The project intended to create a high-speed link between London and the North. Instead, £81bn later, both the Leeds and

Manchester sections have been dropped from the project. Now reaching only Birmingham, there is no clear indication on when it will be completed.

After 14 years, travel from the North to the South has not improved in any meaningful way. The north of England is left without the same transport links that connect London to Birmingham, the capital to the continent, and that criss-cross many other European countries. With the axing of key North-South services, it is now quicker to get from London to Brussels than to Hull.

This lack of investment and the regional divides it has exacerbated have very real effects on student life, both social and economic, during the vacations and term time. This was reflected in the results of the survey, where students were asked about which region of the UK they lived in, and how they rated the overall performance of the railways.

A tale of two trainlines: Regional and London connectivity

On the whole, students rated rail travel poorly, but there was a clear connection between the score given and the student's home region. On

a ten-point scale, students in London and the South-East rated the railways around two points higher on average than their peers elsewhere. Most respondents outside these regions gave scores around three, while those in London and the South-East hovered around five. The disparity in connectivity and reliability was borne out in this increased dissatisfaction. Still, travelling is easy for almost nobody – 85% of respondents considered the state of the railways to have negatively impacted their ability to meet up with people and access opportunities.

The over-representation of the South-East in Oxford admissions exacerbates regional divides in connectivity. According to the 2021 census, the population of London and the South-East made up 30% of the total population of England and Wales. However, students from

The North of England is left without the same transport links that connect London to Birmingham, the capital to the continent, and that criss-cross many other European countries.

both regions make up 50% of domestic students at Oxford. As a result, a majority of students are concentrated in a better-connected region. The gravitational pull to the South becomes social, as well as economic and cultural. London becomes the natural destination for meetups. However, the price and difficulty of the journey is not equally shared.

This was not just a north versus south divide – those in rural areas struggled with poor connection, no matter where they were in the country. One respondent, from Devon, found it impossible to visit their friends in Norfolk. The price of the train rendered it impossible, and there was no coach alternative.

For survey respondents outside London, the concentration of Oxford students around the city was a large concern. Students described the expense and the unreliability of getting to the capital. This unreliability contributed to many also having to purchase accommodation, adding to the cost of train tickets that regularly stretch past £100. Few could manage to get there more than a few times over the vacation, with loneliness following. One respondent from

Avanti West Coast and TransPenine Express were the least punctual, with 42% and 30% of their services running late, respectively. The most punctual, with 93% of services running on time, were C2C and Greater Anglia.

the West Midlands struggled with “being a four hour train away to the function”, particularly when most of the people they knew lived in London. Over 40% of those who considered the railways to have negatively impacted their social lives mentioned London and the difficulty of getting there as a key impediment to seeing friends.

Those in the South-East and London lamented being deterred from visiting friends, especially those who lived in the North, because of the cost of trains. Journeys closer to them were cheaper, leaving fellow southerners the more natural choice for visits. However, due to the distribution of Oxford students across the UK, and the issues with rail connections outside of London, this was not an option open to many students outside the South-East. The 35 miles from central London to Sevenoaks can be covered in 23 minutes on the train, while the 40 miles between Middlesbrough and Newcastle takes an hour.



Meeting with an eye on the departures board

Fleeting meetings during the vac can also prove more stressful than during term. One respondent wrote of their difficulty in making “casual meetups happen”. With the amount of planning required, impromptu coffees, walks, or pub trips vanish. The stress of a trip is compounded by the knowledge that this may be the only time you see your friend for six weeks. Sudden delays can ruin meetups which have been long planned and anticipated, causing heartbreak and forcing students to try to find workarounds. During vacations, these feelings are the exact opposite of what students want after an already-exhausting term.

Friendship weren’t the only relationships strained and frustrated by poor connectivity. Romantic relationships and seeing family were also raised as areas of difficulty in the survey, both in vacations and termtime. One student wrote that it’s “too difficult to see my partner” during the vacation, and another in a long distance relationship highlighted how train delays further narrowed their already-limited time together.

Cost and difficulties in transport meant students missed out on seeing family during term. For those in the North, rural South-West, and other regions of the UK, journeys to Oxford can run above five hours, whether driving or using the train. An overnight stay is often required. The expense spirals, resulting in trips home or visits from family being rationed. Students spoke of missing birthdays and family support, while others could go home every weekend.

The fast-paced nature of term-time life clashed with the delays of the transport system. The closer to the time a booking is made, the more expensive the ticket, with drastic hikes in the week or fortnight before the journey. As a result, students could not enjoy unexpected opportunities with the support of their family. One respondent spoke of finding out the day before that they would be playing the lead role in a production, but the cost of transport and impossibility of finding a hotel meant none of their family could see them.

Solutions

Considering improvements, the survey responses followed two main paths. Namely, nationalisation or an increase in student ticket concessions. “Nationalisation”, “subsidisation”, and “public ownership” were terms that came up often. One response argued that nationalisation would lead to a joined-up system across the network, while another advocated for “total nationalisation” to, in their words, “undo Mrs Thatcher’s crap”. Nationalisation would bring UK rail in line with European countries like Italy, Spain, and Germany. According to a study by Action for Rail, commuters in these counties paid at least five times less for their rail fares.

The current government seems to agree that nationalisation is the path forward, promising the implementation of a public ownership programme under the umbrella of ‘Great British Railways’. This may be a longer-term solution that shifts the status quo. As it is,

The gravitational pull to the South becomes social, as well as economic and cultural ... The price and difficulty of the journey are not equally shared.

the legislation for public ownership has not passed, the transition will be slow, and any future investment into projects like HS2 will have to wait for years until nationalisation is completed. Considering the unpopularity and failures of the current system, a complete rehaul through nationalisation could offer a path to improvement. If properly implemented, it may be a worthwhile effort from the government. How long students will have to wait for such improvement to materialise, however, is impossible to know.

On a more incremental scale, there were proposals for increased ticket concessions, such as a “student specific railcard”. This would be far less invasive and difficult to organise, but how effective it would be is questionable. Railcards for 16-25 year olds already exist. If these aren’t student railcards, then what are?

Similarly, suggestions for a form of off-peak tickets for students with discounts at the beginning or end of term could work in reducing cost, in addition to having “more student concessions” generally. However, with so much variation in vacations across universities, such a solution seems impractical, and would not deal with isolation during vacations. Scotland has scrapped higher fares for peak travel times, an example which the rest of the UK could then follow. “Free bus travel” was also proposed, whcih would be useful at boosting local connectivity but doesn’t tackle the main structural issue.

Overall, the poor and unequal state of public transport across the country doesn’t just make friendships more difficult and costly during vacations. It also makes travelling home and participating in opportunities more difficult for those who live far from London. Even with the much-vaunted future implementation of the Great British Railways scheme, past precedent doesn’t inspire much hope. A government short on cash, and the cancellation of HS2’s northern section, make it unlikely that the demand for rail travel amongst younger generations will be met. Structural improvements tackling the higher fares and long journey times are therefore essential. But for now, it seems that poor connectivity will continue harming student friendships, relationships and opportunities, disrupting the inclusivity the student community strives for.

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(A call to) Action: Oxford's clash of real and reel

As a backdrop or a centrepiece, Oxford is never far from the silver screen. Colleges, local businesses, and the University benefit from the draw of Hollywood fame. But how does this impact students?

LEO JONES

Hogwarts students run up the Christ Church stairs. *Saltburn's* stars roll cigarettes on a Brasenose College quad. And *My Oxford Year's* Anna and Jamie wander up to Duke Humphrey's Library.

Walking through Oxford, you'd be forgiven for thinking there are two levels of reality. First, the actual, which involves hungover tutorials, looming deadlines, and endless crowds on Cornmarket. Sometimes more prominent is the artificial: an Oxford that is romantic, fantastical, and immaculately lit.

There are two main ways the city is shown on screen: sometimes as a fantasy backdrop for an unrelated story, and sometimes as itself, in a tale recreating the minutiae of the University. Such presentations raise Oxford's profile, draw visitors to the city, and cut off streets for film crews. When the endeavour disrupts learning and risks misrepresenting Oxford, the question arises – is all this filming a good thing?

A magical city

Oxford's turn in the *Harry Potter* franchise has proved one of its most profitable modern features. Hogwarts fans swarm well known filming sites across colleges, while, on GetYourGuide Harry Potter walks are the main filter option for the city, out-ranking Tolkien, Morse, and the University itself. It's a strong example of Oxford when filmed in the fantasy genre – sweeping staircases and vaulted ceilings create an arcane, mysterious environment, so alluring it takes on its own character.

Tourists drawn to this version of Oxford appear to view it as their own theme park, replete with backdrops for social media. A Christ Church student told *Cherwell* that they see “more adults than children” on the College's busy staircase. Along with Cornmarket Street's dense concentration of shops selling swords, wands, and University hoodies, they speak to a nostalgic desire to be physically transported to another world.

Other fantastical media, inspired by Oxford but not filmed there, fails to capture the public in the same way. *Alice in Wonderland* was written by a former Christ Church student, Lewis Carroll, partly influenced by Oxford's locations, people, and history. It, too, takes place in an otherworldly, exaggerated dreamland, and is, like *Harry Potter*, a staple of children's literature. Yet, in the city that helped create the story, tourists don Hogwarts robes, rather than Cheshire Cat ears.

Both franchises draw their popularity from escaping the modern world, but only one provides photo opportunities. A tour guide can point out long-necked brass andirons that may have inspired part of Carroll's story, but there are no parts of the novel that a tourist can ‘enter’. The ‘real’ Hogwarts, however, is endlessly accessible. While this may explain the sea of dark academia edits set to Lana Del Rey's ‘Say Yes to Heaven’, this is not the reality of life in Oxford. Fantasy may sell, but it misrepresents the mundane staples of most actual students: Tesco Express, bad signal, and Bridge Thursday.

Oxford as usual?

Other films are set in the ‘actual’ Oxford, but include just as much fiction as fantasy does. Netflix's *My Oxford Year* (2025) was a particular target for students for inaccuracies. Based on the novel by Julia Whelan, the film portrays a student enamoured by ‘The Oxford Aesthetic’, until reality takes over. The film's prominence has caused a surge of Oxford students posting on TikTok about their experiences watching it. Creators participate in “tak[ing] a drink every time they get something wrong about our uni challenge”, and “trying to watch without complaining at every single inaccuracy”.

Cherwell spoke to the author about these inconsistencies. Whelan, who herself studied at Lincoln College in 2006, was initially “inclined to see the negative” of Oxford's portrayal in films.

“Books seem to get [capturing Oxford] more right, more often, than film, I think. It's what I attempted to do in writing *My Oxford Year*. A very gratifying outcome has been the outreach of many Oxonians who read the book and then let

me know it captured the essence of the place, that they felt an authentic melancholic nostalgia while reading. This response was such an unexpected boon, because my initial goal was to make people who hadn't gone to Oxford feel welcome.”

Since her time at Oxford, she's changed her perspective on its on-screen portrayals: “The thing I've come to accept about media is that it meets people where they are, and you can't control where that is. Some will only connect on one level (it was so funny/so sad/so romantic!) and others will find complexity and depth where you maybe never even intended it. I don't think one should set out to “romanticize” (or put another way, flatten it into one dimensionality), but I would push back a little at any implication that all stories must grapple with all sides of a certain thing lest people get the wrong idea about that thing”.

Despite this consideration, Oxford on film seems firmly situated in past incarnations of the University, particularly in Emerald Fennell's *Saltburn* (2023). Fennell depicts an anglophilic Oxford defined by aristocratically chic students, high-class debauchery, and costume parties featuring Sophie Ellis-Bextor. The story is set in the early 2000s, but the classism from the characters is positively Victorian – poorer students are intimidated into buying rounds of drinks, and regional accents are relentlessly mocked. Filmed in Brasenose, a college with almost 80% state school students and a strong tradition of outreach to Yorkshire, the representation of Oxford in *Saltburn* risks preserving stereotypes and undermining the work done by the University to improve access and outreach.

It should be said that while these stereotypes are considered inaccurate and antiquated by many, there is some truth to these cinematic versions. Students remain attached to Oxford's mysticisms – a 2015 referendum voted to keep sub fusc for exams, over 6,400 wishing to continue the tradition. As for the reality of Oxford's diversity, not only did 2024 see the lowest intake of state school students since 2019, but applications from international students to UK universities have also decreased by 6.75% between 2022 and 2024 – the first and biggest fall since 2012/13.

Cameras on the quad... and in the library

Conflict between Oxford on screen and Oxford in reality can also be more literal, when filming encroaches on everyday college life. Tensions between students and film crews arose recently after Brasenose College closed its library to accommodate shooting for the forthcoming sequel to *My Fault: London*. Two quads and the dining hall were overrun by cameras and extras. Disruption clashed with exam season (taking place over 9th week, Trinity term), and prompted questions surrounding the priorities of the College. The Bursar told *Cherwell* they had “underestimated the impact of filming” in their impact assessment, and apologised to the students affected.

Colleges commit to accommodating students, academics, and film crews. And camera crews are certainly not absorbing the downsides of this arrangement. Lex Donovan, location manager for Netflix's *My Oxford Year*, described working at Magdalen as “very smooth. We shot during the holidays, so fewer students were around”.

Even after the camera crews have left, disruption continues, as fans flock to filming locations. A Christ Church student told *Cherwell*: “I was nearly late for my Dean's Collections because I hadn't factored in weaving through the tourists”, and that, once, a tourist berated his friend “for walking in front of his photo” while on the way to a class.

So, what makes colleges open their doors to film crews?

The undoubted publicity of a blockbuster filmed on your front lawn is enticing. Oxford's 2024 UK admissions statistics somewhat reflect this. Magdalen, where *My Oxford Year* and much of *Saltburn* was filmed, received 2,503 applicants, more than double the number received by St Hilda's, who have not appeared in any recent, well-known media. New College, Brasenose, and Christ Church also dominated domestic applications.

Yet Worcester College was on top with 2,623 domestic applications, despite lacking specific media fame. Balliol also made the top five, despite their relative cinematic insignificance.



The most popular colleges all fit into the idea of the Oxford experience perpetuated by so much of the media filmed in the city. The expectation of palatial gardens and towering spires diminishes the ‘Oxford-ness’ of smaller, more modern colleges

Regardless of whether franchises call them home, the most popular colleges all fit into the idea of the Oxford experience perpetuated by so much of the media filmed in the city. The expectation of palatial gardens and towering spires diminishes the ‘Oxford-ness’ of smaller, more modern colleges like St Peter's and St Anne's, which were much lower in the application rankings. The presentation of Oxford onscreen as 100% yellow brick risks narrowing horizons of prospective applicants, and reifying the city as fantastical yet inaccessible.

Beyond cultural capital, the University's financial motivation for such attention is still unknown. A Freedom of Information Request from *Cherwell* to Brasenose revealed an annual filming income of £6,170 for 2024, and £43,827 for 2023 (the College declined to share data for the financial year ending in 2025, citing commercial interests). In terms of income, endowments (£644,000), tuition & research (£3.3m), and residential (£4.5m) provided far more to the College in 2024. The tuition fees of just one domestic undergraduate student are 1.5 times the profits from all filming at Brasenose in the same year.

According to Oxford City Council, the city receives around seven million visitors annually, which generates approximately £780 million per

year. Planning for an Oxford ‘tourist tax’ of £2 for overnight visitors seems to be a less-disruptive, passive profit method, as does the £5 congestion charge recently authorised by Oxford City Council, placing a toll on every vehicle passing through certain zones of the city. Still, it is unclear if this income and subsequent cultural relevance outweigh the disruption media production causes to daily student life. Is this side hustle really worth the hassle?

“Trapped in amber”

Oxford has been immortalised from a hundred different angles, yet, as a student, watching the city on screen provokes a disconnect. Part of this is simply time. Whelan, whose year at Lincoln was 2006, felt that she would be ill-equipped to write about Oxford in 2025, worrying *My Oxford Year* “will feel trapped in amber sooner rather than later... I thought I'd have a bit more time before someone would look at my character's Oxford experience the way I looked at Sebastian Flyte's, but here we are. The future comes for even the most timeless of cities”.

It takes years for someone's experience of Oxford to make it to the screen, and by that time, the city has moved on. The film-inspired underlay will lag a few years behind, while the enchantment that current students find is ever-changing. These stories try to capture the real magic of the city, whether in the robes of *Harry Potter* imitating sub fusc, or the streetlamp in *Narnia* reflecting Radcliffe Square. But they are echoes of actual experiences, animated by other students – walking to Exam Schools with the rest of your subject for prelims, stumbling back from clubs down centuries-old streets, wearing a ballgown on the same quad over which you carry your laundry. They're the kind of things that can't be found on a walking tour.

What remains certain is Oxford's duality, as a city of both students and screenings. Its popularity is built on nearly 1000 years of stories, fantastical and otherwise, from the people within Oxford and the University. Using the city as set dressing raises funds and college profiles, but also disrupts actual student life, and risks reducing Oxford to a set of stereotypes. Perhaps it is no surprise that the foundation of Oxford, its students, now wish to be the ones calling “CUT!”.

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Cherwell

MT25

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Oxford Student Publications Limited

John Evelyn

I, John Evelyn, for one, relished the long vac’s pleasant absence of Union Shenanigans. Until, that is, the Mad King made a series of eminently sensible comments across his various social media accounts. Clearly, he had learned a thing or two from his new OUCA allies, adopting the classic Tory crisis plan of (a) issue half apology, (b) pretend nothing ever happened.

The minor social media outrage which followed has turned The Grape Lord sour. Heartened by Lady Cherwell’s first ever positive WhatsApp message; he has launched a campaign to paint himself as the victim. The contents of his, frankly, miraculous term card were teased in *Pravda*, as the Grape Lord and his chums have already fermented their reputations with every other paper. Every silver lining has a cloud, however, and it is somewhat worrying that a few headlines have promised to come since 2023...

Scared stiff by the drama, the once-favourite candidate for President, Anwar Pervez has frozen his assets. It is of course unlikely that he left voluntarily: nobody has anything better to do than run in Union elections. Oscar Wilde now inherits the crown, banking on everyone forgetting about the flags. Good boy.

Opposing him is the ICC Chief Prosecutrix, who was rather reluctantly ghosted by the Grape Lord, probably because she didn’t stroke his ego quite like the rest. The Prosecutrix now stands facing a divided jury, her support encompassing everybody from diehard Tories to Paul Blart Law Cop himself. We may well need a “Law Cop” given the dire state of the tribunals, the peak of which being InCCCorruptible proving that 2+2=5 and losing a lot of money in the process.

Expect everyone to have harassed everyone, and repeated references to an ‘atmosphere of fear’. Welcome, freshers, to the Oxford Union we all know and love.

Editorial



Éilis Mathur
Editor-in-Chief,
Michaelmas 2025

Oxford University is, without question, one of the most well-known institutions in the world. And with that fame comes relentless scrutiny. From academics discussing recent research, to *Harry Potter* fans obsessing over Christ Church Hall, or online critics (see page six) eager to sniff out signs of decline – everyone has something to say about Oxford.

Over the summer, *Cherwell* published an interview with Oxford offer-holders stuck in the Gaza Strip. It was one of the most powerful stories we have ever run and quickly became our most liked post on Instagram. Within a month, however, it was dethroned by news of Oxford introducing ChatGPT for students. The chance for people, many not even University members, to poke at Oxford, point out its failing as a place of education, triumphed. This is not to say the latter article lacked merit, or the criticism was not valid. Rather, Oxford, as more than a University – as a symbol of British prestige – often becomes the dumping ground of those mourning the loss of colonialesque power.

And this extends to its students. The backlash against the Union Elect’s posts after the death of Charlie Kirk was astonishing. Regardless of the comments themselves, I think we can all agree that in few other cases would the messages of a 20-year-old prompt the US Deputy Secretary of State to joke about removing their visa.

This is not a defence of the University. As a writer, News Editor, and now Editor-in-Chief, I’ve spent almost four years exposing and criticising Oxford’s every move. And if there’s one thing that experience has taught me, it’s that myth often goes further than fact.



Stanley Smith
Opinion Deputy Editor

When I offered to write this editorial, my plan was to talk about the importance of opinion writing at Oxford. I imagine that it would have featured some grandiose platitudes on the need to analyse our experiences, reflect on our privileges, and would doubtless have contained some variation of the phrase “Oxford is a world leading institution and we must hold it accountable”. This may all be true, but I fear stating it for

ARCHIVES

MegaForum
Madness

1986

In 1986, *Cherwell* launched a “MegaForum”. The idea was to invite fellow Oxford journalists and other students to share what they really thought of *Cherwell*.

Although many sang *Cherwell*’s praises, others were less diplomatic. *The Jericho Bugle* accused *Cherwell* of “blowing its own trumpet”, while *Tributary* offered a backhanded compliment: “*Cherwell* is so nice. It’s free. No one wants to pay for *Cherwell*. That is why it is so nice.”

One writer, presumably from *The Isis*, declared that: “*Cherwell* hacks are less intelligent” and “more ugly” than *The Isis* hacks, and told them to “piss off”.

Despite *Tributary*’s claim that *Cherwell* “vehemently and exclusively reveals there is no news in Oxford”, this very paper proves the opposite. There is news in Oxford, and *Cherwell* – which has always been editorially independent and has never had to



the hundredth time would have served little purpose other than to reassure myself that all the hours I spent ignoring my expensive degree weren’t wasted.

In truth, I think we write about Oxford because it’s so hard not to. Bill Bryson once remarked of Oxford that “it’s not entirely clear what it’s for, now that Britain no longer needs colonial administrators who can quip in Latin”. Certainly Oxford is an odd anachronism, but that’s also what makes it one of the most interesting cities in the world. It’s jam-packed with contradictions: a hangover of the British Empire that will give you a first rate education in decolonial theory, an infamous stomping ground of the British upperclass that has also been a haven for socialist politics, an island of ancient architecture, and endless endowments surrounded by a sea of rural deprivation. Oxford embodies both the best and worst of modern Britain, it’s impossible not to have something to say about it.

The academic year we are heading into will be my last here. Reflecting on that fact usually leads to a wave of panic, an “oh no, oh no” feeling that sends me running in terror. But at other times, once I’ve done some deep breathing and taken my medication, I’m left with a desire to make the most of this exciting, contradictory city whilst I can. Regardless of how many days it is until your graduation, I encourage you to do the same. Oxford University is bound to leave a lasting impression on you; whether that’s admiration for the institution or fury at the injustices it perpetuates. Either way, you’ll need an outlet for all your ideas. I find it’s best to write it down.

PROFILES

“If you can’t explain an area of the law to an intelligent teenager, you don’t really understand it yourself.”

Cherwell spoke to Supreme Court Justice Lord Burrows

SOPHIE PRICE

Andrew Burrows, Lord Burrows is a Justice of the UK Supreme Court and one of the country’s leading legal scholars specialising in contract law. He served as Professor of the Law of England at Oxford University and as a fellow of All Souls. As a Law Commissioner, he co-authored the report that led to the Contracts Act 1999. He has authored major works, including *The Law of Restitution* (1993) and *A Restatement of the English Law of Unjust Enrichment* (2012). He was appointed honorary QC in 2003, and in 2020 became the first Supreme Court Justice appointed directly from academia. Cherwell spoke to Andrew Burrows about the Supreme Court, mentorship, and the future of legal judgment.

Cherwell: What first drew you to studying law? Was it something you always saw yourself pursuing, or did particular moments at home or at Oxford shape that interest?

Burrows: We have no lawyers in my family, but I think it was my father who suggested I might like to study law, probably because I was so argumentative at the dinner table! I have to say that when I first arrived at Oxford, I realised straight away I’d chosen the right subject, because I absolutely loved it. Particularly in those first few weeks when one of the subjects we were studying was criminal law and you had to read the case reports. That was really exciting.

I had two wonderful law tutors, both now deceased, unfortunately: John Davies, who was a very calm and collected person. But then the other person who really became my great mentor was somebody called Peter Birks, who was totally brilliant, charismatic, and very passionate about the law. I consider myself very fortunate to have actually had two wonderful tutors, both very different, and as I say, Peter

Birks really guided me and inspired me to become an academic lawyer.

Cherwell: Coming from such a strong background of academia, do the two sides of your work complement each other, or do you see yourself differently as a professor compared to a judge?

Burrows: My academic writings and my academic research really do shape my judgments, at least involving the common law decisions that we make. I’m always concerned about how the particular decision fits with the big picture of the law. In contrast, my colleagues, who have gone the straight professional route that is usually barristers, judges, court of appeals, tend to approach it from the facts up to the law, whereas I think I look at it from the law down to the facts.

Of course, on the Supreme Court, we all have to become generalists. We have to deal with every aspect of the law. I tend to go to the textbooks first of all to see where this whole issue fits. I do that because the textbooks give you a neutral, objective analysis, whereas, when you’re dealing with counsel submissions, you’ve got polarised arguments, so I find that a very helpful starting point, if it’s an area of the law I don’t know much about. I’ve always been very conscious of how important it is to make

We have no lawyers in my family, but I think it was my father who suggested I might like to study law



what you’re doing clear and accessible, both in my writings and my teaching.

Cherwell: Have there been cases, at the Supreme Court or elsewhere, that made you reconsider how the law works in practice?

Burrows: I think one has to be very careful if you’ve been involved heavily in academia, not to come into a case with a preconceived notion, because you must allow yourself always to be persuaded that what you initially thought is not correct. In other words, you’ve got to keep an open mind, and that has happened. I was involved in a case called *Khan v Meadows* quite early on, which is about the total negligence and the scope of duty. I really had to go against writings that I had previously published as to how best to understand that particular area.

When you’re focusing on a particular case, it really sharpens up your understanding and the big situations where I thought I might have known quite a lot about an area, but when you’re focusing on having to make a decision on a specific point, a lot of things that you perhaps didn’t realise why the law was like that all become very important.

Cherwell: On the topic of how people learn and shape their mindsets, how do you see the profession evolving? There is already a lot of conversation about how AI is affecting law in

practice, but do you have any predictions on how AI could change the legal field?

Burrows: My understanding is that AI is already being used extensively in law firms with what you might call more mundane tasks of checking legal documents and the like. There have been a couple of high-profile cases in this country on the incorrect use of AI by barristers, and I took part in an academic study on what it was thought AI could potentially do in court. My own take on this is that it could well be that the more mundane tasks that we have to do, for example, summarising the facts, would be done over the course of time by AI, but I am doubtful whether AI can ever replace the element of judgment that I think we rely on judges for. For example, at Christmas, I was just showing it to one of my children, now grown up, and I just put into ChatGPT to tell me about a case. It was quite good on the facts, but when I asked what was the principle of the case, it was 100% wrong. What AI is doing is using a database and then basing it on probabilities. As the databases become more sophisticated and wide-ranging, the accuracy will increase, but at this moment in time, you have to be really careful.

Cherwell: I think there’s always that human element of not wanting to let yourself be taken over by a machine in a dystopian manner. Peo-

PROFILES

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Oliver Oxford on how he became a street interviewer and his hope to collaborate with the Olympics

Cherwell's Bess Tolley spoke to the man dominating our social media feeds, Oliver's Oxford.

Oliver never intended to become a full-time content creator. He originally created his TikTok page to market his queer fashion brand, launched in the year preceding his master's degree at Oxford. "I wanted to start an eco-friendly queer fashion brand because I had noticed that there weren't really any specifically queer fashion brands out there. It was all people putting a rainbow on collections for pride." It was only when he moved to Oxford and was offered his first brand sponsorship - which he admits was "way more lucrative than selling a few t-shirts" - that he decided to focus solely on making Oxford student content.

Although Oliver has accumulated a well-deserved 770,000 followers on TikTok, he tells me that the street interviews which have made his name were not always the easiest type of content to make. "I hated going up to people and asking like, excuse me, would you mind being in an interview [...] it was always much nicer when someone willingly volunteered rather than being ambushed in the street". This initial reluctance stems from the "unethical" approach that he believes some street interviewers take. They ask questions "designed to catch the people being interviewed out", something which Oliver is both cautious and critical of. "When people run up to someone and shove a microphone in their face ... incredibly unpleasant. Or when they interview drunk people late at night ... also incredibly unethical [...] People are wary of street interviews. I think, justifiably so."

Since his following and the popularity of his content have grown, it has become increasingly easier for Oliver to find willing participants for his interviews, with many students, hopeful for a feature, messaging him on Instagram or approaching him in the streets. This enthusiasm is undeniably a testament to the skilfulness and poise which Oliver brings to each of his interviews. He explains to me that the key to conducting a successful interview is all to do with range, curiosity, and spontaneity:

"Although I'm not an expert in many topics, I have a decently broad range of interests and knowledge that someone else is usually an expert in. This means that I can ask them fairly insightful questions. [...] I think letting the interviewee shine helps to make a really good interview; the interviewer using their



knowledge and experience to help shape the interview in a way that gets the most out of the interviewee's brain onto the screen".

He adds, "the other thing that I think I'm quite good at is coming up with something witty on the spot that helps keep an interview light-hearted when it might be, you know, a difficult topic to get to grips with".

As an aspiring TV presenter, these are skills that Oliver hopes to one day put into practice beyond the context of his TikTok videos. "There are people at the BBC that I meet, and they're like 'I love your videos!' And I'm like, well...I'm here... I can do this for the BBC... And they're like, 'yeah, totally, definitely' and I never hear from them again". While appearing on TV remains the end goal, for now, Oliver is happy to concentrate on social media and has many ambitions for what his content could develop into. He tells me that his dream collaboration is, perhaps unexpectedly, with the Olympic Games:

It was during his training sessions with the University of Oxford's gymnastics team that he became friends with the (in?)famous 'Bartholomew Hamish Montgomery'. They made a few comedy videos together where they parodied American and British stereotypes, the most popular of which was, unsurprisingly, the ones which featured the character of Bartholomew. "It was funny, we found it fun, it did well online, so we carried it on."

Considering Oliver's immense success as a street interviewer, it would be easy to forget the real reason he came to Oxford: his post-graduate studies in Law, which he first began at undergraduate level at the University of Durham. Since Oliver frequently interviews master's students about their respective areas of research in his videos, I was naturally intrigued to hear about his own field of study, which he seldom discusses online. "I really should talk about it but it's contentious in an algorithmic sense, so I don't, and I'm always a bit scared. It's quite vulnerable to talk about my own research. When it's other people's stuff, if it does badly, it's fine but if it's my own stuff doing badly, I'm going to be like, 'oh no, people hate me, I'm really boring'".

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Oliver Oxford with permission.



ple want to feel that a judgment about them is being made by a human.

Burrows: That's an interesting point, even if you were able to replace judgment, would you want to trust a machine? It's a bit like driverless cars. You know, even if we know that a driverless car is less likely to be involved in accidents, is there still something holding us back? Well, we may get over that, but when you come to judgment, I think there's a particular difficulty about trusting an issue. It may just be that, as a society, we just can't take that.

Cherwell: Many of our readers are students who are considering legal careers. Are there any common misconceptions you see from young people, or advice you have for students?

Burrows: I would say, do not just follow the money. Try to find an area of law that you're passionately interested in, and see what jobs there are in that area. The law offers a range of different types of jobs. If you find academic law interesting, seriously consider postgraduate study.

And if you find you're successful at post-graduate study, seriously consider becoming an academic, because it's a fantastically varied and interesting job, and above all else, you control your own type of work. Never be afraid to take people back to the basic principles. If you're presenting arguments, going back to the

basics is always helpful. I remember again, my great mentor Peter Birks saying to me: "If you can't explain this area of the law to an intelligent teenager, you don't really understand it yourself." I think that's a great thing to hang on to, that trying to simplify things down is actually very important in understanding.

Cherwell: Finally, are there any moments from your career that made you laugh?

Burrows: I was doing the London legal walk, and towards the end, I was approached by a person with a microphone and a camera who was randomly asking people if they could name the twelve Supreme Court justices in this country. He said the highest number we've had so far is that somebody could name five. I said to him, "I'm very confident I can name all 12, and I said I'll start with myself, Lord Burrows". He nearly fell over backwards because he hadn't realised who it was!

Read the full interview at cherwell.org

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UR
URBAN REVIVO

Oxford, let's put the creativity back into the creative arts

Why are student writers, and political themes, so scarce within the Oxford drama scene?

MAIR ANDREWS

Welcome back, Oxford. While you were away preparing for the next academic year, or busy attending the Edinburgh Fringe, the Facebook Oxford University Drama Society (OUDS) portal was readying for your return. However, amidst all the supplementary cast calls and promises for location bids, some things stayed the same: conspicuously, the same titles, writers and genres still dominate the listings. Having noticed that this term's promised programme seems to be stuck in a creative equivalent of *Groundhog Day*, one must ask: why has student drama lost its creativity?

As a literature student, I incline towards a controversial performance. Last spring, I recall my frustration at a student production of *The Merchant of Venice*: while the show had enough courtesy to warn audience members about the antisemitism within the play through posters leading towards the auditorium, the production itself failed to expand on that central issue. With the backdrop of ongoing conflict in Gaza, it was almost uncomfortable that the show pretended it had no contextual relevance.

It takes a lot for a student drama to adapt itself in this way and address politics. In Oxford and the creative arts at large, imposter syndrome is never far away. Even still, student drama depends on all participants - from actors, musicians, costume designers and audience members - to view it as a worthwhile and legitimate cause. For a whole university's creative community to caveat and curtail their voices because their stage is 'too small' a platform, or their pen 'too insignificant' a tool, would be a tragedy, indeed.

It takes a lot of nerve to write your own plays. In recent OUDS memory, the success of entirely student produced shows has been fleeting. The Mollys, a production company which facilitated original scripts for comedies, garden plays, and musicals, was created as a remedy for this issue. A similar student-founded company, Lovelock



Productions, debuted their new play *BLANDY* at the Fringe in August, and promises to tell both new and old stories. Though, seeing as the student founders of these two companies are soon to graduate, there is no natural successor to carry the baton of student originality.

Even still, why are student writers, and political themes, so scarce within the Oxford drama scene? Well, unfortunately, money does make the world go around. A show is a product to sell. While personal insecurity and fear of censorship are significant players, they are not isolated as factors from the word loathed by every creative: finance.

Last year *Cherwell* reported on the challenges that hinder the creativity of student drama. Finances accrued through simple technology like microphones and lighting are huge invest-

ments, and sacrifices, that productions must make. More foundational decisions are also impacted by budget, such as which shows are put on at all. Shakespeare is a staple name on college posters - last term saw the influx of garden plays, and already in Michaelmas we have promises for *Twelfth Night*, *Love Labour's Lost*, and *Richard III*.

It's therefore no surprise that the most popular names are the most basic. There is a strong financial incentive for these plays because they are in the public domain and have no rights to purchase. When many essay writing subjects reward originality, but assign a plethora of secondary reading, it is understandably daunting to go with your gut and create an original interpretation. But in the drama world, when the finance, casting, and

reputation of your production are also on the line? It's terrifying.

Oxford's drama scene needs, therefore, to be braver, but this involves not just the dramatists. I believe that the biggest blocker to fresh and thoughtful productions is the audience's own ego: they fear not understanding the adaptation, that it'll be too complex, or that they aren't well-informed enough about the cultural or political subtext. But the risk of being disappointed or misunderstanding a production is meant to be part of the chance that a viewer puts in a show, and a show cannot thrive unless it has that trust from its audience.

Hope, however, is not lost for the future of Oxford student drama.

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

Image Credit: Mair Andrews.

Where Oxford University Drama can take you

CHARLIE BAILEY

They stressed that breaking into the acting world is still exceptionally hard, and that OUDS producing "even one or two successful actors is significantly against the odds compared to the rest of the UK".

I loved theatre at school, and, aged 14, told my parents they had to let me go to drama school. In reply, they suggested I train as a barrister, on the basis that I could still speak in front of people for a decently larger salary. Accepting my place at Oxford therefore made a lot of sense. Multiple people told me that many famous acting faces started their careers in the city of dreaming spires. During my time here, I've repeatedly noticed how Oxford students manage to achieve creative excellence alongside intense study - writing, directing and acting at a near-professional level.

To explain why so many star-studded names began their careers here, one looks to the Oxford University Drama Society (OUDS). It's the

go-to for anyone interested in developing their writing, directing, producing or acting skills, and has an extensive list of student actors going on to make a living in the drama world, largely those who studied English Literature degrees.

One particularly remarkable story is the student film *Privilege*, starring Hugh Grant, which led to him being contacted by an agent and his first major acting opportunity. His OUDS accolades included Fabian in *Twelfth Night* and the titular role in a production of *Hamlet* which dressed its cast in *Star Trek* outfits. His approach to the complex characters he later took on seems to hark back to his English Literature BA at New College, as *The Independent* reported in 2016 that "he makes an almost

academic study" of the characters he plays. Grant has suggested that he stumbled upon his acting career, but one assumes that the seeds of his life-long commitment were sown during his time with OUDS.

Exeter College alumna Imogen Stubbs also acted alongside Grant in *Privilege*, and shone as Irina in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, performed at the Playhouse. In a 2010 interview with *The Guardian*, Stubbs called this play "the first time I got swept up in the dream of what acting can really be". That character-defining performance seems to have inspired her time at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and prolific stage career.

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

What literary character is your college?

Hannah Becker pairs architecture with archetype to assign every college a famous literary icon from ‘the canon’

Oxford’s colleges are all infamous for different reasons, and have their unique reputations and stereotypes. What if, instead of being identified by their quads and cloisters, they were cast as famous literary characters? Christ Church College’s boastful architecture smacks of Gatsby; Keble College seems to brood like Frankenstein’s creature; and Exeter College reminds one of rebels like Jo March.

Below, I’ve matched most of Oxford’s colleges (sorry, graduates and PPHs!) with a figure from ‘the canon’ in an attempt to capture, to the best of my ability, their distinctive characters.

Balliol College is Hamlet from *Hamlet*
Political, intellectual, and emotionally tortured. Balliol’s reputation for philosophers and prime ministers mirrors the political upheaval afflicting Shakespeare’s brooding prince.

Blackfriars Hall is Father Brown from *The Father Brown Stories*
Witty, wise, and compassionate – this beloved Catholic priest is the perfect embodiment of the college steeped in theology and philosophy.

Brasenose College is Sancho Panza from *Don Quixote*
Earthy, humorous, and loyal to a fault. Brasenose is a hearty and sociable college, beloved by most, with a refreshing down-to-earth vibe.

Campion Hall is Father Gabriel from *The Mission*
Quietly powerful and deeply intellectual, this college carries centuries of history and is perfectly represented by the compassionate Jesuit missionary.

Christ Church College is Jay Gatsby from *The Great Gatsby*

Boasting with wealth, grandeur, and pomp. This college is Jay Gatsby personified, with its beautiful dining hall, high society, and students who cannot help but throw themselves into the spotlight.

Corpus Christi College is Mole from *The Wind in the Willows*
Small, understated, and quietly charming. The Corpus Pelican, a golden sundial in the quad, is just as whimsical as Mole’s homey energy.

Exeter College is Jo March from *Little Women*
Creative, ambitious, and literary, Exeter might not be the flashiest of colleges, but is definitely full of heart.

Green Templeton College is Dr John Watson from

Boasting with wealth, grandeur, and pomp... Christ Church is Jay Gatsby personified

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
This practical, observant, and quietly heroic figure captures the progressive nature of the college, as well as its focus on medicine, business, and social sciences.

Harris Manchester College is Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings*
Having famously warm vibes, an eclectic student body, and a touch of quiet wisdom, Harris Manchester stands out among the other undergrad-heavy colleges, and is just like the elder statesman of the Fellowship.

Hertford College is Emma from *Emma*



Witty, independent, and charming, just like the beloved heroine of this Austen classic, Hertford’s architecture is as playful as Emma’s matchmaking.

Jesus College is Howl from *Howl’s Moving Castle*
A flamboyant, slightly chaotic Welsh wizard who is both brilliant and a tad eccentric. Plus, he has a wandering castle - what better metaphor for this tucked away college?

Keble College is the monster from *Frankenstein*
The dramatic, gothic, red-brick college unites all that is paradoxical, and seems to generate a multitude of opinions. Some think it monstrous, others marvellous.

Kellogg College is Katniss Everdeen from *The*

Hunger Games
Young, modern, adaptable, resilient. Kellogg can sometimes be an underdog compared to the grandeur of other colleges, but its modernity is also its strength.

Lady Margaret Hall is Anne Shirley from *Anne of Green Gables*
LMH is – just like the bold Anne – a pioneering outsider full of earnest energy. The first women’s college, it has always strived for change and progress.

Read the full list online at cherwell.org
Image Credits: Howard Stanbury, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, via Flickr.

What’s Oxford reading?

Willow (St Anne’s College) recommends this recent read from Jack Edwards’ Inklings book club:

“Captivating and heartbreaking at once, this book follows the intertwined lives, relationships and identities of a complex cast. Set in the oppressive heat of a London summer, the narrative centrepiece of a whale stuck in the Thames creates a surreal and unique atmosphere.”

Rudy (Lady Margaret Hall) recommends this part-autobiographical book, first published in 1949:

“My favourite Mishima novel - dark, unsettling, and hauntingly beautiful. It’s a powerful exploration of sexuality, identity and desire in wartime Japan, foreshadowing the nationalist and aesthetic obsessions that later defined him.”

Why the fuss about *Wuthering Heights*?

ROSA MOORE

Emerald Fennell’s *Wuthering Heights*, Netflix’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Greta Gerwig’s *Narnia*, HBO’s *Harry Potter*. All these adaptations of well-loved literary classics are currently in production, and, along with other fans of the novels, I have eagerly awaited each new detail of plot changes and casting choices. Yet the original novels by Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, C.S Lewis and J.K. Rowling have already gone through multiple adaptation cycles, from screen to stage to fiction. Why do these works spawn so many descendents, and haven’t we maybe seen enough of them already?

We can easily – if perhaps cynically – feel that these adaptations are symptomatic of late stage capitalism. *Harry Potter*, for instance, is ultimately a product with seemingly limitless earning potential for companies such as Warner Brothers. Or do these cycles of adaptation reveal a dearth in creativity: is it simply easier to sell audiences on something they already know? In an age of doom-scrolling, rapidly declining attention spans, and AI-assisted search engines, are these seemingly endless cycles of adaptations, paid for and provided by media giants, the only literary consumption contemporary readers can engage in?

Well, perhaps. But these adaptations also stem from a cultural precedent that can be traced back to the writers of the classical world.

The ancient Greek poet Bacchylides wrote: “One learns his skill from another, both long ago and now.” *Imitatio* in the ancient world was a rhetorical practice where work which most closely resembled previous masters of the genre was a sign of the author’s literary skill and cultural value. In this world, imitation was not only the sincerest form of flattery but the highest form of art. It was partly through *imitatio* that Chaucer established English as part of the great literary tradition. Chaucer’s long poems ‘The Book of the Duchess’ and ‘The Parliament of Fowls’ make use of passages from Cicero and Ovid, reworking the same material and yet creating something new. These poems involve the “long ago” of the classical world as much as they do the English literature Chaucer was helping to create. The “now” of Bacchylides is then in some ways applicable to our current literary moment, with producers such as Gerwig and Fennell reworking the rich ground left by earlier authors.

But what is it that makes these books so adaptable, so readily reworked, and offered up to each new generation? Again, the answer seems to contradict underlying cultural assumptions of what makes works of literature valuable.

All four works are genre fiction: *Wuthering Heights* is a gothic novel, *Pride and Prejudice* a romantic comedy, *Harry Potter* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* fantasy. The primary audience of Austen and Brontë are women; of Rowling and Lewis, children. While our image of cultural taste-makers might be, predictably, a group of old white men with so-called ‘serious’ fiction, it is the literary favourites of women and children that have proved to be most enduring.

Yet as much as literary adaptations shake prescribed cultural values, they can also do their part to enforce them. Several rumours surrounding Fennell’s *Wuthering Heights* have caused outrage amongst fans of the book, ranging from a rather sexually explicit opening scene to an anachronistic wedding dress more suited to the 1980s than the 1810s. More insidious is her decision to cast Jacob Elordi, star of Fennell’s *Saltdorn*, in the role of Heathcliff. Brontë’s Heathcliff is more than a needlessly broody Byronic figure. Adopted amongst the trading ports of Liverpool, a character in the novel wonders about Heathcliff “where did he come from, the little dark thing?”. The Heathcliff that appears in Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* is heavily suggested to be non-white. Elordi’s Heathcliff, not so much.

Wuthering Heights has always been the subject of controversy: contemporary papers even called the novel “semi-savage”. Yet it is sadly ironic that it seems Fennell’s adaptation has sidelined one of the most truly confronting things in the novel. While I will join many others in the cinema this Valentine’s Day to watch Fennell’s adaptation, I will also reread the original, appreciating Brontë’s text as the soil upon which each adaptation has grown.

What's Oxford watching?



One Battle After Another
Oscar at St Anne's College recommends *One Battle After Another* (2025): "I think it's an extremely relevant depiction of state sanctioned violence." You can catch *One Battle After Another* at the cinema.



The Long Walk
Oskar Doepke at Pembroke College recommends *The Long Walk* (2025): "Although its premise feels bare-bones at first, it overdelivers with some stunning acting and a story that's both thrilling and meaningful — I was rooting for Raymond Garraty until the very end! You can catch *The Long Walk* at the cinema.

Image Credits: Ron Raffety, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons and Kevin Payravi, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Spike Lee's lacklustre remake

MATTHEW MAIR



There is no reason why a remake should remain inferior to its source material; even less so when it's a 'reinterpretation' by an auteur as opposed to a cynical scheme for studios to cash-in on audience's nostalgia. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) comes to mind: Douglas Sirk's Hollywood melodrama *All that Heaven Allows* (1955) provided Rainer Werner Fassbinder with the template he needed to explore Germany's own prejudices and social divisions, while also allowing him to comment on the ability of (American) pop-cinema to bring us closer to simple emotional truths. Unfortunately, no such sensitivity or consideration seems to have gone into Spike Lee's decision to reinterpret Akira Kurosawa's masterly *High and Low* (1963). For most of its runtime, *Highest 2 Lowest* struggles to provide a reason for its own existence.

We begin with a superficially similar set-up of Kurosawa's now classic dilemma: a wealthy but principled businessman, who has just risked everything he owns on a deal to regain control over his company, receives a phone call demanding a ransom for his son. It quickly transpires that the kidnapper has made a mistake and is holding hostage his chauffeur's son instead, but he demands the payment anyway. Our businessman, Gondo Kingo in Kurosawa's original and David King in Lee's latest film, faces an internal struggle: does he pay and lose

all his wealth or leave a child to face death?

It is not needless showboating when the first forty minutes of Kurosawa's film take place within a single location, the living room of Gondo's modernist house, in long takes staged in deep space. We are invited as witnesses to a theatrical display of human passions and resentments emerging under excruciating pressure. Class differences, normally ignored, are brought to the surface, and the actors' entire bodies define their characters. We see the way the chauffeur is relegated to secondary status, a strict social hierarchy forcing him to remain silent even as he longs for his son's freedom, by observing him hovering, hunched over, in the

With Lee, clumsy exposition informs us of the thematic issues he wants to explore.

background of the action. Equally, we witness the insecurity of the nouveau riche in patriarch Gondo's abrupt dismissals of his wife's feminine insight, his eyes seething with resentment as he remembers her socially superior upbringing.

With Lee, clumsy exposition informs us of the thematic issues he wants to explore – authenticity in the age of AI, amongst others – and each line of dialogue sets up a 'problem' which we already know will be resolved in the film's course. By the time we get to the phone call

informing us of the kidnapping, the dialogue has divested us of the possibility of seeing these characters as humans in a sympathetic plight and we watch with near disengagement. Lee's visual touches also alienate and encourage us to emotionally withdraw at crucial points. They evoke security cameras or occasionally, replaying moments of human connection from various angles, sports broadcasts. Formally the complement to the story's themes of twenty-first century digital paranoia and the way that all human action now takes place under the weight of virtual judges is obvious, but never explored satisfactorily. Ironically, this is because Lee struggles to establish a physical sense of space into which these anonymous bodiless online presences can permeate. The King family home never once feels threatened in the way that Gondo's house atop a hill is endangered by the watchful eyes of the lower classes living below him.

It is fascinating to read Joan Mellen's 1975 interview with Akira Kurosawa in which her understanding of *High and Low*, which in its second half transitions to a proto-police procedural where the law attempts to capture the kidnapper, is contrary to the filmmaker's own. Kurosawa did not see the police as heavy-handed in their pursuit of him (he saw the criminal's actions against a child as truly abominable) and did not want to make him sympathetic, but acknowledged that in the act of directing that was how it came together.

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

THE SOURCE

Fresh-Water



Image credit: Cassian Clifford for Cherwell

I am no longer a mother—
I have surrendered my body to the surgeon's
sea shells and fish bones; and my son
to the teal press of synthetic skin and the clean plastic mouth
which kisses him flush with breath.
His blue cheeks expand: little lungs forced to work.

The casket will be crafted from grains of sand
freed from my womb or his ocean.
The gravestone will be the size of
my heart. His heart,
cold and narrow and sharp as steel
trapped under paper-thin skin.

That thing in that cot is not my child. The body
I am in is not a mother's.
I have given my son to the salt and myself
to the shore. The swell will swallow me and wring out
the blood, the sweat, the milk which clogs
my veins—he was born breathing
water.

Spread out on their table they gut me,
marvelling at the wet of my insides—
salt and brine and hundreds of pearls.
The pearl that is my heart. The pearl that is him,
not that creature which they laid on my breasts
To die.

My son is ruddy and laughing already!
What a fast learner, the nurses exclaim
as already he strides and swims and
blows bubbles in the water; sporting lungs
that will not collapse under his rib weight.
I have fashioned him out of sea-glass indestructible,
and carved him fresh organs from sand.

I have given my son to the sea and I hold him
too tightly as we submerge. I am
no longer a mother. The woman in the water is.
Her son is half-fish, half-mer, entirely hers.
The hole in her heart lets all the water out.

BRIONY ARNOTT

WHAT'S ON

STAGE
Your Funeral
Burton Taylor Studio
21st-25th October

UBU: The King!
Michael Pilch Studio
21st-25th October

MUSIC
Villiers String Quartet
Jacqueline Du Pré Building
12th October

Brahms, Carwithen, and Sibelius
University Church
18th October

FILM
Classic Season: Fright's Out!
The Ultimate Picture Palace
4th Oct-1st Nov

The Straight Story
Phoenix Picturehouse
6th October

ART
This Is What You Get
Ashmolean Museum
6th Aug-11th Jan

John le Carré: Tradecraft
Treasury, Weston Library
1st Oct-6th Apr



A tale of two venues: Oxford's musical legacies

Milo Man explores what the Holywell Music Room and Jericho Tavern can teach us about connection

Oxford is a city full of firsts – historical, personal, degree class, and musicological. Two of its music venues, separated by about 250 years of history and a walk of less than half an hour, show their pasts and personalities in convenient opposition.

I'd passed that austere, white-faced building with temple-like pediments on Holywell Street dozens of times, and always assumed it was a church. When I first stepped inside Wadham College's Holywell Music Room, it was only the band playing J-pop where the altar should be that swayed me. With its aforementioned exterior (classical, grand, worshipful), its tiered rows of not-quite pews (absent kneelers) seated around a large clearing, and its organ (likely Dutch, 18th century) against its candid white walls, the space doesn't do much to distinguish itself as a music venue built for the purpose – Europe's very first, in fact.

Holywell Music Room's construction began in 1742, before its opening in 1748. Despite being the first of its kind in the continent, it corporeally echoes its spiritual predecessors. Classical music previously tended to be played publicly in churches, and privately in the homes of the aristocracy. This, alongside its architect's clerical associations, led Nikolaus Pevsner, 20th century historian of art and architecture, to declare that it "looks exactly like a large Nonconformist chapel".

Earlier this year, I watched as Sentacki filled the Music Room with covers of the J-pop musicians Vaundy, Fujii Kaze, and the band King Gnu,

among others. Their energy was stunning, playing extended runs of technically skilful yet still playful instrumentals alongside impassioned, smooth vocals. I couldn't help but feel, however, that the soundscape distinctly lacked much of the usual gig noise of excited chatter or singing along. While the latter might have had a language barrier to blame, the former was especially obvious in the near silence that settled between songs, in spite of the lead singer's stage banter.

The venue seems to intentionally lend itself more to classical performances, where silence from the benches would be more suitable. The band's infectious joy did manage to win some audience participation towards the end, though, as they turned the mic towards the audience for some repeated vocal fills – a manoeuvre that worked even better at a different venue.

Halfway along Walton Street, the Jericho Tavern sits a 20 minute walk away from the Music Room (unthinkably long in Oxford terms). Despite its relative youth, its history and contribution to wider culture is also significant, having hosted the first live performance of Radiohead (then named On A Friday) in 1986, and the record deal-securing performance of Supergrass in 1994. In fact, I would argue the cultural relevance of their firsts are even greater than Holywell's.

Here, later on in the same week as their Holywell performance, Sentacki's energy and noise was much more reciprocated by the crowd. This time, the shout of "Nan-Nan" they asked for during a cover of Fujii Kaze's similarly titled song was picked up eagerly and without embarrassment by the crowd, comfortable in the pit.

The first floor music venue is quite intimate. Its dark blue walls and length in comparison to its thinness leave the raised stage floating as a lone hypnotic light at the end of a long tunnel. The bar at the back acts much the same if you turn around.

A plaque epitomises the fundamental differences in vibe. It boasts of hosting Supergrass and hangs indoors now after an attempted theft in 2019. The item speaks to the Jericho's past both as a venue and as a place. The Jericho proudly embraces its history and character; the plain Holywell Music Room seems to politely decline showing much of either, despite an abundance of both.

These are just two almost arbitrarily chosen places in Oxford. Every building in the ancient city of Oxford holds such a wealth of history and spirit. What many of them lack, however, is the emotional catalyst of live performance. Musicians on stage make the building resonate with the music's emotion through the vibrations of their playing and the audience's synchronised movements. This driver helps link physicality with feeling, building relationships between people and places, and shaping this raw history into character.

Read the full article online at cherwell.org

Image Credit: Tobias Reynolds, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Fashion around Oxford: India Matthews

ANTONIA ROGERS

Cherwell's fashion icon of the week is India Matthews, a third-year English Literature and Language student at St Hugh's College. You might know her as the president of the Oxford Fashion Society. Or you may have seen her out and about (especially in the English Faculty Library) wearing one of her signature jackets paired with her impressive hand-drawn nail designs. I caught up with her on the phone in late August to hear all about her own style and fashion tips.

Cherwell: What are you wearing right now?

India: I'm literally in my pyjamas. I think it's important to have low-effort days, so when I do dress

up, it actually feels fun. Fashion is all about balance – I can't be all decked out head to toe 24/7 because then it would stop being special.

Cherwell: When did you first become interested in fashion?

India: I've always been interested in fashion, but my taste definitely used to be very questionable. I've been buying second-hand clothes and going to local charity shops ever since year six. By 16, I'd started reselling stuff on Depop – I was literally one of those hated Depop grrlles! I feel like each year I've gotten more into it, especially with TikTok and Instagram making me curious about new styles and what people from different places are wearing. Now I always look at the latest runway looks and past archival pieces for

inspiration – I've got more into the history of fashion as time has gone on.

Cherwell: How would you describe your personal style?

Fashion's a hard industry to get into, but being a part of the Fashion Society has brought me so many opportunities

India: Honestly, I never know how to describe my personal style because it's always changing. I like to be diverse – I never want to rule anything out, and I'm not afraid to do different things. I think putting a strict label on people's style can be unproductive, because you start limiting yourself to those categories. If I had to pin it down, I would say 90s and 2000s street style, but I like to play around rather than sticking to those as a strict formula.

Cherwell: Where are you shopping right now?

India: Vinted (it's Indiamatthews, if you're interested) and Depop, but I'm quite into my small brands at the minute. Places like Akino London, Parallel X Studio, Gina Corrieri, and Paloma Wool (even though they are a bit pricey – so I'll tend to get them second hand). I love independent websites that curate vintage pieces, such as Vival Studios. They use an app called Tilt, where sellers go on live streams

to show the items, and you bid on them in real time.

Cherwell: What is your favourite place to shop in Oxford?

India: I'm more of an online shopper, but I do like Gloucester Green Market for the vibe and variety of sellers. They always have a great selection of rings.

Cherwell: What is your role in Oxford Fashion Society?

India: I've been president of the society since Hilary Term 2025; it's a year-long position, so I'm in the position until the end of Michaelmas Term this year. We revamped the society when I took over, from the trendy visuals on Instagram to partnering with the Advertising Society to bring speakers in and promote events. We want to look holistically at the creative industry and keep our finger on the pulse of the fashion scene here. We've done arts and crafts, nightlife events in collaboration with Industry Magazine, and last term, we even had a talk from the CMO of Burberry. Fashion's a hard industry to get into, but being a part of the Fashion Society has brought me so many opportunities. This summer, I've got an internship at Burberry in London to help with their fashion week preparations – so I would definitely encourage people to get involved in the Fashion Society! Committee applications are opening in Michaelmas.

Cherwell: Do you have a fashion icon or designer that inspires you?

India: My favourite fashion designer is Vivienne Westwood – there's something about the orb as a symbol that I just love, as well as the messages behind her looks.

Read the full interview online at cherwell.org

Image credit: India Matthews with permission.



To read or not to read?

Amy Lawson reflects on the experience of reading in a public place and its perceived performativity.

It's 5pm and I'm standing on a packed, unmoving train, somewhere between Swindon and Bristol Parkway, dodging questionable armpits and trying my best to get used to the sardine way of life. The chorus of coughing from the carriage is rapidly becoming a cacophony; the conductor makes a garbled announcement. Outside, fields upon fields of grey, a dreary, flat landscape with nothing to inspire. My Spotify offline playlist has been sorely disappointing and, believe it or not, there are only so many Instagram reels a person can consume.

I glance at the rucksack at my feet. It contains a copy of *The Ghost Ship* by Kate Mosse, the book I'm reading at the moment.

Don't do it, a voice whispers. *You'll be judged, ostracised. You'll have no choice but to throw yourself off the train.*

That's slightly ridiculous, I think. Throw myself off a stationary train? It can't get sadder than that. What's more, I surely couldn't get more bored than I am now. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Haven't you ever heard of being performative? the voice says, growing more snarky by the minute. *Because that's what you'll be doing.*

It's a classic battle of wills which I've been experiencing lately. To read

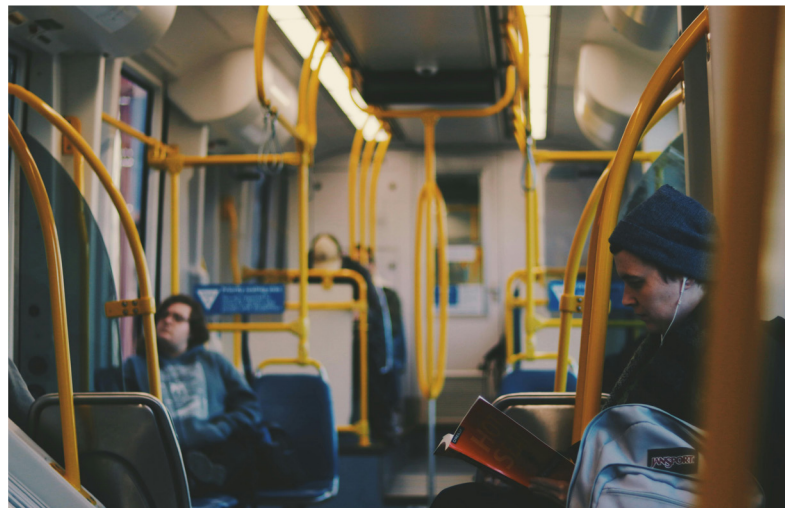
or not to read, in public? The act has become something of a statement, a declaration that I, with my broken-in paperback, am far superior to all those around me scrolling on their phones or listening to music. What's more, taking out the other book in my bag, a Latin text I need to read for my course, would be tantamount to laughing in my fellow passenger's faces. There's even a question as to whether I am actually reading or not, or just putting on a show for the people around me, who surely can't have anything better to do than feel threatened by my taste.

One of the great things about literature is its connective ability.

There is inevitably an element of the echo-chamber to this idea. I can't imagine that people who don't use the embarrassment-mongering machine that is social media are bothered by how it might appear when the person next to them whips out their edition of *The Bell Jar* at the bus stop. Moreover, there have definitely been stranger scenes on public transport, and, as long as you're not performing

a dramatic recital of your book, it's just about the least offensive activity you could be doing.

Then there's the argument that reading, like scrolling TikTok, is essentially another form of escapism: so why should we judge one more harshly than the other? The point is to transport yourself somewhere else that's not the cramped environment of a train, to enjoy yourself in a world that's not your own, but which can be for a brief moment in time. To say that reading is something only for the library, or for the confines of your own home, is to ignore the protean power it has. Reading only in these spaces makes the hobby a private, secretive thing, when, arguably, one of the great things about literature is its connective ability: seeing what other people are reading, and discussing it with them. Or, at the very least,



stifling a laugh when the cover of *Fifty Shades of Grey* peeks up at you from the gap in a duffle bag. Perhaps I'm just nosy, but reading has both an intimate and a social element.

Of course, there are pretenders out there. The trend of spotting the male manipulator reading in public has become ubiquitous; the criteria has been honed to a tee, and we are warned to watch out for moustache-sporting men reading feminist literature, carrying a tote bag and possibly smoking. Presumably the tote bag is where he conceals his other feminist novels, to keep a rotation going and attract different people, some suggest. It's possible, though, that he actually does enjoy a bit of Simone de Beauvoir. We'll never know. And therein lies the third element of reading: its mystery.

Image credit: Alexander Isreb, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Pexels.

HOROSCOPES



Aries

No one wants to hear about your internship.



Taurus

You may not be Sofia Carson, but this is your Oxford year.



Gemini

Time to put that Pinterest board into practice.



Cancer

You don't have to sign up for every student society.



Leo

Embrace a new fashion choice this term.



Virgo

Be the master of eduroam, don't let eduroam master you.

New generation, same old hobbies

SOPHIE EDGERTON

Knitting needles, film photos, vinyl records, and books: what's the link? You'd be forgiven for answering with "things I might find in my grandma's house". But in the last few years, these interests have started to lose their old-fashioned associations, and enter the mainstream, especially among young people. Crochet has become cool, film camera photos flood our social media feeds, and a vinyl record collection conveys social capital: retro is definitively in. So how do we explain this shift?

In an increasingly online world, it's easy to see why young people might be turning to offline hobbies. I don't mean to sound like I'm wearing a tinfoil hat as I write this, but the integration of phones into every aspect of our daily lives does have its downsides: constant exposure to current affairs, overuse of social media, and too much screen-time in general are all known to negatively impact our brains. It's understandable that some might want to disconnect,

and engage in an activity that doesn't require wifi.

These interests also follow a different pace of living to that of today, where it's possible to take and share photos instantaneously, stream almost any song on demand, and order clothes which arrive barely a day later, all from one device.

Within this culture of convenience, there's something to be said for spending weeks on a crochet project, waiting for photos to be developed, or listening to an entire record from start to finish, a deliberate rejection of our culture of instant gratification. That's not to criticise the convenience of the modern-day (I appreciate next-day delivery as much as the next person), but rather to say that there is a place for delayed gratification alongside it.

It's also undeniable that these hobbies hold nostalgic value, a source of a lot of their charm. They can feel like a return to a simpler time, when we didn't have to use Microsoft Authenticator to get into our emails. However, this begs the question: is this really nostalgia? I grew up in a

household with CDs and a digital camera, so any vinyl records or film photos belonged to my parents, not to me. Can we call this nostalgia, if we never actually lived through the time in which these things were originally popular?

Alternatively, it may be true that this boost in popularity doesn't really come from nostalgia, and is instead thanks to the rise of 'vintage' aesthetics, which have become widespread in

These interests follow a different pace of living to that of today

recent years. This has been especially obvious within fashion, where recent trends, like the 'Y2K' aesthetic, have been directly inspired by clothes and accessories from past decades. As a result, 'nostalgic' interests have therefore become not only popular, but also fashionable. With this shift

another reason to partake emerges, beyond simply personal satisfaction: performativity.

The desire to curate a certain aesthetic, and thereby gain social approval, is more prevalent than ever in the age of social media. Taking film photos becomes more about posting them on Instagram afterwards, reading becomes more about looking erudite in public. I would argue that this plays a greater role in our choices than we might like to admit.

But it would be cynical to accuse anyone with these hobbies of only doing them for aesthetic reasons, and would it really matter if they did? I'm in no position to pass judgment – I like a 'grandma' hobby as much as anyone, and I'll admit that aesthetics do play a part in that.

Performative or not, don't be surprised this term if you see more film photos on your feed, record players in your friends' rooms, or homemade-looking sweaters out and about. Whatever the reason may be, old-school hobbies are back – and it looks like they're here to stay.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

You won't find your soulmate in Bridge.



Scorpio

Each unliked Instagram story is a missed opportunity.



Sagittarius

Try setting a realistic budget this term.



Capricorn

Don't restart that Oxford situationship.



Aquarius

Watch out for sharks.



Pisces

Maybe it's time to lock in...

The maddening art of procrastination

ABIGAIL CHRISTIE

In delaying and avoiding writing this piece, I am succumbing to exactly what many university students are guilty of: procrastination. Though not among the seven deadly sins, procrastination is certainly pernicious enough to merit the place of runner-up. If you often find yourself deliberately racing against the clock – maybe in the midst of a frenzied last-minute laundry cycle, or perhaps composing your first and final essay draft in an adrenaline-fuelled scrawl – you're in good company.

So, why do we procrastinate? And why do we seem to hate it? Despite the speed of our increasingly digitised age, most of us seem to harbour some unrelenting desire to slow things down. To put tasks off until the very last minute. To stall. To dither. It is curious.

For some, it is the urge to perfect everything to such an unattainable degree, that it feels ludicrous to even attempt to start. For others, it can be the pure dread of needing to tackle a task you just really do not want to do. Whatever the reason, procrastination seems to be a mental chore in itself. A staple in the forsaken name of productivity. Of course, we know we are – often painstakingly – only delaying the inevitable.

From the intensive eight week bursts of term, coupled with the general pressures of university life, Oxford certainly provides the right environment for procrastination to thrive. For me, although procrastination would bare its teeth during term time, rebelling against relentless academic pressure, it didn't quite leave me once term was over. Although essays and reading lists still loomed, the shadowy silhouette of a deadline at the end of the long vacation felt like a lifetime away.

So I put it off. Pushed my to-do list to the furthest recesses of my mind. Tried to forget. Yet, this feeling of unproductivity gnawed at me endlessly. One of those itches that relaxation couldn't quite scratch. But

then I found if I opened my library-issued textbook, propped it out on the desk, with a pen and notebook placed strategically next to it, whilst I daydreamed out of the window right in front of it, I could hit that sweet spot of procrastination. I could exist on this liminal plane, simultaneously doing and not doing work, but feeling deceptively better for it. Reassured in my doing nothing, that I was doing something.

It can take some mental fortitude to resist the perilous temptations of procrastination, to avoid spiralling into competition with time itself. I sincerely applaud those who can and do. But perhaps procrastination doesn't have to be so awful, after all. Its dubious redemption comes to me in the form of temporary escapism. When my work is in front of me, and it

Procrastination seems to be a mental chore in itself. A staple in the forsaken name of productivity

is the last thing in the world I want to do, to abandon ship feels like waving the white flag. So those minutes that slowly tick over into hours move in a kind of golden haze, allowing my mind to drift to realms far beyond, without ever having to move an inch. Seems like an ideal resolution, for now.

Both a luxury retreat for the overworked student brain and also a whirlpool into which productivity takes a nosedive, procrastination has both its merits and downfalls. Am I suggesting we embrace this age-old habit? Certainly not. But I am proposing that we cut it some slack. Before we skyrocket into the nihilism of procrastination and all its evils, we should pause. Perhaps the transient comfort of procrastination has been lost on us, after all.

CHERWELL-FED

Ramen Korner:
The souperior choice?



BEATRIXARNOLD

Ramen Korner, located on the (you guessed it) corner between the High street and Long Wall street, boasts a striking facade with bold lettering and hanging lanterns, and its manga-inspired aspect immediately catches the eye. When we arrived, it was bustling with activity, with tables even set up outside the entrance. Although it's not a large establishment, they make good use of space, with small tables dotted like islands, and counter-style seats stretched along the length of the large windows. The aesthetic vision was easily discernible, aiming for an urban, street-food feel, with quirky, disparate adornments. But the lack of decorative cohesion, along with the industrial appearance of the ceiling, did make the interior look a little unfinished.

The menu is straightforward, with small plates, donburi, and ramen. Chicken broth is used as the base for all non-vegetarian soups, appealing to customers who don't eat pork products. Yet the paucity of vegetarian dishes, and the singular vegan option, was disappointing.

The Miso Tofu Ramen was topped with beansprouts, mushrooms, sweetcorn, and broccoli. The fried tofu, although well-cooked, sat slab-like on top of the dish, somewhat of a chore to get through. The ratio struck me as a little off – the layer of toppings, while visually attractive

and aesthetically varied, was barely more than surface level, just covering a fathomless depth of unadorned noodles. As a whole, the dish relied almost entirely on the broth for flavour, which, with a rich umami taste, would have elevated the meal if only there were more of it. It resembled a sauce more than a soup, and I was grateful for the soy sauce and chilli oil provided, without which the keynote of the dish would have been banality.

Menu

Miso Tofu Ramen (£13.50)
Ma-Po Chicken Donburi (£14.90)
Iced Green Tea (£3.95)

Total (£32.35)

Ramen Korner
High Street, OX1 4AS

We also ordered the Chicken Donburi, a marked improvement in terms of flavour (although the spice warning turned out to be unnecessary). The sauce was delicious, but, again, formed only a layer covering a disproportionate amount of plain rice.

The overall dining experience was enjoyable, but we were left with the impression that its marketing failed to make up for the mediocrity of its quality.

Image Credit: Beatrix Arnold for Cherwell.

AGONY
AUNT

I am an international student and I have come here for a year. Is it just me or is the dating scene in Oxford terrible? I've studied in Asia, Spain, Greece, and the US, and Oxford is the worst.

Sincerely,
Anonymous

To whom it may (romantically) concern,

I have had my fair share of questionable dating experiences at Oxford; put a bunch of young adults in close proximity with alcohol and an academic ego and you will get some real characters to date. I haven't studied anywhere outside England, so internationally I cannot compare, but I find it hard to believe that the ills of modern dating know borders, or that there is something particular within our city walls that fosters such romantic austerity.

Still, for all the merits of our collegiate system, the small community-feel does have a funny way of putting a microscope on the good, the bad, and the ugly of the dating scene. You can't escape that traumatic situationship, nor the couple who have been together since Freshers' Week. College makes everything feel bigger, for better or for worse. It is this unique environment that is, I believe, fuelling your dismay.

My advice: you will not find the love of your life in the Bridge smoking area (trust me), so keep the Cherpse sign-ups rolling in.

Lots of love,
Your Agony Aunt

EVENT
SPOTLIGHT

FRESHERS' FAIR



This year's Freshers' Fair showcased the vast range of clubs and societies that Oxford has to offer, from rowing to robotics. We hope that, as you frantically rushed around, collecting more tote bags than you thought humanly possible, you had time to peruse our own *Cherwell* stall.

OXFORD

TINY LOVE
STORIES

Something stirred in me that day on Ometepe. Not quite peace, not quite fear. A deep awareness of time. Of the self as a soft thing up against something vast. The sea, in all its forms, is incandescent and immovable. It refuses us. Refuses to be mapped, mastered, or owned. Iris Murdoch wrote of love as the painful realisation that something other than ourselves is real. The sea offers that realness in full. It's a confrontation, not with death, but with limit. A recognition that some things cannot be solved, only witnessed.

Ava Doherty, Brasenose

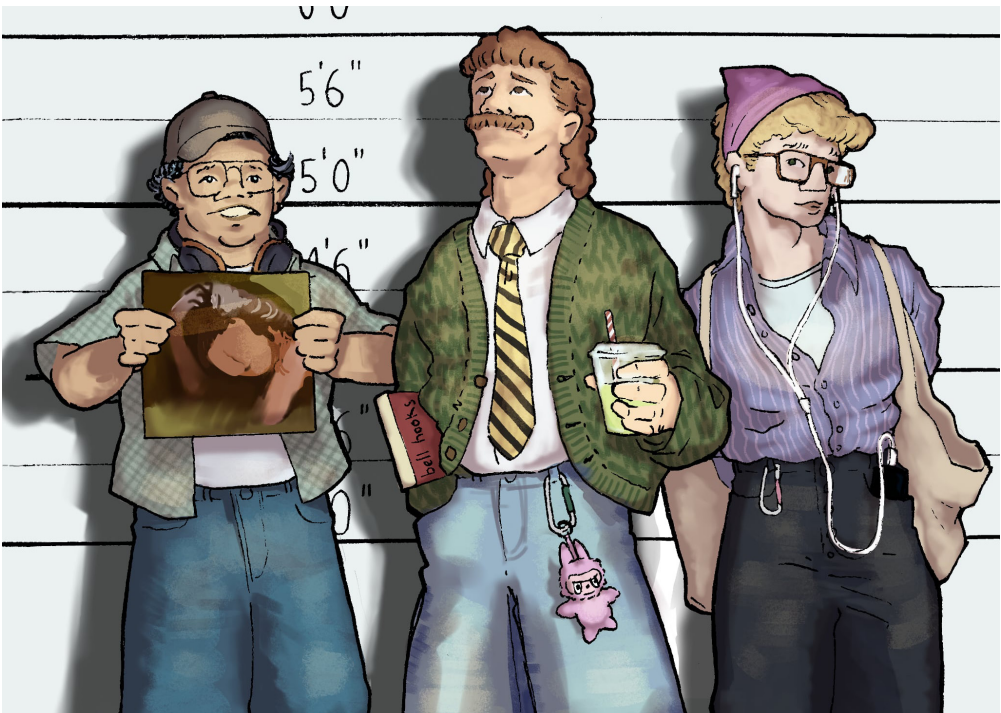
'Have you heard the new Laufey album?'

Beatrix Arnold discusses the performative male trend, and the implications it has for gender politics.

We all know the type, or at least the meme. The tote-bag sporting, wired-headphone wearing, matcha latte drinking, so-called 'performative' men flooding our social media feeds, and even threatening to infiltrate our social circles. Such men are defined by the careful curation of clothes, taste, and aesthetic to attract clout – and implicitly women – rather than as an act of earnest self-expression. The issue lies in their affectation. The performative male parades his own worthiness, his emotional availability, his uniquely feminist perspective, but does not practise it, resulting in a clumsy caricature of what appeals to the female gaze. His theatrics are unconvincing – it's doubtful that he knows the first thing about the feminist authors he loves to vaunt.

While this is a discernible phenomenon in the real world (see how many you can spot around Oxford), the online component is built on a degree of self-awareness. The formula is exaggerated and skewered, either to deride or to self-deprecate. The whole trend is dripping with irony; parody layers upon parody, as every participant is determined to prove themselves to be in on the joke. Such self-awareness does not ultimately free us from the performance, but merely adds another layer to it. The satire in itself becomes another form of performativity: an in-group of men emerges, who reassure their female audience that they get it, that they can recognise and make fun of these performative men, because they themselves are different. In this way, they quickly deflate the aims of the performative male: once it has been named, the device becomes ineffectual.

In fact, almost every permutation of masculinity manifests itself as a kind of performance. Heterosexual men, most noticeably in the online sphere, seem to market themselves according to a self-purported idea of what constitutes female taste. The same impetus can be seen behind the ideology of the manosphere, whose "pick-up artists" structure an entire lifestyle around female attraction. The pressure to perform a brand of masculinity seems to dominate homosocial relationships to the same extent. Is there not a similar element of performativity driving on



those men who force themselves to like Guinness, listen to Kanye, and aspire to be "one of the lads"?

Judith Butler argued that all gender is performance: perhaps the online sphere, with its proliferation of social media trends rooted in aspects of masculinity or femininity, is the perfect gallery for this phenomenon. The trad wife movement can, in many ways, be seen as a counterpart to the performative male trend, inasmuch as femininity is restaged in a hyper-stylised manner, curated to appeal to a perceived notion of male desire. The man who professes his difference from the norm, evidenced by his Clairo listening stats, is similarly aware of this need to present, to showcase the expedient gendered persona.

Amongst all these performances, the feminist-literature reading one appears relatively benign. His vapidty is widely recognised, but at least he's not advocating the violent brand of misogyny that goes hand-in-hand with other 'masculine' online discourse. Yet it's clear how parody can backfire. The instant labeling of these behaviours as aberrant, as a type of specifically female-oriented, and therefore not genuine, masculinity, only serves to reinforce the idea that it is the

traditional 'macho' masculinity that represents the real deal, the default definition of a socially accepted form of manhood. Once this hierarchy is implicitly established, any deviation is labelled as a farce. In that too-familiar way, the trend has become yet another opportunity for men to make fun of other men for a perceived failure of masculinity; their behaviour, and its association with a traditionally feminine aesthetic, is deemed ridiculous. As we irony-poison ourselves to death, we fail to unsubscribe from strictly policed behavioural binaries. Not everything should be so ruthlessly taxonomised.

The problem with the performative male is not his masculinity, but his pretentiousness, his calculated simulation of allyship. Casting the issue in terms of gender is more harmful than humorous.

Or perhaps the trend shouldn't be taken so seriously. Perhaps gentle mockery is the way to dismantle vacuous virtue-signaling. Or perhaps our only solace is to hope that such men may, in between hopefully flashing the front cover of their Angela Davis or bell hooks at passersby, pick up a thing or two.

Image Credit: Archie Johnston for Cherwell.

CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating



DATE ONE: An afternoon walk around Christ Church Meadows. Did the lovebirds sing?

The Next Sam Altman

First impression?
Well-dressed with an excellent wool coat, and a very cheerful smile.

Highlight?
Nerding out about politics and Labour (I'm a PPEist, he's a HisPol-er). I was genuinely interested to hear about his dissertation which he seemed quite surprised by...

Most embarrassing moment?
The café we were meant to be meeting at was very busy so we spent a good few minutes awkwardly trying to find a table without any luck. In the end we went for a walk round Christ Church Meadows though, so all good eventually.

Will there be a second date?
Perhaps? Although I'm not sure how much we click outside of both being interested in politics.

The Next Keir Starmer

First impression?
He seemed friendly, and we studied similar degrees, but I could tell pretty quickly there wasn't a spark.

Highlight?
Probably the walk through Christ Church Meadows. It's hard to go wrong with sunshine and a low-stakes chat about the future of technological regulation.

Most embarrassing moment?
Walking past a *Cherwell* journalist acquaintance who, totally oblivious to what he had interrupted, stopped for a five minute long chat.

Will there be a second date?
The offer was made but I politely declined.



The elusive magic of club cricket

Charlie Towle questions what about club cricket keeps him coming back

As summer draws to a close and we all arrive in Oxford ready for the start of Michaelmas term, spare a thought for the country's club cricketers who are mourning the end of another British summer and, with it, the cricketing season. It will be a long six months of winter training before the country's many cricket pitches are once again graced with the sound of leather on willow.

Many (some) of us will be at a loss for what to do with this new-found free time with a gaping seven-hour hole now left in our Saturdays. There is, of course, no alternative left but to ponder just what it is that makes club cricket so great. There is something uniquely wonderful about club cricket in particular, that even other forms of cricket, at least in my experience, have not quite captured.

Having played both college and university cricket (admittedly for the mighty Elusives rather than anything close to a Blues standard), I can say for definite neither have quite brought the same pleasure that I have found playing for my home club in Liverpool. That is

not to say that I haven't enjoyed both greatly: winning Varsity two years ago and a plucky University College Cuppers run last year are both incredibly fond memories. However, nothing has come close to the joy elicited by a successful year for my club.

This suggests that the allure at the heart of club cricket is not entirely due to the sport itself. So perhaps some of the pleasure lies in the bonds forged by the longer season and greater volume of time spent with teammates. The short Oxford term doesn't exactly provide a huge window to develop relationships, and a week or two of bad weather can quickly wipe out a big portion of scheduled matches. There is also inevitably a rotating cast of characters in college and university teams as people graduate and freshers arrive, compared to the club scene where you can hear first-hand accounts of matches direct from those playing decades prior.

For all the diversity that may be found in Oxford students, they do remain largely homogenous in terms of age. The vast majority of students in sports clubs are in their late teens or twenties,

with the occasional older postgraduate bringing more experience to the field. Contrastingly, cricket teams at clubs across the country will have players as young as 11 or 12 sharing the pitch with seasoned veterans 50 or 60 years their senior. Personally, some of the very best players I've had the privilege of playing with have wicket totals numbering in the thousands and have continued to take five-wicket hauls into their 70s.

The broad age range of club cricketers leads to the formation of some very unlikely partnerships, and even regularly allows multiple generations of a family to share the pitch. In the narrower age range of participants, college and university cricket loses something enriching that club cricket provides. The continued enjoyment and success of Old Boys games at many of Oxford's colleges show what a great vehicle for intergenerational connection cricket can be.

There is also something to be said for the format in which cricket is played. Almost all college games and a large number of university games are the shortened Twenty20 version of the sport. These sharp encounters are

obviously much more accommodating to a busy student schedule – but there is also something lost from the longer Saturday formats played at clubs across the country. Longer styles of the sport can ebb and flow, with momentum swinging from one team to another over the course of an entire afternoon. This produces tension of the highest order and often leads to dramatic moments of both triumph and misery.

The outcome of a Second XI league cricket match played in the dog days of August may matter exceedingly little to all but the twenty-two players involved, but for those individuals it can feel like there has never been anything as important as the next ball to be bowled. A single run can simultaneously bring jubilation and agony. This prolonged intensity, repeated time and time again over long afternoons that stretch out over long summers, is a rare phenomenon indeed. As joyful as cricket can be in all of its many forms, from street to college to international cricket on tv, it is club cricket that I shall continue to cherish above all else.

Image Credit: Emily Henson for Cherwell.

SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT

NATALIE TAN

Not so hot on rugby, rowing, football, (insert traditional British sport here)? For freshers who want something a little more different and diverse, ALTS is a good place to start. ALTS is a beginner-friendly, non-contact, late-night pickup ice hockey. I've met a great mix of people from other colleges – and even Oxford Brookes – chatting while waiting at the side of the ice rink for our turn. Ungated by wealth or skill, ALTS will set you back four pounds a pop, runs on a drop-in basis twice a week, guarantees no one pulls up drunk, and is one of the few clubs where it's genuinely, actually okay – maybe even better – to be piss-poor.

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Cherwell Puzzle Hunt - Trouble in Time

by Zoë McGuire, Alessandra Edwards, Nat Elder, and Jaden Lee

The *Cherwell* Puzzles team found a strange-looking contraption when on a walk in the Science Quarter. Perhaps tinkering with it was a bad idea, as we’ve been transported 100 years in the past to 1925 – back when *Cherwell* was just 5 years old. Graham Greene has just departed, and W. H. Auden is just arriving. Confused, we pick up a copy of the *Cherwell* to look for clues on how to get home...

This is a “Puzzle Hunt”, much like the one from Week 0 last term. It consists of seven small “feeder puzzles”, and each one has an English word or phrase as its answer. You’ll need to use the seven answers to solve the final “metapuzzle” and bring us home!

Sport by Zoë McGuire

It seems the device brought people back to 1925 with news from even further into the future than us! These footballers have all been cancelled, but it feels like something’s missing... At least there’s one team that’s still safe to watch.

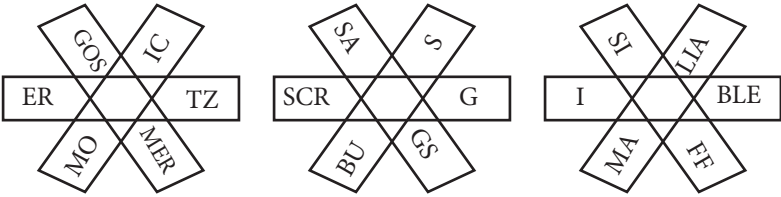
In a shocking piece of news, football committees worldwide have simultaneously banned nine footballers from competitions! Declan Rice, Raheem Sterling, Luis Suarez, Pedri, Harry Kane, Eric Dier, Lionel Messi, and Cole Palmer have all received lifetime bans. FIFA revealed their crimes in a press release:

Opted not to use a tumble dryer
Sprained a joint in his foot
Wore a nappy in America
Swam around like an eel

Discovered an ancient artefact
Discriminated on a gender basis
Said equilaterals are better than scalenes
Pretended to be Hades’ son

Horoscopes by Jaden Lee

Having recently been asked on a date by an editor of Cambridge’s Varsity newspaper, we turned to 1925 Cherwell’s Horoscope section to find out what they’d recommend. Turns out it’s written in the stars...



Opinions by Nat Elder

Even in the days before Facebook pages, anonymous confessions will always be alive and well. But it sounds as if some things are being left unsaid... How could we take a closer look?

Top of George Street has endless shop of spirit (5)
This can go up your nose in hotel antics; rich, naked Etonian’s first key (12)
Article firstly slanders writer, editor resigns in response (6)
Earlier, beef got messy surrounding Oriel’s leading duo (6)
Student Union with empty ballot leads to Fifty Euro initial fine (6)
University getting into alternative music; Bodleian at heart of push (6)
Head of Brasenose studied to make money (5)
It’s easy to remember to condemn E&M, on icky sample of characters (8)
Man, perhaps, is regular Blue (4)

Features by Jaden Lee

The print edition in 1925 had an interview with Philip Cunliffe-Lister, Univ alum and President of the Board of Trade at the time. Included was the transcript of a phone call he made to the government body, encoded for security. Seems as though he feels a different kind of call to the board...

[222 44 777 444 7777 8 6 2 7777 777 33 222 33 444 888 2 555] + [4] [222 2 777 3 9 444 8 44 3. 666. 22.]

2 3 888 2 66 222 33 33 2 222 44 555 33 8 8 33 777 8 9 33 555 888 33 7777 8 33 7 7777

222 666 9 2 22 88 66 4 2, 22 2 22 999!

Metapuzzle: Back to the Future by Zoë McGuire

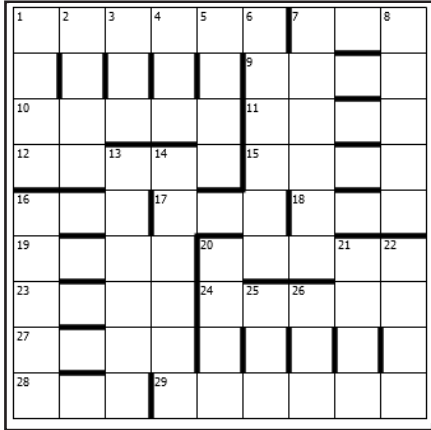
The 1925 *Cherwell* editors have said they know how to fix our time machine, but they need something in return – taking the papers around every week is very tiring (as VOIs don’t exist yet). What could we build them to help distribute the paper?

Sport
Horoscopes
Opinions
Features
Investigations
Culture
News

Capital of Iraq (7)
Explode, as a volcano (5)
Home to the NFL’s Cowboys (6)
18th Century “Revolution” in Britain (10)
Whiskey, or phantom (6)
Tchaikovsky’s “instrument”, famously (6)
Winning gold in a race (5)

Investigations by Alessandra Edwards

Before there were Sextigations and Intoxtigations, there were Churchtigations. 1925 Cherwell has ranked the holiest colleges in Oxford, but one has been left off of the list.



ACROSS
1. Mary’s other half
7. Ragdoll or Sphinx, for example
9. River flowing through York
10. Poet Doolittle
11. Opposite the editorial page
12. Dynamite inventor
15. Out of the ordinary
16. Bono’s preceder
17. Vote in favour
18. Produce an egg
19. Goddess of the Dawn
20. American rubbish
23. Marquee or Teepee
24. 5-7-5 Poem
27. Great lake bordering 2D
28. Ribonucleic Acid
29. Currency of Indonesia

DOWN
1. Major, for one
2. US state bordering 27A
3. Sun, in Seville
4. Preston North ____
5. A loud ringing of bells
6. Dam or vacuum
7. Dome atop a building
8. Bear named after Roosevelt
13. Herzegovina’s partner
14. Vac between Hilary and Trinity
16. “Great” Russian tsar

20. Shakespearean you
21. Seabird
22. Dennis or Laurie
25. Cleopatra’s killer, maybe
26. The third

Culture by Jaden Lee

We found a list of the greatest noise-makers, but it seems as though they’ve got their Strands muddled. Where could we find a more iconic musician?



News by Alessandra Edwards

Back in 1925, Cherwell was investigating a discrepancy in the Oxford Union’s finances. Maybe this email we uncovered could explain what happened to the time machine?

Dear Vreasurer,
X rejenvzy senv you an emaxz jonjernxnq vbe bxjjup we bave fajed wxvb vbe fxnan-
jes.
We jan jonfxrm vbxs mxsvake was an XV QZXVJB.
Sxnjerezy,
Presxdenv

Freshers Guide Answers

Across: PORTER, CUB, RNA, URL, AORTA, TAIPEI, LAGOS, BOP, EEL, ASSAIL, MOD-AL, ULTRA, UMPIRE, BOD, PPE, SHIRT, UNABLE, ULCER, BOT, OWL, KIT, YEARNs
Down: PRELIMS, ON TAP, RAGGED, TUTOR, ERAS, CAPO, BRIE, STYE, HALL, LIB, PAL, ALL, SCR, SUE, BATTELS, APP, TAILOR, THETA, BROWN, BLUE, OSLO, DUCK, PART, EBB, SLOE