

Oxford scholarship director tied to Russian shell companies



- Scholarship director listed in Pandora Papers
- Ties to sanctioned Russian oligarchs
- 20+ new scholars since 2022 Ukraine invasion

CHERWELL INVESTIGATIONS

The University of Oxford prides itself on high ethical and reputational standards for its donors and funding. The list of scholarships offered at the University is long and comprehensive, but how transparent is the identity of the people behind them? Alastair Tulloch, the trustee of the Hill Foundation, which supports a scholarship at the University of Oxford, has managed to balance his role with running a firm that set up and manages offshore companies for sanctioned Russian officials and businessmen.

The Hill Foundation Scholarship is a programme that supports Russian nationals and residents pursuing a second bachelor's degree, full-time master's, or DPhil. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, around ten scholarships per year have been awarded to students.

The scholarship fully covers fees and also provides a grant towards living costs. It has supported 56 graduate

scholars over the past five years. One of the scholarship's eligibility criteria is that students should intend to leave the UK upon completing their degree. Whether this means that students would have to return to Russia is unclear.

One of the three named trustees of the Hill Foundation is Alastair Tulloch, a lawyer who has reportedly been involved in multiple financial schemes, such as the purchase of Whitehall flats for Igor Shuvalov, former First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia. He is also the only trustee listed in the contacts section of the Foundation's website. *Cherwell* discovered that a range of companies linked to Russian oligarchs with minimal online presence have Tulloch as one of their directors and share the address with the Hill Foundation.

University and ethical donorship

More than three years have passed since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. There have been over 40,000 civilian casualties, and 3.7 million people have been internally displaced with 6.9 million fleeing Ukraine. Many countries including the UK and US, as well as the EU, have imposed sanctions on Russian gas and oil, but also personally on individuals who support the war.

According to the register of charities, Tulloch is the oldest standing trustee for the foundation, having been appointed in May 2007. As a trustee, he is partially responsible for awarding the scholarships to the candidates

Continued on pg. 5

Cowley Branch Line to reopen, reducing travel time to London

GASPARD ROUFFIN

The Cowley Branch train line between the Oxford Rail Station and London Marylebone is set to reopen, with the first passenger trains expected in 2029. With trains every 30 minutes to London throughout the day, the new line will reduce travel time significantly for users.

The current Chiltern Railways service takes between 70 and 85 minutes, which is expected to be cut by 20 to 30 minutes without the detour through Bicester Village. Two additional stations, Oxford Cowley and Oxford Littlemore, will also be constructed, with a travel time of less than ten minutes into central Oxford.

The reopening of the Cowley Branch was made possible by a £120 million investment announced by the Labour government on Thursday, as part of a broader £500 million package to boost infrastructure and housing between Oxford and Cambridge, to create a "European Silicon Valley".

An additional £35 million has been

announced by both city and county councils, as well as local businesses and commercial research centres, such as the Ellison Institute of Technology (EIT). The EIT is set to open in 2027 and has already announced a strategic partnership with Oxford University, with its main campus being a short walk away from the new Oxford Littlemore station. Both will be designed by Lord Norman Foster, who is the architect of the Gherkin and the Millennium Bridge amongst others in London, as well as the Apple Park in California.

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves MP, stated: "This investment is a major vote of confidence in Oxford as a global hub for science and innovation and shows what can be achieved when government and world-class institutions like the Ellison Institute of Technology work together to deliver for our communities."

The "European Silicon Valley" is a government initiative aiming to create and revitalise a corridor between Oxford and Cambridge focused on dynamic tech innovation by 2035, supported by major transport, housing, and research investments.

The Cowley Branch reopening is set to boost the local economy, attracting up to £10 billion in private investments – including expanding business and science parks like ARC, OSC, and the EIT – as well as housing developments, leading to the creation of up to 10,000 jobs in the local area.

Continued on pg. 2

Vaults and Garden Cafe to close next month

OSKAR DOEPKE

crowdfunding appeal to raise £100,000.

However, the appeal only raised £17,237. As a result, the cafe, which had already faced £200,000 in legal costs, opted to reach an agreement with the PCC.

In a statement published on the crowdfunding website, Vaults and Garden wrote: "We appreciate the generosity of all 373 of you who have given help with our legal costs in our

campaign to save the cafe. Some of you have given two or even three times to help, and we appreciate your concerns for us and your wish for the cafe to stay open.

"It has become apparent to us now that we are not going to raise the £100,000 target of this campaign to help with the £200,000 of legal costs that we have already incurred ... Accordingly, we have taken the decision to reach an agreed settlement with the church

Continued on pg. 3

Merton updates welfare provisions despite lack of student consultation

CHARLIE GOLDBERG

Merton College has overhauled its welfare programme this academic year, reducing the hours of Junior Deans for Welfare, discontinuing the Associate Chaplain's book club, and replacing the famous "welfare doughnuts" with welfare cookies. Students at the College have expressed frustration at the lack of student consultation regarding these changes, with neither the Junior Common Room (JCR) committee nor the Middle Common Room (MCR) committee consulted ahead of time.

The changes to Merton's welfare provisions are outlined in the College's

Junior Handbook, with the most significant change being the reduced hours of Junior Deans. Previously, Junior Deans had been contactable both during and outside of term time, with the exception of bank holidays. However, according to the Handbook, the Deans can now only be contacted during the two weeks either side of the academic term, in addition to term time.

A spokesperson for Merton told *Cherwell* that "the College's welfare provision plays an important role in helping to create conditions in which our Junior Members can achieve and flourish, both in their academic lives and broader student experience".

Continued on pg. 4

WHAT'S INSIDE?

We must fight the Right's narrative about Oxford

OPINION – PAGE 7

How to build a ball

FEATURES – PAGE 8

Mishal Husain interviewed

PROFILES – PAGE 12

Oxford's women writers

CULTURE – PAGE 19

Why I no longer trust 'male feminists'

LIFESTYLE – PAGE 22

Cowley Branch Line to reopen, reducing travel time to London

Continued from Page 1

Oxford University Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey commented: “The Cowley Branch Line will stitch together our science parks, hospitals, and new cultural spaces so that ideas, researchers, and local residents can move more easily across our city – and out to London – every day. As Oxford accelerates initiatives like the Oxfordshire Strategic Innovation Taskforce, today’s decision is a practical step toward the inclusive, sustainable, and fair prosperity we want to see for our communities.”

The new train line will also help reduce congestion in central Oxford, and promote more sustainable means of travel.

The line currently only serves BMW Mini freight trains from the Oxford plant, and had been shut to

passenger rail service since 1963. Local Labour MP Annelise Dodds has been leading a campaign advocating for its reopening for several years, including a symbolic annual walk from Cowley to Oxford.

Dodds said: “I’m delighted that after years of campaigning for the reopening of the Cowley branch line, alongside local residents, this is finally going to become a reality! I’m grateful to everyone who has pushed for the line to be reopened for so many years.”

“The reopened branch line will make a massive difference to local residents, slashing travel times and reducing congestion. It will also open up many economic opportunities for local residents. I’m so pleased that the government has listened to Oxford today.”

Image credit: Network Rail with permission.



Oxford University ranked second on the Soft-Power Index

JOSHUA MCGILLIVRAY

More current world leaders have studied at Oxford University than at any other higher-learning institution except Harvard University, according to the latest annual Soft-Power Index published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and the educational services organisation Kaplan.

The results measure the educational soft power of different countries by counting how many monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, or similarly high-ranking government figures from other countries graduated from their higher-level education institutes. The results of the index reveal that Harvard has 15 current world leaders among its alumni, whilst Oxford has twelve.

Soft power is defined as a state’s ability to influence the foreign policy of other countries through ideas and cultural influence, rather than military pressure or force. Universities influence the soft power of countries by imparting ideas and cultural knowledge. Higher education can improve a country’s global perception and partnerships, with some international students becoming advocates for their host countries after returning home.

In response to the index, Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey said: “That so many world leaders have studied at Oxford speaks to the transformative power of education – to shape ideas, deepen understanding, and inspire service on the global stage.”

The findings also show that five of the top six global institutions for educating world leaders in the Soft-Power Index are located in the UK. The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst educated eight world leaders, the University of Manchester educated six,

the University of Cambridge educated five, and London School of Economics educated four.

In total, 59 of the 170 leaders who studied outside their home countries did so in the UK – they collectively represent over a quarter of countries across the world. These leaders include Alexander Stubb, President of Finland; Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada; Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary; Abdullah II of Jordan; and Naruhito, Emperor of Japan.

The results of the HEPI 2025 Soft-Power index suggest that the educational soft power of both the US and the UK has remained stable over the past year. In 2024, 70 current heads of state were educated in the US and 58 current heads of state were educated in the UK. However, the number educated in France has fallen from 28 to 23, whilst the number who studied in Russia has risen from 10 to 13.

The release of the 2025 Soft-Power Index follows the creation of a Soft Power Council, announced in January 2025. This is a government advisory board dedicated to promoting the UK’s economic growth and international partnerships. The Council has 26 members, including the Provost of Oriel College, Neil Mendoza CBE, and the BBC Studios CEO Tom Fussell.

Nick Hillman, the director of HEPI, welcomed both the Soft Power Council and the government’s promotion of education exports, but also said that the initiatives were “counterbalanced by the incoming levy on international students, huge dollops of negative rhetoric, and excessive visa costs.”

The Vice-Chancellor of Manchester University, Duncan Ivison, said that the UK has a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the UK the global destination for the best and brightest in the world given what is happening elsewhere”.

Crown Estate acquires 221-acre site for development in south Oxford

CHARLIE GOLDBERG

The Crown Estate, the property company that manages the British monarchy’s lands and holdings, announced last Tuesday that it had acquired a 221-acre site next to the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, about 25 kilometres south of Oxford. The Crown Estate projects the site will be worth £4.5 billion, generate 30,000 jobs nationally, and build as many as 400 homes.

The investment is being made as part of the Estate’s commitment to invest £1.5 billion into science, innovation, and technology. The Chief Executive of the Crown Estate, Dan Labbad, said: “The ambition of Harwell East is to create a space for great science to flourish.” He noted that the “acquisition marks the latest step in our journey to support the UK’s fast-growing sectors”.

The Science Minister Lord Vallance said that the “vast economic potential of the site underlines precisely why we are determined to fully unlock the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor”. The announcement follows the plans unveiled earlier this year by Chancellor Rachel Reeves for major investments in infrastructure, technology, and research in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

As a company sitting between private and public ownership, the Crown Estate sees most of its income go to the HM Treasury, and closely cooperates with government-led schemes to increase investment. Profits made by the company are partly used to fund King Charles III’s work and initiatives. Reeves’ expected announcement of £10 billion in private investment into the UK will include the Crown Estate’s Harwell East science park.

The Harwell Science and Innovation Campus was itself formed as part of

the government initiative in 2006, and has offices and laboratories for organisations working in biotech, energy, and battery systems, and both the European and UK space agencies. The announced investment would mark a major expansion of the campus, which has seen high demand for lab and office space.

The Crown Estate has other significant ongoing investments in Oxfordshire. Last year, the company became a partner in a £125 million project to transform the shuttered Debenhams store in Oxford city centre into laboratory space, alongside Oxford Science Enterprises and Pioneer Group. The Harwell East site will join the Debenhams redevelopment, the new Oxford life sciences hub, the Oxford North innovation district, and the Oxford Science Park as part of the general expansion of sciences and research funding.

Indigenous leaders demand repatriation of Oxford-held artefacts

JOSHUA MCGILLIVRAY

Delegates from the indigenous Ecuadorian Shuar people called for the repatriation of shrunken heads stored at the Pitt Rivers Museum during their visit to the UK earlier this month. The Museum houses Oxford University’s historical and archaeological collection.

The visit lasted from 5th to 12th October and was organised by Proyecto Tsantsa, a project started in 2017 by the Pitt Rivers Museum, Ecuador’s Universidad San Francisco de Quito, and several Shuar groups, including Federación Interprovincial de Centros Shuar. The project aims to foster knowledge-sharing and consideration of Shuar expertise when discussing the group’s cultural heritage.

The delegation was made up of Shuar community leaders, elders, students, and professors. They visited various sites across Britain, including the Pitt Rivers and the British Museum and offered advice about how to care for items acquired from the Shuar in a culturally sensitive way.

Most of the shrunken heads, or tsantsas, contained in the Pitt Rivers Museum were obtained from the Shuar between 1884 and 1936. During European colonisation, tsantsas

became in demand among European settlers, who often traded them for weapons. The Pitt Rivers tsantsas were removed from public view in 2020 as part of the museum’s “decolonisation process”, after an internal review found that the displays reinforced racist stereotypes.

Pitt Rivers director Professor Dr Laura Van Broekhoven noted that the tsantsas received consistent attention from visitors, telling the BBC: “People were saying ‘look how savage, how primitive, how gruesome, how disgusting’.

“The Shuar actually said, ‘that’s not what we want, we don’t want to be portrayed that way – if you’re going to put our culture on display, please involve us’.”

The Pitt Rivers Museum was founded in 1884 and contains over 500,000 pieces, more than 50,000 of which are currently on display. Shrunken heads were prized during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The site’s tsantsas were obtained from collectors like the eponymous Augustus Pitt Rivers. Displays of human remains in the Pitt Rivers were replaced by text panels that outline the problematic history behind the acquisition of such objects, and the racist theories that they were used to support.

The Shuar population is estimated

to number around 100,000 people, and they mostly live around the border separating eastern Ecuador from northern Peru. Shuars made tsantsas out of the heads of humans, sloths, and monkeys. Human tsantsas were made either to conserve the power of the souls of slain warriors or to commemorate the death of important leaders.

Other controversial items include several plaques and sculptures, collectively known as the Benin Bronzes, looted by the British Empire during the 1897 Benin Expedition. The Benin Bronzes are currently owned by the University. In response to the controversy, the Pitt Rivers Museum joined the international Benin Dialogue Group, which aims to promote and facilitate the ultimate repatriation of the Bronzes.

In 2022, Jefferson Pullaguari Acacho, a Shuar leader from Zamora said: “As Shuar, we don’t have anything against the world knowing our world, and for museums to have our souvenirs and talk about our cosmovision, our ways of living here.”

“What we ask is that museums involve us Shuar, so that it can be us who tell the stories, and we can show the world all our instruments and aspects of the attire, the tsantsas.”

Image credit: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Vaults and Garden Cafe to close next month after two-year legal battle

Continued from Page 1

which will allow for the orderly closure of the cafe before the end of the year.”

The Vaults and Garden Cafe, which employs roughly 60 people, will have been in continuous operation for 22 years before its closure next month. The cafe had partnered with events such as the Oxford Literary Festival and the Oxford Chamber Music Festival. More than 15,500 people signed an online petition to save the cafe.

The PCC had originally authorised the eviction order to “reduce energy usage, improve accessibility, enhance security, and ensure that the Grade I building is fit to welcome all visitors”. In addition, the PCC announced plans to reopen the site as a new cafe – a social enterprise offering “affordable” pricing and additional “employment opportunities for underrepresented people”.

One student frequenter told *Cherwell*: “I’m so upset that the cafe isn’t staying.”

She continued: “It was unlike other cafes in Oxford, bringing a different atmosphere than other spaces, and it will be really missed by many students and locals.”

In a joint press release, Vaults and Garden and the PCC confirmed an agreement had been reached where “all parties are happy”. The statement explained that Vaults and Garden’s parent company will continue to operate their other venues, while PCC will “carry out urgent repairs” before reopening the new cafe “in the course of the next 18 months”.

Kathleen Stock among speakers delivering Oakeshott Lectures at the Sheldonian Theatre

JOSEPH RODGERS AND
MERCEDES HAAS

Kathleen Stock, Sir Noel Malcom, John Gray, and Curtis Yarvin delivered the Oakeshott Lectures, formerly known as Scruton Lectures, in Oxford last month. The lecture series, established in 2021, states that its aims are to “keep thoughtful conservatism alive”. Previous speakers have included Peter Thiel, Douglas Murray, and Katherine Birbalsingh.

The lectures, free to attend and hosted in the Sheldonian Theatre, bring together academics, writers, and public thinkers to discuss ideas in the tradition of conservative political philosophy. A corresponding YouTube channel makes past and current lectures accessible to an online audience. The talks are not officially affiliated with the University, and the Sheldonian Theatre is rented out privately in order to host them.

The series is named after Michael Oakeshott, the conservative philosopher. Its previous name memorialised Roger Scruton, another conservative philosopher. *Conservative Home* reported that the name was changed following “a request from the Roger Scruton Legacy Foundation”. The Foundation only lists the lectures which were given under the old name on its “Events” page. It is unclear whether they continued as the organisers of the lectures following the change.

The philosopher Kathleen Stock gave a lecture about assisted dying on Monday 20th October. Introduced as an emblem of “safety in public life”, Stock’s talk was titled ‘Against the Organisation of Assisted Death’.

Stock focused on the moral question of mercy, asking whether assisted suicide is genuinely merciful in practice. She argued that, in countries where euthanasia has been legalised, the process has shifted from personalised doctor-patient relationships, where “the doctor knew the person very well”, to a more bureaucratic, impersonal system.

The former philosophy professor

challenged the eligibility criteria often emphasised in assisted death legislation: that one must have a terminal diagnosis of six months or less, be confirmed by two doctors, not be coerced, and be mentally capable. She warned that even with those safeguards, hidden forms of coercion may infiltrate the system.

Stock questioned why those whose role it is to save lives should ever be the ones deciding to end them. She also expressed a fear that in time people will feel compelled, implicitly or explicitly, to choose assisted death, especially if cost-benefit arguments or resource constraints come into play. Stock contended that the long-term costs (ethical, social, emotional) may well outweigh the benefits that are currently emphasised.

Stock’s talk proceeded without disruption, in contrast to her last public event in Oxford. Her 2023 appearance at the Oxford Union was interrupted by a protester who glued themselves to the floor, in opposition to Stock’s “gender-critical” views on transgender people.

Stock’s lecture was followed by Curtis Yarvin, who gave a lecture in support of monarchism on Wednesday 23rd October. Titled ‘The End of the End of History’, Yarvin contended that liberal democracy contained two contradictory impulses, towards meritocracy and populism respectively. The American blogger, who has been described as “the philosopher behind JD Vance”, recommended instead a “new Platonic

guardian class” to govern society, inspired by a form of “accountable monarchy” he identifies in corporate leadership structures.

The talk included an extended discussion of the “lab leak” theory for the COVID-19 pandemic. Yarvin argued that this theory, which remains contested, is evidence of the failure of “normal science”, and therefore of meritocracy. In contrast, as an argument against populism, Yarvin referenced a famous *New Yorker* cartoon which depicts an airline passenger shouting: “These smug pilots have lost touch with regular passengers like us. Who thinks I should fly the plane?”

Yarvin, widely described as “reactionary” and “alt-right”, is a controversial figure known for his incendiary statements. During the talk, Yarvin described himself as a “Trumpard”, and appeared to make a joking reference to Jamal Khashoggi, the Saudi journalist killed in Saudi Arabia’s Turkish consulate in 2018.

All talks were followed by onstage discussions. Stock was joined by the Oxford theologian and House of Lords peer, Nigel Biggar. Yarvin debated the historian David Starkey, who delivered an Oakeshott lecture in 2024. Noel Malcom was joined by Lord Dan Hannan on the subject of human rights, whilst John Gray had a discussion with History Professor Robert Tombs on the English revolutionary tradition.

Image credit: James Morrell.



Oxford United receives government approval for stadium plan



GEORGE PORTEOUS

Oxford United Football Club received final government approval of its plans for a new 16,000-capacity stadium last Wednesday, clearing the way for construction near Kidlington.

The approval came as a relief to

Oxford United, whose lease at Kassam Stadium is set to expire in June 2028. Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government, announced that he would not call the stadium plan for a further review after the Cherwell District Council approved it in August.

Oxford United chairman Grant Ferguson said: “On behalf of everyone at Oxford United, I would like to thank all of our supporters, along with the incredible project team who have been instrumental in getting us to this point.”

Oxfordshire County Council, which owns the land, agreed to the plans for the site based on several conditions and priorities. Among these, the Council called for the stadium to protect “a green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington” and develop “local employment opportunities”.

“We hope that the stadium can now go ahead as speedily as possible”, wrote Oxfordshire MPs Anneliese Dodds and Sean Woodcock on social media. “The new stadium is needed not only for the sake of Oxford United and its many fans but also for the local economy.”

Student sports enthusiasts have celebrated the decision. A spokesperson for Oxford University Association Football Club (OUAFC) told *Cherwell*: “OUAFC is thrilled about the development of the new Oxford United Football Stadium. As a university football club, we are uniquely integrated into the wider Oxford football community – with Oxford United players and coaches having long been an integral part of our own.”

OUAFC are also keen for the new stadium to be made available for student fixtures: “The prospect of access to this premier facility, particularly for our Varsity matches against Cambridge, is incredibly exciting. Last year, we were unable to host the Blues Varsity in Oxford due to the lack of suitable facilities

for back-to-back fixtures. This new development therefore represents an exciting opportunity not only to bring Varsity football back home to Oxford, but also to share this special occasion with the broader Oxford community.”

The stadium will be the first in the UK to run entirely on electricity. Its design includes 3000m² of solar panels on the roof and air source heat pumps, instead of gas boilers, to minimise carbon emissions. The plan was shortlisted for the Football Business Awards’ sustainability category in March.

Stadium construction has been planned on land known as the Triangle, south of Kidlington roundabout and east of Frieze Way. The complex will include a community centre and Radisson Blu Hotel.

The complex would enable Oxford United Women’s Football Club to regularly play at a home stadium for the first time in their history. Prior to that, licence agreement restrictions prevented Oxford United Women’s from joining the men’s team for regular play at Kassam Stadium.

Grace Bailey, an ambassador for anti-sexism football campaign Her Game Too, lent her support to the scheme in May. “This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to harmonise the training and playing operations of the club’s men’s and women’s teams”, she said.

Kidlington residents have been less enthusiastic about the development plans. Only 31% of residents voted for the plan in a 2023 poll by Kidlington Parish Council, although the poll saw a low turnout.

Image credit: Oxford United Football Club.

NEWS SHORTS

Performative Butch Contest takes place at Brasenose

The *Green Carnations*, an intersectional queer zine, hosted a Performative Butch Contest at Brasenose College. An Instagram post invited participants to “put on your Docs, denim, and thrifted suit. Grab your indie vinyl, tote, feminist literature and prepare to compete.” The four rounds of the competition were: a runway, ‘hit on a femme’, ‘fix a bike in the sexiest way possible’, and ‘butch obstacle course’.

Oxford eShine sells college pet merch

Oxford eShine, a student-run charitable organisation, has sold student-designed college pet merch. Raising money for charity, they ran pop ups selling designs of college cats and dogs, as well as tortoises and Magdalen’s deer. The design of St Annes’ black cats was particularly popular. The designs appeared on pens, kitchen sponges, tote bags, and more.

Schwarzman gate noise turned down

The access gates to the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities used to beep loudly upon scanning your bod card. The noise, to the relief of many students, has now been significantly turned down. This makes it less noticeable (and embarrassing) when access is rejected.

Culture Dep Eds locked out of office

In a humiliating moment for the publication, *Cherwell*’s Culture Deputy Editors were locked out of the Choffice last week. One of the Dep Eds hinted at foul play from previous editors, which has yet to be confirmed.

CROSS CAMPUS

KCL suspends visa of pro-Palestinian protestor

The Home Office has suspended the visa of an international relations student after his role in campus-based pro-Palestine protests led to complaints from the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism. These complaints resulted in his suspension from KCL pending an investigation, and the end of his UK visa.

Harvard student journal suspended for ‘reprehensible’ material

The board of directors of the *Harvard Salient*, a conservative student magazine, have announced that the paper will suspend operations, following the publication of controversial articles. One article included the claim that “leftism is a mental illness”, whilst another called for the university to reintroduce sex-segregated education.



Eagle and Child pub frequented by Tolkien set for refurbishment

HASAN AHMED

New plans have been unveiled by the Ellison Institute of Technology (EIT) for the renovation of The Eagle and Child, a famous Oxford pub.

The pub, once frequented by C S Lewis and J R R Tolkien, has been closed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The venue was bought by the EIT in 2023 and is set to undergo extensive work to bring it back into use. The EIT was established by the world's second-richest man Larry Ellison, co-founder of the software company Oracle.

Lewis and Tolkien were part of an informal group of writers known as 'The Inklings', who hosted regular meetings in the pub with other academics. The Rabbit Room, to the rear of the property, contains a small plaque commemorating the significance of the building.

The plans have been drawn up by world-renowned architects Foster + Partners, which has said that the "light-touch interventions" are designed to "revive and continue the legacy of the Grade II listed building". The pub dates back to 1650, and has seen patchwork updates over the centuries, many of which are set to be "retained and treated as part of the building's evolving narrative", with a "conservation-led approach".

A new dining room will also be added and the pub's third parlour room, which was an original feature of

the pub, will be reinstated, providing additional space. "The neighbouring 50 and 51 St. Giles' Street will become a cafe that serves coffee and baked goods", helping to transform The Eagle and Child into "an all-day destination".

Gerard Evenden, Head of Studio at Foster + Partners, said: "The design preserves the unique character of The Eagle and Child and respects its many layers of history."

"The scheme is stitched together by a newly landscaped garden and restored passageway between the café and the pub – new social spaces that transition effortlessly from day to night."

With an estimated completion date of 2027 for the refurbishment of the pub, the development is the latest in a number of investments in Oxford from Ellison, including a recent £890 million injection into EIT at the Oxford Science Park and a £118 million pledge to fund an Oxford vaccine research project that aims to tackle pathogenic diseases using AI.

Having founded the American software company Oracle in 1977, Ellison has amassed a fortune worth almost \$400 billion. The value of Oracle has burgeoned in the past year, as it has struck deals with companies, such as ChatGPT-producer OpenAI, to build AI infrastructure and cloud computing capacity. Ellison has positioned himself as an ally of President Trump.

Image credit: Foster + Partners.

Merton updates welfare provisions despite lack of student consultation

Continued from Page 1

Regarding the updates to the Handbook, the spokesperson added: "As usual, all students were sent a start-of-year email which detailed how members of the Welfare Team can be contacted during working hours and overnight or at weekends. Weekly emails to the student body provide details of the week's activities."

"The College offers a wide range of activities each term to support the wellbeing and welfare of its students. These naturally change on a regular basis. For example, yoga, circuits, and dog walks are all scheduled for the coming term, and new initiatives, such as writing groups, are also in the process of being added to the programme. In first week, the College offered cookies and a chat in place of doughnuts and it is intended that there will continue to be regular opportunities for our students to come together for a break. These activities supplement those being offered by the JCR and MCR Welfare Reps."

Speaking to *Cherwell*, Merton's MCR President said: "We have not been notified or consulted about any changes to events, so I am not sure

if these are long-term decisions." He added that the MCR Welfare Reps facilitate activities such as "board game exchanges and bouldering" and that they "continue to make welfare supplies available free of charge in discreet locations".

One MCR member told *Cherwell* that they were "concerned" that the MCR would be unable to provide the additional resources sufficient to accommodate the cut to Junior Dean hours, particularly for international students who commonly live in College outside of term time.

The weekly welfare doughnuts were a staple of the Merton calendar and have been replaced by cookies that are baked in-house. Speaking to *Cherwell*, a member of the JCR familiar with the doughnuts said that the confectionery – which came from local bakery Pipp & Co. – were a significant expense at £3 per doughnut, especially when only a small number of students took advantage of the weekly treat. The student added that the changes to Merton's welfare programme were "minor" and "had no effect on student wellbeing".

Merton JCR declined to comment.

Museum of Oxford to introduce entrance fees for first time in 50-year history

MATT DONNELLY

An entrance fee will be introduced at the Museum of Oxford from January 2026, ending five decades of free admission to the local history museum.

Visitors will be charged £4 for standard admission and £2 for those who are eligible for a concession ticket, with students qualifying for the reduced rate. Free access will also be retained by children under the age of five, those receiving benefits, council employees, and Oxfordshire school-trip parties.

Annually, the number of visitors to the museum has dropped substantially from 74,000 in 2021 to 55,000 in 2024. This drop resulted in a £77,000 shortfall for the city council in the past year. The council currently subsidises the museum by almost £250,000 annually, but have agreed to reduce this to £152,000.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture, said: "The Museum of Oxford has been very successful at the work it has done, as a place where the culture

and history of this city's people can be celebrated. However, we must not forget that the creation of its museum in its current format...was with an aspiration that it could be self-sustaining financially, and that has never been achieved."

The proposal faced significant opposition, with more than 650 people signing a petition to keep the museum free. Oxford West and Abingdon MP Layla Moran also firmly opposed the plans.

Marta Lomza, former community engagement officer at the museum, criticised the decision at Wednesday's council meeting. She said the proposal showed "an attitude to Oxford's residents which can only be described as contemptuous" and included "little to no evidence, poor understanding of financial modelling, editorial errors, and simply bad maths".

A council spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The charge is being used to raise funds to reduce the current subsidy that the Council gives to the Museum, from almost £250k a year to the agreed subsidy in the Council's budget of £152k

a year. This overspend by the Museum is taking away money from other potential Council services."

The museum marks its 50th anniversary this year, and houses a large number of significant Oxford artefacts. These include a Red Cross medal that belonged to Alice Liddell, who is believed to have inspired Lewis Carroll to write the Alice in Wonderland novels, as well as St Frideswide's grave slab. The Museum of Oxford underwent a £2.8 million refurbishment in 2021, tripling the size of its exhibition space.

Despite the controversy, the museum recently received news that they will receive a £227,952 award from the government's Museum Renewal Fund to support ongoing operations and marketing.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth further said the museum received only £5,000 in voluntary donations last year, far short of the quarter of a million pounds needed to run the facility. The charge will be permanent but subject to future review based on visitor numbers and income.

Inside Oxford's new Life and Mind building

ALICE RUBLI

The new Life and Mind Building, which houses the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Biology, opened last week following the closure of the previous faculty buildings in 2016.

Situated on St Cross Road, the building covers an area of 81,991m². It encompasses teaching spaces, laboratories, offices, and research facilities which will accommodate researchers, academics, support staff, and students – both undergraduate and postgraduate – when it is fully functional at the end of this year.

An official opening ceremony will take place in November with the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University.

Cherwell was invited to tour the building with Professors Martin Maiden and Matthew Rushworth, the respective Heads of Department for Biology and Experimental Psychology. They remarked that "for Oxford this is a massive teaching facility. We can simultaneously teach well over 1000 people at one time if we fill all the lecture theatres, labs, and computer rooms".

Explaining the philosophy of the building, Professor Maiden told *Cherwell*: "Life is one of the

big mysteries, and of course our consciousness about life all comes from our mind. Together, life and mind comprise two of the biggest mysteries of human existence." He added that "with the new building, the combination of our departments, we can study them under the same roof".

The Ineos Oxford Institute for Antimicrobial Research (IOI) is also housed in the new building. It's hoped that this shared space will allow researchers to investigate the fundamental issues of our age, addressing the climate crisis, mental health, and what it means to be human.

Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey said: "The Life and Mind Building isn't just a world-class facility – it's a place designed to bring people together." New research facilities will allow biologists and psychologists to work on bold new interdisciplinary projects in facilities such as sleep labs, rooftop glasshouses, and a new home for the University's herbarium, including around one million plant specimens. *Cherwell* understands that it will take approximately six months to transport all of these specimens to the new facility.

The original department buildings closed nine years ago following the discovery of asbestos, with research and teaching facilities spread across Oxford in the intervening period until

the opening of the new building.

Although the building does not house a departmental library, Professor Maiden told *Cherwell* that, for science, library space "doesn't necessarily mean having books. It means having these kinds of flexible workspaces", which are "the kind of thing that the modern undergraduate wants". Open desks are situated throughout the building, including the basement and ground floor, which are accessible to all undergraduate students, regardless of faculty.

Professor Maiden went on to say that the "design of the building" means that students can "move through the building as their career progresses, and they can use the different types of spaces" – the open desks, laboratories, and the research facilities – as they "continue their studies". He also boasted that the building has "both the best and second-best view in Oxford".

Construction of the Life and Mind building cost £200 million and began in November 2021 after planning permission was granted in January that year. The building was delivered by Oxford University Development – a £4 billion joint venture between the University and Legal and General (L&G), a financial service group and major global investor.

Image credit: David Hays.



INVESTIGATIONS

Oxford scholarship director tied to Russian shell companies

Continued from Page 1

“who demonstrate extremely high academic ability and personal and social qualities of a high order”, according to the University website.

The other two trustees are Professor John Nightingale at Magdalen College, appointed in February 2022, and Professor Catriona Kelly at New College, appointed in May 2008.

The University Freedom of Information (FOI) Officer told *Cherwell*: “We have not discovered any correspondence concerning UK sanctions against Russia and the appearance of Alistair Tulloch in the Pandora files or other investigations.”

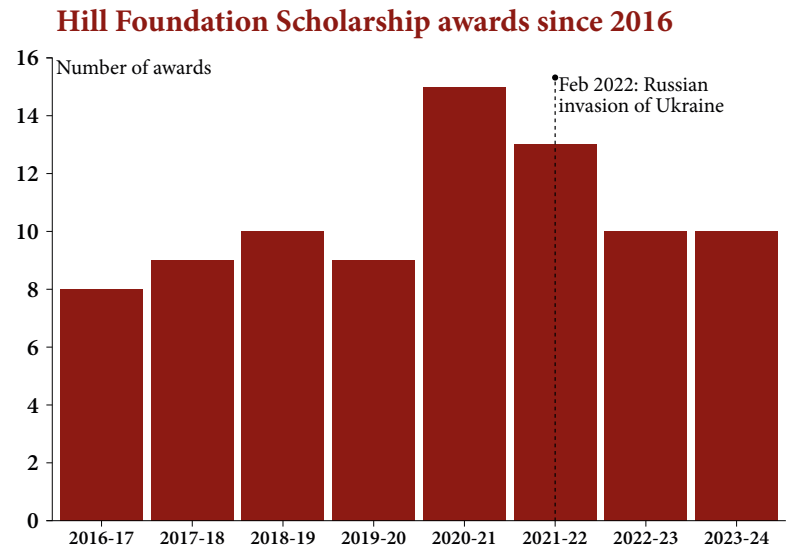
Other scholarships supporting Russian students have been under pressure since the beginning of the war. The Chevening Scholarship, a fully-funded UK government programme priding itself in supporting “emerging leaders”, was suspended for Russian residents in 2022. The decision to reinstate it for Russian students received backlash because of concerns that such education benefits Vladimir Putin’s regime.

Meanwhile, the absence of communication regarding the sanctions, as FOIs show, between the University and the Hill Foundation means the reassessment of compliance to the University’s policy on ethical donorship has not been conducted.

The paper trail highlights a strong connection between Tulloch and Russian oligarchs in London

Better call Tulloch

Tulloch is a founding partner of TGW Law, a firm focusing on corporate transactions and reorganisations, investment funds, and UK charities. TGW Law and its address frequently appear in the financial paper trail of Russian investments with links to government officials and oligarchs.



Tulloch is a director of at least 5 companies and has been a secretary or a director of more than 50 companies and charities in the past. A significant number of these companies have minimal online presence and share the same office and communications address as the Hill Foundation and Tulloch’s law firm.

TGW Law appears in a leak of over 6.4 million documents, including around 3 million images, over a million emails and almost half a million spreadsheets obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) – the Pandora Papers. These revealed numerous international networks of companies set up across borders and hiding ownership of assets.

There is an absence of communication between the University and the Hill Foundation regarding sanctions

According to the leaks, TGW Law firm assisted with the management of offshore companies for former Russian Deputy Finance Minister Andrey Vavilov who served under former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and Vitaly Zhogin, a banker wanted in Russia for alleged fraud.

His firm also structured a network of companies for Alexander Mamut, a Russian billionaire who was included in the ‘Putin List’, a US Treasury Department list of 210 Russian political and business figures, and has faced US sanctions since 2018.

Tulloch was also linked to Igor Shuvalov’s real estate purchases. Igor Shuvalov served as the First Deputy Prime Minister in both Putin’s and Medvedev’s administrations and is currently the Chair of the Russian state development corporation VEB.RF. He has been sanctioned by the US, the EU, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Ukraine since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A University spokesperson responded to the questions about Alastair Tulloch’s position in the Foundation to *Cherwell*: “All donors are subject to our policies on the acceptance of gifts, and all significant donors and funders must be approved by the University’s Committee to Review Donations and Research Funding, which is a robust, independent system taking legal, ethical, and reputational issues into consideration.”

Cosy offices in Mayfair town house

Two addresses keep appearing in the records of a number of foundations linked to Russian businessmen: 4 Hill Street and 46 Laurier Road. For over 60 companies, they are listed as either correspondence addresses or registered offices. *Cherwell* has independently verified that the buildings at those addresses appear to be small London town houses, and are unlikely to be large enough to headquarter that number of separate offices.

Tulloch’s firm TGW Law is also registered at 4 Hill Street, and so is the Hill Foundation. *Cherwell* understands that the foundation which supports the Oxford scholarship takes its name from this address.

Many of the companies of which Tulloch was a director have minimal online presence. A number of them are connected to Russian businessmen such as Alexander Mamut, Evgeny Lebedev, and Yury Milner. There is no public information regarding the identity of the donors of Hill Foundation. This absence of transparency raises many questions about the people behind the scholarship.

A humble flat for Shuvalov

Igor Shuvalov, Putin’s former Deputy Prime Minister, was the richest member of the government in 2012, according to government records, owning a house in Austria, seven cars, and a number of flats in Russia. In 2018 Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation revealed that Shuvalov used a £38 million secret private jet to fly his wife’s Corgis to the UK.

In 2018 Alexei Navalny, Russian political activist and head of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, uncovered Shuvalov’s 483m² flat worth £11.4 million in Whitehall Court, a 19th century Westminster luxury apartment block.

The records, such as applications for listed building consent, show the flat was owned by a number of different offshore companies, including Central Cove Ltd. Central Cove Ltd. also shared the address with the Hill Foundation and Tulloch’s law firm.

This, however, was not the end of Tulloch’s law firm involvement in “fixing” the housing for Shuvalov. In 2014 the flat was bought by Sovo Real Estate LLC, a company owned by Shuvalov and his wife Olga. During the registration of the company, the due diligence was conducted by none other than Tulloch & Co (now known as TGW law) and the person with overall responsibility was Alastair Tulloch.

Ex-KGB spy and Boris Johnson’s friend

Cherwell has also found that Tulloch was one of the directors of the Lebedev Foundation, before the company dissolved. However, the 14 years at Lebedev Foundation does not conclude Tulloch’s business relationship with the Russian-British businessman. Tulloch was a director of the Journalism Foundation together with Evgeny Lebedev from 2011 to 2013. Finally, Tulloch was a secretary of an obscure company, El Private Office Limited, which was directed by Evgeny Lebedev.

Evgeny Lebedev is an investor in

The Independent, and the owner of *The London Standard* (formerly the *Evening Standard*). He received life peerage from Boris Johnson, a decision which faced criticism considering Lebedev’s father, Alexander Lebedev’s past as a KGB agent.

According to the chair of the House of Lords, Lebedev’s nomination for peerage was paused after MI5 advice, but approved with a note that the appointment would be controversial. Channel 4’s documentary has alleged that government officials asked Queen Elizabeth to block Evgeny Lebedev’s peerage.

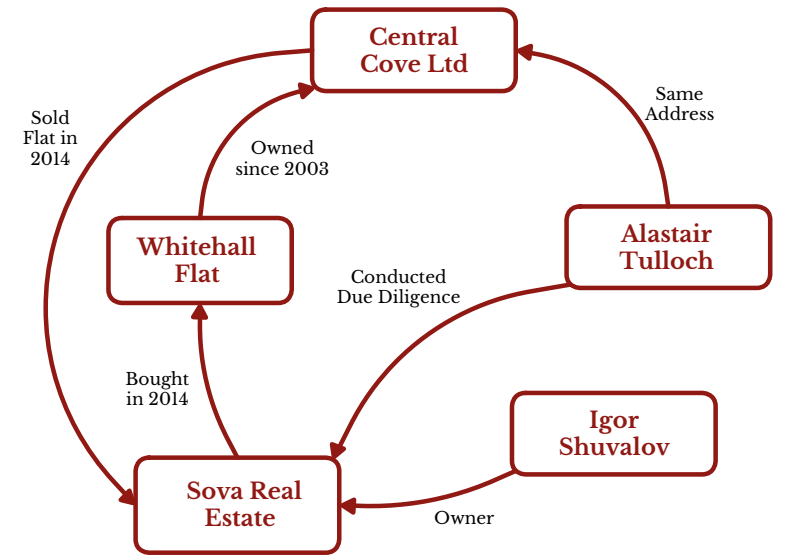
Evgeny Lebedev’s influence on the UK government and particularly

assets reflect the deeper link between Tulloch and the so-called world of ‘Londongrad’.

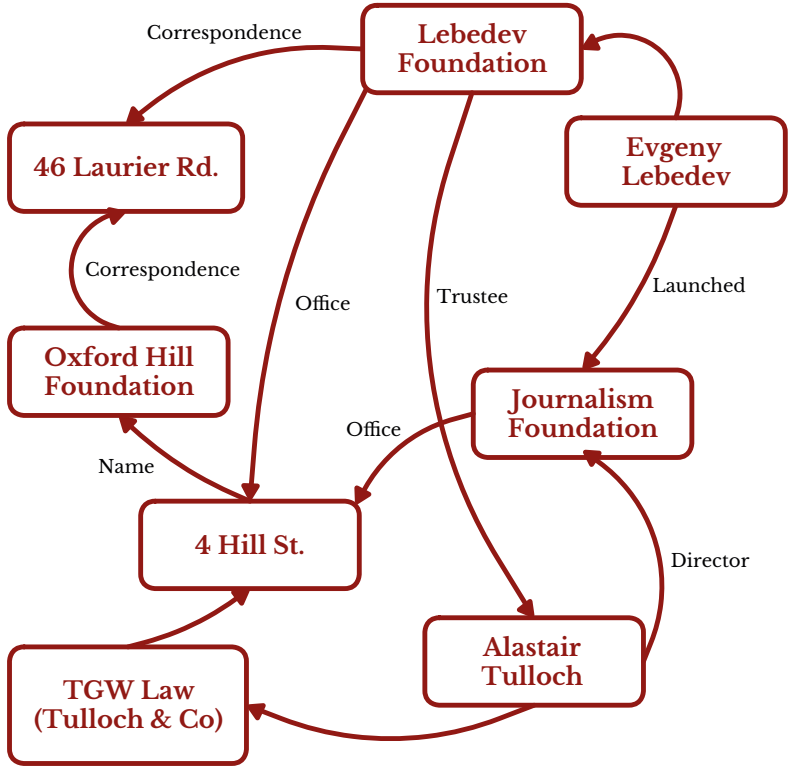
The scholarships support the education of people who, as the Hill Foundation website puts it, will “work for the betterment of Russian life and culture”. What kind of “betterment” do the trustees with links to sanctioned officials and shady businessmen have in mind? This remains unclear, as Tulloch did not respond to *Cherwell*’s comment requests.

The paper trail of a number of charities and companies leading to 4 Hill Street highlights the strong connection between Tulloch and Russian oligarchs in London. It is

The Shuvalov Network



The Lebedev Network



Boris Johnson was the subject of much concern.

Boris Johnson was criticised for meeting in private with the businessmen and his father, an ex-KGB agent. However, Lebedev himself denies there was “security risk” to the meeting. Tulloch’s professional relationship with the Lebedev family seems all-too-similar to his other relationships with Russian businessmen close to power.

Matryoshka of shell companies

Trustees of scholarships like Hill Foundation have the ultimate say in who receives the financial awards. Connections to a range of Russian officials and businessmen and a track record of his company’s involvement in setting up shell companies to conceal the identity of the owners of

unclear who the key donors for the foundation are, as neither the website nor the University is transparent about whose donation established the foundation. Whether the University will conduct a reassessment of the ethical and reputational standards following a range of investigations in Tulloch’s operations also remains unclear.

The University receiving funds from reputationally dubious donors and foundations has raised concerns in the past. *Cherwell* reported on Vladimir Potanin, Russian oligarch and Putin’s “hockey buddy”, donating \$150,000 to the Said Business School in 2017 for a fellowship.

Alastair Tulloch and the University of Oxford have been approached for comment.

Graph credits: Oscar Reynolds and Gaspard Rouffin.
Image credit: Aayan Riaz.

OPINION

The Vice-Chancellor's oration lacks a story

FINLO COWLEY

The Vice-Chancellor's annual oration certainly seems like one of those arcane procedures for which Oxford University is renowned. Professor Irene Tracey delivered her speech standing in front of a gilded throne in the Sheldonian Theatre, flanked by academics in mortar boards and suspiciously animal-like capes. Despite its out-of-date presentation, Professor Tracey's annual address to the University community matters, setting the tone for the coming academic year and sending signals to the wider public about Oxford's role in British society. A keen marathon runner, she used the tale of Pheidippides as the starting point in a speech centred on the importance of stories. The story of Oxford, according to Tracey, is one of innovation, achievement, and progress, but also of hope, truth, and kindness.

However, the oration also made plain the difficulties Tracey will face in selling this story of Oxford. It was hard to miss the glaring contradictions in her speech. Take the several thinly veiled jabs at President Donald Trump. Her pledge to "seek truth, no matter the headwinds" was surely an allusion to the academic climate in America, with the Trump administration threatening several higher-education institutions with reductions to federal spending over

what critics say are ideological grievances.

The contrast with her announcement of the new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities was stark. Stephen A Schwarzman, the businessman and philanthropist who has given the largest single gift to the University since the Renaissance, is a friend of Trump and a Republican mega-donor who gave \$40 million to Republicans during the 2024 election cycle. This "wonderful addition to our Oxford family" flies in the face of the values Professor Tracey set out in her speech.

The same disconnect is apparent in the most reported-on section of the speech, where Tracey sets out Oxford's commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Whether or not the Vice-Chancellor's assertion that "no-one is excluded if you have the smarts" was a reference to the Oxford Union's embattled President-Elect George Abaraonye as some outlets claimed, the contrast with Schwarzman, whose political beneficiary has spent much of the past year railing against such policies, is striking.

The trend continues. The Vice-Chancellor's pronouncements on freedom of speech are juxtaposed with her announcement of changes to the University's disciplinary policies, which have been opposed by a number of academics over its new 'illiberal' clauses. A commitment to harnessing the power of AI by giving all students access to ChatGPT-5 is confused by blunt messaging on its dangers. A note on "celebrating the humanities" seems like an afterthought next to the lavish praise doled out to the sciences.

One story of Oxford that went unmentioned in this year's oration is that of politics. This has been the ever-present backdrop to Professor Tracey's first years as Vice-Chancellor. From the controversy over Kathleen Stock's attendance at a Union debate in

her first year to the Gaza encampment and Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) protesters, politics has dominated the public's perception of Oxford during her tenure. Unfortunately for Professor Tracey, this has also meant that it has overshadowed much of what Oxford has done well over the past few years.

This is the real point of storytelling in Oxford – politics skews every University announcement. So ubiquitous is Oxford in the public imagination that it occupies two ends of an exaggerated spectrum. On the one hand, it is a backward institution, clinging on to its traditions (and endowments) like privileged toffs to their trust funds. On the other, a tragic symbol of a once-great British institution hijacked by radical, left-wing academics interested only in gender studies and "decolonising" curricula. It is not surprising, then, given our polarised political climate, that Professor Tracey's attempts to avoid ruffling any feathers instead expose deep contradictions.

The real shame is that, under Tracey's careful if confusing balancing act, there are some important messages that go missing. The fact that Oxford already provides a bursary equivalent to 60% of a full government maintenance grant to one in four undergraduates was news to me, as was the fact that the cost of teaching an undergraduate at Oxford is around £25,000. Whilst the recent tuition fee cap rise strikes many as unfair, students would certainly benefit from knowing the wider financial context facing universities and the generous support Oxford offers. These announcements go largely unnoticed by the student population, as the oration takes place before the majority of us have returned to Oxford.

The challenges facing the Vice-Chancellor's mission to redefine Oxford's story for a new age are formidable. It seems like the story that Professor Tracey is destined to tell might be less of a marathon, and more of a tightrope walk.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Imaginary magazine

Emily Henson's article ('Embracing AI undermines academia', Week 0) has persuaded me to run a disclaimer in my next book (which, coincidentally, is the second volume of a joint history of Oxford and Cambridge Universities) saying that no AI was used in the research or the writing. My own experiences of AI confirm Emily Henson's scepticism. One example: while staying at Queens' College, Cambridge in September 2025, I met a postgraduate student who was writing his PhD thesis on the architecture of London pubs. He told AI that he wanted to consult any specialist magazine that might have covered subjects related to the building of London pubs in Victorian times. AI duly provided the name of a magazine, gave its publication dates and listed the content of each issue exactly in line with his request. On checking, he discovered that the magazine had never existed – AI had simply invented it to fulfil his request.

Peter A Thompson, Lecturer, St John's College

It's Holyrood's fault

As a state-educated Scot, I agree with Guus Wijnne ('Outreach shouldn't stop at Hadrian's Wall', Week 0) that the lack of Scottish state-schoolers at Oxford is to be questioned. However, to blame the University for this underrepresentation is to forgive the source of the problem – the declining Scottish education system. Scotland's PISA scores have been declining since the SNP took power, and the admissions report shows just 7.7% of students achieve AAA at Advanced Higher: the lowest of any UK region. Fees and distance can be blamed for the low application rate to Oxford (1.9%, with Scotland making up 8.2% of the UK population), but what worries me is the lower offer rate (16%). The Scottish system, and issues of perception, certainly discourage applications, but the system's true failure is to not set up young Scots with the tools to succeed. Oxford's lack of Scots is a multi-faceted problem, but the blame must lie primarily at Holyrood's door.

Robert Mylne, History, University College

Stop fighting AI

'Embracing AI undermines academia' (Week 0) represents a fundamental misreading of our times. Despite Oxford becoming the first UK university to offer ChatGPT-5 to students and staff, college tutors, in my experience, have been less than enthusiastic. The devolved nature of tutorial teaching means fears of an administration-led imposition of generative AI have not materialised in practice. But perhaps that's exactly what should happen. With Britain's higher education sector in crisis, this is Oxford's moment to emerge as a flagbearer of the ethical and academically productive use of AI. We should embrace learning that integrates generative AI tools to enhance the universally adored critical thinking skills of an Oxford education. If such technology appears here to stay, why should we only be taught to avoid its perils? If mathematicians learned to use calculators, why should humanities tutors dismiss AI's pedagogical potential?

Jeremy Azzopardi, History and Politics, Teddy Hall

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

The 'S' actually stands for 'sex (none of it)' ('The 'S' in 'STEM' stands for superiority complex', Week 0).

superdupervalencia_ via *Instagram*

It makes me so thankful to be as thick as mince! ('How to survive Oxford', Week 1)

Phillip Augar via *Facebook*

Instead of complaining, I would recommend getting a job with these summer schools because they pay EXTREMELY well ('Dear summer school snobs, please pipe down', week 1).

isabel_froning via *Instagram*

Follow *Cherwell* on Instagram and Facebook and comment on our posts to see yourself in the next print!

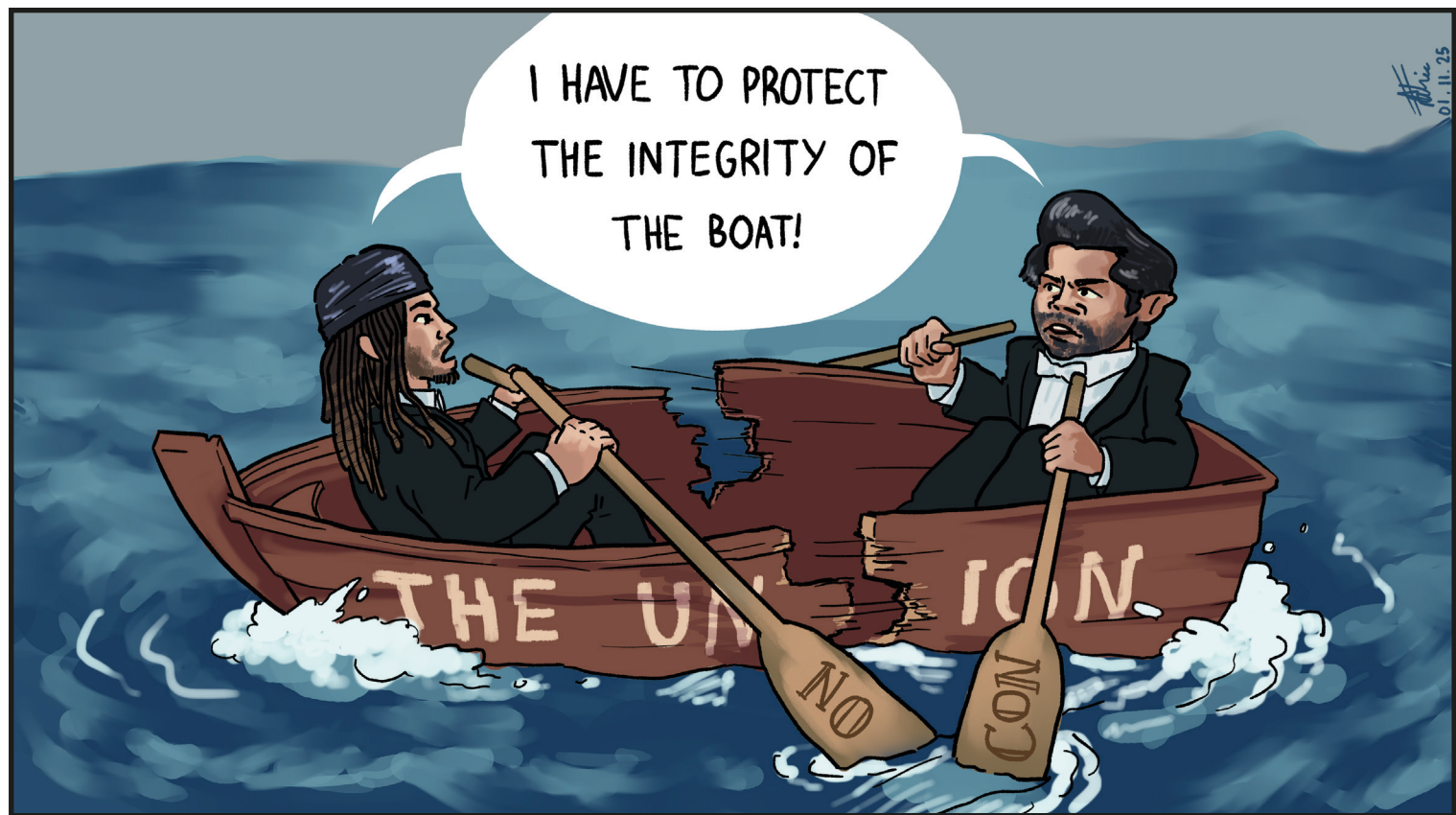


Illustration credit: 'A sinking ship' by Archie Johnston

Take it from me, there are worse things than Oxford

LAURA VAN HEIJNSBERGEN

There always seems to be plenty for people to complain about in Oxford. From late nights in libraries to crunch-time exam season, it's never hard to find people on Oxfess or overhear them on Broad Street talking about their latest woes, academic or otherwise. It's an enveloping force, a key part of being socially included: "This essay's due in an hour", "I've got a reading list the length of my arm", "a 9am every day this week". It's also something I've always felt utterly excluded from.

Growing up, my mother experienced mental health problems, which meant that she was not present in our family home from when I was ten and my brother six. I grew up with an immigrant single father who juggled caring for us on one income with full-time work, without any family to fall back on in a country that has grown increasingly hostile to immigrants. But, unlike the everyday concerns that come with doing a degree, these are not socially acceptable problems to complain about; not something people can use to relate to one another.

I do not say this to condemn people who vent their worries about academic work, or who find that being in Oxford really does cause serious distress. I know from first-hand experience how important it is

to seek help if you find yourself deeply unhappy with your life, however aspirational that life might seem to others. All the same, if Oxford does get you down, I think we could learn something from each other.

For a long time, I allowed my early life to define how I saw myself here. I thought of myself as naturally set apart, unable to take part in the rituals of waving goodbye to parents as they dropped me off at the start of term, looking forward to calls from home, and visiting in the vac. Doing laundry one night, staring at the row of washing machines spinning in perfect unison, I realised the opposite is true. I am a person in the world, just like anyone else. Perhaps my experiences are not a handicap, but a help.

When I sit down to Teddy Hall's "ming" dinners every night, I know how to appreciate the guarantee of a meal that's been cooked for me. When I get back to my room in the evening and turn the heating up, I know what a luxury it is to be sure I can do this, not just for that night, but every night. And when there are bad moments (and there are), I face it. I sign up to help the freshers move in, and when I look for the jealousy I think I should feel at the family relationships I see, it's only vestigial. I make myself join in conversations when the topic turns to home and family. I remind myself that there are a million

things I have that others don't.

I think I've been coasting on other people's happiness for a long time now. It's part of why I felt I ought to write this – everyone who has ever made some passing joke or shown some heartfelt nostalgia for their childhood in front of me has helped me to see that there are always ways to catch up on happiness, and to appreciate seeing it in others. This is my odd way of returning the favour – of saying that, if you feel things are tough for you here, try to hold on to the little moments that remind you how lucky you are to be here.

Go cycling down Broad Street with the sun in your face and the wind in your hair and that interminable pile of books in the basket. Volunteer, if you can, in your local community and see how possible it is to make a difference in the world. If there's something you want that you think you can't have, some unreachable point you're always striving for, take little steps. Now, at the start of my final year, it's difficult to imagine having regrets about being at Oxford, whatever it might bring. The sort of perfectionism that gets to so many people here, I've found, only becomes grating when it's exclusively turned inwards. I might never be a great painter, but the museum is as open to me as anyone else.

Statute XI is about power, not protection

The changes to the University’s student discipline policies do more harm than good

SAHANA NARAYAN

Maybe it’s the American in me but when I think of an investigation, or at the very least an arrest, my mind flashes to the Miranda Rights. I’m sure you can think of a scene in a movie or TV show – “You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.” It’s a famous script, one that we could all probably parrot, and I’ve perhaps naively believed the same right existed here. There does not exist a true equivalent in England, as “police caution” suggests that staying silent, though one may choose to do so, can harm your defence. Looking into the new Statute XI policies, which deal with student misconduct and discipline in the 2025/2026 Oxford Student Handbook, this pattern is echoed here: “You have the right to not answer any question, but such silence will be taken into consideration in any subsequent disciplinary hearing.”

Talk about damning. Or, at the very least, confusing. Regardless, this is just one aspect of the Statute XI changes instituted by the University. Others include newly established jurisdiction for the University to conduct independent investigations – without having to wait for the police to conclude its own investigation first – if there is belief that misconduct has occurred or an individual is “likely” to cause harm. At first glance, these changes may be a push towards greater accountability, but in truth, they blur the line between protection and punishment, instead encouraging an overreach of institutional power. I

Research published in 2023 suggests that over half of Oxford students experienced some form of sexual harassment or misconduct within a single year. This is a massive issue. The University knows this: there exists a dedicated research study, OUR SPACE, to investigate the numbers, experiences, and impacts of sexual misconduct and harassment on campus. The Office of Students (OfS) is even running a 2025 local parallel survey to the National Student Survey (NSS) on sexual misconduct, and an independent research agency is overseeing the data collection and governance. These are serious efforts to create accountability and change and I commend their prioritisation of safety, privacy, and anonymity.

But it’s no longer just about data collection and survey design. By expanding Statute XI, institutional power is now imbued with quasi-judicial power – leaving a system that can be unchecked, unbalanced, and unaccountable. Universities were never supposed to function as courts, and doing so runs the risk of turning justice into an arbitrary process.

Currently, the updates to Statute XI suggest that any alleged breach in conduct will be investigated by the Proctor’s Office, who hold the power to summon individuals, interview, gather evidence, and call upon witnesses as needed. Proctors act like officers, and misconduct can thus be defined as academic or non-academic in nature. Escalations to this protocol would then be taken to either the Proctors’ Disciplinary Hearing (PDH) or to the

Student Disciplinary Panel (SDP), with PDH hearings only occurring if the student consents. The policy states that in “serious cases”, PDH options will not be offered, and instead, the Proctor investigation will be escalated directly to the SDP.

Proctors also have the wherewithal to impose “precautionary measures” on students during an ongoing investigation, such as preventing someone

These new powers set the precedent that proctors can take measures against students, not on the basis of what they have done, but what they *might* do

from entering a specific building. Whilst those who have restrictions placed on them can appeal, these new powers set the worrying precedent that proctors can take measures against students, not on the basis of what they have done, but what they *might* do.

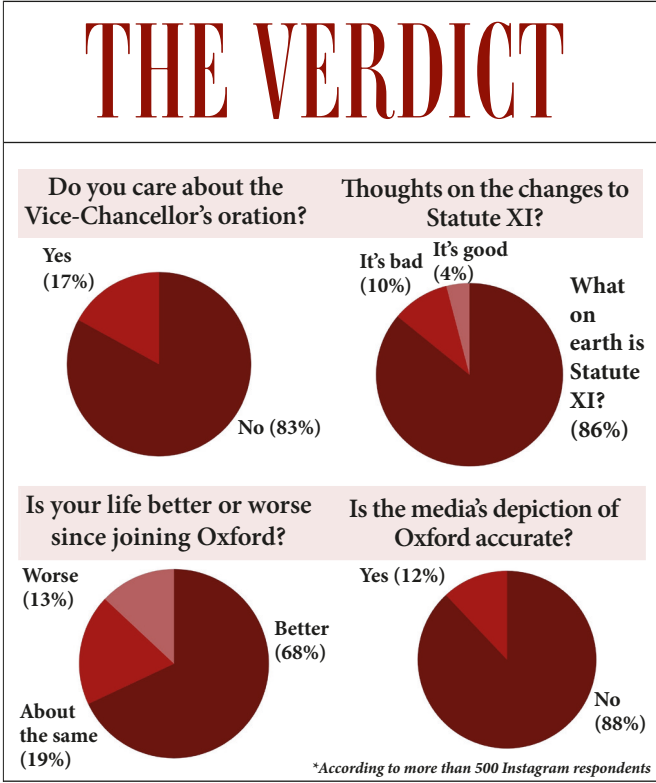
On what grounds can the University determine if someone is “likely” to cause harm? Or that certain precautionary measures are necessary? What kind of hops, skips, and jumps does someone need to make to arrive at such an assessment? Can you really tell me this is some sort of objective science?

This notion of “likelihood of harm” can only lead to one thing: subjective bias. Disparities in disciplinary action do exist, and the data shows that this type of bias can disproportionately affect black students.

Masquerading as a judicial system, too, does little to help the University handle its sexual misconduct problem. This results in some being considered as worthy of protection and others being labelled as a threat. Encouraging this type of judicial overreach begs the question: will students now have to self-censor for fear of being perceived as “likely” to cause harm?

Murky investigation procedures in the name of justice have already shown to be ineffective at Cambridge, where new procedures for sexual misconduct were to follow civil (“balance of probabilities”) as opposed to criminal (“beyond a reasonable doubt”) standards of proof. But there is no definitive approach to these “investigations”, ranging from email exchanges to actual evidence-gathering pursuits.

Though these Statute XI updates may have been intended to increase accountability and safety – and perhaps even protect victims from potentially retraumatising police investigation procedures – the University is now at a concerning crossroads. Safety becomes more about compliance, rather than community, wellbeing, and genuine support, with little



FEATURES

How to build a ball: The trials, tribulations, and financial headaches of ball committees



MAIR ANDREWS

College balls are at the heart of the Oxford social calendar. But with mounting costs, expectations, and pressure, from students and leadership alike, are JCR ball committees being set up to fail?

Students have begun reaching out to Oxfess to solve the annual dilemma: which colleges are hosting balls, and which are the best to go to?

Within weeks of unpacking in Michaelmas, inboxes fill with calls for committee applications, while tickets for launch parties are more sought-after than a last-minute Park End code. But there is more to a ball than the glamorous logo on the Instagram account – they put the college’s relationship with their students under a microscope. From proposal to realisation, the inner workings of a ball define the student experience beyond that one night, with college patriotism following you from the first stash drop to your visits after graduation. It’s no surprise that students want to know how to make the most out of their Trinity, but that decision may very well not be yours, as the future for Oxford balls looks to change.

A ball, let alone a worthwhile one, is no guarantee. I myself know how unstable ball planning can be: last year I was on the committee for a ball that never happened. Complications with a bursar handover meant that the 2025 Keble Ball proposal was rejected twice, even after St Catherine’s College bursar volunteered to take all liability for a joint ball.

The anticipation around a college ball is part of its magic – it is the event of the year,

and a brilliant way to celebrate the college community. But this anticipation creates huge pressure, particularly for the ball committee. Thrown in at the deep end, with budget proposals and production companies to book alongside very busy degrees, how do these committees actually make it to the first drink?

The secret: it’s all about the bursar.

Before we begin

What’s in a ball? According to the Student Union’s guide, an Oxford ball is a must-do bucket-list activity. Most colleges host one every one to three years, inviting current students, alumni, and often guests. The evening is organised by students who first plan a theme, then embellish with food vendors, drinks, musical entertainment, and other activities. Anticipation for a ball builds from Michaelmas to Trinity – the event is announced, tickets are sold, and then black-tie wear is bought. College balls are a great way to celebrate your college community, combining both MCR and JCR, and for the college to foster connections with past students. For students, it’s a fab night out, and you can even work for some of it to get subsidised tickets. This is the legacy of the Oxford ball tradition, but there is more to a ball than an Instagram post.

A ball must be chosen wisely. It’s not just about who the headlining act is or how watered

down those cocktails are. Oxford balls are a unique phenomenon, in that they are entirely held up by goodwill between the members of a college and its Governing Body, meaning that wealth, reputation, and other behavioural issues in college, are also factors influencing decisions made. Getting from the first committee meeting to the survivor’s breakfast is a complicated, stressful process – I’ve broken it down into a few not-so-easy steps.

Step one: Manage your (college’s) budget

The average budget of a college ball, calculated from various FOIs, is £250,000. Despite this cost, it is rare that any college is financially affected by them. They are mainly non-profit, self-funding business operations run entirely on ticket sales. Yet the wealth of a college still hugely impacts the budget, scale, and success of a ball, so that rich colleges know best how to look after their students.

Wealthier colleges tend to have the best relationships with their alumni. The more benefits a college can give to alumni, the more likely they are to receive donations. The success of a ball is therefore not just a promise for alumni, but a commitment to current students for what they can expect when they graduate. A spokesperson

for New College told *Cherwell* that the purpose of a ball is “conviviality” and to hold a “memorable event”, while St John’s College bursar described it as a “unique and shared experience to celebrate students’ time in Oxford”.

There is a more practical significance to accommodating undergraduate, postgraduate, and past students in a single event – the relationship between each class of ticket is integral to the success of the ball. Tickets for current students, particularly access tickets, are subsidised by a premium on alumni sales. As a result, richer colleges can offer more to their alumni, take in more in donations, and have better-subsidised tickets for current students, creating a virtuous cycle for when those students graduate.

Furthermore, while a college’s wealth has no direct impact on the funding of the ball, it may impact how invested the college is in ensuring its success. If appeasing students of past and future is a large part of your endowments and funding, you care a lot more about guaranteeing a good night.

Step two: Choose your bursar

Once you have your ball (provisionally) approved, you must get to the planning. But the budget of the ball is not the only factor monitoring its scale: the involvement of the bursar is paramount.

The balls with the strongest rapports with their bursars, according to testimonies from students and bursars individually, are Merton Winter Ball and St John’s Trinity Ball. Coincidentally, these are the balls with the highest budgets of those who responded to *Cherwell’s* survey. In previous years, the bursars from St Hilda’s College and Mansfield College took little involvement in the production of the ball beyond their legal requirements.

In my many emails to colleges across the city, it was notable that the wealth of the college correlated with the amount of characters utilised in their response. Call it networking or saving face, wealthier colleges were much more open about the entire process of organising a ball.

Iris Burke, Bursary Manager for St John’s, explained that professional staff have taken on more responsibilities for the ball. This was to help “from a risk management perspective and to ensure valuable learnings and experience get passed on to the next cohort of students”. Their domestic bursar and another Governing Body Fellow are on the organising committee for the college ball, liaising closely with the student volunteers.

A good bursar with a good heart builds a good ball. Harmohinder Bahl, the current Home Bursar for Worcester College, has made his role integral to the Oxford three-year memory cycle

Since the COVID-19 restrictions on events in 2020 resulted in many cancellations, the role of college staff in upholding the institutional memory of college balls has been increased. Usually, the handovers between ball presidents, along with students’ own experiences of previous balls, preserve a college’s own traditions. However, with the cancellation of balls from 2020 onwards, and the difficulties in getting them started again, there’s a break in the chain on the student sides. Previous ball presidents may have graduated or dropped out, and few students left in college remember the pre-2020 balls. The expertise of college staff, therefore, has become increasingly important.

A good bursar with a good heart builds a good ball. Harmohinder Bahl, the current Home Bursar for Worcester College, has made his role integral to the Oxford three-year memory cycle. Over lunch or coffee in the college hall, he initiates meetings between the previous and upcoming ball committee members to help provide advice and bounce ideas off of them. Beyond his personal involvement, he has established a tradition of providing a “lessons learned” document to the committee one month after the ball, once the euphoria has waned, to compile advice for future iterations.

When we spoke, he emphasised that there is no tension or hierarchy in the bursar’s involvement with the ball: he sees it as him explaining the experience and sharing his expertise. “I would deliver the ball, but it would be commercial, not for the students.” It is paramount to him that the ball is a collaboration; this is a level of trust that was demonstrated in 2021 when he took on the responsibilities of the outgoing bursar’s ball committee. I asked why he felt comfortable doing so – other balls have been cancelled due to changes in bursar, as I experienced with last year’s aborted Keble ball. Bahl simply said that he “felt confident in the student organisation”.

This level of college involvement in the planning of a ball has changed since the cancellation of the 2020-2021 balls: Mansfield College now position their bursar onsite throughout the ball to respond to any issues arising that evening. This role, however, is still entirely focused on the legal requirements and implications, whereas Bahl’s personal trust and confidence is well placed. When I contacted him for a comment request, he asked to call instead so that I could ask as many questions as I liked. A bursar ought to have confidence and involvement in the student committee.

Step three: Get to know the JCR

Across all colleges, one thing is unchanging: the ball is a student-run operation. The bursar represents the college and Governing Body, but it



is the ‘Ball Committee’ who must first approach the Governing Body with a proposal. Each college’s Governing Body comprises of Fellows, many of whom hold University posts. Colleges are hesitant to guarantee a ball outright, but many make reference to a “standing order” in their JCR handbooks which guides the JCR in creating an application to present to the college. This subsection of a handbook is the closest thing that colleges offer in lieu of an instruction manual: they include the standard procedures of how often the college hosts a ball, what a proposal should include, and what a committee should look like.

So, if you want in on the ball, it seems that you best befriend the JCR committee. In some rather lacklustre responses to my emails, most college bursars declared that they have no involvement with the ball selection process and that it is entirely organised by the JCR. St Hilda’s College Ball is “wholly dependent” on the JCR petition and election of a committee, and the Balliol College JCR leads the selection process. Worcester College were the only ones who mentioned an interview process with the Governing Body for roles such as president and treasurer, while only Merton College specified the involvement of the MCR in the proposal for a ball.

Regardless as to how much support the college offers to their ball committee after the confirmation of the ball, the proposal and instigation is a student initiative. Each college can adjust their level of involvement at any point in its development, but Bahl’s “confidence in the student organisation” was echoed by other bursars such as David Palfreyman at New College, who told *Cherwell* that in his 40 years as bursar he has experienced “no disasters organisationally or financially – students can organise very effectively!”. Of the 15 colleges who responded, none other than Keble have a record of a rejected ball proposal.

Step four: Pick your poison, or rather, production

Balls are a competitive business. Restrictions on events during exam season means that there are limited dates that colleges can host. While most colleges sell out their own students’ tickets, the inflation on guest tickets is how many break even. There is obviously a market for guest tickets: balls occur in three-year cycles so students often attend other college balls in the years between their own. When tickets are at such a premium, it isn’t just a struggle to make your ball more appealing, it’s difficult to book production companies.

The staple entertainment events for Oxford balls range from musical headliners to bumper cars and swings, while certain refreshment stalls offer sponsorship. When multiple ball committees are targeting the same providers, it is a race to sign contracts before they get double-

booked for the same day.

The extent to which balls are conceptualised and developed by students worsens this issue. Once you sign up to a ball committee, you realise that it is an echo chamber of all other balls ever held: whether you are drowning in handover documents, comparing notes with other colleges, or looking at previous celebrations, the names of the same production companies and caterers begin to feel like a threat.

Still, this is not an issue separate to the college’s involvement: budgets are built from the supplier’s quotes, but they may be booked out by the time the Governing Body approves the proposal.

These costs are not insignificant either: both catering and production occupy a third each of the average ball budget. Once themes are announced, Oxfess will resurface to ask the masses who the predicted headliner for each college is. Despite being the centre of many students’ concerns on which ball to attend, entertainment (both musical and non-musical) never takes up more than a quarter of the budget.

Once you sign up to a ball committee, it becomes an echo chamber of all other balls ever held. Comparing notes with other colleges, the names of the same production companies and caterers begin to feel like a threat

Top tip: Get them before they are gone

The future of college balls is changing. Last year, *Cherwell* investigated the ways in which colleges invest their endowment wealth into student life. Of course, subsidising accommodation and offering study grants are more essential to student life than a college ball is, but the investigation revealed that the relationship between college spending and student welfare changed after the 2020 lockdown. *Cherwell* found that “colleges have increasingly adopted protective financial policies that place the possible needs of future students above the real needs of current students”. A college ball is still an investment in students because it fosters good relationships with their alumni, who will likely fund future balls through

ticket sales or donate directly to the college. It is therefore no surprise that the wealthier colleges have more regular balls with larger budgets: the involvement of a bursar indicates whether or not the college is invested or detached from student life.

It will be notable in future years to see which colleges adapt to the changing needs and expectations of students regarding the provision of an Oxford ball. Since 2020, balls have changed structure in multiple ways. Many colleges now have increased the role of the bursar to ensure financial stability, but the cost of living has affected budgets too. The production costs for Exeter Ball, including the transport of equipment and energy costs for the evening, for Exeter Ball jumped from 27% of their 2019 budget to 38% of their 2022 ball.

But some of these changes don’t just reflect the state of the nation but a changing perspective on these celebrations. Worcester College first implemented noise regulations in 2023 after a series of complaints, spending around £4,000 on combating that alone. Bahl explained that this was simply a courtesy: they believe in “One Worcester”, which encompasses all students at any level of their degree, staff, and also local residents, given that the college is in such a central area. The individualism of each ball created by the strong sense of college identity required to advertise it does not separate it from its local area.

As the budget for a ball is increasingly unsteady due to cost of living and efforts to ensure the sustainability of a ball, the overall provision of a ball may itself be changing. Bahl explained that even though students are becoming more interested in headliners than food, production costs still require the hiring and energy costs of catering throughout the evening, and their increase means that a single night may become an unsustainable endeavour. When I asked him what he saw in the future for Oxford balls, he said that there would likely be more joint balls between friendly colleges, or that balls would adapt a structure like Wadstock, the annual 12-hour music event hosted by Wadham. I asked him whether he thought that the increase of events like Catz Gala, a black-tie ball substitute hosted at the Town Hall, would affect people’s willingness to pay the increasing prices for balls. He believed that people would never stop attending their college balls, but the balls will need to up their game if they want to continue to have the legacy that they have built over the past years, and that sort of level-up would require compassion and understanding from a bursar rather than just a student committee. If not? “You can always get the train to Cambridge”.

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

Image credits: Queen’s Ball, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons [Left] and Cantab 12, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons [Right].

Study influencers and Oxford: Rose-tinted computer screens

Study influencers present an idealised version of Oxford that appears to exclude sleep. In an increasingly unstable job market, are their strict study routines comforting, or insecurity-fuelling?

ANGELINA WU

Searching ‘Oxford’ on YouTube brings up what you might expect. One thumbnail invites the viewer to “Study With Me”, the title superimposed over the Radcliffe Camera. Another recounts “a week in my life at Oxford”, complete with “dorm tour, high table dinner, [and] studying”. The status of Oxford online is almost mythological. Polished lawns and gothic spires have brought the University from a solely academic arena to an idol of dark academia aesthetics. Study influencers have eagerly engaged in this reverence, and have not halted at distant adoration. Most popular are a slightly different type of videos: “How I got my offer”.

The popularity of study influencers reflects a generation concerned about work prospects and looking for some stability. Short-form videos bragging about UCAS results respond to contemporary anxieties about the precarious job markets. They mirror popular perceptions of Oxford not just as a place of learning, but an antique idol of security. At a time when the future of work is increasingly unclear, the rigid routines of study influencers provide some ritualistic certainty. The rise of study influencers seem to emerge between the two intersections of work-market anxiety and academic fetishism.

However, the lives these influencers present, and the version of Oxford that they create, are beyond idealised. Waking up at 5am, taking no breaks while studying, and maintaining a constant posting schedule are beyond almost anyone’s abilities. For pre-uni viewers, study influencers seem to suggest that Oxford provides a perfect study routine the same way it does accommodation. But for Oxford students, the videos about their own university can end up fuelling even more anxiety.

The rise of the study influencer

Study influencers have been a mainstay of social media, with informality and relatability some of their main attractions. Like many online spaces, the isolation of COVID exploded the study influencers out of their niche corner of social media. The companionship offered by study influencers became doubly comforting with the social alienation forced upon students by the pandemic, particularly with schools and universities closed, and exam results uncertain. Live, multi-hour study livestreams on YouTube and TikTok became a psychological anchor for many students at home. Unlike the 2010s StudyTube creators, pandemic-era study influencers appealed mainly to companionship, not aspirational performance. As the pandemic faded away, the COVID-era casual intimacy of the study influencer swung in the opposite direction.

Economic instability during COVID revealed uncertainty in the job market, changing the way people work, and increasing remote work at a

Cai is unable to control how his viewers actually perceive his content, whether they’re drawn in by genuine human engagement, or merely the aesthetics and status of universities

time where in-person positions are increasingly scarce. AI as a competitor to humans has become a major concern, particularly for entry-level jobs. 2023 represented one of the worst years for the banking sector since the 2007-2008 financial crisis. The *Financial Times* recorded over 62,000 job cuts across major banking companies such as UBS, Wells Fargo, and Morgan Stanley. In an increasingly difficult market for graduates, top institutions like Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard can provide certainty to those looking at university.

Study influencers became sources of reassurance, highlighting that academic strength was the solution to professional insecurity. It seems that the raw companionship of pandemic study influencers

has vanished. Their content has returned to tours of ‘elite’ universities and intensely disciplined daily routines, capitalising on young people’s dependency on secure institutions.

The myth of Oxford

In the study influencer world, Oxford is such a draw that creators can capitalise despite not actually studying at the University. David Cai can be seen as a representative of the contemporary era. His Instagram account boasts 108,000 followers, and he has 27,700 followers on TikTok. He has been posting study content since the beginning of sixth form. His Instagram reel on receiving his Oxford offer was reposted by the Oxford University Instagram page. However, Cai is a first-year student at UCL. He missed his Oxford offer. Up until his recent entrance into university, his content focused mainly on sharing his own sixth form experience through tips and advice.

Some of his projects seem to lean towards an authoritative stance. In September 2025, Cai held paid webinar sessions with the title ‘Oxbridge Application: Everything You Need to Know’, offering “every little trick that helped us get our offers”. The intention is admirable; Cai’s description talks of increasing accessibility about information surrounding the applications. At the same time, it is hard to ignore that this authority comes from only two sources of credibility: an Oxford offer, and posting study content. Merely by making videos on the topic, Cai has transcended from a fellow student passing around helpful study experience, to a gospel of university admissions – an Oxford idol in himself.

There is an element of blindness from the study influencer’s perspective – Cai acknowledges that he has no concept of the tangible impact he has on his audience, stating that from his side, his viewers are merely “numbers”. No matter what he says about accessibility and genuine human engagement, he is unable to control how his viewers actually perceive his content. His viewers might be drawn in by study tips and authority. But it might merely be the aesthetics and status of universities Cai has come to embody.

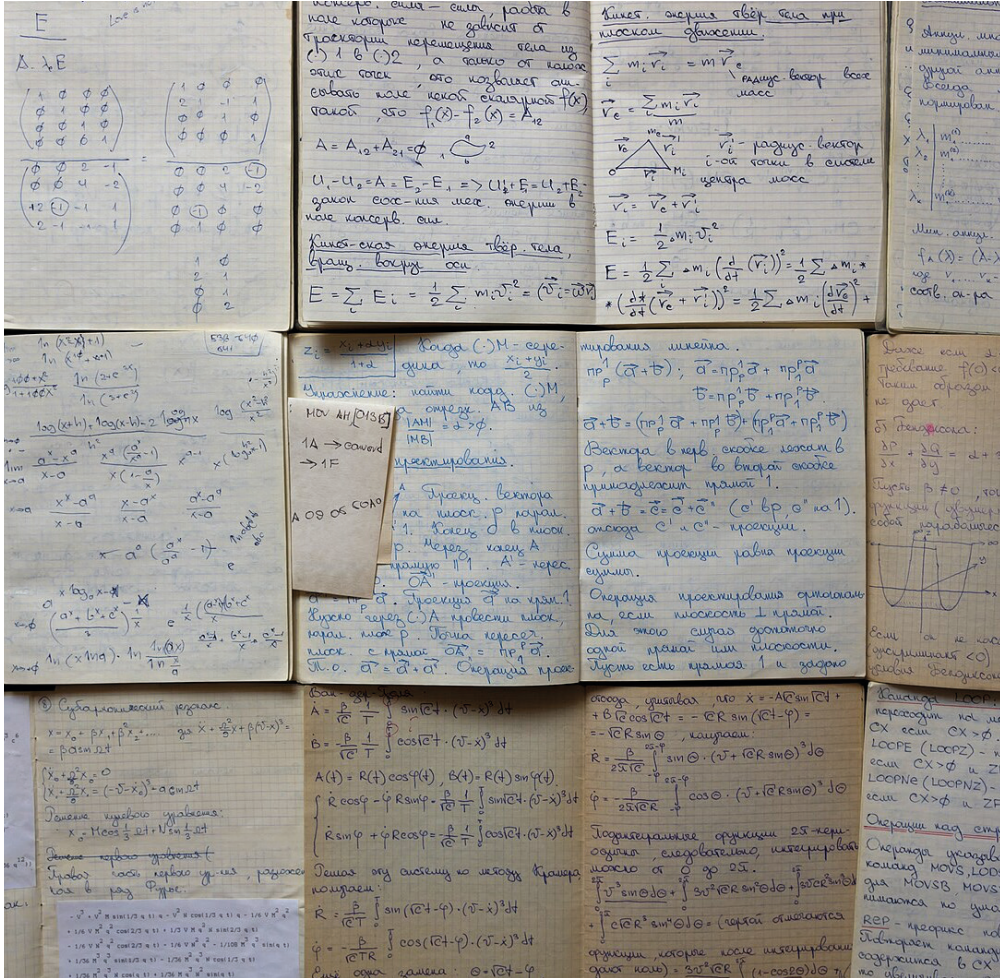
The content he creates is equally for himself: Cai admits that the work that performs the best is when he is “talking to myself”. Content creation is a sort of therapeutic, self-assuring process for Cai. Despite his extraordinary success in his admissions journey, he is ultimately just another student. By his own words, Cai’s motivation in his content was to reassure other sixth form students that he’s “struggling as well”: his intention is one of relatability. Yet through the title of study influencer, as well as his Oxford offer, he has become perceived as a figure of authority.

Even as part of one of the ‘stable’ institutions, Oxford students are not immune to job anxieties. Terms are packed with essays and working a job is banned, so hopes of employment seem to rest on the vacation periods. Instead of sustained employment, most Oxford students’ main exposure to the job market will be through spring weeks and summer internships, notoriously competitive and incredibly opaque. To drudge through the specialised application process of each individual company is a ruthless task alongside the frenetic workload of the Oxford student.

Often, it’s difficult to know what you are doing wrong. Was it the application, the grades, the extra-curriculars – or did you simply not know the right person? The study influencer provides some hope here. Their polished ‘day in the life as an Oxford student’ advertises that academic rigour translates into stable prospects. But there is a bitter contradiction that, whilst Oxford students may be realising the limits of their university, the same prestigious name draws in viewers for the study influencer. In a city that practically breathes imposter syndrome, study influencers are a constant reminder that you could be doing more. With their perfect study locations, immaculate morning routines, and superhuman work ethic, they seem like ‘real’ Oxford students. But this is nothing but detrimental for those who work differently, and idealises overworking.

Reassurance or insecurity?

I spoke to one first-year student at Oxford, whose immediate reaction to ‘study with me’ short videos was to “scroll past that”. On one hand, this distaste stemmed from an awareness of artifice.



There is a reductive sense in the medium of study influencer content, where engaging in addictive reel-scrolling is undeniably detrimental to studying. Yet the authority of the study influencer seems to persuade the viewer that scrolling is somehow productive

Post-COVID, the oversaturated arena of study influencers means intense competition with one another to wake up the earliest, to study the longest for the most continuous period. Mia Yilin’s ‘4am Stanford Student Morning Routine’ is commonplace amongst a sea of supposedly early risers. Whilst it is unfair to accuse all study influencers of portraying a false image online to promote their content, the student argued that these routines were unsustainable, and unproductive to their own motivation.

On the other hand, despite acknowledging the unrealistic nature of extremist routines, he accepted that the main reason for avoidance was guilt. There is something ironic about viewing study content on Instagram and TikTok – these platforms are primarily a medium of guilty procrastination. Study influencers only seem to exacerbate this guilt, as their curated snippets of perfections become reminders of academic inadequacy. During the A-Level revision period, which Cai characterised as a time of constantly worrying that “what you’ve done is not enough”, the study influencer’s videos fuelled only stress, rather than competition. A half-minute video from a dubious source undermines all the reassurance of an Oxford offer and personal academic success.

The short video format has exacerbated all of this. Speaking to *Cherwell* about his two main platforms, Instagram and TikTok, Cai is clear that

he disagrees with the short video format: “Social media is a terrible thing ... it is terribly addictive”, especially to sixth-form students vulnerable to stress and distractions. Similar to the sentiment of guilty procrastination, there is a reductive contradiction in the medium of study influencer content. Engaging in addictive reel-scrolling is undeniably detrimental to studying, yet the authority of the study influencer seems to persuade the viewer that scrolling is somehow productive.

The curt nature of short videos means that the information conveyed is brief and simplistic: advice becomes imperative, where an Instagram reel on the Pomodoro technique declares it to be the only method of effective study. Without engaging in the actual advice being conveyed through short videos, the medium itself is damagingly addictive. Even if you study ‘correctly’, the constant comparison and the unsustainable study habits impressed by ‘study with me at Oxford University’ videos are equally insecurity-fuelling. Even as a then prospective student at Oxford, the student I spoke to described the “shame spiral” this drove him into.

From the study influencer’s perspective, Cai states that the algorithm is a “difficult one to cater to”; to balance genuine personal content with content that performs well is a struggle. The equal desires to perform well online, and to provide the most genuine personal stories thus compete within the study influencer. For both viewer and creator, the short-form video medium can often be a source of distress.

The more accessible Oxford is online, the more distant it becomes. Antiquity and prestige establishes Oxford as a stabilising symbol. Oxford is desired for its aesthetic glamour and the job security it seems to promise. The study influencer, in the present day, reflects an anxiety-fuelled fetishism of established institutions, and presents ‘foolproof’ ways to get good grades.

Besides the intentions of individual influencers, the perception of study influencers by their viewers is one of stressful competition. The viewer engages in addictive, superficially comforting reels, well aware that they should be studying, while the creator, for all their good intentions, loses any pretence of nuance in short video formats, leading to the impression of unsustainable study habits. The study influencer, and the Oxford study influencer in particular, is a paradox: when you’re on the outside, they give you a way in. But once you’re in, they might make you feel like you shouldn’t be.

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Cherwell

MT25

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John Evelyn

Maybe this House should go to therapy. The confidence issues you've all shown over the past fortnight are scaring me.

The issues seemed to begin with the Mad King, now (potentially) de-throned. The Mad King fell to the Grape Lord, with his Death Star, a weapon with the strength of fifty bajillion proxy votes. The Grape Lord then used this mob to bat off the student body, ensuring his security as our benevolent dictator. Moreover, word on the street is that the Extraordinarily Really Oscitant still hasn't had a nap.

The legitimacy of the proxy votes is obviously not questionable. No tribunal should ever go against Benazir's Mate's word. There is absolutely nothing wrong with turning Union elections and polls into popularity competitions decided on alt-right X threads full of non-students. More votes clearly equal more democracy, equals more good things.

In the Mad King's place (potentially) has ascended Human Hermes. We won't actually know whether or not this has happened for a long time, as unfortunately, she can't yell at a tribunal to hurry up the same way as can be done to a hospitality worker.

Two confidence polls begat two defections, begetting a new dynamic. Or so we thought. First, Tamora defected, but only *The Times* actually cared. More importantly, Octavius Leesar then left the TSC Triumvirate. Presumably, he's no longer in contact with the rest of the gang, but that's no bad thing, as the less contact one has with a hack, the better.

If there's one thing that democratic institutions are known for, it's arbitrarily crushing ideological opposition. The Frewin Four, among them the Prosecutrix and Paul Blart Law Cop, have faced an attack which may leave them exiled from the buildings. One may have thought that the past week's drama has changed something, but this helpful little purge has rendered votes exactly as they were before.

Looking ahead, I hope that we have all learned something – in the Union, *nothing ever happens*.

Editorial



Éilis Mathur

Editor-in-Chief

I love being Editor-in-Chief. I love *Cherwell*. I love my team. But even I have my limits. Missing my close friend's birthday dinner to hunch over a desk, destroying my computer (and eyesight) with a million open InDesign tabs, and aggrievedly fixing every misplaced comma, quotation mark, protestor – this is too far. Still, I will not be using this week's editorial as an opportunity to groan and complain, but to talk about my favourite thing: my friends.

Yes, this is cringe, but where would we be without that? Our friends are not just people we love, spend time with, and occasionally make fun of. They are reflections of our own identities, fragments of ourselves we find in the real world. I never feel more affirmed, more inspired, more understood and understanding than when with these people. Looking back on my time at Oxford as my final Michaelmas is already half over (eek!), I can confidently say that the friendships I have formed here are my greatest achievement.

My year abroad proved that to me (did I mention I lived in Berlin?). Long distance is the toughest test of any relationship, and many don't pass. While my love life fell victim, my friendships flourished in spite of, nay because of, the distance. Watching my friends navigate their own years in France, Spain, and Oxford was not the lonely, isolating experience I feared. Instead, it created a sense of omniscient comfort: know-

ing that while I was going about my day in an entirely new city, with entirely new people, in a nearly entirely new language, they were doing the same. Plus, a discovered love for voice notes helped fill the gap of endless yaps and provided a new go-to podcast.

This is why, among all the uncertainties of next year – jobs, masters, the fragility of a career in journalism – the one thing I do not fear is losing these friendships, I genuinely believe they will stand the test of time.

So, to Marlene, I am truly sorry to be missing your birthday. Consider this whole paper my personal gift to you; I'm sure you'll read it cover to cover.



Conor Walsh

News Deputy Editor

A former British soldier once told me that "sleep is a weapon". Not necessarily one that you can fire or blow up, but one which, if used correctly, can be the difference between winning and losing a battle. I don't know about you, reader, but I feel as if I endure endless battles – the so-called battles of 'life'.

Embarking upon my fifth year in higher education (yes, I'm old, I know), I've endured the trenches of thesis writing, essay scribbling, and coursework crunching for many an age. As what some might call an 'old man', I've served more than enough

ARCHIVES

Cherwell

Women

1988

For a significant number of years in the 70s and 80s, *Cherwell* hosted a section 'Cherwell Women'. It was a space for women to write about issues and topics which resonated with them, and often became the space for speaking out against the misogynistic culture which pervaded the city.

This edition, from May 1988, covers the "enigma of the Omega women" and the alarming epidemic of "men's lycra shorts" hitting Oxford. But it also reports on new shelters for sexual assault victims and criticism of the hostile and unsympathetic processes faced by survivors seeking justice.

One recurring segment, 'Viewpoint', offered space for sharper commentary. In this issue, the editors investigated "the ideology behind the 'compliments' of construction workers", finding men "all too willing to talk". The results were pretty disgusting and uncomfortable, ending starkly: "The reality of the patriarchy begins and ends here."

late night library hours. I've also had my fair share of back-to-back nights out. Those who know me, know that my vibe is more pub crawls and house parties than Berlin's infamous KitKat club (a favourite of one unnamed EiC). But having popped a few grey hairs recently, I'll quite happily admit that my ideal Thursday night does not involve the perilous lines at Bridge. No, instead I'd quite happily settle for a warm brew and an early night. Sleep, my lovely reader, has never been more important to me. And while I can't admit to winning every battle, I'd like to hope that my stats are more optimistic than they once were.

Do not get too comfy, however, for being a News Dep Ed is not all roses and comic news shorts. Breaking news is breaking. If we are to uphold our reputation as Oxford's finest broadsheet, we must be first on scene. This means that my sleep schedule is often held captive by those headline makers and breakers. Last week, for instance, I was bound by countless motions of no confidence. True, I didn't have to endure a 6am visit to the Union's doorway as my fellow Dep Ed did – which, for anyone curious, does not open until 9am. I did, however, spend more hours over email, Canva, and WordPress than any normal being might endure at such an hour. Despite my resulting grump (a tired editor is not a happy one), this phenomenon was, in the strictest sense, a 'wake-up call'. My late nights and early rises, all for the glory of *Cherwell*, have reminded me how much I cherish those hours of snoring. In our digital age it's almost impossible to switch off.

But sleep, my sweet reader, allows us to do just that – to drift away into a land of peace, quiet, and tranquility. So, whilst you queue up on a Thursday night, rest assured that my head has, indeed, touched its pillow. And I encourage you, too, to savour those precious hours of shut eye. Because when we sleep, sweet reader, we have a chance to dream.

PROFILES

“The responsibility to arm yourself with knowledge is part of your duty as a citizen.”

Cherwell spoke to Mishal Husain about her journalistic career

CONOR WALSH

Mishal Husain is an award-winning journalist, author, and broadcaster. She was a household name at the BBC for over two decades, working as the broadcaster's Washington Correspondent and as a presenter on Radio 4's *Today Programme* for eleven years. Husain is now Editor-at-Large at Bloomberg Weekend, and recently launched her first podcast series, *The Mishal Husain Show*, where she interviews world leaders, business titans, and cultural icons.

Husain describes her Muslim faith as an integral part of her identity, as well as her work as a journalist. She delivered this year's Romanes Lecture at the University of Oxford, by invitation of the Vice-Chancellor. During the lecture, Husain tied her faith and ancestry to the history of empire, questions of identity, and the search for reason. She talked of 'searching for light', which she said is found beyond the headlines – in history and forgotten texts.

Cherwell sat down with Husain whilst she was in Oxford. In between touring the Schwarzman Centre and dress rehearsals, we discussed the theme of her lecture, her career in journalism, and the changing landscape of the news media – from tapes and print, to tweets and reels.

Cherwell: Maybe we could start by talking about the theme of your lecture: 'Empire, identity, the search for reason'. What inspired this?

Husain: My starting point was seeing that the first Romanes Lecture was given in 1892 because that date rang a bell with me straight away. The reason was that when I was researching my family story, *Broken Threads*, I had noted 1892 as being the general election that brought the first Asian MP to the House of Commons, Dadabhai Naoroji, I just thought: "Oh, what a wonderful bit of serendipity. This date actually means something to me." And, of course, when you're asked to give a lecture as prestigious as this, you also feel the pressure to say something that is ideally unique, but certainly meaningful.

I thought: "my professional life as a journalist is

why I've been asked to do this." I also have researched the impact of empire on families like mine, both the establishment of the British Empire and the way it came to an end. And when I thought about 1892, I thought this was a moment – the first Asian MP was elected to the House of Commons, this was an imperial subject who ends up being a legislator for the Empire. This is a moment when East and West come together. From there, I started to search for other examples where East and West come together, really challenging the divisions that we've seen for many generations, but which feel particularly current now. And that's why the final part of my lecture is essentially on Islam and Muslims and some of the underappreciated, if not unknown, ways that Islam and Muslims have either influenced this country, or are linked to this country and its culture in perhaps unexpected ways. That's why I look at architecture and poetry; reason and insight in the Quran; the world wars; and Muslims in the Renaissance.

I wanted to say something that reflected who I am; both who I am as a journalist, and my heritage, particularly the Muslim part of my heritage. The fact is, that particular community is underrepresented in my profession of journalism.

It's not just sitting around the table, but it's feeling that you've got a voice in that particular editorial meeting

Cherwell: One thing that particularly stood out to me is this idea of identity, and the importance of understanding one another's identities better. You call for reason as a response to misinformation, and I was wondering what the best way is, in your view, of tackling misinformation, and who do you think should be responsible for this – is it journalists, politicians, or perhaps day-to-day users of social media?

Husain: I feel the responsibility to arm yourself



with knowledge is part of your duty as a citizen. There is, certainly in relation to Islam and Muslims, I think, a lot of casual misinformation. People's opinions are formed without either much access to knowledge, or interest in proper knowledge, and that's why there are numerous myths circulating. There's no doubt, also, that there are cultural practices and there are individual actions and difficult issues that we should never shy away from discussing. I'm not trying to suggest that there are any areas of public life that should go undebated. I'm arguing for proper discussion. I've chosen to focus on, what I call in my lecture "the five points of light", because I think there's a lack of bedrock knowledge. I think we're very keen to see divisions rather than common threads. That's the message I wanted to get at in this lecture. And I hope what I say offers less discussed points or points of new insight.

Cherwell: On the point of division – one of the things that you've, no doubt, seen as a journalist is that the way we consume the news is changing. There's huge gaps between generations and how we engage with the news. To a lot of young people, or some young people at least, the news is something that old people do. Social media has become a priority. Meanwhile, older generations continue to consume these more traditional kinds of news. What would you say to these

young people who say, "Oh, the news is something for older people". Why does the news matter?

Husain: Well, the news is evolving, and I've grown up in what we certainly think of, and see, as traditional news media. I've spent most of my career at the BBC, and often that's called "legacy media" nowadays, usually pejoratively. I've seen the whole trajectory of the technological revolution in news. When I joined *Bloomberg*, and then the BBC, tape was still cut by an actual TV editor. You would take the tape which had come in from the agencies, which had been recorded in-house, and you'd physically run with it to an edit suite, and a videotape editor would cut a ten-second headline for you. So the idea that you'd ever have a device in your own hand which you could film an entire documentary on, or you could go live around the world on, was just nonsensical to me when I was your age. I've seen a whole technological transformation. But I certainly think traditional media really has both moved with social media, and has also been massively challenged by it.

I'm launching a podcast, and I think what podcasting has done to the world of information has been revolutionary. I'm now moving into that phase of my professional life. Although the podcast is also going to be filmed, and is going to be on YouTube and social media. So I think the media of the future is



going to have to straddle all these dimensions.

Someone who set out today to have exactly my trajectory, I think would be a very unwise path to go down. That route is not there anymore. I suspect now that if you were setting out as a young producer in a newsroom, as I was in the 90s, what platforms your work goes on would, 10 years down the line, be a bit unknown. TikTok, for example, has come out of nowhere as a news source, as well as a source of other kinds of information. So I think it's really hard to predict what the landscape is going to be a decade down the line.

I think we're very keen to see divisions rather than common threads

But I do believe that good content travels, and I think my core philosophy as a journalist is to do good work in whatever the medium; and for your principles and who you are as a journalist, not to change, because I think that is transferable. I was at the BBC, and as everyone knows the BBC has a certain kind of framework of impartiality. I'm in a different news organisation now with its own set of

editorial standards, but who I am as a person hasn't changed. I am as committed to fairness and accuracy at *Bloomberg* as I was at the BBC, and I think that's the zone which every journalist or aspiring journalist needs to be in. They need to ask themselves: "What kind of journalist or content maker do I want to be?" And then you have to find the vehicle or the employer or the platform that fits what you want to do, but equally, be prepared to pivot.

Cherwell: You talked briefly at the start about representation in journalism, and I guess that brings up two things: 'representation' in terms of how certain groups in our society, in our country, are portrayed, and also 'representation' in terms of who journalists are, who the media is. What more could we be doing to improve representation in the media?

Husain: My podcast, The Mishal Husain Show, is going to be in-depth conversations with newsmakers, or ideas people, or cultural figures. And I think what I'm really trying to get at there is something of the lost art of conversation, the lost art of the long form interview. Obviously things get clipped up and shared in different ways, but I also really hope that a really good conversation is the kind of thing you can really immerse yourself in. But look, representation of all kinds in newsrooms is really important.

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

Image credit: David Hays with permission.

ACADEMIC SPOTLIGHT

Sathnam Sanghera on history, writing, and the conversations Britain refuses to have.

Cherwell's Hattie Simpson spoke to the novelist and historian, **Sathnam Sanghera**



Sathnam Sanghera doesn't believe in tidy or easy stories. Whether writing about empire in his award-winning books *Empireland* and *Empireworld*, or his own family in his 2009 memoir, *The Boy With The Top-knot*, he seems most at home in the uncomfortable space where opposite things can be true at once.

As we get into our conversation, it doesn't take long for us to start discussing the innately political nature of being a historian. Sanghera insists the two – history and politics – are inseparable, though he's quick to clarify that he's never been politically active himself. "I've never been on a march", he says, before pausing to admit that he sometimes wonders if that might be a failure on his part. For him, the black-and-white nature of protests misses something essential. He explains that he would happily join a march if he could take a banner saying "opposite things can be true at the same time". Complexity, nuance – this is what he truly believes in, and he is critical of the way politicians and social media users tend to ignore it. This conviction seems to underpin his work as a historian; books and history, he emphasises, are all about nuance. This instinct clearly shapes his writing, a constant effort to hold conflicting truths together – particularly in his discussions of empire. For Sanghera, opposing the empire is as much a British tradition as being proud of it: "Abolition is a proud British imperial tradition, as was slavery: both things can be true at the same time."

He talks about how little of this complexity he encountered in his own education. At Cambridge, he didn't study a single brown author until his final few terms and empire never came up at all. That silence, he suggests, still shapes the way Britain remembers its past – or chooses not to. "The arguments we have about empire are the same as those that were had at the time" – whether it was too expensive, if we should be focusing on Britain instead – he makes clear: "This is not a new thing."

When we discuss how empire continues to dominate modern politics, he traces a familiar cycle: Corbyn calling for teaching the "crimes of empire"; Gove defending his achievements as Secretary of State for Education; and, more recently, Sunak complaining that historians try to rewrite the history of slavery too much. "Seemingly unaware", Sanghera adds, "that's literally what historians do". Even Reform have picked up on it, turning history into a talking point at their recent Party Conference in Birmingham. "It's a constant battle and culture war", he says, "and we keep going back and forth with it. It's quite tedious".

He admits that although he has become well known for writing about empire, when he first

started he was surprised by how little he knew. "Almost every day over the last five years I've learnt something new", he says. What particularly struck him was the sheer level of opposition to empire at home – another reminder that resistance to slavery has always existed alongside support in Britain. "There's this old line that we shouldn't judge the past by modern values, but it was actually opposed at every single stage." He explains how figures like Warren Hastings and Robert Clive, both credited with laying the foundation of the British Empire in India, were dragged before Parliament to "answer for their crimes", and when Lord Clive later died, it was widely believed that he'd taken his own life because he was so tormented by his actions.

For Sanghera, these stories complicate the national myth of moral certainty, revealing how Britain has always been divided over its own sense of purpose. "If you control the past, you control the present", he says. "History is a narrative of the past; a politician is trying to offer a narrative for the future."

Despite the attention that his work on empire has achieved, Sanghera is reluctant to view himself as an authority: "I don't feel like I've got a lot of influence", he says. Although he's advised various establishment bodies, he "doesn't get any sense they're listening to me". He suggests that even those that once did are now backtracking with Reform on the horizon. It's part of the reason why he distances himself from party politics altogether – he's joined the Labour Party twice and quit both times, and admits he has probably voted for almost every political party at some point. "I struggle to be part of something", he says. "I think I'm contrary."

For all the noise that surrounds the politics of history, Sanghera seems most animated when talking about writing itself. However, he is clear that all forms of writing fundamentally come with the same purpose: trying to understand things for himself. In fact, he suggests one of the most productive things you can do is to put this journalistic lens on your own experiences, as he did when writing his memoir, as it is only this that allows you to confront awkward facts. This curiosity seems to have always guided his work, more than any desire for influence or recognition.

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

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‘The irrationality of grief’: *Your Funeral*, reviewed

Outbursts of toxicity were where the play was at its best, humour was retained when the dialogue became combative

CHARLIE BAILEY



Your Funeral is Pharaoh Productions’ debut play written by Nick Samuel, about the last conversation that ex-partners Anna (Rebecca Harper) and Jeff (Matt Sheldon) have after Anna’s terminal leukaemia diagnosis. The production carried both humour and strong emotional performances, and while both characters were frustrating to watch at times, this added up to a convincing portrayal of the complexity of grief.

Both actors gave stellar performances. Rebecca Harper lent Anna a vibrant incandescence that showed fractures in moments of self-doubt, leading to an eventual complete breakdown. Parts of the script where Anna’s illness became obvious (such as a moment where she is wracked by a coughing fit) were performed sensitively. Equally talented was Matt Sheldon’s interpretation of Jeff, a character both awkward and calculating. Sheldon’s portrayal gave the sense that Jeff had thought painstakingly about what to say to Anna, and was deeply frustrated by her refusal to take his thoughts seriously.

The most impressive aspect of Nick Samuel’s writing was how much comedy was incorporated throughout. Anna’s control of the characters’ dynamic was established immediately with the remark “do you remember when you thought I broke your back during sex?”, prompting some characteristic awkward shuffling from Jeff. Anna’s sarcastic remarks, well handled by Rebecca Harper, visibly reinforced Jeff’s insecurities throughout the play. The dialogue that I was least convinced by, though, was the more philosophical sections –for example, Jeff asking Anna what she was most proud of in her life, and Anna stating the obvious that her life was very short. However, given the subject matter of the play, I had expected more of that kind of introspection and was pleasantly surprised at the ability of the script to hold moments that were both extremely funny and emotionally intense.

The initial dialogue rendered Jeff deeply unlikeable, with a startling ability to make Anna’s



death all about him. Sitting next to Anna on the sofa, he unashamedly began a sentence “when my dog died...”, provoking exasperated laughter from the audience. This turned into a long monologue about the way in which he grieved his dog, as some sort of blueprint for how he would like to grieve Anna, to which Anna said nothing and stared determinedly forward. This became a repetitive and effective dynamic: one of the actors telling a long story to prove a twisted point. It made the audience realise that Jeff was not acknowledging how important it was to Anna that she appear to him “completely fine”.

At the start of the play, it was hard to understand why Jeff kept pushing Anna to admit that her own death scared her. When Anna was choosing to make light of the situation with jokes, his demand that she changed her emotions to reflect his own made him seem insensitive; it was as if he was

seeking a perverse legitimization of his own grief. The initial dialogue was at times slightly repetitive due to this unsatisfying dynamic.

A key shift in how I viewed the characters was when Anna persuaded Jeff to have sex with her, only for him to pause before unzipping his fly, one of the only clear-minded things he said or did. It was the first window into how vulnerable Anna felt, which would be built on in later moments, such as in a tearful confession, in which she admitted that she thought that if they had sex, he wouldn’t leave her. In this moment in particular, Harper’s acting shone. The shock of the intense onstage intimacy seemed to mark a point at which all of their interactions became more toxic and emotionally intense.

These outbursts of toxicity were where the play was at its best. The actors were skilled at retaining humour as the dialogue became more combative.

The jokes themselves, while still funny, became more wounding: outraged by something Jeff said, Anna refers back to her unsuccessful attempt to make him sleep with her: “I wasn’t wet. I lied.” Jeff reacts manically to the words Anna used to order him to do something, suggesting he never loved her and, most disturbingly, that he will laugh knowing she’s on her deathbed. This damaged the audience’s opinion of him irreversibly.

I questioned whether the script could have included more moments of tenderness between the two – but this seems impossible given the self-centred premise of Jeff’s character. Sheldon’s portrayal of Jeff gave the impression that he needed control of Anna: of her funeral, her memories of their relationship, and even her last moments.

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

Image credit: Pharaoh Productions with permission.

‘A team of criers’: Behind the scenes of *Uncle Vanya*

LARA MACHADO

Putting on *Uncle Vanya* comes with baggage: it is a canonical text constantly being performed and reimagined

Nothing makes me more excited about a theatre production than hearing a director talk passionately and intelligently about their chosen text. In a conversation with *Cherwell*, director Joshua Robey’s understanding of *Uncle Vanya* and his belief both in his team and vision for the show shone through.

First produced in 1898, *Uncle Vanya* is one of Anton Chekhov’s most-loved plays. Set in the Russian countryside, the text focuses on the visit of an old professor, Alexander, and his younger wife, Elena, to the rural estate left to him by his first wife. John (Vanya), the brother of the professor’s first wife, and the local doctor, Michael, both become enamoured by Yelena,

while Sonya – the professor’s daughter – develops unrequited feelings for the doctor. The play has had several high-profile stage adaptations in the recent past, including most famously the 2023 production starring Andrew Scott.

So putting on *Uncle Vanya* comes with baggage: it is a canonical text constantly being performed and reimagined. Naturally one of my first questions then was why, as a student theatre company, they should choose to perform it now. I was curious as to what Fennec Fox Productions thought they could bring to the table that was new or interesting. On one hand, Robey is very interested in character; he says about his attraction to the play: “Chekhov sort of inaugurates...a new kind of style that’s very heightenedly real – in

the sense that these characters are treated as people and not as symbols. They don’t really have a symbolic function in the play. They are people who are sort of achingly miscommunicating and trying to connect to each other.”

This concern with character translates to the team’s rehearsals. Walking into a small, crowded room in Worcester College during an emotional scene, I was immediately struck by how focused and grounded in each other’s performances the actors were. The sudden presence of a stranger observing them seemed to have no effect at all. I even felt bad for punctuating their taut silences with my typing.

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

A Life in Song – An introduction to the strange world of Lieder

Francis Lee watches musicians sing love poetry to the elderly at the Oxford International Song Festival

It's time again for the Oxford Song Festival, which means a legion of top classical singers and musicians will be descending on Oxford for two weeks to sing (predominantly) centuries-old Lieder to an audience of those approaching the second century of their own lives. Other than their very favourable student rates, what are the young students of Oxford missing from the strange world of what used to be called the Oxford Lieder Festival? Two very impressive young musicians, Sebastian Hill and Will Harmer, displayed some of the answers last Friday in their performance *A Life in Song*.

A Lieder performance is a very strange thing, especially for those of us more used to a grand Romantic symphonic musical bath. The singer has to stand facing his audience and sing French or German poetry to a sedate piano backing, usually of quaint and florid love. The first song, 'Heidenröslein', written by Franz Schubert before his 21st birthday, saw our three talented young protagonists (a singer, a pianist, and the ghost of a composer) as earnest youths singing obediently to classical tunes on the conventions of love. Hill has a pure voice and Harmer a deft control, and both men harmoniously matched the earnest lightness which Schubert wrote into the piece. I was not, however, left with the impression that Hill, Harmer, or Schubert really were in love with any of the octogenarians to whom they were performing their song of love. All three were performing the stories and styles of others, and, pleasant and accomplished though it was, it was not overly engaging.

The pair also performed a couple of able compositions by Harmer himself. Likewise, they were poetry set to song and piano, but largely avoided the Lieder's storytelling potential. Harmer's premier piece 'Wild Nights' was stark and thematic, but did not end satisfactorily. His excellent 'Canción de Jinete', with its shifting accompanying phrases in the piano sliding underneath the twisting modal vocal phrases, substituted story for mystery and then died away with one last fascinating phrase. The highlights of the concert for me, however, were a couple of the old Lieder, 'Der Tambour' by Hugo Wolf and 'Lynceus der Thürmer' by Carl Loewe.

'Der Tambour', placed in the middle-age portion of the life depicted through the programme, showed the mature confidence of composers and performers who were willing to imprint their own characters onto their works. Humorous and bizarre lines from the poet Eduard Möricke were expertly wrought into wry phrases by Wolf to tell in deprecating fashion the fears and desires (mostly a good wurst and a tankard of wine) of a boy soldier on campaign. Hill, his natural sense of humour plain to see, perfectly embodied the wry storytelling humour of Möricke and Wolf. After singing with relish of all the "Wurst" and "Hexen" in this peculiar delight, he won a well-deserved laugh from the audience.

The concert was not quite done before the turn of age and wisdom in 'Lynceus der Thümer' (or 'Lynceus the Watchman'), which showcased the pathos of loss which is at the heart of the

Lieder genre. The rich tone of Loewe's writing, well-rendered in Hill's pure yet powerful voice, and Harmer's emotion-laden chords gave the beautiful backdrop necessary to convey the watchman's moving story of the beauty of life as death approaches.

The best of Lieder provides an experience you cannot otherwise replicate – of poetry

told across language through performance and music. I would recommend to anyone that they come and cast aside, as I did, their programme with its ready translation, and instead watch and listen to a strange but powerful art form which has captivated for centuries.

Image credit: Thomas Couture, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Fashion around Oxford: Iggy Clarke

ANTONIA ROGERS

Cherwell's fashion inspiration of the week is Isabel (Iggy) Clarke, a third-year English Literature student at Trinity College. You might remember her dazzling dress from the Oxford Fashion Gala last Trinity (more on that later), or you may have seen her about Oxford in her signature cowboy boots.

Cherwell: What are you wearing right now?

Iggy: So, going from bottom to top, I've got my favourite cowboy boots on – they're blue with this gold pattern on top. The dress – white, floaty, and with a drop waist – was given to me by the costume department when I played Daisy (in the Trinity Garden Play TT25, *The Great Gatsby*). The

jumper is a navy knit with a built-in cravat on the neckline, and then my brown check blazer was my grandfather's.

Cherwell: So how would you describe your personal style?

Iggy: I actually don't know, quite frankly! It differs from day to day. I flip between trying to do something classic, like Audrey Hepburn, or I can do the opposite and channel Brigitte Bardot. Some days, I'm neither. I think my style at the moment is just a matter of me picking clothes that I like and wearing them.

Cherwell: Has Oxford affected your personal style?

Iggy: I think I dress smarter now. I've always had a penchant for long coats, but I'm from Shrewsbury and nobody really wears them there. When I came

to Oxford, I realised that everyone dressed like me, so I felt like I had to differentiate somehow. I think I've had to become bolder in what I wear.

Cherwell: What is your favourite item in your wardrobe?

Iggy: My lovely cowboy boots. I found them on Depop, and they're just me as a shoe. I wear them to death – I've had to get them resoled three times! That, or my vintage Burberry trench coat. They're probably my two most well-worn pieces.

Cherwell: What is your best vintage find?

Iggy: The boots, obviously! I did find a gorgeous suede leather jacket from Burberry in a consignment shop in Berlin though.

Cherwell: What are the clothing items you think everyone should have in their wardrobe?

Iggy: A long coat and a good pair of boots. You need clothes that you can pull out at any time, that make you happy. Or something which has a fun story. I recently brought two jumpers off a man who came in a van to where I was staying in Scotland. Apparently, he comes once a year with a collection of Persian rugs and cashmere jumpers, so I had to buy some – just for the sake of the story, really! Everyone needs fun clothes that have good stories and just make you very happy.

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

Iggy: Oxford does have a lot of good vintage shops. I will be a fan of Ballroom Emporium until I die. I've got a silk dressing gown from there that I wear to death. I've even worn it to the club – apparently it makes hangovers look fashionable! Also, What Alice Wore (@whataliceworeoxford), who we had at the Gala.

Cherwell: You were president of the 2025 Oxford Fashion Gala. Can you give a brief description of what the Oxford Fashion Gala is and your role?

Iggy: The Oxford Fashion Gala is a yearly event which happens in Trinity term. We call it a gala because aside from just being a fashion show, it is also a chance for artistic creatives in Oxford to showcase something. It raises money for Oxford Mutual Aid, so it's a charity event – we raised around £1000 last year.

You need clothes that you can pull out at any time. Something which has a fun story

The Gala is a chance for everyone to come together and really appreciate the creativity of Oxford's students – it astounds me every time how impressive the designs are, especially with the workload that they have alongside!

Cherwell: What advice would you give to someone trying to get involved in the Fashion Gala?

Iggy: Just apply – we'll be doing applications this term. We really want people involved, especially if you can design, but also if you have any other talents – just let us know! In terms of filling out the forms, my advice would be to say any ideas you have, because that's what things like this need, new ideas.

Read the full interview at cherwell.org
Image credit: Isabel Clarke with permission.



What's Oxford watching?



Eyes Wide Shut

Zoë McGuire at Somerville College recommends *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999): "A stunning piece about sexuality and relationships that is constantly sexual yet never gratuitously so. It changed my perspective on Tom Cruise as an actor."



Alien Resurrection

Lucy Back at Wadham College recommends *Alien: Resurrection* (1997): "If you go in expecting a campy and somewhat erotic horror-comedy you'll have a great time. Winona Ryder and Sigourney Weaver have a great thing going, and the overall weirdness of the movie is delightful."

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Semi-classic, wholly camp

LARA MACHADO

To call *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) campy would be an understatement. In many ways it felt like a ridiculous version of *Cat People* (1942). At one point, examining the body of a man who has just been vampirised, a doctor dramatically exclaims: "If we only knew what caused those two sharp punctures over the jugular vein!"

Screened at the Ultimate Picture Palace as part of their 'Fright's Out!' classic season, *Dracula's Daughter* follows Countess Marya Zaleska, daughter of Count Dracula. The Countess believes that the death of her father will free her from the urge to kill and allow her to live a normal life among humans. An important aspect of this desire is a longing for human connection – hence my comparison to *Cat People* – and yet any serious attempts at depicting Marya's loneliness, despite an interesting performance from Gloria Holden, are overshadowed by the film's overwhelming silliness.

Curiously, nowadays *Dracula's Daughter* gets discussed mostly in relation to its queer subtext. Particularly in relation to the scene where a young girl, Lili, undresses in front of the Countess so that she can paint her. Originally Lili was meant to pose for Marya nude, but the scene was changed to have her only partially undress. This was the result of a suggestion of Joseph Breen – the American film censor – that the film "avoid any suggestion of perverse sexual desire on the part of Marya, or of an attempted sexual attack by her upon Lili". The discussion of Marya as a version of the archetypal predatory homosexual

dominated discussions of the film both then and now.

I find it very hard to believe that *Dracula's Daughter* ever attempted to be a fully serious film, although to call it a comedy feels wrong too. It would be even harder to justify it as a horror picture, since it makes so few attempts at suspense, and when it does, seems to immediately undercut them. One example is Marya's arrival at the police station to see her father's body. There is an undeniable intensity and allure about Holden.

Dracula's Daughter is unsure of what it wants to be and that is what makes it so entertaining

Covering her face with a black shawl, only her beautiful dark eyes are visible – before she even uses her ring to hypnotise the policeman, she commands the screen with quasi-hypnotic power. This powerful moment is interrupted by the constant slapstick performance from the bumbling policeman. Throughout the film, Holden continues to give a dramatic performance, but the cast almost all seem stuck in different genres.

The audience at the Ultimate Picture Palace were constantly laughing, but for the most part not *with* the film. *Dracula's Daughter* is unsure of what it wants to be and, ultimately,

that is what makes it so entertaining. The film opens with physical comedy from these two policeman figures who make the audience laugh whenever they are on screen and seem to take up an inordinate amount of the film's short run-time. A ridiculous number of characters from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are name-dropped in this opening – including Renfield, although he is entirely irrelevant to the rest of the film – and Van Helsing gets put under arrest for murdering Dracula. In another bizarre scene we meet our hero, Dr Jeffrey Garth – pronounced as Goth in the film, as if everything else wasn't enough – hunting with a strongly-accented Scottish figure whose accent Garth then imitates, presumably as a joke. Why, you may ask? That is a great question, and one that the film doesn't know the answer to.

When it is not being weirdly comedic, the film is seemingly attempting a melodrama with elements of the psychological study. After meeting Dr Garth, who is a psychiatrist, Marya becomes obsessed with the idea that he might be able to free her from her vampirism. This could have been an interesting way to explore themes of sexual repression or alienation, or even, as the film at one point seems to suggest, inter-generational trauma. What we get is what feels like a cartoon version of a psychiatrist's job, including pearls of dialogue such as "more or less, and like any disease of the mind, it can be cured". Otto Kruger – known for playing charismatic villains – gives a baffling performance as Dr Garth.

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

Look up: Oxford's statues and gargoyles

MAXIM VOROBEB

Walking around Oxford you often feel like you're part of the city's tourist attraction. The long walk up to the Radcliffe Camera entrance, pushing the heavy door to enter your college: there's always an eerie feeling of being watched. The feeling is right, you are always observed. Not necessarily by other people, but certainly by the myriad of statues, gargoyles, and grotesques throughout Oxford's architecture. Many statues represent benefactors or founders of colleges, like in the case of The Queen's College. Other common symbols are saints, like St John in the tower of St John's College. Oxford's architecture is a controversial part of the student life, considering the protests against Oriel College's Rhodes statue in 2020, or the architectural inequalities between ancient and modern colleges.

Modern perceptions of such decorations as wasteful expense ignores their important influence on college culture as well as identity. Sometimes looking up at new figures, ideas, and bizarre statues can change our perspective on our environment. As we oppose statues that do not represent our values as an academic community, it can also be a fun exercise to examine what other figures dot our college rooftops.

If you've ever gone to the fifth floor of the Weston Library, or looked up during Matriculation, you'll spot the statues atop the Clarendon Building. With some of them under

maintenance, the building usually features the nine muses. A glance up when walking down Broad Street introduces you to the particularly striking Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, holding out her mask in a foreboding sign of how you're about to do in your exams if you haven't been revising.

For a more shocking experience, don't miss Antony Gormley's *Another Time II*, a sculpture of a nude man atop Blackwell's gazing down on the tourist-packed Broad Street. Its near-human silhouette often catches the unaware mind. Exeter College seemingly prides itself on its unique acquisition that contrasts the classical sculptures atop Trinity College across the street. What's better than a bit of college rivalry expressed through statues?

Oxford's tradition of the bizarre figures continues further down Broad Street. Right beside the nude man, you have the mysterious Sheldonian Emperors, always a favourite for a bizarre tourist photo. They are centuries old with little documented reason for their creation.

To move from their gigantism to the miniature, St John's boasts an impressive collection of grotesques (small figures without a drainage or water use) in its baroque Canterbury Quad. With each new President being given the right to choose a figure of their choice, it features depictions of the Green Man, eagles, lizards, kings, dragons, and a variety of crest-bearing angels. It also boasts some rare gargoyles on its neo-Gothic walls.

Oxford rooftops are a place for colleges to show off their learning and development. Trinity College chapel has four women, representing Astronomy, Theology, Medicine,

and Geometry. St John's similarly features busts of the seven liberal arts alongside the seven virtues on either side of its quad.

Looking up reminds us that these are not simply pretty constructions for colleges, but they are sets of symbols and messages to undergraduates. Statues are not just entertainment, they have always been created with key values. The gothic and neo-gothic styles emphasised instruction as well as decoration. Magdalen's medieval cloisters feature an eclectic set of imagery with statues representing everything from drunkenness to

lust. In each corner there are the four medieval professions for graduates: a priest, a teacher, a doctor, and a lawyer. There are also statues of greed and fraud, warning undergraduates what to avoid, while also informing them of their ideals and future. Always ask yourself, what are you looking up to? Literally and metaphorically.

Many of these statues and figures will become staples of your college tours or photos. Learning your surroundings, what they represent, and what their intention was, is always a fruitful way of understanding the past.

Image credit: Aishia Simmons for Cherwell.



Plaques and peripheries

Aditi Upmanyu traces the legacies of Oxford's women writers through the city

Every morning on my way to college, I pass through the cobbledstoned, crowded St Mary's Passage, overhearing stories of Oxford's most famous literary duo, C S Lewis and J R R Tolkien. It begins with the famed Narnia door, said to have inspired Lewis's magical wardrobe, followed by the soaring spires of All Souls College, the apparent influence behind Tolkien's *The Two Towers*. Both men are woven inextricably into Oxford's cultural and physical landscape. From parks, nature reserves, and pubs, to walking tours and guided museum visits: their presence is permanent and pervasive. And yet, the conspicuous absence of women writers in the everyday geography of Oxford lingers.

This year, I attended a creative writing seminar organised by the Careers Service, where the audience was asked to name authors from Oxford, and the room was buzzing with answers.

No women authors were named. Visibility in public spaces shapes public memory, and Tolkien, C S Lewis, and Lewis Carroll enjoy an extended literary afterlife that has not been granted to the city's women writers. The question persists: why are they missing from the town's everyday lore and landmarks?

The simple answer is, of course, that women were only recently admitted to the University. The other common answer is that the male writers are 'more famous'. But literary fame, as we know, is hardly ever neutral and is pervasively shaped by class, race, gender, and access to cultural capital. From their exclusion from university spaces, powerfully addressed in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, to their marginalisation by critical scholarship until well into the 20th century, women have been systematically written out of Oxford's cultural memory.

While men are remembered in colleges, parks, and pubs – the visibly celebrated spaces – women tend to appear in the margins. Opposite the grand gates of historic Christ Church College lies the narrow, honey-coloured Brewer Street, where Dorothy Sayers once lived. Only a plaque by a blue door informs the passerby that she was a resident here. Iris Murdoch lived farther away, in Summertown, a residential part of the city. The commemorative plaque

is obscured by an overgrown hedge, perhaps reiterating a metaphorical effacement. Somewhere between these two lies the cream-coloured house of philosopher and friend of Murdoch's, Philippa Foot, located among a row of otherwise indistinguishable homes.

Not only are women's absences striking, but also the ways their presence is actively recorded. The shared commemorative plaque for scholarly siblings Clara and Walter Pater is an example. It reads: "Clara Pater, pioneer of women's education, and Walter Pater, author and scholar." Both lived and worked in Oxford as scholars. Clara taught Latin, Greek and German, but their shared memory nonetheless enforces a subtle hierarchy.

And then there are the 'muses', the women who inspired the creative and artistic output of men whilst remaining underwritten in the city's history. The presence of Jane Burden, Pre-Raphaelite muse to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the wife of William Morris, is marked by a plaque, tucked away in St Helen's Passage. Alice Liddell, the real-life Alice of *Wonderland* fame, lives on through Carroll's stories, but also in the physical geography of Oxford: a wooden door depicting the patron saint of Oxford, Frideswide, placed at a Church quite out of sight in Botley, is said to have been carved by Alice.

Catalysed by her visit to Cambridge in 1928, Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*: "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind." We find evidence that the city indeed equally belongs to women who, even when access to the University was denied, formed an integral part of its literary legacy: what remains and is passed down to us are scattered traces, often found in the quieter corners of Oxford. They reveal a parallel literary history, one built not for celebration and visibility, but to be experienced in quieter streets, uncelebrated houses, and modest plaques.

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

What's Oxford reading?

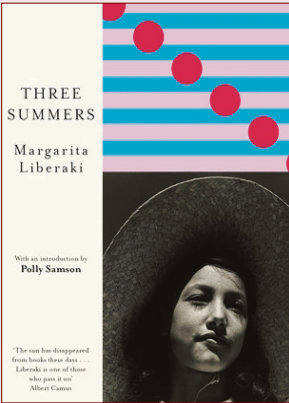


Image credit: 'Three Summers' via Penguin Books.

Astrid (Merton) recommends this recent read, first published in 1946: "Three Summers was a sultry and evocative story of three sisters growing up in rural Greece. I'd never come across Liberaki but her style is so clear and fluid that she deserves a place in the canon!"



Archie (Wadham) recommends this work of magical realism set during a civil war, first published in 2017: "An urgently needed, beautifully moving book that asserts migration as natural and desirable. Speculative fiction done in the best possible way."

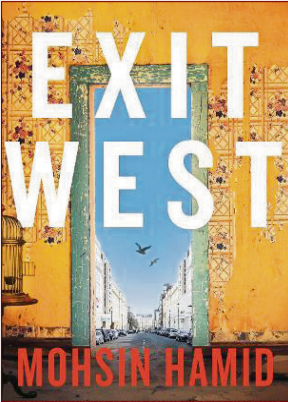


Image credit: 'Exit West' via Penguin Books.

WHAT'S ON

STAGE

To What End

Burton Taylor Studio
4th-8th November

Teen Spirit

Burton Taylor Studio
4th-8th November

Women Beware Women

Michael Pilch Sudio
4th-8th November

MUSIC

Ensemble Isis Series
Jacqueline du Pré
7th November

Fibonacci String Quartet
Holywell Music Room
9th November

FILM

Melodramarama
The Ultimate Picture Palace
2nd-22nd November

Frankenstein
Phoenix Picturehouse
29th October-6th November

ART

Paddy Summerfield: The Camera Helps
Weston Library
11th October-30th November

Photo Oxford
Weston Library
Open until 16th November



THE SOURCE

A Spell for Students

Reading unfinished? Essay half written? Lectures not attended? Then this is the spell you need, guaranteed to make you succeed at your degree*

Under the full moon brew two
tablespoons of tea, or if you prefer
coffee three.

At the subsequent
sunrise, smear a single tear
stolen from a tutorial onto
a clearly torn page from a textbook.
Stir the above in an unwashed mug,
complete with a broken pencil snapped with love.
As the rain slices through the night,
sprint around the quad thrice,
mug outstretched,
and mouth open wide.
Scream carpe diem, be bold, be free
until your voice is sore, then
pour the contents across the floor
and academic success will be yours!

*works best with 8 hours of sleep

TILLY WHITE

Too long, didn't read

Beatrix Arnold discusses the moral panic over the fall in literacy levels in the digital age, and its implications

No-one reads these days. If it's longer than an Instagram caption, it's not worth my time. I doubt most people will even manage to make it to the end of this article.

As more and more studies tracking the decline in literacy pile up, doom-mongering professors self-importantly shake their heads in despair that "people don't read Joyce any more". We fiddle on our iPhones while Arcadia burns.

This moral panic is nothing new. People have been mourning literature ever since its birth: the absence of the great Ancient Greek works from the Elizabethan school curriculum precluded the growth of tragedy; Victorian narrative serialisation killed long-form literature; and, worst of all, in the 18th century people stopped reading serious works because of the growing popularity of (god forbid) the novel.

It may be true that today's attention economy is robbing us of the ability to engage with literary works in a meaningful way. But the 'prophet of doom' attitude assumed by those who claim intellectual distinction does more harm than good. The way we speak about burning sets us up for failure.

Reading is, and has long been, an essentially privileged activity. Quite apart from the financial burden, it requires the luxury of physical and mental leisure, scarce in the working world where every minute is monetised. The sheer number of books that everyone "must read" makes it a daunting venture to even begin, especially for people who have never seen it as a priority.

Even self-proclaimed readers often harbour backwards attitudes. Reading

is increasingly spoken of as a duty, as if, by reading *Bleak House*, you are selflessly engaging in a civilisation-saving act. Yet such an attitude merely perpetuates a utilitarian perspective that cannot, in any meaningful way, incorporate the delightfully useless.

Literature has always been an effective cultural lightning rod. You don't have to actually engage with it – as long as you can self-righteously lament that no-one else is engaging with it, you can't fail to sound intelligent. The practice is condensed into an aesthetic and fetishised – who cares if you didn't understand

People have been mourning literature ever since its birth

Dostoevsky, as long as you can log it on your Goodreads?

The issue is complicated by layers of literary discrimination. Not only are people not reading enough, but they are reading the wrong things, and, as a consequence of this vicious cycle, this means they will never be able to understand the right things.

The phrase "the extinction of humanity" is bandied about at literary festivals, while connoisseurs clutch their copies of Tolstoy like a life raft that will save them from the tsunami of the ignorant masses. There's something particularly jarring about hearing the privileged few bemoan, in their practised RP, the preference of the populace for 'vulgar' literature. Because, of course, it's the craze for 'romantasy' books that will turn

us all into mindless automatons. Unsurprisingly, this turns out to be yet another permutation of the class divide – snobbery marketed as philanthropic concern.

The ruthless taxonomy of books – differentiation by library sticker, by inclusion in the curriculum, by cultural consciousness – is inherently problematic. The notion of 'the canon' has often been questioned, yet it seems impossible to push back on the binary of classic literature and popular books.

We live by an absurd metric whereby older is considered better – if telephones aren't mentioned, it's a classic by default. We forget that Allan Poe's short stories were considered pulp fiction when released, that Austen was disparaged for her frivolity. Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), which occupies a secure position on the 'Classic Literature' shelf somewhere between Lawrence and Locke, narrates a story of pornographic revenge, stuffed with garish ghosts and crude sensationalism that would scandalise the Wattpad users of today. Clearly, 'popular' and 'classic' are not mutually exclusive labels.

Why should one form of literature



claim the monopoly? Why is it that audiobooks, e-books, even films, are implicitly placed below physical books in the accepted hierarchy of media consumption?

Literacy is not a necessary precondition of literature. Our current audio-visual culture encourages the dissemination of literature in different forms; media variation does not spell the death of literature. Besides, reading is an activity that should not be limited to the physical action: it is a social, dialogic process. The canon cannot and should not sit there unmoving.

Of course, we should all read more. Of course, our attention spans are being threatened by the predominance of increasingly short-form, increasingly digital media. But these concerns are perennial, and performative hand-wringing will get us nowhere.

Before we mourn the death of literature, let's make sure to check its pulse first. See? I told you that you wouldn't make it to the end.

Image credit: Beatrix Arnold for Cherwell.

HOROSCOPES



Aries

Great things are waiting for you in the Bodleian.



Taurus

Vitamins are your friends – take care of yourself.



Gemini

Watching *Pulp Fiction* doesn't make you a connoisseur.



Cancer

Read something for pleasure this week.



Leo

That guy from the Halloween club night isn't your soulmate.



Virgo

If your friends all hate them, that's probably a sign.

Hyperactive brain, hypoactive thyroid

OLIVIA-MAE BUTTERFIELD

Many Oxford narratives have been told time and again, but the story of the chronically-ill overachieving student is one which has more fruit to bear. The experience of such an intense, fast-paced university inside a slow, self-destructive body is a poetic oxymoron worthy of exploration.

I was diagnosed with Hashimoto's disease at eight years old, and so have come to accept it as a very mundane aspect of my day-to-day life. To the outside world, this manifests itself as daily medication, avoiding certain foods, going to bed a little earlier than most, and being very upset when my ankles get cold.

Much of the time, I believe this is how it is – no different in any great capacity from everyone else. Yet in the brief moments of pause within the frenetic pace of Oxford life, I am reminded that I do, in fact, struggle with things that many of my peers have never even considered, big and small.

Particularly as the winter months draw closer, I become wary of spending too much time outside lest my bones ache unbearably. I lose a night's sleep, and am too exhausted to keep my eyes open to get through the four readings required of me the next day.

The same is true of the weeknight clubbers, whose squeals echo around my central Oxford bedroom in the

small hours. A chronically-ill friend of mine joked about taking extra sleeping pills to combat this issue. This lack of sleep causes a hefty flare of symptoms. Aches, pains, fatigue, and brain fog: all unfortunate afflictions when trying to keep up the academic excellence most of us aspire to achieve.

There is a quiet sense of shame that comes along with many of my symptoms, and I find myself feeling embarrassed by their manifestations. In particular, I suffer with leg pains which can sometimes stop me from walking. This is a harsh fact of late-night trips home from a ball at the Isis Farmhouse – I have to smile at the irony of the beautiful gown floating around my weak ankles as I insist to my friends that I can absolutely make it home.

As if to deflect my embarrassment, I throw around jokes about being the grandma of the group as I slip on my compression socks, or my fingerless gloves, which I can't attend a choir rehearsal without, as my hands will lose circulation and I won't be able to turn pages.

But these measures aren't a panacea, and as much as I would prefer to hide them away underneath a respectable healthy exterior, I have come to realise that my time at university is too limited to spend concealing the less favourable parts of myself.

The public spectacle I produced by fainting in the city centre might have made me wish the ground would

open up and swallow me, but at the end of the day, visibility is not a curse. These physical reminders aren't just for myself, but others around me who might suffer and experience similar things.

Most people can easily understand the physical symptoms like fatigue and pain. But the mental aspects are a bit more of a grey area. Brain fog, concentration, and memory problems are particularly prevalent for me, unfortunate in an environment like

My time at university is too limited to spend concealing the less aesthetic parts of myself

Oxford where academic work plays a huge role in day-to-day life.

While it's true that my tutors have been accommodating, I continue to struggle with the unpredictability that my condition brings into my life. Because of the nature of autoimmune diseases, it can be near impossible to plan out a week, or even a day. Having to take each day as it comes, even at the detriment of mental goals, is something I am learning to embrace throughout my experience of university.

HOROSCOPES



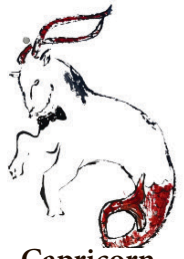
Libra
Stop trying to manufacture a meet-cute: you're not Dua Lipa.



Scorpio
Being too cool for Halloween is not a personality trait.



Sagittarius
Take a walk in Port Meadow and see the autumn trees.



Capricorn
Go to a new society event, and not just for free drinks.



Aquarius
Hold on, financial prosperity is coming your way.



Pisces
Your summer travelling can't *still* be your personality.

Chivalry in the age of automatic doors

MATT DONNELLY

The waiter has just brought the bill, irritatingly diplomatic in his placement – the middle of the table. You both glance at it, then at each other, caught in that peculiar modern standoff where nobody's quite sure what the right move is any more. Will they think I'm old-fashioned and patronising if I offer to pay? Rude if I suggest splitting it? All the while, the nagging question lingers of whether the gesture means anything if it comes straight out of Daddy's Barclays Premier Current Account. So, has chivalry had its day? Or does it just look different in 2025 – a world of situationships and automatic doors?

Believed to have been coined in medieval England, stemming from the French 'chevalerie', the term originally referred to horse-mounted soldiers, but later became associated with the behavioural code that these knights were expected to follow. A code that encompassed loyalty, honour, and courtesy.

Taking this as the definition, I don't think chivalry is dead, nor does it need to be. What I do think is that we've been approaching it all wrong. The problem isn't that men do or don't open doors for women, or offer to pay for dinner. The problem is that we've made chivalry about gender rather than kindness, about grand gestures rather than basic human decency.

True chivalry, surely, is about extending courtesy to anyone who might need it, regardless of their sex. It's about recognising that a fellow human being is struggling with a heavy bag outside Blackwell's and offering to help. It's about saving someone's seat in the Bodleian when they've gone to find a book. It's about sharing your lecture notes with the person who was too ill to attend.

These don't need to be patronising acts, but simple human kindnesses that make daily life a little more bearable. Modern chivalry doesn't need to be limited to the acts of males towards females.

Besides, modern dating practices can be more than a little confusing. How do you navigate traditional gestures of courtesy when you've both agreed that your relationship exists in some undefined space between friendship and romance? Does offering to pay for a meal signal an inappropriate investment in a situationship?

The truth is that some people genuinely don't want doors held for them, meals paid for, or heavy bags carried. And that's absolutely fine. Part of modern chivalry can be reading social cues and respecting boundaries of individuals. The key is making the offer without expecting gratitude, and accepting refusal without taking offence.

The academic pressures of Oxford life certainly don't help. With everyone desperately clawing to stay afloat, with the weight of 900 years of academic tradition resting on our shoulders, basic consideration for others can sometimes become lost in it all. We're so focused on our own deadlines that it can be difficult to notice the opportunities to help someone out.

The cruel irony is that this may be exactly why we need it most. In a world where we're increasingly isolated by our phones, carefully curated social media presences, and never-ending coursework, small acts of human consideration become more valuable. A form of chivalry that has nothing to do with horse-mounted knights and everything to do with simply paying attention to the people around us.

True chivalry, surely, is about extending courtesy to anyone who might need it, regardless of their sex

Infrastructure can also get in the way. Every term seems to bring a fresh batch of automatic doors, rendering a door-holder-opener entirely obsolete. I have nothing against automatic doors, but there's something vaguely melancholic about watching a steady stream of students flow through the Schwarzman Centre entrance without so much as a second of eye contact, let alone holding anything open for anyone.

I am entirely in favour of a man acting courteously towards a woman – in the same way that I am entirely in favour of a person acting courteously towards another person. I would hope that these acts of 'chivalry' are not carried out on the patronising condition that the recipient is female. So no, chivalry isn't dead; it's just evolved.

Modern courtesy isn't about men protecting women because they need protecting. It's about human beings looking out for one another where we can, acknowledging our shared vulnerability and, occasionally, dependence. It's about being the sort of person who makes other people's lives fractionally easier, not because you want anything in return, but because kindness, as it turns out, is still worth practising. But as for restaurant bills: God knows.

AGONY AUNT

I dream of the Navier-Stokes equations every night. Is this normal, or should I take it as a sign of something?

*Sincerely,
Stressed STEM student*

CHERWELL-FED

Grilling the Parsonage: Oxford's 'best' restaurant?





— BENJAMIN NAYLOR —

Sometimes you want more than just a meal, to celebrate a birthday, an anniversary, a graduation. You want somewhere that appreciates the occasion, with delicious food and unrushed service – a restaurant with atmosphere. I was chatting with my college dad about the best restaurant in Oxford, and he insisted that the title belonged to the Parsonage Grill, which has certainly priced itself into that category of special occasion meal. A friend and I, both curious and hungry, set out to see if it lived up its lofty reputation.

Looking over the menu, a consistent theme emerges; this is simple, elevated British food, with some creeping French influence, served at a lofty price. The wine list, though short, is considered, and, comparatively, reasonably priced. We started with some fresh sourdough and butter, which although not baked in house, was incredibly soft, and generously portioned. For our first course, we decided on the steak tartare, the twice-baked goat's cheese and thyme soufflé, and one oyster each. To drink, I had a dirty martini. The steak tartare was seasoned thoroughly, mixed in with diced sweet pickle, garnished with a raw egg yolk, and served with potato crisps. It was serviceable, but for £17.95, I would expect more creativity, or at least a larger portion. The soufflé was the star of the show: perfectly light, with a moreish tang from the goat's cheese, complemented beautifully by the thyme. Unfortunately, the oysters were watery, far from the briny intensity we were looking for.

For our mains, my friend ordered the venison loin, which came with a celeriac puree, salsify, shallots, and a juniper berry jus; I picked the wild mushroom risotto, served with pickled red onion

and rocket. It was cooked well, and the accompanying vegetables worked nicely, particularly the creamy celeriac puree. But its price invites comparison to top restaurants that deliver more ambitious and creative dishes, and so it fell short of expectations. Risotto is often at risk of being a bit one-note, particularly texturally, but I can confidently say that this was not the case. The rice was silky and parmesan-forward, balanced by the meaty chunks of mushroom; there was a refreshing piquant snap of the pickled onion, and the peppery kick of rocket. Whilst £25 is still not cheap, the portion was generous, and the flavours assured.

Menu

Starters £11.50-£20
Mains £22.50-£42
Desserts £8.50-£10.95
Wine from £29 a bottle.

*Parsonage Grill OX2 6NN,
1-3 Banbury Road*

For dessert, we shared a fig pavlova, which was largely unexceptional. Yet the inclusion of basil added an interesting herbaceous note, boldly complimenting the whipped cream and meringue – this is the sort of flair I would've liked to see more of. If I can see any great strength of this restaurant, it is consistency. The food is simple, well-executed, and competent. It's a restaurant for relaxed conversation where the food isn't a focal point. Though I went in with high expectations, I don't think Parsonage quite lives up to them.

Image credit: Parsonage Grill with permission.

Dear stressed STEM student,

I hate to say it, but it's not a promising sign if I have to look up mathematical terms in order to understand your predicament. Yet I can sympathise with your subconscious – when assailed with the culture of constant productivity that dominates Oxford, it's understandable that the streams of never-ending work will grant you no respite, not even in your dreams. In fact, just last term I dreamt that I was held hostage in the Glink, slaving away to finish my essay right down to the minute (an experience I re-enacted in real life the next morning).

Find some solace in the fact that this is not a unique experience among Oxford students, nor is it limited to STEM. Such academic nightmares are a rite of passage, proof that you're fully immersed in the Oxford experience.

But there is a world outside of equations – take a walk, smell a flower, catch up with a friend. Your dreams are not messianic visitations. Don't be a slave to academics, the laws of physics need not rule every aspect of your life.

It's only third week so beware: there is worse to come.

Lots of love,
Agony Aunt

Why I no longer trust ‘male feminists’

Maya Rybin reflects on men who call themselves feminists, and whether their allyship is counter-productive

Over the past year, I’ve spent more time in male-dominated spaces than I ever had before. Growing up with a sister, attending an all-girls’ school, and moving in the art, theatre, and music scenes of South London, my world was shaped mostly by women.

My first year of university brought an entirely new set of dynamics for me to navigate – shifting friendships, uncertain first impressions, the trial and error of finding my place. Some of the men I’ve met along the way are now among my closest friends, while others have made me more cautious about taking certain claims at face value. From the latter, I learned something else entirely: you cannot trust a man just because he calls himself a feminist.

At first, this felt like a personal lesson about who I could and couldn’t rely on. But the more time I spent in these circles, the more I realised it was part of something bigger: the way words like feminism can be emptied out when they’re too easy to claim.

Of course, this isn’t new – a list as long as my arm of ‘60s activists accused of sexual abuse says otherwise – but it feels particularly pressing now.

As social media has turned identity into aesthetics and trends, calling yourself a feminist has become less about conviction and more about appearance. This is especially the case in communities where the term is taken as the default. The label works like social camouflage – a quick signal of belonging that shields men from scrutiny, even when their behaviour tells another story.

I began to notice it most of all in the smaller everyday moments – the offhand jokes and comments that hang in the air longer than they should. I initially protested these words through pointed silence, and, when the guilt of my non-confrontation finally forced me to call them out, I would be brushed aside, accused of not understanding the laddish culture of his rougher hometown. As if a postcode could launder the meaning out of the words. As if the fact of his self-proclaimed feminism somehow erases the very real discomfort his words are meant to provoke.

And it’s not just the words. It’s hidden in the Instagram account where his grid slips in a corner of a Simone de Beauvoir cover, carefully

annotated and underlined. But he still follows a rapper with domestic abuse allegations, Andrew Tate, or a string of bikini models he’d never admit to liking in front of you.

It’s the friend who insists he “hates toxic masculinity,” yet calls his ex-girlfriend “psycho” the minute her name comes up. Or the subtle drop in enthusiasm when you’re talking and another man enters the conversation, who suddenly becomes the real audience he wants to impress. None of these moments are catastrophic on their own, but together they form a pattern that speaks louder than the label he’s chosen for himself.

The rest is aesthetics. The chivalry in holding doors open or extreme politeness that abruptly vanishes the moment sexual interest is off the table or the ego is bruised. The cigarette, lit just long enough to suggest a pitiable tortured edge, carefully obscuring the comfortable stability of a middle-class upbringing. The sudden, almost indulgent flare of paper-cut anger, sharpened against another man’s misogyny – a release that flatters his feminist credentials even as the violence of the gesture lingers, unsettling, for a more critical eye. These aren’t random quirks; they’re part of a curated brand designed to be read as safe, progressive, and desirable.

But a performance only holds until it doesn’t. Sometimes it’s a flicker – a smile snagging sharp when you tease out a contradiction. Other times it’s a full unravelling: the frantic defensiveness, the voice pitching up like cheap fabric under strain. That reaction isn’t concerned with protecting feminism; it’s concerned with protecting himself, the fast-fashion facade that was always going to fray.

And the truth is, there’s no cost to this label of allyship – at least, not in my small social bubble at university. I’m glad, genuinely, that there’s been an increase in open discussion, along with a reduction of stigma around the term “feminist”. This is not something to be undervalued, especially in the face of rising red-pill and anti-feminist rhetoric.

But alongside this comes a troubling ease: men can take on the label without ever having to grapple with what it means, or risk anything by using it. Such a lack of danger – often exacerbated by the presence of incentives – creates a gap between the safety women are induced to feel around a “feminist” man and the



actions those same men sometimes take. And it’s in that gap that the danger lies.

And here’s what I’ve learned most clearly: the moments when a man’s feminism really matters aren’t the ones lit up for display. They’re not in the loud declarations or the carefully crafted performances. They’re in the private spaces – in the dark, where intimacy makes a moment both beautiful and vulnerable. That’s where trust is tested, where instincts and intuition are all you have to go on.

And it’s in those spaces that the gap between words and actions shows itself most vividly. Too many of us know what it feels like when the man who called himself a feminist still crosses the line, still ignores a “no”, still believes his desire matters more than your safety.

That’s the place where the slogans can’t reach, where the mask slips, and where the cost of misplacing trust becomes something you carry with you. That is why I will never give away that trust freely again. The benefit of hindsight revealed the hollowness behind his words that I couldn’t see before.

So, when I say I no longer trust men who call themselves feminists, I don’t mean that there are no men who use this label and truly mean it. Instead, I mean that I have been reminded that trust has to be earned, and as always, actions speak louder than words.

Image credit: Samantha Sophia, CC BY 4.0, via Unsplash.

OXFORD

TINY LOVE STORIES

Life in rural England moves slowly, idling in a sort of liminal 1950s haze. If you slow your heart rate down to the pace of a small town, and cup your ear, you’ll be witness to the quiet beauty I find such peace in. Antiquated church bells marking the hour, charmingly out of sync. The chorus of farm animals, never further than a mile away, carried by the wind. The fabrics of this corner of the country are woven tightly, like the thread of hedgerows that line the quilt of patchwork fields.

Our unanimous comfort in the nostalgia of the unchanged can be found at every turn of a twisting street, in each letterbox of a brightly painted postbox, and between each and every stone-built house.

Abigail Christie, Christ Church

CHERPSE.

Oxford’s blind dating

A coffee date at the Missing Bean. Will their attire get in the way of romance?

Miss Underdressed

First impression?
A little bit jarring to be honest: he showed up to our coffee date dressed in a full suit.

Highlight?
He insisted on paying for my coffee, even though I had a voucher. I felt much less guilty about this when I found out that he has a second home.

Most embarrassing moment?
He kept talking to me about his mother, and he even told me that I looked like her. I had to text my friend to come and rescue me.

Describe the date in three words.
Off-putting, awkward, surreal.

Will there be a second date?
Absolutely not – I’m never dating a blond man again.

Mr Overdressed

First impression?
She seemed very lovely, but I have to say that she was a little underdressed for a date.

Highlight?
She was really interested in my recent trip to Thailand, I showed her lots of pictures from my camera roll, which I think is always a good way to break the ice.

Most embarrassing moment?
Not embarrassing for me, but she seemed to be texting under the table while I was talking to her, which made things a little awkward at times.

Describe the date in three words.
Pleasant, genuine, intriguing.

Will there be a second date?
I think so, I felt a connection, although our date was cut short when her friend arrived.



Austria, the Allianz, and applause

Natalie Tan examines how sound turns stadiums into something holy

In March I twice came very close to something holy: once in Austria and once at the Allianz.

In Vienna, where Mozart played, lived, and died, I buy a ticket to watch a classical music concert at Peterskirche. I have Kaiserschmarrn for dinner, travelling alone for the first time, wandering through the streets bundled up in my coat and scarf. The girl who clips my ticket can't be much older than me, but she takes me by the hand and leads me into that silence as the doors swing open, padding down the glossy tiles of the nave to where the pews await.

The string quartet emerges to polite applause. When the violinists lift their instruments to their shoulders I can hear them inhale, a single sound synced to the count. And it's beautiful, the sweet thread of song they draw out, how it rings high and clean and clear all the way up to the Peterskirche's Baroque frescoes. As if in answer, I'm reminded of the Allianz, how they cut the music and the crowd kept singing in the silence, 50,000 bodies speaking with the same voice: *Juve, storia di un grande amore...*

What a relief, to realise I'm still capa-

ble of wonder.

Debussy, del Piero: functionally they're one and the same, characters in a performance that inhabits a space and turns it into some kind of stage. Like every performance, what you're watching has to be christened with rituals. Rapt faces in neat rows, leaning forward as if doing so will bring them any closer to what's being created: could be either Serie A or a sonata. The round of applause that follows every piece of Dvořák also sees out every clearance, every shot on goal. In the Curva Nord I'm surrounded by Italians attempting to tick off every stereotype imaginable: smoking, tattooed, incredibly enthusiastic in telling me to ignore my ticket entirely and find a seat wherever I can. Behind us a bespectacled boy hoists a flag twice his size into the air, and as we watch he brandishes it wildly and sets off a new wave of melodic chanting.

Bells, songs, hums. People everywhere use sound to mark a time and a space as sacred. You don't need to speak Italian to infer what *bianco e nero* means: white and black, the signifier and the signified. The famous stripes. What else, the whole stadium heaving with it, this

delirious, electric energy sociologist Emile Durkheim called collective effervescence? A group of people coming together, communicating the same thought, performing the same action – the kind of extraordinary, unifying force that arises then, whether that's hushed awe or hysterical cheering. That lifts you up, makes you feel like you're part of something bigger than yourself.

But all those nebulous emotions like love and pride have to go somewhere: give them physical form and suddenly we can speak of away grounds like their atmospheres are hell, stadiums like they're sites of worship. In the Bernabeu they prayed for miracles and miracles arrived. So back into the bowl it goes, repeated and reanimated each time, infusing the physical space with that communal belief and rendering it divine. Durkheim was envisioning crosses and totem poles when he wrote of sacred objects which take on this significance; funnily enough San Siro's towering spiral walkways look as if you could climb them all the way to heaven.

You can trace these spaces a long way back. The stadium is the church is the medieval mead-hall of Viking-era

fame: that great big wondrous beast, supported by beams that stretch up to the ceiling and ringing with noise. In *Beowulf* the hall is named Heorot, meaning stag; multiple times throughout the epic the hall is referred to as having a mouth. There's something almost animal about it, something living.

It's in this way that society creates tangible representations of itself, a constant, cyclical expression of self-affirmation. Heorot represents all of human civilisation, an example of how a space becomes the world ... and isn't that still how it is? As though, for those 90 minutes in the stadium, nothing else exists? As though you lived and died and lived again to do it over next Sunday at noon?

"We have lost religion and found sport", former BBC sports editor Mihir Bose once claimed; we've never lost it, not really. There are patterns we cleave to, comforting ones, familiar ones. We don't change half as much as we think. Fishing for an ending, I return again to that anthem: this story of a great love. Like everything else, that's what this is all about.

Image credit: Sebleouf, CC-BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

SPORTING SPOTLIGHT

CHARLIE TOWLE

The Boat Race moving away from the BBC is another small sign of the decline of the broadcaster's role in providing an element of public service – we are being robbed of the opportunity for more truly ubiquitous national sporting moments. Events like the World Cup and Euros are elevated into the national conversation by their accessibility, but the way it's going we're unlikely to see a repeat of the collective joy that the 2005 Ashes series inspired. In a political environment that feels increasingly polarised, and a country that often seems as disunited as it has ever been, the loss of more opportunities for moments of sporting captivation on national TV is to be lamented.

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Puzzles

Reader’s Digest by JADEN LEE

The sentences below are clues to phrases, which, when read out, hint at the answer. For example, “Wandering in envy” might be a clue for “Lost and jealous”, which would read to the answer “Los Angeles”. Decipher the following clues to works of classic literature.

Want to put **Parmesan on your pasta**? Foreign immigrant set up **booths** for that – 1861

Extra red root vegetable cause **exclamation of disgust** – 1851

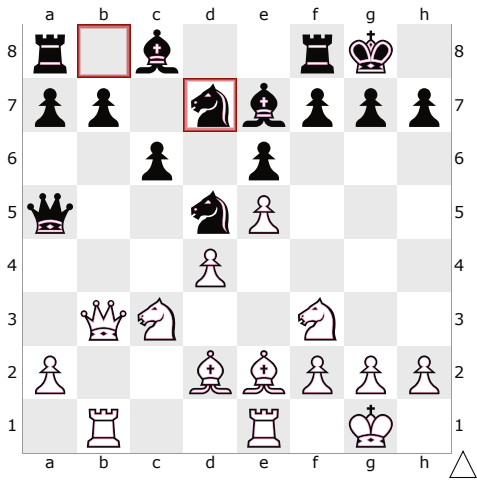
Visualise **burnt forgetful fish**, went ashy coloured – 1890

Hotdog found in **German beer mug** – 1818

Pork fat that was used to make **chips in America** – 1954

Chess

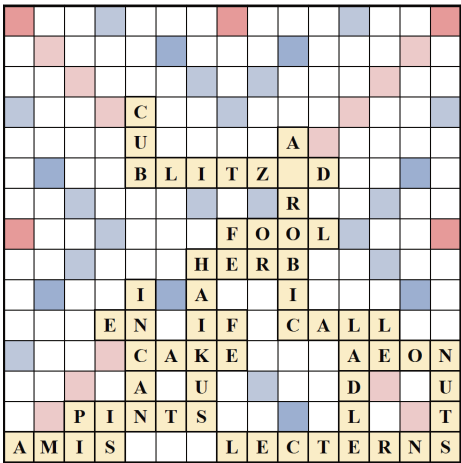
by NIAL CLARKE



Black has played Nd7, missing an opportunity for White to gain a significant advantage. How can you exploit this?

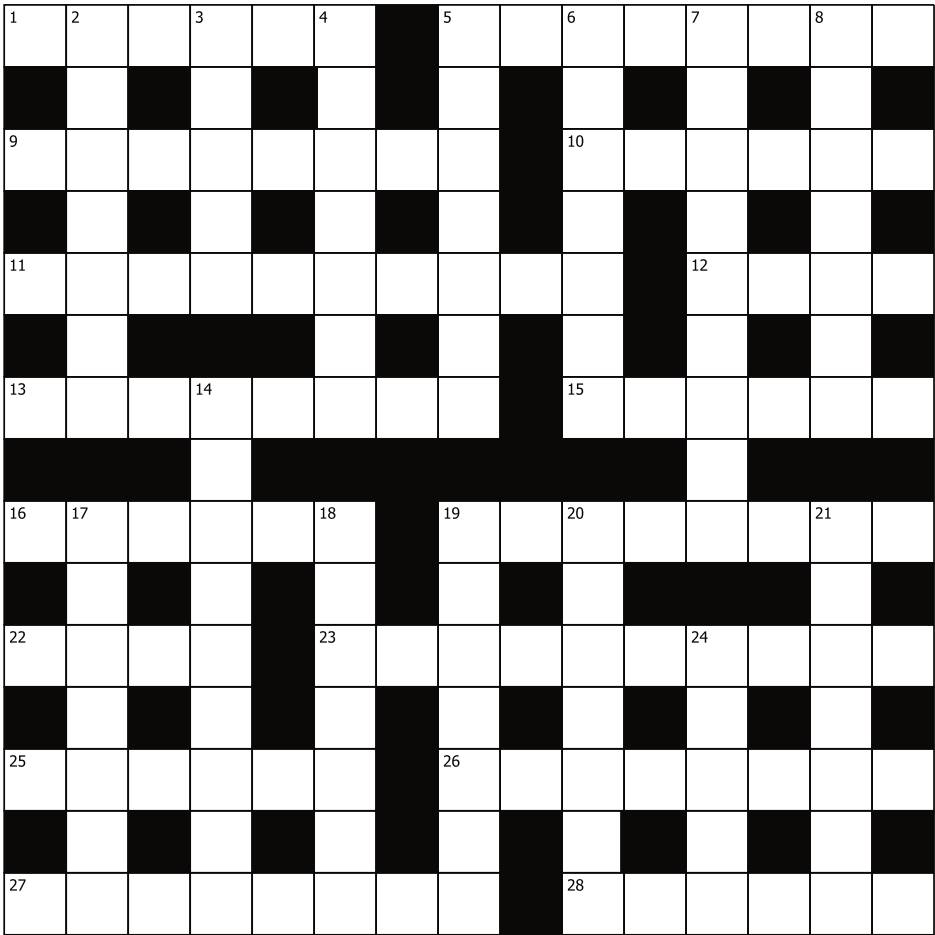
Scrabble

by ZOË MCGUIRE



We hold SLICITY. It’s no good looking for a bingo; there isn’t one. CYCLIST seems nice (via CUB) and scores 30, but there is a better play. Can you find it?

Cryptic Crossword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS



ACROSS

- 1) Beamed for small distance daughter (6)
- 5) Star for couple of pandas (3, 5)
- 9) Normal and found in celestial object diamond (8)
- 10) Setter divides remainder sloppily at first so takes exam again (6)
- 11) Article on revolutionary party skirt from our time (4, 6)
- 12) Extract in herbal or English tea (4)
- 13) Witty remark about pear tree (8)
- 15) Suppress itself carelessly (6)
- 16) Higher education establishment receives note principle reckons is biased (6)
- 19) Girl grew awkwardly one can’t stay still (8)
- 22) Reading maps upside down leads to unwanted information (4)
- 23) Lost rune laid intermittently can or can’t be counted on? (10)
- 25) Pictures of men returning to infiltrate federal organisation (6)
- 26) A trio buy amendment to death report (8)
- 27) Practice routine, the boring part (5, 3)
- 28) Instagram video rejected before editor watched (6)

DOWN

- 2) Performing time, at one, to go in the afternoon (7)
- 3) Famous duo have score of zero after return shot (5)
- 4) Prolong devouring starter: French stew (4, 3)
- 5) Bordeaux, for one, gave 3 points to Liverpool by header from Elliott (3, 4)
- 6) Local clashes by maddened brides taking drug (7)
- 7) Keeping warm without central blaze is disrespectful (9)
- 8) Inherent but weird lunar eclipse of star’s middle going west (7)
- 14) All about crafting marble with warning (5, 4)
- 17) Livelier kid grabs current (7)
- 18) Stalk Royal Business Centre with supporter in retreat (7)
- 19) Exercise figure (4, 3)
- 20) Animosity expressed by poorly bard (3, 4)
- 21) Jazz genre covering lyrical replacement to get bigger (7)
- 24) Tickle a model (5)

Week 1 answers:

Circular Reasoning: Raisin, Singly, Glyph, Pharoah, Oahu, Humour, OUROBOROS, Rosin, Intimacy, Cymbal, Balsam, Samurai

Chess: Nf4 wins a bishop; if Qe1, Nxd3 and if Qe3, Qxe3 fxe3 Nxd3.

Scrabble: The only bingo that can play in the rightmost column to hit the triple word is NEBULAE. You score slightly more for hooking ZE than ZA/OE.

Cryptic Crossword: Across: Earth, Tutorials, Stand Out, Reared, Pleasure, Whinge, Considerate, Briefs, Radiance, Porter, Freshers, Fearfully, Ember.

Down: Battels, Stanza, Punt, Borrow, Finalist, Allergy, Forums, Elder, Overturn, Redder, Brookes, Scarper, Sprout, At Home, File.