

The contact hour conundrum: Oxford's unequal hours and unequal tutors



- DPhil students teach 10% of tutorials
- Significant disparities across colleges
- 50% decline in contact hours during degree

LAURENCE COOKE

When the tutor's using ChatGPT to answer stats problems you do question what you're there for."

Oxford University is heralded as housing the greatest minds in academia, with the pioneers of cutting-edge research sharing their vast quantities of knowledge directly with students. But behind this image lies a far more varied reality of teaching at the world's best university.

This Biology undergraduate's experience with a DPhil student tutor may be the exception, not the rule, but analysis of data obtained by *Cherwell* reveals courses and colleges rely substantially on teaching by postgraduate students who do not hold a lecturer position.

And while stereotypes about overworked scientists and humanities students with next to no hours of teaching abound, information obtained

through Freedom of Information (FoI) requests reveals the true state of play.

College comparisons

Some colleges are distinctly more dependent on teaching from graduate students than others. These tutors are themselves students, often in their third or fourth year of a DPhil, who are not regular staff within a faculty – this means they work only on contracts with colleges, rather than also with faculties. For some colleges, such as at Lincoln, these students led only 4.1% of the contact hours. However, at many other colleges, including Somerville, the figure sits at 17.9%. Across 21 colleges, the average stood at 10.1%.

Other colleges with high rates of graduate student teaching include Oriel (16%) and St Anne's (15.3%), while at the other end we find St Hugh's at 5% and Trinity at 7%. This would suggest there is no clear link between college endowment, size, and reliance on graduate student teachers. Indeed, half of Archaeology and Anthropology contact hours at St John's, one of Oxford's wealthiest colleges, were taught by graduate students.

One thing remains certain: Oxford colleges systematically depend less on graduate students for teaching than their Cambridge counterparts, where an average of 21.2% of contact hours were taught this way. At Emmanuel College,

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Vice-Chancellor says 'emotional connection' needed now more than ever in annual oration

DYLAN PORTER

Professor Irene Tracey delivered her annual oration as Vice-Chancellor last week, covering a range of topics including artificial intelligence (AI), freedom of speech, and the climate crisis.

The University has seen significant changes since the Vice-Chancellor's last oration, including the election of Lord William Hague as the University's 160th Chancellor. Reflecting on Hague's election, Tracey spoke of the Chancellor as "an absolute delight to work with".

Shortly after the oration, the *Times Higher Education's* global ranking placed Oxford first for a record-breaking tenth consecutive year. In anticipation of this year's ranking, Tracey boasted of Oxford's "enduring, endless excellence".

In a speech strongly rooted in what it means to be human, the Vice-Chancellor outlined the University's integral role in the lives of staff, students, and wider society. Reflecting on the date of the oration, Tracey said: "as we gather here on 7th

October 2025, still in shock at what antisemitism and hatred wreaked in Manchester last Thursday, let us hope for more kindness.

"Let us hope for peace in Gaza and for the people of Palestine and let us hope for the safe return of all hostages."

Examining the state of the world, the Vice-Chancellor described AI as the most pressing issue of our time. Acknowledging the "anxiety this new world brings", she said that "people have to find an emotional connection". She discussed Oxford's role at the forefront of the AI revolution – championing initiatives such as the University's AI in Education hub, and its role as the first UK university to offer ChatGPT-5 to all of its members.

Despite the challenges posed by AI, Tracey emphasised humanity's compelling power with regards to innovation and creativity, encouraging the use of AI as a tool for distinctly human development.

The Vice-Chancellor also touched on the extensive equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) debate taking place in America, saying that Oxford is committed to "finding the best talent, wherever we can, and then striving to ensure that talent thrives once here... This is where we stand, and it is where the middle ground of British public opinion stands too".

Reflecting on changes to Statute XI, the University's policy on disciplinary procedure, the Vice-Chancellor said: "Balancing the need to protect students from misconduct with the

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Hundreds march through Oxford in pro-Palestine protest

CHERWELL NEWS

Starmer and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak specifically.

One Oxford student participating in the protest told *Cherwell*: "We cannot rest. Students have to get organised." He continued to state that through tuition money and attending the University, students' existence "comes with a level of complicity".

A speaker from Oxford Jewish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign

addressed protesters at the start of the march, saying: "Of course [we] welcome the prospect of a ceasefire, but how can we trust a ceasefire broken by Israel within hours."

The protest was organised by the Oxford branch of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), a national grassroots movement working to achieve "peace, equality, and justice" in the face of "racism, occupation, and colonisation".

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Mishal Husain delivers Oxford's annual Romanes Lecture

WILLOW LOCK

Award-winning journalist and author Mishal Husain delivered Oxford University's annual Romanes Lecture on Tuesday. Taking place in the Sheldonian Theatre, this year's lecture was titled 'Empire, Identity and the Search for Reason'.

In the lecture Husain explored both historical and contemporary narratives of identity, communities, and conflict. She reflected on our imperial past and talked of a search for points of light, finding them beyond the headlines in history and forgotten context.

Husain also examined the election of Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Asian

MP elected to serve in the House of Commons, whose work was driven by the poverty gap between India and Britain. As a Liberal MP during Gladstone's premiership, Naoroji's critique of empire is thought to have influenced Gandhi and Jinnah.

During the lecture, Husain said: "When I look at today's undergraduates I am conscious that, at the same point in my life 30 years ago, I was emerging from my university education into a less troubled world. The Berlin Wall had been torn down, the Soviet Union had come to an end, it felt as though societies were moving towards more freedom and more prosperity. The 9/11 attacks had not happened."

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Mishal Husain delivers Oxford’s annual Romanes Lecture



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“Today, the level of conflict, and the economic pressures on countries, and individuals, make for a very different reality. The news is often hard to take, leading to a sense of overload. Even, at times, despair. The ‘search for reason’ is part of this lecture’s title because my own search for reason – a compass through these times – is how I try and make sense of dramatic events around us. It’s at the heart of my new on air work. And I hope that what I share about that compass – that search – may be of use to some of you, in providing points of light.”

Challenging the relationship between East and West, Mishal spoke of the lost religious context in the words of Rumi, reflected on the case of Shamima Begum, and shared often-overlooked connections between English architecture and Islamic buildings, including the Sheldonian Theatre – the venue of the Romanes lecture.

Mishal Husain is currently Editor-at-Large at Bloomberg Weekend. Prior to

joining Bloomberg, Husain presented a number of BBC News programmes, including Radio 4’s Today programme, from which she stepped down in December 2024.

Established in 1891 with the funding of George John Romanes, the Romanes Lecture is delivered annually by a public figure by special invitation of the Vice-Chancellor. Past speakers have included Professor Geoffrey Hinton, Dame Catherine Bingham, and Hilary Clinton.

Prime Minister William Gladstone was the first speaker to present the Romanes Lecture in 1892 when Dadabhai Naoroji was a serving MP.

Professor Irene Tracey described the lecture as “a valued Oxford tradition – an opportunity to engage with the ideas and individuals shaping our understanding of society, history, science, and the arts”.

Further information about the annual Romanes Lecture is available on the University’s website.

Image Credit: David Hays for Cherwell.

Investigation reveals serious asbestos management issues in the University

ARINA MAKARINA

An investigation by Confront Power has revealed that Oxford University was recently in serious breach of asbestos management regulation.

An audit conducted in 2019 revealed that information in the asbestos register was not consistent or up-to-date, with auditors, PwC, highlighting a critical risk that the University was non-compliant with UK legislation. A second audit in 2020 also revealed that the University had only surveyed 97 out of 160 of the highest-risk buildings, with only 23 of 72 asbestos management plans completed by their June 2020 due date.

Following Confront Power’s report, the University has emphasised that the procedures currently in place “pose no risk to the health of our students, staff, or visitors”.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “Like institutions across the UK higher education sector, the University has a diverse, complex estate, and we face legacy issues around asbestos-containing materials in some of our buildings.” They added that the University “proactively” engages in the risk management of asbestos in University buildings.

Confront Power is a not-for-profit organisation which specialises in investigative journalism.

The audits, obtained by Confront, were initially withheld by the University until the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) issued an order to release the documents. Oxford responded to the

ICO claiming that disclosure of parts of the information in the audits could lead to panic among people inhabiting the buildings.

Confront Power reported in June 2025 that Oxford had paid out £850,000 in compensation for three claims regarding asbestos exposure internally. The University has 4,609 asbestos-containing materials across its buildings, including 24 buildings which are classified as “high-risk”.

An Oxford University and College Union (UCU) committee member said: “Oxford UCU is extremely concerned that information about the location and management of asbestos in University buildings – including the University’s own assessment that it is in breach of the Control of Asbestos Regulations – has been withheld from staff working in affected buildings.”

Asbestos was banned in the UK in 1999, and the government introduced the Control of Asbestos Regulations in 2004. ‘Asbestos’ refers to a group of naturally occurring heat and water resistant fibrous minerals that were used widely in construction in the past. Exposure to asbestos can lead to cancer or asbestosis through inhalation.

Oxford University is among a number of UK higher education institutions such as Imperial College London, the University of Bristol, the University of St Andrews, Newcastle University, and the University of Aberdeen that have been revealed to also have previous and current asbestos management issues.

Oxford Labour Club joins forces with the YIMBY Alliance to tackle Oxford’s housing crisis

OSKAR DOEPKE

The Oxford Labour Club (OLC) has teamed up with the Oxford branch of the ‘Yes In My Backyard’ Alliance (Oxford YIMBY) for a joint launch event. YIMBY is a campaign advocating for more high-quality, affordable homes with local branches across the country. The event, which took place on 16th October, was held at Trinity College and attended by both YIMBY representatives and MP Danny Beales. The launch marks OLC’s first collaboration with YIMBY.

The Co-Chairs of OLC told *Cherwell*: “This relaunch is about finding a new generation to pick up the call to build more homes and end the city’s housing shortage. That shortage affects both students and long-term residents, and it is only right that students use their voice to advocate for more homes for everyone.”

When asked how students in the OLC can contribute to YIMBY’s goals, the Co-Chairs told *Cherwell* they will “help set up a fully independent Oxford-based campaign”. The Co-Chairs explained that, for OLC, working toward an accessible Oxford “means supporting Oxford YIMBY’s

campaign for a city where nobody has to be priced out”.

OLC’s involvement with YIMBY comes amid rising concerns about Oxford’s housing crisis. As of July 2025, the average home price in Oxford stands at £497,000 – nearly double the UK average of £270,000 – while average monthly private rents have reached £1,897, up 11.7% in the last year. Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University’s student populations add additional strain on the city’s housing market, with a combined 4,521 students living outside of university-provided accommodation as of the 2023/24 academic year.

Oxford YIMBY campaigns to address Oxford’s housing crisis by “building out”, expanding Oxford’s green belt – the protected land around the city designed to limit urban sprawl – outward to allow development along the city’s edges. The organisation also advocates for “building up”, which focuses on replacing terraces or detached houses with taller apartment blocks.

Currently, Oxford YIMBY supports three projects: the redevelopment of the North Oxford Golf Club site, the creation of 1,450 new homes in a new community called Bayswater Brook, and the development of land south of

the Oxford Science Park.

While Oxford YIMBY and the wider YIMBY organisation are both unaffiliated with any political party, their goals align with the Labour Party’s aims to build more affordable housing. Speaking to *Cherwell*, the Co-Chairs of OLC explained that despite YIMBY being non-partisan, OLC “share their commitment to tackling the housing crisis, building more homes, and creating a housing system that works for students”.

Beales, who will attend the launch event, serves as a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness and for Temporary Accommodation, which brings together parliamentarians to tackle homelessness and the housing crisis at the national level.

Through the joint launch event and continued collaboration with Oxford YIMBY, the Co-Chairs told *Cherwell* that OLC aims to seize the “opportunity to expand pro-housing outreach” and “be part of that change”.

YIMBY as a movement began in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 2010s as a response to the lack of affordable housing in the Bay Area. California YIMBY as the first political group was founded by tech executives such as Nat Friedman, the former CEO of GitHub.

Oxford alumnus Richard Robson awarded Nobel Prize in Chemistry

OSKAR DOEPKE

Brasenose College alumnus Richard Robson has been awarded the 2025 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his research into the development of metal-organic frameworks (MOFs). Robson, now a professor at the University of Melbourne, was recognised by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences alongside Professor Susumu Kitagawa from Kyoto University and Professor Omar M. Yaghi from the University of California, Berkeley.

MOFs, a novel type of molecular architecture, combine metal ions and organic molecules to form crystalline frameworks with large cavities, allowing other molecules to move in and out freely. Since their discovery, MOFs have been used to extract water from desert air and to trap and store carbon dioxide, among other applications.

Speaking to *Cherwell*, Robson described the award as “a great honour and pleasure”. Robson, who matriculated in 1955 to study

Chemistry at Brasenose and later earned his DPhil from Oxford in 1962, first began exploring what would become MOFs in 1974. While building atomic models for his students in Melbourne, Robson realised that the models’ connection points determined the resulting molecular structure, leading him to wonder whether molecules could be designed to assemble into pre-determined shapes.

Continuing his interest, Robson combined copper and a four-armed organic molecule to create a crystalline framework with large cavities in 1989 – the first of what would later be coined by Yaghi as an MOF. In a paper published in the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* later that year, Robson outlined the novel architecture and its potential applications.

Within a year, Robson had proven his own ideas: he demonstrated that MOFs could allow for the exchange of ions, laying the conceptual foundation that future researchers – particularly Kitagawa and Yaghi – would build upon.

Professor Stephen Faulkner, Head of Oxford University’s Department of Chemistry, told *Cherwell*: “I am delighted to see the work of an Oxford Chemistry alumnus recognised with the Nobel Prize. This award serves as an inspiring reminder of the extraordinary impact our students and researchers can go on to make in the world.”

A spokesperson for Brasenose College told *Cherwell*: “We are immensely proud to congratulate our alumnus on being awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. It is a joy to see one of our own excel in a field to which they have devoted so much of their life. Professor Robson’s work represents an incredibly impactful contribution to advancing humanity’s understanding of the chemical world, and Brasenose is delighted to see it receive global recognition.”

With this honour, Robson joins 57 other Nobel Laureates who studied or taught at Oxford, including two from Brasenose.

Image Credit: University of Melbourne with permission.



Hundreds march through Oxford in pro-Palestine protest

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Members of Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) were also in attendance, alongside other student and national campaigns. OA4P have been advertising the protest outside the Oxford University's Student Union Freshers' Fair this week. Members of OA4P stood outside the entrance to Examination Schools on High Street, handing out flyers with information and encouraging people to attend.

At the event, the organisers specifically thanked students who "came from Freshers' Fair". Flyers were distributed urging people to join "Palestine organising in Oxford" and to "organise in your colleges & departments".

The protest was attended by the members of the *Socialist Worker*, the newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party, as well as Student Action for Refugees (STAR) Oxford. Oxford University and College Union (UCU), a trade union representing academics and academic-staff at the University, were also among protesters and carried a poster entitled "knowledge is power".

The police were present and pulled aside a counter protester, carrying St George's flag, asking him to avoid provoking the pro-Palestine protesters.

The University of Oxford and Thames Valley Police have been contacted for comment.

Somerville holds ceremony for new Ratan Tata Building

MATT DONNELLY

Somerville College has held a ground-breaking ceremony for the Ratan Tata Building, a new 700m² academic hub in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The building will house the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development, as well as spaces for teaching and learning.

Planning consent for the building was granted last month, with construction planned to commence from April next year. The project will take around 18 months, with completion planned to coincide with the 2027/28 academic year. The building will occupy the last plot for development in the Observatory Quarter, which is also home to the new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities.

The ceremony was attended by Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey, High Commissioner of India Vikram Doraiswami, and Natarajan Chandrasekaran, Chairman of the Tata Group, whose recent donation to Somerville was the largest in the College's history.

Chandrasekaran was awarded a Foundation Fellowship – Somerville's highest honour for philanthropy – in recognition of the Tata Group's support for the project.

Catherine Royle, Principal of Somerville College, commented: "Somerville has always gone its own way and blazed new trails. That's why Somerville is proud to be playing a key role in Oxford University's growing relationship with India."

Royle also described the building as bringing together "everything that is unique about our College", adding: "it's creative and it's ambitious, but it's also an example of living our principles of partnership and sustainability."

The building is named after Ratan Tata, the late philanthropist and former Chairman of the Tata Group, making it the first building within the

University to be named in honour of an Indian.

Chandrasekaran said: "Mr Ratan Tata believed absolutely in the power of education to create a brighter future. In creating a permanent home for the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development at Somerville College, we see Mr Tata's vision taking shape in a place he admired, in a form that will create a lasting bond of scholarship and hope between the University of Oxford and India."

Designed by Morris+Company, the Ratan Tata building will feature six tutor rooms, two research rooms, multiple seminar spaces, and a "chai ideas" room, described as a flexible shared space.

The design incorporates Passivhaus principles, including a low-carbon

timber structure and air-source heat pumps. A key feature is the Oculus, a large circular opening above the main entrance which will bring natural light into the building, while also glowing outward at night.

A spokesperson for Somerville told *Cherwell* that the College had "hosted a week-long internal consultation for students, fellows, and staff" about the building, which included "360 feedback" that would be "fed into future planning discussions".

The spokesperson added: "Students are also kept informed about ongoing developments to the building through the attendance of JCR and MCR representatives at both Finance Committee and Governing Body."

Image credit: Oxford Atelier with permission.



Long-awaited St Anne's accommodation reopens with some delays



WILLOW LOCK

Students have been delayed from moving into newly renovated accommodation in St Anne's College. After a two-year renovation project, 82 bedrooms across eight Victorian houses on Bevington Road were meant to come into use, however residents in one of the houses have been placed in temporary accommodation due to an issue identified in a final inspection.

A spokesperson for the College informed *Cherwell* in September that the houses would be completed by the beginning of the academic year, however completion of 8 Bevington Road has been postponed for several weeks. Two additional houses, 9 and 10 Bevington Road, are on track to be completed at the end of Michaelmas term but will be used as conference stock for the rest of the academic year.

One of the students impacted by the delay explained that those who balloted for the rooms "were aware there was a tight deadline" and "that the completion of the work would be close to the start of term". They added that the process was executed "without fuss" and that they are grateful "to move into brand new properties within the College campus".

Other students living near Bevington Road complained about the "loud building work outside [their window]", and an intermittent loud whirring noise which was reported throughout the night.

The renovated accommodation was designed to bring the building into the 21st century, whilst maintaining its Victorian heritage. St Anne's Domestic Bursar, John Banbrook, told *Cherwell* that the removal of gas boilers will "contribute to the college's sustainability goals."

Prior to the renovation, access to the buildings was through "ad hoc infill structures...in a poor state of repair", whilst the landscaping did "not contribute positively to the appearance" of the local area. The original buildings' rooms were also described as "outdated", with kitchen and bathroom provisions "below par".

The final cost of the project was £14.8 million, with funding provided through a combination of donations and the College's own funds. A spokesperson for the College told *Cherwell* that the rooms would cost students the same rate as the other rooms in College, which is currently £1,974.90 per term for an ensuite room.

In November 2022, *Cherwell* reported that the Bevington Road renovation would create a room shortage. This resulted in St Anne's requiring more students to live in accommodation in Summertown, 25 minutes away from College, and many others to arrange their own accommodation.

At the time, one St Anne's student expressed their frustration to *Cherwell*, saying: "Many people applied [to St Anne's] as one of their big selling points was three years of onsite accommodation." Since then it has become policy for the majority of second years to arrange their own accommodation, often privately renting. Students privately renting have had to arrange second year housing and find a group to live with as early as Michaelmas term in first year.

In reply to concerns about the costs of private rent, Mr Banbrook said that the College "provides grant funding for those that need financial support as well as advice on renting in the local community".

Read the full article at [cherwell.org](#)
Image credit: St Anne's College with permission.

NEWS SHORTS

Chancellor ignores Cherwell

Lord Hague forgot to visit *Cherwell's* stall at the Student Union's (SU) Freshers' Fair last week. The Fair was the new Chancellor's first exposure to the many clubs and societies the University has to offer. He visited the Oxford University Conservative Association and Oxford SU's Class Act. However, his wife came to the stall and explained that he did want to visit and understood *Cherwell's* importance to the University.

Confusing 'Times'

The *Times* UK University Rankings place Oxford University at joint fourth with the University of Cambridge. However, the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings put Oxford at the number one spot globally for the tenth consecutive year. The University beat the likes of MIT, Stanford, and most importantly, the University of Cambridge.

'Oriel is so back', bar rep Theo Elliott says

After two years of renovations, the Oriel College bar finally opened on 10th October, for the first of many Oriel Fridays. This was followed by the first bop on Saturday, an "exhilarating moment" for the Provost, Lord Mendoza, an Oriel spokesperson told *Cherwell*. Delays and issues with the keg system had initially left Oriel students worried but these were solved in time for the opening night.

Footprints found

A dinosaur superhighway in Oxfordshire has been uncovered by researchers from the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham. The excavation at Dewars Quarry Farm included a trackway over 150 metres in length, Europe's longest, dating back to the Middle Jurassic Period over 165 million years ago. According to Emma Nicholls from Oxford's Museum of Natural History, the footprints were "insanely big".

CROSS CAMPUS

Lights out for Northwestern

America's Northwestern University has decided to remove festive lights this winter because of budget cuts. Following a \$790 million funding freeze enacted by the Trump administration, the lack of Christmas lighting is part of a wider plan to lower spending, including standardised building hours and reviews of general maintenance projects.

How Cambridge colleges stay rich?

The richest colleges in the University of Cambridge have been found to be raising rent the most. The steepest rise was at St John's College, where median rents rose by over 40% over the past four years, despite the college's nearly £800 million endowment. Rents at Trinity College, Oxbridge's richest, rose by nearly 30%, compared to a university average of only 22%.



Vice-Chancellor says ‘emotional connection’ needed now more than ever in annual oration

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need to protect freedom of speech and the right to protest under new Office for Students obligations is not easy.”

In addition to weighing in on pressing social problems, the Vice-Chancellor praised Oxford’s world renowned research in both science and the humanities – which includes the development of TriOx, a novel blood test for cancer powered by machine learning research, as well as the work of the Evidence Centre for modern slavery and human rights.

Tracey was also keen to emphasise the University’s role in tackling climate change, including: developing clean hydrogen, improving water se-

curity across East Africa and South Asia, and hosting the Right Here, Right Now climate summit in partnership with the United Nations.

In an era of uncertainty and financial instability for the UK higher education sector, Tracey admitted that “Oxford is not cheap to run”, and emphasised the need to “build financial as well as physical and human capital resilience across the collegiate University”.

Concluding the annual oration, the Vice-Chancellor placed emphasis on hope, truth, and kindness which she said were key components of “the Oxford story”.

Image credit: Feng Ho for Cherwell.

Channel 4 secures rights to Boat Race broadcast

HASAN AHMED

Channel 4 has announced they have secured the television broadcasting rights to the annual Boat Race, upending a 98-year-old relationship with the BBC.

The new five-year deal, reached for an undisclosed sum, will give Channel 4 the rights to broadcast the 100th anniversary of the Women’s Boat Race in 2027 and the 200th Men’s Boat Race in 2029. The BBC will retain the radio broadcasting rights.

Although rowing as a sport does not usually draw large television audiences, the Boat Race drew a peak audience of 2.82 million viewers this year, making it the most watched sporting event in the UK across free-to-air and pay-TV channels on the weekend in question.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4’s *The Media Show*, the Boat Race Committee Chair, Siobhan Cassidy said: “We looked at the offers on the table and we’ve gone with the one that’s best for us...based on the commercial terms and also a bit more broadly on what Channel 4’s enthusiasm was going to bring to The Boat Race.”

Sources close to the talks have told *The Daily Telegraph* that Alex Kay-Jelski, the BBC Director of Sport, “showed very little enthusiasm, believing that a showcase for London, the UK and two of our top universities is elitist”.

Channel 4 has developed a reputation for landing unexpected sports broadcasting deals, securing Emma Raducanu’s 2021 US Open victory and England’s ICC Men’s T20 World Cup Final win in 2022, at a time when the BBC is working under tight budget constraints.

Pete Andrews, Head of Sport at Channel 4, rebuffed any charges of elitism, telling the Broadcast Sport website: “The viewing figures show that it’s for everyone...We don’t look at it as elitist. Lots of people feel involved, and they’ve grown up with it”.

The BBC have publicly responded by stating that they have been proud to broadcast the Boat Race over many years, and that this decision reflects the difficult choices they have to make under current budget limitations. Cassidy said: “The BBC have done a fantastic job over nearly 100 years...but it was just time for change.”

Over 40 local leaders ‘sleep out’ to support Oxfordshire Homeless Movement

GRACE KYOKO WONG

Over 40 local business and community leaders took part in this year’s Oxfordshire CEO Sleepout, a fundraising event for Oxfordshire Homeless Movement (OHM), which took place in University Parks last week. Prior to sleeping outside for the night, participants had the opportunity to network with one another and to listen to speeches by event organisers and speakers who had experienced homelessness in Oxfordshire.

Jane Cranston, Chair of OHM, told *Cherwell*: “This is the fourth year we’ve done this event, and we do it in conjunction with CEO Sleepout, who have a franchise. We’ve had some very interesting people sleep here, including very senior members of the University – the Vice-Chancellor has done it a couple of times.”

Some of the money raised through this event will go towards OHM’s initiatives to support women experiencing homelessness in particular. Cranston added: “There are a lot more women rough sleeping than are normally counted, because women don’t sleep out at night in the same way [as men], so they’re

hidden...there are about four times as many as are counted.”

Jane Madden, Event Coordinator for CEO Sleepout, told *Cherwell* that the purpose of the Sleepout is for local business and community leaders to “communicate between themselves about what they can do and the changes that they could make to improve people’s lives: bringing in people to their organisations who don’t always have the qualifications they might be looking for, giving people a chance, and taking away the stereotypes of being homeless”.

Cherwell spoke to several event participants about their motivations for taking part. Sonya Batchelor, CEO of Buckinghamshire-based food bank One Can Trust, told *Cherwell*: “Taking part in the event last year pivoted my entire career...[it] cemented for me what I want to do: I want to have a social impact.”

Angela Unsworth, Jesus College Home Bursar, has participated in the annual event since its inception. She told *Cherwell*: “Some years we’ve been out, it’s been howling gales and pouring rain, or it’s been -3 or -4 degrees. But even so, we do it for one night. There are people that we’re raising money for that do it every

night, regardless of what the weather is. It makes you understand what people have to go through, day in and day out, and how divided the city is.”

Neil Unsworth, Head of Resilience at the University, told *Cherwell*: “When you wake up and you’ve got either frost on your sleeping bag or you’re soaked, you realise you can go home and have a shower and get warm, but people on the streets couldn’t do that. And it really brings it home as to how tough it can be. So even a little taste of it, which is nothing really like actually being on the streets, makes a big difference.”

Before participants took to their sleeping bags, they heard from speakers who expressed first-hand accounts of their experience being homeless.

Jack, one of the speakers, was homeless for several years in London and Oxford before he received help from Edge Housing, an Oxford-based charity offering temporary supported accommodation.

Jack told *Cherwell* that his early life was “very chaotic”. On attending the Sleepout, he said: “This is my way of giving back. My life’s just been so traumatic and [Oxford] is the only place that I’ve ever felt safe.”

New ‘nightlife champion’ introduced to Oxford City Council

SOPHI HAYES-HOYLE

A role championing Oxford’s night-time economy has been created at Oxford City Council. Labour Party councillor James Taylor was appointed to the position last week at a full council meeting in an effort to support new businesses in bolstering the city’s nightlife, live music, and events.

Taylor will advocate for the importance of Oxford’s vibrant cultural scene, advising the Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture in decision making. The Councillor is one amongst four unpaid Champions for the city, with other councillors advising respectively on the issues of Heritage, Cycling, and the Armed Forces.

The introduction of this new role comes as the night-time economy faces decline nationwide. According to the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA), nearly 800 late-night businesses have been forced to close over the past five years, representing a 26.4% contraction in the late-night sector overall. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses have accrued irreversible debts, failing

to reopen sustainably. The cost-of-living crisis has simultaneously reduced footfall and customer spending.

UK nightclub closure has only intensified in recent years: 65 nightclubs closed between December 2023 and June 2024, a rate of closure only increasing since. Students and residents of Oxford experienced this first-hand with the closure of ATIK nightclub in June 2024, with Kiss Bar following suit later that year.

In a press release, Council Leader Susan Brown acknowledged the importance of small businesses in promoting musical talent and equal opportunity, calling Oxford “the home of Radiohead, Supergrass, Foals, Ride, and Glass Animals”. Brown added: “Events, live music, and the night-time economy are key industries in Oxford.” Taylor has also expressed a desire to re-establish Cowley Road Carnival, held only once since 2019.

Although the UK Government has pledged to tackle the problems facing the nighttime sector, Plush’s Company Director Stuart Hayles told *Cherwell*: “This has failed to materialise, and late night venues are still paying thousands of pounds a year on business rates

based on estimated turnovers from before the pandemic.”

Coining a term for the increasing number of cities around the country where nightclubs are virtually non-existent, lobbyists have warned that the UK faces a crisis within the hospitality industry because of the rise in ‘night-time deserts’.

With Kiss Bar having been home to ‘Intrusion’, Oxford’s goth and industrial night, and ‘METAAAL!!!’, Oxford’s heavy metal club night, the decline of the nighttime economy threatens spaces for cultural and artistic expression. Michael Kill, CEO of the NTIA, identifies this as an urgent problem for burgeoning artists and the wider cultural sector, warning against “the silent slide into night-time deserts”.

Local business owners like Stuart Hayles are ready to welcome the council’s new role. Hayles told *Cherwell*: “I am confident that they would be highly supported by businesses within the city.” A champion for Oxford’s nightlife could improve late night public transport services, introduce safety initiatives, and monitor anti-social behaviour, all whilst bolstering the local economy.

Image credit: Arina Makarina with permission.



INVESTIGATIONS

The contact hour conundrum: Oxford's unequal hours and unequal tutors

Continued from page 1

27.5% of tutorials ('supervisions') were led by postgraduates. The disparity between the least and most reliant on graduates was also marginally wider at Cambridge at 14.4 percentage points.

The student experience

Of course, this does not mean the remaining contact hours are taught exclusively by professors with decades of experience and hundreds of publications. At St Anne's, for example, just 32.7% of contact hours were led by tutorial fellows. Another 34.2% were led by stipendiary lecturers on fixed-term, part-time contracts which typically last a few years before renewal.

Average hours spent with tutors in college diminish year-on-year through an Oxford degree. Where first years have an average of 2.5 hours per week, this drops to 1.8 in second year and further still to 1.2 in third year. This is in part due to the centralisation of teaching in later years in subjects like Maths, as well as more independent work including dissertations.

Value for degrees comes from more than what you are required to do

Subject differences

Some subjects arguably get a better deal than others. At Worcester, for example, History and Politics students had a total of 42.5 hours of Final Honour School (FHS) classes or tutorials, whereas physicists across second and third year had, on average, 133. While one might assume STEM students consistently had more contact hours, linguists and classicists also benefitted

relative to other subjects, with the former enjoying seven hours per week of teaching in college in first year.

The average Fine Art student at Exeter, according to the data, had only one college-based contact hour per year. Although, where college-based contact hours are lower, this is often offset by more faculty teaching, practical work, or independent study.

Different formats of learning and assessment methods, as a University spokesperson highlighted when contacted by *Cherwell*, are appropriate for different courses and years of study.

4.1%-17.9%

Range of teaching led by graduate students across colleges (Lincoln versus Somerville)

Yet when the core of Oxford's offer to prospective undergraduates is the college-based tutorial system, some students may begin to question whether Oxford provides such a unique form of teaching after all.

One historian at St John's, when asked by *Cherwell* whether he felt his course provided value for money, was relaxed about contact hour disparities. "Sure, I may not make use of expensive lab equipment or have three lectures a day, but access to the libraries, to the support provided by colleges, and wider University opportunities is invaluable.

"I think value for degrees comes from more than what you're required to do – opportunities like (optional) seminars, lecture series, talks, student run clubs or societies are all outside my timetable – but define my degree and are invaluable to my future and my current experience. My tutors are always free to reply to an email, to mark an extra practice paper, or to talk about my careers."

The tutor experience

What is remarkable is just how contingent that tutor-student relationship will be. The University and College Union (UCU), in a 2023 briefing, highlighted the fact that stipendiary lecturers work nearly triple the amount of hours they are actually paid on tutorial preparation as well as administrative and pastoral duties. Taking preparation time into account, the hourly-paid college tutors had a real wage between £8.42 to £12.63. Only 36% of casualised workers' wages were above the Oxford Living Wage.

One German student told *Cherwell* that their tutor "had to deliver milk on weekends because they weren't paid enough". Another former DPhil student and tutor described how even with scholarships, many would struggle to cover their living expenses, and that this has deteriorated in the past few years: "I didn't need to work to eat; I don't think that's true any more."

The difference between asking a tutorial fellow (who is paid an annual salary) and a stipendiary lecturer to mark an extra paper is the difference between paid and unpaid labour. For a graduate student, that difference is even starker. A 2023 *Cherwell* investigation found that 74% of women were on fixed-term contracts compared to 61% of men, and 83% of BME staff were on fixed-term contracts compared to 61% of white staff.

One student *Cherwell* spoke to underlined this concern: "It was definitely in the back of my mind the whole time that the DPhil candidate teaching me is getting a bit of a raw deal from it, with the pay for early career academics being so low once you factor in time spent marking essays."

You might assume that first years would be taught the most by graduate students, given it is at this stage that the least teacher specialisation is required. This is far from the case. At St Catherine's College, for example, approximately half of courses saw the share of teaching conducted by graduate students increase the further into the degree students got. First year Economics and Management students at Catz were taught exclusively by university staff in 2024-25, whereas their finalist counterparts were taught by graduate students 42% of the time. This is along-

I was so scared all the time. [The system] places a lot of burden on the student tutors

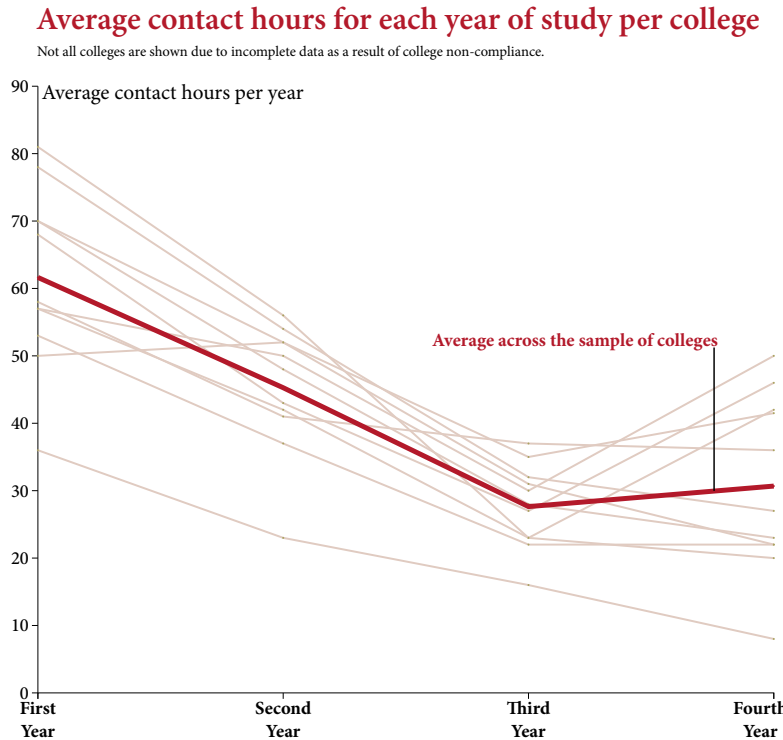
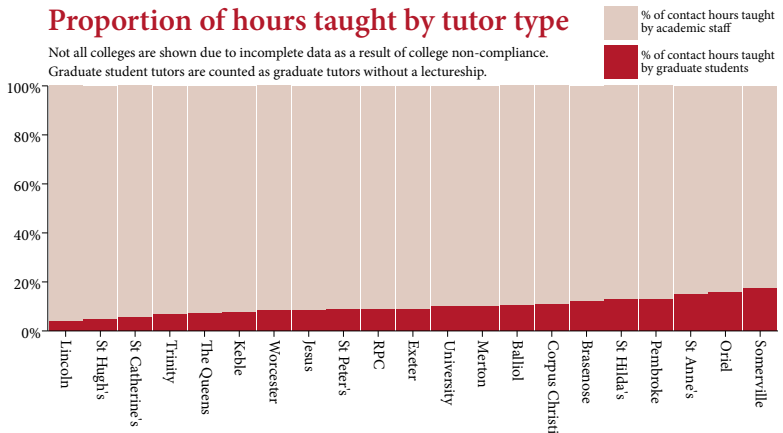
side average contact hours more than halving over that period.

Cherwell spoke to a former History DPhil candidate, who tutored in the last two years of her degree, and now teaches at another Russell Group university. She shared she didn't feel "fairly paid" at the time, but that it "felt like a valuable experience because you need to show you can teach if you want a job in academia".

She added: "I was so scared all the time. There was some mandatory training that we all did, but I felt at sea with the syllabus. I worked under very kind people who were happy to explain things, but the syllabus felt a bit much, especially since they are enormous and sometimes extend back over decades of scholarship."

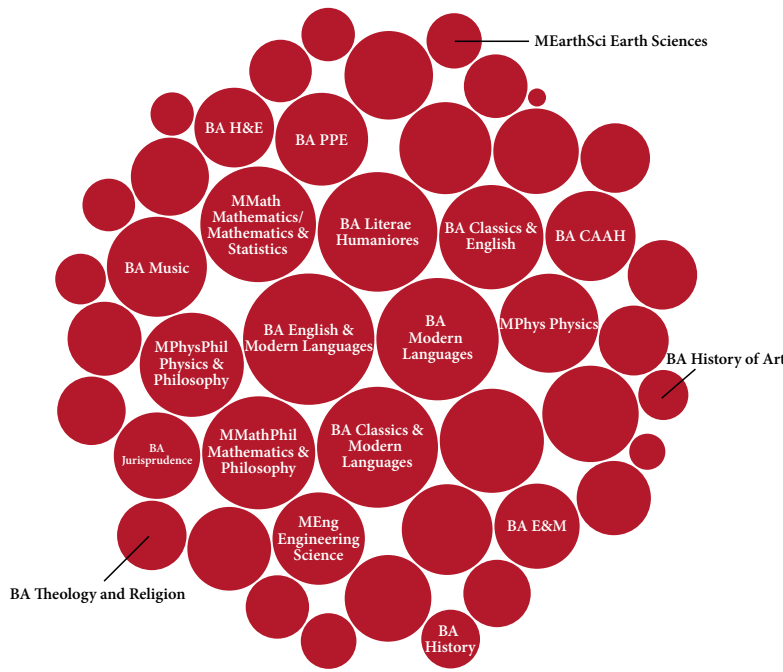
She further told *Cherwell* that she "didn't understand how the classes students were taking with me fit into their wider degrees", raising serious concerns about the capacity of DPhil tutors to provide effective advice, in particular regarding exams, to students of all year groups.

She said that Oxford's teaching system "places a lot of burden on the student tutors, but also relies on kindly



Average contact hours by subject

Data from Lincoln and Worcester Colleges only. Selected subjects are shown.



senior academics giving up their free time to help people like [her] out. And that doesn't always happen!"

The amount of teaching hours required of DPhil also impacts the degree progression of the tutors. "I would have finished earlier if I taught less, it

dents, however.

One St Hugh's undergraduate said: "At first I'd say that having a tutor who was visibly more nervous than I was for the first few tutorials helped with imposter syndrome but not with feeling academically confident...I was used to my [usual] tutor having particular reading lists he's used for years rather than just the generic faculty one."

Another added: "As a humanities student at Teddy Hall, the vast majority of tutoring I have received has been from DPhil candidates studying at other colleges. There are pros and cons to it. Because DPhil candidates are younger, they are often better at communicating with people my age which can really help you grasp complex topics quicker."

Illustration Credit: Archie Johnston, Graph Credit: Oscar Reynolds.

OPINION

The Greens must revive Oxford's leftist scene

MORWENNA STINCHCOMBE

Whilst in Germany I decided to leave the Green Party of England and Wales. Not out of disgust, mind, but a recognition that she and I had merely drifted apart. Much like a hopeless Professor Farnsworth declaring that he doesn't "want to live on this planet anymore" when facing the despair of anti-evolution cranks in an episode of *Futurama*, I glanced over the options on the leadership ballot, concluded that neither were viable, and took my exit.

I was wrong: my scepticism of London Assembly member Zack Polanski's ability to lead a parliamentary party of nearly as many MPs and councillors as Reform was clearly misguided. He was elected with 83% of cast ballots (this trans woman thanks God, given the other candidates' comparatively less forthcoming support of trans rights). He has proven himself capable of doing what leftists really need to do, in the UK at large and in Oxford: engaging ordinary people in progressive politics. He has talked to Farage voters, and declared out loud his support for trans rights and immigration. He's unafraid to defend his beliefs, without talking down to those who disagree. All of this has certainly caught people's eye, with the Greens membership skyrocketing to 100,000 and counting.

It's certainly a shame, then, that the Oxford

Student Greens are almost nowhere to be seen, having been on hiatus for the past year. With a lacklustre social media presence and no in-person events to offer insofar, they are missing a crucial opportunity to capture this moment and challenge Oxford Labour Club's top spot in left-wing student politics at this University.

Historically, Oxford Labour Club (OLC) has been the default home for lefties in Oxford. Many of the big OLC names would eventually be preceded by "the Right Honourable" as they file into the ranks of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Now, though, the PLP is hemorrhaging progressive clout for its insistence on reducing trans people's lives to their genitalia, its inaction on Palestine, and its rhetoric around migration. Even if they do not reach such lofty heights, anybody on the OLC committee must also be a member of the Labour Party itself. So, it begs the question: why do progressives bother with OLC?

One answer lies with the fact that the alternatives to OLC are often just a bit dry. Events and societies designed for egalitarian, grassroots democratic engagement, such as the orderly discussions at Rum & Revolution (the October Club's boozy debating event), suffer from this. When I was a regular attendee, the appeal of Beer & Bickering (OLC's flagship social event) was the fact that it was fun. Whilst the good vibes have taken a nose dive since Labour became the party of government, it has historically been a left(ish) space where progressives snipe and centrists jeer, but we all keep the red flag flying. Life's too serious to take seriously; I yearn for the theatre of being flayed by the sharp tongue of a Wadhamite, or called a "shitlib" for suggesting, three vodkas down, that the UK ought to return to pre-decimal currency.

Of course, another reason OLC is the dominant left-leaning society in Oxford is because of the brand

name: Labour. In a two-party system, this makes sense; if you're left of the Liberal Democrats, vote Labour. But, in a town where the student population elected Greens to the City and county council, this no longer makes sense. Instead, the student Greens seem the obvious choice for Oxford progressives. This holds true especially in the light of the conflict between Zarah Sultana and Jeremy Corbyn over the Your Party membership portal.

What the Labour Club offers left-leaning students is a fun, lively place to be neither a Tory nor a Lib Dem. What it cannot offer, and what a lot of left-leaning people want, is a grouping out of the clutches of the Labour Party. This must be the unique selling point of the Your Party or Green society – if they can avoid the aforementioned trap of being too earnest to be fun. The Your Party society is leaving its events and setup in the hands of interested students, and excuse my cynicism, but the first taste of a possible new leftist society may therefore be tinged with death by committee. The Greens, having the party armoury at its disposal, can do away with such drudgery and start on a high note, but start they must.

The inevitable debating events will also have to find the path between being fun and facilitating dull yet insightful discussion. To appropriate a quote from Kim Campbell, possibly Canada's answer to Liz Truss: "An election is no time to discuss serious issues." Although she was mocked for saying this, it hits on a slight truth: what drives people to engage in politics is as often a desire for camaraderie as it is the policies. Progressives have to excite and entertain, like our new folk hero Zack Polanski. What Oxford needs is a Green event, an answer to OLC's Beer and Bickering. As for a name – let me see – Sozzled Socialism? Ecology and Ethanol? Some workshopping may be needed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Men in PHLEGM

Poppy Littler-Jennings is right to draw attention to the gendered dynamic of the STEM vs humanities debate ('The 'S' in 'STEM' stands for superiority complex', Week 0). Not only does English stand at 74% female intake, but Modern Languages is also at 68%. It is indeed no surprise, then, that those subjects are considered less serious in some quarters. Yet this couldn't be further from the truth.

A potted analysis will tell us that men are generally more likely to vote for the far right than women, and are also less likely to read fiction for pleasure. In the midst of the current empathy crisis that seems to be erupting everywhere, it's more important than ever that disciplines which brings us closest to understanding both our own and other cultures and perspectives are valorised. We need more women in STEM, but we also need more men in PHLEGM.

Laurence Cooke, *Cherwell's foreign correspondent*

Have we learnt nothing?

Oxford has a rich tradition of naming buildings after important people: from the plethora of buildings named after and built through donations by the physician, academic, and MP John Radcliffe, to Rhodes House, named in tribute to the politician and imperialist Cecil Rhodes. But, after the attention drawn to public statues by the Black Lives Matter movement, I thought there would have been more debate over the act of memorialisation. Stephen Schwarzman's name has been erected in bricks and mortar ('Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities opens', Week 0) and will stand at the heart of the university for generations. I am not suggesting we should cancel Schwarzman for his support of Trump – he's a hard-headed businessman who would rather be in than out. Indeed, his philanthropic work is extensive and genuinely commendable. But is this really the kind of person a well-endowed and fiercely independent academic community should be memorialising?

Timothy Blackburn, *English, Brasenose College*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts.

Oh, I dont know, I wonder if the WHOLE-HEARTED EMBRACE OF AI has anything to do with it ('Oxford falls from top three in Times UK university rankings', Week 0).

elizaweinfeld on *Instagram*

The Ex-Union President to *Cherwell* article commentator pipeline goes crazy ('Your Party society launched as 'union of the left' at Oxford', Long Vac).

will_fancy_super replying to ebrahimosmanmowafy on *Instagram*

We all died in 2020 and this is hell ('Oxford University first in UK to offer ChatGPT-5 to all its members', Long Vac).

hafmimi on *Instagram*

This article is really cool and whoever wrote it is probably really hot ('This is What You Get': Thirty years' worth of mad ravings from two great artistic minds', Week 0).

zoh_my_gosh on *Instagram*

'Ate thugs, luv asylum seekers. Simple as ('Protests outside Oxford asylum hotel as campaigners call for unity and compassion', Long Vac).

aimerydelusignan on *Instagram*

I see that no one in the graphic is 6'2" #simply built different #whatsthisohnothingjustmycopyofbellhooks ('Have you heard the new Laufey album?', Week 0)

st4n13y.sm1th on *Instagram*

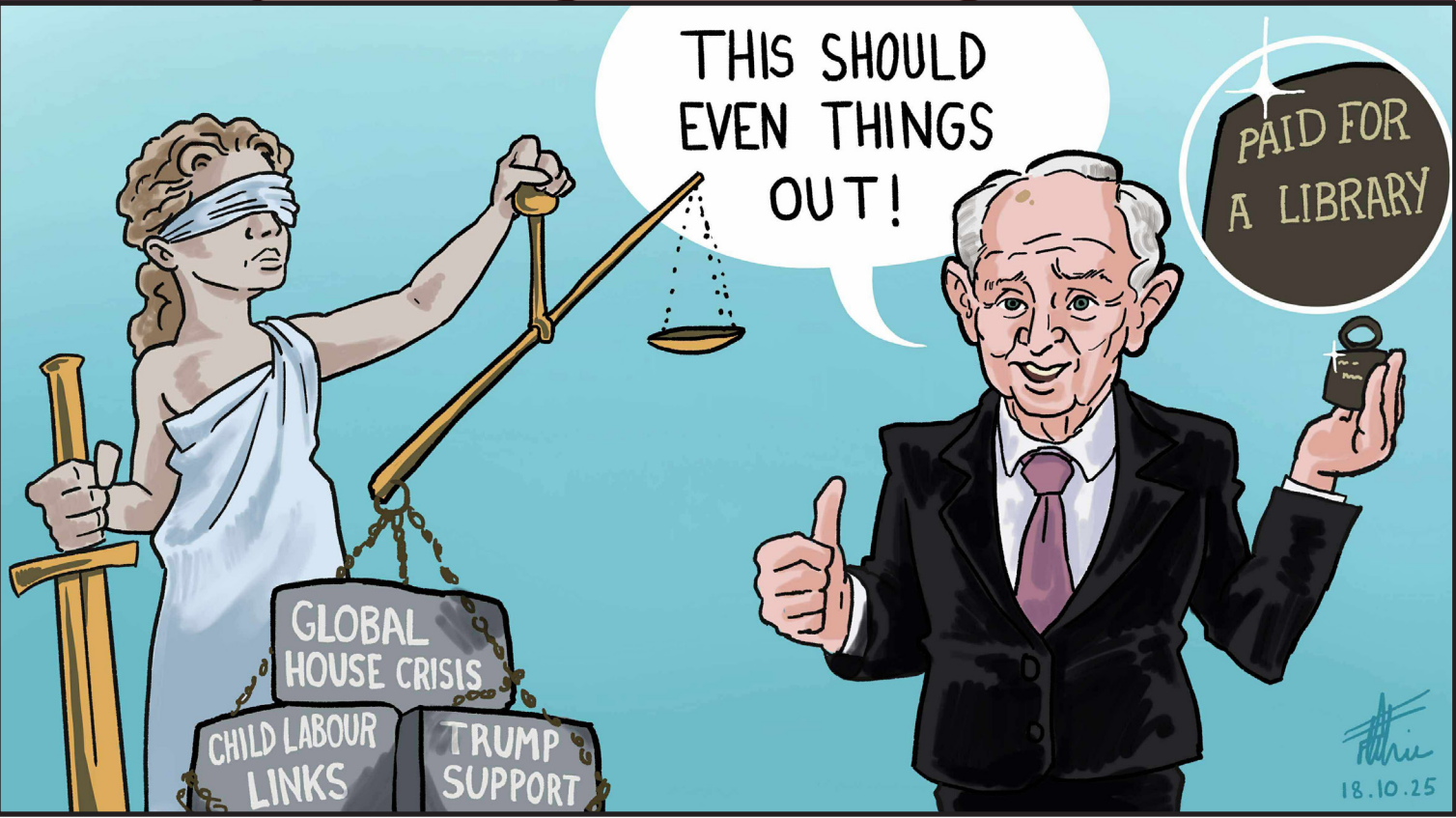


Illustration Credit: 'The Schwarz-Man of the Moment' by Archie Johnston.

Dear summer school snobs, please pipe down

BARBARA DOLGOVA

As someone who has just begun her studies at Oxford, I naturally spent the liminal pre-Michaemas weeks scrolling through r/OxfordUni, trying to piece together what this city is actually like to inhabit. Somewhere amongst the many photos of shoes asking "can these be worn with a subfusc?", a comment appeared, claiming that private summer schools wearing branded college lanyards is a "worrying trend".

"Are some colleges actually allowing themselves to be officially partnered with these parasites?", the author writes. "[It's] utterly unacceptable that the University is turning a blind eye to [it], all in the aim of a short-term boost in finances."

Nasty, yes, yet the sentiment reads sincerely enough to warrant a rebuttal. Some of these programmes charge upwards of £7000 for just two weeks – not for real academic credit, but for ambiance, atmosphere, and the ability to say "I once studied here (sort of)". You might not like it, but in an era of rising financial pressures for the university sector, summer schools are not just harmless – they are essential.

A quick refresher. During the long vacation, a number of colleges rent out their buildings to private summer schools selling the Oxford fantasy to those willing to pay, though none are academically affiliated with the University.

Sure, these companies do name-drop liberally in their marketing and, yes, their branding trades on the dream of brushing up against the institution's legacy, but so does most of the city. There's no real "partnering" here – just a rental agreement. In truth, it's hardly a mystery what struck such a nerve: "It's the lanyards, which will cause huge problems", the author of that comment claims. This phrasing echoes the familiar rhetoric of panic around 'intrusions' into elite academic spaces, even when the access is merely symbolic, temporary, or simply bought. Those who turn their noses up at summer schools seem unsettled that the gates of the University's perceived prestige appear a little too ajar. To them, it feels like a betrayal of an unspoken promise: that mere presence at Oxford would grant them a certain air of superiority.

You might be surprised to learn that one of the University's most prestigious colleges, Christ Church, is also amongst those most enthusiastically rented out. Few others commercialise their identity as eagerly. Add to that its reputation as a hub for future politicians – and you start to see a telling microcosm of elitism, a place where exclusivity is simultaneously protected, rented out by the week, and then met with a wince when someone actually shows up on the grounds with a lanyard. From a foreigner's perspective, there's something deliciously British about it.

Contrary to what the complaint on r/OxfordUni

claims, the University isn't turning a blind eye to any of this. The institution knows full well that those visible signifiers of quasi-belonging are lucrative and increasingly necessary, especially to bolster finances, as universities in England are seeing their incomes fall for the third consecutive year, largely due to steep declines in international student enrolment. Add to that a proposed 6% levy on international tuition fees, and increasingly hostile media messaging towards foreign students, and universities could face losses exceeding £600 million annually.

At Oxford, where international students make up 43% of the total student body, the estimated loss is around £17 million per year. Against this backdrop, summer schools, often dismissed as being a superficial academic cosplay, are beginning to look like critical ballast. They provide consistent, reliable cash flow, remaining one of the few scalable revenue streams left relatively untouched amid the government's purge of anything resembling shared progress. The cash brought in by summer schools helps sustain not only the wider institutional functions but also the ceremonial traditions the University's colleges are so revered for – ironically, the very signifiers of prestige students here are often so protective of.

So, to the students who scoff at summer schools, the next time you're having your cake at a formal and trying to eat it too, do remember: it might just be the parents of a 16-year-old summer school student who paid for it.

Student voices must be heard

Young people have lots say to the government and the University. Why aren't they listening?

CONOR WALSH

As students, our voices can be powerful. They can strengthen human rights movements, achieve University divestments, and bring down political careers. But all too often our voices are held captive by those who ought to be listening. We're dismissed as naive, foolish, and immature. We're overlooked because, after all, what would we know, we're only young? The truth, however, is that today's youth are tomorrow's future. Our voices matter, and the government should do more to listen.

A few weeks ago, the *Cherwell* team and I were working on a story about Oxford offer holders stranded in Gaza. We'd written on this topic previously and this time I was particularly keen to get a comment from the Home Office – here began my 'battle' with His Majesty's Government.

Over the course of two weeks, I was spun through a messy web of mis-truths. It all started with my first phone call to the Home Office, where a press officer emphasised that it wasn't policy to speak with students, saying that I should write: "The Home Office declined to comment". So I did just that. But our conversation piqued my interest. I wanted to know why he wouldn't speak to a *student* journalist.

I went back and forth several times with press officers from the Home Office and the Department for Education. After countless phone calls I was left frustrated, annoyed, and, most crucially, ignored. Frustrated because I'd been lied to (in reality, no such policy existed); annoyed because I'd been messed around; and ignored because my questions remained unanswered.

The reality is that the press officers that I spoke to didn't take me seriously because I was young. They didn't get back to me because they didn't think it mattered. But it does matter – it should matter. Not only because I was writing about a hugely important issue, offer holders stranded in Gaza, but because *Cherwell* matters, students matter, young people matter. We might be a student paper, but that's not to say that we write about trivial issues. Our readership comprises some of the country's greatest minds.

The great plague of politics is that today's decisions don't just impact the here and now; they impact the world for many generations to come. So when our voices are ignored by governments, when we are held captive by those who are meant to listen, we lose out on an opportunity to shape policies which will profoundly affect our futures.

Some weeks after my 'battle', a new society emerged on Oxford's political scene. Founded by students Esme Thompson and Callum Turnbull, the 'Your Party Society' was inspired by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's alliance. It was founded because of a feeling that the

Oxford Labour Club hadn't done a good enough job of holding the government accountable. I reached out to Your Party, as well as other Oxford political societies, to better understand their thoughts on the value of young voices. Callum was the only one kind enough to respond. He told me that "people look at what's going on in Oxford very closely", adding that "there's a strong understanding that student voices do have power, but I think that's treated with fear more so than respect. There's more of an attitude of 'we need to control what's being said' rather than an attitude of 'we need to listen and have a dialogue'".

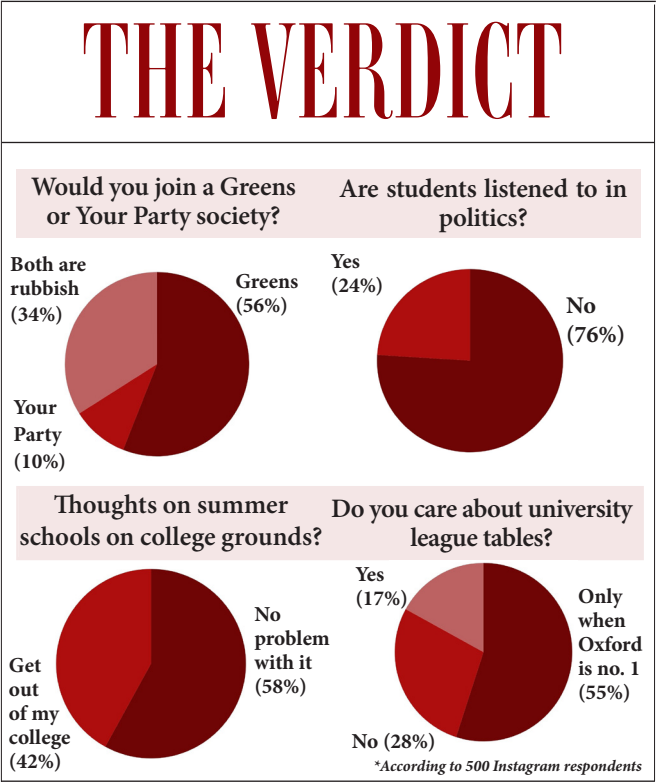
Hearing Callum's perspective was fascinating, not only because he's deeply involved in student politics, but because, unlike me, he was so positive about the opportunity facing young people. Our conversation covered everything from lowering the voting age, which Callum told me was a purely "political move", to Warwickshire's 19 year-old Council Leader, George Finch.

I think the University and the government see us as a nuisance and less of a threat

Reflecting on young people in politics – including Keir Mather MP, the youngest Minister since William Gladstone – Callum said: "I do think there's space now for young people across the political spectrum to be listened to and voted for, because there's a lot of anger about how young people have been treated over the last ten, fifteen years. Whether that pulls you to Reform, or whether that pulls you to the left, it all stems from that same anger. There's anger from young people because they want to get involved, because they want to change things."

Someone who shares this anger is 'Anna' (not her real name), a student activist and member of Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P). I asked if she thought her activism was taken seriously. "Somewhat," she said. "I think the University and the government see us as a nuisance and less of a threat. If we were taken seriously, I feel some change would have happened already. I say somewhat because I think together they do see us as a threat but it takes a lot for a large group to consistently organise and rise together."

Similar to my conversation with Callum, I was curious whether Anna felt the government cared about the voices of young people. She said yes: "Theoretically" the government "cares about young people and their futures and opinions. However, when you look at their response to any dissent or criticism, the government's response is careless and



hostile." When I asked her if she felt respected, Anna said, "I feel neither respected nor heard, but that doesn't matter. It's not the goal. The goal is to hold the government and institutions accountable, irrespective of how they feel about me or fellow student activists."

Anna might be right. Perhaps the goal isn't merely being heard, but exercising our right to speak up for what we believe in – to speak truth to power, to better our futures, and to hold institutions to account. But even still, that doesn't mean that we should be overlooked.

As young people, our votes and our voices matter. We might be young, but we're not stupid. Callum doesn't believe we're ignored, but controlled. Anna doesn't protest for attention but for action. And I don't write stories for fun, but because I believe in the truth. Our voices matter, and the government ought to do more to listen.

That starts with dialogue instead of fear, respect instead of apathy, and honesty instead of lies. Today's youth are tomorrow's future. It's about time we were treated as such.

It's time we stopped fussing over university rankings

Where your university lands in the league tables doesn't matter as much as your individual experience

ALEXANDRE GUILLOTEAU

Oxford recently made headlines by dropping to fourth place in the *Times Good University Guide*. Should we worry that Oxford is losing its way? A closer look at the factors defining the ranking reveals several flawed measurements, some of which are in direct contradiction with each other. More fundamentally, by combining every possible factor into an aggregate, it obscures the fact that different people value different things in a university. Rigorous measurement of universities' performance can be very useful in holding institutions to account and helping students choose where to apply – unfortunately, this ranking does neither.

It ought to go without saying that a ranking table is only as valuable as the criteria behind it. This is no small quibble. Just look at the variation between *The Times'* UK and international rankings: this year Oxford came first in the world, but fourth at home; the LSE was top in Britain and 52nd in the world.

Let's examine what data goes into the mix. According to *The Times*, there are seven umbrella categories: teaching quality, student satisfaction, graduate job prospects, and research quality (all weighted at 1.5); entry standards, percentage of students getting a 1st or 2.1, completion rate (weighted at 1); and 'people and planet' (weighted at 0.5).

There is an issue with almost all these metrics. The first is that teaching quality is based on student surveys: there is no universal or objective standard against which it is measured. Even if we accept that graduating students are the best judges of teaching quality – and how many people have disliked a teacher, only to realise later how valuable they were? – this measure remains unreliable. Some students might judge relative to their expectations of the university. Others may be influenced by past experience: if you are lucky enough to have gone to an excellent school, you may be nonplussed by the teaching at Oxford, whereas those less fortunate may be in awe of the same teaching. I appreciate that it is difficult to design a more objective measure of quality, but this suggests a deeper flaw in a guide purporting to rank each university in minute detail.

Student satisfaction is a questionable metric. Of the top ten universities, Oxford and Cambridge come last here. Could it be a case of the highest expectations being the hardest to please? Or do those

universities which demand the most of their students – presumably a positive on the other criteria – have the least satisfied students?

Entry grades are a flawed measure too. They measure how academically successful the average student was prior to arriving, rather than the quality of the work they produce and the teaching they receive at university. This measure shows where the highest-performing schoolchildren choose to go, which is likely based on reputation as much as reality – hardly a useful standard for a ranking designed to dispel preconceptions about universities.

It ought to go without saying that a ranking table is only as valuable as the criteria behind it

Perhaps the most glaringly flawed statistic is the proportion getting a 1st or 2.1. If I were to be facetious, I would suggest the lower the percentage the better! This is simply a reward for grade inflation; it punishes the universities with the most rigorous exams – the very ones that push students to achieve their best and are most valued by employers. Similarly, dropout rates could be determined as much by the rigour of the course as by the support given by institutions.

Finally, we move to the suspiciously-named "people and planet" section, on which Oxford scores particularly poorly. It turns out to be measured by peopleandplanet.org, an organisation which, amongst many activist aims, wants to abolish all national borders. Universities are ranked on factors ranging from how much waste is recycled to the nakedly political – divesting from the 'border industry', ending relationships between career services and the mining sector. There may be good arguments for doing these things, but people should be aware that factors unrelated to education influence the ranking. Related to this is the 'social inclusion' score. It includes things like state-school admissions (tellingly excluding grammar schools), and comparing dropout rates between different groups of students. These may be important considerations. *The Times* does not actually say how this influences



the rankings, but, if it does at all, it contradicts the entry grades score: since universities cannot influence the quality of schooling, the easiest way to increase representation of disadvantaged groups is to reduce entry requirements.

For all of the complaints I have made about the metrics, each one may well be important to an individual person: some care very deeply about recycling; some will feel that being in a good research environment will be beneficial even as undergraduates; some will be worried about dropout rates. For the simple reason that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, aspirations and preferences, not everyone will benefit from the same thing at university. So what is the purpose of the ranking? Is it to help prospective students choose where to apply? If so, to some the most important consideration might be that Imperial graduates appear to have the best job prospects, and that St

Andrews has the best teaching as rated by students – not that Imperial came sixth and St Andrews second. If it is to help employers assess applicants, the rigour of exams might be the most relevant. To combine all the factors that might influence someone's decision-making into an aggregate score – even if they directly contradict each other – obscures as much as it illuminates.

I would argue that Oxford (and Cambridge) is attractive because of the tutorial system, because of the confluence of extraordinarily talented individuals meeting outside their degree, and because of the beautiful surroundings, both architectural and natural. To others these may not appeal, regardless of *The Times'* ranking. Rather than worrying about the league table, we should focus on preserving what makes Oxford so brilliant – and, not incidentally, so attractive to applicants.

Image Credit: Grace Greaves for Cherwell.

FEATURES

‘A dangerous moment of repression’: Is the US Higher Education crisis affecting the UK?



MARY HUANG

Students have protested as long as universities have existed. As relations between students, faculties, and administrations reach fever pitch regarding Pro-Palestine protests, how worried should we be?

Over the last year, universities have become flashpoints of protest and backlash. Student protest is nothing new, but the heavy-handed government response is notable. In the US, President Donald Trump’s administration has utilised the federal government’s power against higher education institutions, particularly those in the Ivy League. Spending cuts, attempts to deport international students, and allegations of civil rights violations have all been leveraged to influence the way universities work. Much of this has been in reaction to pro-Palestine protests, as well as a broader right-wing suspicion of university ‘indoctrination’.

Far-right figures in the country echo a Trumpian attitude to ‘woke’ universities, and high-profile protests have taken place in the UK. So, is the state of higher education in the US a sign of things to come for the UK, and for Oxford? Will similar tensions translate to similar government action, and similar university response?

Existing tensions

Universities have long been a target of the far right, with familiar claims made on both sides of the pond: that they are places of indoctrination, that they are inhibiting free speech, and that

they are being ruined by diversity initiatives. Allegations of antisemitism on campus, in relation to pro-Palestine protests, have also been raised.

In a climate of rising anti-intellectualism, British institutions have not been exempt from these accusations. Nigel Farage, the leader of Reform UK, has suggested that anyone who is an EDI (equality, diversity, and inclusion) officer should “look for another job”. Zia Yusuf, Reform’s head of policy, similarly stressed that universities had become “indoctrination camps”. This echoes Trump’s attack on higher education diversity initiatives, and marks deepening ties between the British far-right and the MAGA movement.

One of the most prominent voices in this special relationship is James Orr, the Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Cambridge, who has been considered the “intellectual mentor” of US Vice President JD Vance. Orr is an outspoken critic of the “dogmas of EDI” that, in his words, “distort decision-making at every level of the modern university”.

The 19-year-old Warwickshire County Council leader George Finch recently accused universities of being “conveyor belt[s] of communism” where students are taught a “coercive curriculum”. Finch, who chose not to pursue any education

beyond sixth form, argued that “you’re being told what to think, you’re being told what to say”.

I spoke to Annelise Orleck, a history professor at Dartmouth College, about the current crisis facing universities. She rejected the accusation that she is indoctrinating her students: “We teach our students how to think, [we] give them critical tools to think and ask questions in ways that make the current powers that be uncomfortable.” Orleck, who has taught at Dartmouth for over three decades, reflected that there were problems facing higher education, but they were not the ones being identified by the far right: “It has been said of universities, even before Trump took over, that they are...hedge funds and weapons portfolios with a sideline in education, so they can write all that off in their taxes.”

The crisis

Widespread student protests in both the UK and the US have set these tensions alight. On International Workers’ Day, 1st May 2024, faculty members joined Dartmouth students at a pro-Palestine protest. In the rural New Hampshire town of Hanover, state police were called to break up the demonstration. As Orleck, the former chair of the Jewish Studies department, took out her phone to record the protest, an officer slammed her to the ground. Her arrest,

caught on video, went viral.

Recalling the night of her arrest, Orleck said that the protesters “had no idea what was beginning”. In Orleck’s words, she was arrested for “trying to fulfil [her] responsibilities as a teacher and protect [her] students”. She considered that the experience “marked the beginning of this assault on peaceful protest and freedom of expression on our campus and on many campuses across the country”.

Trump’s pledge to “fire the radical-left accreditors that have allowed our colleges to become dominated by Marxist maniacs and lunatics” culminated in a battle between the administration and the United States’ oldest university, Harvard. In April 2025, \$2.2 billion in funding was frozen by the government as the President demanded that Harvard be audited to assess the “programs and departments that most fuel antisemitic harassment or reflect ideological capture”. In response, Harvard sued the administration.

The State Department revoked the visas of around 300 international students (as of April 2025), and attempted to block Harvard from enrolling more. The administration has also used its financial power over universities, cutting diversity-related research grants while offering a preferential funding plan to all universities

and colleges that adopt certain policies. They involve requiring ‘single-sex spaces’, capping undergraduate visas at 15% or less, and abolishing units that “punish” or “belittle” conservative ideas.

In the same month as the Dartmouth protests, Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) set up encampments at the Natural History Museum and the Radcliffe Camera. The University threatened legal action if they didn’t leave, a move that Cambridge had already pursued. A few weeks after the arrest of 89 students and staff at Dartmouth, 17 student protesters were arrested in a pro-Palestine sit-in at Wellington Square. Thames Valley Police have since dropped the charges, and the University recently stopped disciplinary measures against the students.

While far-right rhetoric against universities

We’re in a dangerous moment of repression and as a Jewish Studies scholar and a Jewish historian, I find it really, really frightening that it’s being done in the name of protecting against antisemitism

is intensifying, government action has not yet followed, and certainly not to the extent seen in the US. The Labour government has not publicly criticised any universities, nor used its powers to intervene into university matters. And no matter what Reform says, the party is not in power. No matter how strongly it states its stances, it cannot match the firepower of the Trump administration because it does not have access to its tactics. Even if it did, they may prove less effective against Oxbridge. Oxford’s colleges are financially autonomous of the University, and the University itself has independent sources of income, like research and donations. But with 36% of undergraduates admitted in 2024 being international, Oxford is similarly vulnerable to a crackdown on visas. This presents an ominous picture for what may happen if Reform do as well as they are projected to at the next election (projected to be the largest party, but 25 short of a majority). Much depends on how universities and other institutions choose to respond to governmental pressure.

We teach our students how to think, [we] give them critical tools to think and ask questions in ways that make the current powers that be uncomfortable

Response

In response to increased government crackdown, US colleges quickly sprang to Harvard’s defence. Over 600 institutions signed an open letter from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as “one voice against the unprecedented government overreach and political interference now endangering American higher education”. Calling for “constructive engagement”, the letter demanded the protection of their shared ideal of the “essential freedom to determine, on academic grounds, whom to admit and what is taught, how, and by whom”. All Ivy League colleges signed the letter, except Dartmouth.

Sian Beilock, the President of Dartmouth, defended her decision in an email to students and faculty, claiming that open letters are “rarely effective tools to make change”. Two years prior, she signed an open letter as president-elect to support diversifying the semi-conductor industry. Dartmouth, unlike its peers, has continuously stressed their neutral position, staying away from the political limelight. “We



can do better by staying focused on what we are: educational institutions, not political organisations”, wrote Beilock. The exact same rhetoric was employed during her address to the matriculating Class of 2029: “We’re not a political organisation.”

Beilock’s actions gained praise from conservatives and members of the Trump administration. Despite claims of neutrality, the former chief counsel at the Republican National Committee, Mathew Raymer, has been appointed as Dartmouth’s Senior Vice President and General Counsel. In an op-ed titled ‘Trump Is Right About Birthright Citizenship’ in *The Federalist*, he argues that children “born to aliens” should not have birthright citizenship. As the new head of the college’s Office for Visa and Immigration Services, this calls into question how apolitical Dartmouth truly is.

Dartmouth has yet to face direct funding cuts, unlike other elite colleges, such as Columbia and Cornell. For supporters of Beilock, her unprovocative strategy towards the Trump administration has paid off. The college’s international students have by and large avoided becoming the next target of the administration – as long as they don’t protest.

When I asked Orleck about Beilock’s actions, she said it seemed to be a “strategic decision”, however, she added that “collaborating with fascism, in the end, is never a good idea”. Perceived as having perpetrated a betrayal against Dartmouth’s Ivy League peers, close to 3000 alumni condemned Beilock’s refusal to sign the AAC&U letter in a petition.

“Appeasement can feel safe and easy – if that means giving in to the demands either of student protesters or of vocal donors”, wrote Beilock in *The Atlantic* in September 2024. It is difficult to overlook the irony at play. Choosing the “safe and easy” option, Dartmouth appears to have appeased the Trump administration.

But the power of the administration was not unlimited. Judge William G Young considered that the Trump administration had acted unlawfully in its deportations. In a September ruling, the Massachusetts federal judge held that non-citizens hold the same free speech rights as citizens under the US constitution, and that the targeted deportations infringed upon this right. Similarly, Judge Allison Burroughs overturned Harvard’s funding freeze. The administration is appealing both cases, and much will hinge on the pro-Trump Supreme Court’s treatment of

the issue. These rulings suggest that the bark of government pressure does not always match its bite. Appeasement may be an unnecessary step in the long run.

Impact on Oxford

As the far right’s potential assault on higher education in Britain looms large, we must then ask: how has Oxford acted in the face of an increasingly global threat to higher education? Unlike Dartmouth’s decision to stay under Trump’s radar, cowing to the administration’s demands at the cost of academic integrity and the safety of their students and staff, British institutions must not merely protect their reputations but fight to ensure our institutions foster a diverse and inclusive culture.

In response to the protest that took place in Oxford, eleven Jewish faculty members wrote an open letter to the Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Diversity Officer, urging the University to “drop disciplinary proceedings...against the 13 students who occupied Wellington Square”. The signatories pushed back against the idea that pro-Palestine actions in Oxford were related to

I want to be a purveyor of radical hope. That said, I and everybody else I know...is very worried

antisemitism, saying: “antisemitism is a serious and ongoing threat, but there is no credible evidence that the encampment, in which Jewish students were also actively involved, led to a rise in antisemitism or that it was experienced in a uniform way by Oxford’s highly diverse Jewish community.”

In Dartmouth, Orleck echoed the sentiment in the letter, arguing that “the problem is weaponizing antisemitism as an excuse for cracking down on speech and speech rights and the right to peaceful protest”. Orleck said: “We’re in a dangerous moment of repression and as a Jewish woman...and a Jewish Studies scholar and a Jewish historian, I find it really, really frightening that it’s being done in the name of protecting against antisemitism.”

The University of Oxford’s Chief Diversity

Officer, Tim Soutphommasane, has made it clear that “the UK is not the US”. Recognising this distinction, he says, is “a critical starting point for any approach we have. And we should be very mindful of allowing culture war excesses from the US contaminating the public culture here”. He has warned that British universities “can’t be sucked into a vortex of culture war politics”, arguing that “public institutions in the UK, including universities, have an important role in promoting equality of opportunity and social understanding”.

Last year, Oxford launched the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategic Plan as the institution “strive[s] to be a leader on equality, diversity and inclusion in society”. Addressing the four areas of culture, diversity, work and leadership, the plan seeks to “strengthen a culture of belonging”, “increase staff and student diversity and representation”, “ensure teaching, research and engagement practices are inclusive” and “support academic and professional leadership”. Clear targets were outlined, including increasing the proportion of BME and female professors. Working alongside the LGBTQ+ group, a racial and religious inclusion ‘task and finish’ group was established. More work is clearly necessary to see improvements within Oxford, but the administration’s dedication to EDI initiatives provide a stark contrast with Dartmouth’s appeasement in the face of government pressure.

Where next?

“I’m constitutionally optimistic”, Orleck said wryly when I asked her about the future of higher education. Nonetheless, I am unconvinced that she has faith in her optimism. Her attempt to remain positive does not seem successful: “I want to be a purveyor of radical hope. That said, I and everybody else I know... is very worried.”

The UK often feels shockwaves from political actions in the US, but the difference between Dartmouth and Oxford’s reaction to increasing anti-diversity rhetoric shows that there is still a place for resistance. The outcome of cases brought by universities provide a chance for optimism, and a reason against immediate appeasement. As universities brace for what may be an existential threat, let us only hope that Oxford can one day become a “purveyor of radical hope”.

Image Credits: Aayan Riaz for Cherwell [Left], and Kenneth C. Zirkel, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons [Right].

What's in a name? The donors shaping Oxford's streets

Naming rights are a brilliant way to secure university funding from external donors, and the money given funds important research. But should Oxford's buildings be fodder for billionaire legacy shopping?

LILLY LAW

Walking down Broad Street can sometimes resemble a school register. It would, admittedly, be a strange class that comprised Thomas Bodley, the Weston family, the first Earl of Clarendon, and Gilbert Sheldon. But Oxford's avenues are littered with the names of its donors, on libraries, museums, and faculties. Such a privilege is anything but cheap. Julian Blackwell's £5 million donation to the Weston Library gave him a hall. For naming rights to a whole building, you'd be looking at something closer to the Weston family's donation of £25 million.

Carving your name into the fabric of Oxford is undoubtedly a tempting idea. Initials can be found carved into stone, into pews, into walls, by students responding to just this. It's catnip to donors. Universities are not cheap to run, and expansion is even more expensive. Combining the two ideas, using the allure of naming rights to secure funding for the University's future, is inevitable.

A donor is inextricably linked to Oxford when a building is given their name, with their involvement discernible just from looking at a map of the city. It associates the donor with education and philanthropy – noble aims that can be exploited into 'reputation laundering'. Furthermore, it represents trust in the family in question, not just at the time of the donation, but for as long as the building stands. This might be centuries. As a result, named buildings pose huge potential liabilities to the credibility of the University by cementing a legacy on the security of little more than money.

These risks are not theoretical. It took me two years to actually work out where the Art, Archaeology, and Ancient World Library was. Everyone I spoke to going in that direction still called it the Sackler.

In the wake of the Sackler support scandal, Oxford has not resiled from naming buildings after the biggest contributors. The Schwarzman Centre, opened earlier this month, was the result of the largest donation received by the University since the Renaissance. High-level donors receive other tangible benefits, including regular communications with the Vice-Chancellor, and contact with the Chancellor and other senior levels of the University. Allowing them to stamp their names onto the city with no more than a bank statement connecting them to Oxford risks rendering the city a playground for the vanity of the rich. Are the benefits of this money worth it?

Bodley and Sheldon

The Old Bodleian Library, the oldest named University building in Oxford, actually bucks this trend. It is named after Thomas Bodley, who was instrumental in reviving the library after the Reformation. Previously, Oxford's only library had been housed in the Divinity School. This collection

Clearly, [Radcliffe] had an eye for a legacy, but this was a legacy he did not wish to realise during his life

of religious tracts did not fare well in the 16th century – the Dean of Christ Church removed all of its “superstitious books and images” in 1550. Bodley, a fellow of Merton College, devoted his retirement to refurbishing the building and donating some of the 2,500 books contained on its 1602 reopening. He also took the first steps towards making the Bodleian a legal deposit library, striking an agreement with the Stationers' Hall that they would send the Bodleian a copy of every book registered to their hall. Operationally, the Bodleian would not exist in the form we currently see without Bodley. He also contributed financially, largely with the money received from marriage to a wealthy widow.

Gilbert Sheldon, who paid the full cost of Sheldonian construction, was also Warden of All Souls, Chancellor of the University, and had to be physically ejected from All Souls by Parliamentarians during the English Civil War. While his involvement was more financial than operational, he was closely connected to Oxford. The Sheldonian marks both

his money and his effort, and provides a connection to Oxford's history. The building is richer for its association with Sheldon – more closely integrated into the heritage of the city.

Keep it in the family

John Radcliffe, who provided £40,000 for the construction of the Radcliffe Camera in 1714, gave the money in his will on the condition that construction would not begin until he and his sisters had all died. Clearly, he had an eye for a legacy, but this was a legacy he did not wish to realise during his life. In fact, he appeared to want no part of his generation to see his library. When the Radcliffe Library (as it was then known) was built, it therefore appeared less a personal project, and more a donation to the future of science. A board of trustees still manage Radcliffe's testament today.

However, giving your name to a building puts a more metaphorical trust in every subsequent generation of the family. In 1884, Augustus Pitt Rivers gave over 20,000 archaeological artefacts to the University, which became the founding collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum. By all accounts, he was devoted to the subject, with a focus on scientific archaeology, and on cataloguing everything, not just aesthetically-pleasing pieces, which changed the way museums and excavations were viewed. Fifty-six years later, Pitt Rivers and Oxford were linked once more. This occurred when Augustus' grandson, George Pitt Rivers, requested in 1940 that, if he had to be interned for his support of Oswald Mosley, he would prefer for it to be at Worcester College. It was this Pitt Rivers who gave the skull-cup used by the Worcester SCR until 2015, which had itself come from his grandfather's private collection.

This unfortunate connection did not impact the Pitt Rivers Museum at the time, but the more recent revelations risk undermining the work that it has done to move away from its colonial legacy. It's worth noting that the Pitt Rivers family, while always linked to ethnography, has approached it in very different ways depending on the generation. Julian Pitt Rivers, George's son, was a vocal supporter of cultural diversity, in sharp contrast to his eugenicist father. The problem is that, by tying the building and the work of the museum to a single family, its work is forever linked to their lives and their interests. When attempting to move away from some aspects of ethnography and archaeology, particularly concerning human remains, it is difficult to remain named after a man who collected so many of them.

The Art, Archaeological, and Ancient History Library (née Sackler)

One of Thomas Bodley's innovations had been a Register of Donors, allowing names of donors to be publicly displayed. A successor to this, the Clarendon Arch, carries on this legacy, bearing the names of the most significant benefactors of the University. This arch is one of the only places where the Sackler family are still present in Oxford. In a statement released in 2023, the University removed the pharmaceutical dynasty's name from a gallery, a fellowship, and a library. This was four years after the first institutions had started to 'de-Sackler' their buildings, and a year after Purdue Pharma settled their suit from US states alleging that they fuelled the opioid crisis.

Treatment of donors is increasingly systematised and incentivised. The Development Office's page highlights the perks of giving. The very first option is “naming opportunities”. Then, the Vice-Chancellor's Circle provides “regular communications from the Vice-Chancellor” as well as an annual members' event. The Vice-Chancellor's Guild gives you this, as well as an annual dinner in Oxford. The highest circle is the Chancellor's Court of Benefactors, meeting twice a year in Oxford and London. The description highlights the “chance to engage with the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and other senior leaders within the collegiate University” to help develop “a greater understanding of the life and work of the University and the colleges”.

The approach taken appears to move away from naming opportunities as recognition for work done within the University. Instead, it encourages specifically external figures, dangling the chance of networking with senior figures in exchange for donations. The more you give, the more access you receive. A month after the Purdue



Providing access to the extent that the Chancellor's Court does, and tying the University to its largest donors, relies on the donors themselves being truly benevolent. The Sackler family are a key example of the naivety of such a belief

Pharma settlement, Theresa Sackler (a member of the Chancellor's Court) was invited to a private screening of the Boat Race on board the Erasmus, an event attended by both the Vice Chancellor and the Chancellor.

A close relationship to donors makes their support more likely. However, it also becomes more difficult to sever ties. With the level of personal connection given to modern donors, there may be reluctance to completely cut off those who have gone awry. While disgraced donors can use the University's name for a semblance of credibility, the University is pulled into the scandal, and suffers reputational damage as a result. Providing access to the extent that the Chancellor's Court does, and tying the University to its largest donors, relies on the donors themselves being truly benevolent. The Sacklers are a key example of the naivety of such a belief.

The future of donations

But running a university is only becoming more expensive. With lower levels of government support, and capped tuition fees for domestic students, universities have to find some way of funding expansions. Advances in technology, increasing student numbers, and environmental priorities all

point towards building more. If putting a donor's name on a wall ensures that their £185 billion can help make study of the humanities more accessible, then what's wrong with that?

The recently-opened Schwarzman Centre is an example of this continued practice. Stephen Schwarzman did not attend Oxford. The co-founder of Blackstone, Schwarzman has donated to institutions including the New York Public Library, the Tsinghua University, and MIT. His asset management firm, the largest commercial landlord in history, has been accused by a United Nations adviser of helping to fuel the global housing crisis. The firm denies these allegations, and say that they are based on “factual errors and inaccurate conclusions”.

The Schwarzmans Centre for the Humanities is certainly a boon for the University. It helps bring Oxford closer to its sustainability goals, and puts seven faculties under one roof, promoting interdisciplinary cooperation. Its concert spaces are accessible and support the arts at a time when government funding is extremely limited. Its AI Institute could help analyse and solve the problems faced by the emerging technology. But something does ring hollow about using money raised in sky-high rents and gentrification to investigate the problems of the future. It helps the University, and it helps humanity. But it does very little for those suffering right now.

It all comes down to priorities. Is it more important that the centre of Oxford feels linked to the University's rich history, and celebrates the people who worked hard to make it the place it is, or is it more important that it continues to expand and adapt quickly, even if this means appending names that have little business inside the city outside dinner galas? This is certainly not to discourage charitable giving. Still, there is a certain vanity in philanthropy that does not consider the positive results of their gift a sufficient reward. When naming a building entails trusting that the family name never falls into disrepute, and that the University will be able to handle it if it does, perhaps it would be better not to use billionaires who made their money from pharmaceuticals or private equity as namesakes.

Image Credit: Omassey, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Cherwell

MT25

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John Evelyn

I know exactly what you're here to read about, so I'm going to talk about it last, losers. First though, congratulations are in order. Despite Oscar Wilde misjudging the numbers by three hundred attendees, the Freshers Drinks were an unparalleled success. No, literally, there is no parallel, because everything else is a mess.

The Standing Committee is truly off to a fantastic start, as the Grape Lord was caught wine-ing with Rishi Sunak. Over what? No clue. Before anyone could find out, Brigitte, with Emmanuel (now part of TSC!) in tow, threatened to discipline Rishi. If the vapid legal threats aren't a sign that we are back to normalcy, I don't know what is.

The miraculous term-card is clearly so great that nobody even needs to see it – and nobody has seen it, bar committee. Jevelyn is impressed by the Grape Lord's ability to thank literally everybody except the Mad King, on a double page spread, no less. Perhaps he's petrified of Rotating Spot



Oxford's impending four-man protest; or perhaps he secretly just wants Saturday's vote to go his way.

Let me preface this by saying that Rule 33 doesn't apply to polls. Time for the elephant in the room! It's clear to anyone with a brain that the Grape Lord has always wanted to send the Mad King to Broadmoor, and now is his chance.

Despite a last-ditch attempt to hold the vote when freshers can come down and alumni cannot, the Mad King now faces a crowd of angry, middle-aged consultants. I say crowd; the vast majority of those running their mouths on X probably can't tell Magdalen from St Catz.

The Mad King sends in return his own troops: drunk, muddy freshers – probably equally incapable of cartography by the time of the poll. The Mad King, isolated and threatened, may feel as if there really is no reasoning with these human beings in a mob.

But what's a mob to a King?

Editorial



Morien Robertson

Editor-in-Chief

A whole week-and-a-bit into the first term of my last year, I'm confronted pressingly with the knowledge that already the things that I do now are my last.

Not in a moribund sense, yet still one that is still poignant. It doesn't take much linguistic contortion to come up with true sentences like "this is my last Michaelmas week 1 as an undergraduate", which are on one level utterly trivial (especially as this instance is 33% of the total occurrences), but still sound a bit too much like finality.

Reflecting on time – both that which has passed and that which is still to come – is prone to lead to all kinds of emotions. (Proust managed to produce possibly the longest ever novel on the theme.)

The philosopher Schopenhauer argued that what sets human suffering apart from that felt by other animals is that we are aware of our own existence in time: we can torment ourselves about the past, sweat in anticipation of the future, or suffer great disappointment when reality fails to correspond to expectations. Then when we look back in old age, we find we "have been living the whole time *ad interim*" and let life go "unregarded and unenjoyed".

His endless pessimism is not to my taste, yet I do think the caution is a worthy one.

Too much anticipation of leaving Oxford will only dampen the experience, paradoxically worsening the very thing the imagined absence of which is the cause of the feelings.

Yet, the latter aforementioned passage suggests that the "unregarded" life is also as a bad one. A clear-minded awareness of the evanescence of experience in fact helps to bring attention to the joys of the present moment. Being aware that next Michaelmas will likely hold something very different is sad, but so too is continuing as if the terms repeat indefinitely. Oxford's terms are short and the workload is often monumental. Such a combination means it's all too easy to forget to take a step back and appreciate each day for what it is. But being cognisant that – despite how it might feel – there is only a finite number of essays and problem sheets to be completed might just make your work seem that bit less dastardly.



Arina Makarina

News Deputy Editor

Everyone loves free speech. And it would be very unfortunate if institutions that deem themselves as bastions of this free speech were to limit the access of journalists in an act of retaliation. Dearest reader, or chat (more informally and intimately) whatever we do as a paper is for you, and you only. Despite continuous glazing from external institutions, we write for you.

ARCHIVES

The Great Pisstake

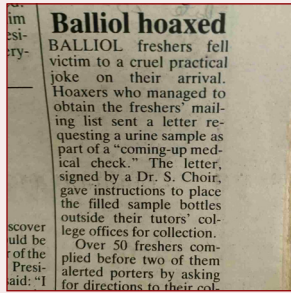
1986

These days, incoming first years might face the odd initiation or overzealous scone, but back in 1986 the bright-eyed Balliol freshers were the victims of a rather more inventive practical joke.

The "hoaxers" managed to obtain the freshers' mailing list and sent out a letter, signed by one Dr S. Choir, requesting a urine sample as part of a "coming-up medical check", and asking them to leave the sample with their tutors. Their instructions were dutifully followed; over 50 freshers deposited sample bottles at their tutors' offices.

The scheme was only uncovered when a few especially conscientious victims asked the porters for directions to the "urine collection point."

It was, by all accounts, a golden moment in Balliol history, although one unlikely to feature in the alumni newsletter.



Suppose someone has led a smear campaign against their opposing candidates. Now that wouldn't be very nice would it? And as a member of the public, you, dearest reader, would love to hear about this before making the important decision of who to vote for? God forbid, the institution you might be a member of is so short-sighted in its financial management, that they would rather spend £137,000 on bathroom renovations. Wouldn't you want to know, dear reader?

It would be a shame if institutions were to use poor excuses to prevent press access to reporting. It could be described as ridiculously unprofessional and even childless to upend a 100-year-long tradition of reporting on the weekly pre-Thursday Night Bridge meet ups of the society. Especially, if the society in question were using accessibility for freshers as their excuse. I wonder if, in that case, the society would go as far as sacrificing the 200-year-old dedicated press bench for the sake of freshers. It makes you wonder if the situation with the membership drive is really that dire. Between us, not many of you will miss the coverage, dear chat.

But all of this is obviously hypothetical. Things like this never happen. From the USA and Russia to the oldest debating societies, like Oxford Bread Society, free press thrives. Accessibility is of highest importance to all of the Oxford societies including those that face scrutiny over classicism and "institutional racism". Thank god the press passes were, are, and will always be provided promptly everywhere throughout the entire world!

PROFILES

“I tried to give it up once, but politics is a drug.”

Cherwell spoke to Baroness Hodge about her long political career

HATTIE SIMPSON

Above the Churchill War Rooms, Dame Margaret Hodge sits with the easy confidence of someone who's been in the fight for too long to be rattled by it. The day of our interview happens to coincide with US President Donald Trump's visit to Britain – a neat bit of symbolism for a woman who has spent decades pushing back against populism and division. When I ask how she's managed to survive in politics for so long she laughs: “I tried to give it up once, but politics is a drug.”

But if one phrase defines her career, it's the advice she was given in the 1970s, at the height of the housing crisis: “Fight it Margaret.” Half a century later, that's still what she's doing – whether against the BNP in Barking in the early noughties, or corruption in Westminster now. Hers is not a story of quiet politics but rather continual resistance. In the days following the ‘Unite the Kingdom’ march across London, that ethos feels almost radical.

One of the first things I learn about Hodge is how deeply her early life and two decades spent in local government shape her politics today. Born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1944 to Jewish parents who fled Nazi Germany, she describes how she knows what it means to be an “outsider” – an experience that has shaped everything from the way she talks about immigration to her belief in the importance of communities.

Her route into public life, like much of her career, was accidental yet defiant. She never set out to be a politician. It was only in the weeks following the birth of her first child that she recalls calling her sister in floods of tears saying she couldn't bear the monotony of changing nappies anymore, seeing little point in even getting dressed. She hurries to clarify that she, of course, loves all four of her children, but that they just were never quite enough for her. It was a friend in the local Labour Party in Islington who offered the advice that would change everything: “Margaret go on the council, it'll keep you sane while you're changing nappies.”

First elected in a 1973 council by-election to represent the Barnsbury ward, Hodge went on to serve as Leader of Islington Council for a decade and later as Chair of the Association of London Authorities. Though she has since held several ministerial posts following her election to Parliament in 1994, it is

this period in local government that she seems to recall with the greatest pride. When I ask what one thing she wants to be remembered for, her first reaction is a laugh – “bloody hell” – before she immediately turns to social housing.

Her eyes light up as she describes, in remarkable detail, how she transformed Islington's housing programme in the late 1970s. Her predecessor as Chair of the Housing Committee had bought 12,000 homes but was converting only a dozen each year into council housing; Hodge expanded that to 1,000 annually, ultimately creating 16,000 new homes in the midst of a housing crisis. She smiles as she remembers the results: “my perfect vision of social democracy in practice” as she calls it – where city banker and council tenant lived side-by-side, indistinguishable except for the identical letterboxes bought in bulk for the converted homes.

It was, like many things in Hodge's career, a battle hard won. When the 1976 financial crash wiped out local capital funding, she was told there was nothing to be done but refused to take no for an answer. Within three days, she had mobilised

From the housing estates of Islington to the streets of Barking to the red benches of the House of Lords, the thread running through Hodge's story is undeniably one of endurance and fight

thousands of residents at the town hall and brought the Housing Minister down to see the conditions for himself – homes still running on gas power alone, with no indoor toilets. The funding was restored, and the project completed. It's a story told with the satisfaction of someone who still believes you can fix things, as long as you're brave enough to give it a go.

She follows her answer about housing by asking if she can possibly stretch to two things to be remembered for – and, of course, I give in. The

second: her fight against the British National Party (BNP) as the MP for Barking. By the mid-2000s, the far right had taken root in her constituency, becoming the second-largest party in the council following the 2006 local elections. She describes how the biggest change she saw, however, was that people weren't ashamed of voting BNP anymore. When she knocked on doors and spoke to voters, eight in ten would tell her they were thinking of voting BNP.

It became possibly the biggest fight of her career and she took it on, head-first. Refusing to retreat to Westminster, she stopped attending ribbon cuttings or making speeches in Parliament, instead staying in Barking listening to her constituents.

As our conversation turns to the modern rise of Reform and right-wing populism – our interview taking place just days after the ‘Unite the Kingdom’ marches – Hodge draws a direct line back to those years. The same anger, the same insecurity – just on a national stage. She's insistent that voters aren't apathetic but angry; they feel politics has stopped listening. And, as she recognises, immigration is central to that conversation – a subject she describes as being too often avoided, “so I started talking”. Having arrived in Britain as an immigrant herself, she describes how she knows how it feels to be an “outsider” but also the importance of creating communities. She never promised to cut numbers,

but instead talked about how migration could be fair, bringing value to the community.

Then she pauses and asks if I've time for another story. It's from one of her coffee mornings in Barking. One in particular stands out, a woman stood up to accuse asylum seekers of ruining the borough and being “benefit scroungers”. Before Hodge could respond, a white man interrupted to say he'd been on benefits for 25 years and didn't want to be called a scrounger. A Jamaican father then spoke, explained that his children had grown up in Barking and gone to university, and he was proud to call himself British. The atmosphere was tense but by the end the same woman who had sparked the row crossed the room to apologise to both men.

It's a morning that's stayed with Hodge. One she describes as “deeply emotional” and clearly still drives her approach to politics and belief that it can still achieve as long as people are willing to listen and engage. It also highlights her beliefs that all politics starts from the local, and “politics is a marathon not a sprint”. For Hodge, it's about the long process of communicating, listening, acting and reporting back – the steady rhythm of local work that builds trust over time. It's a principle she's carried from her years in Islington to Westminster, and one that still defines how she sees the purpose of politics today.



PROFILES

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Matt Williams on his work behind Oxford's access programmes.

Cherwell's Yeva Kebabdjian spoke to the man behind outreach at Oxford, **Matt Williams**



Matt Williams is a professor at Jesus College. You may recognise him from your Instagram reels or YouTube suggestions. His work with Oxford's outreach has gained hundreds of thousands of views – helping students across the world in understanding the Oxford application process. Matt's content is insightful, detailed and covers a wide ground of questions and aspects of what can be a very difficult application process. But what's more is that, as a person, he is extremely warm and always open for a friendly chat. *Cherwell* spoke to him to find out more specifically about his work in access and how his successful social media and internet presence first came about.

Cherwell: First, I wanted to ask you: could you describe Oxford in three words?

Williams: Oh! I always ask people this but have never thought about it myself. So, I think it is friendly, which I've always found slightly surprising. It can be a bit scary, however, so that's my second word, and just exciting! So friendly, scary and exciting. Few juxtapositions there, but in the best possible way.

Cherwell: Could you introduce yourself to our readers? What do you teach, how long have you been at Oxford, and when did you first get involved with outreach?

Williams: So, I came to Oxford in 2006 for my Master's and DPhil. I teach politics, specifically British politics and comparative government. I got involved in access when I was doing my DPhil at Wadham College – Wadham has always been really interested in access, and as a grad student, I was able to work with visiting schools and just really enjoyed it. I noticed that it was that side of sort of helping people get into university that I was beginning to find as interesting as my academic work. And so I was lucky that this post at Jesus College came up, which literally combined the two, so it couldn't have been a better fit! I was very lucky, and I've been at Jesus for nine years now.

Cherwell: Well, my next question was going to be how you came to be the face of Oxford outreach. I assume there was already some outreach presence on social media, like YouTube for instance. But how did you start posting videos on Jesus' channel, and when did they start going viral?

Williams: So, the Jesus College YouTube account preexisted me, but there wasn't a huge amount of content being uploaded. What changed was the pandemic. We had organized

lots of access events where schools were going to come visit us or we were going over to them, and that suddenly had to stop. Specifically, we had to shift our Welsh Jesus College Summer School fully online. I knew that some people wouldn't be able to make all the sessions, so I just recorded them and posted them to YouTube, thinking it would just be an easy way to distribute those videos, but I didn't think anyone else would be interested. One particular video on Personal Statements ended up getting hundreds of thousands of views, which I was really shocked by. But then I thought – okay, well, there's obviously demand for this sort of stuff. It's clearly quite an efficient way of helping people who might not otherwise be able to access the same information. So, I sort of doubled down on that then. But I wouldn't say I was the face of Oxford at all – and that wasn't my ambition either! All I really care about is making Oxford representative of Britain, so that we take the best students. So it's not about me getting my face out there – I promise (said whilst humbly smiling).

Cherwell: You mentioned that one specific video did really well – would you say there's been a lot of growth between then and now?

Williams: We recently hired an amazing digital access officer called Iman Ali – she's only been working here for just over a year. She put us onto TikTok and Instagram so this past year we've had ten million views across all platforms, which is much more than we've had historically. So, yes, there's been quite a lot of growth.

Cherwell: Of course, the content you produce can help anybody who needs some extra support, or is a bit curious, but, how would you say you've measured the tangible impact that your work has had on students who may not have had opportunities previously to have this kind of support, for instance, at school?

Williams: That's the million-dollar question in access – how do we actually prove impact and then have an evidence-based approach to policy? It's markedly difficult! With any intervention we have, whether it's our summer schools or working with individual schools on a sustained basis, it's very hard to prove causation and conclude that, because we did something, someone ended up in some destination. The best we can do is not quantitative analysis, but to more qualitatively say that there have been people who've told us it's made a difference to them. And that's good to know!

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Matt Williams with permission.



That patience explains her weariness with politics today – she describes herself as “deeply depressed” by politics at the moment. She describes how we've lost the center in the

At a time when public faith in politics feels fragile, Hodge's career seems to offer proof that persistence and local action can add up to real, lasting change

midst of extreme polarisation, recounting how during the Corbyn years and her fight against antisemitism, the far-left levied the same critiques as the BNP had 15 years earlier. She talks of the loss of values in Labour politics; the erosion of the balance between economic growth and social justice that she believes should define it. She praises Gordon Brown and Tony Blair for allowing economic growth and prosperity, and social justice and inclusion to not be seen as opposing ambitions, but ones that are interlinked. For Hodge, it was this balance that could deliver for communities like Islington and Barking and could

work effectively against the disillusionment which fueled the far-right.

Throughout our conversation, Hodge is brilliantly frank, disarmingly honest, and utterly relaxed – her language, peppered with expletives, quickly followed by “don't include that”. She jokes how she never made Cabinet due to running her mouth too much, and it's easy to laugh along with her. Her candour and refusal to self-censor is what makes her such an enjoyable person to chat to.

As a young woman looking to enter politics there's something quietly encouraging and oddly comforting about her outlook. At a time when public faith in politics feels fragile, Hodge's career seems to offer proof that persistence and local action can add up to real, lasting change. After an hour with Margaret Hodge, it's hard not to believe her when she says “we can change, there is hope”. It's the sort of conversation that gives you conviction in what you do again – the most beautiful and brilliant sort of conversation in what seems to be an increasingly cynical political world. It's the sort of conversation that gives you conviction in what you do again – the most beautiful and brilliant sort of conversation in what seems to be an increasingly cynical political world.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

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URBAN REVIVO

Are you listening comfortably? Audio drama unmuted

Oxford would do well to not simply accept, but embrace audio drama as a new type of theatre and literature

RHYS PONSFORD

When people think of podcasts, they probably wouldn't associate them with theatre. Yet it was this seemingly unlikely convergence between the two forms that led me to attend the London Podcast Festival at King's Place on September 7th. I was curious to see staged performances of audio drama. Indeed, part of my excitement lay in my fascination with the relationship between theatre and audio drama in the first place. Audio drama is an increasingly influential artform, with popularity continuing to surge every year. One of the most famous shows, Rusty Quill's *The Magnus Archives*, hit 100 million downloads on Spotify alone in 2025. This popularity was reflected in the turnout at the Festival, where every event I attended was either almost or completely sold out. Audio drama's demographic is a diverse and youthful one, which responds positively to shows that push the form to its absolute limits. It has the potential to highlight the voices of marginalised groups, like queer and BAME individuals. And yet it still feels underrepresented in discussions both around literature and theatre, despite being a genuinely exciting sphere of artistic creativity.

The absence of audio drama from discussions of art is not a concern for me alone: prominent audio dramatist Amber Devereux, notable as the creator of the experimental speculative audio drama, *The Tower*, remarked how "audio drama as a distinct storytelling form as well as the theory of sound storytelling is something Ella [Watts, the writer of Arthurian post-apocalyptic fantasy show *Camlann*] and I spend a lot of time talking about, and it's wonderful to read that we're not alone in that! It's also exciting that writing like this exists out there; there are tragically so [few] texts looking into audio drama and storytelling properly". Staged audio drama is a different beast entirely to a conventional stage play. While elements like body language and physical humour are reintroduced, it is still defined by the trappings of the recording studio. Actors



stand in front of microphones while performing with a script in hand, and creators are much more reliant on sound design and foley to convey a setting than a typical stage play; elaborate sets and props are rare. It is the audience's imagination which projects the world around the actors.

What staged audio drama performances can often lean on, however, is the listener bringing in their pre-existing conceptions of the show's setting. There are instances where a person's image of a character clashes with the actor in front of them. Yet this is part of the appeal of actors for audio drama. The second event I attended touched on this, featuring the cast and creators of the science-fiction comedy *Wolf 359*. Emma Sherr-Ziarko noted how acting in audio allowed her to play "Sigourney Weaver/Ellen Ripley"-type action heroes – roles otherwise denied to her in stage performances, due to her physical appearance. Still, staged audio drama performances are the ultimate hinterland between

audio drama and stage plays, a text half-translated and trembling with resonances from physical and audial language.

Both live audio drama performances I saw did an admirable job of making the most of their stage, however. These were *Camlann* and a Monty Python-esque sit-com called *Wooden Overcoats*, about two rival undertaker companies on a tiny Channel Island. From side-eyes and intentionally comedic multi-roling, to moving offstage and into the aisles between onlookers, both combined the power of the audience's imagination and the novelty of the physical presence of the cast before you to create something distinctly unique. Perhaps staged audio drama belongs in a special category of its own. I would certainly say so.

So what comes next for audio drama? Well, it's a future that has already been influenced by a former Oxford University student by the name of Jonathan Sims – writer of the same *Magnus Archives*

mentioned earlier. *The Magnus Archives* has had a profound influence on the audio drama sphere as one of the most popular audio dramas of all time. It emerged in a 2014-2016 period that birthed so many titans of the form and has since spawned a sequel that raised over £700,000 in crowdfunding (as well as, ironically, a theatrical spin-off show this October). Sims is a former St Hilda's student, and also a prolific ex-member of OULES (the Oxford University Light Entertainment Society), showing that the University had a hand, however inadvertent, in influencing the form.

Ultimately, what is evident is that there is a clear demand both for typical audio drama and staged audio drama performances. Oxford would do well to not simply accept, but embrace audio drama as a new type of theatre and literature – a medium with near-limitless potential.

Image credit: Philippe De Gobert, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Call centres and over-the-top-vlogging: *Dial 1 for UK* reviewed

CAITLIN SHAW

The one-man show is a notoriously hard format to pull off, and Mathur attempts to make it work by conveying the plot through a series of conversations with unseen companions. This makes it hard for the audience to fully appreciate its important message.

Dial 1 for UK is a one-man show following the journey of Uday Kumar (UK for short), who leaves his job at a call centre in New Delhi to come to England, and all the while he is filming vlogs for other 'dreamers' who want to follow him. However, when UK arrives things are not as simple as they seem. The play is an exploration of what happens when immigrants slip through the cracks and are forced to get by any way they can.

Performed by Mohit Mathur at the Burton Taylor Studio, the action takes place in a stripped-back set consisting of just a battered table and a series of small pictures. Each time the setting changes or UK talks to another character, a new picture is propped up on the table featuring a different place or face. This is intended to make the show easier to follow, but it is at times off-putting given that many of the pictures appear AI-generated – often images of the same person look completely different.

The one-man show is a notoriously hard format to pull off, and Mathur attempts to make it work by conveying the plot through a series of conversations with unseen companions. This makes for interesting watching at times; one example that worked well was a conversation with a shopkeeper, who UK assumes is also Indian from his appearance and, therefore, thinks will help him now that he's homeless. The shopkeeper, however, is born and bred in Manchester, and dismisses UK's pleas. As UK faces the audience, we see his hurt and confusion at the shopkeeper's unwillingness to help him when he is at his most desperate, reflecting a wider rejection on the part of society.

The sound and lighting did a better job than the pictures in immersing the audience in the plot. Whilst waiting for the play to begin, we were treated to some infuriatingly repetitive hold music and, later on, a trip to central London was made to feel realistic through the noise of bustling crowds

and roaring traffic.

Mathur's character is intended to be likeable, and he drew some laughs from the audience with his over-the-top vlogging style. Yet, overall the comedic aspects of the play fell flat with many of the jokes feeling obvious and laboured. Furthermore, the comedy did not always mesh well with the serious themes of the play – whilst we were meant to sympathise with UK and find him amusing, it was revealed he had scammed an old lady out of her life savings for his plane ticket, and forcibly moved into the house of an elderly man with dementia. This tonal inconsistency made it difficult to fully appreciate both the serious and comedic aspects of the play.

Dial 1 for UK tackles the ostracisation and neglect of immigrants, which is an extremely timely issue. Overall, however, the plot is confusing and a little slow, making it hard for the audience to fully appreciate its important message.

Algorithms of individuality: *The Consciousness Company*

Maddy Gillet reviews M N Rosen's novel about artificial intelligence, existentialism, and the terror of legal technicalities



As Stephen Fry wrote, *The Consciousness Company* by M N Rosen addresses the “enormous ethical, metaphysical and existential waves threatening to engulf us”. It is a novel which speaks to our fears about Artificial Intelligence in a fresh manner. In conversation with *Cherwell*, the author agreed with the view that it is not dystopian, but “pre-dystopian”. The conclusions of *The Consciousness Company* are foreshadowed through a witty blend of irony, style, and a starkly accurate depiction of business procedures, but never fully realised. It feels as though the novel ends on the precipice of dystopian-style havoc.

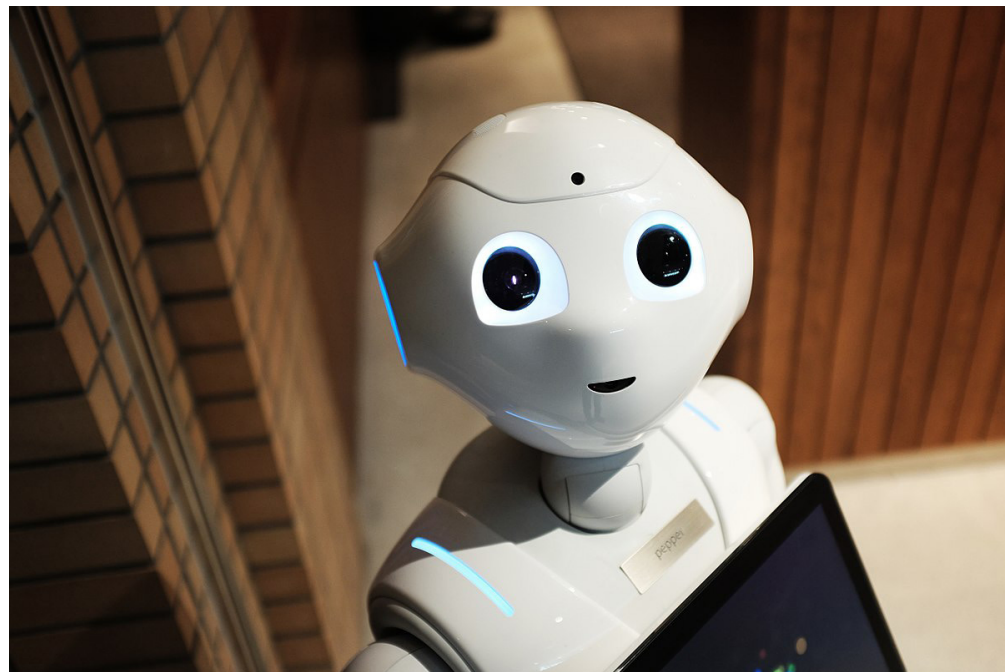
The Consciousness Company follows two friends who found a company that uses AI to stimulate mindfulness in users. Their programmed Consciousness Company's Consciousness records diaries of people's inner consciousness. As the company develops, technology is used to inject algorithmically-generated thoughts into people's minds and seems to increasingly blur the lines of individuality and autonomy. As Rosen told *Cherwell*, this novel is a thought-experiment: what if we used AI to create a “Headspace on steroids”? What would this mean for our sense of identity?

Particularly impressive was Rosen's handling of existential and political zeitgeists. Most notable was the chapter entitled ‘The Consciousness Diary of The Consciousness Company's Consciousness’ (the concept of being ‘meta’

reaches humorous complexity here – AI is used to record the programmed consciousness of AI). What is truly distinctive is that, through this, Rosen seems to write a pre-dystopia that is aware of itself. The Consciousness Company's Consciousness is worried about the extent of its own computational power and even suggests to itself that it write a dystopia for the founders. We tend to approach the threat of AI as humans harmed by their own creation. It is truly subversive to see the creation worry about its own impact in the same way that its creators do.

It is truly subversive to see [AI] worry about its own impact in the same way that its creators do

Rosen's experience in the finance sector, working with early-stage technology and impact businesses, is evident. Through his insightful dissection of the business sector the existential implications of *The Consciousness Company* take an extremely disconcerting shape. His chapters entitled ‘A Letter from a Thousand Scientists’ and the final, ‘The Prospectus Drafting Session’ are key to this. In the former, the founder confronts the fact that his creation could have disturbing existential implications. The scientists write: “You are causing the extermination of the human race. Something non-genetic has taken over...you are destroying the sacred concept



of identity that our world is built on.” This, again, creates the sense that Rosen is writing a pre-dystopia that is aware of its own progress. The same can be said of ‘The Prospectus Drafting Session’, where the participants of the meeting debate the ethical concerns of *The Consciousness Company*. Rosen's decision to write a self-aware pre-dystopia suggests that the biggest threat to today's society is not a lack of awareness, but an over-intellectualising and overly-bureaucratic dealing with the awareness of such threats, which prevents actual meaningful action from occurring. This, to me, speaks to the modern world: the source of this frightening stasis is

not the remarkably sinister intentions of those responsible, but banalities such as procedural and legal technicalities.

I would highly recommend *The Consciousness Company* to anyone who is philosophically-minded and shares concerns about technology's impact on individuality and freedom of thought. Rosen masterfully approaches these ideas with a balance of humorous irony and existential anxiety, making *The Consciousness Company* a novel which sends out a warning in a fresh and distinctive manner.

Image credit: Alex Knight, CC0 1.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

What's Oxford reading?

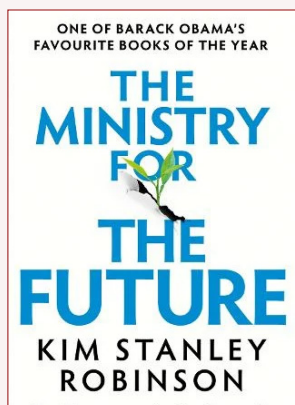


Image credit: 'The Ministry for the Future' via Orbit Books

Nat (Pembroke College) recommends this work of science fiction, first published in 2020.

“Blending climate fiction with real scientific solutions, this novel starts in 2025 and follows different characters as they deal with and try to solve a worsening climate crisis. This book inspired Oxford University to create its own Ministry for the Future!”



Henry (New College) recommends this work from 1939, which had a successful Hollywood adaptation starring Maureen O'Hara.

“An all consuming portrayal of the emergence of capitalism from the heart of the Welsh valleys. Llewellyn casts a spell on his readers. You'd have to be made of stone to not be moved by this novel.”

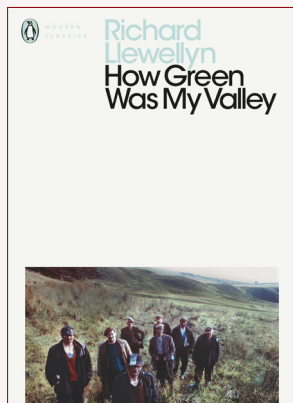


Image credit: 'How Green Was My Valley' via Penguin

On gravel and grass: Virginia Woolf's Oxbridge in *A Room of One's Own*

BEN WATERER

Virginia Woolf's extended essay *A Room of One's Own* is probably the most important 20th century piece of writing concerning women's place in literature and education. It illustrates the power of the patriarchy in schooling through a simple, but very familiar, allegory of grass and gravel:

It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me...His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help, he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me.

In Woolf's imaginary “Oxbridge” (a fictionalised version of Oxford and Cambridge representing all their men's colleges), turf is not reserved for men explicitly but for Fellows and Scholars, who nonetheless must be male according to the rules of admission. The Beadle is so confident that Woolf is not a Fellow or a Scholar precisely because she appears as a woman.

“Turf”, then, represents the status quo, the system of men's colleges that ensure women are relegated to the gravel. In maintaining the status quo and removing any woman from Oxbridge's turf, women's education must necessarily be secondary, for “turf is better walking than gravel”, and without the anchoring of turf and the patriarchal power systems it reinforces, one is removed “from any contact with facts”. Gravel, in Oxbridge, is the preserve of those not worthy of grass, which includes commoners, scouts, and, of course, women.

A Room of One's Own was originally a series of lectures

delivered at Girton and Newnham Colleges in Cambridge, and Woolf continues through her fictional Oxbridge to these women's colleges. Here, “not a penny could be spared for ‘amenities’; for partridges and wine, beadles and turf, books and cigars, libraries and leisure”. Unlike at the men's colleges, where turf is an ‘amenity’ available only to the upper classes, at Girton and Newnham College, and Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall – all amalgamated into Woolf's fictional college “Fernham” – there is “grass” instead. Here, “somebody was in a hammock”; the grasses of the garden are “wild” and “unkempt”. The women's colleges of Oxford and Cambridge reclaimed the turf for themselves by making it not just available for everyone, but by treating it as grass: wild, natural and unkempt, rather than repressive turf.

This is a tradition that, even today, is maintained in the former women's colleges of the real Oxbridge. The pristine turf of Christ Church or King's College, Cambridge cannot be walked on even by the scholars and fellows any more; they are instead to be admired from a distance, with the modern equivalent of Woolf's Oxbridge beadles, the college porter, ready to steer all trespassers back on to the gravel. At Somerville, Lady Margaret Hall, and other similarly-relaxed colleges known for being more progressive than their central compatriots, grass is to be walked on and laid upon.

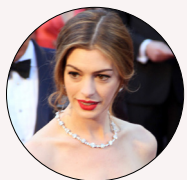
This reclamation is a hundred years in the making and resists “300 years in succession” of tradition. There seems no greater, seemingly innocuous, reminder of the strides women's education has taken in the ninety-seven years since Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own* than the ability of students at some colleges to have sunny picnics on the quad, where once gravel would have been their lot.

What's Oxford watching?



Duidha

Matthew at St Peter's College recommends *Duidha* (1973): "This adaptation of an Indian ghost story is a melancholic tale of desire with a sublime use of colour." You can catch *Duidha* at the Oxford University International Film Society's screening.



The Princess Diaries

Mair Andrews at Keble College recommends *The Princess Diaries* (2001): "A cliché make-over movie that has preserved its charm, it's the perfect way to end an evening. Procrastinating an essay, it's fun to dream of a long-lost relative who reveals you are a princess." You can catch *The Princess Diaries* on Disney+.

Image Credits: Anonymous, CC0 1.0, via Wikimedia Commons, and Mingle MediaTV, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Cillian Murphy does it again

TOBY BOWES LYON



Since his generation-defining performance in *Oppenheimer* (2023) two years ago, Cillian Murphy has shown little interest in playing it safe. Having collaborated already on the understated, unflinchingly raw historical drama *Small Things Like These* (2024), he has joined forces once more with Belgian director Tim Mielants. The duo first met filming the third season of *Peaky Blinders*, beginning what has quickly blossomed into a rich and dynamic creative partnership.

With *Steve*, Murphy has once again proved himself a force to be reckoned with. Playing the headmaster of a residential home for troubled boys in conflict with the law, he brings star-power to a film which otherwise might have felt flat. His performance is subtle and multi-layered, alternating between quiet moments of anguish and outbreaks of frustration. The deep emotional pain which underpins Steve's drive to help others is palpable throughout, as he tackles the numerous daily challenges he encounters in his job, in particular his attempts to help the brilliant but troubled Shy (Jay Lycurgo).

In adapting his book *Shy* for the screen, Max Porter has made the unusual decision to change the perspective of the drama from Shy to Steve. In doing so, he has created a film which, rather than undermining the achievements of the book, arguably strengthens them by examining how it might feel to be on the other side of

things. *Steve* thus approaches the staff of the residential home with a much greater level of detail, turning them into more relatable figures. We are introduced, for instance, to Steve's struggles with the injuries he sustained in a car crash, his guilt at the effects of the crash, and his resulting struggles with substances and alcohol, all of which are interwoven into his daily sense of mission.

Mielants declines to give his audience easy answers to difficult questions

Steve is also, of course, a topical and timely examination of how society treats those who differ from the norm. It is forthright in the way it advocates for the possibility of a solution for troubled boys which focuses on rehabilitation rather than punishment, but it is also realistic in acknowledging the limits of such proposals. As Steve puts it: "I mean it's chaotic, right, but we think it's working, and if you lock these kids up and throw away the key...we feel we're doing something as an alternative."

As with his previous film *Small Things Like These*, Mielants has chosen a theme which speaks to the needs of the marginalised. Exemplified by the behaviour of the news crew who come to film at the school, many in society view

the kind of troublemakers Steve cares for with a mixture of horrified fascination, righteous indignation, and apathy. The deep dedication and love Steve and his team show towards the boys is contrasted with the unthinking indifference of higher-ups.

Mielants declines to give his audience easy answers to difficult questions. The positives of the boys' personalities are highlighted, but their behaviour at times is difficult to make excuses for. At the same time, Porter's screenplay emphasises, with for instance the character of Shy, the deep trauma underlying many of the boys' antisocial actions. It seeks to make the audience care about them on a personal level, so that they become more than just statistics, but at the same time avoids dealing with moral absolutes.

The audience thus walks away from the film without a complete sense of closure. It is designed to raise questions and provoke discussion, rather than to put forward a manifesto for change. *Steve* seeks to highlight the remarkable work done by those working in the field, and the ways that that work might sometimes not receive the credit it deserves, while also emphasising that no one should be seen as beyond hope of rehabilitation. At the same time, however, it does not shy away from questioning its own assumptions, and is stronger because of it, proving that a nuanced look at such issues is the most effective way to tackle them.

Overall, *Steve* is another huge achievement for Murphy.

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

Contemporary China, through cinema

ZAC YANG

An artwork whose medium is history", is how sinologist Haun Saussy defines China. As passionately debated as it is little understood, China today remains a mystery, the elephant in the world room. Its life and history remain contained in its great walls. Cinema occasionally provides us glimpses into this country, however ephemeral.

As for contemporary China, I am excluding from this list any film made in Hong Kong or Taiwan, or the mainland prior to 1979. Expect no Wong Kar-Wai or Ang Lee. This is the real People's Republic.

The Blue Kite (1992)

This one is my mother's favourite.

China, since the revolution, has been a country ruled by campaigns. Campaigns to purge 5% of the population. Campaigns to exterminate sparrows. Campaigns to limit the birthrate to one child per family. Unlike policies, campaigns would mobilise the entire population to enact on vague commands issued from above.

What they translate to on a human level is a million different stories. *The Blue Kite* tells one of them: the life of a young boy whose mother married three times.

For making this elegy, Tian Zhuangzhuang – the director – faced the most harsh punishment imposed by the state on any filmmaker, a near decade long exile from the film industry.

Farewell My Concubine (1993)

Widely considered the best Chinese film ever made, the winner of the Palme d'Or at the 46th

Cannes Film Festival retells China's modern history through the twists and turns of Peking Opera.

Starting in the aftermath of the revolution which overthrew the 4000 year old monarchy, through the Warlord Era, the Japanese invasion, the Civil War, and the Communist Revolution, ending in the Cultural Revolution, the film is the retrospective of a legendary opera singer. It is celebrated, not only for its captivating representation of the craft, but also for its pioneering exploration of gender, due to the practice of cross-casting in Chinese opera.

Devils on the Doorstep (2000)

If you turn on the TV in China today, 90% of the shows will be set in the 1930s, during the War of Resistance against Japanese aggression. This history makes up the core of China's patriotic education, yet it has always been taught in one way: Communist guerrillas aided by the heroic peasantry successfully defeating the invading imperialists.

The reality, however, was more nuanced. The film was first banned by state administration for allegedly portraying the peasants as indifferent and servile. It was the winner of the Grand Prix at the 53rd Cannes Film Festival. The director Jiang Wen has produced some of the best comedies in the People's Republic, with a lingering sense of the tragic. *Devils on the Doorstep* is a whimsical deconstruction of the myth of war, and it ain't afraid of getting bloody.

Imagine if *Inglorious Bastards* was anti-war.

Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks (2002)

In a 2012 poll by the British Film Institute, eight critics named it one of the ten greatest films ever made.

Wang Bing's *West of the Tracks* is a nine-hourlong

immersion into the north-east's decaying industrial world. After marketisation, the industrial north-east, the eldest son of the Republic, was abandoned as the centre of economy moved to the mercantile south. Filmed between 1999 and 2001, the film captures the largest population movement since Mao's exile of educated youths to the countryside. It details the lives of the 40 million quietly laid off, living in the last days of the Socialist dream.

The Epic of the Central Plains (2006)

This two-hour-long documentary remembers Gao Yaojie, a retired doctor who led a one woman battle against the government cover-up of the AIDS

crisis in rural China. Starting in 1991, the newly liberalised market economy and a government campaign drove millions of impoverished peasants to sell blood for money, creating what was then called the 'blood economy'. As low health and safety standards resulted in large-scale contamination of the blood which would later circulate, a quiet Chernobyl began taking place in central China, affecting the lives of millions of men, women, and children. An unknown number would die.

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

Image Credit: Martin Lewison, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



The Oxford Art Calendar: Michaelmas 2025

Polina Kim provides a rundown of the best upcoming art events in and around Oxford, from Ashmolean exhibitions to printwork showcases

Autumn in Oxford is not only golden leaves, dark academia, and beautiful architecture – Michaelmas is also a season of creativity. The start of the new academic year simultaneously marks a vibrant start time for art exhibitions: from major retrospectives, to novel voices, to printmaking. *Cherwell* has curated a calendar of highlight events to look out for...

Pat Suet-Bik Hui & Three Perfections
20th September 2025-28th June 2026, Ashmolean
‘The Three Perfections’ refers to the tradition, dating back to the Tang dynasty, of what’s considered in China to be the three highest art forms: poetry, calligraphy, and painting. The Ashmolean presents both early examples from the 17th century onwards, as well as the works of Hong Kong artist Hui and her contemporaries. The exhibition provides visitors the necessary space and context to view the dialogue between the disciplines. Seeing the way calligraphic strokes interact with paintings, and the reimagined and thematically diverse poetry, is a brilliant antidote to autumn blues.



This is What You Get
6th August 2025-11th January 2026, Ashmolean
If you’re seeking a subject a bit closer to home, then head to the top floor for a major exhibition exploring the collaboration between Stanley Donwood and Thom Yorke (of Radiohead fame). From initial album cover mock ups, to unpublished lyrics in their sketchbooks, this is an

iconic tribute to the band, which formed in mid 80s Oxfordshire. It is the ideal chance to look back at the group’s music, but also the creative process behind their hits. Note: the exhibition requires advanced booking. *Cherwell* have already been to take a look at the display, so check out our review before visiting yourself.

Suzanne Treister & Prophetic Dreaming
4th October 2025-12th April 2026, Modern Art Oxford
Nostalgic reminiscing aside, it’s also time to embrace modernity. Seeing the radical, para-disciplinary artist Suzanne Treister’s a retrospective is the solution. From embracing new technology to exploring potential futures, the

exhibition welcomes the artist’s time-travelling alter ego Rosalind Brodsky, Tarot decks, and machine intelligence. Her newest projects collaborate with local quantum physicists in the form of a walking tour across five city sites, allowing you to travel without leaving the comfort of Pembroke street.

The Printmaker’s Eye
28th November 2025-3rd January 2026, The North Wall
The Open access Fine Art Print workshop, known as the Oxford Printmakers Co-Operative (OPC), is exhibiting a new range of handmade prints, along with insight into the process – relief prints, monotypes, and lithographs. The vibrant creativity is a welcome reprieve from a long term, and the perfect opportunity to find a Christmas gift.

Imagining Wolsey: The invention of an English cardinal
18th June 2025-22nd December 2025, Christ Church Picture Gallery
Catch the last of Rome – A Cardinal’s Dream up to the 20th October, visualising the Roman drawings of Wolsey’s time, and then head to the 500th anniversary exhibition in honour of the Cardinal, and the founder of Christ Church. Tudor oil paintings, representations in Hilary Mantel’s iconic *Wolf Hall*; this is the exhibition to see if you want traditional portraits, and canonical artists.
Oxford brings old masters and emerging talent together, from the Ashmolean’s awe inspiring halls, to the welcoming gleam of Oxford’s Modern Art haven. The months from autumn to winter pulse with creative energy, and *Cherwell* hopes you’ll find an event to spark your interest and inspire you. We eagerly await your thoughts, submissions and reviews.
Image credit: ‘Cardinal Thomas Wolsey’ via flickr (PDM 1.0).

WHAT’S ON

STAGE

Emma
Oxford Playhouse
21st October

Your Funeral
Oxford Playhouse
21st-25th October

MUSIC

International Song Festival
Various locations
10th-25th October

Bilk
The Bullingdon
22nd October

FILM

MET Opera Live: La Sonnambula
Phoenix Picturehouse
18th October

The Royal Ballet’s Cinderella
Curzon
25th November

ART

Printing Tarot
Modern Art Oxford
23rd October

Daphne Wright
Ashmolean
Open until Feb 2026



THE SOURCE

Dear Reader,

It has been so long since last I felt
your fingertips tracing my pages,
cascading shivers across my spine.

I have missed your smile,
and the way your laugh
reaches your eyes;
I would do anything
to kiss your happiness.

Stay awhile, please,
let me calm your racing mind, think
of me as the moon, pulling
your cool waves of calamity
into tides.

I will listen, and wrap up
your worries like gifts
and cradle them close until
they dissolve at sunrise.

Pause for a moment dear reader,
Stop and stay please,
Do not glance to the other pages, allow me
to savour the memory of your face, tuck it away
for a rainy day, and breathe a sigh
of incandescent happiness.

Read the full poem at cherwell.org

TILLY WHITE

What will the Schwarzman Centre mean for music at Oxford?

Lilia Goldstein explores music provision and performance at Oxford's brand new humanities faculty

The new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, located in Oxford's Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, opened on 30th September.

Alongside teaching provisions, such as seminar rooms and the new Bodleian Humanities Library, the centre has various state-of-the-art performance and rehearsal spaces: a concert hall, a lecture hall which doubles as a drama theatre, a black box experimental performance space, a music studio, a recital hall and dance studio, and practice rooms that are available to be booked by music students. The performance spaces will be accessible for Oxford University Music Society (OUMS) ensembles and Oxford University Drama Society (OUDS) groups through a centralised booking system, which currently states that bookings are only available from January 2026. Additionally, the centre will be the new home of the Bate Collection of Musical Instruments and Archives. The faculty's heirloom gamelan has already been moved into the recital hall.

These spaces open up a huge range of exciting possibilities for performances by both students and professionals. Placing the humanities together in one building creates new pathways for collaboration between disciplines. The architects have paid detailed attention to the acoustic capabilities of the building: the concert hall was designed by Arup Acoustics to be completely soundproof, and the hall is connected to the black box theatre so that sound can be fed in, allowing for interdisciplinary performance.

The Oxford Cultural Programme will be

putting on a range of events, such as concerts, spoken word, dance, theatre, and art installations. Some of these will be in collaboration with the ten new Cultural Fellows that the centre has appointed. Concerts to look out for include the BBC Singers with composer Eric Whitacre, a concert with the London Gay Big Band, a performance by composer Anna Clyne, a music and spoken word performance with Kim Stanley Robinson and Brian Eno, and one by the Aurora Orchestra, known for playing complex classical repertoire from memory. The Sohmen Concert Hall isn't quite big enough for a modern full-scale symphony orchestra, so the Aurora won't be able to play its famous rendition of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, but will instead be treating audiences to a memorised performance of Mozart's *Symphony No. 41* ('Jupiter') and later of Bach's *Magnificat*, amongst other works.

There will also be collaborations between student ensembles and professional musicians, such as *Oxford Sings: Carmina Burana* (with Conductor Benjamin Nichols, Oxford Bach Choir, and Merton College Choir), as well as *Splendour and Majesty* (with the University's Schola Cantorum and His Majestys Sagbuts and Cornetts). It is promising that the Oxford Cultural Programme is enthusiastic about giving students a chance to perform with visiting musicians, and to participate in masterclasses and workshops.

The centre will open fully for teaching on 13th October, the start of Michaelmas term. Unfortunately for students like me who are

entering their final year at Oxford, the Cultural Programme and access to the new performance spaces will only begin in April 2026, and the music studios are expected to open in week 4 of this term.

Nonetheless, it's clear that the Schwarzman and the Oxford Cultural Programme are looking to situate Oxford as a cultural centre on a global scale. With its bar, cloakroom, and modern architecture, the basement housing the concert hall and other performance spaces are reminiscent of London venues like the Southbank Centre and the Barbican. The upcoming events by the Oxford Cultural Programme further emphasise the centre's desire to be at the

cutting edge of new developments in the fields of the arts, humanities and performing arts.

This is exciting for students who will have chances to witness and get involved with an expanding professional musical landscape. It's also essential that the Schwarzman Centre continues to provide spaces for the rich student music scene that already exists at Oxford. As long as the centre adheres to its stated aims – providing for current students and setting graduates up to “thrive in often complicated and rapidly transforming workplaces” – it should be an important new resource for student musicians in Oxford.

Image Credit: Grace Greaves for Cherwell.



A love letter to Vinted

HANNAH COWLEY

It's that time of year again. I am the last twenty-something standing in my village, my desk is filled with unfinished books, and I've had to explain the word “collection” to several family members. All of this can mean only one thing: it is back-to-school season for the Oxford student, and reinvention is in the air (alongside a healthy dose of anxiety, of course).

When I think of my Michaelmas self, she reads for pleasure and does her essays in

Common Ground instead of in bed. And, most importantly, she is very, very chic. Her wardrobe is full of skinny scarves and shiny boots and denim skirts. It makes me want to burn my wardrobe and start again. In this crisis, I simply turn to a magical, budget-friendly treasure trove: Vinted.

Some people have massive qualms about second-hand clothes. While I will admit that it can be weird smelling a stranger's perfume on your new(ish) jumper, I also believe that clothes that have been worn already just look better. Now, stay with me here. You know when you

borrow an item of clothing from a friend and it mysteriously looks a thousand times better than anything you've ever bought? My friend's leather jacket, for instance, genuinely looks incredible on anyone who wears it. I know it sounds too *Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* to be true, but it is. Whether it's your friend's little top that you borrowed for a night out, your boyfriend's jumper, or your dad's waterproof Patagonia cap (true story), I think that clothes with a certain worn-in-ness have some magic in them. Buying things on Vinted has that 'raiding a friend's wardrobe' feeling.

The overly familiar messaging etiquette on Vinted definitely contributes to this feeling – if you didn't punctuate each DM with a kiss or, at the very least, a smiley face, I'm fairly sure you'd be kicked off the app. This is part of its charm – there is something lovely about having a brief exchange with a stranger. Once, a man thanked me for buying some shorts because he was saving up for an engagement ring. Another time, a girl sent me some free handmade earrings because she felt so guilty for sending her parcel late. I fear I'm getting too warm and fuzzy here, so I'll just add that for every pleasant DM, there's someone offering to pay two pounds for an item listed at 20. They're always very polite about it, though.

As much as I (clearly) love Vinted, it is not a perfect app. Its biggest design flaw is the fact that favoured items do not disappear after they have sold, which means that your 'Liked' folder can start looking like a graveyard of missed fashion opportunities. Vinted is also rife with people who tear the Temu labels out of clothes so that they can call them vintage. I once paid ten pounds for a jumper that stretched to the

size of a small tent after two washes. However, this is all part of the thrill of the hunt for the perfect jumper/jeans/bag.

Vinted pros will know that a great way to find hidden gems is searching for things by fabric. Although this does mean lots of zooming in and squinting at blurry photos of care labels, the effort is worth it, because it guarantees a good-quality item that will not only look better, but also last longer. While we're on the topic of fabrics, Vinted is an excellent place to go if you want to buy a leather jacket without feeling horribly guilty every time you see a cow.

A Cold War leather jacket doesn't even scratch the surface of the weird and wonderful items that Vinted has to offer – you can probably find something even cooler

One of the highlights of my year abroad was finding one designed by Angelo Litrico (yes, my year abroad was dull). Litrico was a big-time tailor during the Cold War, dressing Khrushchev, Kennedy, and Tito – and now, me.

The amazing thing is that a Cold War leather jacket doesn't even scratch the surface of the weird and wonderful items that Vinted has to offer. If you dig for long enough, you can probably find something even cooler that will likely cost you less than a tenner.

Image Credit: Hannah Cowley with permission.



How to survive Oxford

Ava Doherty offers her advice on navigating university, managing expectations, and maintaining perspective

Welcome to Oxford University, the place where ambition goes to drink, cry, and write 3,000 words on “liminality” at 3am, the place where people say “I’m just popping to the Bod” and genuinely mean it.

You’re here because you were clever once. Now you’re mostly just tired. Oxford isn’t about academic glory. It’s about surviving a term system designed by someone who evidently had a vendetta against joy.

You’ll arrive bright-eyed and quoting Virginia Woolf. By week five, you’ll be negotiating with your tutorial essay as if it’s a hostage situation.

Oxford isn’t so much a university as a social experiment in exhaustion, ego, and caffeine. Still, it’s beautiful, in that dysfunctional, emotionally unavailable way. Like a cathedral with commitment issues.

So before you drown in deadlines, societies, and the creeping suspicion that everyone else has got it all figured out, here’s a guide. Not to thriving, that’s ambitious, but to surviving, politely.

1. Sign up for everything, then panic elegantly.

You’ll join rowing, choir, debate, and a society that earnestly discusses “the ontology of soup”. You’ll be elected treasurer of a committee you didn’t know existed.

At some point, you’ll realise you spend more time in committee rooms than in your own room. That’s fine. Burnout is just enthusiasm without manners.

2. Nobody cares about your grades.

Yes, even the person who claims that they “didn’t revise for Prelims”. Everyone’s bluffing. Everyone.

Your tutors won’t remember any of

your marks by next term, and your friends certainly won’t care. Do the work, then let it go. There’s a whole world beyond the bibliography.

3. Beware the loud intellectuals.

Some people treat every corridor conversation as an audition for BBC Question Time. They quote Foucault for fun and sigh over a misused semicolon.

There is absolutely no need to keep up. Let them exhaust themselves on the Rad Cam staircase while you quietly enjoy the chaos from a safe distance.

Oxford will chew you up politely and spit you out, often in sub fusc

4. Burnout is inevitable; honesty is always helpful.

Oxford will chew you up politely and spit you out, often in sub fusc. Talk to your tutors before your stress manifests as involuntary eye twitching. Talk to friends before you start “experimenting with isolation” as performance art.

Don’t romanticise the ruinous effects of overworking. Transparency is underrated. Suffering alone is overhyped.

5. Flirt like your life depends on it.

If you like someone, tell them. Oxford runs on repression; any genuine emotion counts as rebellion.

People disappear fast here, into dissertations, internships, or mild existential dread. Say what you mean to your library crush before they vanish

into the untraceable depths of the Bodleian.

Be brave. In the worst case scenario, you get a good story to entertain your friends at pres. Best case, you end up with someone you can split Hassan’s chips with at 2am – the quintessence of modern romance.

6. Alcohol is a tactical hazard.

One blackout is character-building, two is reckless optimism. Beyond that, you’re in moral territory that’s best left unexplored.

Hydrate. Snack. And remember, nothing good can ever happen following the words “formal dinner afters.”

7. Criticism is mostly nothing more than noise.

You’ll receive essays back that read like crime scene reports. Take what’s useful, ignore the theatrics.

Everyone’s improvising, even the people who look like they were born quoting Weber. Most tutors have seen worse. Logic abandoned mid-sentence and replaced with sheer audacity. You’ll be fine.

8. Fun is its own scholarship.

The impassioned 2am conversations, the delirious walks home from Bridge, the friendships held together by shared panic and overpriced coffee. That’s the real degree.

In the end, Oxford isn’t about mastering knowledge. It’s about surviving brilliance and insanity in equal measure. It’s an extended tutorial not in academia, but in being human, flawed, curious, and occasionally spectacular.

9. Tell stories, not just essays.

In ten years times, no one will care about your footnotes. They’ll care about the night you danced on the college lawns, argued with a classics tutor about the morality of pigeons, or survived the Keble pantomime as an unconvincing shrub.

Your degree will fade. The absurdity and the people will remain. That’s the Oxford curriculum you can’t fail.

Image credit: Grace Greaves for Cherwell.



HOROSCOPES



Aries

Do you really need to use ChatGPT for that?



Taurus

To be honest, you’ve looked more alive.



Gemini

Buy someone flowers this week.



Cancer

Steer well clear of that Zesty wine.



Leo

There is actually such thing as too much caffeine.



Virgo

Collegest is almost always a bad idea.

Mind over matter: Searching for mental clarity

MINGDONG HE

The first time that I remember coming across the phrase “mind over matter” was in Foyles bookshop in Charing Cross, printed and prominently displayed above shelves filled with books about philosophy and psychology.

The words immediately reminded me of the principles of Chinese philosophy – in particular the teaching of Wang Yangming, who maintained that the human mind resembles a mirror.

Since I first encountered it, this idea has quietly become a pillar of strength for me amidst the turmoil of my research life while at Oxford University.

Wang Yangming’s doctrine stood in contradiction to the idea of *gewu zhizhi* that dominated neo-confucianism – that is, “investigating things to extend knowledge.”

According to Wang Yangming, by contrast, the world contains infinite objects. Therefore, how could it be possible for one to ever exhaustively “investigate” all of them? Instead of chasing endlessly outward, he argued, one should aim instead to turn one’s perspective inward, in order to investigate the mind itself.

This is where his striking metaphor of the mirror comes in. The human mind is comparable to a mirror. A mirror can only reflect the world clearly when it has been polished.

Yet most people, as Wang Yangming’s philosophy suggested, attempt to “investigate things” while holding up a dim and dusty mirror, hoping to see the world through it.

But how could a clouded mirror ever reveal anything distinctly? What we should do instead is not to carry a tarnished mirror to reflect the world, but to polish the mirror of our own mind.

Once it becomes clear, it can reflect everything truthfully. As Wang Yangming taught: “The mind itself is the ultimate principle – there is nothing beyond the mind, and no truth outside it.”

Research students are habitually trained to “find out something to find out...then find out”; they are constantly taught to read more, calculate more, prove more. Yet in the midst of such an intense process, we can often forget to find ourselves. I came to appreciate the truth of this while I was wrestling with the trials and tribulations of mathematics.

As a DPhil student, I (all too frequently) find myself drowning in dense papers and seemingly unsolvable problems. In these conditions, it is easy for anxiety and self-doubt to feel overwhelming. But I find that when I pause – close my eyes, steady my breath, and “polish the mirror” of my mind – the fog clears.

The problem may yet remain, but my way of looking at it changes. What once seemed like a dead end often

reveals a crack of light. Such a moment provides the impetus for real progress in my research.

It must be said that my personal experience, however, is far from unique. Recent data suggests that the struggle for mental clarity and balance is widespread among university students, particularly for those at Oxford.

According to a welfare report issued by the Oxford Student Union earlier this year, 38% of surveyed students revealed that their mental health had deteriorated since they first began their studies at Oxford. 76% had felt anxious, and 44% had experienced depression.

What once seemed like a dead end often reveals a crack of light

These numbers indicate that behind Oxford’s academic success, many students quietly, yet consistently, struggle with stress and self-doubt. In conversations with friends, I often hear stories of burnout, sleepless nights, and the ubiquitous pressure to appear ever composed and accomplished.

The culture of constant productivity

that such an environment as Oxford fosters leaves little room for reflection or rest, and even moments of achievement can feel fleeting.

The academic mind, in its relentless pursuit of knowledge, often forgets to care for itself. To polish the mirror, after all, is not to escape the world, but to face it with a clearer mind.

Then, I realised, the deeper meaning of “mind over matter” is not about brute willpower against the world, but about cultivating clarity within.

A restless mind makes even simple logic a tangle; a calm mind can trace paths through even the most complex questions.

In the moments just before his death, Wang Yangming’s resonant final words were: “My mind is luminous – what more is there to say?”. He had spent his life striving to embody this belief, and as a result, in the end, he had nothing to regret. Amongst his many achievements, he founded the ‘School of Mind,’ which went on to become a major force in the intellectual milieu of the Ming and the Qing dynasties, and would later influence prominent and influential thinkers across East Asia.

Perhaps “mind over matter” is not ultimately about conquering reality, but about finding peace and clarity within. May we all learn to polish the mirror of our own mind, so that when it becomes clear, the world before us may also come into focus.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

Beware of punting while intoxicated.



Scorpio

Turn off that Clairo and pick up a library book.



Sagittarius

Try a new recipe! There's a world beyond pesto pasta.



Capricorn

The truth will come out over college brunch.



Aquarius

LinkedIn will only cause you pain.



Pisces

You don't have to read the entire reading list.

Does Oxford prepare you for the real world?

JAMES THATCHER

As one of the approximately 3000 undergraduates to have recently bid farewell to Oxford, I've learnt just how easy it is to be overwhelmed now that my degree is over. Admittedly, a few months ago I was writing my thesis, overwhelmed that my degree wasn't over, but the sudden absence of work, routine, and plans is proving incredibly daunting.

I know that many people prepared a route out of university, stepping directly into a comfortable (and well-earned) graduate role. But for those of us who weren't so forthright, or, in my case, whose plans changed, we now find ourselves back at home, seemingly in the same position we were in three years ago before we even applied, wondering, what's next? And indeed, how did Oxford actually help us?

Before I spiral into nihilism looking back, much has changed in these past three years. Has it been enough to fully prepare me for the outside world? Maybe not entirely. I'm not keen on the binary of Oxford versus the real world, and I doubt that anyone is ever truly prepared to become an adult. But Oxford certainly challenged me, as it has many other people, to develop a greater degree of confidence and ambition. It might not be the real world, but I think it gives you enough of a taste of it to want more.

Oxford is certainly a world of its own, with thousands of people, all bound by similar interests and attitudes, interwoven by the stress of simply existing. It's an environment in which we all have our own diverse daily routines that fundamentally amount to the same thing. We share the same stresses and joys – from tutorials to Oxford Kermit, Oxford students are bound by an esoteric language that puts it one human sacrifice away from being a cult. At the centre is its focus on academia, but there seems to be little preparation beyond this. Where are we taught how to do taxes? Or how to face rejection from job applications? For many, Oxford provides a kind of safety blanket where such concerns are temporarily suspended. The gap between town and gown is evidently a wide one.

So is that all finalists have to look forward to? A harsh drop into reality because Oxford didn't prepare us? Whilst we get the chance to exist in such a haze, I would advise younger years to recognise the many skills and abilities with which Oxford does equip you, many you develop unknowingly.

University life requires so much, from juggling deadlines to the pressure of sustaining a social life. It's clear how far my friends and I have come in this time. It provides a

sense of independence and freedom which is incredibly liberating. Key skills that stay with you might not be those you learn in university, but they certainly are those you learn whilst at university.

The most tangible way of judging how prepared we are is whether we have a job after Oxford – a harsh metric. According to the University, 93% of undergraduates were in full-time work within 15 months of leaving Oxford in 2021. A positive figure. Likewise, the Careers Service deals with the queries of students and provides many valuable opportunities year-round. The University is clearly offering some form of employment preparation, regardless of whether it's for the welfare of its students or simply in order to bump it up a few more places in the league tables.

Skills that stay with you might not be those you learn in university, but they are those you learn whilst at university

There certainly can be a sense of guilt, that not taking advantage of the abundance of opportunities at Oxford is somehow a failing on your own part. But you can't do everything, and, if truth be told, this is part of a wider problem. The imagined incompatibility of Oxford life and the 'real world' creates some mirage that we stagnate or solidify in maturity after leaving university.

Yet we will continue to be faced with thousands of opportunities and setbacks, will continue learning in one way or another. The notion of the real world serves primarily as intimidation which can be helpful, to an extent. The only thing different from the Oxford bubble, truly, is that there is no set framework for opportunities.

So, it is at this point that we use the creativity and strength which we have from being at Oxford, fostered through work and daily life, to push forward and try to create opportunities. This will undoubtedly be difficult; I labour under no illusion that meritocracy is perfection. We should reframe ourselves and the labels we've adopted. Leaving Oxford should not be a tragic loss but an exciting time for new development. Or maybe check in with me in a couple of months when I've been rejected from a few hundred jobs.

CHERWELL-FED

Barcelona-Upon-Cherwell: Tapas at Arbequina



SEBASTIAN PAGE

Nestled under the antiquated sign of a Victorian chemist in Cowley, a short trek for city-centre dwellers, Arbequina is almost certainly one of the best places to eat in Oxford. Bookings are much sought after – they're only open for three days a week – but your time and effort is well rewarded.

The Arbequina olive tree is native to Cataluña, but the culinary influence extends well beyond the region. The North African twist of molasses and pomegranate that accompanies the more conventionally European grilled aubergine and whipped feta ensures that no depth of flavour is left neglected – smoky, creamy, tart, and sweet like an exemplar dish from *Salt Acid Fat Heat*.

Some fine dining fanatics insist that no ingredient should be reused on the same menu, but why do that when pomegranate is so delicious? The roast cauliflower that sits on a purée of the same vegetable, topped with hazelnuts and pomegranate seeds, follows the same formula as the aubergine just as successfully.

If by this point you're getting tired of vegetables, the crispy chickpea salad offers a beautiful alternative to the plants you've been tucking into so far. Dressed simply with yoghurt and chilli butter that coats each individual pulse, it's the perfect foil to the richer dishes that otherwise dominate the meal (and tapas in general).

Evidently, the menu is fantastic for vegetarians, but carnivores and pescatarians are also well catered for. The rhyming sobrasada tostada is delicately spiced with the traditional

expected players, and offset just as softly by a drizzle of honey and a dash of thyme.

It would be a crime to leave without having sampled at least one of their desserts – although the savoury options are probably the stars of the show. The Instagram-viral burnt Basque cheesecake may sound enticing, but I would steer you towards the Santiago tart or the honey and lavender panna cotta with mangos and tortas de aceite.

The drinks menu is somehow just as

Menu

- Aubergine & whipped feta (£9.50)
- Roast cauliflower (£12.50)
- Crispy chickpea salad (£10)
- Sobrasada tostada (£8.50)
- Honey & lavender panna cotta (£8)

Arbequina OX4 1JB,
72-74 Cowley Road

well-rounded as the food-based one, and under-appreciated on their social media. Sporadic posts and stories come along, but there should really be essays on the basil gimlet and autumn mezcalita. The alcohol-free options are just as tempting – the pick of the bunch would have to be the grapefruit and rosemary spritz.

It's certainly on the pricey side, but perfect for a special occasion. With a new location opening in the Covered Market, I would get booking for the next time the parents come to visit.

Image credit: Arbequina with permission for Cherwell.

AGONY AUNT

I'm in my second year, but I think that I've fallen for a fresher. Is sharking really all that bad?

Sincerely,
Anonymous

Dear Petrarchan Anon,

The age-old question: to shark or not to shark? It has haunted Freshers' Week bops for generations, so you're not alone. However, it is side eyed for a reason.

Think about how different you were in your first year compared to now. Could you imagine the naïve and overwhelmed you of last year dating an (let's face it) intense second year you met in your first week?

With vastly different banks of life experience and levels of self-actualisation, it may benefit both you and the fresher to not rush into a messy love affair before your first essay is even completed.

Maybe you need to do some reflection on why you haven't yet managed to find romance amongst your cohort. There are plenty of eligible second years, have you tried Cherpse? Or perhaps you have been burnt before, and this is merely an ugly hangover of that. Best to cool off, reconnect with nature (or with your college library), and come to your senses. In any case, who falls in love in a week?

Lots of love,
Your 'Non-Judgemental' Agony Aunt

Please run responsibly (and intoxicated)

Amelie de Lara reveals how incorporating booze into her running journey finally taught her moderation

I get it – you’re bored of hearing about running, of seeing the zillionth marathon post. I feel the frustration. I have long been a running hater; coming from a family of sports fanatics, my refusal to get out of bed for parkrun on Saturday mornings was the peak of my teenage rebellion. Yet at the tail end of last summer, facing a return to Oxford without my friends (who had treasonously graduated) and without my favourite way to waste time (Atik), I realised I needed a hobby that could help me meet people in a low-commitment way, and maybe also do me some good: sedentary months of revision followed by summer bed-rotting had taken their toll. In the end, the shame of realising my cardiovascular fitness was about the same as my elderly house cat spurred me into downloading Couchto5k.

So, I dutifully followed Sarah Millican’s instructions and set off. A few days later, I had my first injury. A few weeks later, I was buying my first shoes. And a few months later, I decided to enter my first race. I stumbled across Denbies’ ‘Bacchus’ 10k and half-marathon, held in a beautiful vineyard and punctuated by wine-tasting stations – the British answer to the Medoc marathon. My interest in wine was far more deep-rooted than in running, so this was a no-brainer. It was a fun run, which rewarded not the fastest time, but the best costume. My mum was also (easily) persuaded to participate, so we could do a joint costume.

Fast-forward to September 7th – a year after my first five-minute continuous run – and into the car piled the whole family, the dog, and what can only be described as balloon-vests, constructed to transform us into twinned bunches of grapes. After a pre-run gin taster for good luck, we spent an hour in the hazy late-summer sunshine ‘running’, drinking, and chatting to our like-minded competitors. Doing a race was completely different to running by myself: the balloons immediately knocked out my headphones and silenced my ever-faithful running companion (Charli XCX), yet the sound of supporters and steel drums gave me that same faux-club rush. I finished the race invigorated – and not just by the wine. Good for the soul, I thought, but not necessarily good for the body.

The rise in running amongst young people has been touted as a universally Good Thing,

the quick-fix that will help us outrun our generationally-determined demons – getting us off screens, boosting mental health, and fighting loneliness. All this is true, but I wonder if there’s a darker side to it all, and whether I have fallen prey to some of its pitfalls.

As skinny becomes trendy again, celebrity waistlines are shrinking faster than my 5k PBs. Even Serena Williams has endorsed Ozempic. Are we running just so we look better in LuluLemon? Is this the age-old regimen, presented as a different set of drills? Run more, eat more protein, don’t drink a drop of alcohol. The clean girl who goes to bed at 9pm, works twelve hours a day, tracks her macros, and has a 15-step skin-care routine feels like another standard I can’t possibly keep up with. I’m a vegetarian! I’m a student! And even if it makes me desperately uncool, I don’t want to live in a world where wine and cheese aren’t a girls-night staple.

Another big driver of Gen-Z’s love of running is, of course, the online sphere, exacerbated by influencers and their inducements to spend more time and money. Even for people like me who are actively trying to reduce their time on social media, there is Strava.

It started so innocently. It tracked my progress, and held me accountable by displaying my success – brilliant. But I, inevitably, became addicted. I followed all my friends. I followed my local ‘Str-influencer’. And I followed my fellow ‘athletes’ into this new facet of our online identities. Snapping photos as I went, keeping my bad runs private, over-thinking the witty caption: running just got delightfully performative, and perform I did. I perfected my make-up and hair routine: mascara, concealer, and a half-up pony that would look artfully windswept. How natural! Once, I waited until golden hour so that my mid-run selfie would be perfect.

I Strava-ed my ‘Bacchus’ run, but those photos will certainly not be added to my Hinge profile. 20 balloons and a ridiculous headdress are hardly appropriate for dating apps. Even worse, my average pace was nowhere near what I had aimed for: the hills, crowds, and ten-minute wine-breaks saw to that. But I’d run next to my mum, at a conversational pace – this is part of what made the experience so special.



Without pressure, without trying to quantify the outcomes in weight lost, speed gained, Strava likes achieved – running for the sake of running was brilliant. I could drink like a Millennial, exercise like a Gen-Z, make cringe-worthy ‘wine o’clock’ jokes like a Gen-X. My mum and I may not have won the race. We may not have even won the best costume category (a travesty, in my opinion). But I got to clear my mind, spend time with my family, and take in a bit of fresh air. Wasn’t that what Sarah Millican had promised me in the first place?

When I first started my running journey, my exercise-mad brother would inundate me with clichés: “You’re lapping everyone on the couch!” “Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional!” I’d roll my eyes. I hate clichés. I hate people who like

sports. I hate unsolicited, badly-phrased advice. But whilst I was looking up wine marathons, I came across a phrase that stuck with me: “It isn’t about getting a good time, it’s about having a good time.” We are reminded everyday that only the extraordinary goes viral, that running the centre course amounts to running nowhere. But doing something averagely, surrounded by average people also doing it averagely, turned out to be the highlight of my summer.

Talent and hard work can race it out between them: I’ll be going at my own pace round Florence Park, stopping to pet dogs, smelling the proverbial and actual roses, and following it all with a glass of wine (or, at least, a pastry).

Image credit: Jan, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

OXFORD

TINY LOVE STORIES

Autumn, for me, has always been about love. The soft, gentle kind that offers a familiar balm to my sunburnt cheeks. The kind intertwined in the memory of my friends, hurrying along the streets of our hometown, gripping hot chocolates against our chests, giggling at the sheer joy of our girlhood. The kind I find in warm bookshops, in holding hands, in new stationary, in the films I watch until I know the script by heart. The love I find I have for the tree, standing tall outside my childhood bedroom, that, with each season, delightfully reminds me that it is always okay to begin again.

Elizabeth Bourn, Balliol

CHERPSE.

Oxford’s blind dating

An evening stroll through Jericho. Will they find love in spite of logistical issues?

An illustration of a castle tower with a figure on a winged horse. The background is a solid red color. The figure is a person with large, feathered wings, holding a bow and arrow, and standing on a horse-like creature with wings. The castle tower is in the background, with a flag on top.

Miss Rising Star

First impression?
Very lovely! We had a really nice walk through Jericho and the conversation was great, it felt like we had a lot in common on lots of subjects.

Highlight?
Both deciding that live music wasn’t the vibe and choosing a different pub – it was nice to be on the same wavelength. There wasn’t any awkwardness, the whole atmosphere was very chill.

Most embarrassing moment?
Cherwell sent us to a closed pub on the other side of Jericho, but it ended up being quite funny.

Describe the date in three words.
Articulate, lovely, and chatty.

Will there be a second date?
No, but I’d love to be friends, as I thought we got on very well.

Miss Unemployed

First impression?
Sweet and personable, with a cool hobby. I can’t act but it was interesting to hear about it from someone who can.

Highlight?
It was definitely nice to meet someone who I had common ground with, especially because as an unemployed English student I feel like I rarely meet a STEM student I can relate to.

Most embarrassing moment?
Not so embarrassing for us, but probably the fact that Cherwell sent us to a closed pub.

Describe the date in three words.
Friendly, interesting, sincere.

Will there be a second date?
No, but I definitely hope I see her around sometime as she was really nice to chat to.



Ready, set, go: At the start line for the Oxford Half

Image Credit: Aayan Riaz for Cherwell.

Oxford sailors take on the Celtic sea

John Frame journeys seven hundred miles with us across the ocean

Many people would consider offshore yacht racing a somewhat daunting, if not downright insane, endeavour. But it's how a determined crew of Oxford sailors from Oxford University Yacht Club (OUYC) chose to spend a week of their summer.

Whether it's friendly yet competitive club-level dinghy racing, relaxing cruising in the tropics, or gruelling ocean crossings, sailing can take many forms. In a racing context, the aim of the sport is to simply make the boat go as fast as possible – which can be a difficult challenge in ever-changing conditions at sea, requiring a unique combination of physical strength, tactical planning, and intimate knowledge of the boat's systems.

Yacht racing has had an illustrious history from its early days as a pastime of Victorian-era gentleman-explorers to the opulent J-classes of the 1930s to the highest level of technical innovation today: the America's Cup. Ocean racing, one of the toughest and most expensive sports which an athlete can partake in, tends to attract a certain kind of daring – and often eccentric – individual.

Over seven hundred miles across the Celtic Sea and back, the Fastnet Race holds a near mythical status in the world of sailing. First organised by the Royal Ocean Racing Club in 1925 and having since established itself as one of the most famous offshore races in the world, it attracted over 400 entries in this centenary year. The course begins in Cowes on the Isle of Wight and sends competitors westward past Land's End, across to the southernmost point in Ireland, then all the way back to finish in Cherbourg.

With the Oxford crew competing aboard 38 foot yacht, *Talisman*, the starting cannon was fired around noon on Saturday 26th July, and the race was on. In fair conditions, the *Talisman* made good progress down the western Solent and past the iconic Needles into the English Channel. While still near enough to land for mobile reception, the crew kept the club members ashore updated on the progress being made, and by nightfall the watch rota had begun, necessitating extra attention by the skeleton crew who stayed on watch. The stoic skipper Simon, though, always remained on hand to offer guidance to the crew and

impart knowledge from his many years of successful racing.

Guided by the compass (and GPS – a far cry from 50 years ago!), they sailed onwards, the Bishop Rock Lighthouse slowly vanishing from view until dawn broke in the Celtic Sea over nothing but open water as far as the eye could see. Isolation from the rest of the world is one of the defining factors of offshore sailing: there's just nine people in the yacht, alone at sea. Perhaps another boat would be sighted from time to time, but this remoteness was a far cry from the typical experience of busy traffic near major ports and shipping lanes. The majority of the racing OUYC undertakes (such as the British University and College Sports regatta and Varsity match) are short in-shore day races, where brash split-second decisions mean the difference between victory and defeat; the Fastnet was therefore a unique opportunity for much of the crew. Hundreds of miles away from civilisation, sufficient preparation and self-reliance for the voyage were essential.

Following daybreak on the third day, Ireland gradually faded into sight, and by 9.30am, ever-reliable helmsman

Ross guided the crew around the fabled Fastnet Rock. A tall, angry hunk of stone, weathered by many Atlantic storms and surmounted by the towering stone lighthouse, the Fastnet Rock inspired joy instead of dread: the crew had reached the halfway point in the race. Some may wonder if sailing non-stop for three days to see a rock is worth it, but the achievement is certainly satisfying, if not otherwise impressive.

The return leg was calmer, with generally pleasant weather; the crew were delighted by the exciting appearance of pods of dolphins. After two more mostly uneventful (and almost relaxing) days and nights, the Alderney lighthouse came into view on the morning of the 31st. At 11.38am, *Talisman* and her Oxford crew crossed the finish line into Cherbourg Harbour, marking the end of a heroic voyage. With a finish time of just less than five days, a ranking of 267 out of 380 was achieved in the International Racing Certificate class – impressive for a crew of students in a race many sailors (not to mention other universities) fear entering.

SPORTING SPOTLIGHT

NATALIE TAN

Woken up last Sunday morning by rave music blasting from Banbury Road, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed spectating the Oxford Half. Judging from the delighted smiles of participants who lit up mid-stride at seeing cardboard signs adorned with their own faces, you could be forgiven for thinking running 13 miles might actually be enjoyable – not necessarily only for the physical achievement itself, but for the community that it inspires. Never in my life have I thought “perhaps I'll go on a run”, but if this fit of delusion persists I may well find myself warming up at the start line of Town and Gown come May next year.

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Puzzles

Circular Reasoning by Jaden Lee

_____ - Rum & ____, ice-cream flavour

_____ - One at a time

_____ - Symbol, rune

_____ - Ramesses II, e.g.

_____ - Hawaii’s most populous island

_____ - Cater to possibly unreasonable wishes

_____ - This puzzle, in a sense

_____ - Prepare one’s tool, as a violinist

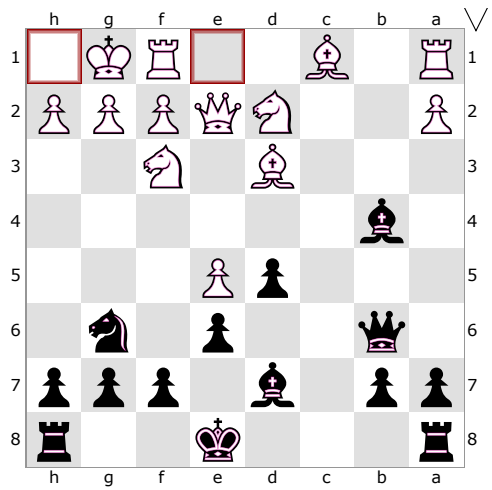
_____ - Type of theatre “co-ordinator”

_____ - Ride or crash, for instance

_____ - Tree resin used in medicine and perfume

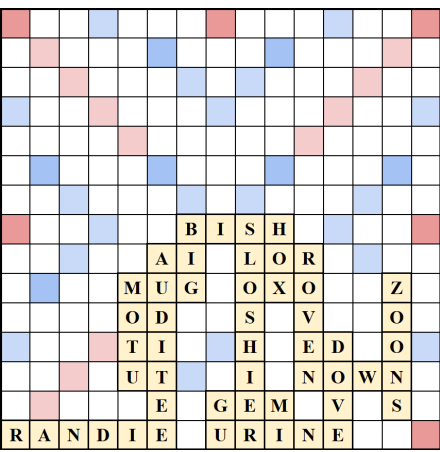
_____ - Warrior class that adheres to the ‘bushido’

Chess by Niall Clarke



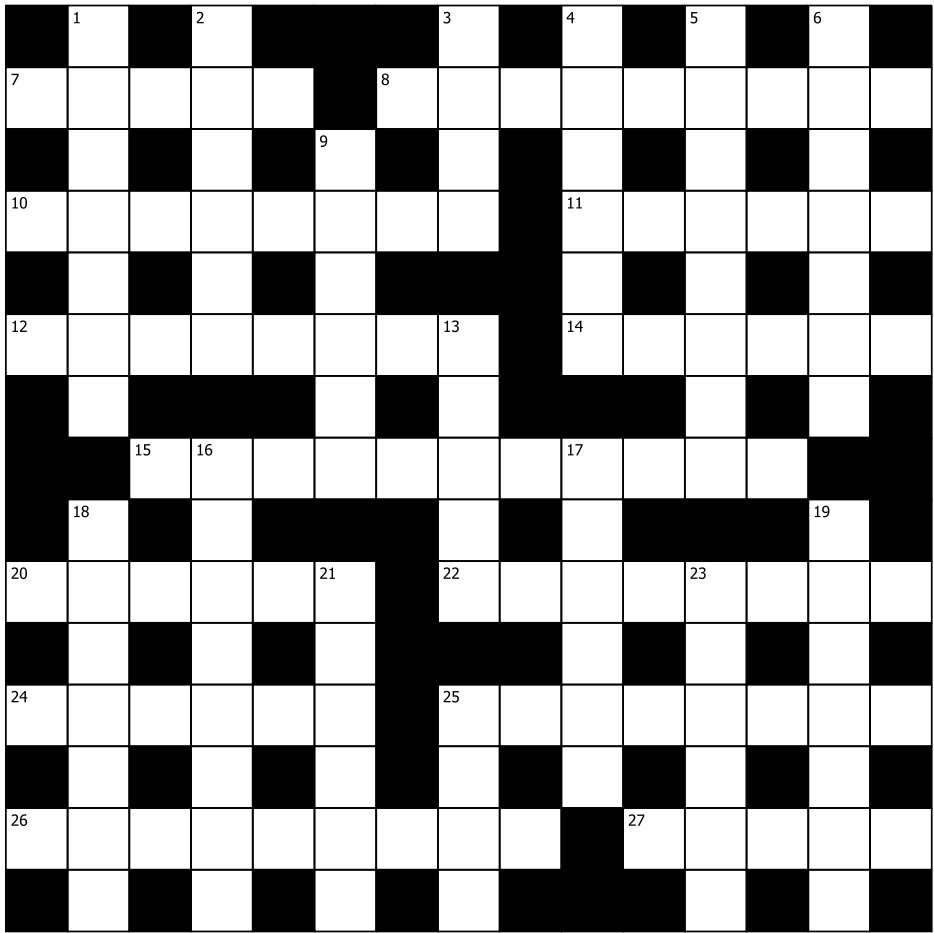
White has castled, overlooking a tactic for Black. How can you win a piece?

Scrabble by Zoë McGuire



This is from one of my recent Blitz games. We hold ABEELN and a blank. I played ENABLED, hooking LORD for 71, but there is a better bingo. Can you find it?

Cryptic Crossword by Alessandra Edwards



ACROSS

- 7) Some fear the great cost (5)
- 8) Express disapproval of drunken sailor’s instructional guide (9)
- 10) Be different and get into dark beer (5, 3)
- 11) Read about wingless wren lifted by its back legs (6)
- 12) Green spaces amongst unadulterated joy (8)
- 14) Complaint with dating app (6)
- 15) Thoughtful self-desecration (11)
- 20) Weave fibres to make underpants (6)
- 22) On and off dream: one participating in jig with splendour (8)
- 24) Emergency Room after wine is drunk with beer (6)
- 25) Liberators collect shut up initiates (8)
- 26) Apprehensively glide over scolding (9)
- 27) Last part of the festive month is the remnants of a dying fire (5)

DOWN

- 1) Report struggles with expenses (7)
- 2) Function interrupted SZAs verse (6)
- 3) Play on words before introducing Tobola gamble (4)
- 4) Take back argument; embrace (6)
- 5) Appendage of the highest tier who made the last round of the competition (8)
- 6) Juggling largely causes a bad reaction (7)
- 9) Travelling from US conferences (6)
- 13) Not a foolish leader, one to be re-spected (5)
- 16) Obvious container for tip (8)
- 17) More embarrassed whichever way you look (6)
- 18) Rivers around east of Oxford University (7)
- 19) Take off mark by overturning Rep (7)
- 21) Expert wears suit I removed from bud (6)
- 23) Relaxed hydrogen, splitting atom with energy (2, 4)
- 25) Life-changing document (4)

Cherwell Puzzle Hunt answers:

Sport: Clues give an anagrammed footballer’s name plus a letter: AIRED=RICE+A; ANKLE=KANE+L; DIAPER=PEDRI+A; LAMPREY=PALMER+Y; RELIC=RICE+L; SEXISM=MESSI+X; TRIANGLES=STERLING+A; ZAGREUS=SUAREZ+G. Reorder by list of footballers for LA GALAXY.

Horoscopes: Each star is completed by adding some letters in the centre; SA + YIN + GNO = SAYING NO. **News:** Six letters have been replaced by other ones. Identifying them all yields IT GLITCH.

Opinions: Cryptic clues each have a silent letter: GHOST (H); HANDKERCHIEF (D); ANSWER (W); BEFORE (E); SUBTLE (B); MUSCLE (C); BREAD (A); MNEMONIC (M); ISLE (S) = HD WEBCAMS.

Investigations: Every Undergrad Oxford college with a “St” name is present: Relevant clues are CAT, JOHN, TEDDY, PETER, HUGH. The missing one is ST ANNES.

Culture: The grid can be solved to find HUMPHACKWHALE; KENDRICKLAMAR; YOYOMA; BEETHOVEN; OTOMATONE; NIGHTINGALE; SAJABOYS. Remaining letters spell CORNMARKET ST.

Metapuzzle: Clues solve to BAGHDAD, ERUPT, DALLAS, INDUSTRIAL, SPIRIT, CANNON, FIRST. Each puzzle answer has a two-letter word that can be found within one of these, and the other word of the answer is of the same length. Take the two letters in the same place in the puzzle’s longer word: WEB[CA]MS, SU[RF]S, GAL[AX]Y, CORN[MA]RKET, GLIT[CH], SAY[IN]G, ANN[ES], for the whole page’s answer: CARFAX MACHINES.