

Oxford students queue for over 48 hours to secure accommodation



- Students camp out for 48 hours to secure housing
- Over 100 students outside letting office
- Agency rules out online alternative

ARCHIE JOHNSTON

Students from the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University queued for up to 48 hours this week to secure housing for the next academic year. The agency Finders Keepers released 40 properties for 3 or 4 occupants at 9am on Tuesday morning, to a waiting queue of more than one hundred students.

At 5.40am on Monday morning, there were already ten students queuing down the side of the letting office. Three groups of students had pitched tents, two of which were set up in front of the office windows. Because of the cold temperatures, most people in the queue were dressed in hats, scarves, and winter coats.

The queue for Finders Keepers has become notorious in recent years. Last year, the BBC covered the experiences of a first-year Brookes student who queued for 24 hours to secure a lease. The situation has worsened this year. Speaking to *Cherwell* on Monday morning, students at the front of the line said that

they had been there since 9am on Sunday, expecting a 48-hour wait to secure the house that they wanted.

The properties offered by Finders Keepers are primarily in Headington, Marston, and Cowley, and the demand from students at both of Oxford's universities is intense. An Oxford student who joined the queue at 9am on Monday told *Cherwell* that she and her prospective housemates had looked at ten houses the previous week through another letting agency, Chancellor's. All ten of the available properties were leased before the students could attend the viewing.

A spokesperson for Brookes University told *Cherwell*: "Many students choose to live in the private rented sector after their first year, which is common across the sector. In Oxford, the market is competitive due to high overall demand for housing in the city. Returning students can also apply for University accommodation and many do so each year. To support students navigating this, the University provides clear guidance throughout the year on how and when to book with the University."

Of those Oxford University students waiting in line, around half were medical students seeking housing in Headington because of the neighbourhood's close proximity to the John Radcliffe Hospital. A third-year Oxford medical student told *Cherwell* that though she could have another year of college accommodation,

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International student fees increased by 37%

PETER CHEN

Overseas student fees have increased more than 37% over the last three years, a *Cherwell* investigation has found. BA Biomedical Sciences and BA Psychology have seen the biggest increase at 69% and 67% respectively. But even those rises do not make them the priciest degrees. In the Sciences Division, most degrees now charge £59,260 per year as of 2025/26 for overseas undergraduates, compared with the £9,535 cap for home students. In other words, an international science student can be paying roughly six times what a British counterpart pays for the same lectures, labs, and exams. These figures were obtained from publicly available information and through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

Broken down by division, the steepest increases are in science and medical subjects. In the Mathematical, Physical, and Life Sciences Division, 23 degrees have risen by an average of about 47% over 3 years. Fifteen programmes have increased from £39,010 in 2022 to £59,260 in 2025, while the remaining eight have moved to £44,880. Courses in the Medical Sciences Division, including Biomedical Sciences, Experimental Psychology, and Psychology,

Philosophy and Linguistics, record the highest average increase at around 53%, driven by BA Biomedical Sciences and BA Experimental Psychology, which have jumped from just over £30,000 to £51,880.

STEM vs Humanities

By contrast, humanities and social sciences courses are tightly clustered around £41,130 for 2025: 27 humanities and 8 social-science degrees move up from either £29,500 or £32,480, producing more moderate average increases of about 27% and 36% respectively.

Although tuition fees for domestic students are capped by the government at £9,535 – a figure that is now set to rise with inflation from next year – universities are largely free to set their own charges for overseas students. The home-fee cap was effectively frozen in cash terms for most of the last decade. Since 2012 it has only risen once, from £9,000 to £9,250 in 2017, before being nudged up again from 2025.

International origins

Over a period of high inflation, that has translated into a substantial real-terms cut in income per home student. Since Brexit, "overseas" has also included most students from the EEA and Switzerland who do not have settled or pre-settled status under the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement, meaning many EU students who would once have paid the home rate and accessed UK loans are now treated as full-fee internationals.

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Bloomberg investigation sparks scrutiny over Oxford's handling of sexual misconduct

CW: Sexual harassment; sexual assault

Oxford University is facing mounting media scrutiny after a *Bloomberg* investigation alleged that the University has consistently mishandled sexual harassment complaints involving senior male academics. The investigation, which took place over 9 months and drew on interviews with almost 50 people, describes an environment in which complaints were

MERCEDES HAAS

often addressed slowly, quietly, or not at all. Several of the individuals interviewed by *Bloomberg* said they feared retaliation or other repercussions for coming forward, particularly given the significant power imbalances within departments.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Sexual harassment has no place at Oxford. Our sympathies and thoughts are with

anyone who has experienced harassment or misconduct. We strive to ensure that Oxford is always a safe space for all students and staff. We take concerns seriously, applying robust procedures.

"Support for those affected is a priority, and we take precautionary and/or disciplinary action where justified. We reject any suggestion that the University tolerates harassment or puts reputation

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Intoxigation 2025: The good, the bad, and the Balliol bar

CHERWELL FEATURES

Pour out a glass for the second annual Intoxigation. 562 of you told *Cherwell* all about where, when, why, and how much you're drinking. Now it's time to reveal the results. The best bar, the best drink, the most alcoholic course, college, and year, and some of the wildest stories – you'll find it all below.

We received responses from every college, but excluded colleges from rankings when they were based on fewer than seven responses (Merton, Mansfield, St Catherine's, and Trinity).

The most alcoholic college was New College, while the most teetotal was Lady Margaret Hall. The booziest courses

didn't necessarily correspond with stereotypes: Engineering Science students spent the most time per week drinking, while Theology and Religion was the most sober.

There was an even split between college bars and pubs overall, but this changed between years. First-years drank the most in college accommodation, second-years were evenly split between college bars and pubs, while third and fourth-years overwhelmingly preferred pubs.

The best and worst bar were unequivocal: according to our respondents, you should get your socials to Balliol bar, and stay away from Wadham College.

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“the accommodation we do get is in north Oxford, whereas the hospital is in southeast Oxford, so very inconvenient location wise. This means that what generally most people have to do in fourth year is find a house somewhere else.”

The student lamented that the scramble to find housing came alongside the transition to clinical studies: “This is routinely the year that people find the most challenging, just because of how big of an adjustment it is to be in the hospital. So, having this looming over my head plus this whole organisational crisis with trying to find a house is not great, and I know that there’s a lot of people in the same boat as well.”

Explaining the process of securing a house through Finders Keepers, she said that the agency does not give property viewings before leases are signed, at which point tenants must make a holding deposit of a week’s rent. What this means, according to the student, is that “effectively a viewing costs £700”. She said that this makes it difficult to assess the quality of a property before one has signed the lease, a process that she described as “really shady”.

She told *Cherwell*: “Just because we need houses as students and the letting

agencies know that, doesn’t mean the letting agencies can just take advantage of us.”

Victoria Lyall, head of marketing for Finders Keepers, told *Cherwell*: “Launching our properties on a nominated date is the fairest way to give all students a chance to find a property they want. This enables us to communicate this date to students so that they can see all available options in one go.”

“During the pandemic, we launched the properties remotely (via the telephone) but this was not effective as the systems were overwhelmed; rather than one person calling on behalf of a group of five they were each calling and getting their parents to call in an attempt to get through first. We have always stated that we are open to suggestions on how to manage this situation in the fairest way, and this remains the case.”

Lyall said that students queuing was not necessary, and that other properties become available later in the year. She said that “if students start to queue, we advise them (face to face) that it is not necessary.” Students waiting outside the office on Monday, however, encountered no staff from the agency.

Image credit: Stanley Smith for Cherwell.



Asbestos forces temporary relocation of the University’s Blues’ performance gym

SIENA TRACEY

The Oxford Blues’ performance gym at the Iffley Road Sports Centre will be temporarily relocated after asbestos was discovered in its grandstand. A new building has been approved for construction on the same site, in order to avoid any danger to Blues members who use the gym.

The current performance gym is exclusively for the use of Oxford University’s most elite student athletes, including those involved in the Blues Performance Scheme, which is dedicated to supporting high-performing student athletes to balance their sporting commitments with their academics.

The gym contains a range of facilities, including equipment such as weights, squat racks, and Olympic lifting bars, as well as a large free exercise area with both functional equipment and conditioning equipment. It provides strength and conditioning assistance for student athletes, as well as hosting physiotherapy appointments and psychology team workshops.

According to TMD Building Consultancy, the presence of “a large quantity of asbestos” in the building’s fabric and finishes has been under control for some time now, but “the decision has been taken to relocate the gym from the grandstand to remove any in-use risks”.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “In the performance gym, we have also been carrying out regular air monitoring to confirm that there is no possible risk to users. However, the top floor of the stand building has now

reached the end of its usable life, and the presence of asbestos would make addressing this through refurbishment extremely challenging. We are therefore closing the gym for the foreseeable future.”

According to an investigation by the journalism non-profit Confront Power, 24 University buildings are classified as “high-risk” because of the presence of asbestos. Audits conducted between 2019 and 2020 indicated that the University may be non-compliant with UK asbestos legislation.

While the new building is constructed, student athletes will use a dedicated gym in the Plant Sciences/Biology building, and will be given access to facilities usually reserved for rugby and rowing. The University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “Our thanks go out to the Biology department, Oxford University Boat Club and Oxford University Rugby Football Club for their support this year in creating timetabled strength and condition sessions for University sports teams.”

Oxford City Council has granted the University permission to build a temporary new gym – lasting five years – on the same site in the absence of any other feasible option. Since, “operationally the gym cannot also be located away from the sports centre site”, and none of the other available spaces at Iffley Road are suitable for such specialised training, a new building at the Iffley site is required.

The new building is currently projected to open by summer 2026.

The Oxford Blues Committee declined to comment.

Image credit: Steve Daniels, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Labour to bring back maintenance grants for ‘priority’ courses

ARINA MAKARINA

The government has confirmed the reintroduction of maintenance grants for tens of thousands of students from low-income backgrounds on “priority” courses before the end of this Parliament in the Autumn Budget.

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

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

What exactly the “priority courses” will include is not clear yet. The government said the maintenance grants will be provided for students obtaining Higher National Certificate, Foundation, and Bachelor’s Degrees on priority courses. The priority areas will be linked to the government’s

industrial strategy.

The Oxford Labour Club told *Cherwell*: “[We are] delighted by the reintroduction of maintenance grants, a decision which demonstrates Labour’s commitment to a higher education accessible to all, and out of reach for none.”

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

The grants will be financed by a flat £925 yearly international student levy announced in the recent immigration white paper and outlined in the Budget. The levy will be introduced in August 2028.

The levy has been a contentious issue, with Higher Education Policy Institute estimating it would cost the universities in England over £600 million a year. The government stated in the Budget: “We will keep the rate under review, with future decisions on deployment of the proceeds set out at the next spending review.”

Dr Tim Bradshaw, the CEO of the Russell Group, an association

of 24 UK universities including Oxford and Cambridge, responded to the announcement, criticising the financing of the maintenance grants.

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

The SU spokesperson also told *Cherwell* that any policy that negatively affects the accessibility of British universities to international students “raises serious concerns” for the student body and the education sector.

The University of Oxford declined to comment.

Correction: An article published in the last edition, ‘Oxford Union October membership intake fell by over 25%’, incorrectly implied that Mr Shermar Pryce was a senior Union official when he was convicted of electoral malpractice this term. He was previously elected to standing committee and served as Social Events Officer, but was no longer an official at the Union at the time of his alleged misconduct and conviction. We are happy to correct the record.

Hague to confer honorary degrees to celebrate first year in office

SHARON SEGAYE

Lord William Hague has announced the conferral of nine honorary degrees to mark his first year as Chancellor of the University of Oxford. The degrees will be awarded during a special ceremony on 24th February, or at the University’s next Encaenia, Oxford’s annual honorary degree ceremony.

Hague told *Cherwell*: “I have nominated exceptional individuals whose achievements have been an inspiration to me and also made lasting contributions to society. I am very much looking forward to honouring their accomplishments next February.”

The nominees include Oxford’s Vice-Chancellor Irene Tracey; former US Secretary of State John Kerry; presenter of *The Rest is History* podcast Dr Dominic Sandbrook; journalist and *Cherwell* alumna Christina Lamb; and the British elections pollster Professor Sir John Curtice.

Christina Lamb, who will be conferred with the honorary degree Doctor of Letters, told *Cherwell* that “Doctor of Letters sounds so cool. And getting a doctorate without having to do any of the academic work has got to be good”.

Lamb added: “I’ve been a foreign correspondent for 37 years since an

unexpected wedding invitation took me to Pakistan, and have covered most of the major wars and conflicts of the last 25 years...As a woman in what was very much a male field, I have always focused on what war does to women. In particular I’ve tried to raise awareness of the horrific and widespread use of sexual violence as a weapon.”

Sir John Curtice has also been nominated for an honorary Doctorate of Letters. Reflecting on his nomination, Curtice told *Cherwell*: “I have spent much of my career, which began as a student at Oxford, trying to understand and explain the interaction between what politicians say and do and what the public believe and demand. It is humbling to have this work recognised.”

The University normally confers honorary degrees once a year during the annual Encaenia ceremony. But by longstanding tradition Oxford’s new Chancellor is invited to nominate candidates for additional honorary degrees, including the serving Vice-Chancellor of the University and the current head of the Chancellor’s former college.

Hague graduated from Magdalen College in 1982 having read Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). Dinah Rose KC, President of Magdalen, told *Cherwell*: “I am utterly delighted to have been nominated for an honorary

doctorate by the Chancellor. It is a great privilege to represent Lord Hague’s own college, Magdalen, in this way.”

The other nominated honorands include the author and conservationist Isabella Tree; New York University Professor Jonathan Haidt; and Lord Clerk Register of Scotland and former St Hugh’s College Principal Lady Elish Angiolini.

Isabella Tree, who is expected to receive an honorary doctorate in science, told *Cherwell*: “I feel something of an interloper accepting an honorary degree that has fallen into my lap but I take it in the spirit of it being an honour – and it’s a huge one. It’s incredibly kind of Lord Hague to consider me in such an amazing company, including Christina Lamb who has long been a hero of mine.”

“I don’t see myself as an academic or scientist...I’m just the chronicler, someone who has told the story and – I hope – can tell it in a way that is accessible and can inspire people to see the value in nature-based solutions to the climate and biodiversity crisis. Without inspiration and hope it’s easy to give up, but nature needs a voice and the world needs change. It’s an incredible honour to be recognised for helping to do something towards that change.”

Image credit: David Hays for Cherwell.



Bloomberg investigation sparks scrutiny over Oxford’s handling of sexual misconduct

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before people’s safety. While we cannot comment on individual cases, we are committed to continuous improvement and have strengthened our approach over recent years.”

The *Bloomberg* report outlines numerous cases in the past two decades, revealing what many staff and students characterised as a persistent pattern of institutional inaction. According to the investigation, 5 women reported alleged rapes or sexual assaults across the University in the past 5 years, while more than 30 women described direct experiences of harassment or bullying during the past 20 years.

Over the course of this year, Oxford has become the subject of two legal actions concerning harassment, while also conducting three internal inquiries. Two of these relate to senior figures at the Institute for Ethics in AI, and another staff member. Despite these concerns, several academics accused of misconduct were reportedly allowed to remain in their positions for extended periods, with some continuing to supervise students or occupy public-facing roles.

Cherwell also recently reported that Professor Mette Morsing has been named interim Dean of the Saïd Business school, following the resignation of Professor Sourmitra Dutta. A five-month internal investigation upheld three harassment allegations against Dutta made by a female academic. At the time, the University had stated that it would address concerns via “established procedures” and maintain a “strong framework of support...for staff and students...subject to harassment”.

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

Students join demonstration to keep Campsfield House immigration detention centre closed

CHERWELL NEWS

Approximately 50 protesters staged a demonstration outside the Campsfield House immigration detention centre in Kidlington, Oxfordshire, last Sunday.

The protest included students from Oxford University and was organised by the Coalition to Keep Campsfield Closed. The group are campaigning to prevent the government from reopening the detention centre after it closed in 2018 following concerns about safety and living conditions.

The coalition was founded by Asylum Welcome, a charity providing support and advice to asylum seekers and refugees living in Oxfordshire, as well as the Oxford branch of Student Action for Refugees (STAR) who seek to build “a more just society for refugees in Oxford and beyond”. The groups were joined by members of the Stand Up to Racism movement, as well as local residents, during the demonstration.

The protesters held placards reading “freedom is a human right”, and a banner which said “coalition to keep campsfield closed” was draped across a sign at the entrance to the Oxford Technology Park.

Song sheets were also handed out, with activists singing: “It could be you, running from the guns and bombs... It could be us, fleeing from famine and war.”

One protester told *Cherwell*: “We are here to express our rage and distress about a place that treats people with such hostility and cruelty simply for being born in a different place.” Another said that they were appalled that the site will be operated by the same company who ran the previous detention centre, adding “the whole thing is disgusting”.

Campsfield originally operated as a young offenders institution before becoming an immigration detention centre in 1993. The site closed in 2018 after the government decided not to renew its contract with Mitie, who operated and managed the centre.

Before its closure, 41% of Campsfield’s detainees described feeling unsafe, whilst an inspection by HM Chief

Inspector of Prisons found that “many rooms were cramped and standards of cleanliness were variable”, with rooms “blighted by damp and peeling paint”.

However, the Inspector also noted that Campsfield had a “calm and relaxed atmosphere”, with “little evidence of violence”.

Boris Johnson’s government announced plans to reopen Campsfield in June 2022. Last year, under the current Labour government, the Home Office awarded a £70 million refurbishment contract to construction firm Building Southern as part of the site’s reopening.

Cherwell understands that Campsfield is expected to reopen at the beginning of December and that the new centre will also be operated by Mitie.

Ahead of the protest, STAR said: “More detention means more years of danger, misery, and harm for detainees. Mistreatment of vulnerable people, including survivors of torture and trafficking, is deeply ingrained in the system. Immigration detention is not the answer to the arrival of people

in the UK, regardless of how they get here.”

A spokesperson from Asylum Welcome told *Cherwell*: “We strongly support student activism on these issues. Students have historically played a powerful role in challenging injustice, including since Campsfield was first opened, and we are grateful to STAR for continuing this legacy by raising their voices in solidarity today. Their advocacy helps challenge harmful narratives and keeps public attention focused on the human impact of detention.”

In response to the protest, Mitie told *Cherwell*: “Our colleagues are committed to upholding the highest standards of dignity, safety, and respect for those in our care. At Campsfield, our experienced team is focused on creating a safe and supportive environment built on compassion and care.”

The Home Office has been approached for comment.

Image credit: David Hays for Cherwell.



Larry Ellison scales back £10 billion Oxford science initiative



MATT DONNELLY

Oracle co-founder and tech billionaire Larry Ellison is scaling back plans for the Ellison Institute of Technology (EIT), an Oxford research institute, following a significant restructuring.

This comes after the departure of Sir John Bell from EIT; Bell left his role as president in September, after clashing with Ellison and the institute’s chief operating officer over their “downgraded vision” for the project.

Bell has been replaced by the former President of the University of Michigan, Santa Ono, as global president of EIT. Ono remains based in the US, and it is unclear if he will move to Oxford.

The upheaval raises questions on Ellison’s projected £10 billion investment over the next decade. While Chancellor Rachel Reeves called it “a major vote of confidence in Oxford as a global hub for science and innovation”, those close to the institute warn the total spending is not guaranteed. Only £2 billion has been committed so far.

Despite this restructuring, the University of Oxford continues to receive £20 million from EIT annually, plus an additional one-time investment of £30 million to fund scholarships. Under the partnership, which started in 2023, Oxford can take stakes in spinouts from joint research and receive up to 120% back in funding where intellectual property is held exclusively by EIT.

According to more than a dozen people involved, Ellison has tightened control over operations and cut several initiatives, including pandemic

preparedness programmes. The tech billionaire, who briefly became the world’s richest person earlier this year, has reduced EIT’s focus from 10-20 different projects to a handful of longer-term projects that are centred around AI and robotics, DNA sequencing, generative biology, and plant sciences. One former EIT employee said: “There’s been a bait and switch.”

EIT has outsourced several ventures, including an Africa Clinical Research Network, partly funded by the Gates Foundation. EIT has also eliminated much of its commercial strategy team and government relations unit. Some staff working on AI in government transferred to the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, which has received \$350 million from Ellison since 2021, according to public filings.

Substantial investments have already been made by EIT in Oxford, with Ellison having purchased a six-acre site for £45 million in 2021. He also purchased the Eagle and Child pub for £8 million, in the hope that it will become a “vibrant social and intellectual hub” for scholars.

“EIT’s contribution and commitment to both Oxford University and the city of Oxford is clear in our recent investments,” the institute said in a statement.

Oxford University said in a public statement: “Our strategic alliance with [EIT] continues with real momentum to deliver support and investment in, as well as expansion of, our existing world-leading expertise.”

Image credit: Oracle PR Hartmann Studios, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

NEWS SHORTS

Stone-Age snogging

A study by Oxford University has found evidence which suggests that kissing evolved around 21 million years ago. The findings suggest that Neanderthals and the common ancestor of humans and apes kissed. This is an evolutionary puzzle; kissing has no obvious survival or reproductive advantage, and causes disease transmission.

Aura farming, bio hacking, rage baiting: Woke madness

Voting for Oxford Word of the Year 2025 was open from 24th to 27th November. Members of the public could choose between the three shortlisted words online. The short listed words are “aura farming”, “biohack”, and “rage bait”. These words were selected by lexicographers who examine trends to identify words reflecting the world in the last year.

Wadham College hosts annual Queerfest

Wadham College hosted Queerfest last Saturday in the college gardens. The lineup included DJs, drag performers, and musicians. This year’s theme was GLOW, which “celebrates the vibrant spirit of queer culture – its resilience, visibility, and radiant diversity”. Queerfest, formerly known as Queer Bop, has been running for decades and was originally a protest against Section 28, which banned schools from “promoting homosexuality”.

SU sets up bike theft support scheme

Has your bike been stolen? The SU has announced a scheme to “make life a bit easier when things go wrong”. Students will be able to apply for a short term bike loan for up to 8 weeks. This will require a £25 deposit and will include a bike lock and an SU ID tag in the hopes that loaned bikes won’t also be stolen.

CROSS CAMPUS

Cambridge students angry that note sheets banned in exams

Cambridge University English Faculty has announced changes to exam regulations. Note sheets up to 1000 words were previously permitted in exams to balance the impact of COVID-19. The Faculty claimed that note sheets hampered “thinking with the terms of the question”. Students argue that this will turn exams into a “memorisation game”.

Online criminals impersonate the University of Toronto

The Varsity, the University of Toronto’s student newspaper, uncovered a pattern of forgers, scammers, and pornographers posing as official University of Toronto channels on Telegram. Their article claims that “Mexican pornmongers and deep web criminals” do this as an attempt to evoke trust and avoid scrutiny.



Canals reopen following long drought

MIMI HUDSON

The Canal & River Trust has announced that the southern section of the Oxford Canal has been fully reopened for navigation following a long period of drought.

It is the first time since July that water levels have been high enough to allow for boats to move through the locks. Storm Claudia’s prolonged rains earlier this month have helped this recovery following an extremely dry spring and summer.

A spokesperson for the Canal & River Trust, a registered charity which maintains the canals and rivers across England and Wales, told *Cherwell*: “The Oxford Canal felt the effects of the drought and prolonged dry weather across the country this summer and autumn. Our charity’s teams and volunteers worked round the clock to manage water levels but, with reservoir holdings dwindling, some locks had to temporarily close to boats. This helped us save water to keep boats afloat, protect the wildlife that lives in the canal, and safeguard the canal infrastructure itself.

“After such an extended dry period, sustained rainfall over several weeks was needed to top up the reservoirs that feed the canal. As soon as water levels allowed, we got the locks back open for boating. We know how frustrating navigation restrictions are and we’re grateful to boaters for their support.”

The stretch of the canal from Claydon Top Lock to Aynho Weir Lock via Marston Doles is now accessible to boaters. Somerton Deep Lock and

Dashwood Lock will remain closed for planned winter works.

The closure has heavily impacted businesses along the canal. Historic drydocks, such as Tooley’s Boatyard in Banbury, have seen an estimated 80% loss in business since the beginning of summer. The lifting of restrictions will come as a relief for both boaters and businesses, with the canal likely to see an uptake in pleasure cruises and trade.

The annual social and economic value of England and Wales’ canals is estimated to be worth £6 billion, with thousands of businesses benefitting from the waterways. The trust estimates that more boats are using their canal network today than at the height of the Industrial Revolution, sparking a so-called “second golden age of canals”.

The Trust’s spokesperson also told *Cherwell* that “any decision to close navigation on any of the 2,000 miles of waterways our charity cares for is a last resort, and would be based on a range of data”. This data includes real time electric monitoring of water levels as well as weather forecasts. Combined with the Trust’s centuries of experience and knowledge of lock usage, the teams who run the waterways are able to predict how much water is needed to keep navigation open.

The spokesperson added: “Knowledge gathered in previous droughts allows us to identify improvements in water management, but there is no doubt that climate change is making what were previously unusual drought or flood conditions happen more frequently.”

Image credit: Conor Walsh for Cherwell.

Derelict Debenhams store to be turned into innovative laboratory space

ABDUL OLAGUNJU-ADELKULKNE

The former Debenhams department store on the corner of George Street is to be turned into a 9,000m² laboratory space. Construction will begin next year and will be completed and operational by 2028.

The store, which closed down in early 2021 and has remained boarded up ever since, is to be transformed into a “life sciences and technology space”. After the Crown Estate launched a search for a company that could redefine the department store, their £80 million bid eventually resulted in a partnership between Pioneer Group and Oxford Sciences Enterprises (OSE).

Pioneer Group has built a reputation for life science growth

facilitation in Britain and in Europe.

Oxford University has been marked second globally for Life Sciences Research, to which the current Debenhams project is set to contribute. Richard O’Boyle, Executive Director at Pioneer Group, commented: “With the UK’s largest network of life science experts, cutting-edge labs, and robust support systems, we are poised to redefine industry standards and foster a vibrant scientific community.”

Oxford Sciences Enterprises is a venture capital firm and one of the world-leading builders of university spinouts. Since 2015 it has built an investment portfolio worth up to £2 billion, within what it calls “Oxford’s innovation ecosystem”. CEO at Oxford Science Enterprises Ed Bussey spoke of the difficulties of accessing “the right lab or start-

up space – which can be a significant barrier to entry for companies as they scale”. The repurposing of the former Debenhams store hopes to remedy this lack of available spaces for early-stage businesses in supply-constrained locations, such as Oxford.

The Crown Estate told *Cherwell*: “The transformation of this site will ensure the next generation of pioneering science and technology companies have the necessary space to grow their operations in the heart of Oxford, benefitting the local and national economies, while unlocking subsequent social value for the community.”

The former Debenhams store is currently being stripped out by contractors BibbEgan, who are preparing to hand it over to The Crown Estate, ready for the next phase of construction.

Pembroke houses ‘Highly Commended’ at Oxford Preservation Trust awards

SOPHIA HARRIS

A renovation project, retrofitting and refurbishing student accommodation at Pembroke College, was “Highly Commended” at the 2025 Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT) awards earlier this month. At the awards ceremony, which took place at St John’s College, Pembroke was recognised in the “Adaptive Re-use” category.

The renovations of 21-24 Pembroke Street, comprising four Grade II listed cottages in Pembroke’s North Quad, took nine months to complete. They included fabric improvements to the buildings’ facades and the restoration of heritage features, including fireplaces which were lost in previous renovations during the 1960s.

The OPT Awards acknowledge excellence in design, conservation, and sustainability in Oxford, celebrating projects which enhance the city’s

landscape and demonstrate a communal focus. This year, plaques were awarded to eight projects, with 13 runners-up. Harris Manchester College won in the “Adaptive Re-Use” category for their College chapel renovation. Merton College also took home a winner’s plaque in the “Building Conservation” category, awarded for work done on the stained-glass windows of their Old Library.

A spokesperson for Pembroke told *Cherwell*: “Everything we do at Pembroke is underpinned by our core purpose, which is to serve the common good through the provision of education and the promotion of scholarship and research, but we know that today this involves adapting to a changing world around us.”

While the refurbishments have enhanced the buildings’ original character, the installation of a low carbon enabled heating system reflects the College’s commitment to sustainability.

Other areas of the College’s site have also been decarbonised.

Throughout the refurbishment, Pembroke emphasised the importance of student satisfaction. One first-year undergraduate who now lives in the renovated staircases told *Cherwell*: “I love the building. The recent renovations have made living in a college dorm feel more like living in a holiday resort. The rooms, the living areas, the kitchen, the bathrooms, all of it is done to an excellent standard. The price of the accommodation is the second cheapest at Pembroke and yet by far the best accommodation here.”

The renovation plans were drawn up by Ridge and Partners, a built environment consultancy whom the college has worked with previously. Subsequent building work was completed by Benfield and Loxley, the principal contractor for the project.

Image credit: Fisher Studios with permission.

COP30 sees launch of Oxford TIDE Centre’s Nature’s Intelligence Studio

RUARIDH MCEWEN

The COP30 summit, which concluded on 21st November in Brazil, saw the launch of a project from Oxford University’s Technology and Industrialisation for Development (TIDE) Centre. The Nature’s Intelligence Studio aims to observe and imitate natural principles in biological systems to advance renewable energy goals, environmental monitoring, and sustainable mobility.

This process of imitating nature is known as biomimicry, which is an innovative branch of science, drawing from nature’s ways of creating natural solutions for problems such as energy efficiency, material strength, and climate adaptability. The goal is to study natural processes and structures to create new technologies, without involving living organisms – instead studying the mechanisms they use. The development of some wind turbine blades to mimic the shape of humpback whale flippers due to their natural aerodynamic form is an example of biomimicry.

The creation of the studio has been supported by an investment of around £1 million from Oxford University, philanthropic foundations, and the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF). Initially, the Nature’s Intelligence Studio will operate between Oxford and Belém, Brazil, with plans for future expansion to other

regions.

The Nature’s Intelligence Studio sets out to treat the planet’s biodiversity not just as a conservation priority but as a source of innovation. TIDE Director Amir Lebdioui said: “The developing world holds most of the planet’s biodiversity, which is a vast library of biological intelligence built over 3.4 billion years of evolution.”

Lebdioui further told *Cherwell* that the project “will incentivise students and faculty to join a community interesting [sic] in bio-inspired innovation. Students are more than welcome to reach out in case they want to contribute.”

The Studio aims to launch three initial programmes. The first of these is an “energy atlas” of nature’s innovations, to be developed in collaboration with the startup Asteria. This platform will use AI to analyse over four million scientific articles to map biological solutions to industrial energy challenges.

The Studio is also planning an “ideathon”: in partnership with CAF, they will aim to identify promising innovations from the global south, focusing on biologically inspired prototypes in real-world field conditions. local communities. The Studio plans to ensure these communities share in the value created. This approach fosters new economic and scientific opportunities amongst indigenous groups.



INVESTIGATIONS

International student fees increased by 37% since 2022

Continued from Page 1

Unlike their American counterparts, it remains highly unusual for British universities to offer scholarships or bursaries to overseas undergraduates that cover a substantial proportion of tuition fees or living costs. In the United States, around 20% of international students receive some form of student loans. In the UK, overseas students are not eligible for loans from the Student Loans Company, and students at Oxford must complete a financial declaration which demonstrates their ability to pay their fees before they are finally admitted. A handful of high-profile, highly competitive schemes – such as Reach Oxford or country-specific awards – exist, but they reach only a tiny fraction of the international cohort. *Cherwell* estimates that fewer than 30 of these places are available. For most overseas students, the sticker price is broadly what is paid. In practice, this means international undergraduates

are funding their degrees out of family resources, private or government sponsorship, or commercial loans.

International STEM students pay roughly six times what a British counterpart pays

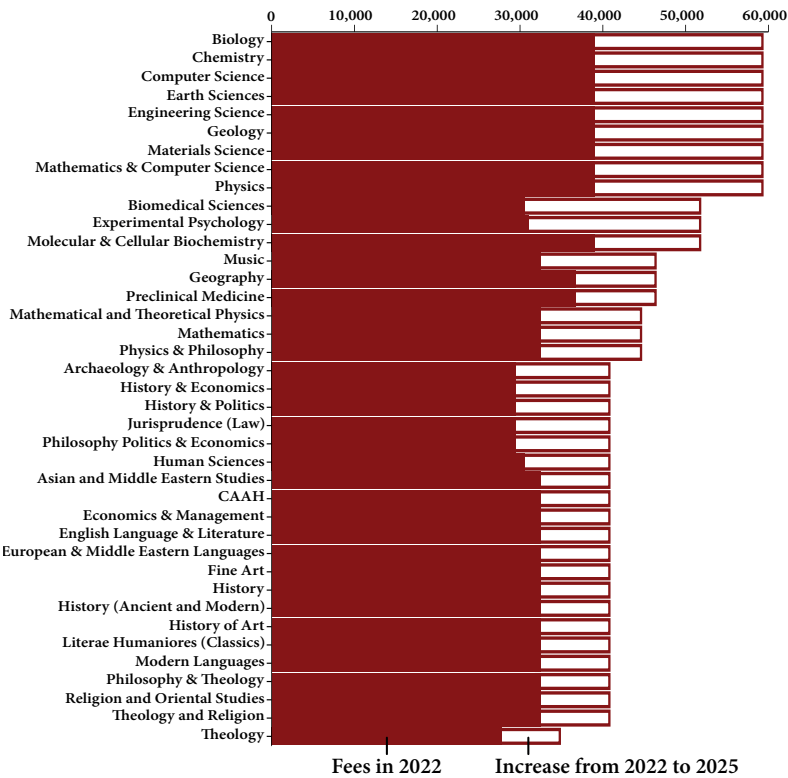
At the same time, the government has tightened rules on international students. Dependants have been largely removed from the student route, financial and English-language thresholds have been raised, and ministers have repeatedly stated that international recruitment needs to be “curbed”. These moves are justified by reference to data showing that a non-trivial number of people who entered on study visas later claimed asylum.

National problem
Universities across the UK are, by the sector’s own admission, in serious financial trouble. Because the home-fee cap was frozen for so long, teaching a home undergraduate, especially in a lab-based subject, now often costs much more than the regulated fee brings in. *The Guardian* reported back in 2022 that Russell Group universities make “a loss of £1,750 a year teaching each home student”. The effects are now clear: courses closed because of finances, departments merged or hollowed out, staff made redundant, and institutions in the regions openly talking about insolvency.

At the University of Cambridge, most STEM degrees cost £44,214 – around 25% less than Oxford – while humanities and social sciences remain broadly comparable at £29,052. Cambridge’s Medical Sciences stand out at £70,554, one of the highest fees in the country. By contrast, University College London offers STEM degrees at £36,500 and humanities at £29,800, closely aligned with the University of Edinburgh, where STEM tuition is £36,800 and humanities £28,000.

Oxford and Cambridge Universities are often presented as exceptions, insulated by their large endowments and research income. To some extent, that characterisation is accurate: both institutions have kept the proportion of overseas undergraduates relatively stable, while many other universities have shifted much more aggressively

International student fees increase from 2022 to 2025



towards international recruitment. The fee rises at Oxford indicate that these institutions are also operating within the same financial constraints that affect the

wider sector. The University of Oxford was approached for comment. *Graph credit: Oscar Reynolds.*

Too hot to handle: Tracking Oxford’s energy efficiency

GASPARD ROUFFIN

A *Cherwell* investigation can reveal that 89% of buildings owned by the University of Oxford do not have valid Display Energy Certificates (DECs). The University has discontinued the maintenance of DECs following changes in regulations.

DECs are on a scale of A-G, with the best score of 0 being equivalent to an A, and the average rating being 100 or D. Anything above 150 would be a G, the worst possible rating. The average rating for all University buildings examined by *Cherwell* is 128, equivalent to an F rating. This raises concerns regarding the University’s ability to monitor the energy usage of its more than 200 buildings, as well as its commitment to energy efficiency in the context of fossil fuels and climate change.

Display Energy Certificates (DECs) are legal requirements for all buildings occupied by public authorities – such as universities, local councils, or hospitals – and must be renewed every year for buildings with surfaces of 1,000m² or more. They are issued following assessments carried out by professionals, and publicly display the building’s energy performance, alongside details about heating and energy emissions.

Cherwell has analysed 1,356 DECs available publicly on a government database. Over 300 unique buildings were then identified, owned either by Oxford colleges or the central University

or its subsidiaries, such as Oxford University Press, and only their most recent DEC kept for this analysis.

The University told *Cherwell* that it “takes its energy and sustainability commitments seriously, and has a programme to ensure all required DECs are up to date and are regularly reviewed”. For instance, the University has committed to “significant reduction in energy consumption over the winter months”, through the implementation of energy-saving policy measures, such as reducing the temperature of buildings to 19 degrees and encouraging staff and students to act responsibly.

Of the 121 University-owned buildings examined by *Cherwell*, only 3 received an A rating, the highest score on the scale

The energy sector is the leading driver of climate change, producing around three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions. In the UK, buildings remain a major contributor: they generated about 17% of the nation’s total. Public sector buildings make up roughly 2% of UK emissions from direct fuel use, mainly

from heating, but this rises to around 10% when electricity and other indirect sources are included.

Oxford’s expired certificates

Of the 121 University-owned buildings examined by *Cherwell*, only 3 received an A rating, the highest score on the scale. Around half of the buildings were rated D or above – the average rating for buildings (where a score of 100 is typical and lower scores indicate better performance) – while 59 fell below this benchmark.

Of Oxford’s famous landmarks, many have substandard energy ratings. The Ashmolean Museum has a rating of 117 (E), Oxford University Press of 111 (E), and the Weston and Bodleian Libraries of 105 and 98, equivalent to an E and D respectively.

Some do have more positive ratings, like the Sheldonian Theatre which sits at 38 (B), or Examinations Schools at 43 (B). The Radcliffe Camera sits in the middle, with a rating of 66, equivalent to a C.

As of the end of November, only 13 of the 121 DECs seen by *Cherwell* were still valid. This means that 89% of certificates are expired, including several that have been expired for more than five years. Buildings with expired certificates include the Radcliffe Camera, the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University Press, and the Blavatnik School of Government.

Cherwell understands that because of a recent change in regulations, DECs are no longer a pathway to comply with the University’s legal obligations with the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme (ESOS), meaning that many DECs that were formerly voluntarily maintained as a pathway to comply with this scheme are no longer maintained by the University.

The University told *Cherwell*: “Recent changes to the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme (ESOS) mean many of the DECs that used to be required for University buildings are no longer needed. These are therefore no longer being maintained.” It is unclear how the University will continue to monitor energy efficiency across its buildings.

Changes and improvement

Many of the University’s buildings have benefited from significant energy efficiency improvements over the past

two years, as evidenced in the data analysed by *Cherwell*.

For instance, the central University offices, located in Wellington Square, improved their rating by 21% over that period, going from a D to a C. Similarly, the Ashmolean Museum improved by 16%, and the Radcliffe Science Library 15%. The most significant improvement was the Department of Biochemistry, which improved its rating from 301 to 149 by 50%, just barely passing the threshold of the worse rating band.

During the same period, the rating of certain buildings got worse – for instance the Taylorian Institute, which saw an 85% increase in its score to 89, now ranking it as a D. Other buildings include the Engineering Department, now at 91, or the Rothermere American Institute which saw an 85% increase to 113, placing it at an E.

Of all the buildings analysed by *Cherwell*, only three list renewables as an energy source

An Oxford spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The University’s Environmental Sustainability team are continually working to monitor and improve the energy efficiency of buildings across our estate. Since its initiation in 2022, the Oxford Sustainability Fund allocated £3.5 million to support energy-efficiency projects and feasibility studies, paving the way for improvements across more than 200 University buildings.”

Energy sources

Of 178 buildings analysed by *Cherwell*, 166 source their energy from natural gas. Natural gas is a fossil fuel, but which is widely available and produces significantly less carbon dioxide emissions than oil or coal. It is therefore considered a transition between non-renewable and renewable energy sources. Of the remaining buildings, eleven source their energy from grid supplied electricity, and one from oil – the

University Parks Tentorium, which acts as the operational and administrative centre for University Parks.

Of all the buildings analysed by *Cherwell*, only three list renewables as an energy source – the Department of Pharmacology which takes 30% of its energy from renewables, the NDM Building at 11%, and the Department of Biochemistry at 0.1%.

Oxford colleges

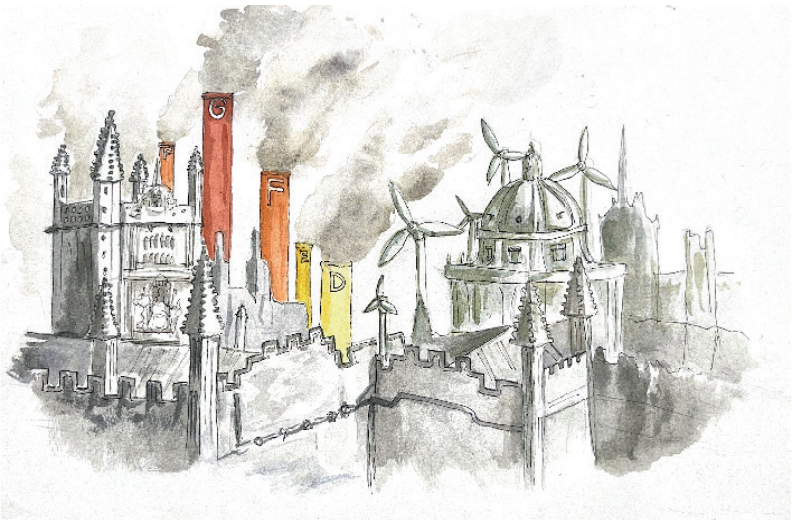
Of all Oxford colleges, only four have publicly available DECs: St Peter’s College, Lady Margaret Hall, Wadham College, and Wolfson College. *Cherwell* understands that unlike the central University, it was never a requirement for colleges to obtain and maintain DECs, but some chose to do so voluntarily.

Speaking to *Cherwell* about their energy efficiency policy, many colleges explained that they monitor energy use throughout buildings with a platform called Eyesense. Wadham College explained to *Cherwell* that they “take monthly meter readings that are put into our energy database”, and that CO2 emissions are “calculated and reviewed against the amount used in the previous year, adjusted for outside temperatures”.

St Catherine’s College told *Cherwell* that the voluntary procurement of DECs was part of their “commitment to environmental responsibility, transparency, and steady improvement in the College’s energy performance”, while St John’s College said that it voluntarily acquired an Energy Performance Certificate – similar to a DEC – for its most recent building, the Library Study Centre, “as it was considered more appropriate for a new build”.

Across the collegiate University, a varied picture of energy monitoring is emerging. Some colleges have chosen to track their usage through their own systems, while many central University buildings currently operate with expired DECs following recent regulatory changes. The difference highlights a practical challenge rather than a divide: without consistent, up-to-date data, it becomes harder to understand how energy is being used across Oxford’s estate. As the University continues its sustainability work, ensuring clear and regular measurement will be an essential step in assessing progress.

Illustration credit: Cassian Clifford.



OPINION

Distance does make the heart grow fonder

POPPY LITTLER-JENNINGS

Being a student at Oxford certainly comes with its challenges – something that, as Oxford students, we love to lament. The workload is intense, the nightlife limited, and the caffeine dependence debilitating. But, whilst the University is not without its faults, since embarking on my year abroad, I’ve come to realise just how much there is to love about it. With this in mind, I think we could all use a reminder of the charm that lies at the heart of our wonderfully unique student experience.

I’m currently about three months into my semester studying at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris, and whilst it is just as wonderful and surreal as you would imagine, I feel as if my academic muscles are beginning to atrophy. Without the weekly essays and the accountability that comes with tutorials – all of us with horror stories of turning up to tutes woefully unprepared will understand – I’m not doing anywhere near as much work as I would in an Oxford term. On one hand, I’m relishing the chance to step off of the academic conveyor belt for a bit, breathe, and enjoy all of the opportunities that living abroad as a student boasts (at this point I remember my tutor’s comparison of termtime to a lorry going down a mountain at full speed without any breaks).

But equally, there’s a part of me that misses the

productivity and the fast-paced nature of a normal Michaelmas term. Maybe this is the result of a kind of Stockholm Syndrome, but, regardless, I’ve been reminded of why I chose Oxford in the first place. The opportunity to study my passion under the tutelage of leading experts is not something to be overlooked. At the ENS, my experience as an international student has been very different. *Cours* or classes are more like lectures, with little discussion or interaction, and the only assignments to validate modules are due at the end of the semester. This, whilst a welcome break at first, is definitely less effective at cementing my understanding of new topics, and less engaging than the tutorial system.

Beyond the scope of the purely academic side of Oxford, there is so much more that I’ve come to miss – the little idiosyncrasies that make Oxford what it

The intensity of Oxford can be damaging, but we can also become desensitised to our University’s beauty too quickly

is. Formal dinners as a regular indulgence; heavily subsidised college bars never more than a stone’s throw away; gazing in awe at the dome of the Rad Cam every time I stumble across it...All of this is part of a microcosm of quirks and traditions that we might occasionally roll our eyes at, but is ultimately close to all of our hearts. I know it’s embarrassing

when you catch yourself using Oxford-specific vernacular with friends from home (“What the f*** is a bop?” – a dear friend of mine) but it wouldn’t be our University without it. With this in mind, I would venture to argue that the romanticisation we tend to deride so-called Oxford influencers for is not necessarily the crime we purport it to be. Why are we so intent on denying that (true to its *Harry Potter* connotations) Oxford can feel magical? Whilst I don’t deny that the intensity can of course be damaging, and too much pressure can erode the novelty of gorgeous libraries and eating in resplendent halls, I think we can also become desensitised to our university’s beauty too quickly.

Even the allure of Oxford itself springs to mind, which might seem odd considering I’m currently living in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. But the small-but-mighty Oxford holds its own against the boulevards of Haussmannian buildings and views of the Eiffel Tower peeking around street corners. The way that the University is intrinsically intertwined with the city grants its students a special relationship with every nook and cranny of the place, allowing it to truly feel like home. So whilst running into an ex-situationship in the Tesco’s on Magdalen Street is a nightmarish reality, there is also something comforting about the snug muddle of colleges, libraries, and faculty buildings that makes up Oxford.

As I’m typing now, I cast my mind back to that day in Year 13 when I received my offer and was, predictably, overcome with disbelief and euphoria. I would urge fellow students to do the same – remember that attending Oxford is both a huge achievement and a colossal privilege. Amidst the essay crises and the weight of your sub fusc, remember to look up every now and then to appreciate where you are (unless you’re in the glink).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Gosling’s gargoyle

The piece about gargoyles (‘Look up: Oxford’s statues and gargoyles’, Week 3) in *Cherwell* caught my eye. As bursar at St Edmund Hall, I installed Oxford’s last functioning gargoyle in the Quadrangle as a tribute to Justin Gosling upon his retirement as Principal. Justin agreed to its installation as his response to years of witnessing students doing the same thing in the flower beds outside the Buttery opposite the Lodgings. It amused him to hear tour guides claim that the effigy was of the journalist Robin Day, an alumnus of Teddy Hall – the sole justification for which was that both Gosling and Day wore horn-rimmed spectacles.

Geoffrey Bourne-Taylor, *Bursar, St Edmund Hall 1988 - 2006*

There’s more to art than the Ruskin

It is argued that “without Modern Art Oxford the art scene in Oxford is pretty bad” (‘What does a Ruskin artist actually learn? A graduate’s perspective’, Week 5), and despite great student shows, there isn’t much going on at Oxford. This perception of Oxford art scene is not only a misunderstanding, but also wrongly attributed to the small size of the city. I believe that the source of this disappointment is the separation between Oxford students and Oxford residents. Student shows are often only advertised within the small circle of Ruskin students and their friends, and exhibited in college or University buildings. In fact, students almost never participate in non-University related art events such as life-drawing organised by Common Ground Café, or zine-making workshop by Curio Bookshop. Perhaps it’s time for Ruskin students to step out of their bubble, interact with and gain inspiration from people outside Ruskin, so more people are made aware of the artistic events going on at Oxford.

Aijia He, *Psychology and Philosophy, Brasenose*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

I love how one year of my degree can pay for the whole undergrad of my friends (‘International student levies won’t level up higher education’, Week 5).

jul.szypul via *Instagram*

Wow I can’t believe people don’t want to pay £300 to watch a bunch of racists being given a platform and see all their money being spent on “dinners” (‘Oxford Union October membership intake fell by over 25%’, Week 5).

danatbrookes via *Instagram*

Cherwell has been attacking Mandy since before it was cool (‘Lord Peter Mandelson resigns as honorary fellow of St Catherine’s College’, Week 5).

hassan.akram via *Instagram*

Justice for a review from the bridge (“‘You will kill my children!’”: ‘A View from the Bridge’ reviewed’, Week 5).

st4nley.sm1th via *Instagram*

The entry gates suck. I’m not sure how architecturally related that is, but it’s the truth (‘An architectural tour of the Schwarzman’, Week 5).

luccc.a5 via *Instagram*

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



Illustration: ‘Merry Christmas from Thames Valley Police’ by Archie Johnston.

The joint honours system is a mess. It needs reform

MORWENNA STINCHCOMBE

I am juggling four balls. Biologically speaking, I should only have two. Ideally, none.” So I (a trans woman) kept joking in the final month of my year abroad as I tried to work, have a social life, see my boyfriend, and organise my eventual escape from Germany. Admittedly, I was complaining for the art of it, for the easy laughs. Yet what awaited me is not like juggling four balls, but instead 20, because I am one of those empty husks inhabiting Oxford whose souls have long been drained out of them. No, not an MBA student. A joint honours student.

Doing German with another subject was originally a pragmatic decision: straight German would have been a merciless onslaught of German literature, and I wanted to occasionally rest my weary head upon another subject after having to read a great mass of unintelligible compound nouns. Doing joint honours at Oxford, though, offers no such rest. I find myself busily flitting between the two halves of my course, with very little time to enjoy the luxuries of life, such as going to the toilet or breathing. My Google Calendar stuffed to the gills with hours to be spent in the Schwarzman, lectures often clashing. All for the sake of two degrees for the price of one.

Some would suggest that the solution is simple:

Oxford should just not have joint honours. Goodbye to HisPol (History & Politics), ClEng (Classics & English), and a myriad of equally comic degree names. We are looking for people who want to really specialise in their subject, so why do we allow people such a broad scope through doing two or three degrees at once? Within many of the Modern Languages joint honours, there isn’t even a bridge paper to at least make a vague attempt to conjoin the two degrees. Instead, they stretch out, vast and unconquerable, before the student, and equally so before tutors, many of whom have no clue what happens in the other half of the degree. As such, timetabling errors abound among weeks where three essays get set as each tutor believes their pupil only studies their subject.

Yet I was admitted to my degree on the basis of being enthusiastic about both German literature and English literature. Four years ago, I found just as much joy in Kafka as in the Brontës. Why should one be muted? If anything, having people in a field who also have expertise in another provides a richness to research. In writing about the English Romantics, I can touch on their forefathers in Germany and enhance my work in a way only somebody versed in German literature could do. Equally, a classicist writing about 17th Century English rhetoric will

have a greater understanding of the matter at hand than a sole English student. Part of the reason I am writing about Vonnegut for my dissertation is because I was enticed by a man with German ancestry writing about his experiences in a war fought against Germany.

The problem is not in the buy one get one free deal. The problem is in the disorganisation of the oh-so-Oxford fractured collegiate and faculty system, making it unendurably hard to schedule anything. Sometimes tutors do not even know which papers from *their* course a joint honours student is supposed to take. Tutors end up setting hefty work simply out of naïvety. It is rare that anybody tells them what their students do, apart from the paper(s) they are teaching. How I yearn for a centralised system to organise my degree, like my boyfriend in Cardiff has. Instead, 0th Week becomes a mess of scheduling, and given that tutors are people, sometimes tutorials move – and my entire life with it.

It may be deeply un-Oxford, but the solution is clear: faculties must talk to each other, and keep tutors abreast of what specific degrees involve. They must be able to collaborate on lecture timetables, rather than revolving around single honours students. Then, Oxford will be able to serve the best and brightest – and the most burdened.

We must separate Church and University

The continued influence of the Church of England over Oxford University is a worrying anachronism

LILLY LAW

If I had attended Oxford just over 150 years ago, I would have had to swear loyalty to the Church of England. Of course, if I were attending Oxford in the mid-19th century as a woman, I would have had bigger problems than religion, but we'll put that aside for now. From 1581 to 1871, every Oxford student had to declare their fealty, not only to Christianity, but to its Anglican denomination. Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Catholics, and many more were all excluded from its halls.

Obviously, this is no longer the case. The University's 'Opening Oxford' exhibition in 2021 showcased the various ways Oxford has become more welcoming over the past century, presenting it as a secular place of education where religion is not a factor in treatment or experience. The problem is that this is not entirely true. Financially, culturally, and quasi-judicially, the Church of England remains part of the furniture in both the city and the University.

Fifteen colleges have senior members of the Church of England as their Visitor, making them the ultimate authority on college statute interpretation. This, admittedly, sounds quite dry – college statutes tend to include lofty preambles and regulations for trustees. But they also set out the administration of a college, the disposal of revenue, and the powers of investment. A Visitor essentially acts as a judge, interpreting the meaning of words within these statutes, then stating how they should be applied to a given situation.

A dispute about statutes would not go to the County Court, but to the Visitor, then the High Court, resulting in considerably increased expenses and a financial barrier to appeal. They hold considerable theoretical power over a college. But on what grounds? What expertise does the Bishop of Winchester have to determine how Trinity College is governed? With Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) calling for divestment from various arms companies, what qualifies the Archbishop of York to determine what the Queen's College's investment powers include? This is not a coincidence. The appointments are made *ex officio*, meaning that the Visitor for some of Oxford's wealthiest, most influential colleges (including St John's College, All Souls College, and Magdalen College) will always be the person holding a certain ecclesiastical position. This requirement imports an apparent religious influence into a key area of college for no reason other than historical precedent.

This is not entirely innocuous. The provisions that import members of the Church into colleges can be rigid and poorly-worded, and do not lend themselves to easy removals in the event of difficulty. In Christ Church, the statutes made it incredibly

difficult to remove the head of the College, who until 2023 had to be a member of the clergy. This changed as the result of a six-year legal battle with the previous Dean, involving a pay dispute, an allegation of sexual harassment (which was settled), and £6.6m of college funds. With the Church of England beset with scandals, it is reckless to continue importing such figures into colleges with no safeguards.

In a subtler way, the Church of England is presumed as the default throughout college life. It's not the only religion in Oxford – the colleges are non-denominational – and yet the vast majority still perform Anglican services. Yes, Mansfield follows the Nonconformist tradition, Harris Manchester has a Unitarian congregation, and various permanent private halls (PPHs) have Roman Catholic affiliations. The Anglican chapels too have an outward-looking perspective, and regularly arrange multi-faith services. But the novelty of such services underscores the point that the Oxford colleges are, spiritually, first and foremost spaces for the

Financially, culturally, and quasi-judicially, the Church of England remains part of the furniture in both the city and the University

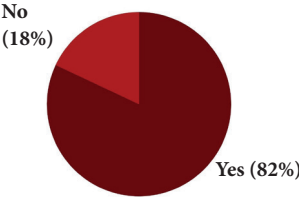
Church of England. You no longer have to swear an oath of fealty, but your pidge will be overflowing with leaflets for their services.

Christianity is centred and universalised in sharp contrast to other religions. This risks isolating atheist or non-Christian students from college welfare support, which is frequently tied up with the chapel. While Christian services make their way into colleges, other religions remain academic disciplines with associated societies. The University has a Centre for Islamic Studies and an Oxford Jewish Centre. Both are open to the public and members of the University for prayer, as well as study of the religions. An Anglican student at, say, University College, would walk past their chapel every day in college, able to reach it in minutes to attend a service. A Jewish student would face a 20 minute walk to Jericho. A Hindu student wouldn't have anywhere to go at all – only last year was a community centre secured, and the University is yet to show direct support. Such an exclusion is doubly insidious given the presentation of the chapel and the chaplain as a welfare space.

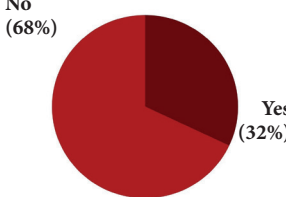
A historical influence is one thing – Oxford is the city of dreaming

THE VERDICT

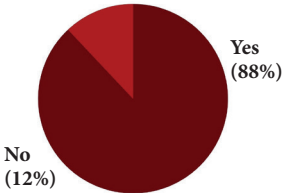
Do you miss Oxford when you're not here?



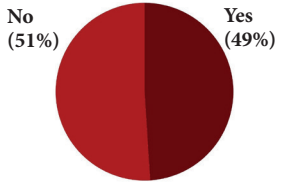
Does the Church influence the University too much?



Should Oxford do more to coordinate joint honours?



Should Oxford SU disaffiliate from NUS?



**According to 1500 Instagram respondents*

spires, after all, and many of those spires are attached to chapels. But the Church should not be influencing how the University operates, nor how colleges spend money, nor how students are treated. It shouldn't be doing so in opaque, unclear ways that are difficult to predict – when applying to Brasenose, I certainly didn't know that the Bishop of Lincoln would be my ultimate authority.

The Church of England has been affiliated with Oxford for so long that it has blended into the background. Its influence over culture and governance is found in obscure PDFs, and bubbles under the surface, until a scandal bursts the situation wide open. At the same time, it subtly reinforces the idea that, whilst Oxford is a place for everyone, it still welcomes some people more readily than others. This is not to say that Christianity has no part in Oxford. Merely, when roughly 50% of Britons say they have no faith, and global religions are growing faster than ever, Anglicanism should not be presumed default, and certainly not the authority.

It's time we woke up to failures of the NUS

Cambridge's disaffiliation is a reminder that the National Union of Students is not fit for purpose

ARCHIE JOHNSTON

After the Cambridge Student Union (SU) voted to disaffiliate from the National Union of Students (NUS) last month, Oxford University students should be left with questions about whether the NUS is equipped to live up to the political moment, especially after years of watering down their radicalism.

The official case for the motion to disaffiliate claimed that the NUS has "ignored calls from students nationwide, and a motion passed at their own highest democratic decision making body, to campaign for Palestine". This is not the first time that the NUS has been challenged in recent years, especially over what Amnesty International has described as the apartheid and genocide in Palestine. In the last three years, SUs at the Universities of Warwick and York have tabled disaffiliation motions, citing Islamophobia, antisemitism, and anti-Palestinian racism in the organisation. Cardiff SU voted against renewing their NUS affiliation just last week. However, there is a much longer history here that Oxford students should consider: that of a once-vital student organisation slowly fading from relevance, an organisation we desperately need back. If Oxford disaffiliating could serve as a step towards an effective and principled NUS, it is one we should seriously consider.

The disaffiliation vote at Cambridge came after more than 200 student leaders and societies signed an open letter to the NUS criticising the organisation for "failing to defend" pro-Palestinian student protesters facing a "wave of repression" on university campuses. This should ring true for Oxford students more than anyone; the demonstration at Wellington Square on 23rd May 2024 saw heavy police repression of peaceful demonstrators. The University accused student protesters of violence and failed to back these claims up. The NUS, however, was silent.

The issues raised in the open letter were serious, and merited appropriate engagement. Unfortunately, NUS leadership did not see it that way. According to Not My NUS, the group that organised the open letter, the NUS issued a letter to the CEOs of

all student unions that signed, pressuring them to unsign or be banned from NUS events.

Though in recent months the NUS has made concessions to student pressure, supporting the campaign to evacuate Gazan students with places at UK universities, it has not done enough. Delegates walked out of the NUS conference last week after NUS president Amira Campbell refused to state, when asked, that the NUS was willing to be anti-Zionist. The invitation of Palestinian ambassador Husam Zomlot to the conference rang a little hollow, given Campbell's refusal to stand against the ethno-nationalist ideology which guided the settlers who expelled Zomlot's parents from their home in 1948.

This equivocation over Palestine draws a sharp contrast with the key role the NUS has played in fighting apartheid in the past. The NUS "Boycott Barclays" campaign was critical in forcing the bank to pull out of apartheid South Africa in 1986, putting its institutional power behind a campaign which had originated in the student movement and university occupations of the 1960s.

Yet some argue that the case for disaffiliation ignores the important work that the NUS does on issues that affect UK students more directly. The Cambridge Labour Club highlighted the work of the NUS in "campaigning to save the graduate route visa or defending trans rights". This argument sets up a false opposition, however, between taking a principled stand on global politics and effectively defending student interests. An institution which can fight for the just treatment of its own members is one which can stand up for justice everywhere. It is here that the NUS is now failing.

In 2000, journalist Gary Younge said that over the previous fifteen years the NUS had been transformed "from a mass campaigning organisation to little more than a provider of cheap booze and a crèche for would-be parliamentarians"; a dramatic change that occurred under the dominance of the Labour faction in the NUS. The detrimental effect of the monopolisation of NUS leadership by its Labour supporters reached its most depressingly illustrative moment in 2007, when the NUS dropped their opposition to tuition fees under then-President,



now-Health Secretary Wes Streeting. In 2010, while demonstrators filled the streets of central London in protest against the trebling of fees, NUS leaders were telling Liberal Democrat MPs that if fees were doubled, the organisation would only "go through the motions" of opposition.

The NUS has changed, and for the worse. Over the last three decades – especially during the tenure of New Labour – it has become a springboard for ambitious would-be Westminster apparatchiks rather than a purposeful organ to represent students and uphold progressive values. It no longer fights power. It is a path to power.

This is such a waste. Having a nationwide organising structure for students to use is vital. Whether challenging universities on complicity in genocide or fighting for the freedom of international

students to study in the UK, there are so many things that the institution can do, and has done. The NUS needs to change if it has a chance of fighting on both fronts. Dramatic actions like disaffiliation cannot be off the table, if they can force the NUS into becoming the institution students so desperately need.

A spokesperson at NUS UK said: "Through NUS, students at Oxford are represented across the country, in Parliament and wider afield. NUS staunchly defends the right to protest on campus. Additionally, we are committed to ensuring that Palestinian students can access higher education here in the UK. We have been working with the Universities Minister on that. We hope to continue working with Oxford SU, and remain open to constructive conversations."

Image credit: Jean-Christophe Benoist, CC-BY-SA-4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

FEATURES

The Intoxtigation 2025: Where, why, and how much are Oxford students drinking?



CHERWELL FEATURES

In a whistlestop tour through drinking at Oxford, Cherwell reveals the best college bar, the most alcoholic course, and the booziest college. The results may surprise you...

Continued from Page 1

Before we begin, a note on data: it is difficult to work out how much people are drinking from a self-reported survey. Few consider their drinking in terms of units, but there aren't many other reliable metrics from which it can be estimated. We went with the number of days drinking per week, with an additional question on how many days respondents drank specified numbers of units. We also asked how many days they had been drinking in Week 4, in order to compare perception with reality (respondents were surprisingly on the money). In estimating intensity, we also looked at where people were drinking. As a result, this survey is not claiming to be a perfect encapsulation of every drop of alcohol consumed within Oxford. It's a tour around attitudes, anecdotes, and habits in drinking.

The colleges ranked

New College was the booziest college in Oxford, with the average student drinking 3.62 days per week. Second and third place were taken by Jesus and Christ Church, closely following with 3.5 and 3.1 days, respectively. Other strong contenders included St John's (3.1), Queen's (2.9), Balliol (2.86) and St Hilda's (2.71).

At the other end of the spectrum were Lady Margaret Hall (2.33), Corpus Christi (2.32), Keble (2.31), and St Edmund Hall (2.20). Ultimately, the three most teetotal colleges (or PPHs) were Regent's Park (1.71), St Anne's (1.78), and Worcester (2.19). For Regent's, however, this may have just been efficiency, rather than sobriety; for 3 respondents, at least 1 of those days would exceed 14 units (the NHS recommended limit for a week).

Yet our survey also showed the gap between perception and reality. Our respondents thought the tipsiest colleges would be Balliol, St Peter's, and – as our evidence revealed – the fairly sober Teddy Hall. It's possible a great bar doesn't always translate to more drinking...

The courses ranked

Most alcoholic course was a different story. Stereotypes about hard-working STEM students and no-contact-hours humanities students were generally confirmed, but with some notable

exceptions. The most sober course (with 1.86 days spent drinking per week) was Theology and Religion – perhaps that one day was a Sunday. Aside from this, the sciences dominated: Maths (1.90), Physics (2.05), Human Sciences (2.07), Biochemistry (2.09), Earth Sciences (2.11), and Experimental Psychology (2.11).

By contrast, climbing up the alcoholism ladder were Classics (2.65), the STEM-outlier Biomedical Sciences (2.65), English (2.85), History (2.88), PPE (3) and Law at an average of 3.08 days per week. The most intoxicated course, however, bucked all trends. With an average of 3.14 drunken days per week, Engineering Science students seemingly just can't put the bottle down, topping the leaderboard as the drunkest degree. Not a great sign for our future buildings and bridges.

Location, location, location

So where exactly are our students doing all this drinking? Our data suggests that Oxford students are nothing if not consistent in their favourite watering holes. Despite all the buzz regarding rising pub prices, college bars and pubs are still essentially neck-and-neck as the city's favourite locations. Respondents were asked where they drank the most, which we then compared to how many days they drank. Respondents who drank most in college bars drank an average of 3.04 days a week, narrowly beating pubs (3.01). Clubs trailed behind the two at 2.77 (must be all those blacked-out rounds of shots), followed by drinking in college accommodation at 2.48.

Despite stereotypes of lonely and overworked Oxonians, only 0.08% of respondents reported primarily drinking alone, half of whom were at Merton, and over half of whom reported drinking primarily due to emotions or essays. Statistics which, if nothing else, are worrying in their existence, but reassuring in their proportion.

What is interesting is not where people drink, but how little concern about cost seems to affect the choice. Weekly expenditure was nearly identical between mainly drinking in pubs (£23), college bars (£23), and clubs (£22). Even drinking in college accommodation averaged out to £16 pounds per week. The only real outlier was drinking alone (£8), which stubbornly resisted Oxford's rapid inflation

and remained alluringly affordable. In other words, Oxford students are seemingly willing to spend roughly the same amount regardless of location, suggesting that convenience, culture, and company matter more in choosing where to drink.

A Balliol bartender told *Cherwell* that people drink whatever is cheapest, which at Balliol is Hobgoblin. She did not have glowing things to say about the taste of the drink. On the other hand, a St Hilda's bartender reported a broad range of popular drinks: "We started selling San Miguel this term and it's ridiculously popular. The only thing that comes close to it is Stella to be honest – although on the cocktails side our passionfruit martini goes down a storm. We also get loads of requests for Guinness, so are bringing that onto draught for next term. Oh and of course – our cocktail and beer pitchers are some of

our most popular offerings!"

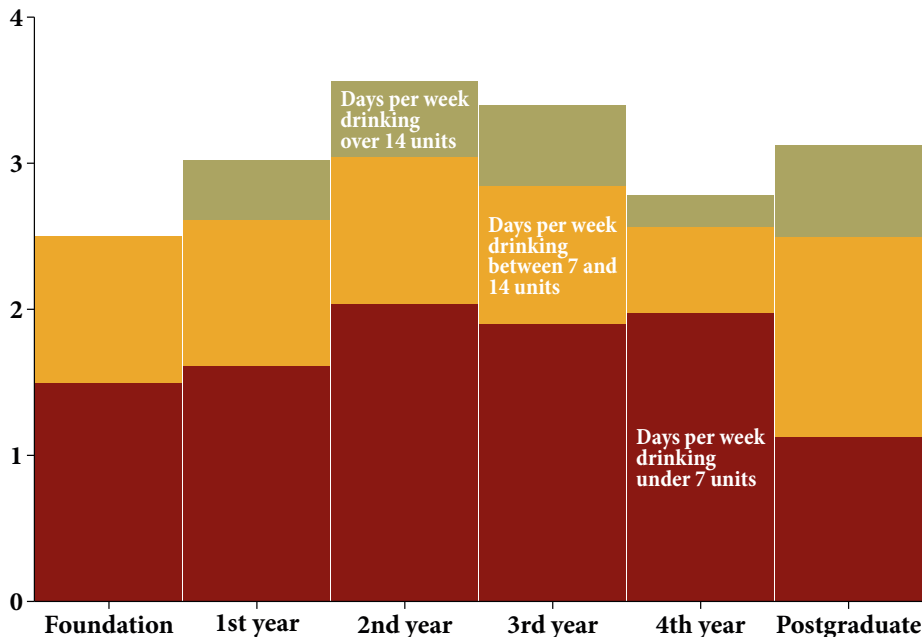
When it comes to the pubs themselves, a clear favourite emerged. The Lamb and Flag swept the poll with 83 votes, firmly claiming its title as Oxford's best pub for the second year in a row. The Four Candles (63), White Rabbit (56), King's Arms (54), and The Bear (50) completed the top five. According to the most frequent and regular pub goers, the order reshuffled slightly, with the Lamb and Flag still secure, but The Bear climbing to second place, and White Rabbit rounding off a holy trinity that sits at a convenient triangle in Oxford's dense centre.

Inappropriate imbibing

Unsurprisingly, all this drinking doesn't always stay in pubs and bars. Respondents listed some of the most inappropriate places they have been drunk. The

Average drinking quantities by year

Seven units is approximately equal to three glasses of wine or three pints of beer



standout answer by a wide margin was tutorials, with around 40 students having experienced at least one tipsy tute. College chapels featured 13 times, with students reporting everything from doing a reading of a Bible verse drunk, to singing a solo at Evensong after a few too many. One respondent even claimed to have been drunk and locked inside their chapel at 3am. Some answers went even further, with students confessing to being drunk at the Master’s Lodgings, a Principal’s Collection meeting, the Sheldonian on matriculation day, and in one particularly memorable entry, the “gravel of the driveway of [their] tutor’s house”.

With a whopping 40 respondents confessing to turning up to tutorials mildly hungover, mildly dying, and in some cases, wildly still intoxicated, it seems Oxford drinking culture follows students straight from the club to the classroom. Some respondents describe all-bad experiences, like death warmed up. Others swore up and down it “makes your answers better” due to “pure adrenaline”. We can only hope that this was true for our one respondent, who described still being drunk during their last preliminary exam. Experiences reported ranged from petrifying to downright bizarre, with one student confessing to solving a problem in slow motion, only to have their tutor start “playing the f**king banjo at me to shame me”, and others describing a post-Halloween morning class where someone brought a cereal box instead of their laptop. One brave student soldiered through an entire tutorial before sprinting out to throw up down a grate on Ship Street. Their tute partner described them as “unusually subdued”.

Stereotypes about hard-working STEM students and no-contact-hours humanities students were generally confirmed, but with some notable exceptions

Special mentions must be made for the May Day tutorials. Several beautiful May morning classes were interrupted by students stepping out to throw up, falling asleep, and at some points even almost fainting. The only comfort? It was May morning for everyone else in the class too.

The institution of the college bar

If you’re going to drink at college bars, you want to drink at the best ones. According to the respondents to our survey, that’s Balliol bar, St Peter’s bar, or Jesus bar. The draw might be obvious for Balliol – it was also voted best college drink, and its central location may account for 72% of its voters attending other colleges. A Balliol bartender told *Cherwell* that college bar crawls often come to a screeching halt when they reach Balliol, with all other college bars forgotten for the rest of the night.

It divided opinion, however, in our “Rant about a college bar” section. Its supporters were avid: “Balliol Bar might be the best thing about my university experience”; “Balliol Bar is so good and cheap and awesome”; “A shining beacon against corporations and late stage capitalism”. But its detractors were equally passionate. According to one: “Balliol Bar is OVERRATED. IT IS BUSY, IT SMELLS, AND THE FLOOR IS STICKY”. For another, the “blood red scheme” gave “slightly dodgy vibes much more in keeping with the college”. From a Balliol student, there was a different criticism: “Balliol bar is great for everyone who’s not Balliol since the reason it’s so cheap is because of the insane rent prices.”

A bartender at Balliol told *Cherwell* that the bar gets most busy on a Thursday night when it gets inundated with drunk rugby and netball players on crewdates and bar crawls. She highlighted the peculiar trend at Oxford of drinking being a punishment. People don’t drink to enjoy drinking, she said, they drink to get as drunk as possible. Comparing it to her home city of Glasgow, where, she said, people drink for enjoyment, the gamification of drinking was quite odd to her.

On the other hand, almost half of the votes for St Peter’s bar (48%) came from its own students, many of whom emphasised the importance of it remaining student-run. Across the survey, student-run bars were overwhelmingly popular. 82% of people preferred their bars to be run by students. In longer-answer questions, respondents praised student-run bars for the opportunities they provided, both for work experience and for paid work, in a university that bans term-time working.

Leo Kilner, one of the St Hilda’s bar managers, spoke to *Cherwell* about his experience behind the bar. St Hilda’s operates a hybrid system, with the College having taken over the bar after the COVID-19 pandemic. Students run the bar, while

the College is in charge of stock and devising staff rotas. This is a relationship of autonomy and high expectations. The bar is expected to pay for itself, but the bar team is able to try all sorts of strategies to achieve this. At the moment, they are focusing on drawing in students from other colleges, taking advantage (for once) of Hilda’s less central location: “Everyone walks past Hilda’s on the way to O2 or the Bullingdon, so it’s the ideal pres spot.”

He considered student-run bars to have a more communal, convivial atmosphere than their professional counterparts, and to provide some of the cheapest drinks in Oxford, since they weren’t attempting to cover a professional salary. However, the downside of this was the strain on the bar team. Each member of the team had to play so many roles – bartender, events planner, strategist – alongside an Oxford degree. They host live music nights, karaoke, Champions League football nights, and pool tournaments, making the bar an events space in its own right, not just for pres. Something appears to have paid off. Despite low uptake of the survey from St Hilda’s, the bar was the ninth most popular, and 70% of those who voted for it attended other colleges.

The student-led status of the Balliol bar was also a point of pride for the bartender *Cherwell* spoke to. She believed that student-run bars make for a better atmosphere, that people like knowing who is behind the bar, and that it is a great opportunity for the bartenders working there. She added that with student-run bars, there was no pressure to make a profit and that they can just be a space for people. She lamented the loss of student-run bars across the University.

In some ways, people felt more strongly about the best bar than the worst. On the latter question, there were double the number of blank responses than for the best bar. Still, the result was unequivocal – Wadham College bar is the worst college bar in Oxford, with 64 votes and numerous rants. Apparently, the quality brought out the poets in respondents, with numerous metaphors used to encapsulate its horror. A cafe, an NHS waiting room, and a youth club which had recently received its alcohol licence were all comparisons drawn to the Wadham bar. That, of course, was when it was open. The occasional 9.30pm closing time attracted considerable approbation, as did the bright lighting and the plastic cups. One Wadham historian put it in the most militant terms: “Wadham undergrads, we are supposed to be Communists. Seize the means of having a good old time.”

Drinking culture

The reasons Oxford students reach for a drink are, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly social. A whopping 58.7% cited socialising with friends as their primary motivation, with 28.8% pointing to social events more broadly. Just 1.2% admitted to drinking for emotional reasons, 0.9% for dates, and a brave 0.5% confessed to alcohol-fuelled essay writing. Meanwhile, 8.4% abstained from drinking entirely.

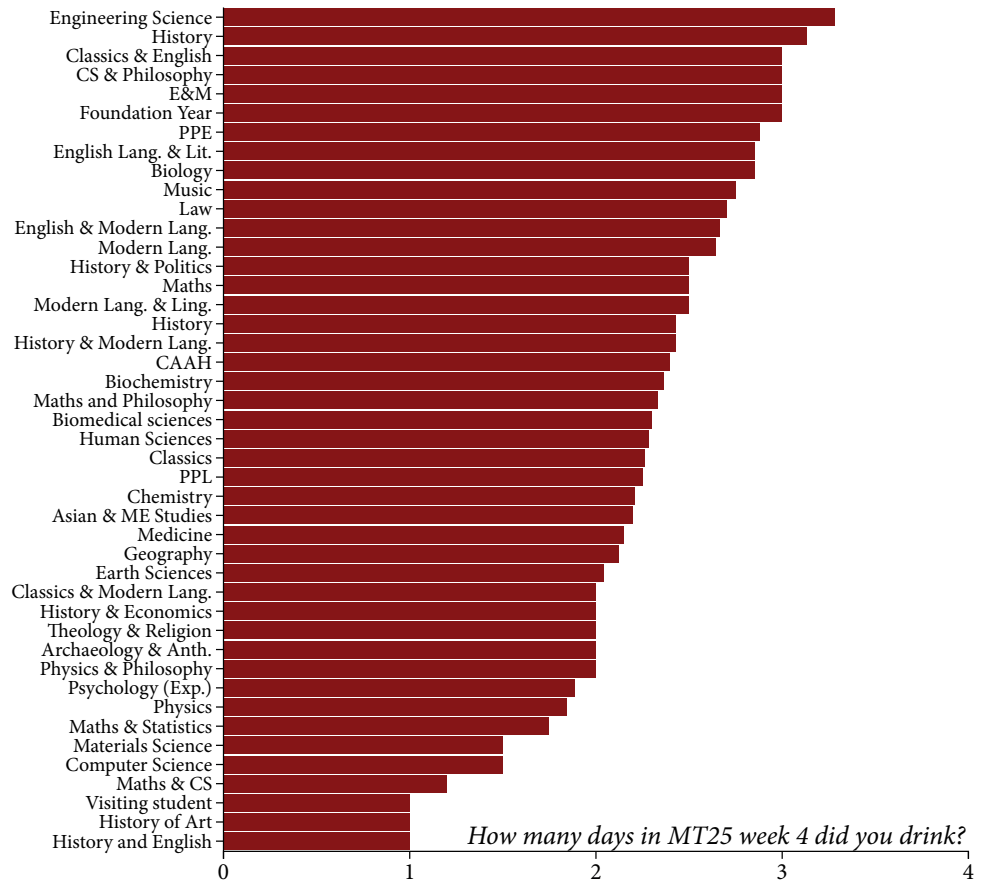
The dominance of social drinking suggests Oxford’s booze culture is less about drowning sorrows or Dutch courage than it is about fitting in. When nearly nine in ten students are drinking primarily to bond with mates or navigate the endless carousel of bops, formal halls, and college bar sessions, abstaining becomes a social minefield. It’s hardly shocking that teetotallers remain a minority – though with 52 respondents choosing not to drink, there’s a quiet contingent opting out. While we emphasised that both drinkers and non-drinkers were welcome to fill in the survey, it’s also reasonable to assume that more people who drink will answer it, leading to a selection bias.

Despite all the buzz regarding rising pub prices, college bars and pubs are still essentially neck-and-neck as the city’s favourite locations

But how much are students actually putting away? The NHS recommends no more than 14 units per week, ideally spread over three or more days. Our survey found 181 respondents regularly exceeding this threshold on at least one day per week. The breakdown reveals a stubbornly male-dominated pattern: 71 men versus 55 women drinking over 14 units in a single day weekly, with the gender gap widening as frequency increases. Among those drinking heavily two days per week, it’s 21 men to twelve women. By four days per week, it’s exclusively male territory. And then there’s the outlier: one Christ Church third year drinking over 14 units seven days a week. If that is true (which *Cherwell* does doubt) we would like to express concern for his wellbeing. A Balliol bartender observed that during crewdates, girls were more likely to do shots of spirits

Average number of days drinking by subject

Some subjects excluded due to low response rates



and order doubles with mixers, whilst the boys drank mostly pints, making them “messier” by the end of the night.

Yet self-perception tells a rosier story. Nearly half of respondents described their drinking as “moderate”, with 25.1% rating it “low”. Only 17.3% admitted to drinking “quite heavily”, and a mere 3% copped to “very heavy” consumption. This perception at least matches some reality. The “low” drinkers drank an average of 1.28 days in week four, the “moderate” drinkers an average of 2.9 days, and the very heavy drinkers reported drinking 4.8 days in the week. But while the amount drunk (and spent) increased, something decreased across these categories – satisfaction. 90% of teetotallers drank as much as they would like, and even moderate (73%) and quite heavy (50%) drinkers were broadly content. But of self-reported very heavy drinkers, 59% drank more or much more than they would like.

The university years follow a predictable arc. Over half of freshers (56%) reported increased drinking since arriving at Oxford, but this enthusiasm steadily wanes. By second year, 48% had ramped up their intake; by third year, 41%; and by fourth year, just 26%. In practice, this reduction appears to be limited to the amount being drunk. Between years, on average, there was just 0.3 days difference. Third-years reported drinking 2.85 days per week, while first-years drank 2.5. The places that each year reported drinking in most may account for a difference in perception, or amount, between them. First-years drank the most in college bars or college accommodation. Second-years were split fairly evenly between college bars and pubs. Third and fourth-years overwhelmingly drank the most in pubs, suggesting more social, low-key drinking meetups, rather than the club nights and crewdates

of earlier years.

The reverse trajectory tells the sobering truth: only 12% of first-years had cut back, compared to 27% of second-years, 39% of third-years, and a majority 57% of finalists. Whether it’s impending Finals, encroaching adulthood, or simply growing tired of hangovers, Oxford students eventually learn to ease off the accelerator.

But for Kilner in the college bar, the first years weren’t necessarily swarming: “You notice there’s usually one friend group per year group that makes the bar their second home. The rest of the undergrads aren’t necessarily regulars though – especially the freshers, which is surprising. From what I’ve heard across the uni, there is a definite downward trend in drinking in general in our generation, and every new wave of freshers highlights it more and more. We aren’t able to take the freshers’ custom for granted anymore, which I think speaks a lot to how our generation are changing their approach to university.”

In terms of the change in drinking habits across the years, a Balliol bartender said that freshers were most likely to drink the infamous Balliol Blue, whereas third and fourth years stay far, far, away from it. She also noted that drinking was particularly prevalent in Freshers’ Week, when 18-year-olds, who don’t have to face their parents at two in the morning, and are very nervous at being at the formidable Oxford University, drink enough Balliol Blues and Reds to turn their insides purple. Although alcohol consumption decreases across the years, she said the booziest group she has ever served were a group of recent graduates in College for a reunion who were thrilled to be back in their old college bar drinking cheap drinks. Reliving the glory days...

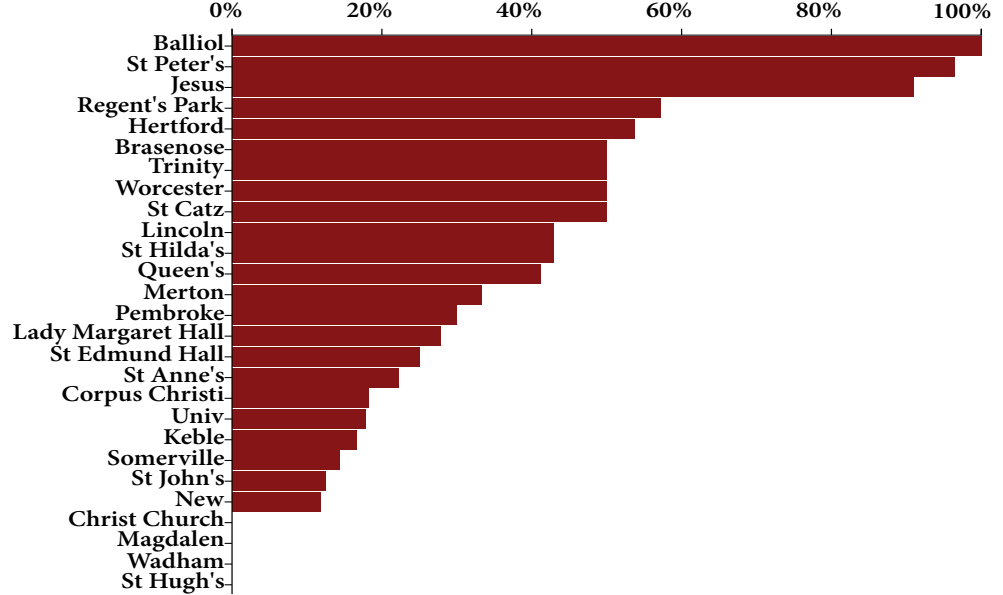
Image credit: Aury Mosseri for Cherwell.

Graph credits: Oscar Reynolds.

Proportion who think their own college bar is the best

Not all colleges are shown due to limited responses

0% indicates that no one in the college put their bar as the best bar



Is the future of student protest set in stone?

Protesters are being targeted from all angles, particularly in the courtroom. Cherwell spoke to one of the recently-acquitted JSO activists about the future of protest in the UK, and the role of student protest

LILLY LAW

Niamh Lynch did not expect to attract international attention during Trinity term of her second year. That changed after her arrest at Stonehenge for spraying orange cornflour onto the ancient monument. From there, it was a barrage of articles, press requests, and more praise than she'd expected. Not that she registered much of this. Almost immediately after the protest, Lynch went to the Isles of Scilly to carry out her dissertation fieldwork. In her brief contact with her parents and friends, they would carry reports that "there's been something in the paper, another thing in the paper, and someone's saying this, someone's saying that". Lynch was unperturbed: "Jeez Louise, okay...I'm fine, just monitoring my birds, living in my tent."

Perhaps that was for the best. The protest was not well-received in the political arena. Then prime minister Rishi Sunak called it a "disgraceful act of vandalism". Sir Keir Starmer, then Opposition leader, was barely a few steps behind – he called for the protesters to face the "full force of the law". Online abuse mounted. None of this was expressed to Lynch in person: "People were saying it was cool. I had loads of messages from my uni friends" expressing admiration. Even those who didn't agree with her actions appeared to understand that she was acting from "a place of love and a want for things to be better".

She recalled reading the bill in 2022 and seeing the lack of definitions for serious annoyance: "I remember thinking this is wild and that was literally what we were debating in court last week."

That understanding didn't just extend to her peers. Last month, Lynch and her co-defendants Rajan Naidu and Luke Watson, were acquitted unanimously of causing a public nuisance and damaging an ancient monument, making waves in activist circles: "My phone has just been pinged with messages from... activists who have seen it all, who have been doing this for 60 years." It comes at a time when the climate protest movement could do with some hope. More arrests are being made under nuisance laws than ever before. Sixteen sentences handed down against climate protesters in the last year have been found to be manifestly excessive. And even once activists are released from prison, they may face licence conditions which are generally reserved for extremists. Despite this, Lynch is "tentatively optimistic". Her experience at trial is a glimpse into the future of protest in the UK, and how student activism forms the foundation of national efforts.



Ancient Monuments Act 1979

This was the first time the Ancient Monuments Act had been used for a prosecution. The Act covers tens of thousands of scheduled monuments, and its name is slightly misleading: the list includes World War I factories and a swing bridge in Oxford built in 1851. It made Lynch's bail conditions perplexing. She couldn't go within 100m of an ancient monument. This would prevent her from going within 100m of the Oxford city walls, Oxford castle, and the Grandpont causeway (which runs underneath Folly Bridge – good luck getting to the *Cherwell* offices). This wasn't seriously followed up, but raises concerning questions for future prosecutions. With such restrictive conditions permitted under the Act, activists could end up in a kafkaesque spiral of avoiding 20,000 different sites across the UK. There is no debating that Stonehenge is an ancient monument, although the same cannot be said for many other sites on the list.

There was considerable debate before trial whether Lynch and her co-defendants had caused any physical damage to the stones. One argument put forward had been damage to the rare lichen that made their home there, but the prosecution's own expert witness certified that there had been none. Lynch found this the most reassuring outcome: "It wasn't that the defence had commissioned a lichenologist report that was likely to be sympathetic...this was the prosecution's expert witness."

The serious annoyance of bad drafting

There was something surreal for Lynch about her prosecution under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC). She was arrested for aggravated trespass and damage to an ancient monument, but the CPS later changed the charges to public nuisance, after "the police told us it was being referred to the specialist protest unit of the CPS". Public nuisance is now a statutory criminal offence, established under the PCSC. The 2022 Act attracted huge protests while it was going through Parliament. Its vague definitions, increased ability of police to place conditions on gatherings, and expansion to peaceful and non-violent protest were strongly criticised. Lynch herself had attended those protests, watched friends be arrested, and eventually been arrested under the same Act. She recalled reading the bill in 2022 and seeing the lack of definitions for serious annoyance: "I remember... thinking this is wild...and that was literally what we were debating in court last week."

A public nuisance under the PCSC is committed when a person does an act (or omits to do a legally required act) that creates a risk of serious harm to the public or a section of the public. While serious harm is defined in the Act, it's split into three categories, and one of them is not like the others. Death and personal injury appear clear-cut questions of fact, as does loss of or damage to property. However, the prosecutions under the Act have largely arisen from section 78(2)(c), the third category: "Serious distress, serious annoyance, serious inconvenience or serious loss of amenity." Defining serious harm and using it as an adjective four times gets a reader (or a judge) no closer to understanding just what "serious" means. As a result, the scope of public



nuisance is broad and open to overuse, particularly against protesters. After all, protest is intended to be disruptive.

The prosecution attempted to take advantage of this breadth. The prosecutor Simon Jones told the jury that annoyance, distress, and inconvenience were "common English words" which did not require explanation. He appealed to how they felt when they heard the news of the protest, to which Lynch took issue: "They said so many times to the jury, you judge this case just on the facts that you hear in this room. But then they're being told by the prosecutor to think about how they felt at the time."

The most serious aspect of the whole trial, for Lynch, was the potential ten-year prison sentence: "The only thing you've got to go on is the fact that it's serious in the context of a ten year maximum prison sentence...That is how serious the seriousness has got to be." For comparison, grievous bodily harm (GBH) or wounding without intent

The only thing you've got to go on is the fact that it's serious in the context of a ten year maximum prison sentence

to do serious harm will give a maximum five-year sentence. Racially or religiously aggravated GBH or wounding will give seven years. Bringing these questions into criminal law had been daunting to activists, particularly when looking at the length of sentences.

In order to threaten a ten-year sentence the case must be tried in the Crown Court, which brings in the option of a jury trial. Lynch was acquitted unanimously by a jury, which meant a lot to her, particularly since they were all from Wiltshire. "There is a huge, huge love for Stonehenge in the country, but especially in Wiltshire and in Salisbury" – it was "massive" for "twelve members of that community to say you did a good thing". She saw the reasoned deliberation of the jury, and the careful discussion of facts throughout the trial, as an antidote to sensationalist, unnuanced reporting.

A question of human rights?

In the end, Lynch was acquitted after using the defence of reasonable excuse. The defence is found within the Act, but also drawn from Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which protect freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly. Together, they effectively form the rights to protest. The defendants have to apply to the judge for permission to use the defence – while Lynch was successful, many other activists have been denied. She knew people who "weren't allowed to use their article rights because the act of throwing had an essence of violence". Protesters have praised the defence for the nuance and context it brings to cases, but whether it

is available at all depends on the discretion of individual judges. It also depends on continued support for the ECHR.

In its article on the acquittal, *The Telegraph* attributed the decision to the ECHR. Lynch emphasised that this may not be the reason. For the jury to convict, they would have had to have found that the defendants caused damage, were reckless to causing damage, and had no reasonable excuse. To acquit, they would just have to find that one of those three elements was absent. The jury may have found that there was no damage (on the Ancient Monuments charge) or no serious annoyance (on the public nuisance charge). Lynch argued: "We haven't been let off because of the ECHR. I think we've been found not guilty because there is no case."

This defence has been valuable for activists, but whether it will continue to be available is dubious. Two prominent political parties have strongly advocated repealing the Human Rights Act and pulling out of the ECHR, which would dismantle the foundation on which it stands. Even at the moment, the availability of the defence depends on the discretion of individual judges, leading to a patchwork of decisions and extreme uncertainty that could lead to a chilling effect on protest.

The future of student protest

Lynch was optimistic about the future prospects of protesters, particularly in the light of the ruling. Still, the fact that one judge applied the law sympathetically does not change the fact that Parliament's words are could be interpreted in any way, and that this area of case law is by its nature uncertain and unpredictable due to the vague wording. More broadly, it's not a pretty picture. Justice Secretary David Lammy recently set out proposals to phase out jury trial for almost all indictable offences. Just Stop Oil has ceased protesting disruptively.

Lynch herself said she wouldn't carry out any similar protests in the future. After the police posted her town of origin (which is their standard policy), she remembered being "suddenly kind of scared, being on my own thinking that one of the people that [didn't] like me could literally just come and knock at my door and, you know, do anything". She didn't want to put her family through the same stress again.

At the same time, she saw a strong community of activists, particularly based in universities. She's been involved with activism for some time, taking part in the Fridays for Future climate protests and Extinction Rebellion before university. Once she got to Oxford, she joined the activist societies at the University. There, she found company in people who "see the world in a similar way...and this desire to change it". There was a practical importance to this as well. Planning a protest, anticipating arrest, and navigating the legal system are all daunting tasks. Being surrounded by people who had been through the same experiences gave some "power in a situation where you're otherwise totally powerless".

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Cherwell

MT25

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

OLC Outreach and Metaphysical Feet

SENIOR EDITORIAL TEAM

Shobsessed, Muffin Man, Cannot Count, Freudian Scrote, Lifestyle Leech, Lost Deposit, Social Dodger #1, Social Dodger #2, Straight-laced, W-1 Saviour, and Cryptic Whiz

NEWS STRATEGY

EiC Welfare, Eurostrategist, Is That A Woman?, 10 Minutes, and TVP

NEWS

Shobsessed and Muffin Man with Sports Deserter, SUEd for Cartoons, LinkedIn Warrior, Isis Defector, van House, BMW, MI6 Informer, and Detective Bevs

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LIFESTYLE

Straight-laced with Cheerful Cupid, Small Town Girl, Professional Pub-Goer, Always in Agony, Love-girl, Token Man, and Absentee

SPORT

Week-1 Saviour with Jockie Pippen and One and Done

PUZZLES

Cryptic Whiz with Madam President, 44 Squares, and The Other One

CREATIVE

Photography: Old Man, Hinge, Pub, Grace, MIA, and Freudian Scrote
Video: Reel FT Fan
Illustrator: Facebook Banned and SUEd for Cartoons
Data Consultant: Feminist Theory
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John Evelyn

It's the night after elections, and all through the house, not a hack is stirring, not even a mouse. Whilst I, Jevelyn, by constraint of the time-space continuum cannot know the winners, I can give a damn good stab at spilling gossip.

We've almost reached the end of the Grape Horde's reign over Frewin Court, and the Grape Lord has set about establishing his legacy. It has not gone to plan. The Master-Debaters complained of being locked in the chamber for hours with Mossad, and I wish that were a pseudonym. Even within his committee things have gone awry. His right-vine man, Oscar Wilde, has been cast away from the buildings for a year, as the Prosecutrix assumes his job once more.

But "The Duties and Powers but not the Title of Secretary" is not the only role up for grabs this term, though it kind of has been since first week. Emanuelle and the Prosecutrix are now locked in against each other for President. Emanuelle is channelling her inner Bardella and somehow has courted the extremes of right-wing House. At the same time, she has launched the Grape Horde's strongest soldier, SBScourge, against the Prosecutrix, mainly through playground insults so bad he's been vetoed from running.

The Grape Horde have now chosen their officers – all standard hack names, but it does seem a bit odd to see the Famous and Accredited Death Penalty Reviewer running Librarian when he really does need to lock in for finals and maybe not sentence his degree to death, too.

The Prosecutrix too has finally chosen her officers, with Monsieur Gilet, as predicted, chosen as Secretary. Her nominated Treasurer is no surprise either – especially given her generous pockets which in ages past would send an RO into anaphylactic shock. This walking-talking malpractice machine can drum up votes, but whether she can hust without offering a bribe to her opponent in front of the chamber, is a factor unknown.

Editorial



Lilly Law

Features Deputy Editor

Like most people (and a surprising number of the Senior Editorial Team), I didn't really know what Features did until I wrote a piece for them. The prompt was Oxford coffee shops and how they benefit and suffer from student custom. I ended up arranging a grand total of one interview, with the owner of the Independent Café. I proudly told everyone I knew that I was conducting an interview, then walked down St Aldate's feeling more dread with every second. Why should he deign to talk to a student who wasn't even technically a student journalist?

It's still one of my favourite interviews. Firstly, because it felt more like a conversation, as cliché as that may be, but secondly, because the owner could not stop talking. Yes, I learned that the Independent Cafe took in most of their revenue in the summer, which was all I needed for my article. But I also learned that the owner and his business partner had originally planned to open an Italian restaurant, that he thought the Oxford scene was abysmal because of students' low standards, and the amount of time he'd spent designing the loyalty cards.

A lot of my job is putting a human face to a headline. It's exploring different issues from the perspective of the different people affected by that, and the best way to unravel their stories is simply having each of them tell me. This patchwork of stories has created another layer of the city for me, and it's been the most rewarding thing to discover. Aside from when I have to write it all up...

Éilis Mathur

Editor-in-Chief

To be entirely honest, I've found the end of my *Cherwell* career to be mildly anticlimactic. I'm not sure what else I expected, uploading PDFs to some obscure print site never was going to be the exciting, celebratory end I feel is needed. And as sure as I am that I will find many an opportunity to celebrate, inevitably drink in hand, at the remaining Chocials (*Cherwell* socials), I don't think any final party or moment could properly round off my last three years here.

Perhaps it's a little sad to say, and I do promise I have a very exciting and very fulfilling life outside *Cherwell* (seriously, I promise!), but this has undoubtedly been the highlight of my time at university. The skills I've learnt (sidestepping defamation, perfectly aligning Canva posts, manipulating every Chocial to end up at Balliol bar), the people I have met, the stories I have had the privilege to write – these have all brought me immeasurable amounts of joy, fun, and admittedly a fair bit of stress.

Despite the inevitable *Cherwell*-sized hole in my life that will follow for a long while, I am actually, mostly, happy and ready to be moving on. Although my dream of reviving weekly prints never came to be, in most other areas, things exceeded my expectations. Besides, it's high time I delete Facebook Messenger, throw away my phone, and stop complaining about the Union.

ARCHIVES

Oxmas Guide

1957

With Oxmas underway, it's worth revisiting 1957, when *Cherwell* offered advice on keeping a Christmas party "in full swing".

The guide covers every festive emergency imaginable, from guests sulking in corners to those droning on about "ruggers" scores. One suggestion is to jolt the room back to life by breaking out into sudden song, or even launching a game of musical chairs without warning.

The accompanying photographs show a decidedly debauched scene: a couple passionately making out, others sprawled on the floor among strewn bottles. But *Cherwell* has this covered too. Should one stumble upon such unseemly activity, the key is "not to panic". Creep around quietly, then startle the culprits with a sudden game of hide and seek: "You're the first to be caught!"

Another suitable Oxmas tale from that same edition graced the front page, where the Proctors were summoned to break up a "Sing-Song" at Turf Tavern. What began as innocent Christmas tunes had evolved into decidedly more "bawdy" numbers, with singers hoisted onto shoulders and tankards of beer "swinging in time".

We can only hope that the Oxmas spirit this year remains as lively.



Morien Robertson

Editor-in-Chief

Somehow, it's already come around to the end of term. But I don't want this to be a bittersweet farewell – there's plenty of time to reminisce on how great the term was when it's over, and the absence of constant Messenger notifications means there's more time for wandering thought – indeed any thought at all.

As we do the final lay-in with Christmas music blaring and the smell of coffee and pastries filling the air, the editorial life has never felt so idyllic. Despite being a true grinch, having produced five prints, which I couldn't be more proud of, the need to put my festive reservations aside goes without saying.

Whilst the all-day Wednesday is still a monumental amount of work, it really does get easier. Soon, the thought of 9am-1am on the laptop will be just a fever dream. The angry emails from people with far too much time and large egos blissfully forgotten. Like my wonderful co-EiC, I will be renouncing all digital software and touching lots of grass. Apart from the many *Cherwell* articles that I'm already planning to write...

PROFILES

“There’s a disconnect between how we see ourselves and how the world sees us”

Jeremy Hunt on OUCA, regrets, and the post-war world order

HASSAN AKRAM

Cherwell: What was your experience of Oxford when you did PPE at Magdalen?

Hunt: They were some of the happiest times of my life, but there were lots of ups and downs. In my first year I struggled a bit, found it hard to make friends. I had such high expectations of ‘Oxford’ that I was a bit disappointed when it didn’t quite live up to what I hoped for. In my second year I found a great group of friends. I really enjoyed my subject. My main passion was actually philosophy of the three. I also did university politics, I became president of the Oxford University Conservative Association (OUCA), that was my first exposure to the sort of – madness – of politics. I made lots of friends who I’m still friends with today. I do think that studying at Oxford or Cambridge is one of the greatest privileges you can have because they are the only two universities in the world where you get the chance to sit down once a week, one-to-one, with one of the greatest experts in the world in the field you’re studying. That is an extraordinary privilege.

Cherwell: Would you say your time at Oxford shaped your trajectory towards politics?

Hunt: In some ways it slightly put me off. There was a lot of backstabbing in those elections, I’m sure that hasn’t changed. I think what you get in university politics is actually the worst of what you get in the real thing. In university politics, because you’re only president for a short period – say, a term before someone else comes in – people’s track record doesn’t count for much, you just have to be good at winning elections. Whereas, in the real thing, in Westminster, your track record does actually count for something – perhaps not as much as it should, but it does count for something.

Cherwell: Why would you say you entered politics?

Hunt: I didn’t give it too much thought. I was just really interested in political issues. I was at Oxford 1985-1988 when Margaret Thatcher was at the height of her powers. She inspired me to do something first, which was to set up my own business. I was a kind of card-carrying Thatcherite, perhaps a bit more than I am today. I just thought the political world would be fascinating to be a part of, but I didn’t really understand the personal sacrifices that were necessary for a political career – the crazy pressure you can be under in certain jobs, the impact on family life. It is not a great

career for families. I didn’t really understand any of that. Perhaps I should’ve given it more thought. Despite those downsides, I don’t regret a second of my career, and I do think there is no greater privilege than public service. That could be being a teacher or working for charity – not necessarily politics – but doing things that make the world a better place is a wonderful thing. Despite all the flack that politicians get, it’s worth it.

Cherwell: What’s your proudest achievement since you entered Parliament?

Hunt: I was in Cabinet for most of the 14 years the Conservatives were in office, and I did 4 jobs. It’s just impossible to be around for that long without making a lot of mistakes. For sure I didn’t get everything right. Probably most people will remember me as the Chancellor who came in during a crisis, when inflation was 11%, and got it down to 2%, got the economy growing again despite predictions of the longest recession in history. But if you ask me what I’m most proud of, when I was Health Secretary I was very unpopular – a 2016 YouGov poll put me as the most unpopular politician in the country, because of the junior doctors’ strike – but my focus was on patient safety, reducing the amount of avoidable deaths. During my period, the number of baby deaths fell by about two a day. I think that’s a statistic which for me personally I’ll be proud of until the day I die.

It’s more about wishing I could have done more, perhaps with a bit more time, than regrets about things I actually did do

Cherwell: What’s your biggest regret in politics?

Hunt: What I’ve been doing is trying to write – I want to be a writer now – and as a writer you do reflect on things you got wrong. I think, looking back, that I was generally thought of as a safe pair of hands. As an entrepreneur, I was a radical innovator, and I think the system made me more of an incrementalist, and less radical than I would really like to have been.

Cherwell: So, your regret is more about things left undone than anything you did which you wish you hadn’t?



Hunt: When I was Chancellor, working with Rishi Sunak, I steadied the ship. We had less than two years before the end of parliament. I would like to have done more radical welfare reforms, which are badly needed, and which, sadly, it doesn’t look like the current government is going to do either. Whether Rishi Sunak would have wanted me to do them, I don’t know, but it’s much more about wishing I could have done more, perhaps with a bit more time, than regrets about things I actually did do.

Cherwell: Moving onto your new book, *Can We Be Great Again? Why a Dangerous World Needs Britain, a sort of memoir-cum-manifesto*. What inspired you to write it?

Hunt: I think we have become too gloomy as a country. There are various reasons for that, but there’s a paradox which is that you can do surveys where nearly a third of young people want to move abroad and then you ask young people across the rest of the world what they think of Britain, and we are considered the third most attractive, appealing country in the world, after Japan and Italy. We are the second most trusted country in terms of its government and people. When it comes to the country that’s a force for good in the world, we’re rated top in the world by 18 to 34-year-olds surveyed across G20 countries. There’s a disconnect between how we see ourselves and how the world sees us. I wrote this book to understand who’s right.

What I found when I was Foreign Secretary was that we are much more respected than we

perhaps understand in the UK. After the Second World War, Britain and America set up a global order which has been the most successful in the history of humanity. It has been better at reducing poverty, maintaining peace, helping people to live in freedom, than any other order – that is until quite recently, with big problems in Ukraine, and the rise of China, which is an avowedly autocratic system that doesn’t share our democratic ideals. In my lifetime, the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty – which is defined as less than £2 per day – has fallen from half the world population to only 10%, and that too in a period where the world population has tripled. That’s an extraordinary achievement, but people are saying, “is this going to continue?”, they’re looking to the countries that set up that order, saying, “are you going to step up to the challenge?”

This book is not a jingoistic book. I’m not saying that Britain is superior to other countries. I’m saying that in a really dangerous world the worst thing is to underestimate your own influence and that we – and the same is true of the Germans, the Japanese, the French, Americans, and Australians – are countries of influence and we need to use it. We need to work with our friends and allies around the world to solve these big problems.

Cherwell: You speak about our place in the post-war world order, and in the book, you talk about the position we should have in promoting democracy, security, human rights. Do you think these values are undermined when in world affairs we do not practise



what we preach? Most recently, it's been in the Middle East, but that hypocrisy has been there since the early days of the liberal international order. To give the example of a friend who you praise highly in your book, Henry Kissinger in the 1970s helped overthrow a democratic regime in Chile and killed hundreds of thousands of Cambodians through carpet bombing. That doesn't sound to me like either democracy or human rights. Don't you think things like that undermine the American-led world order?

Hunt: For sure, we haven't got everything right. Sometimes we are hypocritical. But remember that in the 1970s and 80s, during the Cold War, we were up against the Soviet Union that was actively trying to subvert regimes all over the world and turn them into part of the Communist bloc. When you're dealing with a threat like that, there are trade-offs. It's not possible to conduct a foreign policy where all you think about is talking to people with exactly the same values as you. You need to deal with the world as it is, not as you'd want it to be. I think there is a world of difference between what Britain and America did in Afghanistan and Iraq and Libya – where we made big mistakes – and what Russia is trying to do in Ukraine. We've got things badly wrong in all those three countries, but we were never trying to turn them into imperial possessions. It was always the plan to go in, install a democratic regime, and then leave again. We were naive and made big mistakes and we need to learn from that. That's not the same as what Putin is doing in Ukraine by invading an

independent country and turning it into a vassal state. I think it's a big mistake to conflate those two and we should be very clear about the difference.

Cherwell: *Clearly there's a difference between Britain and Russia insofar as we didn't invade Iraq to make it an imperial possession again, but surely you can see why these wars, and their enormous human cost, have delegitimised the West and its world order.*

Hunt: Yeah. For sure. When you make mistakes, you lose moral authority. And that means that we go into this global struggle between autocracy and democracy not being in as strong a position as we might otherwise. Despite that I think it's important that we don't lose confidence, that we recognise that our system is better, that open societies are morally superior to dictatorships in which people who disagree with the government get locked up. And it's really important that we don't forget that basic truth. The evidence is that, in the global migration crisis, people aren't banging the door down to become Russian citizens, they're not trying to get into China. They want to live in Europe and North American and Australia and Japan and Korea, because they know that for them, and their families, our system is more humane. One of the things Henry Kissinger said to me is that his concern about the West was that there was so much self-doubt, even self-loathing, and we need to be really careful not to let that get out of hand.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

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OXFORD SPOTLIGHT

Azeem Zakria spoke to *Cherwell* about why Scriptum is more than just a stationery shop

Cherwell's Bess Tolley spoke to Azeem Zakria, the face behind Scriptum



For anyone who has ever wandered down Turl Street, it would be impossible to miss the elaborate window displays of Scriptum, the fine stationery shop which has become a staple of Oxford since its creation in 2003. Whether it be the miniature hot-air balloons which hang from the shop's ceiling, the Hungarian marionettes which adorn the upper floor, or the cast iron paperweights shaped as toucans and tortoises, anyone who enters the store will be sure to find something which sparks their curiosity. Yet despite its universal appeal, Scriptum is a shop reflective of the interests and passions of one particular individual: Azeem Zakria. I spoke to Scriptum's owner and creative director about the origins of the store, the vision and values which define his business approach, and the reasons why Scriptum is so much more than just a stationery shop.

The creation of Scriptum was by no means something which Azeem ever anticipated. His first career was as an air steward, a line of work which appealed to his love of travel, but ultimately could not fulfil him in any long-term capacity. "You could say I really wanted to move on to do something a bit more serious." As the youngest of six children, all of whom were already employed as engineers or architects, he felt mounting pressure to find his purpose in life.

It was during a trip to Florence that Azeem came to the realise that running a stationery business was what he wanted to do. "Florence had these amazing stationery shops, with really beautiful products which I had never seen before." With £45,000 of savings, Azeem made the decision to take a risk: he moved to Oxford and opened Scriptum. Despite not knowing "a single person" in the city and having no experience of running a business, he tells me that "within days the magic would start". Twenty-two years have since passed and Scriptum has grown and flourished, becoming a much-beloved fixture of Oxford for citizens, tourists and students alike.

The commerce of Florence might have been the short-term catalyst for opening Scriptum, but Azeem's choice to sell fine stationery was not entirely unprecedented. He developed a love for stationery at a young age, recalling his purchase of his first "leather-bound journal" from Selfridges at the age of 15. "I remember I paid £70 for it. And this must have been in the early 90s, so that was a lot of money back then. But more importantly, it was a lot of money for me. I came from a very large family who lived in a small house. We didn't have a huge amount of money." It is therefore no surprise

that the journals sold by Scriptum are one of Azeem's most treasured products: "They are really special to me...they have this longevity; they're going to be here after we've all gone perhaps."

It is also a matter of great sentimentality and importance to Azeem that Scriptum's journals are designed by the people who work in the shop. "When I have young people joining the team, I always encourage them to design a product, find their skill...Within a few months, they're seeing something that they've converted from their artwork into a product, which they're actually then seeing being sold as well."

Azeem's efforts to allow his employees as much creative freedom as possible is part of his belief that "delegation" is the key to running a successful business. "I don't think of Scriptum as my baby, because I think that's really unhealthy to hold on to something. I prefer to see myself more as a custodian of this business. You have to have trust in people... that way, I think you get to keep them longer. All the staff at Scriptum are really overqualified...that's something I personally find quite humbling."

In order to allow his employees to take on as much responsibility as possible, Azeem spends most days at the shop "in the basement, unpacking deliveries". Yet he is always looking for new ways to connect with his customers. Over lockdown he hosted a men's letter writing club, with the aim of reducing isolation during such a difficult time. However, it is through his appreciation for opera and that he has been able to have such frequent and meaningful encounters with his clientèle. "I love opera myself. And I think that opening a shop is very easy. You have a space, you put things in it, and then you wait for your customers to come and buy them. But a stationery shop requires a bit more than that. It requires a bit of soul." No matter the hour of the day, you will be sure to hear some of the greatest arias playing in Scriptum. "I've found customers in the shop crying because the music evokes a memory. And I've often spoken to people who will say things like 'this aria reminds me of my father', or something of that sort".

Although Scriptum works with the best atelier workshops and suppliers across the United Kingdom and Europe, Azeem remains firmly opposed to the term "luxury" when it comes to describing the products he sells, assuring me "it's about quality more than luxury". His reluctance to this term stems from the way it could "exclude" certain people, namely Oxford's student population.

You can visit Scriptum at 3 Turl Street.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Kirsty Lloyd with permission.

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Witty, original and colourful: Tidal Theatres' *Launa*

Moving, original, and daring: this portrait of a young mother's grief should be the standard for new student productions

CHARLIE BAILEY



Tidal Theatre's *Launa* (at the BT 18-22nd November) is exactly the kind of play that the student drama scene needs more of. It was original, witty, bold, and colourful, with an incredibly authentic portrayal of grief in all its forms.

Rowan Brown's impressive original script explores the emotional turmoil of Edna (Sanaa Pasha), a once hopeless romantic processing the death of her daughter Launa (Coco Scanlon) at just six years old. The production's choreography reflected Edna's dreamlike state, in which she tortures herself with imaginary conversations with shifting versions of a grown-up Launa. Alongside these central interactions, Edna's husband Jo (Callum Beardmore), sister, Beth (Kitty Brown), and mother, Helen (Rosie Sutton), break through her preoccupied state to attempt to encourage her to begin her life again.

Sanaa Pasha was electric as Edna. She was captivating to watch from the initial moment that her character walked into the surroundings of the flat, throwing off Edna's work gear and putting on tracksuit bottoms to signify the mental defeat that would characterise her preceding interactions. Her physicality was a mechanism for portraying the pain inside Edna's head: she spun, danced manically, and curled into a ball on the floor, conveying different facets of despair. Pasha's ability to portray the desolation that Edna was feeling through facial expression was also very impressive.

Intensifying the pain of Edna's thoughts was Launa's onstage presence, a now grown woman in childish pyjamas. Director Emily Polhill deserves commendation for the presentation of their relationship: at different points Scanlon as Launa physically clung to Edna's side, put on a whiney babyish voice, and loomed over Edna while accusing her of poor parenting. The effect was to give the audience a deeper understanding of the intensely self-critical nature of Edna's thoughts. In one especially haunting moment,



the ensemble and main actors came together to recreate a time when Edna, frustrated at Launa disturbing her in the night, locked her in a room. Launa and the ensemble created a chilling chorus of "let me out" as Edna grew visibly panicked. Scanlon was skilled at switching between Launa's childish, tender side, and her angry outbursts used to reflect Edna's guilt back at her. The ability of these moments to generate sympathy for Edna is testament to Brown's skilful writing.

Edna's refusal to cease reliving her time with Launa is the main source of conflict in the play. A key theme is how to be there for someone who stubbornly refuses help, but is clearly struggling. The relationship between Edna and her husband made it clear that Edna had not considered the ways in which Jo must be hurting. Caught up in her own grief, she refuses to admit that she's been talking to Launa in her sleep as he begs her: "I want to hear you say it." Lost in the confusion of what her life has become, Brown's writing showed that Edna was

unable to appreciate how far she had pushed Jo away until it was too late.

Bringing some much needed comedic relief was Kitty Brown as Beth, bursting into a scene to make an awkward attempt at meaningful conversation with Edna, who still ironically retained a sense of protectiveness over her younger sister. Particularly funny was Beth's attempt to suggest something positive about her own partner, who no one remembers is called Toby, other than the fact that he's...there, and makes risotto. As the action progressed, Brown was convincing in becoming more firm with Edna, warning her not to indulge in grief and, in one particularly well-written line, telling her she's "spoilt on loss".

As someone that loves the combination of naturalistic acting and physical theatre, I felt that the use of an ensemble (Mary Stillman, Rowan Brown, and Katie Maybin) diversified the onstage action in an exciting way. The use of breathwork in particular was effective: at points Edna's deep breath in would be matched by the

ensemble as she was swept up into a crowd of unfriendly faces. Figures personifying grief held potential to be reminiscent of GSCE drama, but the skill of the ensemble made it nuanced rather than stereotypical. Additionally, some visual moments were truly beautiful, with effective repetitive use of flowers and undersea motifs. Memorably, an intricate shadow of a whale appeared on a white plastic sheet as Edna and Launa lay below.

The set perfectly portrayed Edna's inability to let go, covered with visual remnants of Launa: her childish drawings hung above the stage, a constant, haunting presence. I had some questions about the ending, as I felt some loose ends were not tied up, and it seemed as if Edna's pain would simply continue – nothing having been clearly resolved with Jo. This is a small critique amongst what I felt was an ambitious and holistically impressive production – it is rare to find a play about grief so fun to watch. Tidal Theatre deserves a higher profile.

Image credit: Alice Mitchell with permission.

'Under Milk Wood': A homely play with hidden ambition

MAIR ANDREWS

The most engaging set innovation was a small light projector, used to create a backdrop, but also tell shorter narratives of the play without adding in new cast members through clever shadowplay

The lights dimmed, a small plaque was illuminating the stage with the red letters, "ON AIR". I know I am in for a treat: Welsh poet Dylan Thomas wrote *Under Milk Wood, or A Play of Voices*, as a radio play, and this set choice indicates the production will be a thoughtful application of Thomas' voice. The sound designers are actually onstage, at the edge of the traverse, so the audience is conscious that every sound is indeed an act of theatrical illusion. During one moment, a metronome pulses while characters begin to exchange lines in perfect meter – the way that Thomas' poetic and sensitive rhythm was lifted from the page and to the stage was charming.

Playful deception is the starting point for this play, as the first narrator (Bea Smalley) opens, inviting the audience to listen to the innermost thoughts and dreams of the townspeople of a small Welsh fishing town called Llareggub (which you only notice is 'buggerall' backwards when you look at the programme). One by one, the characters enter, and we see snippets of their dreams: Mrs Ogmores-Pritchard relentlessly nags her two dead husbands; Captain Cat relives his precarious seafaring times; and Polly Garter pines for her dead lover. After these introductory snippets to the unconscious of our characters, the town awakens and we watch them go about their daily business, now with the knowledge of what hidden feelings motivate their actions.

It's all rather chaotic. Not only are there 12 actors onstage but there are 28 characters in the whole play – it's incredibly difficult to follow. Actors had to double up and identities were initially easily confused given that our introductions to the characters were through their fantasies (or nightmares) rather than reality. Yet when Mr Pugh has dreams of poisoning Mrs Pugh, and then in real life announces to his wife at dinner that the book he is reading is a guide on poisons, the moment of connection between the unconscious and conscious is such a sudden shock that it provokes a rich feeling of collaborative comedy – the audience is delighted to be in on the joke.

Read the full article online at cherwell.org

The Magdalene Songs: Giving a singing voice to victims

Natalie Conboy on Deidre Brenner's historically informed collection at the Oxford International Song Festival



CW: Abuse

Modern slavery, abuse, and human rights violations are not something you would usually expect to be tackled in an evening of classical music. Yet Deidre Brenner, pianist and instigator of *The Magdalene Songs*, felt it was the perfect way to honour the women of the Magdalene laundries, a group of punitive institutions for “fallen women” run by religious orders which from 1922 to 1996 incarcerated over 10,000 women and girls in the Republic of Ireland.

The performance is part of the Oxford International Song Festival, a champion of classical song for 24 years. This year's theme was “Stories in Song”, with 67 performances covering music from around the world: *The Magdalene Songs* were perfectly placed here to give voice to the experience of a group of women institutionally silenced for well over 100 years.

A sentence in a Magdalene laundry meant infinite detention with no legal basis. They provided numerous religious bodies, state agencies, and government departments in Ireland – including the President's house – with laundry and needlework services without paying their workers, who were women and girls often as young as nine.

The Magdalene Songs collection is an ongoing project by Deidre Brenner in collaboration with many prominent female Irish composers, including Deirdre McKay, Rhona Clarke, Elaine Agnew, and Elaine Brennan. It was created in order to honour

the victims of the Laundries by giving voice to their experiences in the hope of encouraging further dialogue about the human rights abuses committed by the Laundries.

I attended the pre-concert discussion, led by Deirdre Brenner and human rights lawyer Maeva O'Rourke, internationally recognised for her work interviewing the Magdalene laundry victims. “Every woman I ever interviewed thought they would die in there”, she tells us, describing the conditions faced by the victims.

The evening performance was captivating from the start. Set in the Holywell Music Room, each song put to music the words of testimonies from individual survivors interviewed as part of The Magdalene Oral History Project. Both Brenner and the mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean, were dressed in green and black signaling the grief of Ireland, and after a brief introduction to the project and the Laundries, we were thrown into the testimonies.

Betts-Dean had just the right amount of storytelling ability to elevate the colloquial Irish dialect from the page, although it would have been more natural had she been Irish herself. Nonetheless, the words and music themselves were enough to convey the trauma. With dissonant, deliberately uncomfortable chords and melodies in the first few songs, the breathy voice of the mezzo-soprano sung testimonies of being “put...on the wooden table” in punishment, and individuals who “went in as a baby”, with just the right amount of anger and shame, avoiding the pitfall of overperformance.

From the third testimony it was anger that reigned, emphasised by traditional hymn-like chords being broken off, never-ending scales,

and hand slams on the piano. Unconventional techniques, such as deliberately loud breathing and hitting and plucking the piano strings, rather than playing the keys, made the performance truly interesting as an exercise in translating trauma into musical terms.

The last two songs were the culmination of this project, the penultimate relying on just one sentence of testimony: “She denied she was my mother.” This one sentence was captivating, repeated and gradually building in long phrases. The dissonant harmonies vanished and were replaced by a return to traditional Irish *sean-nós* keening (a rhythmically free, expressive lament). The piano was reduced to a near-single line, weaving in and out of the melody and focusing our attention on the devastating words. The whole audience listened in tense silence, and a collective breath was let out at the end.

The silence was continued as the mezzo lit a can-

dle, before concluding with the final song, ‘Litany to the Magdalene Dead’. The focus shifted back to the piano, as Betts-Dean recited in monotone the names of 72 of the 1,867 known to have died in a laundry, arranged so that the initial of their last names spelled out “DOLOREM”: Latin for sorrow. The audience, reading along in their programs, looked like they were praying. Each woman's name was chanted, along with the laundry and her date of death: they ranged from 1847 to 2015. The piano perfectly conveyed the poise and grace of the funeral atmosphere, and the final silence after Betts-Dean blew out the candle stretched for a few seconds before the first smatterings of applause grew to a standing ovation lasting five minutes. It was the perfect, dignified homage to those who were denied dignity during their lives.

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

Image credit: Natalie Conboy for Cherwell.



‘You’re going to make mistakes’: Katie Robinson on fashion and sustainability

AURY MOSSERI

Katie Robinson is a sustainable fashion journalist, content creator, and campaigner, with experience working in fashion marketing.

I (virtually) sat down with Katie to discuss hot topics in fashion – ranging from the fashion of Formula 1, Victoria's Secret's “inclusive” new fashion show (neither secret nor inclusive), to the many ways that AI is rapidly taking over the fashion industry.

Cherwell: How do you decide what your videos will be on? Are they usually about what current topic angers you the most?

Katie: It really varies! Sometimes it will be

something that I've noticed happening in the industry – maybe other people are talking about it in magazines and I feel I have an angle on it. Or maybe there's a trending topic on social media, and I'm like “oh, this could do with a sustainable fashion spin”. As much as I want to yap on and on about my interests, I need to make it accessible to the most people, which is something I've really had to learn whilst making my channel.

Cherwell: Since so much of sustainable impact is up to the brands to control, is there anything that we as consumers can do?

Katie: I do believe we can make a difference. When you talk about how much brands are producing, and how there's this massive issue of recycling, it feels like, “okay, well what can I do,

this is a massive industry issue”. But I do believe that everyone doing something tiny makes a massive difference. Wearing your clothes to death and recycling on your own may not seem like you're making a difference, but I think it does. It makes me feel better as a consumer. But I know it's overwhelming, so imperfect sustainability is absolutely fine. A tiny step is still a step.

Imperfect sustainability is absolutely fine. A tiny step is still a step

Cherwell: Given your experience working in the fashion industry, do you think that companies actually take sustainability as a major part?

Katie: I worked for a very small brand, before that I championed their sustainability, and I do think they were doing some very interesting things. But it's hard to be a fashion brand. You need to put profit above all else in a capitalist society – that's just unnegotiable. There aren't many examples of brands that you can look at that are sustainability first and profit after. I do think there are a few that are choosing a balance and it's working – I always talk about GANNI. I think their sustainability marketing is good and really clear for consumers. Whether they're at the forefront of the industry I'm not sure...but as a consumer of them, I do feel informed. There's also Stella McCartney, which pushes a lot of innovation in the industry. I saw some brands put “the planet” on their list of shareholders, and I think that's a really cool technique – I would love to be a fly on

the wall in these meetings and see if there's actually this impact.

Cherwell: You shared a post in an ‘AI in Fashion’ video recently that noted how there were AI models before plus-size models in Vogue. Do you think there's a future of inclusivity for body types in fashion, or is it inherently exclusive?

Katie: Oo, that's a hard one. Again, it comes down to whether fashion wants to go for the shopping only route, or if they'll listen to consumers that want to see fashion as an art form. In the art case, they can't ignore body and size inclusivity – people are sick of seeing fashion on skinny models. However, the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show just came back. People were like “oh, it was inclusive this time” (which they aren't usually), but I don't think it was all that inclusive. I have to say, I didn't watch all of it, because I wasn't that interested (chuckles). It's another case of the same body type wearing polyester clothing. People did seem to like it online... Maybe this goes against my point of brands having to stop being deaf to size inclusivity. I've seen all the Vogue reports for this season (and the prior ones) that size inclusivity is steadily going down. It's a known issue, and people are picking it up, but fashion just doesn't seem to be responding! As much as I think that consumers don't want this, and it will get in the way of profits, fashion seems to think something different. We had a sweet spot in the 2010s-2020s where it was really improving on the runway. Plus-sized clothing was obviously not developed enough, but still trending upwards. And they just threw all that out the window.

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

Image credit: Taras Chuiko, CC0, via pexels.



What's Oxford watching?



Johnny Guitar

Lara Machado at St Hugh's recommends *Johnny Guitar* (1954): "With an unforgettable lead performance from Joan Crawford and hypnotic visuals, Nicholas Ray's masterpiece is the Western to end all Westerns. An overpowering dream." You can watch *Johnny Guitar* on YouTube.



Boom!

Matthew Mair at St Peter's recommends *Boom!* (1968): "Joseph Losey's Technicolor adaptation of Tennessee Williams' flop play *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* fuses high camp Burton-Taylor extravaganza with a moving meditation on death and aging." You can watch *Boom!* on YouTube.

Image credits: Hurrell, CC0 1.0, via Wikimedia Commons and PickPic, CC0 1.0, via PickPic.

Can violence ever be fun?

OTILLIE BOSTRIDGE

Because it's so much fun, Jan!" This was Quentin Tarantino's answer when an interviewer asked him to justify on-screen violence. Few would disagree. From the thousands who flocked to see the on-stage strangling in *The Duchess of Malfi* in the early 1600s, to the 16.5 million movie-goers who paid to watch the slaughter of four teenagers in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), violence has always been a staple of popular entertainment. Even the supposedly buttoned-up Victorians had the sensational novel and the "penny dreadful"; *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* sold 40,000 copies in only 6 months.

But is violent entertainment really just a bit of fun? Aristotle thought it might lead to spiritual renewal through catharsis. Psychologist Dolf Zillman thought violence was entertaining because it is perversely arousing. Others have likened it to a "forbidden fruit" or as a contained rebellion against everyday morality. Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke, whose films *The Piano Teacher* (2001), *Funny Games* (1997), and *Caché* (2005) were re-released this summer, shows that violence in media isn't harmless; it desensitises us to the act itself.

Haneke has made it his project to remove the fun from violence on screen. He wants to remind his viewer of what it means in real life. In a 2009 interview, he articulated the dangers of desensitisation: "I don't notice [when violence is shown on the news] anymore." He told another interviewer that physical violence "makes

me sick. It's wrong to make it consumable as something fun".

So his most violent films are anti-violence. They intend to be anti-entertainment, too. *Funny Games* (1997), for example, tells the story of a bourgeois family's country holiday. Two young men take them hostage in their home, torturing and killing them in sadistic 'games'. It's a pretty standard sounding slasher plot, except that Haneke frustrates the viewer at every turn. When one of the young men is shot, the other one breaks the fourth wall, winding back the plot with a TV remote: he frustrates the viewer in their desire for revenge. Even the violence avoids gory catharsis: the murder of the last remaining family member is an anticlimax, as the mother is quietly pushed off a boat to drown. After beating a dog to death with a golf-club, one of them turns towards the camera and winks. Thus Haneke seeks to show our complicity in the characters' suffering.

I doubt cinema can ever truly offer a deconstruction of its own violence

Caché does the same. It begins as a surveillance thriller. A French TV host anonymously receives videotapes of his house. But the whodunit setup never pays off. The film shifts its focus into an exposé of French colonial vio-

lence. We never discover for sure who sent the tapes. As in *Funny Games*, Haneke frustrates the viewer's wish for a tense, violent thriller. A tale of bourgeois paranoia is trivial next to the mass, unthinking violence of colonial brutality.

However, I doubt cinema can ever truly offer a deconstruction of its own violence. Take, for example, the opening of *Funny Games*. A family drives down an idyllic country road, playing 'guess the opera'. Suddenly the words "FUNNY GAMES" appear in huge blood-red letters, accompanied by the discordant screams of the avant-garde metal band Naked City. The noise verges on painful, but it's so audaciously satirical that it's also incredibly compelling. Haneke's postmodern tricks do the same thing. The torturers break the fourth wall; they comment on their own violence; they compare themselves to Tom and Jerry and Beavis and Butthead. All these make for bold, playful storytelling so strangely fascinating that it ends up aestheticising the violence Haneke wants to deplore. He cannot escape his own talent: by making a film so engaging, he fails to avoid the 'fun'.

Haneke's aims are didactic, but he carries them out with such bold style and biting satire that, for viewers already used to violence on film, it's hard not to get something pleasurable from his bleak cinematic imaginarium. He may want to teach us about the dangerous power that violent entertainment offers. But he can never avoid an uncomfortable truth: that cinema, however upsetting, is always entertainment.

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

An architectural tour of the Schwarzman Centre

FREDRIK MITCHELL O'REILLY

The product of a controversial £150 million donation, the new Schwarzman building is a dominating new presence for the city and University, built within the architectural patchwork of the Radcliffe Observatory, Somerville College, and the Blavatnik School of Government. But whilst the Blavatnik takes its cue from the sleek, all-glass modernism of a Canary Wharf skyscraper, the behemoth Schwarzman, designed by Hopkins' Architects, offers an entirely different impression. Professor William Whyte, who acted as chair of the project board, told *Cherwell* that the brief for the building's design was to create "a contemporary version of a traditional Oxford building" – a description as vague as it is evocative. And yet it describes precisely the impression one receives of the Schwarzman upon first viewing: a building which is unashamedly modern, and yet engaged in a subtle dialogue with the storied architecture of Oxford. Approaching from the North, the principal façade combines the familiarity of Oxford's warm, honey-coloured stone with vast windows, glazed with a single, uninterrupted pane. The composition centres on an outwardly projecting pavilion, supported by a sleek arcade of eight bays, which contains the compact, new Bodleian Humanities Library.

This polished yet sober classical reference successfully negotiates the balance between tradition and modernity in a synthesis which is somewhat reminiscent of interwar stripped classicism. Whilst this stylistic parity may on the one hand recall the architectural language of

continental fascism, Professor Whyte countered that the building was as much in dialogue with the work of Lutyens, as with the Palazzo del Civiltà Italiana. This classicism in geometry and form lends the building something of a "civic" feel, to use Whyte's phrase, an impression important for a building intended from the outset as a public, as well as an academic, space.

The Schwarzman avoids, however, the charge of inauthentic historicism. It does not strive for the elegance of its neighbouring Radcliffe Observatory, completed in 1794 by the neoclassical architect James Wyatt. Instead, the Centre gives the impression of muscularity, a solidity of presence – largely a product of the building's adherence to the passivhaus standard of sustainability. The symmetrical groupings of windows in the central pavilion give way to a playfully disordered composition of openings, which Whyte comments drew inspiration from the arrangement of windows at New College.

Curiously, the entrance pavilion is a storey shorter than the rest of the building, undermining its massive presence. It gives the impression of a building embarrassed by its own bulk, stooping down at the centre to bashfully meet the Observatory. The landscaping between the two buildings manages this awkwardness with a little more flair. The circular patterns of planting and lawn create a charming garden which flows naturally between the two buildings, easing the transition through the newly created plaza.

Moving inside the building, the sleek and crisp feel continues. The building's interior is unashamedly modern, even corporate, although the use of wood offers a humanising touch. The

main feature of the interior is the impressive glass-domed atrium, which rises through the full height of the building, flooding its depths with light. The wooden slats which crisscross the dome burst outwards like a star, and in their geometry recall the flavour of Islamic architecture.

The atrium itself, with the off-shooting faculty offices whose names are displayed over their glass doors, recalls the labels in the quad of the Old Bodleian Library, and Whyte also notes the proportional similarity to the interior of the Radcliffe Camera. There is clearly an intent in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter to create a coherent assemblage of university

buildings mirroring the traditional University centrepiece of the Radcliffe Camera, Bodleian, and Sheldonian, although an evaluation of the success of this endeavour must await the redevelopment of the as-yet empty plot adjacent to the Schwarzman.

The Schwarzman Centre, then, makes a fitting addition to an ancient scholastic heritage, sensitively tying in with the Observatory without alienating the post-modern buildings that surround it through an excess of ornament: a cautious and relatively successful approach to adding to Oxford's built environment.

Image credit: ResonantDistortion, CC BY-SA 4.0, via openverse.



We should read in other languages

Ben O'Brien encourages us to look past the language barrier when we read

My most hated subject at school was French. I mean, I hated every subject – the only thing I remember liking in all my years at school was the hour-long geography lesson we spent watching videos of erupting volcanos (lava spouting!) – but French had a special place in my list of hated things. This was partly because learning it seemed so boring. Did we really need to know how to buy an umbrella, or how to help Simon find the bus stop, and couldn't we do something more interesting, like watch a French film and drink red wine? But there were also the usual Anglocentric reasons. I didn't see why I, an English-speaking person, should have to learn a foreign language, when out in the big wide world everyone else would have to speak English just like me. On the morning of my French GCSE, I slipped out of the school gates and went to the park to smoke weed. Needless to say, my results weren't good.

Little did I know at the time, I had many things in common with Annie Ernaux, the French author who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2022 (the first French woman to do so: 15 French men had been nobelised before her). Not that I've won the Nobel Prize (I've never even been nominated). Nor am I French, a woman, or born in the 1940s. And for that matter, Ernaux didn't even hate school. But one of the major themes of her writing is the tension between the world she was born into – that of provincial, rural France, where most people spent their lives working on the family farm and where living room floors were made of bare soil – and the one she climbed her way into, that of the university-educated intellectual elite whose books were published by Gallimard. One of Ernaux's obsessions is the way that "provincials" felt disdained by what we would now call the metropolitan liberal elite, and how they disdained those elites in return. Town versus county, intellectuals versus the "uncultivated", those who quote Shakespeare versus those who don't – all these oppositions are present in much of Ernaux's writing. There's a lot that I, the weed-smoking hater of anything intellectual, including learning other languages, could have identified

with, had I been willing and able to read French.

For those starting out reading French, Ernaux is a good place to begin, because her writing is so straightforward – pick up any review of her work and you'll see her writing described as "sparse", "clinical", or "like cut glass". When confronted with the scary thing called "French Literature", it's easy to feel you have to start with the intimidating classics, like Proust's 3,000 pages about Madeleines, page-long run-on sentences and all. At least I did, and it's the quickest way to confirm the feeling that your French is useless. Giving up Proust and finding Ernaux's cut glass is a good way to realise that your level probably isn't as bad as you think. I read *La Place* (1983), the short book about the death of her father that made Ernaux's name in a weekend. I followed this with *Une Femme* (1988) an equally short book about her mother's gradual descent into dementia and then death. A lot of death to deal with at once, but Ernaux's writing is so gripping, it's impossible to put the books down once you've started. And I hardly had to use a dictionary.

But there's also a political point to Ernaux's writing. As she has spoken about at length, she never escaped the feelings of guilt that came with joining France's intellectual elite – she describes herself as a "class defector" ("transfuge de classe") – and both her subject matter and her style reflect this. Time and time again her writing returns to the experiences of those, including her own parents, who felt looked down upon by French social elites, and the point of her pared back style is that her parents and those like them could feel both that her books spoke to them and spoke like them. And therein lies the value of Ernaux to me. She shows that intellectualism, if that is what writing books – or, dare I say, going to Oxford – has to be called, it can be done without pretension. Maybe if I'd read her sooner, I'd have done better in my GCSEs. Or at least I'd have thought that trying to do well didn't necessarily have to involve quoting Shakespeare.

What's Oxford reading?

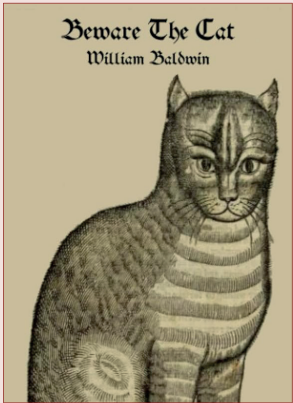


Image credit: 'Beware the Cat' via Amazon.

Hannah (Queen's) recommends this 1561 novel by William Baldwin:
"An exhilarating read full of cats and religious satire that was written during a time of intense political upheaval and warns you that cats are always watching. Even when you think they aren't."



Briony (Trinity) recommends this 1993 work by Jeffrey Eugenides:
"A powerful statement on objectification and the male gaze within the suburbs of Detroit; languid prose coupled with a driving tragic plot and an unforgettable finish."

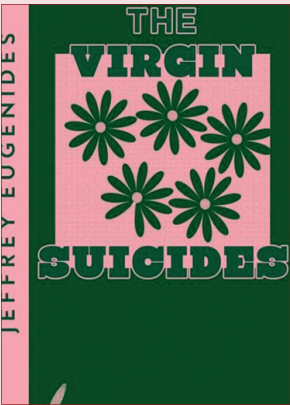


Image credit: 'The Virgin Suicides' via Amazon.

WHAT'S ON

STAGE

Hedda Gabler
The Michael Pilch Studio
26th-29th November

Doctor Faustus
Keble O'Reilly
25th-29th November

MUSIC

Roopa Panesar: ATMA: (The Soul)
Sheldonian Theatre
5th December

Family Christmas Concert
Christ Church Cathedral
6th December

FILM

Anenome
The Ultimate Picture Palace
28th November-3rd December

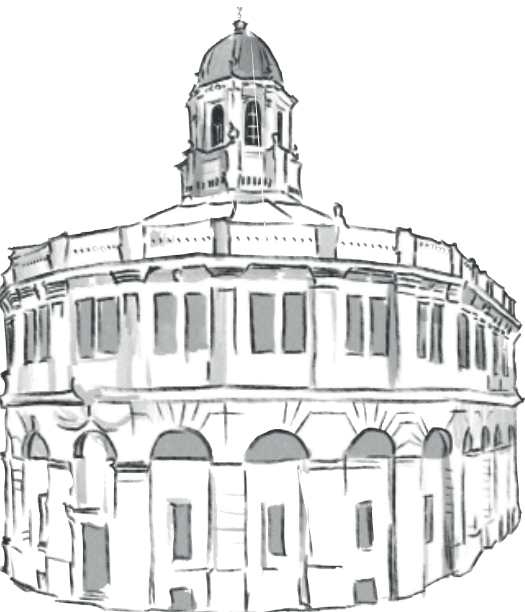
Blue Moon - Preview
Phoenix Picturehouse
24th November

LITERATURE

Dancing With Jane Austen
Blackwell Hall, Weston Library
Starting 6th December

TALKS

C.S. Lewis's Oxford
1 Wellington Square
2nd December 8-9pm



THE SOURCE

A Sunday in the Park with Marianne

She wears no rings. Her ears are double-pierced, hanging with astrolabes and star-studded. She wears two necklaces—one is a golden cross, and the second is a white diamond. Her wrists are thick with bracelets. But no rings.

She no longer wears gloves. I wonder if this is by her choice, or practicality. Her hands are white and creamy. Butter-soft, and when I clasp one in my hand, she feels oddly fragile, though I know she has withstood worse.

There is a crafted beauty to her and I think perhaps her sculptor could not quite fashion rings out of his portfolio. When she smiles in greeting, her eyes are dwarfed by the cherry red of her cheeks. Tiny crescents of ocean. I kiss her cheek and feel her eyelashes soft against my skin.

The park is heavy with promenaders. We negotiate prams and nannies and stray children; pensioners walking prim poodles. The sun bites the back of my neck.

We haven't met since before the war. When we were both brides flushed with the shining attention drawn by a kneeling man in a garden of roses.

Her wedding was a ripple in time. She was gorgeous in white, adorning the arm of her father, first, and then her husband, in a house of God, under the eyes of God.

Deep into the wilderness, there is a grove secluded from the public eye. I have never known another soul to walk there. It is shabbier than the rest of the park, overgrown and half wild. An anti-Eden: I think that God cannot see us here.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

BRIONY ARNOTT

It's beginning to look a lot like Oxmas

Elizabeth Bourn reflects on her experience of Christmas in Oxford, her Michaelmas terms, and the process of starting to feel at home while at university

I begin listening to Christmas soundtracks in September, I theorise decorations in October and, by November, I have made my way through a few Advent calendars. I have been this way for as long as I can remember.

Being born in late November means either embracing Christmas early or rejecting it entirely. I am a firm believer in the former. Each year, my birthday present was a Christmas tree, which stood in the corner of my bedroom, aglow with small golden lights and rosy-pink tinsel. I would wake to it, the sound of baubles rustling from wagging tails, my dogs excited by the commotion.

Each of my new years, new starts, begins with Christmas. I was born in London, where Christmas is celebrated so beautifully. I was raised in a loving family, where Christmas is spent enjoying each other's company. And so the idea of finding myself in an unfamiliar place for the beginning of such a cherished holiday made me feel a sense of unease; another reason to dread the move to university. That is, until I experienced Christmas in Oxford.

Michaelmas term of my first year was laden with gaping holes. On the day I moved to Oxford, I spent the morning crying. I loved my hometown, I loved my school, and I loved the people I waved to everyday as I passed their windows. I loved my friends and my street and my childhood room. I spent the day rattled with nostalgia.

University, to me, was a rug pulled out from under my feet too fast. I spent the first few weeks blurry-eyed, weighed down by a feeling of homesickness mingled with lonesomeness that seemed to colour my every interaction.

When late November came, I rushed home, determined to find some familiarity. I fell asleep the night before my 19th birthday with the genuine wish to wake up aged 13, or 15, or even 18 again, anything that meant I didn't need to leave when the weekend was up. My birthday was spent safely within the confines of my comfort zone, the familiar Christmas lights blinking in the corner of my room, telling me I made the right choice.

The Christmas season was a kind of olive branch, a gentle nudge from the city to take just one more step outside of my comfort zone

I spent the train back thinking of the postcard of Oxford that has been pinned to my corkboard for years. How determined, how courageous, how passionate I'd been to have applied. How delighted I'd been to know my dream was becoming a reality. But, in the present, I was filled with fear, terrified that I hadn't found a home here yet.

The walk between the station and college was silent. I remember the wheel of my suitcase getting stuck as I crossed to Broad Street, but when I turned, I saw the Christmas market for the first time. Music was playing, a song that looped around my living

room on Christmas day, and I could smell a mixture of sweet and savoury, festive scents I knew from the markets in London.

The first time I felt at home in Oxford was that very week. I remember walking into Blackwell's and being enveloped by warmth, the kind that induces a sigh of relief and thaws frozen noses. I remember shopping for Oxford-themed gifts to bring back to family, and the act brought a haze of excitement to sixth week that I hadn't felt before. I remember dressing as reindeers with friends, laughing over shared make-up and cheap wine. While, throughout first year, I continued to feel slightly out-of-place and tentative, the Christmas season was a kind of olive branch, a gentle nudge from the city to take just one more step outside of my comfort zone.

Michaelmas term of my second year has been a slightly different story. Last



year, I stood in awe of my college's carol service, tucked away in the back row; this year I am performing. I walk to the chapel, bundled in a coat from last year's wish-list, each and every step taken for that fearful girl on the train.

This year, I attended Oxford's ice-skating society from the very first week of term and have loved every moment of it. I hug friends tightly and play Christmas music while I brush my teeth. I stop and notice the fading light behind the Ashmolean and delight in delivering letters through the post-boxes I know so well. I perform in a nativity and sit in the wings of dreamy theatres and spend my welfare week making medieval princess crowns. I choose to stay in Oxford for my 20th birthday. I feel at home.

So, as I set a small Christmas tree in the corner of my room – the one my grandmother sent with love – I feel an acute longing to reach across the divide of time. To that train, to the birthday girl of last year, to tug her hand firmly and, even for the briefest of moments, have her experience her new reality. The ups, the downs, and the Christmas lights that still warm the scene.

Image credit: Beatrix Arnold for Cherwell.

HOROSCOPES



Aries

You've earned a break – go and buy yourself a hot chocolate.



Taurus

Drink and be (a little too) merry at Oxmas dinner.



Gemini

Watch out, or you'll end up as the target of a *Cherwell* article.



Cancer

Careful, you might miss the point.



Leo

There's only one week left – confess your love (or hate).



Virgo

Time to start planning your 2026 glow-up.

Ghosts of the King's Arms past, present, and future

JOSEPHINE STERN

Have you ever felt a supernatural presence hovering over you in what claims to be Oxford's oldest pub, the King's Arms (KA)? And no – not the ghost of an ill-fated first date from last Michaelmas.

According to the website *Dark Oxfordshire*, the KA boasts an even more eerie reputation. There are some who claim to have heard a pair of phantom Oxford dons at the bar, heatedly bickering – in Ancient Greek, no less – over the quality of the port wine.

Another website, *The Haunted Hub*, adds that patrons have reported the spirit of a former musician playing piano at odd hours in an otherwise empty room. And if you're still unconvinced of the pub's spectral credentials, the Deputy Manager of the King's Arms told *Cherwell* that a ghost-finder once detected an entire ethereal family loitering there. Having perished in a fire which consumed their upstairs lodgings, the noise of the youngest daughter Amelie can still be detected, running and playing in the hallways.

Today, the King's Arms continues to beckon a motley crew of pub-goers to haunt its sticky hallways, day in, day out. Standing proudly on the corner between Holywell Street and Parks Road, the pub has long been a favourite of students, academics, tourists, and locals alike: a rare

Oxford gem in that it belongs to no single type of person.

My friend, a History and Politics student, gathers with her tutorial partners each week in the King's Arms in order to spend a self-consciously highbrow hour and a half dissecting John Rawls' political philosophy. By contrast, just a fortnight ago, I stumbled through a pub crawl that kicked off in the King's Arms, its aim decidedly far less intellectual enlightenment and far more maximal inebriation. Variety is the spice of life, I suppose.

In short, such assorted ghosts as solitary musicians and drunken professors have been joined by the ranks of the equally sundry living, with each individual who roams the halls now contributing their own quirks, charm, and colour to the storied pub. The result: a social sphere that feels, as ever, like a refuge for wandering souls.

To be sure, more generally, Oxford's bountiful pubs seem to offer the opportunity to shed the tired trope of the neurotic, over-worked student, and slip into a more unguarded way of being. However brief, a couple of pints in The Star's beer-garden, or sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in the Half Moon, softens one's defences and eases the pressure of appearing perpetually profound. It is in these pockets of calm that the suspect hauntings of essays and expectations are relieved, leaving room for genuine, candid connection. The pub demands for us to trade in academic armour for

the company of lost spirits, living or otherwise.

Old habits tend to die hard, however. It is no small feat to ditch a meticulously crafted Oxford persona: the unflappable scholar, the sharp raconteur, or the champagne socialist – each honed under careful scrutiny. In other words, after a day spent playing the demanding role of 'the Oxford student', it can be hard to know whether a pub trip truly signals the curtain call.

The pub demands for us to trade in academic armour for the company of lost spirits, living or otherwise

For many, the theatre of it all knows no boundaries, and the pub becomes a new stage upon which the performance can continue well into the night. If the costume comes off, it does so tentatively – and never all at once.

I had this theory in mind on my last trip to the King's Arms, and was more than ready to put it to the test. Standing outside the pub, drink in hand, it is almost impossible to decipher who is still in character

and who has given up the charade. Were those two trying their hand at method acting, or were they genuinely impassioned about the significance of free will in *Macbeth*?

In any case, I left the pub with the sense that an uncertain space resided between performance and repose, between folklore and reality. I only wish the scales could tip slightly in favour of the latter, so that it might be possible for authenticity to stretch beyond the walls of this transient, in-between realm.

Charles Dickens assures us in *A Christmas Carol* that: "While there is infection in [...] sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour." This rings true not just in Oxford's most-fabled haunted pub, but equally in any of the city's favourite haunts.

Pubs are at their most vital when they offer wayward souls a reprieve from close examination, where the crushing weight of expectation lightens, so that they may roam carefreely. They offer more than cocktails and conversation; in this uncanny overlap between the living and the departed, spirits of every kind can rejoice in the revelry.

So, next time you visit the King's Arms, listen out for the faint clinking of piano keys and muffled scholarly debate, toast a drink to your fellow patrons, and loosen your guard, before even the resident ghosts decide they would prefer more authentic company.

HOROSCOPES



Libra

Well done! You’ve out-performed all the other males.



Scorpio

Overthinking is so passé; own everything you do.



Sagittarius

Someone is waiting for you under the mistletoe.



Capricorn

No, it’s not quirky that you “don’t do Christmas gifts”.



Aquarius

Factor in plenty of time for bed-rotting this vac.



Pisces

There are lessons to be learnt from this term. Reflect.

The luxury of political ignorance

MORIEN ROBERTSON

PE at Oxford is often seen as a one-way track to ending up in the House of Commons (usually on the wrong side of the house). Introduce yourself to anyone as a PPE-ist and you’ll inevitably receive the displeased sighs or disgusted face befitting the discovery of a bit of chewing gum on the bottom of a shoe. This is understandable, of course: many politicians do take PPE at Oxford and go on to make a mess of the country they were ostensibly taught how to govern. So perhaps this article is just a futile effort to avoid the unfortunate association of my degree.

However, believe it or not – and certainly don’t inform my politics tutor (sorry Federico) – over the last year or so I’ve found it impossible to engage with political news, especially British party politics. Whilst in Sixth Form I was one of those (super cool) people constantly refreshing (what was then) Twitter to find out the latest fiscal announcement or policy U-turn, ironically enough, being in Oxford has slowly but surely reduced this desire to the point where I have to make an active effort to keep on top of what’s going on in the world. Recently I opened the *Financial Times* and was genuinely baffled by an editorial reading “Labour has shredded its claim to competence” – having missed all mention of the budget, an event which looms large in the calendars of political aficionados (and those who wish they were).

Perhaps this is simply because you naturally get sick of the subject you’re constantly studying – just look at the mockery English students face when they complain about having to read novels all day. No matter how much you might think you like something, subjecting it to endless academic scrutiny is a surefire way to prove yourself wrong. Yet this isn’t the case for me. Contrary to the beliefs of all those politicians-in-waiting, the academic politics course in Oxford is very far from lessons in governance; even less so is it training to be a backbencher. The kind of quantitative analysis and theory-testing that we do is, in fact, very enjoyable, precisely because it’s so different from what you get in a current affairs programme.

The real explanation, I think, as to why getting through a news article feels like an ever more insuperable task, lies in a dangerous conjunction of four facts: (1) there’s not (that) much you can do to change things significantly; (2) many of us are fairly isolated from its fluctuations, or can at least pretend that we are; (3) politics is very boring; (4) Oxford is pretty interesting. I don’t intend to debate the first here: whilst lowering the voting age to 16 is a good step in giving younger people more of a voice, the overall nature of representative democracy means that individuals’ impacts are inherently minimal, so it takes some kind of aggregating movement to have a discernible effect on the composition of

government. I hope for your sake, dear reader, that (4) is true – whether that’s because you have back-to-back nights out or because you get to have tutorials with academics you love, it seems fair to suggest that student life in Oxford is, on the whole, pretty damn good. With a huge range of events, societies, work, and interesting people, the usual problem is having too much, rather than not enough, to do.

If you are deeply exposed to the vicissitudes of short-term policy decisions, then naturally politics will be of some interest to you – even if not out of choice. And this is true for lots of students. Many people simply cannot afford (quite literally) not to pay attention to politics. Even if you aren’t allowed to work during term time, when the vacation rolls around again, you suddenly realise that someone has to pay for all those formals – and not everyone can pull out daddy’s chequebook. But still, if you aren’t dependent on the government for some kind of benefit, seeking refuge, or any number of other cases, it’s (all too)

With so much else going on, who in their right mind wants to follow a cabinet re-shuffle?

easy to pretend as though Westminster is far away. (Tuition fees? No such thing.)

If that’s not convincing – which it really shouldn’t be – then consider (3). Oxford’s own politics tutor Matt Williams is fond of describing politics as “*Love Island* with nukes”. This can be taken in two ways: if you love soaps and have little else going on in your life, then perhaps this high-stakes production will be just the opiate you need. Alternatively, if you wouldn’t watch *Love Island* even if held at gunpoint, it sounds like just another reason to clock out. With so much else going on, who in their right mind wants to follow a cabinet re-shuffle? That’s not helped, of course, by some of the least charismatic politicians ever to grace Parliament’s seats. (Say what you like about him, Tony Blair’s PMQs are some of the finest lessons in British debating you could ask for. His successors? Not so much.) When you stop to think about it, it’s almost amazing that so many people read about politics, even frenetically. If you aren’t sure, I can recommend a hundred more enjoyable or interesting things to look at (try *Cherwell’s* Lifestyle section).

To all of this you may well say: it might be just lovely for you to frolic around, blissfully unaware, in your ivory tower. But you have a duty to be informed, to participate in social and political affairs. I myself used to be one of those moralising evangelists for being an ‘active citizen’ – it was being informed or the guillotine.

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

AGONY AUNT

For Secret Santa, I pulled the name of someone that I barely know. What on earth am I supposed to get them for under £10?

Sincerely,
Clueless Claus

CHERWELL-FED

The Gee’s knees:
Brunch in North Oxford



— BEATRIX ARNOLD —

Good things often come in threes. Having reviewed both Parsonage Grill and Quod, it was only right that we complete the trilogy with a visit to their North Oxford sister restaurant Gee’s.

On a crisp November morning, after a short walk up Banbury Road, we were welcomed into the warmth of the iconic conservatory’s dining room. The neighbourhood certainly set the tone: spacious 19th century townhouses lined with trees stretched down the road, the kind that most of us could never hope to afford in our lifetimes. The dining room of the restaurant was gorgeous, brightly lit by the sunshine pouring in through the glass roof. The service was extremely attentive, always friendly, and contributed to a relaxed and accommodating atmosphere.

For me, brunch at Oxford has never escaped the confines of the college, and so I welcomed the chance to try a mid-morning meal that didn’t involve undercooked hashbrowns at Christ Church, or watery mushrooms at Somerville. Thankfully, Gee’s provided an altogether different culinary experience.

We began by ordering coffee, which, with a rich flavour profile, was clearly of a very high quality. Faced with an eclectic menu, we ordered several dishes to share. The eggs benedict were perfectly cooked, with a rich yolk that spilled over the dish when broken into. The citrus notes in the sauce, combined with the freshness of the chives, really elevated the dish. The highlight, for me, was the smashed avocado and burrata on sourdough toast. The creamy burrata and the chewy sourdough transformed the dish from the typically millennial photo opportunity into a truly decadent brunch

option, complemented perfectly by a generous drizzle of olive oil.

Afterwards, we opted for a pain au chocolat, a pastry which, in the UK, can so often be disappointing. Yet the perfectly flaky pastry, combined with the rich filling, would have exceeded the standards of even the most pretentious French patisserie connoisseur. We also ordered the pan con tomate; the juicy tomato mixture, enhanced by olive oil, was the ideal texture to balance the sourdough toast. Ordering a cocktail at 11am on a weekday felt a little indecent, but the bellini was a delicious balance of sweet peach and dry prosecco, exalting the entire meal to heights that the college brunch could only dream of.

Menu

- Pain au chocolat £3.95
- Pan con tomate £9.50
- Eggs benedict £11.95
- Burrata & smashed avocado on sourdough toast £12.95
- Bellini £10.95
- Americano £4.25

Gee’s, OX2 6PE, 61-63 Banbury Road

As with its sister establishments, Gee’s is definitely an occasional restaurant. The other diners included a disproportionate number of people in black tie, the kind of place those with wealthy parents and substantive allowances might stop by before a graduation ceremony. But in a gorgeous setting, with an appealing menu, a cocktail in hand, and amazing company, Gee’s was the perfect place to spend a long, leisurely morning, as I congratulated myself on my excellent life choices.

Image credit: Gee’s with permission.

Dear Clueless Claus,

Fear not: Secret Santa at Oxford is rarely about deep personal insight. It’s about committing wholeheartedly to the festive chaos for the price of a Pret sandwich. Since you barely know your giftee, embrace the advantage: you can’t get it wrong per se, only delightfully random.

First, consider the classic safe bets. Cosy items are universally welcome during freezing and slightly miserable library sessions. These can be mini hot-chocolate kits, a cheerful pair of socks, or a tiny candle that promises festive vibes even if it only smells vaguely of cinnamon and the desperation of seventh week. These gifts say, “I hope you survive until real Christmas”, which is frankly the kindest message anyone can give.

If that doesn’t inspire you, dive into the traditional Secret Santa approach: intentional absurdity. A novelty rubber duck wearing a Santa hat, a tiny desk gonk, or a thrift-store book with an unexpectedly dramatic title will all earn a laugh at the very least when gifts are passed around.

Finally, a college-specific in-joke, like a joke about your staircase’s heating (or lack thereof) or a pun involving your college crest. This shows effort without necessitating personal knowledge.

Remember: No one expects luxury – they just expect you to commit to the bit.

Lots of love,
Agony Aunt

‘Designed to be deleted’: The unHinged world of online dating

Beatrix Arnold discusses her experience of being on Hinge at Oxford, and the pitfalls of online dating

I’d been warned about the dating scene at Oxford. There’s something about self-entitlement that sharpens the sting of hook-up culture. One too many walks of shame through the city centre as students flocked to their 9ams taught me all too clearly that academic and emotional intelligence do not always develop in equal measures. And so, earlier this year, I made a pact with a friend that we would both download Hinge. Given my track record of Kanye-defenders, love-bombers, and emotionally under-developed mummy’s boys, I figured that I had nothing to lose.

The notion of romance, naively supported throughout childhood through the Hallmark staples of love letters, roses, and the meet-cute, has, inevitably, evolved in the digital age. The whole process of dating has become ‘gamified’, and romantic decisions are compressed into the tap of a button – a bleak arcade machine where the prize is usually disappointment. If you’re looking for the reasons behind the dwindling marriage rates, I have an entire album of screenshots that make a strong case. Somewhere between the third “I’ll fall for you if...you trip me” prompt, and the eighth awkward group photo (it’s always the one you hope for the least), I came to accept the fact that I wasn’t going to find the one on Hinge.

Romantic decisions are compressed into the tap of a button – a bleak arcade machine where the prize is usually disappointment

The entire concept of online dating has long been regarded as dubious. Flattening yourself into the confines of a perfectly curated profile can all too easily verge into the risky territory of commodification, a marketing campaign from which a unique image of yourself can supposedly be extracted, bolstered by artificial insights into your personality to muster a mumble of self-expression. Within this hall of mirrors, you must

display uniqueness filtered through the limits of the socially digestible.

This performance art eschews intimacy and reduces romance to a highlight reel of superficial ranking, a digital pageant show which incurs the same, age-old objectification: the same Faustian bargain with a built-in obsolescence clause. We are made to represent ourselves in some sort of perverse panopticon of romantic and sexual fantasy.

Everything about this is a humiliation ritual. The act of sending a like is enough to make you feel like Carrie Bradshaw showing up at Big’s door. You have to cultivate a show of insouciance, an ironic detachment: desperation is detrimental to the brand image. Even *Vogue* decreed that having a boyfriend is cringe now, actually. One wrong romantic step is figured as a catastrophic brand collapse, where partners are evaluated not as people, but as threats to your image. This focus on optics turns out to be just another symptom of the timeless idea of women as a product, something to be marketed and sold – capitalism loves to disguise itself as feminist analysis.

But it never felt that serious. Once I had abandoned the hope of actually making a meaningful connection, scrolling the app became a kind of entertainment, an opportunity to laugh with my friends over some of the more egregious profile choices. The bleak landscape of online dating, when viewed through this lens, was transformed into a carnivalesque display of what Oxford has to offer.

That is, of course, until I began to more frequently experience that uncanny feeling of recognition as I pass people on Broad Street. Oxford is ultimately too small a place for the world of Hinge to be safely abstracted. The profiles of friends, exes, and BNOCs appearing on my feed has caused me to throw my phone across the room in shock more times than I can count. One more photo of someone in an academic gown is going to make me scream, not to mention the sheer number of people willing to label themselves ‘conservative’. But the real low point came when I received a pick-up line that was patently AI-generated. Clearly, communicating with girls their own age is beyond the skillset of the average Oxford student.

This is not to say that such a disheartening range of options is an Oxford-specific problem.



When I went home over the vac, the only profiles that came up on my feed were the bartender at my village pub, and a boy I went to primary school with. Needless to say, this didn’t fill me with optimism.

At some point, the curiosity wore off. Opening the app became admin and tapping through the profiles became a chore. The ethos of “it’s just around the corner” is an exhausting one, and lack of fulfilment breeds defeatism. The half-baked prompts and confusing red flags that had, at first, provided such ripe comedic material, now became a source of frustration.

Increasingly, I found myself lost in analysis paralysis, weighing up which of my standards I could compromise on in the interests of the least bad option. I buried my instincts for self-preservation and followed the rules for dating

proscribed by the universe (or rather, by the Hinge CEO).

Hinge fails because it turns dating into a diagnostic test. Romance is too stubbornly particular to be generated by an algorithm, particularly one that, as a business model, benefits from relational failure. Dating apps impose an artificial structure, an illusion of control over something inherently mysterious, as if all romantic experience can be concentrated into the conveyor belt of homogenous profiles.

Hinge is marketed as the app “designed to be deleted”, but what it didn’t specify is that it would be out of frustration, rather than any kind of romantic fulfilment. All this is to say, there’s no way that Zohran Mamdani met his wife on Hinge.

Image credit: CC0 1.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

OXFORD

TINY LOVE STORIES

Love is ubiquitous, transcending time, language, and culture. We can reach across the barriers of our mortality to brush fingertips with those who leave their palms outstretched – a Michelangelo-esque connection. Tracing inscriptions painstakingly carved into jagged rock. Cradling a baby’s rattle lovingly crafted by an expectant family. Reading into the nuances carefully woven by a poet into a tapestry of verses and stanzas. Chuckling with an Elizabethan audience at Shakespearean profanity, or gazing at the beauty of time-weathered monuments, once the pinnacle of someone’s career. Even murmuring affection in the tongue of an ancestor’s language. In embracing the warmth of our past, we breathe life, anew, into the love that kindles its hearth.

Abigail Christie, Christ Church

CHERPSE.

Oxford’s blind dating

A coffee date at G&D’s. Will the lovebirds end up singing in the rain?

Mr Architecture Fan

First impressions?
He had flower earrings and a cool outfit. I was maybe a bit awkward because I was nervous (the fact he was quite pretty didn’t help with the initial nerves).

Did it meet your expectations?
Far better than most Cherpse dates I’ve read about. I thought it would be a short coffee date but it turned into a two hour chat with ice cream and waffles and a walk that left him late for dinner with his friends. The conversation was fun (after I stopped stress-yapping about my love of Oxford cloisters and religious architecture).

What was the highlight?
Walking down New College Lane with the church bells in the background was very aesthetic, even though it was a very rainy day.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
Accidentally poking his head with my umbrella when we were walking (I’m not used to walking next to other tall people).

Describe the date in three words:
Cosy, cute, rainy.

Is there a second date on the cards?
I asked and there will be a second date next week!

Mr On Fleek

First impressions?
He had a middle parting, an umbrella, and shiny nails. He was helpfully calm and confident at the start, suggesting we go to G&D’s across the road when there were no free seats at the cafe; I meanwhile thought we’d have to call the whole thing off, go home, and cry.

Did it meet your expectations?
I’m not sure I had any expectations, apart from him being gay and single (which thankfully he was).

What was the highlight?
Honestly, the fact that we just ended up having a really nice time.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
When all the tables were taken at the cafe, and a woman offered for us to sit at her table, having met him 30 seconds ago.

Describe the date in three words:
Waffles, autism, shiny nails.

Is there a second date on the cards?
It’s taken me so long to write this that we’re already on date number three!



Women's Varsity cross-country turns 50

Alice Rubli spotlights the illustrious history of the women's races

The 50th anniversary of women's cross-country in the Oxford-Cambridge Varsity Competition is set to be celebrated on Saturday 6th December. The event will be held at Roehampton Vale, the headquarters of Thames Hare and Hounds, the oldest adult cross-country running club in the world.

The Oxford-Cambridge University Cross-Country Race is one of the oldest inter-club matches still in existence, with the very first race occurring in 1880. However, it wasn't until the early 1970s – 1975 for Oxford – that both clubs welcomed their first female participants, with the first official women's race taking place in Shotover, just outside of Oxford. The following year, in 1976, the race was granted official status; hosted at Thames Hare and Hounds, Oxford were victorious with Lynne Wightman (Lady Margaret Hall) winning the first official race.

Since then, over 300 female runners from Oxford and Cambridge have participated in the Varsity race, in-

cluding Olympians Louise Shanahan and Mara Yamauchi.

Women's Captain of Oxford University Cross-Country Club (OUCCC) Tamsin Sangster said: "This special anniversary will be an exciting celebration of past and present members who have contributed to our achievements. OUCCC is forever grateful to the women and men who paved the way for women's participation in the Varsity Match." Lilian Lewis, Women's Captain of Cambridge University Hare and Hounds, reflected a similar sentiment: "In this anniversary year it is exciting to be able to bring the number of Women's Varsity teams equal to the Men's side. I can't wait for this year's Varsity and to see what the next 50 years of Women's Varsity brings."

Originally, races would alternate location between Oxford and Cambridge, before the decision was made that this system was "shockingly unfair" for the visiting side. As a result, the races have since been held at the neutral grounds of Thames Hare and Hounds. Nestled in South East London, this location provides com-

petitors with the essential cross-country obstacles of deep mud, logs, and the watersplash across Beverley Brook. In 2021, Thames Hare and Hounds received recognition of their importance in the development of cross-country. The club was named as one of seven new recipients of a World Athletics Heritage Plaque, awarded for "an outstanding contribution to the worldwide history and development of the sport of track and field athletics and of out of stadia athletics disciplines such as cross country".

Simon Molden, Secretary of Thames Hare and Hounds, told *Cherwell*: "Thames Hare and Hounds is proud to be hosting the University Races in 2025, particularly as this year sees them reach another important milestone with the 50th anniversary of the women's contest."

The men's and ladies' races are run in an eight-a-side, six-to-score format and, with competitive selection, the races have seen the likes of Sir Roger Bannister and Stephanie Cook MBE participate over the years. Bannister, famously known for running the first

sub-four minute mile at Iffley Sports Centre in 1954 – which is now home to the Sir Roger Bannister Track – won the 1949 Varsity race. Cook also took victory for Oxford in the 1966 race, going on to win the gold medal for Great Britain in the modern pentathlon at the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

After 133 years, competition is close between the universities on the men's side, with Oxford in the lead by just one victory (67 wins to 66). The women's side sees Oxford lead with 28 wins against Cambridge's 20. Last year, Oxford were victorious on both the men's and women's sides, winning 7-0 against Cambridge in the first clean sweep in several years.

This year's edition of the race will take place at 3pm, with results available on the OpenTrack website after the races conclude. Both female and male former members of the Oxford and Cambridge clubs will be welcome to take part in the Old Blues' Race, with the Gentlemen's and Ladies' Races occurring afterwards.

Image credit: Graham Smith with permission.

SPORTING SPOTLIGHT

JAMES MCINERNEY

Last week *The West Australian* decided to brand Joe Root, the leading run-scorer of all current test batsmen, as "Average Joe". As an Englishman whose teenage years were spent watching Joe Root's hundreds a year, to see our number four dubbed a "hero in the homeland, pretender in Australia", did – I can say in all honesty – get my goat. While certain things need to go in our favour – Crawley and Duckett must keep their wits about them at the top of the order, Brook needs to hold onto his braincells while he bats, and our bowling attack needs to stay injury-free – I, for one, still believe that they will bring that glorious little urn back to us here at home.

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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

Puzzles

Santa's Journey by ZOË MCGUIRE

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

4 4 10 10 6 4 3 3 4 2 2 1 5 3 3

Can you help Santa find his way to the house? He may only turn right angles or carry straight on, and the numbers indicate how many cells in that row or column he enters. He may not enter the same cell twice. Some of the route is marked to get you started!

Codeword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS

1: __ 14: __
2: __ 15: __
3: __ 16: __
4: __ 17: __
5: __ 18: __
6: __ 19: __
7: __ 20: __
8: __ 21: __
9: __ 22: __
10: __ 23: __
11: __ 24: __
12: __ 25: __
13: __ 26: __

In this puzzle, each number represents a unique letter. Every entry is an English word (or common two-word phrase in a few cases). Can you fill the grid?

Cryptic Crossword by NAT ELDER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27

ACROSS

- 1) Criminal hug with Clinton leads to stripping (10)
6) At heart, Conservative, Reform, and No. 10 take on beginning of uniformity (4)
8) Smile to doctor from dating app (6)
9) Blaze and company dance with castanets (8)
10) Produce a smile (6)
11) Mouse run wild in large numbers (8)
12) A great deal exclude you from throuple; a shame! (8)
13) Research empty and absurd myth to reveal pattern (6)
14) Launches attack on good man or woman (6)
18) Speak back to leader of house, all in moment of inspiration (8)
22) Pretentious craft involves organ playing (8)
23) King tucks into pasty or sausage roll, perhaps (6)
24) Flower to cap off a final Mod, it's all over? (8)
25) Pairs up with line to form helix (6)
26) Website visitor returns orders regularly after starting university (4)
27) Continues to hack amidst pres, taking drug (10)

DOWN

- 2) Creature chased back whale endlessly (7)
3) Let nine out - that's forgiving (7)
4) Underwater missile regularly dropped amongst commotion (7)
5) Good ram goes and returns to school (7)
6) Charge beginner prematurely, of course (7)
7) France's number 1 with awful touch, reveals lack of class (7)
9) Support a crazy rule (11)
15) Walks around hotel to get clothes (7)
16) Origin starts front or back (4,3)
17) Tolerate no more, avoid date (5,2)
19) Devilish creature and fool to start eventual stalemate (7)
20) Unfriendly setter enters untidy hotels (7)
21) Setter gets runs, and a start to excruciating chronicle (7)

Week 5 answers:

Homophonograms: EDITION/ADDITION; SYMBOL/CYMBAL; IDLE/IDYLL; GROAN/GROWN; HUMOROUS/HUMERUS; HOSTEL/HOSTILE.
eldroW: DANCE, REACT, ACHED, ACTED, CADET. **Go:** White holds the strong threat of M13; it turns out Black's best option is simply to play it first, and then there are many lines to a complete defense. **Scrabble:** The only legal bingo is the spectacular CENTRALISED down the right hand side.
Cryptic Crossword: **Across:** Hippocampus, Bar, Assam, Hit Or Miss, Big Cheese, Amend, Traipse, Nuts, Midi, Kick Off, On Air, Speed Bump, Time Stamp, Coins, Rat, Self-Defense. **Down:** Headbutt, Postgrad, Oomph, Achieve, Pattern, Sarcastic, Blimey, Reside, Primroses, Solution, Off-Piste, Install, Kneepad, Co-Star, Marmot, Decaf.