



## Oxford's student left turns away from the Labour party

George Heeley in FEATURES – PAGE 10



Conor Niland on the space between Centre Court and obscurity

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# Oxford University Catholic chaplain removed after student sexual abuse complaint



- Student alleges non-consensual touching
- Howard helped secure funding for student
- Jesuits in Britain misrepresented the nature of the complaint

**CHERWELL INVESTIGATIONS**  
*CW: Sexual abuse, grooming, suicide*

The Senior Chaplain at the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy (OUCC), Father Damian Howard, was asked to step down last August after a student made a complaint of sexual abuse against him. A *Cherwell* investigation has subsequently revealed that Jesuits in Britain, the organisation which appoints the Senior Catholic Chaplain at the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy, substantially misrepresented the nature of the complaint made by the student.

The student submitted a report, seen by *Cherwell*, to Jesuits in Britain in early August, which alleged that Father Howard initiated sexual contact with the student on multiple occasions last summer, often while

the student was under the influence of alcohol. Before becoming the University Chaplain, Howard was the Provincial Superior of Jesuits in Britain from 2017 to 2023, the leading role in the organisation.

### Sexual abuse complaint

Howard met the student, who was reading for a DPhil, in 2023 through his capacity as Senior Chaplain. According to the student's statement: "It was around this time that Damian took up the cause of my funding request to the Province, and with his help, the funding was secured."

In Hilary term 2024, Howard reportedly invited the student to day trips or dinners on multiple occasions, which Howard usually paid for. The student wrote in his statement: "[Howard] urged me to stay in the Chaplaincy accommodation in the 2024/5 academic year, notwithstanding... my belief that I could find cheaper housing and a calmer atmosphere."

According to the student, from late 2024 to early 2025, Howard became prone to jealous behaviour when the student spent time on other commitments.

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## Oxford University Press issues apology for book published 20 years ago

MAYA HEUER-EVANS

The Indian division of Oxford University Press (OUP) has apologised for statements made in the book *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*, published in 2003. The work, written by American historian James Laine, examined the history of Shivaji Shahaji Bhosale, a 17th century regional sovereign whose legacy has particular cultural and political significance in the state of Maharashtra and is widely celebrated

by Hindu nationalists.

Udayanraje Bhosale, an Indian politician from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and descendant of Shivaji, filed a complaint in 2005 against Sayeed Manzar Khan, the then Managing Director of OUP India, over the book's misrepresentation of his ancestor. The criminal defamation proceedings against the latter and three others were quashed by the High Court's Kolhapur bench last December in favour of a public apology.

This apology, issued 6th January in two Indian newspapers on Khan's behalf, "acknowledged that some statements regarding Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at page nos. 31, 33, 34 and 93 of the book were unverified". "We sincerely regret publishing those statements", it continued, apologising to "Shrimant Chhatrapati Udayanraje Bhosale and the public at large, for any distress and anguish caused to him".

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## Two Oxford professors awarded inaugural Green Future Fellowship

OSKAR DOEPKE

adapting to the climate crisis, nor is there a quick fix. It will demand multiple, diverse, high-potential, and long-term solutions that each make a positive contribution. We must get ideas and concepts off drawing boards and out of labs, so that they can fulfil their potential in the world.

"Current funding structures don't always support the creativity and progress needed to enable innovators to turn complementary or long-term climate ideas into action... As such, we do not prescribe specific targets as an assessment criterion. What we are seeking is quantitative impacts on greenhouse gas emission reduction or clear evidence of a contribution to climate adaptation or resilience."

Professor Moritz Riede and Professor Robert House have been selected for the first-ever Green Future Fellowship. Under a Royal Academy of Engineering programme, the inaugural 13 fellows will receive £3 million over 10 years to develop commercial solutions to tackle climate change across the UK.

The fellowship is supported by the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology (DSIT), which awarded the Academy a £150 million endowment to support the scheme in 2024. Dr Christina Guindy, Associate Director for Research Programmes and Awards at the Academy, told *Cherwell* that "climate change is the challenge of our generation" and that the fellowship will enable "ambitions, lasting engineering solutions".

Guindy told *Cherwell*: "We know there is no silver bullet to solving and

Riede will use the fellowship to speed up the commercialisation of organic photovoltaics (OPV), a type of carbon-based solar cell. Being lightweight and flexible, OPVs can be installed in places solar panels cannot, such as on curved surfaces. Yet, while OPVs have reached 20% efficiency in labs, commercial panels only remain at 8-9% – a gap Riede aims to close.

In the University's press release, Riede said: "We know organic photovoltaics work very well in the lab. The challenge is achieving the same at scale in factories in a way that is both fast and affordable. That is what the climate urgency demands right now, and that is what we are solving. Focusing on industrially relevant materials and proven processes,

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# Oxford University Press issues apology for book published in 2003

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Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India was subject to widespread criticism upon publication, with a passage on page 93 that alluded to Shivaji's parentage seen as having disrespected the memory of his mother Jijabai. The book was banned by Maharashtra in 2004, and withdrawn from circulation later that year. The same year, officials from the state sought to arrest Laine, and more than 150 protestors from the Sambhaji Brigade, a Maratha activist group, targeted the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune for what they saw as its complicity in his research.

The ban on the book was lifted by the Bombay High Court in 2007, and the decision confirmed by the Supreme Court in 2010. But this is not the first time that Shivaji's legacy has caused controversy in the context

of mounting Hindu-Muslim tensions in India: in 1993 there were calls for the author of an article printed in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* to be publicly flogged for misrepresenting the ruler.

An OUP spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "The title in question was published for a brief period more than two decades ago in India. In response to concerns about the title's content which were raised at the time, we took prompt steps to recall the title and withdraw it from circulation."

"Our products and services support education and research across the world. We always seek to consider cultural sensitivities and context carefully to ensure that our products can be read and enjoyed by as many people worldwide as possible."

James Laine was contacted for comment.

Image credit: Mercedes Haas for *Cherwell*.



## Oxford congestion charge records 31,000 fines within two months

OSKAR DOEPKE

Oxfordshire County has issued 31,588 fines to motorists who failed to pay Oxford's temporary congestion charge as of 7th January, Oxfordshire County told *Cherwell*.

Introduced on 29th October last year, the scheme requires drivers without a permit or day pass to pay a £5 fee to enter Oxford through six charging locations. Motorists who do not comply are fined £70, reduced to £35 if the fine is paid within 14 days. Enforcement began 10th December, after a six-week grace period.

The temporary congestion charge – which aims to reduce traffic and reinvest in the county's bus service – has already raised £728,825 from 135,297 total payments, including £22,085 in fines. Despite the high number of fines, Oxfordshire County told *Cherwell* that "there is no cause for concern", as enforcement costs were included in the scheme's financial model.

Nevertheless, the leader of the Conservative opposition group, Councillor Liam Walker, said the number of fines and money raised "doesn't tell the story the county council might want it to". He said the scheme looks "less like a transport solution and more like a tax on those who rely on their cars".

Pete White – an Oxford resident who organises the 'Anti-Traffic Filters and Congestion Charge Oxford' group – told *Cherwell*: "From the perspective of many Oxford residents, the congestion charge has very little to do with climate action or clean air, and a great deal to do with revenue generation."

"The scale of fines is telling. Tens of thousands of penalties don't indicate success; they indicate widespread non-

compliance and disengagement."

White added that "a clear majority" of Oxford residents oppose the congestion charge. During the council's initial public consultation, nearly 74% of respondents said the scheme would have a negative impact, while separate petitions opposing the charge's implementation reached 13,500 and 2,500 signatures, respectively. Another organisation, Open Roads for Oxford, is attempting to initiate a judicial review against the congestion charge.

Responding to criticism, Councillor Andrew Grant, who is the Cabinet Member for Transport Management, told *Cherwell*: "As with any new scheme, there's a bedding-in period as residents, visitors, and businesses adjust to the temporary congestion charge. We are monitoring the scheme's impacts carefully and are reporting monthly on the data available to us."

Grant added that the scheme's free park and ride – which allows drivers to park outside Oxford and travel by bus for free – "is proving extremely popular", with 179,000 more journeys in its first two months than in the same period last year. The temporary offer – which has been extended to March – has given Oxfordshire "more choice and convenience when it comes to bus travel and accessing the city, including major hospital sites", Grant told *Cherwell*.

Further, Grant said the "fantastic take-up" in bus ridership will lead to cleaner air, reduced traffic, and safer streets.

The Oxford temporary congestion charge scheme is set to run until August, when Botley Road reopens. The scheme will then be replaced by a traffic filter trial, where motorists without a permit will be charged £70 for driving on the same six roads.

# Former Odeon to be demolished and redeveloped as an aparthotel

BEATRIX ARNOLD

The former Odeon cinema on Gloucester Green is set to be demolished by Oxford City Council this summer. The cinema was closed at the end of January last year with plans to use the site for a £47 million council project. It will be redeveloped into a new hotel and community space.

Oxford City Council have approved plans by Marick Real Estate, in partnership with Makespace Oxford, for the construction of an aparthotel. This will consist of 145 rooms on the upper five storeys, along with a bar and a cafe. It will be operated by the Dublin-based operator Staycity Group under its Wilde brand. Plans for the development also include a cultural community space on the ground floor.

The demolition of the former building will start this summer and

is projected to be completed by the end of the year or at the beginning of 2027. Following this, the construction of the new hotel complex is expected to be finished by the end of 2028. The project is part of the Council's effort to revitalise the area and support local jobs.

Because of the building's much-frequented location at the intersection between George Street and Gloucester Green, the demolition and subsequent construction process has the potential to cause disruption to the activity in the area. Trading in Gloucester Green market and neighbouring businesses, including the Old Fire Station venue, are particularly likely to be affected.

An Oxford student told *Cherwell*: "I've always enjoyed visiting Gloucester Green market for the food and the vibrant atmosphere, but I think construction noise would put me off."

The building has been in operation as a cinema since 1936, when it opened as the Ritz Cinema, and has since passed through several owners before it became an Odeon in 2000. Its closure in 2025 followed that of the Odeon on Magdalen Street, which shut in the summer of 2023 after 99 years of business.

Another student told *Cherwell* that although the former Odeon on Gloucester Green was affordable, "I only went once – I prefer independent cinemas".

Earlier this year, The Oxford Cinema & Café was opened on the Magdalen Street site. In addition to this, Oxford's cinemas include Phoenix Picturehouse in Jericho, the Curzon in Westgate, Ultimate Picture Palace on Cowley Road, and Vue on Grenoble Road, although the last is situated in Littlemore outside of the Oxford ring-road. Oxford's nearest Odeon is now located in Aylesbury.

## Wellington Square redevelopment plans submitted

ALICE RUBLI

Plans have been submitted by Oxford University Development (OUD) to include new graduate accommodation and teaching and retail spaces at Wellington Square.

OUD, a joint venture partnership, submitted a planning application to Oxford City Council for a two-phase redevelopment scheme. If approved, the first phase would involve demolishing 25 Wellington Square, which borders part of Little Clarendon Street. In a press release, OUD said the building would be replaced with a four-storey academic and office facility, including teaching space, with plans also indicating a possible café on the Little Clarendon Street frontage.

25 Wellington Square currently consists of graduate accommodation on the upper floors, which have been closed due to maintenance issues.

The second phase of the project would entail the refurbishment of the Western Terrace of the Square, 32-42 Wellington Square. As part of this redevelopment, around 100 graduate rooms of varying sizes would be created. Although this phase would involve developing the buildings, the existing historic terrace facing the

Square would be preserved.

In addition to the redevelopment of the buildings themselves, Wellington Square would also undergo renovation with "streetscape improvements", including a widening of the pavement, "cycle parking, and an electricity substation". Public seating, pedestrian, and cycle movement have been "carefully considered to ensure safety and comfort", according to OUD, and the connection between Wellington Square and Little Clarendon Square has also been revised under the plans.

Clare Hebbes, Director of Development at OUD told *Cherwell*: "Our aim is to create a place that supports the wider community, contributes to the local economy, and provides world-class facilities for the university and its students."

Previously this year, public consultations were held to gather opinions from residents, businesses, and the wider community. Sustainability was a key focus during the consultations, and "both phases of the proposals include a strong emphasis on sustainability".

The new building's design meets high environmental standards, including Passivhaus principles, and increases biodiversity through landscape changes. Oxford University Development told *Cherwell* that

it would aim to use a sensitive construction approach, using a "Construction and Environmental Management Plan, dust control measures, and the Considerate Constructors Scheme", amongst others.

Clare Hebbes said: "We are grateful to everyone who took the time to take part in the two stages of consultation. The feedback we received has informed our approach to the final proposals, including our thinking about the construction."

Formed in 2019, Oxford University Development is a joint venture between the University and L&G, a UK financial service group and major global investor. Previously, OUD has completed several projects around Oxford, including delivering the Life and Mind Building and homes for graduate students at Court Palace Gardens. OUD expects to deliver approximately 150,000m<sup>2</sup> of University space and 3,000 new homes for University members and the wider community by 2035.

Plans for Wellington Square's redevelopment are currently under consideration by the Council and, if approved, construction would likely begin in 2027.

Image credit: © SLAB with permission.





## Two Oxford professors awarded inaugural Green Future Fellowship

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we aim to scale organic photovoltaics, the greenest and most equitable form of solar energy, reaching low-, middle- and high-income countries alike.”

Meanwhile, House will use the fellowship to develop a novel type of battery. He told *Cherwell*: “My vision is to realise an entirely new Li-ion battery concept with four-fold higher energy density than existing technology. Such a battery could offer a viable green alternative to kerosene, thus potentially enabling a new generation of low-emission or even emission-free commercial airliners. During the fellowship, my team and I will prove the concept, develop new materials and processes, and eventually scale up and demonstrate the technology in aerospace applications.”

House added that the “uniqueness” of the Green Future Fellowship lies in its length, which will allow him “to pursue the ambitious ideas ... to achieve batteries suitable for electric flight”.

Looking ahead, House told *Cherwell*: “It is hugely motivating to be part of a cohort of fellows and the Royal Academy of Engineering who share the same commitment to delivering real-world climate impact through science and engineering. The hard graft begins here, but what better group of people to go on the journey with?”

The Green Future Fellowship is an ongoing Academy programme, with a second cohort group to be announced in early 2027. Applications for the third round will open this autumn.

## Four Oxford researchers honoured at Royal Astronomical Society awards

NED REMINGTON

Four researchers from the University of Oxford have been honoured in the Royal Astronomical Society’s (RAS) 2026 Awards. Professor Suzanne Aigrain, Dr Deaglan Bartlett, and Professor Andrew Bunker from the Department of Physics all received awards, along with Associate Professor Paula Koelemeijer from the Department of Earth Sciences.

Professor Aigrain was awarded the George Darwin Lectureship in recognition of her research on detecting and characterising exoplanets. She has been involved in surveys that have discovered thousands of new exoplanets over 25 years, developing research methods which are now widely used. Aigrin is also took part in the European Space Agency’s PLATO mission and the UK-led Terra Hunting Experiment.

Professor Aigrain told *Cherwell*: “Exoplanet research has tremendous resonance for the general public in their broader context, and aims to answer questions like ‘where do we come from’ and ‘are we alone.’”

Professor Aigrain also plays a key role in scientific outreach initiatives and is a former TEDx speaker. In a comment to *Cherwell*, she emphasised the need to “demystify the process of scientific research, and to inspire others” through outreach work.

Professor Bartlett was awarded the Early Career Award in Astronomy. His work focuses on developing statistical and machine learning methods, including the construction of high-performance machine learning models, for research in cosmology and astrophysics. His research involves international collaboration to apply machine learning to accelerate and

improve computer simulations of the Universe.

Professor Bartlett told *Cherwell*: “My work focuses on a branch of machine learning where we ask the machine to discover (hopefully simple) mathematical equations.” He also described the great change to his research being brought by AI, which comes with “both risks and benefits.”

“It is an honour to receive such an award, and humbling to receive this recognition from the RAS.”

Associate Professor and seismologist Paula Koelemeijer from the Department of Earth Sciences was honoured with the Fowler Award for Geophysics. Koelemeijer’s work involves a range of seismological applications, including the use of seismic noise to study human and animal behaviour and global tomography to image deep Earth structure.

Professor Koelemeijer told *Cherwell*: “A lot of my research focuses on imaging of the Earth, to diagnose processes that occur, very similar to CT scans of a human body. This is fundamental research... fundamental science often

leads to innovation and developments in applications in the end.”

Andrew Bunker from the Department of Physics was awarded the Herschel Medal, honouring investigations of outstanding merit in observational astrophysics. His research focuses on the formation and evolution of galaxies and the search for distant galaxies formed when the Universe was far younger. He has recently worked on the near-infrared spectrograph NIRSpec on the James Webb Space Telescope, an extremely sensitive instrument that has enabled the discovery of some of the most distant galaxies yet observed.

The Royal Astronomical Society told *Cherwell*: “Scientific outreach is extremely important because it helps to inspire the next generation, seeks to attract people from all backgrounds and walks of life to the wonder of astronomy and geophysics, and allows those within our fields to share their passion and excitement about their subject.”

*Image credit: Mike Peel, CC-BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.*



## New Oxford study finds weight regain can be rapid once injections stop



LARA MURRANI

*CW: Weight loss*

A study conducted by researchers at the University of Oxford suggests that maintaining weight loss may be particularly challenging after discontinuing weight-loss medications such as Ozempic. The research, led by the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, found that many individuals experience rapid weight gain once treatment is stopped.

The study, published in *The British Medical Journal* (BMJ), is a review and meta-analysis of 37 studies involving 9,341 adults who stopped weight management medicines after an average of 39 weeks of treatment. Participants were followed for an average of 32 weeks after discontinuation.

Dr Sam West, the lead author, told *Cherwell* that the study “included any medication that has ever been licensed for weight loss. So this included older medications such as orlistat, the older GLP1 medications such as liraglutide and then newer GLP1 medications such as semaglutide and tirzepatide”.

Across all weight-management drugs included in the review, weight increased by an average of 0.9 pounds per month after treatment stopped. At that rate, the researchers estimate people would return to their starting weight within 1.5 to 2 years after stopping the medication. For newer medicines such as Semaglutide and Tirzepatide, regain averaged 1.8 pounds per month, indicating a return to baseline by about 1.5 years.

The review suggests that the regain following the discontinuation of medication occurred more rapidly than after ending behavioural weight loss programmes, such as exercise or

dieting, by approximately 0.7 pounds per month. While behavioural support alongside medication was associated with greater weight loss during treatment, it did not slow the rate of regain afterwards.

Dr Sam West, said the results “sound a cautionary note for short-term use without a more comprehensive approach to weight management”, adding this “isn’t a failing of the medicines” but “obesity as a chronic, relapsing condition”. Senior author Associate Professor Koutoukidis then suggested one reason for faster regain may be that people using drugs “don’t need to consciously practise changing their diet to lose weight”, so they may not develop strategies that help maintain weight loss once treatment ends.

The analysis also raises questions about how these drugs are used in practice. The team noted that an estimated nine in ten people currently using weight loss medicines in the UK are purchasing them privately, often without the clinical oversight and behavioural support that the NHS usually prescribes. Professor Susan Jebb, a joint senior author, said that the findings “underscore the need for a more holistic and long term approach to weight management”, alongside greater emphasis on prevention of weight gain.

Dr West told *Cherwell*: “The findings can allow patients and practitioners to make fully informed decisions about what treatments is best for weight management. The new medications are very effective in helping people lose weight but people need to be aware of the rapid weight regain after they stop taking the medication.”

*Image credit: Marianna Weiner, CC0 1.0 Universal, via PublicDomainPictures.Net.*

## NEWS SHORTS

### Shisha? I hardly know her!

ThirstBar on Park End street had its licence suspended following a shisha discovered on the premises on three different occasions. The bar was investigated by Trading Standards, who found evidence that illegal tobacco products were being stored and supplied by the venue, with 8kg of non-duty paid waterpipe tobacco discovered in a cupboard last March.

### Nice rack

Oxford City Council has bought and installed 45 new cycle racks across the city. These racks will create 88 additional cycle parking spaces. The project was funded by Oxford City Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy, costing £25,000. This all comes after community requests for cycle parking in various locations in Oxford. The installations are part of a broader commitment by the Council to “encourage cycling and make active travel easier”.

### A warm ‘fellow’ to Prof Hinchcliffe

Professor Steve Hinchcliffe has been appointed Professor of Environmental Geography, and will also be a fellow of Linacre College. He is a well-regarded human geographer and social scientist, known for his research linking environmental issues with social theory.

### The case of the missing kebab van

*Cherwell* was given a tip-off regarding a kebab van that has vanished off the streets of Oxford. Students from Magdalen College informed us about the disappearance of their “nighttime staple”, Ahmed’s Bar B-Q kebab van. *Cherwell* is highly concerned about this and will be conducting a thorough investigation into the disappearance of this much-loved food spot.

## CROSS CAMPUS

### Cambridge launches legal case over use of word ‘Cambridge’

Cambridge has launched a legal objection against a local rowing business over the use of the word ‘Cambridge’ in their name. Cambridge Rowing, run by Omar Terywall, applied in 2022 to register a trademark, which featured the name along with a shield design depicting a rower. Cambridge University has challenged the application.

### Stanford shuts a scheme for low-income high school students amid budget cuts

Digital Education scheme was designed to provide online education to wider audiences. Over its five years of activity, the programme helped over 2600 students across 22 US States and Washington DC. Since the closure, the University has indefinitely paused its collaboration with the National Education Opportunity Network.



# New study co-led by Oxford shows global aviation emissions could be halved by maximising efficiency

LUCY POLLOCK

A new study co-led by the University of Oxford has found that global aviation emissions could be reduced by 50 to 75% by flying only the most fuel-efficient aircraft models, switching to all-economy layouts, and increasing passenger loads to 95%. The study was published in Nature's *Communications Earth & Environment* and co-authored by Dr Milan Klöwer, a research fellow in the Department of Physics. It showed that a 10.7% reduction in global aviation emissions is achievable immediately, by using more efficient aircrafts on more strategic routes.

Data collected from Airline Data, International Civil Aviation Organization, and International Air Transport Association was used to analyse almost 27.5 million flights, transporting over 3.5 billion passengers a total distance of over 43 billion kilometres – a distance equivalent to 145 return journeys to the sun. These flights emitted a total of 577 million

tonnes of carbon dioxide. Business and first class seats were found to be up to five times more CO<sub>2</sub>-intensive than economy class seats.

20 countries accounted for 74.9% of global emissions from air passenger transport, with the United States, the highest, responsible for 25% of global aviation emissions. Efficiency was lowest in Africa, Australia, and Norway, and highest in Brazil, India, and Southeast Asia. Dr Klöwer told *Cherwell* that the least efficient airlines, according to his research, were United Airlines, Delta, and Air Algerie.

The study found that the most efficient aircraft model was the Boeing 787-900, and that replacing aircraft with models like the Boeing 787-900 for long-haul flights and the Airbus A321neo for medium and short-haul flights could result in fuel savings of 25 to 28%. Due to predicted “robust growth” of the industry over the next 20 years, the study called for serious changes to reduce fuel use without limiting air transport capacity.

Dr Klöwer told *Cherwell* that whilst aviation is only responsible for 2-3% of

annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, its contribution to global warming is 4% higher due to secondary climate effects like condensation trails. Dr Klöwer told *Cherwell*: “This contribution to global warming is dominated by rich people flying excessively, often long-haul in business and first class or even private.”

The study highlighted that “aviation’s climate impact continues to grow, with little progress toward emission reductions aligned with global targets”. Factors affecting this growth include the expansion of airlines, airports, and the role of subsidies, as well as patterns of flight distribution and the influence of frequent fliers on demand generation. As demand growth has outpaced efficiency gains in the past, aviation emissions will continue to rise unless new technologies, including sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) become available on a large scale.

Concern was expressed over Airbus’ recent decision to delay work on hydrogen-electric aircraft, as well as the technical and economic barriers to e-fuel production and the cost and production limits to SAF.

## Green Party becomes joint second largest on City Council after independent councillor joins

ARCHIE JOHNSTON and STANLEY SMITH

The Green Party became the joint second largest party on the Oxford City Council after independent councillor, Edward Mundy, joined the party on Monday 12th January. This brings the number of Green Party seats to nine, equal to that of the Liberal Democrats.

Mundy, who was first elected as a Labour Councillor for the Holywell Ward in October 2021, was one of nine Oxford councillors who left the party in October 2023 after Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Israel had the “right” to cut off water and electricity in Gaza. He has since been part of the Oxford Community Independents Group, formerly the Oxford Socialist Independents. Mundy told *Cherwell*: “The Labour Party has left a lot of people over the last couple of years, and I’m one of them.”

According to *Green Elects*, an independent organisation reporting Green Party news, 19 councillors have left Labour for the Green Party in England and Wales since Zack Polanski was

elected as the party leader last September, not including Mundy.

In a press release, Mundy said: “While the far right is emboldened and clearly influencing government policy, it is vital that we have credible socialist voices at the heart of our communities. The Green Party has an excellent base of political support in Oxford, thanks to years of backing a more sustainable and equal future for the city.”

He told *Cherwell*: “Activists and leading Green Party figures – most notably Zack Polanski – are consistently and robustly standing up for progressive principles.”

Mundy was formerly the Labour Group whip for two years and served as Chair of the General Purposes Licensing Committee for four years. He is currently Vice Chair of the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee.

Chris Jarvis, leader of the Green Party Group on Oxford City Council, said: “I’m delighted to welcome Ed to the Green Party. I’ve had the privilege of working closely with Ed over the last four years and have seen how dedicated he is to the people of Oxford and working to make

our city a fairer and better place to live.”

Jack Hutchinson, President of the Oxford Student Greens Association, told *Cherwell*: “People are beginning to realise that other national political parties can’t or won’t represent them. Over the past decade Labour has stopped prioritising progression in favour of pandering to the ultra-wealthy donors that prop them up. Progressive voters and politicians that are unhappy with this have found that the Green Party will welcome them with open arms.”

As of 9th December, the Green Party had over 180,000 members, more than double the number it had when Polanski was elected. In late December, one voting intention poll by *Politico* put the party at 16%, level with Labour and 2 points behind the Conservatives.

Labour remains the largest party on the Oxford City Council, with 21 seats. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Labour Group and of the City Council, confirmed in a statement to *Cherwell* that the party was aware of Mundy’s defection.

*Image credit: Edward Mundy with permission.*



## Reuters Institute report highlights growing AI impact on global journalism

ANISHA MOHAMMED

A major new industry forecast from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford has charted the forces set to reshape global news media in 2026. The annual ‘Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions’ report finds that fewer than four in ten senior news executives are confident about journalism’s prospects this year, as publishers grapple with declining search referrals and persistent audience trust challenges.

The report is based on a survey of senior editors, executives, and digital leaders from news organisations in more than 50 countries. It examines how developments in AI, platform distribution, and audience behaviour are shaping newsroom strategy.

One of the report’s central findings concerns the growing role of generative AI in how people receive their news. It states that “the rapid shift from search engines to AI-powered answer engines is expected to reduce traffic to publisher websites”, with many respondents predicting a decline in referrals from search over the next few years. The report adds that generative AI tools are increasingly “intervening between audiences and original journalism”.

Senior editors and executives who took part in the survey said these developments were likely to place additional pressure on existing business models. According to the report, many respondents believe that AI will “make

it harder for news organisations to maintain direct relationships with audiences”.

These concerns are reflected in recent industry action. *The New York Times* has filed a lawsuit against OpenAI and Microsoft, alleging unauthorised use of its journalism to train AI models. This case has become a focal point in debates about how generative AI systems source and monetise news content.

The report received financial support from the Google News Initiative (GNI), as disclosed by the Reuters Institute. Google has invested heavily in developing artificial intelligence technologies, including AI-powered search and generative tools. The Google News Initiative also supports other Reuters Institute research, including the annual Digital News Report, which examines news consumption and trust across global markets.

In response to the wider availability of AI-generated content, many survey participants reported that their organisations were prioritising journalism that is more difficult to replicate. According to the report, respondents plan to focus on “investigative journalism, analysis, and distinctive reporting”, while reducing investment in more routine content.

The report concludes that the news industry is experiencing “ongoing adjustment rather than a single moment of disruption”, with the impact of AI and platform change expected to vary across markets and organisations in 2026.

*Image credit: Mercedes Haas for Cherwell.*

## Prime Video releases trailer and premiere date for Oxford-based ‘Young Sherlock’

LILY GAGE

Prime Video recently released the teaser trailer and premiere date for *Young Sherlock*, starring Hero Fiennes Tiffin – best known for his role in the *After* series – as Sherlock Holmes. The series is about the origin story of the detective, unfolding in 1870s Oxford before venturing abroad. It follows 19-year-old Holmes and his early adventures as he attends the University of Oxford. The trailer displays iconic parts of Oxford, such as the Radcliffe Camera and New College’s cloisters and courtyard, which are also featured in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

Filming for the show saw a five-day closure of Merton Street, Oriel Square, King Edward Street, Queens Lane, New College Lane, and Cattle Street in August 2024. There is no definitive evidence in Arthur Conan Doyle’s original Sherlock Holmes works that the detective attended the University of Oxford, but most scholars and writers suggest he attended either Cambridge or Oxford, for example; *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street: A Life of The World’s First Consulting Detective*, by William S. Baring-Gould and *Sherlock Holmes at Oxford*, by Nicholas Utechin.

Oxfordshire County Council’s press office told *Cherwell* that they received “£2,644 plus VAT for the SEO (road closure Notice) & £5,810 plus VAT for the

filming approval licence”.

All eight of *Young Sherlock*’s episodes will premiere exclusively on Prime Video in over 240 countries and territories across the globe on 4th March. The television show is the long-awaited third installment of Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock* series, which he produced and directed for its first two episodes. Guy Ritchie previously directed *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), both starring Robert Downey Jr., Jude Law, and Rachel McAdams. *Young Sherlock* is the prequel to both of these films.

The series focuses on Sherlock’s first murder case, which he subsequently finds himself wrapped up in as it threatens his freedom, and he is sent on a worldwide mission in an attempt to solve it. *Young Sherlock* is expected to reveal an unfiltered, rebellious side to the character, with Prime Video reflecting on his character in the show as a “raw” and “disgraced young man”. Prime Video also describes the series as an “action-laden mystery that follows the iconic detective’s early adventures”.

The show will also star Colin Firth (*Mamma Mia* and *The King’s Speech*), Dónal Finn (*The Wheel of Time*), Zine Tseng (*3 Body Problem*), Joseph Fiennes (*The Handmaid’s Tale*), Natascha McElhone (*Halo*), and Max Irons (*Condor*).





# INVESTIGATIONS

## Oxford University Catholic chaplain removed after student sexual abuse complaint

*Continued from Page 1*

The student reported that in Michaelmas term 2024, Howard “would often end nights in his office with intense, intimate hugs”, and tell the student he loved him. In his report to the Jesuits, the student stated: “I have never been in love with him nor have I ever initiated intimate contact with him.” The student alleged that Howard initiated kisses several times last year, encouraged the student to sleep in his bed, and to remove layers of clothing. He also alleged that Howard felt his chest on several occasions.

“Howard asked for secrecy because “a single call to safeguarding” would have him removed from his post

In his report, the student claimed that, by last Hilary term, he felt “trapped” by Howard, describing the Chaplain’s involvement in his personal life as “oppressive”, but felt that he relied on him for support amid issues with his mental health and bereavement after the death of a close friend.

The student’s complaint alleged that, after one such incident, Howard told him not to “tell anyone” about the incident, because it would “ruin” him. At a later point during this period, the student reported that Howard asked again for secrecy because “a single call to Julie at safeguarding” would have him removed from his post, a reference to Julie Ashby-Ellis,

Safeguarding Coordinator for Jesuits in Britain.

In the report, the student stated that Howard “failed me when I was in a vulnerable position, chiefly after the suicide of my friend. He was my University Chaplain... He was entrusted, by both the Church and the University, with the pastoral care of everyone who passes through the Chaplaincy. He witnessed the implosion of my faith, my life, and my emotional state; rather than offering the kind of disinterested support a Chaplain would, he used me as a crutch for his loneliness”.

The student concluded his report by saying: “I now believe that I was abused by Damian Howard.”

The report was submitted to Father David Smolira SJ, who is currently the Provincial Delegate for Ignatian Formation, responsible for overseeing the spirituality work of Jesuits in Britain. Smolira is also a former Provincial Superior of Jesuits in Britain.

### Response from OUCC and Jesuits in Britain

Howard has been the Senior Chaplain at the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy (OUCC) since 2023. On the OUCC website, Howard described his employment as University Chaplain as a “pastoral role”. Jesuits in Britain confirmed in a statement to *Cherwell* that Father Howard “was asked to step down as Senior Chaplain at [OUCC] in August due to professional misconduct, following a complaint that was investigated and substantiated”.

“An independent review by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) is currently underway, and we are awaiting its recommendations. The matter has also been reported to the Charity

Commission and to the police. We take our safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and will continue to act as required.” Prior to the *Cherwell* investigation, neither OUCC nor Jesuits in Britain had issued a public statement confirming that Howard had been dismissed for professional misconduct.

The CSSA, an independent agency which ensures safeguarding standards are maintained by the Catholic Church, confirmed when asked by *Cherwell* that they were investigating the allegations against Father Howard.

When approached for comment, Howard directed *Cherwell* to the statement by Jesuits in Britain.

Howard was also an Honorary Fellow at Campion Hall, a Permanent Private Hall at the University of Oxford, run by Jesuits in Britain. A spokesperson for Campion Hall told *Cherwell*: “When the Hall was informed by Jesuits in Britain that he had been asked to step down as Senior Chaplain of the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy for professional misconduct, it was decided on these grounds to end his fellowship of the Hall also.” Honorary Fellows do not have teaching or pastoral responsibilities.

“Jesuits in Britain confirmed that Howard “was asked to step down... due to professional misconduct”

### Misrepresentation of complaint by Jesuits in Britain

*Cherwell* understands that Jesuits in Britain substantially misrepresented the nature of the complaint made against Howard. Documents seen by *Cherwell* show that safeguarding staff from Jesuits in Britain sent a report concerning the student’s complaint to the Archdiocese of Birmingham, which oversees the activities of the Catholic Church across a wide territory, including Oxford.

In that report, the writer incorrectly claimed that the student had “withdrawn” his claim that an abuse of power took place in his relationship with Howard, and that he stated that the relationship was in fact consensual, and that he had chosen to postpone his further studies at Oxford.

The report also claimed that the student would deny that abuse had occurred if approached by police or safeguarding officers, and that a Jesuit member of staff had determined that no abuse had occurred following three hours of interviews with the student.

In an email sent last October, Smolira wrote to the student that he and Ashby-Ellis had agreed that there was no evidence of “grooming” in the



student’s relationship with Howard. He implied that the student had recognised that the “possessive” phase of his and Howard’s relationship had lasted a few weeks, following which the student had reported his allegation of abuse.

However, in the official report that the student sent to Smolira in August, he reported possessive behaviour by Howard from as far back as Trinity term 2024. Last October, Father Peter Gallagher, the head of Jesuits in Britain, agreed to an independent review into the Jesuits’ handling of the abuse allegation. By early November, he proposed that the investigation be handled by the CSSA, to which the student agreed.

The student obtained the report sent by the Jesuits to Birmingham archdiocese through a subject access request last November. A subject access request is a person’s right under data protection law to access information pertaining to them held by an organisation.

As no further communication with Jesuits in Britain regarding the student was provided by Birmingham archdiocese, *Cherwell* understands that the Jesuits did not contact Birmingham archdiocese between August and November to correct the account of the allegation that they had provided. The student maintains that Howard’s conduct was not consensual and that he would co-operate fully with any police investigation into the case.

The scope of the CSSA review does not include an investigation into how and why a member of safeguarding staff for Jesuits in Britain incorrectly told the safeguarding team at Birmingham archdiocese that the student had withdrawn their allegation of abuse. A CSSA staff member told the student in December that: “We are not able to look at new concerns raised before the Jesuits have had an opportunity to investigate and respond to them themselves.”

When asked by *Cherwell* about whether they misrepresented the student’s complaint, Jesuits in Britain declined to comment.

### Additional context

The Catholic Church has been haunted by sexual abuse controversies for several decades. Pope Leo XIV stated in June last year that the Church “must not tolerate any form of abuse”, sexual or otherwise.

In his capacity as Provincial Superior of Jesuits in Britain, Howard issued a personal apology to one of the victims of Peter Orr, a Jesuit priest who was faced to allegations of sexual abuse of minors between the 1960s and 2000s.

Jesuits are members of the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic order of priests founded in the 16th century. A chaplain is a religious leader who provides for spiritual needs within a predominantly secular environment, rather than a traditional church. As most Roman Catholic chaplains are priests, the Church generally expects them to be celibate.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), which is the world’s largest community of survivors of clergy and institutional sexual abuse, told *Cherwell* that “religious orders, such as the Jesuits, are known for being highly insular and evading accountability, but we have seen countless instances through the years where Catholic dioceses have knowingly allowed [members previously credibly accused of abuse] of religious orders to minister under their jurisdiction.

“The report incorrectly claimed that the student had “withdrawn” his claim that an abuse of power took place and that he stated that the relationship was in fact consensual

“There is currently no law in the Catholic Church that mandates the permanent removal from ministry of individuals who have abused a child or an adult. The result of the current policy is that there are currently thousands of abusers, known to the church, who have been legally permitted under Vatican law to continue holding positions of public trust and authority.”

The University of Oxford declined to comment on this matter.

Reporting by Archie Johnston, Stanley Smith, Arina Makarina, Gaspard Rouffin, and Mercedes Haas.

If you have been affected by the issues raised in this article, there are resources available to help.

Safe Spaces provides free and confidential support for survivors of church-related abuse in England and Wales. Help line: 0300 303 1056, or make a referral at <https://safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk>.

Solace Thames Valley provides a 24/7 sexual assault referral service. For a referral or to book an appointment, call 0330 223 0099 or email [solace.sarc@nhs.net](mailto:solace.sarc@nhs.net).

MACSAS provides advice and resources and a helpline 08088010340.

The University of Oxford provides a Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, which can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/supportservice>.

Image credits: Gaspard Rouffin for Cherwell.





# OPINION

## Oxford’s digital footprint

EMMA HEAGNEY

How do colleges maintain a social media presence when competing with 40 others? From access Instagrams to society Facebook groups to JCR-run TikTok pages, you’d be hard-pressed to find a corner of the Internet not touched by an Oxford University college. But, in a sea of similar profiles, it isn’t easy for colleges to stand out.

For a year, I managed my college’s access page on Instagram. This would be fun, I thought. But when I tried to make an infographic explaining student life, I quickly found that not all college profiles are made equal, and engagement is not a given.

Being an unofficial profile, the outreach staff had no involvement in the Instagram page, which meant I was alone in my research. Part of the reason I got the role was because I understood the need for an access page: I was the first from my school to go to Oxbridge and from a very deprived area. I didn’t expect to suddenly have to know all of the information I was barred from accessing myself – like formal etiquette, for instance. I went from being the target of access initiatives to being expected to share this information with the children I was once one of, as if a few terms here taught me a

lifetime of experience.

But would it be unethical for someone without this background to take on this online persona? Would it be seen as patronising? Out of touch? In my opinion, yes. It would be unethical, and for good reason. So, the issue of my lack of knowledge persisted.

A potential solution would be to ensure that students in charge of representing the college online are properly trained and supported by staff. The difference between college-run and student-run social media (as the two rarely mix) is often palpable, and the latter could learn a lot from the former.

The lack of training is not the only issue that plagues student-run pages. First, the quick turnover of student pages often creates inconsistency in aesthetics and long gaps between posts, affecting how well posts perform. This may be no problem for college Entz and society pages, but access posts, which are designed to reach a wider audience, are significantly affected.

Secondly, the resources available to students are often much less than pages with college support or management. I could not tell you the amount of times I stalked the Pembroke College access page, admiring the beautiful clips compiled into semi-viral reels. I had a degree to balance, and there was no way I could dedicate this much time to filming, editing, promoting, and monitoring. Likewise, camera equipment and even Canva Pro were far out of budget for our JCR. These financial disparities also exist between colleges with vastly differing endowments.

Consequently, engagement suffers. Do prospective applicants know about these pages? Do they even care? During one open

day, I did everything I could to advertise the access Instagram, from etching the handle on chalkboards to talking directly to students. The response? No one had heard of it, much less followed it. I understand this completely – coming from a school where academic success was not exactly great for social status, following a bunch of Oxford pages was probably a bit (dare I say) cringe. In the end, the follower base remained the same: entirely students of my college.

Is meme-ification the way to go? It seems to gain the most attention right now, to the extent that the current government is posting Keir Starmer sigma edits. Brasenose JCR’s TikTok page is one of the rare examples of a student-run page actually achieving success, pairing trending audios with open day footage and student life, and averaging thousands of views.

Their approach certainly works, with accessible, relatable memes that do not bombard the unfamiliar viewer with Oxford lingo. However, the perhaps lightning-in-a-bottle success of Brasenose JCR may not translate to other colleges, especially for those whose social media reps do not want to affect their digital footprint for the future.

Oxford’s reputation precedes itself, and for this reason the University is perhaps less reliant on social media than other higher education institutions. Yet, Oxford is faced with a unique problem: so many colleges yields so many social media profiles.

While the University’s central social media thrives on platforms like LinkedIn, individual college pages, especially those which are student-run, may not be able to compete with the funding and time poured into their official counterparts.



Image credit: Ondrejkk, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons.

## New year, same me

FREYA ROBSON

We’ve all been there: gathered around on New Year’s Eve, each exchanging resolutions, describing the person that we wish to miraculously transform into the next morning. But by the time mid-January rolls around, that inspired figure full of hope from just weeks earlier has seemingly vanished. The idea of having resolutions, let alone keeping them, becomes almost laughable. Whether it be exercise, relaxation, or the oh-so-naïve ‘Dry January’, the idea of resolution-making is one that has become a redundant activity (even if we forget this by next New Year’s). However, whilst most have no chance of maintaining such deranged promises, the academic rigour of Oxford makes students even more likely to give up on resolutions before feeling their benefits.

Between last-minute tutorial essay writing and mad rushes between lectures on opposite sides of the city, Oxford really does not leave its students much time for healthy habit-making. Granted, the idea of ‘not having time’ is simply a matter of priorities, but with so much academic pressure it would feel ridiculous to focus our limited energy on small acts of self-improvement rather than our work. I struggle to believe that any tutor would accept an incomplete essay because you

simply *had* to do that online guided meditation. The intellectually challenging environment which we are constantly surrounded by at Oxford is just incompatible with resolutions. How can we aspire to keep healthy habits when 24/7 libraries populate the city and pulling an all-nighter to finish a piece of work is as much an Oxford tradition as matriculation?

This is not to say that welfare is lacking at Oxford, because support for student wellbeing is abundant, reaching a crescendo when the horror of ‘Week 5 blues’ rolls around. Yet resolutions are supposed to be a preventative method of bettering ourselves, rather than a reactive response to what is going wrong. Instead of dedicating time to our own pursuits of self-wimprovement, we choose to drown in a crushing workload, using welfare resources as the life ring keeping us afloat.

Even the setup of Oxford life gives us no chance of being well-equipped for resolution keeping. It becomes incredibly easy to fall into laziness when a scout is cleaning your room each week and every meal is catered for. The entire Oxford lifestyle is built so that we as students don’t have to concern ourselves with household tasks in order to maximise working potential, making our lives easier but stunting our ability to take care of ourselves. Every college comes with its own micro-community, a safe haven that seems isolated from the real world, equipped with all the resources you could ever need – making it easy to never leave. But what comes with that

sense of familiarity is a lack of drive, meaning that pursuing any kind of self-improvement becomes hopeless.

However, a lack of drive is not necessarily what Oxford students are associated with; some may object to this pessimistic perspective on the promising prospects that a New Year brings. Surely as driven students we can defy the odds and dedicate ourselves to healthy habit-making as well? But as we all well know, dedication and intelligence don’t necessarily go hand-in-hand with common sense. Quantum mechanics students using WikiHow to cook pasta; scholars of 19th-century Gothic literature forgetting to separate their laundry and wondering why all of their white t-shirts are mysteriously pale pink. These quirks of Oxford students are plentiful, demonstrating clearly that basic life skills do not correlate with intellect – so what chance do we have to keep any resolutions?

So whilst Oxford students may have met their match when faced with the prospect of resolution-keeping, there is still hope. Resolutions are not restricted to the 31st December, so we can always wake up and try again. Yes, we may fail countless times in this process, and no, we won’t magically wake up one morning as the perfected version of ourselves which we envision. But the course of self-improvement never did run smooth, as Shakespeare (should have) said, so be kind to yourself this January – your resolutions might be broken, but may your spirit never be!

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have an opinion on something we’ve published? Email [editors@cherwell.org](mailto:editors@cherwell.org)

### Losing at the Louvre

It is always eye-opening to read (‘Falling out of Louvre’) an outside perspective on something that you have grown up so closely to, and perhaps never paused to consider critically. From a historical standpoint, such a museum can only serve a limited purpose – its value lies more in the breadth of works on display than in the depth of their contextualisation. It is entirely possible to enjoy a museum simply by seeing the art and wandering its corridors, absorbing new cultures, without having to read about historiographical debates. While the Louvre is certainly a “must-see” on any first trip to Paris, I encourage anyone with a bit more time to venture into smaller museums, which better encapsulate French culture. In hindsight, the Louvre falls short of modern (particularly Anglo-Saxon) expectations of museum ‘wokeness’, yet there is still much to appreciate beyond the permanent collections, for instance its increasingly unconventional temporary exhibitions. Oh and, next time, avoid Brexit – EU citizens under 26 get in for free.

**Gaspard Rouffin**, *History and German, St Anne’s College*

### We should care about the JCR

The article about JCR politics (‘Who cares about college politics?’) serves as a compelling reminder of the vital role JCRs play within the college. It’s no secret that meetings are sparse and election turnout is abysmal. The failure of members to show up further delegitimizes committee officers and members themselves. The author’s point that political disillusionment is a phenomenon which extends beyond the college walls is provocative – many of us are frustrated with the growing apathy shown towards our ‘actual’ political systems and lack of meaningful change, so why are so many complicit when the same episode plays out in our own colleges?

**Logan Furino**, *PPE, St Hugh’s College*

### The JCR isn’t that deep

Your recent article on JCR participation (‘Who cares about college politics?’) was a fascinating look at the frustration and hopelessness from people on the inside of college politics. As someone on the outside, I don’t disagree with many of the points raised. JCR positions hold considerable power, and JCRs are fundamental in holding colleges and the University to account. However, I don’t think the apathy towards JCR politics is simply a microcosm of broader politics, or the result of people thinking their business is dull. JCR roles are important – so they’re time-consuming, stressful, and threaten to take over your whole life. When people are already doing taxing degrees, civic responsibility alone is unlikely to be enough to entice them to give up their evenings.

**Lilly Law**, *Law, Brasenose College*

### Meal ticket to freedom

I very much enjoyed Eve Richardson’s article about the importance of JCR politics (‘Who cares about college politics?’). I think Richardson is spot on, and I only wish to add a little anecdote (read: rant) of my own to back up her point. Over the summer, Teddy Hall kitchens tried to increase the cost of the standard ‘meal deal’ at college dinner to £7.40. Don’t get me wrong, I love our ‘ming’ dinners, but paying this much per meal simply does not make financial sense for most students, who have no choice but to put £400 of food credit on their battels at the start of term. Luckily, our current President and former opinion editor (so sorry we didn’t rehire you), Guus Wijnne, talked them down to a still eye-watering £6.90. All of this to say – it’s not lost on me that I’ve just spent 10 minutes essentially writing a letter to myself about meal deals – that it’s vitally important that normal people, who are aware of the financial realities normal students face, occupy positions of authority in our college bodies. Richardson is very right to point this out, highlighting how JCRs make important representations to colleges on crucial issues such as the cost of accommodation. Rant over, now I’m off to dinner.

**Stanley Smith**, *Editor-in-Chief*



# Lawyers are weird. Mods are (partly) to blame

*Early law exams warp first year, isolate students, and extinguish learning*

LILLY LAW

Have you been injured in a conversation with a law student that wasn't your fault? Have you been unnerved by their coffee habits, worried about their hobbies, and uncertain as to whether they actually want to do their subject? Have you watched the light leave someone's eyes as they hear the phrase 'commercial awareness'? You may be entitled to compensation from Law Moderations. These exams, taking place in Hilary of first year, contribute to the subject's pupils being unable to relax, cut off from other subjects, and distant from friends. The University should move Mods to Trinity, for everyone's sake.

Disclaimer: every subject at Oxford is incredibly stressful. I'm not saying here that law is more difficult, more prestigious, or more impressive than any other. It's not. I'm saying that making students take exams after 16 weeks of learning does some strange things. Specifically, the isolating nature of Mods creates lawyers who cannot escape their subject, but can't enjoy it either. I'm also aware that Classicists do Mods in their second year. I know nothing about the experience of sitting them, nor about their peculiarities. That's for someone else to write.

If you don't take a gap year, there's just over a month between A-Level results day and starting at Oxford. You'd better have taken advantage of those brief days. The moment you sit down in the Week 0 lecture, the only time the Gulbenkian will be standing-room only, you're plunged into another ice bath: exam season. There are 16 weeks of term between matriculation and the first Moderation. Good luck thinking of anything but that ticking clock.

*The first year taking law is a lonely one. During 'Trinifree', your friends have their noses to the grindstone*

Immediately, your outlook is skewed. Instead of considering university an opportunity to explore different interests over time, there's a brick wall on the horizon. Long-term plans never enter the picture when the short-term is so acutely urgent. Get the content down as quickly as possible, churn it into flashcards, write it out as essay plans, repeat. With so much content and so little time, the issues have no space to breathe.

Oxford prides itself on the philosophical elements in its law

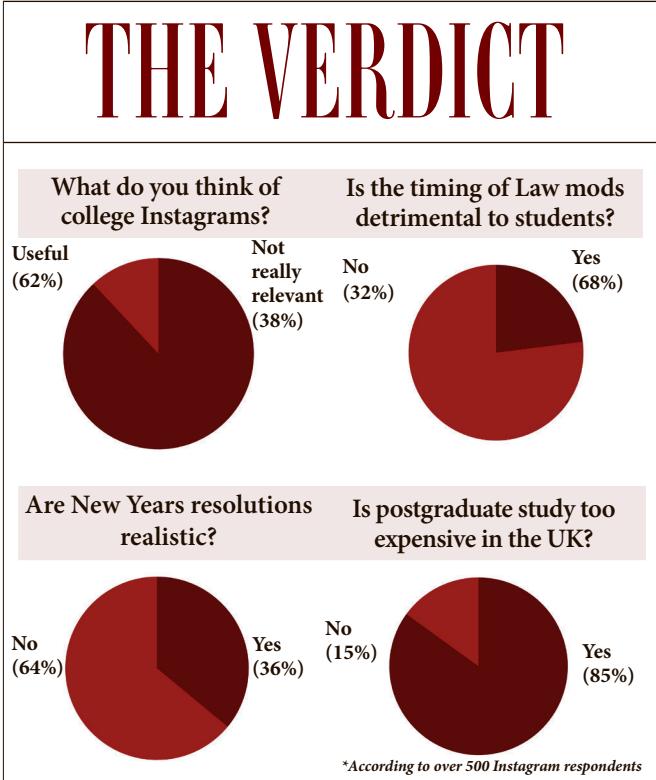
course. We call it Jurisprudence, after all, and make it a BA rather than an LLB. The beauty of studying law is in the broader picture: stepping back and seeing a tapestry of logic, philosophy, and humanity. You can't step back when you're scared you'll fall. If you're not given a chance to fall in love with the subject, if the importance of grades is reiterated at every turn, why would you see it as anything other than a means to an end? Great legal minds could be lost or stifled through bad habits they adopted from unnecessary stress.

Extracurriculars provide that long-term thinking, with a progression through the ranks of societies and a real feeling of achievement in a space untouched by jurisprudence. The workload in Michaelmas is enough to obliterate any hope of them. Tutors cover exam content until week seven of Hilary, so anything in that term would be madness. And at that very point in the term when applications for Trinity open, you aren't going to be thinking about joining a committee or a newspaper – you're going to be trying to learn the Offences Against the Person Act. First year dashes by, with nothing but law to show for it.

*Specifically, the isolating nature of Mods creates lawyers who cannot escape their subject, but can't enjoy it either. It's a pity, because extracurriculars can provide such vital interdisciplinary thinking*

It's a pity, because extracurriculars can provide such vital interdisciplinary thinking. I do student journalism, and am interested in other subjects like History, so watching how my peers solve problems, approach writing, and approach thinking have all made me a better lawyer. My essays have changed since my term as a News section editor. My writing is less meandering, more defined.

The first year taking law is a lonely one. No one goes to lectures and no other subjects are doing exams at the same time. During 'Trinifree', your friends have their noses to the grindstone. What's left but law? There's pressure to apply for first year days and vacation schemes from the moment Mods ends (if they wait that long). If you're already used to a structure where you achieve first





# FEATURES

## Between halls and helplines: Oxford's rising eating disorder culture



*In a university where excellence is expected and discipline is praised, disordered eating can hide in plain sight. As concerns grow, how effectively is Oxford confronting the culture and systems that allow it to persist?*

LEO JONES

Do you ever look around and think everyone is perfect? Attractive, fashionable, sporty, academic, musical – the list of Oxford students' well-rounded talents can seem endless. At a university consistently ranked first in the world, excellence isn't just encouraged: it's expected. But beneath the polished CVs, regimented routines, and curated images of success lies a quieter pressure: to control, refine, and shrink in pursuit of an ever-moving ideal.

In an environment where discipline is praised and comparison is unavoidable, conversations around food, bodies, and health can easily slip into something darker. From casual calorie talk to hyper-fixation on exercise and productivity, eating disorder culture often hides in plain sight – normalised, and even celebrated. Behaviours that might raise alarm elsewhere are reframed as dedication, self-control, or simply 'coping' with the demands of Oxford life.

In recent years, concerns about eating disorders among students have grown, raising questions about how well Oxford is equipped to respond. While the University promotes a range of welfare services, from college-based support to NHS provision across the city, students' experiences of accessing help are often fragmented, delayed, or unfulfilling.

Long waiting lists, unclear pathways, and an emphasis on self-advocacy can leave those most at risk slipping through the cracks. And when

high achievement masks high risk, the question remains: who is really being looked after?

### Eating disorders in Oxford

According to a 2016 survey organised by the Student Union, at least 1,200 people at the University of Oxford were struggling with an eating disorder – figures which only include those who felt able to speak out. For a condition widely acknowledged to be under-reported, particularly among high-functioning individuals, this number alone suggests a far broader issue embedded within the student body.

Since then, the pandemic, politics, and global instability have only intensified existing pressures. Lockdowns disrupted routines and access to support, online learning blurred the boundaries between work and rest, and widespread uncertainty heightened anxiety around control and stability.

The correlation between eating disorders and stress is already well-established, and at an institution like Oxford – layered with academic intensity, social comparison, and recent global upheaval – those risk factors are compounded.

Oxford Centre for Eating Disorders sees this pattern in its patients. The private clinic told *Cherwell* that "many patients we see are high achievers and perfectionistic", adding that "the pressures of their studies can be very challenging". This combination – ambition paired with vulnerability – is particularly acute in an environment that rewards endurance and downplays visible struggle.

“  
At least 1,200 people at the University of Oxford were struggling with an eating disorder

It is clear that this issue is particularly prevalent at the University of Oxford. The Centre estimated to *Cherwell* that “30-40% of our patients are students – the majority from Oxford University rather than Brookes”. With such a significant overlap between the student population and professional services in the city, the line between “student welfare” and “local healthcare provision” becomes increasingly blurred. It also raises pressing questions about how responsibility is shared – or deferred – between institutions, especially when treatment costs themselves become an immediate and exclusionary barrier for many students.

### Must the university do more?

It is increasingly clear that more coordination between the University and external healthcare providers would play a crucial role in improving support. While the Centre confirmed that a recent Q&A session was held for college nurses in an effort to improve frontline support, they told *Cherwell* that “we did used to have links to the University's counselling service, but less so in

recent years”.

Oxford University Counselling Service (UCS) positions itself as a first point of contact for students facing a wide range of personal difficulties. However, its website also warns of a clear limit to the support it can offer: “If you need longer or more specialised therapeutic treatments to help you address psychological difficulties then you will need to be referred to the appropriate NHS medical, psychological or psychiatric services.”

For those with eating disorders, NHS referral often appears less as a solution but rather the start of another exhausting process. Students describe long waiting lists, impersonal administrative systems, and a sense that continuity of care is lacking – particularly for those who have already navigated NHS mental health services at home.

One second-year student recalled waiting three years for regular sessions under NHS services in the South East. During this time, they described “constant questioning about the nature of my issues for ‘admin purposes’ – essentially retelling my life story to an unenthusiastic counsellor who merely provided the same responses. It felt like an endless cycle – one that I did not want to start again at uni [sic.]”

Past local data does little to reassure students with similar concerns. A May 2021 briefing from NHS Oxford Health reported expected waiting times of 18 months for NICE-concordant intervention (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) for individuals with “severe and high-risk” eating disorders. Those assessed





as having “moderate severity” were expected to wait up to 24 months. For a condition where early intervention is widely recognised as critical, such delays raise serious questions about whether existing pathways are fit for a transient, high-pressure student population.

The same applies on a college level, where welfare provision is often presented as a cornerstone of student support. Pembroke College told *Cherwell* that it offers a wide “range of welfare and wellbeing services” tailored to individual circumstances, including those struggling with eating disorders. Students are able to access one-to-one support from members of the welfare team, described by Pembroke as consisting of “our Welfare Lead, our Student Support and Wellbeing Tutor, the Chaplain, the Junior Deans, our Academic Office team including a Disability Coordinator, JCR and MCR Welfare Representatives, and student peer supporters”.

Yet while this network appears extensive on paper, its function in cases of eating disorders is largely intermediary. Pembroke noted that support typically involves listening, monitoring, and signposting – assisting students in navigating appointments with college-linked GPs, University-wide services such as the Counselling Service, and NHS provision. Colleges may liaise with external providers where appropriate, but they do not offer treatment themselves.

This distinction is echoed across the collegiate University. Lincoln College told *Cherwell*: “Students have full access to our welfare provision but in the case of an eating disorder, we would normally expect to refer to an appropriate medical professional(s). Their primary treatment would be by a medical professional.”

While medically appropriate, this approach places significant emphasis on referral as an endpoint rather than part of a supported transition. College nurses are not qualified to provide specialist eating disorder treatment, and it would be inappropriate for them to assume clinical responsibility beyond their remit. However, in practice, responsibility for care is often transported rapidly from colleges to external services, most commonly the NHS.

However, in practice, responsibility for care is often transferred rapidly from colleges to external services, most commonly the NHS, which faces well-documented delays in accessing specialist eating disorder treatment as a result of chronic underfunding and systemic strain. During these prolonged waiting periods, students remain embedded in the intense academic and social environment of Oxford, yet may receive little

structured support beyond monitoring, check-ins, and signposting. The result is not a failure of individual colleges, but a wider systemic gap in which students find themselves caught between services – acknowledged as unwell, but unable to access timely, meaningful treatment.

As eating disorder culture becomes evermore prevalent the question is not whether pathways exist, but whether a system built on referral rather than continuity can adequately meet the needs of students for whom delay is itself a big risk factor.

## A particularly pernicious environment

Oxford is an environment where everything is dialed up to ten; a “work hard play hard” culture that can exacerbate disordered eating. In a university where food is woven tightly into social life – from catered accommodation and formal halls to kebabs after a night out – eating is rarely a private act. Meals are communal and often highly visible. For students struggling with eating disorders, this can make it feel as though the battle never ends, played out repeatedly in public spaces where absence, refusal, or deviation is immediately noticed.

For those affected, the pressure to eat dessert at a formal, drink an extra pint, or finish the night with a cheesy chips can be deafening. While re-feeding may be clinically beneficial in the short term, it is often followed by intense grief, guilt, or anxiety.

These feelings can be all-consuming, bleeding into academic work, friendships, and rest, and leaving little mental space for recovery. Over time, many students describe retreating from social settings altogether, gravitating instead towards isolation – one of the few environments where food can be avoided, controlled, or simply not discussed. In a university that prizes endurance and self-mastery, the capacity to function while unwell can be mistaken for success. High achievement becomes a mask, concealing behaviours that might otherwise prompt concern, and allowing eating disorders to persist unnoticed or unchallenged.

This withdrawal can be easily misread within Oxford’s culture of independence and self-discipline. Skipped meals are normalised by busy timetables; excessive exercise is reframed as productivity; weight loss is quietly praised as evidence of ‘control’. In such an environment, behaviours associated with eating disorders are not only obscured but, at times, inadvertently rewarded. The line between health, discipline, and harm becomes blurred, particularly when

ambition and aspiration echo the same language as illness.

Yet the consequences of this culture are cumulative. Isolation deepens distress; delayed intervention worsens outcomes; and a fragmented support system struggles to respond to students who appear, on the surface, to be coping. When social life is structured around food and institutional support is structured around referral, students with eating disorders are left navigating both constant exposure and limited protection.

“*Responsibility for care is often transferred rapidly from colleges to external services, most commonly the NHS*”

One first-year student at The Queen’s College said: “The constant conflict between feeling able to enjoy what are meant to be ‘the best years of my life’ at a university that I have worked so hard to get into, versus the frustratingly never-ending temptation of the eating disorder voice is so exhausting.” Another told *Cherwell*: “It’s like I know the demands of that voice are bad, but the perfectionist culture I am surrounded by means I cannot have a problem – I don’t have time to have a problem.” They pointed to the University’s hustle culture as a reason to “just keep going – and struggling”.

## What can be done?

As Oxford continues to celebrate its reputation for excellence, the question remains whether it is willing to examine the cultural and structural conditions that make recovery so difficult. Addressing rising eating disorder culture requires more than expanding services; it demands a reckoning with how ambition, social life, and success are defined, and who is left behind when those definitions go unchallenged.

Undeniably, supporting a 26,000-strong student body is a formidable task. Yet, as discussions around harmful body ideals resurface – from media-reported returns of ‘heroin-chic’ to pervasive social pressures – Oxford faces a pivotal moment of reflection. This is not only about expanding services or improving referral systems, but about examining the everyday culture that shapes students’ relationship with food, bodies,

and achievement.

Addressing this issue requires more than policy; it demands attention to the small, often overlooked pressures embedded in academic, social, and collegiate life – pressures that, cumulatively, determine whether support systems are effective or whether students are left navigating high-risk spaces alone.

Support is out there, and recovery is possible – however incompatible it may seem with the already extraordinarily intense academic environment of Oxford. In a university where intensity is normalised and vulnerability can feel like a liability, change does not always begin with formal interventions alone.

It can start quietly, in everyday moments: in the way we speak with friends about food and our bodies, in the willingness to check in rather than compare, and in the act of making space for a whole person – alongside their achievements. In an environment shaped by pressure, those small acts of care can be powerful, reminding students that survival is not the same as success, and that asking for help is not a failure, but a form of resilience.

Jane Harris, Co-Director of Student Welfare and Support Services and Head of Counselling at the University of Oxford, told *Cherwell*: “There are a wide range of national and local sources of information and support, including student specific resources, alongside various forms of College and University support. All students are encouraged to speak to their college GP or nurse in the first instance, in addition to registering with Student Welfare and Support Services. The Counselling service offers a range of resources as well as help in ensuring students can access the support and services appropriate to their individual situation. More practical support, if appropriate, may be available from the Disability Advisory Service, where the management of a long-term Eating Disorder is the priority for the purposes of supporting the students’ studies.”

*If you or someone you know is affected by eating disorders or disordered eating, support is available. Alongside college welfare teams and the University Counselling Service, you can also reach out to specialist charities such as Beat Eating Disorders, whose helpline is available Monday–Friday from 3pm–8pm.*

*Beat Eating Disorders: 0808 801 0677 (England) help@beateatingdisorders.org.uk*

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# ‘Making Politics Political Again’: Oxford's student left turns away from the Labour party

*The University’s increasingly disillusioned leftist student population are disifiliating themselves from traditional political parties. They illustrate a wider trend in student politics occurring across the UK*



GEORGE HEELEY

In the miserable rain of last November, I found myself queuing at the Cowley Workers Social Club for a Your Party meeting at which Jeremy Corbyn was set to speak. With an attendance of no more than that of an average college dinner, it was a strikingly understated affair for an event hosted by a former leader of the Labour Party who would be travelling immediately after to his party’s first ever conference. Corbyn’s final words were addressed to students, calling on them to fight for their future amidst increasingly bleak prospects. However, the students in question were largely absent, making up just a small fraction of his audience. Even Oxford Left Society, the University’s only society that officially supports Your Party, was absent. They were instead hosted by the Liberal Democrats for one of their “Liquor and Liberalism” debates.

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*Left wing student societies are increasingly detaching themselves from organised parties across the country, preferring instead to represent a broader leftist movement*

The Oxford Left Society was originally called Your Party Society Oxford when it began but recently rebranded to its current name. It’s easy to see this as a consequence of Your Party’s chaotic internal struggles that have dissipated so much of their initial momentum. However, there is a broader picture here to consider. Left wing student societies are increasingly detaching themselves from organised parties across the country, preferring instead to represent a broader leftist movement without the restraints of toeing a party line.

## The trend

Oxford is not alone in this phenomenon. More dramatic examples of this can be found across other UK universities. Warwick University’s Labour Society decided in last August to back Grace Lewis, a councillor who had defected from Labour primarily due to the party’s response to industrial action in Coventry and cuts to welfare spending. In turn, the national party sent the society a cease and

desist letter, officially disaffiliating themselves from one of the largest Labour clubs in the country (one significantly bigger than any of Oxford’s political societies). This was followed by a number of other societies such as those in Manchester and Newcastle choosing to disaffiliate from the national party. Both opted not to defect to another party, but instead to represent a broader socialist and/or leftist movement.

While Oxford University’s own Oxford Labour Club remains steadfast in their affiliation to the national party, the emergence of a wider spectrum of left-wing societies (as well as the broader national context of disaffiliation) provides challenges to those holding on.

It would be naïve and inaccurate to assume that students of any political society support entirely the policy platform of their corresponding party. In particular, Labour societies across UK universities have members with a range of views (13 consecutive years in opposition have somewhat forced their hand). A visit to any of Oxford Labour Club’s weekly “Beer and Bickering” meets is more than enough evidence that this is still very much the case. A significant proportion of the membership find themselves ideologically to the left of the current Labour government. Though this in itself is nothing new, the emergence of left alternatives in Oxford, as well as direct disaffiliation happening nationally, indicate that there is more urgency than ever before to break from an association with one party.

To make sense of how a hypothetical second year anarcho-communist could be a member of a Labour university society, *Cherwell* spoke to two ex-members of youth Labour organisations, who now consider themselves further left of the national party. Ed Swann, the current chair of Warwick Left Society, who oversaw its transition away from Warwick Labour told *Cherwell* that the previous belief was that: “Labour is the only option for ever having a government that is willing to even just succeed, [that may] give in to left-wing activism in any form.” Both Swann and Alex Evans, the current chair of Oxford Left Society claimed that it was realising that this was no longer the case that made their split from the party inevitable. And they have been followed by an exceptionally large proportion of left-wing students.

## Union or division?

Whether the consequence of this dissociation is increased fragmentation or the possibility for newfound unity is up for debate. The accusations that these distinctions between societies are arbitrary and electorally untenable (resembling Monty Python’s People’s Front of Judea versus the Judean People’s Front) is a common one. Former labour leader Neil Kinnock certainly shares these views, having recently

rebuked Warwick Left Society after he was contacted to speak there. Swann observed that a form of the narcissism of small differences – in which the fraction of disagreement you may have with someone dwarfs the frustration caused by those who share none of your beliefs – was definitely present at the Your Party conference. Zarah Sultana’s boycott of the event for their exclusion of members from the Socialist Workers Party exemplified this. Nonetheless, Swann emphasised that the media portrayed a more hostile environment at the event than what he had seen on the ground.

Despite this, both chairs of Warwick Left and Oxford Left insisted that fragmentation has not been the result, and instead the dissociation from particular parties has offered a potential to unify student left-wing voices. Evans was clear, for instance, that Oxford Left represents a bridge between supporters of the Green Party and Your Party and it is likely that Oxford Left will work electorally in a similar fashion to the rumoured agreements between Your Party and the Greens. Regardless of this, the process of campaigning will inevitably be a more complex one for Oxford Left, as support for any party or candidate cannot be assumed or mandated among its members.

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*Whether the consequence of this dissociation is increased fragmentation or unity is up for debate*

Any account of Oxford student politics must inevitably take into account the elusive, so-called ‘Oxford bubble’ – the stereotype of a future MP’s journey from the panelled walls of a historic public school to those of Oxford, and finally to those of Westminster. Yet it is a progression that has been true of three of the last five Prime Ministers. It does also bring into focus the inevitable careerism of much of Oxford’s political societies. Careerism is no stranger to student politics as a whole. Speaking about the most recent Labour conference, Swann said to *Cherwell*: “People are out for themselves in many ways, [and] I think that does, unfortunately, trickle down and almost start with student politics. I think you see that to a vast extent within the Labour Party unfortunately...you’re surrounded by people who went to Oxbridge [and] Russell Group universities.

“Some of them come from political backgrounds of lower socio-economic backgrounds, different races, [or] different genders. But even so, they’re dressing up in suits, and they’re pursuing a career. . . over what they actually believe in.”

While this sentiment is familiar to all student politics, Oxford is a particularly conspicuous example. Outside of parliaments and congresses there may be no other place as familiar with the ‘hack’ as Oxford’s spires. Student politics in other UK universities tend to be more tribal than they are in Oxford. There is a significant proportion of enterprising students in Oxford that frequent many different club debates rather than allying themselves to one particular party – something that is more typical of environments such as Warwick. While this could indicate a genuine interest in hearing a range of views and perspectives, there may be another, more cynical interpretation: attendees are opportunistic, with the sole aim of achieving a committee or executive position within one of Oxford’s political societies, no matter which.

## Oxford Left and the winds of change

Oxford Left, however, finds itself strikingly outside of this ecosystem. It represents an emerging enthusiasm for politics, not within the hallowed halls of Westminster, but on the streets and picket lines outside. Evans assured me that, while he could not provide specific numbers, the majority of Oxford Left’s members have not been involved in student politics before, and most have never been affiliated with Labour. Palestinian solidarity amongst student bodies – for which Oxford has received significant national attention – was perhaps an impetus for this alternative route into politics. Swann also noted this to also be the case in Warwick. He suggests that the inadequate response of the major parties to Israel’s assault on Gaza “pushed [young people] more towards activism, community organising,

any form of politics outside of Westminster”. This aligns with Evans’ belief that, among the left, there has been a resurgence in older, socialist ideals that exist outside of almost all party platforms and are far more cynical about the status quo of a capitalist system and foreign policy.

There is evidence also that attitudes among the more established Oxford political societies are changing. When reporting on the student exodus from Labour taking place last September, the *New Statesman* placed the blame squarely at Labour’s inability to read the room among young people and their abhorrence for Israel’s actions (something that has been accompanied by a more than 60% decrease in youth membership under Starmer).

This trend among some left-wing students is of particular interest when contrasted to their right counterparts. Nationally, right-wing student societies are not abandoning party platforms but have instead become largely dominated by the rise of Reform UK, which has called for, among other things, a draconian crackdown on immigration. Members of Conservative societies, including those in Oxford, are primarily faced with a question of how closely to align with Reform’s momentum, accelerated further this week by the defection of Robert Jenrick.

The left is experiencing a similar dynamic. New party platforms have emerged (such as those of Your Party and the Greens under Zack Polanski) which attempt to appeal to a new concentration of leftist principles. In such an environment, the rise of generalised left-wing societies seems inevitable and they will perhaps have more influence in the future of British politics than ever before. It also makes the electoral challenges of the left far more acute in comparison.

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*Attitudes among the more established Oxford political societies are changing*

When I saw Corbyn in Cowley, he seemed to me fundamentally more of an activist than a politician. In fact, this is a critique that can be levied at Your Party as a whole. Indeed, much of their failings could be attributed to its nature as a political party void of politics. While Swann is sympathetic to such a view, Evans has an alternative interpretation: that a preoccupation with activism is instead simply evidence of a new party, and a new movement. It is laying down support that later can be electorally mobilised. Activism, by his assessment, is simply an electoral strategy in its infancy. In Evans’ view, it is precisely the current status quo of UK parties and student societies which has been a prolonged “attempt to de-politicize politics”, with very little that sets a current careerist politician apart from civil servants due to their bureaucratic focus and narrow conception of what the government should be and can do. His rallying plea was to “make politics political again”, attempting to redefine politics as societal instead of merely personal ambition.

## A long history

This is not unfamiliar territory for student Labour. While the party does not publish specific numbers on student membership, they have faced similar challenges under Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. There were even similar calls for “collective liberation” against both the perceived imperialism of the Iraq invasion as well as the economic policies that resulted in the 2008 market crash, for instance the Occupy Wall Street movement. Labour may find some solace in the thought that this is an inevitable product of being in power. But the political landscape of the UK is far less kind to governments than it was in the 2000s. According to polls, Britain is functionally barreling towards a multi-party system, and any suggestion of lost ground for Labour could well be fatal. If Oxford student politics really does represent the future of Britain, Labour has much to worry about.

Oxford Labour Club were approached, but did not respond for comment.

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# Cherwell

## HT26

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# John Evelyn

**B**locked, blocked, blocked – a word overheard so often these days you'd have thought Minecraft Steve has already had his ball. It turns to me to explain to you all what's inside the Union's inventory this week.

The first block was mined when HackGPT and MBaWful were prevented from assuming roles on President Prada's committee. This then triggered some rather naughty words to be said on the part of HackGPT's various users, against everyone from Prince Hamlet to High School Newsical.

Needless to say, it isn't worth the hassle, as Magdalena has proven that no matter how much you spread this, you'll never be HackGPT's only secretary nor will you be invited to her worse half's house parties until after they've begun.

This isn't to say that HackGPT's other candidate for secretary, John Minor, is faring any better. After trying a bit too hard to please the foreign press, John Minor had an apt chance to prove that he had any convictions at all. Intense interrogation ensued from That Frosh With A Camera, thanks to which, CC found out that at least one member of TSC reads books – or claims to. And no, we still don't know what he actually thinks.

Alas, there were more blocks this week. President Prada, in a state of apotheosis,



or so I'm told, tried to block Port and Policy, not realising that the justification she gave was about as strong as a wooden pickaxe. Fearing for so-called 'liability', she refused to open the doors for Prince Hamlet, to tear up the dining room with lashings of port.

Hamlet then politically spun the occasion to the negligible band of 50 he was intending to arrive with. Was this truly a legal blunder, or an order on the part of HackGPT and her worse half? The answer is unclear, but President Prada did eventually allow the boozing Tories to congregate. At least, allowed for now. For now, meaning the time being.

## Editorial



### Arina Makarina

#### Editor-in-Chief

#### Hilary

**S**tudent journalism often causes me to end up in a lot of silly situations. Getting into News, I did not expect to come across passive aggressive memes online targeted at my work from a grown (?) adult. I also did not expect that I would be going through Union balance sheets during BOP pres, but here we are I guess.

It's been exactly a year since I started doing journalism at *Cherwell*. I'm not sure why I applied at first, and I definitely did not think how big of a part of my life it would become. Not the least because I realistically will not end up a journalist; for the sake of my family's nervous system, my financial stability, and immigration status. However, I would still argue that joining *Cherwell* was the best decision of my university life.

I have learnt (not painlessly) so much from this year of work, from handling the mystery that is InDesign and navigating WordPress, to crisis management and making complicated ethical decisions on the spot. I genuinely believe there is no other place that would give you as

much experience as a nineteen-year-old without a degree (yet, hopefully).

Most of all I learned so much from the people around me. The debilitating impostor syndrome that stalks any Oxford student only intensified after I joined this lovely paper. But this should not deter anyone from joining, every interaction I had with people here was markedly friendly and taught me a lot, regardless of whether they spent more time at *Cherwell* than I at Oxford or never wrote a piece before.

This is to say, I really hope that I continue ending up in a lot of even sillier situations. There is no better way to learn than by being an absolute idiot.



### Archie Johnston

#### News Deputy Editor

**T**his edition of *Cherwell* features the most in-depth investigation I have worked on in my time on the paper. Anyone who has made it to page 11 without going via either the front page or the Investigations section, please do double back. This was a lot of work.

When I checked my emails for the first time after Christmas to find an anonymous tip-off about misconduct at the Catholic Chaplaincy, I had little idea that it would snowball into the mammoth piece it has become. At points during the last three

## ARCHIVES

### 'Let's get this bastard'

1977

**O**n a cold November night, climbing out of a basement window isn't on anyone's agenda. That is, unless you happened to be Mike Smith. The St John's student, named in *Cherwell* the week before as the organiser of the Oxford Hunt Saboteurs, was forced to flee his room after a mob of Hunt sympathisers gathered outside. They let off fireworks and shouted: "Let's get this bastard!"

Defenders of hunting often have recourse to tradition. But this attack drew closer to The Shining than Brideshead Revisited when four or five people rushed into Smith's house and started hammering on his door. They broke through a panel, Smith saw the light (literally) and scarpered. The vandals left his door in splinters and kicked his window in.

It will surprise many readers to know that Christ Church students featured prominently in this story. A member of the mob was recognised as a student from Christ Church. In his words, it wasn't a big deal: "The general idea was that there should be some mild hassle and aggro." And doesn't everyone's idea of mild hassle involve "crowscarers and fireworks"?

The student also denied the Christ Church Beagles' involvement, stating reassuringly no-one present was acting in an official capacity, and that "the Masters would never sanction such an action". Given an official capacity would involve rifles, that's probably a good thing.

What a quaint, remote tale of a long-distant past. Thank goodness no-one in Oxford would ever dream of doing something like that today. Of course, the only reason they wouldn't is because there are no longer any Saboteurs.

weeks, I've felt run-down, angry, and filled with anxiety that this story might not make it to print. Settling into a new living arrangement this term while devoting significant time to uncovering a very emotionally charged story has made first week an intense one.

However, despite the temptation to cast myself as a Mark-Ruffalo-in-Spotlight type (I really need to get around to watching that movie), this piece is the product of matching effort by an incredible team. The article is on the page thanks to all the News and Investigations Deputy Editors, the Editors-in-Chief, the sources who gave us the material we needed, and our long-suffering and greatly appreciated legal counsel. It was only together that we produced a report which was well-researched, clearly written, and legally viable, which I'm led to believe is also important. My fledgling dissertation might have been forced to take a back seat for the start of term but without everyone on that team giving it our all, this story simply would not have seen the light of day.

Any piece of news reporting is a shared endeavour. Our work is in cobbling together bits and pieces from sources, contributors, and multiple sets of editors. It's part of what continues to excite me about the section even when I've put as much energy in as I have for this piece. As much as journalists get cast as individualist, career-driven underdogs, the best journalism is done when we're oriented towards putting out the stories that matter, whatever that looks like. No matter who makes the byline, every article in this print was a collective effort. And that warms my woke little heart.



## PROFILES

# ‘A career can get condensed into four or five matches’

## Conor Niland on being on the margins of tennis



GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

Conor Niland returns Serena Williams’ serve. He’s sweating. She’s unruffled. He’s desperately trying to play his best tennis. She’s having a casual hit about. She crunches a forehand into the corner. He reaches for it but just misses. Then the practice is over, and they both depart the court. A fleeting encounter with stardom.

With his characteristic wry humour, Niland interrupts this moment with an interjection from reality. “When I was practicing with Serena at 16, she was already top 20 in the world”, he tells me, “whereas I was still at school in England and I had no clue whether I was going to be 1,000 in the world or 200”.

Niland is a former tennis player and author of the book *The Racket: On Tour with Tennis’ Golden Generation and the other 99%*, which tells the story of his professional tennis career. It is unlike other sports biographies in that its subject was not a generational star or a multi-Grand Slam winner. That’s the point. Niland’s book fills a gap

in the genre, telling the story of those who don’t quite reach the very top. The book isn’t a study in failure; it’s an exploration of the psychological reality of competing in elite sport. No other book quite captures the relentless, monotonous grind of being a lower ranked tennis player; that sense of stretching for dreams that are tantalisingly close but just out of reach. An extra ten miles per hour on his serve, groundstrokes landing mere centimetres deeper in the court, a deftly disguised drop shot – small margins – and perhaps Niland’s dreams might have been realised.

I ask Niland why there is such a dearth of biographical writing from those who were not stars. I bring up the public misconceptions about the tennis rankings and he quickly concurs. “It’s something that’s frustrated me my whole life, people’s lack of understanding of the ranking system in tennis”, he says. “If you hear somebody’s 150 in the world, you’ll have people who almost think that they are a part-time player.” An expression of incredulity crosses his face, and one can’t blame him – it must be difficult to have worked your whole life at something only to be

underestimated. “Hopefully the book has played a small role in educating people”, he adds.

Our conversation turns towards Niland’s early years. When did tennis become more than a hobby? When did it become a professional endeavour? “It was always the number one thing in my life, tennis, even more than school”, Niland says, his passion for the sport evident. Tennis ran in his family – Niland’s sister Gina remains the best female tennis player Ireland ever had, playing at Junior Wimbledon when he was eight. His father also constructed a tennis court in the backyard. With intensive practice, Niland soon became one of the best players in Ireland.

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*Stretching for dreams that are tantalisingly close but just out of reach*

It was at the 1994 Winter Cup that Niland played a twelve year old Roger Federer. I ask Niland if he noticed anything different about

Federer, any transcendent quality that earmarked him for success. Niland explains that, earlier in the tournament, he had played the Swiss number one, Jun Kato: “I really felt like I was totally outclassed.” Playing Federer was different – and not because it was harder. Precisely the opposite. “All of a sudden, I was like, okay, this guy’s more my level”, Niland says, breaking into laughter. “Which is really funny, obviously, because nobody’s heard of lots of guys who were at the junior level.” Few have heard of Jun Kato – a quick Google search reveals that his career peaked at a world ranking of 367 in 2003. Niland far surpassed his former junior vanquisher. Yet Kato is far from an anomaly: countless prodigious juniors find that early promise proves stubbornly difficult to convert into sustained success.

It was playing on the big stages of junior tennis that truly eroded Niland’s confidence. When he was eight, he dreamed of winning Wimbledon. By the time he was twelve, crashing out in the first round of tournaments to juniors who were levels ahead, his mindset had radically changed, as Niland writes he now simply “dreamed of one day



playing at Wimbledon”. I ask Niland if he believes this realism freed or limited him. He takes me aback with the immediacy and conviction of his answer. “It limited me”, he asserts emphatically, “I think I even downgraded my ambition from that, to accepting that I wasn’t going to play in Wimbledon. I probably lacked a bit of belief”.

If Niland thought junior competition was hard, he was about to find out how much more challenging senior tennis would be. After studying English Literature at the University of Berkeley in California, where he was a star of college tennis, it was time to try out the professional ranks. Travelling week after week to far-flung places. No coach. Jetlag. Exhaustion. New conditions. All whilst trying to produce your best tennis. “A very, very unusual kind of way of life”, Niland describes it, with the look of a man momentarily bewildered by the life he once lived.

Starting out in the professional ranks, Niland competed in the Futures Tour, the lowest rung of the ladder. In the book, he describes the tour as a “vast netherworld of more than 2,000 true prospects and hopeless dreamers”. Could he tell if his opponent had what it takes to ascend the rankings hierarchy? “You could usually tell from three courts away”, Niland replies quickly. “You didn’t even need to play them.” The weight of shot, the athleticism, the technique – all was evident from afar.

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I’m reminded again of the realism of a twelve year old who knew that he would not win Wimbledon

Chronicling the struggles of life on tour, desperate to break through, Niland demonstrates an almost unsettling level of self-awareness about his role within the tennis hierarchy. “I think the strongest parts of the book are where I’m kind of the fly on the wall”, he says, “nobody even sees that I’m there, but I’m sort of showing you that world”. Niland points to a key part from his book as an example of this. At an Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tournament in San Jose, Andre Agassi, a multiple Grand Slam champion, was the big name. Sitting in the player’s lounge, Niland watched as Agassi walked past, “surrounded by a gaggle of tournament organisers”, each of them earnestly asking if they could assist him at all. Agassi asked for some water, which was quickly provided, even though he was standing next to a fridge full of bottled water. That sight of Agassi “besieged by help” stayed with Niland. The brief moment seemed to him to be emblematic of the divergent lives lived by the stars and the strivers of the sport: the former travel with an entourage, their every need indulged; the latter travel alone, grappling with the isolation of the itinerant lifestyle.

Niland’s book builds to a climax towards the end, when he finally reaches the destination of his dreams: Wimbledon. A slew of impressive results – including a rare tournament victory – had put him at a career high ranking of 129 in the world, meaning he could enter the qualifying rounds of the most prestigious event in tennis. After winning two qualifying rounds, Niland was one win away from his first grand slam main draw. All that stood between him and his dreams was Nikola Pietrangeli from Croatia. Niland cruised to a dominant lead, staying off a bout of nerves in the closing stages to seal the victory. Then he fell to his knees, the magnitude of the moment sinking in. How did it feel to qualify for Wimbledon for the first time? Niland smiles. It almost feels as if he is reimagining that moment as we speak. “Yeah, it

was the highlight of my career. Just qualifying for the tournament, I celebrated like... like I’d won it. It’s such an instant release of tension.”

Niland’s first round match at Wimbledon pitted him against Adrian Panatta, then a top 50 player. The winner of the contest would face Roger Federer on Centre Court, a tantalising prospect for Niland, who had never played on such a big stage. Niland won the first set, before Panatta came back to win the next two. Niland snatched the fourth. Serving at 4-1 up in the fifth, victory was within his grasp. He cast his mind towards the match that awaited him. The magnitude of the moment overwhelmed him and minutes later it was Panatta’s match point. A missed backhand volley. A match against Federer was off the cards. In the book, Niland vividly described his emotions in the aftermath of the loss: “He screams. I stand motionless...I can almost feel the shadow of Centre Court weighing on my back.”

A couple of months later Niland tasted grand slam success again, this time in the sultry heat and vibrant festivity of the US Open. For his first round match, he would be on the biggest stage of his career, Arthur Ashe Stadium, which could seat over 20,000 spectators, playing against World No. One Novak Djokovic. The match that was supposed to be the realisation of all he’d worked towards ended up being one of the most painful. Walking onto court for the match, Niland wondered whether he would even be able to finish it, as he was suffering from food poisoning. A cruel turn of fate. Surprisingly, Niland is sunnier when reminiscing about this match than I would have expected. “It’s made for a slightly funnier, more interesting story than just going out healthy”, he points out. “It’s yet another element for the reader.”

Retirement came the year after his food poisoning misfortune. “That’s why I finished playing six months later. I’d done Wimbledon and the US Open.... It definitely helped me move on”, Niland tells me. “I felt like I’d done the thing that I was chasing.” As he says this, I’m reminded again of the realism of a twelve year old who knew that he would not win Wimbledon.

Looking back on his time on tour, Niland remarks that “a career can get condensed into four or five matches, and that’s what you take with you through the rest of your life”. He picks out the matches at Wimbledon and the US Open, as well as his tournament wins, as the ones that stay with him. All the rest – the first round losses in Canada and India and Japan and Ireland – would fade from memory, surviving only as scorelines online.

“Did you win Wimbledon, or how’d you do in Wimbledon? Did you play a famous player? Did you beat a famous player?” These are the questions Niland is asked time and time again. Yet his story is more than the highlights, the fleeting encounters with fame and glory. His is a story of ambition tempered by realism, confidence inhibited by insecurity, and talent constrained by circumstance. Above all, Niland’s book has a radical honesty which humanises elite athletes, who are too often seen as impenetrable, soullessly and endlessly dedicated to their craft.

Reading Niland’s book, I felt that I was being transported into the mind of a man in between two worlds. With a career high ranking of 129 in the world, Niland neither gained admittance to the elite class of the Top 100 singles players, nor languished in the lower ranks of the hopeless strivers who would never even compete at a Grand Slam. No longer is Niland trapped in that liminal space between worlds: he’s entered the literary realm.

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

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# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



## Lauren Lendrevie spoke to Joshua Robey about directing ‘Company’ at the Oxford Playhouse

Joshua Robey is a name quickly gaining traction within the Oxford University Drama Society (OUDS), the heart of Oxford’s theatre scene. From sold-out runs to glowing reviews from Peter Kessler, his productions last year were not to be missed. A DPhil student specialising in contemporary theatre, Robey has staged productions across the Pilch, O’Reilly and Burton Taylor Studio. Now, staging Stephen Sondheim’s *Company*, he’s left with the showstopper: the Oxford Playhouse.

Not only is this Robey’s biggest production to date, but it also marks a deliberate step outside of his comfort zone. Known primarily for directing plays, he has chosen to take on a musical – a Sondheim classic. I sat down with Robey to discuss his journey into theatre and his vision for *Company*.

Robey’s interest in drama was born from early theatre-going. At 17, he was struck by a number of productions, but one stood out: *The Writer*. “It completely changed what I thought theatre could be”, he tells me. “It was alive and political and funny and exciting – and that really hooked me.”

He found his way to directing during his master’s degree at Cambridge, after COVID put a pause on drama during his undergraduate years. In it, he discovered a new creative outlet. “Some people work well with a blank page”, he explains, “and some work better with something that already exists, which you can play around with”. For Robey, the appeal lies in translation: taking a text and reimagining it in a physical space.

One of the most distinctive features of his directing style is his focus on sound. Robey is responsible for sound design on most of his productions and often begins his creative process there. “It’s where I find a lot of feeling in a show”, he says. “Sometimes you just need the absence of sound...but often you need a heartbeat, and that’s what sound gives you.”

His rehearsals reflect an equal commitment to emotional storytelling. They are heavily text-centred and discursive, with actors openly debating interpretation. “I want rehearsals to be led by dialogue”, Robey explains. “It’s really important that your cast feel able and empowered to ask questions.”

Choosing to direct a musical was, in part, a personal challenge. “I had this vision of myself as someone who wouldn’t do a musical”, he says. “So I thought, lean into the perversity of that.

What would a musical I direct look like?” He was also drawn to *Company* for its resonance with a student audience. Bobby, the show’s central character, is 35 and facing an “early midlife crisis” – something Robey sees as abstractly familiar to students approaching the end of their degree.

Keen to experiment, Robey has opted for a non-literal, “expressionistic” approach to staging the musical. He describes the set as “an open arena where there are things that aren’t actually in the play”. I sense his reluctance to disclose a secret that has clearly long been on his mind as he gradually reveals his creative vision: the stage design draws on the aesthetic of an indoor soft play centre. Devised by Holly Rust, the set operates on two levels and includes a slide – a design “full of character, whilst chiming very closely with the themes of our interpretation”.

Staging *Company* at the Oxford Playhouse has also brought new logistical demands. Compared with smaller venues, the production requires far more advance planning: blocking must be communicated early; safety checks factored into design; and budgets scrutinised. Robey sees this as valuable preparation for professional theatre: “It’s much closer to how theatre works outside a student context.”

When it comes to OUDS itself, Robey positions himself at its edges. “I do OUDS shows because that’s what people call it”, he says, “but I don’t feel like I’m recruiting from OUDS – I’m recruiting from Oxford students”.

What excites him most about the current Oxford scene is a renewed interest in contemporary theatre. He sees plays written within the last decade as an ideal starting point for student drama, allowing directors to “get more out of it” when they’re “connected to its cultural context”.

As *Company* approaches its run, I ask Robey what success looks like to him. His answer is simple. “It comes down to audience experience”, he says. “The measure of success is based on whether the audience felt or thought in interesting ways... They don’t all need to feel the same thing – but they do need to feel something. I think that’s so important.”

***Company*, by Fennec Fox Productions, runs from the 28th-31st January at The Oxford Playhouse.**

*Image credit: Will Schwabach with permission.*



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# lonely hearts

# CLUB NIGHT

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## ‘Theatre is a tool of resistance’: Lighthouse Productions on ‘Lemons’

*Abigail Lakeland interviews the cast and crew of Lighthouse Productions on the vision behind their debut*

Lighthouse Productions was born when co-directors Alys Young and Ivana Clapperton conspired to create a company based on a shared taste in theatre, and their interest in human connections and friendships.

Alongside producer Grace Yu, the team outlined the vision for their debut production: a political, surrealist, five-night run of Sam Steiner’s *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* (2015) at the Burton Taylor Theatre. “This is really fresh writing”, says Alys. “It’s nice to do contemporary theatre [written] by young people. It brings a certain energy.”

The text is set in a world where language is limited by a so-called ‘Hush Law’, and everyone is given a daily word limit. When Oliver and Bernadette start a relationship against this background of linguistic and political suppression, it’s not just their conflicting personalities that pose a problem.

“They have their own communication issues, regardless of the law. The law just crystallises an experience that was already there”, says Alys. “It genuinely would resonate with so many people, especially people in relationships”, Grace adds. “Communication issues are so important, and most people don’t even notice they’re there.”

*Lemons* is a play of two elements. Like a lemon, sliced in half: there’s the opposites-attract love story, and a political commentary on freedom of speech. Lighthouse’s performance homes in on the latter. “[The] different elements seem like they wouldn’t go hand in hand, [but] these exterior motions can leave such a devastating impact on our daily lives”, says Ivana.

“[The Hush Law is] always a shadow over them”, says Alys. The trio selected the play over summer, amid the proscription of Palestine Action in June 2025. Alys recalls when Banksy’s mural, *Royal Courts of Justice* (2025), was immediately scrubbed. “Theatre is a tool of resistance”, she says. For Alys, *Lemons* is “scarily relevant”.

40 students auditioned for the roles of Oliver and Bernadette. “Call-backs were a nightmare”, the team recalls. “We did a workshop with every possible

pairing, since the play depends on chemistry.” The team landed on Kit Rush in his debut performance as Oliver, who Alys describes as “an absolute blinder”, and Caeli Colgan as Bernadette, who Ivana describes as “a powerhouse”. Grace also mentions an exciting original score composed by Oliver Spooner.

Talking to Kit Rush and Caeli Colgan provided some insight into the leads of the two-hander. “On the surface of it, Oliver and Bernadette’s relationship might be described as the classic ‘opposites attract’”, says Colgan. “But actually I think part of the chemistry between the characters comes from their similarity.”

“They balance each other out”, explains Rush. “Oliver is charming and fun; Bernadette is hard-working and reserved. Are they a good match? The jury is out.”

“I think what makes them a good match is that they find each other exciting”, Colgan says. “What the Hush Law does is it transforms that excitement into frustration. Where before they might have enjoyed being challenged by one another, maintaining a relationship in 140 words a day simplifies the types of communication available, which forces everything they say into a kind of total bluntness.”

On the more demanding aspects of the play, Rush and Colgan cite different challenges. “The structure of the play is very fast paced because it is made up of lots of little vignette-like scenes in non-chronological order”, says Colgan. “It’s quite challenging to keep a clear sense of the narrative when it flits between pre and post Hush Law, but I’m hoping this also challenges the audience in an interesting and exciting way.” For Rush? “Actually, doing a two hander – I didn’t realise how many lines there were!”

“The play is rejecting realism”, Ivana describes. “We’re trying to experiment with different mediums.” The team wanted to add many “absurd surrealist elements”. They plan on using a montage, projected onto the walls of the Burton Taylor, which they hope indicates “how the sense of being watched



can be traumatic, in a way”.

The Burton Taylor is a recurring topic in my conversation with Lighthouse Productions. “It is a very small space, as we all know”, laughs Grace. “Having acted in the BT, the intimacy is perfect for this play.” In comparison, Grace says that at the similarly-sized Michael Pilch Studio “you still feel a little bit of distance, it’s surprisingly big”. The BT, however, gets it just right.

“The fourth wall is so thin. But we want it to be so thin”, Grace states. Alys adds that they wanted it to feel like Big Brother is watching, with the audience also under the microscope. “They’re being brought into the action as well.”

On inspirations, Alys says she’s fascinated by the ballet based on *Lemons*. *The Limit* (2023) was performed for eight nights at the Linbury Theatre, London in October 2023, starring Francesca Hayward and Alexander Campbell. In Lighthouse’s *Lemons*, the team has incorporated movement to illustrate that when language fails, movement

supports communication. Present too in the brainstorming were the West End performances, where the actors only wore socks. “You’re in that very intimate, domestic setting,” Alys says, in a sentiment echoed by Rush, who notes: “You’ll feel like you’ve been inside that intimate space of a new relationship. It’s a messy mixture of humour, sadness, and hope.”

When asked how they want audience members to respond to the performance, the co-directors diverged. “I want them to feel all the emotions, to laugh, to cry [...] to be distressed. I want them to leave thinking about the current political climate,” says Alys. Ivana’s response was more ominous. “I don’t want to freak people out, but I do want them to leave feeling scared,” Ivana laughs. “[The Hush Law] seems like a very unusual thing, but it could so easily happen to any of us.”

*Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* shows at the Burton Taylor Studio 27th-31st January.

*Image credit: Jamie Bernard with permission.*

## ‘Funny, sad things’: In conversation with ‘GREYJOY’

RIVA DAWAR

**G**REYJOY is Blackstar Production’s second show, written by Rebecca Harper. Taking a light, sharply comic tone, it grapples with the weighty themes of end-of-life care, sibling relationships, and anticipatory grief with assurance and deftness. Each night features several “placed” audience members, cold-reading as one of the play’s doctors – a formal risk which is both playful and fresh. I sat down with Rebecca, Blackstar’s co-founder Tom Onslow, and crew and cast members Zee Obeng, Libby Alldread, and Avani Rao to talk about the show.

Our conversation meanders through the topics of *Horrible Histories*, American roads, and whether the sea or snow is scarier, before I start the questions proper, beginning with Rebecca’s inspirations for the project. She explains that the cold reading element emerged about halfway through the writing process, “very inspired by a lot of plays with audience interaction. My favourite play is *An Oak*

*Tree* by Tim Crouch”, which shares *GREYJOY*’s interest in metatheatre, and “devolves into this thing about grief and performance. I was separately writing about my experience as a medical mock patient, and at some point, the two came together”. As for inspiration for the title, Rebecca teases that “it references the surname of some *Game of Thrones* characters, you’ll have to watch the show to find out why that’s important!” Initially called *Moonbear*, *GREYJOY*, with its heavy yet hopeful connotations, “picked up a better thread”, being suggestive, slightly ominous, and oddly tender.

When I ask what drew the rest of the team to the project, Zee, one of the play’s co-stars, responds effusively: “*GREYJOY*’s script was beautiful. I think that I look for things that are written in a way that I feel moved by, it’s not just the themes but the very way that it’s written. I had to be in it. I couldn’t talk about anything else in the week I auditioned.”

*GREYJOY*’s emphasis on rhythm and lightness is palpable even in our brief conversation, not

least because of the genuine warmth and affection between the cast and crew. This tonal balance, juggling humour and weight, is one of the play’s greatest strengths. Tom explains that the show relies on the cast’s ability to “land a laugh and then go into something really tough. People have to really trust that they can do that, that they’re not going to step on one [by] doing the other. That they work together, a laugh doesn’t discredit a sad moment!”

“*This tonal balance, juggling humour and weight, is one of the play’s greatest strengths*

Zee adds: “It’s like when you’re talking to someone about something [serious], the easiest way is to make it funny. Is that a British thing? I think it’s very human, something we all do, everyday.” Avani, assistant director, says the humour “makes it real, like the characters are actually going through these

events – they wouldn’t joke about it if they weren’t”. Rebecca agrees: “Grief brings out odd things. I’ve been at some funny funerals. The things you remember about someone are often funny stories. That’s a nice part of grief to focus on.”

*GREYJOY*, at least in part, draws on Rebecca’s own life experiences: “I have three characters who go through different things. Cait’s relationship with her sibling is the most similar to my own, growing up with someone, and being at different stages in life, and having different concerns over time is something that speaks to me in particular.” In terms of the play’s exploration of anticipatory grief, Zee tells me: “As an actor, it’s oddly therapeutic. Working through Cait, her experiences aren’t unique... Being able to put words to it feels very poignant, and I think it could be for the audience too. It’s a play that sparks conversation.” With its cold reading element, *GREYJOY* blurs the lines between actor and audience more than most.

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



## ART

## Family resemblance: Oxford's twin cities

*Emma Heagney discusses the intellectual and cultural ties that Oxford has built across the world*

From prestigious university towns to ancient settlements, Oxford is twinned with seven cities around the world, spread across three continents. But what do these cities in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Nicaragua have in common architecturally? What about Poland, France, and Palestine? Where can we see our beloved university city in each of them? A look at each city's traditions and visual culture reveals a connection close to the heart of Oxford: academic heritage.

Bonn (Germany) and Leiden (the Netherlands) share a common feature with Oxford: the highly prestigious university. Bonn, the birthplace of Beethoven, is home to one of the oldest universities in Germany. The institution blends modern and historic architecture, with the University Library embracing a St Catz-esque facade following its initial destruction in the Second World War, while the Koblenz Gate boasts gilded column capitals and no fewer than nine statues. Unlike Oxford, the University of Bonn does not seem to have as many odd traditions as their British twin, but as part of the wider Rhineland, it is a keen participant in the annual Karneval season.

Likewise, the University of Leiden is the oldest university in the Netherlands. Having produced 13 Nobel Prize winners, Leiden has been one of the world's major scientific centres. Its academy building bears striking resemblance to Keble College with its unusual red brick construction. The De Valk mill and museum lies above the skyline, infusing the city with characteristic Dutch culture, exchanged with Oxford each year through performances by the Leiden Youth Choir. Bonn and Leiden are also both situated on an iconic river, the Rhine, just as the Isis and Cherwell rivers flow through Oxford.

Grenoble (France) is also a deeply ancient city. In southeastern France, Grenoble was the home of a Gallic tribe, the Allobroges, conquered by Caesar and subsumed by Roman Gaul before eventually becoming part of modern-day France. Despite its heritage, Grenoble today is a hub of modern architecture, reflecting its more recent industrial development. A leader in sustainable housing initiatives, Grenoble's unique "fungus shaped" apartment blocks use brown balconies contrasted against white cladding, creating the illusion of a tree growing inside a building. Just a look at the skyline, however, reminds one of the city's history – the famous Bastille, a series of medieval fortresses, remains Grenoble's most popular tourist attraction.

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*Oxford's warm relationship with Ramallah will hopefully provide support in a catastrophic time*

The last of the European cities tied with Oxford is Wrocław (Poland), as Oxford's relationship with Perm (Russia) was suspended after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Oxford and Wrocław were twinned in 2018 in order to recognise Oxford's large Polish community (the second most spoken language in Oxford is Polish). Wrocław maintains much of its architectural heritage, and the Old Town is named on Poland's prestigious list of National Monuments. The Cathedral Island is, in particular, the oldest part of the city, and reflects the religious life of Poland more widely. Wrocław Cathedral dominates the skyline, its two towers gazing over the land. Once again, the University of Wrocław's historic main



building is perched on the side of the Oder River. During the Guanlia festival in June, students at Wrocław temporarily 'steal' the sword of the statue by the main entrance, symbolising the handing over of keys to the student government for festivities.

Finally, we arrive at Ramallah (Palestine). Oxford and Ramallah became twin cities in 2019, after the creation of the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) in 2002, after volunteers from Oxford called for help as Israeli tanks entered Ramallah in the same year. In the decades since its establishment, leading figures in Oxford and Ramallah have visited each city – most recently, the Palestinian flag was flown from the Town Hall to celebrate one such visit. Moreover, the Palestinian History Tapestry Project was displayed in the same location in 2021, an artistic exchange designed to celebrate Palestinian culture and raise awareness for the devastating situation in Palestine. Ramallah itself

incorporates the architecture of several periods, from Roman ruins to the ultra-modern Arafat Mausoleum. The brightly-lit Ramallah Cultural Palace opened its doors in 2004, reflecting the cultural and intellectual importance of the city, home to poets, musicians, and activists. It is no wonder that Oxford is twinned with such an important area of the West Bank, and Oxford's warm relationship with Ramallah will hopefully provide ample opportunity to support the people of Palestine in what continues to be a catastrophic time.

Oxford's twin cities share its intellectual spirit. The curiosity to learn, even in the face of poverty and destruction, endures. The buildings constituting each city reveal a deeper history, a reflection of religious life, cultural proliferation, and much needed political activism.

*Image credit: Remi Mathis, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Dressed the part: Dark academia at Oxford FASHION

CERYS BENNISON

Another Oxford Hilary, the term of bleak midwinter. Utterly bereft of Christmas sparkle, the season forces us to focus on our studies, with libraries becoming a refuge as the weather worsens. Reflecting Oxford's heritage as a romanticised stronghold of academic tradition, the style of dark academia, while it helps us to ward off the worst of the seasonal chills, hints at the class politics underpinning the University.

It is an aesthetic rooted in male-dominated institutions of wealth and knowledge, much like the iconic sub-fusc academic dress. The unfortunate stereotypes are not entirely inaccurate here, with the tweed-clad, bespectacled professor cast as this season's unexpected fashion icon. Romanticisation

meets subversion, with Pinterest boards collating a mixture of aesthetics and influences: Victoriana, Claudia Winkleman on *The Traitors*, and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. Through its long wool overcoats, dark academia presents us with a fiction of a past Oxford, but one that illuminates an ecologically sensitive approach for the future.

Glorifying the library as a fortress of knowledge, the dark academia colour palette comes straight from the half-lit gloom of the Duke Humfrey's: rosewood, burnished leather, and aged manuscript pages imbue tweeds and corduroy trousers with their tones. This style is built on the fantasy of an 'old money' lineage, as with much at Oxford. Artfully shabby, dark academia glorifies not only the pursuit of knowledge, but also its privilege. One which has historically been afforded to male circles

in the upper echelons of society. Although it is an aesthetic adopted by many today, the masculine tailoring of dark academia's key garments – Oxford shirts, bags, and brogues – matches the University's historical cohort of wealthy, white men. Age, in this instance, is an accolade, reflecting both Oxford's prestige and that of the individual wearer through an exclusionary fostering of 'Englishness'.

Although it does nothing to brighten the leaden British skies, dark academia's earthy tones imply a connection to land as property. Its iconography is tied to archetypes of the English country house, only minorly adjusted from the garments worn for a weekend hunting party. Tweed originated as a practical material for rural workers, made from their own flocks. English estate tweeds, however, emerged in the Victorian era as variations on the classic plaid. They circumvented the disrespect of wearing clan tartan when English aristocracy was increasingly purchasing impoverished Scottish estates. Crisp shirts were paired with straggly scarves, battered overcoats, and round glasses.

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*Dark academia glorifies not only the pursuit of knowledge, but its privilege*

Affiliations with the 'Sloane Ranger' (that horsey paradigm of upper-class affluence) run deep, but given dark academia's hand in imaging Oxford's male exclusivity, signet rings eclipse Granny's pearls as choice embellishment. Yet, at least they are

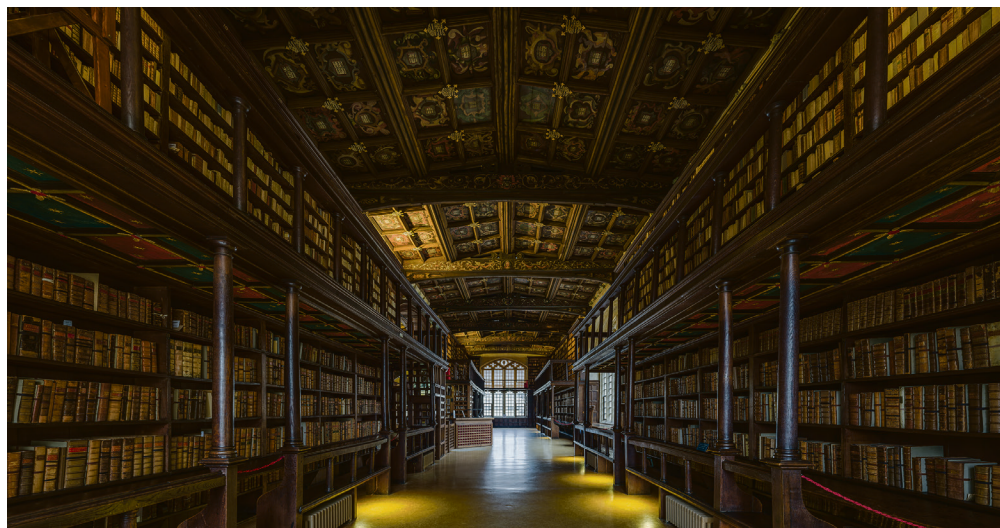
already in the family jewellery safe, hardly a non-recyclable purchase from a high street brand with suspiciously opaque sustainability policies.

Dark academia fashion also encourages deeper environmental consciousness, with an emphasis on material traceability and high-quality, small-scale craftsmanship, especially important in an age where fast fashion titans indulge our willingness to trade conscience for convenience. No one adopting it would be caught dead wearing a crackly polyester hybrid – dark academia fashion prioritises hand-me-downs, vintage and natural materials, making it a style of timeless transgression.

Few fully-suited, brogue-wearing tutors remain in Oxford – arguably for the better, considering the discriminatory foundations of dark academia style. However, this makes it ripe for a subversive rebrand: its dandyish decorum is adopted to challenge heteronormativity, with women wearing it to walk to the Bodleian as visibly as men. It is evident that Oxbridge remains most accessible to the upper class (apparently intending to stay that way, if Cambridge's 'reverse discrimination' admissions are anything to go by).

Undeniably, dark academia style is tied to this, with the sourcebook based on a wealthy, white, and male vision of academia – a triple threat indeed. Yet this is exactly what makes it ideal for reconstitution, satirising and subverting the exclusionary English education system from the foundations, and ultimately diversifying Oxford's image through wider, personal stylisation.

*Image credit: Diliff, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.*





# The underrated releases of 2025

## Lara Machado on films of 2025 you may not have watched, but definitely should

It's that time of year again: the season in which we are inundated with a never-ending stream of lists ranking 2025's top releases. *Cherwell*, however, will not attempt to tell you which films were the best. What follows instead is a list of less-discussed new releases that are still very much worth your time.

### Mirrors No.3, Christian Petzold

Laura (Paula Beer) escapes the car crash that kills her boyfriend, miraculously unscathed. A local woman, Betty (Barbara Auer), who witnesses the accident, takes her in while she recovers from the shock. As Laura continues to stay with Betty and her family, it becomes clear that something is strange about the nature of their connection. The German auteur's newest film premiered at the *Quizaine des Cinéastes* at Cannes, a section usually associated with the discovery of new filmmakers rather than veterans like Petzold. While *Mirrors No.3* is simpler and smaller in scope than most of his other films, quickly labelled a "minor Petzold", it remains a deliciously subtle and psychologically complex exploration of grief and identity. Paula Beer steals the show as usual, endlessly enigmatic and elusive in the lead role.

### Where to Land, Hal Hartley

*Where to Land* follows Joseph Fulton (Bill Sage), a middle-aged filmmaker (a kind of Hartley alter ego), who suddenly decides he wants to work for his local cemetery. At the same time, he resolves to have his will drawn up. As a result, his girlfriend (Kim Taff) and niece (Katelyn Sparks) become convinced that he is dying. As the news spreads, neighbours, family members, and friends gather in his apartment to say goodbye. American independent film legend Hal

Hartley returns to the cinema with his first feature in over a decade. While decidedly weaker than some of his previous work, *Where to Land* is still infused with a charm and originality that puts much of recent indie American cinema to shame. Although not all of the cast are equally convincing at delivering his highly stylised dialogue, Hartley proves that he is still a master of the awkward comedy. Reflective and funny while remaining unpretentious, if nothing else, this surprisingly optimistic film will put a smile on your face.

### In the Land of Brothers, Raha Amirfazli and Alireza Ghasemi

Divided into three parts spanning three decades, *In the Land of Brothers* follows a family of Afghan refugees in Iran and their struggle for integration. The film boasts a series of very impressive performances from first-time actors, with Mohammad Hosseini giving a particularly moving and nuanced turn as Mohammad. *In the Land of Brothers* sheds light on an underdiscussed issue through powerful vignettes each centred on a different facet of the struggle. Amirfazli and Ghasemi clearly get across their social and political message – the exploitation of Afghan refugees in Iran – while never allowing the characters to be purely defined by their suffering. This is a film which will not leave you unmoved.

### The Blue Trail, Gabriel Mascaro

In the near future, the Brazilian government commits anyone over 80 to isolation in a remote colony in an effort to increase the productivity of the working population. When the age limit is unexpectedly lowered, 77-year-old Tereza (Denise Weinberg) refuses to be taken away and escapes into the Amazon, beginning a journey of self-

discovery. At a time of great success for Brazilian cinema worldwide, *The Blue Trail* has been largely overlooked. The film takes a rare approach to old age, giving us an elderly protagonist whose narrative is not about death, illness, or the past, but is instead an unusual twist on the coming-of-age film. In Mascaro's clever, funny, and moving new feature, Tereza is the driving force of the film, a woman still very much capable of desire, renewal, and hope for the future.

### Winter in Sokcho, Koya Kamura

Based on Elisa Shua Dusapin's eponymous novel, Kamura's debut film follows Soo-Ha (Bella Kim), a recent graduate working at a small hotel in the town of Sokcho. The arrival of a French artist, Yan Kerrand (Roschdy Zem), at the guesthouse leads her to reevaluate her life and ask new questions about her estranged French father. While far from being a perfect film, Kamura's debut is definitely promising. Certain aspects of Yan's tortured artist persona veer dangerously close to cliché, but a quietly stunning lead performance by Bella Kim earns the film its sincere, tender quality. The animated watercolour interludes, along with their sound design, are very affecting, as are the moments when Kamura's visuals seem to capture something of Yan's illustrations. These choices elevate the film above your run-of-the-mill narrative about feeling lost in your 20s.

### On Falling, Laura Carreira

Laura Carreira's feature-length debut follows Aurora, a Portuguese immigrant working in an online shopping warehouse in Scotland. Her job seems designed to minimise contact with others and she finds herself overwhelmed by loneliness.

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

## FILM AND TV

### What's Oxford watching?

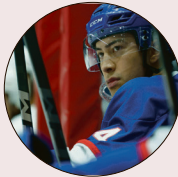


#### The Housemaid

Gaspard at Anne's recommends  
*The Housemaid* (2025):

*"'The Housemaid' is a gripping thriller, with several surprising plot twists that will keep you enthralled and make you second-guess your expectations. While it is what you would expect from a typical Hollywood film, it still has some interesting cinematic value and good acting!"*

You can watch *The Housemaid* on Youtube.



#### Heated Rivalry

Cecilia at Keble recommends the TV show  
*Heated Rivalry* (2025):

*"I liked 'Heated Rivalry' because it felt like a rare example of an on-screen romance about two people who are genuinely, mutually in love with each other."*

You can watch *Heated Rivalry* on NOWTV.

Image credits: "The Housemaid" and "Heated Rivalry" via [imdb.com](#)

# A reconsideration of the live-action remake

WILLOW JOPP

There is a particular kind of cultural contempt reserved for the live-action remake. Many film buffs see them as evidence that nothing new is being made in Hollywood, that writers have given up, and that audiences prefer to be spoon-fed reheated stories. But to dismiss live-action remakes entirely is to miss what they reveal about the moment we're currently living through. I held the same distaste for them, but never tried to understand the reasons why these films are made and why they continue to succeed financially.

Maybe it's time, then, to challenge my past attitude, and attempt to find worth in a film format I previously considered redundant. Live-

action remakes, when viewed with an open mind, can be seen as cultural negotiations, as attempts to revitalise and pass down old stories to new eyes and ears. They test which morals we still believe in, and what we feel requires modernisation. They are a first step towards change in a time when change feels frightening. They make up a film category of their own, which deserves to be recognised and respected.

The live-action remake is often accused of simply tracing the outline of something we have already seen and loved. But this is not entirely true. The trend within this genre in the early 2010s was to take the original story and put a darker spin on it. Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* essentially changes the entire plot of the original 1951 film by including Alice's mission to slay the

Jabberwocky, all enacted with Burton's trademark gothic tone. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Maleficent*, and *Snow White and the Huntsman*, which sit somewhere between remake and adaptation, all add a grittiness absent from their source material. This shift in tone in the early 2010s reflected a cultural seriousness that rewarded tonal darkness and thematic maturity. It was as though the modern audience had become disillusioned with the innocence of the fairy-tale, and so these remakes treat optimism as something to be earned through suffering. The point of these films was not fidelity; instead offering a reframing of familiar narratives, treating fairy-tales as raw material for a different type of film entirely.

“  
*Live action remakes, when viewed with an open mind, can be seen as cultural negotiations*

Regarding the Disney remakes of its animated musicals, the charge that these films are just lazy cash grabs is harder to dismiss. After all, it's true that Disney's most financially successful movies are sequels, adaptations, and remakes. But perhaps that indicates that they are responding to audience trends: after all, we are the ones who continue to watch them. Business rationale explains why these films are commissioned; it doesn't fully explain why they resonate. The stories are timeless, and their morals and messages still ring true after decades. And since these films cater not only

towards the original audience's nostalgia, but also towards new generations, these messages are thus revived and remastered for a modern audience.

Furthermore, once budget is factored in, their returns are not as efficient as the originals: *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) grossed \$1.2 billion on a \$255 million budget, but the 1991 original grossed \$451 million on a mere \$25 million budget. These films are gargantuan feats, showing off the advancements in CGI made in the decades elapsed since the release of the original. They require hundreds of crew members and thousands of hours of real labour. It is reductive to call live-action remakes 'lazy', when in reality they reveal how much work goes into making familiar stories feel relevant again for a new cultural moment.

Before starting to write this, I was judging live-action remakes by the wrong standard. I wanted them to be at once faithful and original, reverent and surprising, comforting and challenging, but, of course, many adaptations buckle under the weight of these contradictions. The quality of live-action remakes varies greatly, and I am personally not a fan of many of them, but I am by no means against the live-action remake as a concept. And even in their failures, they remain revealing of what ideas have changed in the past few decades, and what we hope to preserve. To defend the live-action remake, then, is not to defend every individual film, but to recognise the genre as an ongoing attempt to translate inherited stories into a present that no longer trusts innocence, but still longs for it.

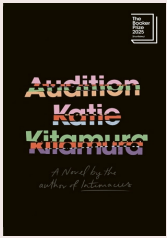
*Image credit: Walt Disney, PDM, via Wikimedia Commons.*





# BOOKS

## What's Oxford reading?



Charlie at Keble recommends *The Audition* (2025) by Katie Kitamura:

*"This Booker Prize nominee starts slow, but evolves into a pacy psychological exploration of an uncommunicative modern relationship."*



Ila at Wadham recommends *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi:

*"Homegoing is a deeply emotionally affecting book about slavery, racism, and generational trauma. Each chapter follows a different character, which can sometimes lead to a shallowness in development but in Gyasi's hands, you feel immersed in only a few pages. A must read!"*

Image credits: 'The Audition' and 'Homegoing' via Penguin.

# How should a person read?

BEN O'BRIEN

Over the course of this Christmas vacation, I was mostly reading Karl Ove Knausgaard. Not his slightly weird-sounding recent stuff (see: *The Wolves of Eternity*), but rather his six-volume international best-seller, *My Struggle*. It had long been on my radar, mainly because I seem no longer able to engage with actual fiction – and Knausgaard's mega-hit is one of the classics of autofiction. So I got the first three volumes, put my folder labelled "THESIS" away, and settled down on the sofa to enjoy Karl's struggle.

While I very much liked what I read, I didn't like what happened to my brain as term time came back around. Gradually, the old mental tics crept back in. Instead of reading the words on the page, I found my mind wandering. As Karl was talking about his father's seemingly pathological inability to say anything nice to him, or about his embarrassingly misshapen penis, my thoughts returned to my work. "Shouldn't I be dedicating all of my mental energy to my degree?", I asked myself. Could reading about Karl's penis and his relationship with his father possibly contribute something towards my next thesis chapter? And if not, shouldn't I just put the book down and do something more constructive with my time? I hate these kinds of thoughts, so much so that I spend nearly as much time thinking about how annoying they are as I do actually having them. Yet every time a new term comes around, I find it almost impossible to stop them.

No doubt, my inability to stop my mind wandering is partly a symptom of our digital age,

dominated by short-form content. No matter which book is in front of me, I'm almost always reading in 20 second bursts, and I'm constantly thinking about what else I could be looking at if I only picked up my phone. In other words, even if I was working on my thesis, I'd probably be thinking about something else.

*"Oxford can feel less like a place of intellectual freedom than of maximising future earnings"*

My struggle with non-academic reading is also an example of what Oxford itself can do to you. The problem is less my concentration than my feeling guilty at reading anything that doesn't directly contribute to me getting a better result in my degree. And it's hard to make the guilt go away. In our imposter-syndrome-inducing bubble, it's easy to think you have no choice but to give up any non-academic pastimes. The pressure of weekly deadlines, the desire to show that you deserve the place you worked so hard to get – it often seems like the only option is to dedicate 100% of your time to your degree. Any time I don't do so, I end up feeling like I'm doing something wrong.

Of course, something must have gone very wrong if university messes up the one of the pastimes you might think it was designed to facilitate above all else – namely, the reading of books. In a way, my messed up reading habits are just another example of the instrumentalisation

of higher education that has been going on for a long time. University league tables, eye-watering amounts of student debt, the closing down of degrees that don't 'increase earning potential' – all this makes it hard to escape the feeling that higher education has become less an opportunity for intellectual pursuits of all kinds and more a product to be purchased in return for earning a certain amount of money once you leave. In this context, Oxford can feel less like a place of intellectual freedom than of maximising future earnings. Karl's struggle might be engrossing reading, but if it's not going to be financially beneficial, it seems like I'm supposed to set it aside.

If this all sounds extreme, and maybe even a little bit mad, then that's because it is. The idea that I'm not allowed to continue reading for fun during term time is no saner than the idea that I shouldn't see my friends. More to the point, it's no doubt counterproductive in the long run – the irony being that I'd probably do better in my degree if I was less obsessed with doing well.

So this term, my last Hilary at Oxford, I've decided to try and fight the guilt. I've brought Karl's books with me, and they're staring at me from the shelf on the other side of my room as I write. I'm trying to tell myself that it must be possible to find a happy medium when it comes to my reading habits – that it's not fatal to my degree and my job prospects to allow myself some guilt-free reading time every evening. This might be easier said than done, but I'm determined to give it a go. For Karl and for me, I'm curious to see how it goes.

# Lost and found: The art of translation

BEATRIX ARNOLD

In undergraduate Classics, translation is an unforgiving exercise, demanding almost mathematical precision. I've spent excruciating hours poring over lexicons and grammar books, only to face reproof for neglecting the odd particle. When so many English versions of ancient texts already exist, not to mention digital translation resources, it's easy to question why we bother.

Yet translation should be more than mechanic substitution. It demands that the translator acts as a conduit, conveying the intricacies of emotion, style, and intention, while negotiating the hurdles of linguistic complexity. It involves a degree of compromise, balancing fidelity to the original with creative interpretation. When a piece of literature is transposed into the idiom of a new age, a new culture, each adaptation becomes a radical re-reading, not a straightforward reproduction.

Rather than representing the work as a historical artefact, mute and moribund on the page, the process of translation can shore up unmined meanings. In ancient languages, with a comparatively restricted vocabulary, each word is capable of being expressed in English in multiple ways, giving rise to vastly divergent interpretations. Word choice becomes a declaration of intent. As the translator Emily Wilson points out, the *Odyssey's* opening line, which Fagles translates as "Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns", could equally be rendered as "Tell me about a straying husband", a very different framework for the same Greek words.

Things inevitably slip through the cracks;

wordplay in particular demands more than a literal translation. For instance, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in French translation frequently becomes *L'importance d'être Constant*, replicating the pun by renaming the protagonist, yet losing out on the connotations of deceptiveness. Moreover, there are concepts so tethered to their specific language that they defy straightforward translation. How far the unfamiliar should be domesticated is a consequential choice – is it better to retain culturally specific allusions, or facilitate understanding through parallels or explanations?

English translations of Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Quartet* embed words of dialect, a deliberate choice to ensure that the work remains firmly rooted in its original context, with its particular local colour. The rhythms of each language, which determine much of literature's emotional impact, are likewise impossible to reproduce exactly. Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, for example, is widely regarded as untranslatable, owing to the intricacy of its rhyme scheme, and the unique musicality of the Russian. The best that can be achieved is adaptation: Deborah Smith in her translations of Han Kang – *The Vegetarian* (2015) and *Human Acts* (2016) – attempts to emulate the cadence of the Korean, its repetitions and underspecifications, resulting in a stark prose that enhances the tragedy.

The insistence on preserving the original essentially untampered with is futile; excessive hand-wringing over what is being lost in the process can only stunt creativity. Translation is, in a sense, a work of realignment – nothing

can remain fixed. Since utter fidelity to the original source is impossible, the objective should be to create something that works in one's own language, a discrete piece of art, so that the translator is effectively another writer of the same book. The boundaries of language are always permeable – a good translator is an unscrupulous gerrymanderer.

After all, translation is an inherently malleable concept, and does not necessarily signify replication of the source material. Language is not exclusively about designation, but the meanings hovering between statements, the conveyance of a mood, a perspective, an intention. There is no need, then, for translation to adhere to semantic, generic, or even formal boundaries. In this expansive spirit, Louis and Celia Zukofsky wrote homophonic translations of the poet Catullus, rendering not only the meaning but also the actual sounds of the Latin into English (*miser Catulle* becomes "Miss her,

Catullus?"). Anne Carson went even further in her 'translation' of Catullus' poem 101, an elegy for the death of his brother; Carson's version constitutes a single long sheet of paper folded concertina style into a box entitled *Nox*, an epitaphic reflection on her own brother's passing. How far then can we push the definition of translation? What's to stop any response to a literary work being considered a translation – is Petersen's *Troy* (2004), for example, a translation of the *Iliad* (despite it being a terrible film)?

The politics of translation are similarly complex. To translate a literary work into another language is, in a sense, to appropriate it from its original context for the enjoyment of another set of people. Taken further, a French translation of, say, an Arabic text could be viewed as an implicitly colonial act, while the ubiquity of English translations raises the spectre of global monolingualism. But surely this kind of engagement can be part of a dialogue, not an act of imperialistic plunder?

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

Image credit: Beatrix Arnold for Cherwell.





# From topping charts to ‘The Traitors’: An ode to Cat Burns

## Charlie Bailey reflects on the singer’s rise to success, and her lyrical talent

The hilariously chaotic new season of *The Traitors* made me reflect on the celebrity version, and my personal favourite contestant, singer and songwriter Cat Burns. I remember being excited to see her on the line-up as she’s made my Spotify Wrapped top 10 multiple times now, and I liked the idea that a stint in the castle would enhance her fame.

It was interesting to witness her in a reality TV show given the highly personal nature of her songs. Naturally, everyone interprets her lyrics according to their own experiences, but her songs in particular manage to spell out the way personal relationships affect her, while at the same time aiming for universal relatability. When interviewed, she is candid in explaining that her best music arises from her worst days. It was interesting, therefore, to watch her on *The Traitors* so poker-faced. What I like about Burn’s lyrics is that they are not subtle. They outline typical student and young adult experiences without quite reaching the manic candour of Lily Allen. Rather than cloaking the song’s meaning in flowery language (which other similar pop artists fall prey to, sorry, Taylor Swift) it feels like crystallised thoughts come straight out of her head.

Burn’s fame originated from her track ‘go’, which narrates her rushing over to a guy’s ‘uni hall’ to find out he “f\*cked up on a night out” – it starts blunt and no-nonsense and devolves into a really quite sad section about her concerns about meeting someone new. She has an equally candid song on the same album, ‘people pleaser’ in which she essentially self-therapises about her tendency to form opinions based on what others want to hear. It serves as a kind of wake up call for anyone who acts in the same way, as she is so clear with what that means for her: “When you say something’s

wrong, I just want to make it better.”

A common theme in her music is finding comfort in the things you still have after loss. The songs come across as if she’s trying to tell herself and her listeners that it will be ok. Naturally, this is not unique – songs in general are more likely to deal with pain than joy, and Cat Burn’s ‘indie pop’ genre is crowded with sadder lyrics (look at Olivia Dean’s *The Art of Loving*, for instance). Her music stands out because she pairs raw depictions of her own emotions with straightforward advice, as if she’s reflected on where she faced challenges and wants to share how she overcame them with those in need.

I love the song ‘live more & love more’ – basically an exhortation to do whatever you want, since no one really cares, with the lyrics “if there’s something you want to do, just do it, don’t let your head stop your heart from moving”. It also makes a point about how much we all learn from others: “Maybe speak less and listen more.” As the winner of Keble’s Biggest Yapper award, this is a personal favourite piece of advice.

A more recent dimension to her musical voice has been the embrace of her queer identity. Her most recent album, *How to Be Human*, includes a range of releases reflecting on queerness and grief, choosing to collate songs on the challenge of coming out with those about the passing of her grandfather. Again, the lyric choice is hardly subtle, with one titled ‘GIRLS!’ – I’m sure you can guess its themes. Like her earlier tracks, the songs speak directly to those who need it. This album was released shortly after her *Traitors* experience was televised, meaning her personal experience was given a particularly large platform. Interviewed at the time, Burns mentioned the increased opportunities for queer representation that social media, which she sees as a relatively safe

place for self-expression, provides.

The light-hearted tone of ‘GIRLS!’ is a counterweight to less hopeful tracks like ‘today’, depicting her first attempts to get back to regular life after a period of struggling to leave home. She tackles grief by appreciating the connections that helped her through its initial sharpness, again in a song with the obvious title ‘All This Love’, in her usual stream-of-consciousness style – “been going out more, I’ve been seeing friends more” and “lately I’ve been crying more”. It feels like a much more subtle, refreshing version of Taylor Swift’s ‘I Can Do It With a Broken Heart’.

A great thing about the stories her music tells is they’re intended to make her audience feel seen, and feel good. Interviewed on Jamie Laing’s podcast *Great Company*, she spoke about the messages and shows of support from her recent album from others becoming comfortable with their queerness.

Her music brings a definite sense of community, speaking directly to the listener as a kind of advice figure. So many mini-scenarios that she describes – anxiety at a social event, heartbreak, the difficulty of staying in touch with friends – are without doubt relatable to students.

I think Cat Burns is a great recommendation for this period in life, the university experience, because she doesn’t beat around the bush: her straightforward approach to explaining her emotions is revitalising. Music has long been heralded as a way to process emotions. Without veering into cliché, she reminds us to be kind, to ourselves and others. Among Sabrina Carpenter, Taylor Swift, and other overplayed pop ‘icons’, Cat Burns stands out because of her ability to outline her emotions in real depth. Listen if you like indie pop, if you need a reality check, or if you love *The Traitors*.

## MUSIC

### What’s Oxford listening to?



Izabela at Lincoln recommends  
*The Art of Loving* (2025) by Olivia Dean:  
“A beautiful album, representing the journey of love in such a raw and touching way. I also really like the mix of upbeat and sad songs. My favourites include ‘Man I Need’, and ‘I’ve Seen It.’”



Lilly at Brasenose recommends  
*Love Over Gold* (1982) by Dire Straits:  
“‘Love over Gold’ makes 41 minutes out of five songs. Each one feels like you’re entering a different, rich story, with new details to pick up on each listen. Its wordplay is hidden in moody guitars and sheer speed, but the lyrics are as masterful as the production. Perfect for winter evening walks..”

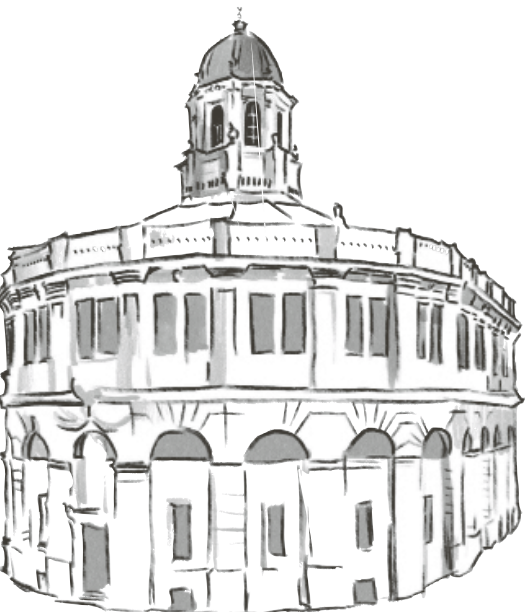
Image credits: ‘The Art of Loving’ and ‘Love Over Gold’ via amazon.com.

## WHAT’S ON

### STAGE

*Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons*  
Burton Taylor Studio  
27th-31st January

*Company*  
The Oxford Playhouse  
28th-31st January



### MUSIC

*Jazz at St John’s*  
Garden Quadrangle Auditorium  
26th January, 7:00pm

### FILM

*Animalia*  
The Ultimate Picture Palace  
26th January

*No Other Choice*  
Phoenix Picturehouse  
29th January

### LITERATURE

*John le Carré talks*  
Weston Library  
30th January, 3:30pm

### ART

*Living with Human Conflict*  
Pembroke JCR Art Collection  
23rd January-7th March

*Story Painters, Picture Writers*  
Kendrew Barn Gallery, St John’s  
20th January-2nd February

## The Source

### Cowstride

One hip thrusts to bone up through  
Inner recesses of muscle, now climax  
And fall, filth-crusted flank sinks and  
Skin sags into bone-hollows, then stretches  
And balloons into a barrel body,  
The flapping veined udder strapped under the chassis,  
Neck now bracing with pace, tendons taught, and  
Up kick the legs, cramping to a grotesque gambol,  
Plates of muscle squirming beneath her leather  
And the buried arrowhead heart heaving  
Its weight of hot blood up to a lolling head:  
Midnight eyes, each  
Mad with a crescent moon of white,  
Stretch their ligaments to escape each other.

Of the ancient golden ideal,  
She is dirtily unaware.

NIAMH DURNIN



## Moving cities, keeping home

*Oxford, London, Yerevan: each city offers a different perspective on the world, but what happens when one is exchanged for another?*

SABA AHMADZADEH  
NOUGHANI

I’ve moved cities enough times to know that leaving is never just about packing boxes. After spending 18 years in London, I found myself applying to universities in a number of different cities, including Oxford. All my London friends were shocked at the thought of anyone willingly leaving the capital, especially with the countless high-ranking universities already at our doorstep. After a year at Oxford, I shocked them again by packing my bags for Yerevan, Armenia, for the first part of my year abroad. Four months later, I am awaiting my visa for Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

For me, the hardest part about moving has never been adapting to somewhere new, but figuring out how to leave the place I was already calling home. When I first arrived at the Lodge in Wadham College, the porter said something along the lines of: “Westgate is like your ‘Westfield’ in London.” That sentence alone made me feel at ease. I realise now that I was searching for pieces of home. I hesitated before cancelling my subscriptions and memberships to clubs, galleries and museums in London. I’d still read through all their event emails, refusing to tell myself that I wouldn’t be able to attend. My face would light up if I ever heard a distinct London accent or when anyone mentioned they were also from London. Without realising it, I was continuously searching for London in Oxford’s smaller, quieter streets.

London doesn’t just have a place in my heart; I’d say it is my heart. With constant changes in the landscape through gentrification, shifting communities and evolving social life, I wouldn’t say I grew up in London, but rather I grew up

with London. There are words, sounds and smells that only a Londoner can understand: a pace of life and a hectic routine that only we are accustomed to.

Every weekend, I forced myself to stay in Oxford, trying to navigate my new city and build a community in a place I would call home for the next four years. Oxford seemed gentler and orderly compared to London and people were often much friendlier. When I spoke to my friends who were still back in London, they complained about the high cost of living and their chaotic daily commutes on the Tube, yet my heart still ached to step in their shoes and experience their university routine, even if just for a day.

But then something changed. After my second term, I returned home for the holidays and, for more than a split second, I truly missed my dorm room. Even though I reminisced as I passed by my old school, watching all the school children leaving to catch the bus, the tube, or to walk home together, just as I once did, and found comfort in London’s multicultural streets, I was still counting the days until I could pack up and move back to Oxford.

I added words and phrases like ‘college mum’, ‘plodge’ and ‘subfusc’ to my vernacular: vocabulary which I now needed to explain to my non-Oxford friends, just as there had once been references only my fellow Londoners could understand. These new words summoned a feeling of deep nostalgia for the place I now was able to call home. I had finally accepted Oxford as my second home, without feeling as though I had to leave London behind.

So when I moved to Armenia, I had to figure out how to leave yet another city behind. At first, moving beyond UK borders didn’t exactly feel exciting or adventurous. Not speaking Armenian

meant I couldn’t effectively communicate with locals, or at times even with my own landlord; I couldn’t read addresses or ingredients, which were usually in Armenian script.

I quickly learned that all fruit and vegetables were organic so expired quickly, and that my usual walking pace was considered ‘rushing’ to Armenians. Neighbours always greeted one another, and social etiquettes and daily rhythms of life differed from anything I had previously known. Except for the fact that, like in Oxford, it was also deemed unacceptable to walk on grass, which took me embarrassingly long to realise.

So I sought comfort in small, familiar things, such as ordering English Breakfast Tea at coffee shops. The sound of rain instantly transported me back, and having classmates from London gave me a sense of belonging – although hearing us say ‘Come off it’ or ‘Are you having a laugh?’ was met with a great deal of confusion by my American classmate. I



experienced similar confusion when the same American classmate said ‘crosswalk’ instead of ‘zebra crossing’; ‘truck’ and ‘trunk’ instead of ‘lorry’ and ‘boot’.

When I look back on my initial days in Oxford and Yerevan, I realise I had not yet experienced these cities beyond their tourist attractions, and most interactions with locals were surface level conversations. Yet as I prepared to leave, I felt as though I was leaving behind a part of me – a part that I wanted to hold on to, even if it was time for me to move on.

If there’s anything I’ve learnt from adapting to different cities and building homes in once-unrecognisable landscapes, it is that our time spent in different cities is not separate chapters to be left behind. Instead, these experiences can be thought of as sedimentary layers. My London layer shaped my Oxford layer, and both influenced my Yerevan layer. In turn, each of them will shape whatever comes next in Dushanbe. There is no need to store cities elsewhere or file them away. Cities are identities that follow us, evolve with us, and take root within us.

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

*Image credit: Serouj Ourishian, CC0 BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

## HOROSCOPES



**Aries**

Banish any Traitors from your life this Hilary.



**Taurus**

Try to make a good first impression in your tutes. Kermit the Frog is a good one.



**Gemini**

Your room is looking a bit bare right now – decorate!



**Cancer**

Don’t let Clubcard dictate your snack choices.



**Leo**

Visit a new library this term. Scrolling is more fun with better ambience.



**Virgo**

“You think, therefore you are” – Descartes.

## The dating bio's obsession with Oxford

MANYA SINGH

As Michaelmas drew to a close, a dramatic conversation about Zohran Mamdani, the new mayor of New York City, finding his partner on a dating app prompted my friend and I to try a dating app for the first time in the UK. It wasn’t that we weren’t familiar with the app and its workings in our home country, but this time we simply wanted to explore the *demography*! It goes without saying that the outcomes were not satisfactory. They are dating apps for a reason, and one cannot really rely on the prospects of finding London’s next mayor just yet.

Still, what began as a light-hearted swipe soon took on the shape of an experiment. The aim was to make it the most non-academic experiment compared to Oxford standards. As we went about playing the left-right game that night – sprawled across our CCR sofas, just two teetotallers checking out people (and not books), half-amused and half-delusional – we soon lost hope and decided to pause. I didn’t find a suitable match, but this delusion did turn into an experiment: that is how I came across the bio’s obsession with Oxford. And this wasn’t just true for dating app bios, but, surprisingly, even social media bios.

In those few lines qualifying their life status, people refused to name their university; just writing “Oxford” was enough. For instance, my friend came across a profile that announced “Graduated from Oxford” while their

LinkedIn quietly named a university in Loughborough. One even went so far as to claim they worked in an MNC in Oxford – perhaps proximity to the University alone was considered good enough. And since Oxford Brookes was considered too plain, just mentioning Oxford gave all the cues. This is the die-hard obsession with Oxford.

“*The obsession with Oxford is often more about belonging than the location*”

As an international graduate fresher this year, I realised that Oxford is known far better as the home of the University of Oxford than as a historic town in its own right: one with a rich landscape, another university sharing a similar name, and a population that extends well beyond academia. These aspects are acknowledged but often only secondarily. The obsession with Oxford is often more about belonging than the location itself.

As a student, I can very well comprehend this obsession but as a writer and researcher, I have to first ask some deeper questions: Why the obsession? What kind of legitimacy or desirability does “Oxford” signal on dating apps or social media? Is this a form of cultural capital being implicitly traded in bios and profiles? It seems we really are living in an age where people

choose to validate their personality based on an academic institution. If I were asked to break down this mentality, what would it imply? That I’m a potential date because I’m officially a product of Oxford, specifically the University of Oxford, and hence I’m more credible than others?

I’m sure this isn’t unique to Oxford. Harvard, Yale, and Cambridge are all similar shorthands for ambition, wit, and success. But Oxford carries additional weight in the UK context, where it conveys not just academic achievement but also social arrival. It is the university of 28 British Prime Ministers, of Stephen Hawking and Malala Yousafzadeh, of *Brideshead Revisited* and *Inspector Morse*. So, when someone writes “Oxford” in their bio, they’re not just stating a fact but invoking an entire mythology. What makes dating apps particularly revealing is their economy of attention. You have seconds to sell value before someone swipes left. In that compressed space, “Oxford” really does extraordinary work.

I’ll admit: I wrestled with this myself. Should I put “Oxford” in my bio? Would it feel like grandstanding, or would omitting it seem like false modesty? In the end, I left it vague. But I realised that when matches discovered I was at Oxford through conversation, the dynamic often shifted. Messages became more frequent, and questions became more intriguing. I hadn’t imagined myself to be more interesting than I had been five minutes earlier, but the institutional halo made me seem so. Half-conceding, I realised the obsession was real.

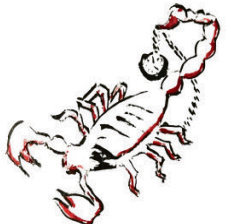


HOROSCOPES



Libra

Avoid exercising this term.  
You'll only injure yourself.



Scorpio

Your next-door neighbour is  
out to get you: fill their room  
with slugs.



Sagittarius

Don't take advice from a  
Cherwell horoscope.



Capricorn

Turn up your radiator for a  
Hot Girl Hilary.



Aquarius

What doesn't kill you makes  
you stronger.



Pisces

Treat yourself to an Easter  
egg (it's never too early).

A love letter to authenticity

*In a world which seeks to profit from our insecurities,  
what does it mean to be truly authentic?*

ABIGAIL CHRISTIE

Mirrors often occupy an uneasy place within the collective consciousness. A reflected replica of this world, not quite false, but not entirely real either. The liminal ambiguity lends itself well to folklore, legends, and myth; regaled tales of wandering eyes and flickering lights. Yet the most unsettling thing about a mirror is perhaps not the murky unknown that slinks in the shadows. It is more the fear that the face we see reflected back at us is, indeed, our own: unaltered, unedited, and unfiltered. Raw and candid – your authentic self.

Having spent the better half of my teenage years obsessively fixating on my appearance, I now feel a stranger to any semblance of authenticity in my twenties. The vanity in my bedroom can certainly attest to this. Resembling an ambitious Victorian apothecary, every crook and crevice is crammed with antidotes to the inevitable. Anti-aging, anti-wrinkle, and anti-frizz; serum for plumper lips, a concoction for brighter eyes, and cream for a smoother complexion. These promises I took as gospel, neatly arranging the tiny bottles in votive style around my mirror in some delirious hope that these offerings would change what I see looking back at me.

“  
*Draining  
your bank to fill  
the pockets of  
another avaricious  
corporation will not  
change your feelings*

But these insecurities bleed, and sharks can smell blood in the water. It doesn't take long for social media algorithms to catch on. Endless pages of influencers preach 'self-care' with a siren-like hypnosis that sucks me in. Each clamouring for your attention through the screen, showcasing the newest, shiniest cosmetic product on the market. All of them brandish their version of the crème de la crème of the industry, a colourful rotation of more than 1000 'must have' products – and you simply must have it. Can you afford the price of beauty? They implicitly ask. No answer is required; their profits will speak for you.

Yet the notion of 'self-care', and all the images of tender softness it conjures, is entirely misleading. A trending buzzword that hides the authenticity it should champion – being content with your appearance doesn't necessarily work for a brand

image. Beauty becomes defined by what sells out first and the buyer's market is saturated with our feelings of inadequacy, broken down and churned out into capitalist fodder. So chasing the consumerist high of the wholly unattainable can only end in disappointment. Inevitably, the only winners in this rat race are the companies that prey and profit off manufactured insecurities. If we're not starving, how will they eat?

“  
*My face, as I see  
it now, is a tapestry  
of all those who love  
me. And if I pull at  
the threads, will the  
whole thing unravel?*

But, the knowledge that we're lambs to the slaughter doesn't really do much for self-confidence, and being aware of capitalist ploys certainly does not heal a festering wound. However, the resentment I felt on behalf of my teenage self towards this breed of influencer has become to feel misplaced. Although complicit in a system that is rigged to exploit insecurity, under the surface, they are perhaps no different to me. We are together stuck in this rut; discontent with our appearance, wishing to look like another. Draining your bank to fill the pockets of another avaricious corporation will not change the feelings that burn inside.

Despite these revelations, my reflection has not changed and my vanity table remains the same, so I will not pretend there is some magic cure-all remedy for this. But a labour of love has begun to take place; to be content with what I see in the mirror, I first have to mend the despair I have felt from within. This kind of metamorphosis is one I can gladly yield to – a transformation I will greet like an old friend.

Now, when I glimpse the crinkle around my Dad's eyes as he laughs, and the curve of my Mum's smile, I suddenly cannot bear the thought of not looking just like them. My face, as I see it now, is a tapestry of all those who love me. And if I pull at the threads, will the whole thing unravel? This uncertainty is enough to sate my curiosity. So, now, when I scrutinise my appearance in the mirror, I do not just see my own reflection staring back. I see the laugh lines that have formed from years of joking with my sister, I see the creases on my forehead from a lifetime of pulling faces with my parents, and, above all, I see myself.

CHERWELL-FED

Faith in humanity restored:  
Taste Tibet, reviewed



NANCY ROBSON

It might have something to do with the freezing January rain outside, but when I arrive at Taste Tibet in East Oxford it seems a lot like paradise. The décor is stripped-back but welcoming, with several long benches designed for communal eating. Julie Kleeman, who, alongside her husband, is the lifeblood of the restaurant, welcomes me in from the rain and suggests we sit down with a cup of chai. This is precisely what the drenched-to-the-skin, cold-to-the-bone me needs, but it is also lovely in its own right, warmly spiced without being overly sweet.

The restaurant, Julie tells me, began over a decade ago as a market stall in Gloucester Green, where her husband – who grew up in the mountains of Tibet – would cook the food of his childhood. At the same time, they organised takeaways out of their own kitchen, eventually opening this restaurant in the middle of a COVID lockdown. During the summer months they still take their food stall to festivals, partly – Julie explains – so that they can share the desperately underrepresented wonders of Tibetan culture and cuisine with a larger audience.

Time and again during our talk she returns to the idea of community, which is central to the restaurant's ethos and practices. Julie seems genuinely pleased to see everyone who walks in, many of whom are regulars. There are those who linger over a meal, but also those who have braved the biblical storm outside to pick up a takeaway, or one of the meals from the freezer. The latter of these is a revelation to me. Julie explains how they freeze all of their leftovers, meaning that the restaurant creates nearly no food

waste and that it is possible to try their food at an even more affordable price. If you've never had Tibetan food before, it is built around hearty, comforting dishes or, as Julie phrases it, food to warm your hands and your stomach. I begin with the dal, which is everything a dal should be – rich, almost creamy, with a subtle complexity of flavour. The two chicken curries I try are just as delicious, although my personal favourite is the wonderfully fresh sesame chicken. Having resigned myself to the wilted, soulless greens served in Hall, the vegetable dishes bring me the most surprising joy. This is how broccoli was born to be served.

Menu

Meat Feast for one (two dishes + dal + rice + momo): £17  
Stir-fried broccoli with garlic: £2.50  
Tibetan chai: £3.50  
Vegan momo: £2.50

*Taste Tibet, 109 Magdalen Road,  
OX4 1RQ*

The real stars of the meal, however, are the momos, the generously sized dumplings which seem to be Tibet's unofficial national dish. I sample both varieties. The beef feels like proper mountain fare – rich and wholesome enough to help you weather a snowstorm – but it is the 'Heavenly Vegan' momos that live up to their name. I can't exactly describe the flavour, because it tasted like nothing I'd ever eaten before, but I can only urge you with every fibre of my being to try them yourself. When I reluctantly leave, it is still pouring with rain outside, but my faith in humanity has certainly been restored.

*Image credit: Paul Gregory,  
with permission.*

AGONY  
AUNT

Help! I keep running into my ex-situationship everywhere and it's starting to make me think I should start things back up with her. I can't stop thinking about her and have no clue what to do.

*Sincerely,  
Situationship Crashout*

*Dear Situationship Crashout,*

Believe it or not, there is such a thing as right person, right time, and a situationship rarely meets either of those requirements. By nature, it's a slippery deal which rarely ends well for either party involved. I'm inclined to shake you by the shoulders and tell you to leave your situationship in the past, where it belongs. But alas, we all know that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. Ultimately, the decision is yours as to whether you end up back in the momentary throes of delightful delusion, only to end up with a bad feeling in your stomach; or whether you call it quits now, once and for all. All I'll say is that this Agony Aunt has never regretted going no contact. What's more, running into her all the time could be fate's way of testing you. Are you ready to start afresh?

Lots of love,  
Agony Aunt



# Not on the tour: An unconventional journey through Oxford

*Elouise Wills takes us on a tour beyond the RadCam and High Street, tracing the Oxford shaped by her memories*

I remember being taken on a tour of Oxford as part of my post-offer visit day early in 2023. A first-year Classics student (who coincidentally was assigned as my college parent a few months later) took us through Gloucester Green, past Waterstones and Blackwells, round the RadCam, and down High Street to look out over the river Cherwell from Magdalen Bridge. My 18 year-old self was enthralled by the beauty and the sheer size of the buildings, and all I could think to ask my tour guide was how he managed to not get lost, what it was like to live in Oxford, and where I could borrow my course books. With all the uncertain knowledge of someone in their second term, he assured me that I would be just fine. He told me about the infamous ‘Tescalator’, the importance of meal deals, his favourite libraries, and the best pubs near our college. He gave me an insight into what lies beyond the normal Oxford tour organised by colleges and diluted down into historical anecdotes, notable alumni, and impressive architecture.

“*My 18-year-old self was enthralled by the beauty and the sheer size of the buildings*

Yet as I drafted this article, I realised that all tours are fundamentally flawed. However detailed and student-focused they may be, tours are something you experience before you know a place. They are therefore utterly incapable of expressing what it is like to love and to leave Oxford. So, as I prepare to face a fourth, far quieter year, I have decided to write my Oxford exploration as a love letter to the places which have been shaped by my favourite people.

There is no better place to start than by honouring the bond of college spouses, and therefore the first stop on our ‘Not on the tour’ tour shall be the OURFC audience stands. I firmly believe that women’s rugby at Oxford (and in general) is chronically under-watched – and I’m not just saying this as a self-proclaimed “ultimate college WAG”. Our women’s Blues team are incredibly talented, and although I have managed to go over two years without remembering a

single rule, I enjoy attempting to re-learn them each term, huddled up in those stands every other week. There is nothing quite like screaming at the top of your lungs and hearing the entire crowd gasp as your wife tackles player after player until the game is called and she rushes off, covered in mud and blood, to hug her adoring fans (myself and our flatmates).

“*Tours are therefore utterly incapable of expressing what it is like to love and to leave Oxford*

With the mention of my wonderful flatmates, let us now be whisked off to the other side of town, deep into the heart of Jericho. It has been our tradition since first-year Hilary to start each term with a trip to The Gardeners Arms, with its incredibly funny barmen, gorgeous fairylights, outdoor heating, and the best Baileys hot chocolates in the world. It’s the perfect place to play cards, drink, yap, and brace yourself for incoming collections and the chaos of our eight-week terms. In truth, I cannot imagine my life in Oxford without the buzz of conversation and holiday catch-ups in that outdoor seating area, or without the people who made it feel so magical in the first place.

In Trinity of my first year, I learnt the importance of expanding my Oxford experience. Although I had taken part in several extracurriculars before, it wasn’t until my third production with the Jesus College Shakespeare Project that I truly felt at home beyond Worcester. Therefore, the third stop on our tour is the Habbakuk Room at Jesus College. Exceedingly hot and with a few odd stains, it is far from being a must-see spot. And yet, I know it will be one of the places I miss most. To me, it represents the importance of finding a hobby you love, and like-minded people who make Oxford’s everyday pressures feel manageable.

One particular theatre friend of mine also added greatly to my third-year experience, thanks to our weekly walks around Port Meadow. This will likely be a spot that most students already consider fundamental to a good tour, but I still believe it



deserves a mention here, along with its highlights – namely The Perch and Godstow Abbey. Through our weekly walks last term, I was able to escape the bustling city and discuss with an equally scared third year what life might be like after Oxford. Port Meadow is more than a pretty field, and yet this was not something I could sense when I walked around it obsessively in my first term.

Inevitably, though, a large percentage of my Oxford memories are linked to studying, and so stops six and seven on our tour are the two places which have continuously reminded me that I do in fact enjoy my degree: the alcoves in the Art, Archaeology and Ancient World library, and the handling room on the top floor of the Classics faculty. It has been incredibly important to me both to find a study spot that I actually enjoy being in (and can drag friends along to) and to find fun, unusual ways to engage with my degree

which feel more interactive and exciting than every-day reading and essay-writing. I highly recommend all Classics students to enquire about attending a handling session, and for students of other subjects, I would just advise that you ask around and find new ways to engage. Indeed, no essay has ever stood out to me quite as much as the friends I studied with, or the physical ways I have been able to interact with the ancient world.

With five terms left to go, it feels as though this send off is slightly premature, and yet this sense of liminality is inevitable for those of us who stick around long enough to see friends move on. Though this cannot yet be a full goodbye, I have at least aimed through this ‘Not on the tour’ tour to bid a tentative farewell to the specific way I have experienced Oxford thus far.

*Image credit: William Turner, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons.*

OXFORD

TINY LOVE STORIES

I had always been a bookshop lover, and I still wonder if he sensed that before I even said it out loud. Perhaps it was the way my pace slowed near shop windows, or how my eyes lingered on spines through glass. One evening, he suggested a walk. We didn’t go far. We went to a bookshop – my first bookshop in Oxford, Blackwell’s. Bookshops are magical spaces for me, but then they become more so when your favourite person walks you through them. I still wonder if it were the shelves that cast their love spell on us; after all, he is a Potterhead, and I, a Janeite.

May, St. Antony’s College

CHERPSE.

Oxford’s blind dating

An afternoon at Opera Café. The conversation flowed – but was it enough to send sparks flying?

Miss IT Girl

**First impressions?**  
He was very friendly and thankfully took the lead a bit in the conversation. At the beginning of the date he came and rescued me when I was looking a bit lost outside the cafe, otherwise I would’ve been stood there for a while!

**Did it meet your expectations?**  
I had never been on a blind date before and was prepared for the worst, so it very much exceeded them!

**What was the highlight?**  
The chat flowed well and there weren’t any particularly awkward moments. The cafe that *Cherwell* picked out for us was nice and quiet, so there was a calm atmosphere.

**What was the most embarrassing moment?**  
I was very nervous at the beginning and stumbled over my words a few times, but thankfully that settled down after a while.

**Describe the date in three words:**  
Chill, funny, amiable.

**Is there a second date on the cards?**  
Maybe? We had a good chat but I’m not sure if there was a connection.

Mr Juice Enthusiast

**First impressions?**  
We were meant to meet outside the cafe but, alas, I was already inside, which must have confused her.

**Did it meet your expectations?**  
Unfortunately not. She was really very sweet, but I found that we didn’t have any common interests or experiences.

**What was the highlight?**  
She was quite passionate about Computer Science and Philosophy, and I learnt several things about those subjects which I hadn’t known before.

**What was the most embarrassing moment?**  
When one of us didn’t know the dates of the First World War.

**Describe the date in three words:**  
Tea, carrot juice.

**Is there a second date on the cards?**  
It was a pleasant 40 minutes, but I think this is an encounter which, like *The Godfather Part II*, requires no follow-up.



# SPORT

## Will running a half-marathon fix you? *Sophi Hayes-Hoyle dissects the consumerism underlying the rise of running*

SOPHI HAYES-HOYLE

I’ve made my New Year’s resolution”, says my friend Millie. “You’re going to love this.” “Go on then”, her dad replies, raising an eyebrow. “I’m going to run a half-marathon in 2026.”

He clears his throat. “Oh really?” He pauses. “Maybe you should tackle some lighter commitments first, love... like, clearing out your inbox?”

The running boom. Park Run, protein bars, carbon plates, Garmins, gels. A craze we’ve all seen: “Run a 5k with me!” or “Follow me on my running journey!”. Matching sets, 6am run clubs, and 9pm bedtimes. Besides a ‘For You’ page full of neon clad run-fluencers finishing their 5ks in bohemian coffee shops, though, it feels like there is something deeper to unearth behind this craze – or, dare I say, zeitgeist. Running has undergone a paradigm shift; no longer a punishment in PE class or your parents’ Sunday morning escape, running is a lifestyle: a personal brand.

As far as marketing feats go, then, I want to ask how sustainable this lifestyle truly is. Are we all suddenly enjoying running? The voices of my friends bemoaning the umpteenth time I’ve begged them to join me on an early Sunday morning run resound. Or are we buying into a brand – worse, an unattainable self-image – something we want to be? Surely there is more to this than a change of heart: we’re reaching for something to structure our lives. To solve all our problems.

Unfortunately, mapping out your route on Strava is probably not going to dissolve the listlessness that sits in your stomach on your weekly Tesco shop. Running is no quick fix. Yet it is marketed to us lately like a full coverage concealer – not for your under-eyes, but for your life.

So: you’ve started running. You wonder how far that loop around the block is. You innocently



download that app... what’s it called? Strava. You’re in. Collecting trophies, being crowned a local legend on every corner. But wait, stop! You’ve fallen into the stats trap. The subscription conscription. The kudos compulsion. Before you know it, you’re running up and down your street trying to turn your total distance into a whole number – less of a local legend than the local lunatic.

I did it too. Most runners have been there. And I’ll recruit you now to the movement against it. Anti-stats, anti-watch runners know where it’s at. With sky-rocketing numbers picking up the hobby, it feels all the more important that what we consume online – and every part of the running culture that surrounds us – puts us on the right track. Whilst running can work wonders for your physical and mental health, create a sense of community as you plod around suburbs, and forge new friendships, there are also so many ways for a simple sport to become a product for consumption. What has been a sport that springs you from your desk into the middle of the woods

on a random weekday now spams the very screens we’re running away from. I’m no scientist, but I’d rather trigger that flight or fight mode as I race the imminent sunset than through another Instagram reel.

Not only are more people running than ever before; more people are entering races. The number of entries for the 2025 London Marathon reached a record-breaking high of 840, 318 that has already been shattered by those for the impending 2026 London Marathon: 1,133,813 people from the UK and across the globe applied in the public ballot for

“  
*Running is a lifestyle: a personal brand*

an entry to this year’s edition.

Furthermore, the average marathon time has increased in recent years, meaning that, on the whole, runners are getting slower – or rather that more and more recreational runners are choosing to take up the challenge of entering official races. Calling yourself a runner no longer means running for a university or being part of an official club, but simply lacing up your shoes and getting out the door.

More people are running. But why? And what kind of running culture is this creating?

Perhaps the answer is quite simple: running is an accessible sport. It’s a cheap, flexible hobby requiring no membership, excessive equipment, or particular terrain. Running is free – and in this economy, priceless. Anyone can be a runner. All you need are some trainers and a dream.

When the neon trainers fade, will running turn out to be something people are picking up, only to put down again?

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

Image credits: Martin Vorel, CC0 via Libreshot (top); Dan Huddleston, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons (left).



## UPCOMING

### Ice Hockey

Women’s Blues vs Spitfires B  
Saturday 24th January  
Oxford Ice Rink  
Captains: Mira-Rose Kingsbury  
Lee and Julia Edgar

### Dancesport

Men’s Blues vs Rams RFC  
Saturday 24th January  
Birmingham  
President: James Moore

### Rugby

Women’s Blues vs Brunel 2s  
Wednesday 11th February  
Iffley Road Sports Centre  
Captain: Chloe-Marie Hawley

## MATCH OF THE WEEK

OURFC hold their own down under

OURFC headed to Australia for a nineteen-day tour across Sydney, Newcastle, and Canberra that concluded last Tuesday, starting with opposed training against the Aussie Sevens at Moore Park and a match against the University of Newcastle on 5th and 6th January. The No. 2 Stadium in Newcastle saw a commendable display, clearly enhanced by an invaluable session with the Sevens professionals, even if the end result was a narrow loss. The Blues followed up with a historic match against Sydney University at the Woollahra Oval.

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Corpus Christi cricketer Amogh Karpe is awarded a First Grade Cap

Over the vac, second-year undergraduate Amogh Karpe was presented with First Grade Cap No.701 in the Queensland Premier Cricket Competition, the top level of competition played in Queensland. Though representing South Brisbane District Cricket Club and Hamstead Cricket Club, the Blues cricketer has brought recognition for Oxford’s Blues Performance Scheme and will continue to bring success home for Oxford in this year’s cricket season.

## OUTSIDE OXFORD

Aryna Sabalenka loses the Battle of the Sexes – and sets women’s sports back in the process

The ‘Battle of the Sexes’ between Nick Kyrgios and Aryna Sabalenka sought to evoke the memory of Billie Jean King’s victory in the 1973 match of the same name against Bobby Riggs. The women’s number 1 against the men’s no. 673 played in a flat atmosphere despite all the attempts to manufacture hype, with Kyrgios’ victory demonstrating the dearth of creativity in sports media.

## BUCS BLUES

Oxford Women’s Rugby Blues make valiant effort to conquer Brunel – but fall short

Last Wednesday saw a massive effort from Oxford Women’s Rugby Blues in their match against Brunel University London. The team started strong with the assurance of a successful preseason behind them; unfortunately, a formidable performance from Brunel placed the team under pressure. Nevertheless, the OUWRFC Blues have shown just how much work they’ve been putting in over the vac; despite facing a loss of 14-29 against tough opposition, their score demonstrates a huge improvement compared to their previous match against Brunel with a loss of 0-95. Get them next time!

*Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?*

Email [sportcherwell@gmail.com](mailto:sportcherwell@gmail.com) to write up a match report



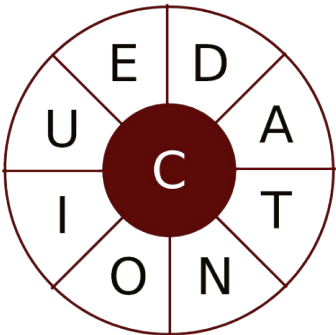
Puzzles

Skippy Synonyms by JADEN LEE

Each of the below is a “kangaroo word” – it contains the letters, in order, of a synonym of itself. For example, “evacuate” contains “vacate” and “deception” contains “con”. The letters filled in are those **not** part of the inner synonym (called the “joey”). Find the joeys that, when the letters are filled into the gaps in order, form their kangaroos – then look at the first letter of each word to reveal a thematic period in which you might see kangaroos!

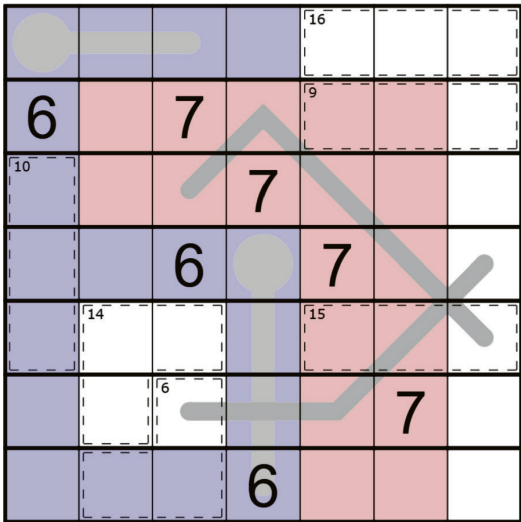
\_\_\_ I G H T L \_\_\_  
\_\_\_ O P \_\_\_ T I O N \_\_\_  
\_\_\_ U N \_\_\_ H \_\_\_  
I \_\_\_ A T \_\_\_ D  
\_\_\_ O \_\_\_ I \_\_\_ H \_\_\_  
\_\_\_ G \_\_\_ I C  
\_\_\_ B U N \_\_\_  
I M \_\_\_ T \_\_\_  
\_\_\_ A N \_\_\_ U \_\_\_ R \_\_\_  
E N \_\_\_ W \_\_\_ N \_\_\_

WordWheel by NAT ELDER



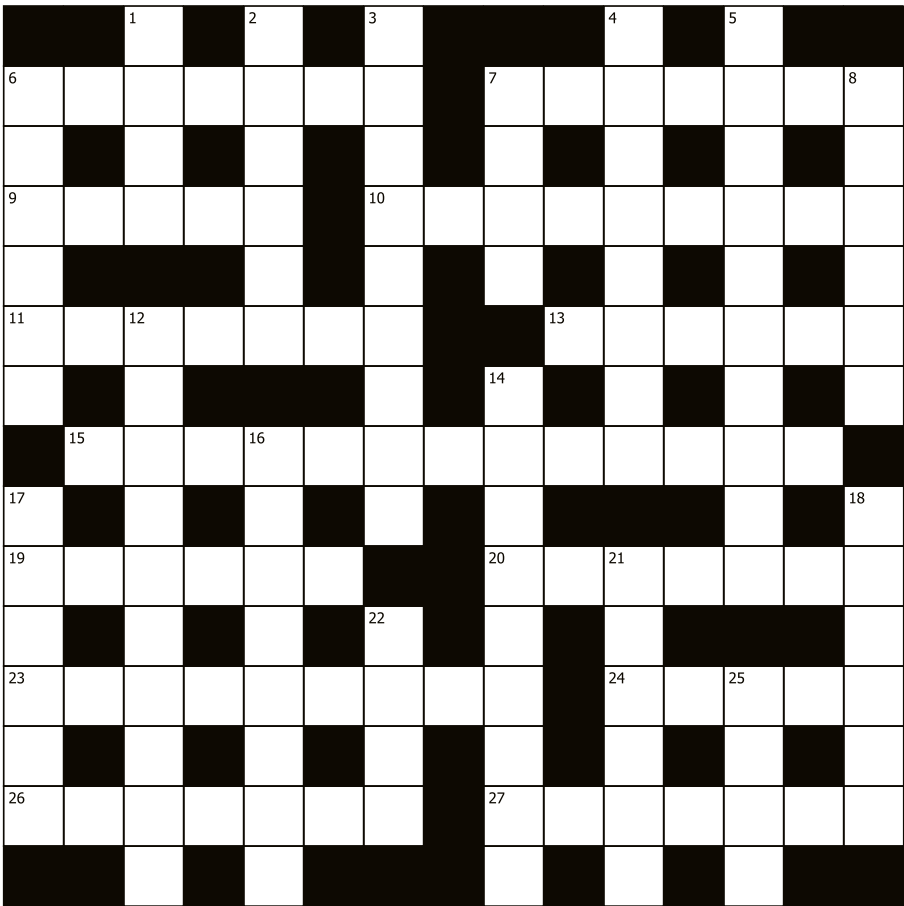
How many words of at least four letters can you make from this wheel? You may only use each letter once, and every word must contain the central letter.  
20: Good; 35: Great; 55: Excellent!

At Sixes and Sevens by JADEN LEE



A 7x7 Sudoku, with the following rules:  
Numbers in the blue “6” add up to 67, while numbers in the red “7” add up to 76.  
Within a cage, there are no repeat numbers and the digits sum to the value in the top-left corner.  
Digits must strictly increase along thermometers from the bulb.  
Digits along thermometers without bulbs must form a palindrome.

Cryptic Crossword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS Difficulty: 3/5



ACROSS  
6) Drunkenly nags to bring back gas in alcoholic drink (7)  
7) Point to using lubrication for defiling (7)  
9) In company of Sam on George’s bits (5)  
10) Euphoric feeling with unfinished tablet where the fellows are (4, 5)  
11) Copper, if force is inept (7)  
13) Flairs for murder in ship (6)  
15) Disguise “eek” - panic around ninth annoyance (4, 2, 3, 4)  
19) Sacrifice first lamb, shepherded and strolled (6)  
20) Large fleet to assemble around a flyer (7)  
23) Shade for regal sporting achievement (5, 4)  
24) Laddish untimed match ends with nothing (5)  
26) Empty day ends bad for the bloodline (7)  
27) Good and simple baffled look (7)

DOWN  
1) Revoke a French party (4)  
2) Sad cigarette talent is stuck-up (6)  
3) Deviant raging round the meeting (9)  
4) Lowest possible wager put in the middle was incorrect (8)  
5) Fiendish circus prop cut short by setter, Callum (10)  
6) Some eagles had owlish silhouette (6)  
7) Legend, as recalled by odd gran (4)  
8) Slimy gamer banks on simplest mode (6)  
12) Exuberant endless fire by male colonial creature (10)  
14) Coin-pinching alley inhabitants are a struggle (9)  
16) Unnecessary to pester central USSR (8)  
17) Holy crusades ignore US interference (6)  
18) Lackey goes to hell (6)  
21) Regularly carry my print sweater (6)  
22) Three central characters leave play-boy, as a tactic (4)  
25) Hat and Eastern cloak (4)

Week 0 Answers:

eldroW: OASIS / CREAM / CREED / GEESE / QUEEN / SUEDE

Cryptic: Across: PACT, SWEETHEART, NEITHER, MUSICAL, NEWSPEAK, AGAVE, FIGURE OF SPEECH, INDECISIVENESS, EERIE, WISTERIA, SPARROW, AT A LOSS, WEAK WILLED, MEAN; Down: PENKNIFE, CHINWAG, WORKAHOLIC, ELMS, HOSTAGE, ARCHAIC, TALKER, HYPER, ASSIMILATE, ASSASSIN, NIRVANA, EYEBROW, EXTRA, EARLOBE, SEESAW, AWOL.