

# Cherwell

Oxford's oldest independent newspaper, est. 1920

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## 15 minutes of fame: The legacy of Oxford's protest

Eden Smith in FEATURES – PAGE 8-9



## "15 MIN CITY" IS A DYSTOPIAN HELL



## Neil Kinnock: 'The power of cooperation is slow but relentless'

Hattie Simpson in PROFILES – PAGES 12-13

## Vice-Chancellor's pay package increased to £666,000, among highest in Russell Group



- Professor Irene Tracey receives 2.5% increase in base salary
- Included £188,000 for accommodation
- £51,000 in lieu of pension contributions

### GASPARD ROUFFIN

The University of Oxford's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Irene Tracey, received a total pay package of £666,000 last year, the University's latest accounts reveal. This represents a 2.5% increase in her base salary, placing her as one of the highest paid Vice-Chancellors across Russell Group universities.

Tracey's pay package also included £188,000 for accommodation, and £51,000 in lieu of pension contributions. Until the beginning of this year, the Vice-Chancellor has been residing in accommodation provided by the University valued at £3.5 million, and therefore was not paying rent.

Cherwell understands that the Vice-Chancellor is required to reside in a property "appropriate for undertaking

University duties", but that she decided to purchase her own property upon taking the role. She has been living in temporary University-owned accommodation since accepting the role, but is moving into her new property in this month.

The University told Cherwell: "The Vice-Chancellor's total remuneration for 2024/25 includes an unusually high payment of £91,460, as part reimbursement for tax liabilities." It said the charge arose while Tracey was living in temporary accommodation, which constituted a taxable benefit, including a £49,762 payment relating to the previous financial year which will not apply after January 2026.

The £666,000 total package makes Tracey one of the highest paid Vice-Chancellors in the country. Her Cambridge counterpart, who was previously the highest paid in the Russell Group, received £507,000 in 2025, while the Vice-Chancellor of LSE was paid £530,000.

Only the Dean of London Business School, which is not part of the Russell Group, received a bigger package of £707,000. Many Vice-Chancellors across the country also received exceptional bonuses, ranging between £5,000 and £50,000.

Continued on pg. 2

## The opaque charity funding new St Anne's scholarship

### CHERWELL INVESTIGATIONS

Cherwell has conducted an investigation into the charity which jointly administers the Tikvah scholarship with St Anne's College. The income of the charity, Leg-Up Charity for Kids (LUCK), dwarfs its expenditure. Cherwell can also reveal that there is no evidence that St Anne's was involved in the alumnae fundraising process, despite claims by the College to the contrary. St Anne's College recently launched the

Tikvah scholarships, meaning "hope" in Hebrew, in order to "support Jewish and Israeli students in Oxford", and to foster "greater understanding between people of different faiths and cultures".

The Tikvah scholarships were announced last August and beginning in the 2025/26 academic year. St Anne's told Cherwell that "four... students have been awarded" scholarships this year, each receiving £5,000 for the academic year. The College states that they "are designed to support Jewish and/or Israeli (of any or no faith) undergraduates". It also requires the candidates to write a personal statement which would "demonstrate a clear plan to give back to Jewish or Israeli communities".

### Opaque funding

Very little information is publicly available about the charity which provides for the scholarships.

Continued on pg. 5

## Oxford University Hospitals to pilot AI assistant for cancer care

### LUCY POLLOCK

care without delay". TrustedMDT aims to "reduce 'cognitive load', improve documentation quality, and free clinicians to focus on the nuanced, high-value discussions that require human judgment".

It is a hierarchical multi-agent system: the first agent is the "electric health record (EHR) analysis agent", which analyses a patient's health records to determine their status in their cancer journey. The second is the "tumor, lymph nodes, metastases (TNM) staging agent" which provides automated tumour staging using established international standards. The third and final agent is the "guideline-driven treatment planning agent", which delivers treatment plans that are holistic, personalised, and

grounded in current clinical guidelines.

The AI system's integration within Microsoft Teams enables TrustedMDT to be brought into the existing clinical workflow relatively easily. TrustedMDT is set apart by its agentic architecture, strict clinical grounding, and commitment to clinical evidence. Clinical decision-making is treated as a structured engineering problem rather than a generation task. Sub-agents are used in order to allow incorrect outputs to be tracked to their source more easily, making the AI system easier to audit.

TrustedMDT is currently in an evaluative phase, but is being piloted across hospitals in Oxford. The pilot study will be supported by OUH Resident doctors, Dr Sajjan Patel and

Continued on pg. 3

## WHAT'S INSIDE?

Livin' la vida Lidl: the case for a discount supermarket

OPINION – PAGE 6

Cherwell's Freedom of Information review

FEATURES – PAGE 10

How a visual impairment changed the way I see art

CULTURE – PAGE 16

Going analogue: exploring the aesthetic of curation

LIFESTYLE – PAGE 20



# Vice-Chancellor’s pay package increased to £666,000

Continued from Page 1

Jo Grady, general secretary of the University and College Union, told *The Times Higher Education*: “Vice-Chancellor salaries are already eye-wateringly high; this Christmas they should do the charitable thing and donate their bonuses to the food banks that will be supporting far too many students.”

At the University of Oxford, eight other senior figures were paid £300,000 or more last year – over £655,000 for the highest paid. In total, 470 employees were on annual salaries of £100,000 or more, including 113 clinical staff.

When taking up the post in January 2023, Tracey declined a proposed 8.4% increase in her base salary “in light of the financial situation”, a University spokesperson told *Cherwell*. According to the University, before this 2.5% raise, “the base salary for the role had not increased since 2009”.

The pay of the Vice-Chancellor and of other senior University figures is decided by the Senior

Remuneration Committee, which includes external members and makes recommendations regarding salaries every two years. The University emphasised to *Cherwell* that Tracey “does not participate in any Council discussion regarding her own remuneration”.

A University spokesperson emphasised to *Cherwell* that “in leading the world’s highest-ranked university, the role of the Oxford Vice-Chancellor is complex, demanding and multi-faceted”, and that the increase in her pay package was granted “in light of these responsibilities and taking into account the current Vice-Chancellor’s performance and experience, as well as the market rate in UK universities for jobs of comparable scale”. The spokesperson added that “the Vice-Chancellor this year [2025] also received the 2.5% national pay award to all University staff”.

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

## Five University Members included in the New Years Honours List



### MAYA HEUER-EVANS

Five members of Oxford University, including Chancellor William Hague, have been included in the 2026 King’s New Year Honours List. Recipients, chosen for extraordinary public service or achievement, were awarded honours by King Charles III. Nominations were made by the Prime Minister, senior government officials, and the general public.

Lord William Hague has been appointed a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (CVO), reserved for those who have performed exceptional service for the royal family. Hague worked as Chairman for The Royal Foundation, which is responsible for the non-profit work of Prince William and Princess Kate, from 2020 until he was elected Chancellor in 2024.

Tamsin Mather, a Professor of Earth Sciences, has been awarded an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in recognition of her contributions to Volcanology and the Promotion of Science. She told *Cherwell*: “I opened the envelope in our kitchen, having just returned from a work trip, while we were all trying to sort supper, and was rendered speechless mid-sentence!”

“Rigorous evidence-based thinking has never been more important, and I hope I can continue to champion science education and understanding for many years to come.”

A fellow Professor of Earth Sciences, Gideon Mark Henderson, has been appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to Science. He was Chief Scientific Adviser to the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs from 2019 to 2025.

Henderson told *Cherwell*: “The award

of a King’s Honour reassures that scientific advice – based on my own research but much more commonly on that of many other brilliant environmental scientists – is recognised and valued in government.

“This is motivation to climate and environmental scientists whose work can help inform society about the dangers of, and solutions to, the triple challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.”

Nigel Clifford, current Rector of Lincoln College, has also been awarded a CBE for services to Geography and Geospatial Data Services. He previously served as Chief Executive Officer of Ordnance Survey from 2015 to 2018, and as Deputy Chairman of the UK’s first Geospatial Commission from 2018 to 2023.

Clifford told *Cherwell*: “It is lovely to see that the value of Geography is being recognised through this honour...The UK is a pioneer in the use of geospatial data, and I have been fortunate to work with very talented colleagues in several organisations to improve the quality and availability of location information.”

Nicholas Day, Professor of Tropical Medicine at the Nuffield Department of Medicine, has been appointed a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, awarded to those who have served a foreign or Commonwealth nation. Day’s honour follows his work with the Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit (MORU), which aims to combat the infectious diseases, such as malaria, affecting rural communities in Asia and Africa.

Nicholas Day and William Hague have been approached for comment.

Image credit: Chatham House, CC=BY-2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

# University appoints Professor Mark E. Smith as new Pro-Vice-Chancellor

MERCEDES HAAS

The University of Oxford has confirmed that Professor Mark E. Smith will become its next Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources). Professor Smith will step down as President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton this May to take up the post in Oxford.

With a research career spanning more than 380 publications, he is widely regarded for his contributions to nuclear magnetic resonance and materials physics. Professor Smith has held senior leadership roles at Warwick, Lancaster, and Southampton. Currently, he chairs Advance HE’s Board, a UK-based, member-led charity focused on higher education globally, and serves on Research England’s Council.

A University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The primary responsibilities of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Planning and Resources) relate to providing leadership across the University in matters relating to planning, resource allocation, and the development of the University’s estate and its capital programme.”

The post involves guiding the Council and the Vice-Chancellor, taking charge of key committees that oversee the University’s planning, finances, and estate, and steering the Physical Estate element of Oxford’s forthcoming Strategic Plan. The position also requires close collaboration with the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Development Officer.

Regarding his appointment, Professor Smith told *Cherwell*: “It is a great honour to be able to play such a significant role at the heart of a great university, working as part of the Vice-Chancellor’s team. I am particularly drawn to the opportunity to help ensure that our resources are aligned and used to achieve the University’s strategic aims. The experience and perspective I can bring from the three universities where I have been a senior leader will, I hope, help me be effective in this role.”

Oxford’s Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey told *Cherwell*: “His years of outstanding leadership in the Higher Education sector, alongside his strategic insight and collaborative approach will be vital

as we strengthen the University’s planning, resource allocation and estate development at this important moment in our evolution. Mark will play a key role in delivering our next Strategic Plan, ensuring that Oxford’s physical estate and financial sustainability continue to support our academic mission for generations to come. I look forward to working with him as we shape an Oxford that honours its heritage while confidently embracing its future.”

Professor Smith will succeed Dr David Prout, who has served as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources) since 2017. Dr Prout played a key role in shaping Oxford’s long-term direction, taking responsibility for the University’s overall planning framework and the distribution of funds across divisions and departments, which together represent more than £1.3 billion a year. His portfolio also included major building and refurbishment projects, from new teaching and research spaces to upgrades to existing facilities, as well as “plans for University’s libraries and museums, and for the administrative service”.

# Farmers block traffic outside Exam Schools to protest minister’s visit

ARINA MAKARINA, GASPARD ROUFFIN, and STANLEY SMITH

Farmers staged a protest action on the High street using tractors on Thursday 8th January. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs secretary Emma Reynolds was giving a speech at the Oxford Farming Conference, hosted in the Examination Schools.

Farmers have carried out numerous demonstrations using tractors across the UK to protest the government’s decision to apply inheritance tax to farms and agricultural businesses, announced in the October 2024 budget. One of the protesting farmers told *Cherwell*: “It’s an egregious tax. When someone dies, they then put the family through the suffering of finding the tax set... on their farmland, which is our shop floor at the end of the day.”

“The government have declared war on the countryside, whether it’s to do with our countryside pursuits or... with food production.”

Speaking about his personal

experience, the farmer told *Cherwell*: “I have two sons who want to carry on my farming legacy...It’s currently very difficult for them to take over my farmland.”

Speaking to the press after her speech at the conference, Reynolds stated she had “no idea” what message the farmers were trying to get across, and criticised the use of the tractor horns during the demonstration.

At the conference, Reynolds announced the set up of a Farming and Food Partnership Board. She emphasised that “farmers will have a seat at the table when policy is developed”.

Extinction Rebellion (XR) also staged a protest outside of the Examination Schools. A demonstrator told *Cherwell*: “We believe that big farming is extremely deleterious to nature and to social life”, citing methane emissions and the negative impacts of farming techniques on species of wildlife. She added that “the themes of this conference are completely misguided and ignore

what the real problems in farming are”.

The Extinction Rebellion protestors laid cardboard tombstones outside of the conference dedicated to wildlife species purportedly adversely affected by farming. In a similar protest, the farmers placed a coffin outside of the High Street entrance to the Examination Schools with “R.I.P British Agriculture” written on it.

Following criticism from rural business activists, the government altered the plans to raise the tax relief threshold from £1 million to £2.5 million.

Farmers previously staged a protest in Oxford over the government’s inheritance tax policy in September 2025.

Thames Valley Police (TVP) blocked access to Merton street during the demonstration. A TVP spokesperson told *Cherwell* that they were aware of “an ongoing protest in Oxford” and had “officers in attendance”.

Image Credit: Gaspard Rouffin for Cherwell.





# Oxford University Hospitals to pilot AI assistant for cancer care

Continued from Page 1

Dr Jaya Sharma, who will provide expertise during the clinical integration stage. DPhil candidate Edward Phillips assisted in the development of the third agent in the AI system.

Its pilot study across OUH is planned to proceed in two stages. Phase one involves anonymous or synthetic cancer cases, which will benchmark TrustedMDT’s reasoning against consensus decisions from expert clinicians, agreed via a standard MDT meeting. Phase two will introduce a “shadow mode” pilot within simulated MDT meetings which will use retrospective data. This will be done to evaluate performance and usability without risk to patients.

Dr Soltan emphasised that this pilot will operate under strict research governance, and that the technology is “not yet ready for deployment in a live-care setting” – the study is merely a small step in that direction. Significant work will remain before TrustedMDT can obtain regulatory approval as a medical device, but once the system has been validated in controlled environments a wider rollout will be considered.

Dr Soltan told *Cherwell* he envisions TrustedMDT acting as a “digital collaborator” – supporting, not replacing, clinicians. His primary focus for the moment is on safety alignment and ensuring the system is robust before it is introduced in live patient care.

# Bodleian unveils new photo portrait series

ANGELINA MIRRASLAVSKA

The Bodleian Libraries and the *British Journal of Photography* (BJP) unveiled a new photographic portrait series, entitled *Catalysts*, last month. The series is made up of 19 portraits, highlighting members of the University whose work has been identified as “driving meaningful change”, according to a Bodleian Libraries press statement.

These sitters range from leading academics and clinicians to senior figures in science and arts, including Professor Steve Strand, Shadreck Chirikure, Rajesh Thakker, and Rachel Upthegrove, alongside public health leaders such as Sir Peter Horby, Dame Molly Stevens, and Sir Adrian Hill. They are joined by researchers and humanities scholars including Philip K. Maini, Nandini Das, Krina Zondervan, Teresa Lambe, Dr Samina Khan, Anne Davies, and Alain Fouad George.

The shortlist of sitters also reflects collective and interdisciplinary work, with projects spanning cultural collections, climate training and global engagement, including Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM), Global Youth Climate Training, We Are Our History, the Africa Oxford Initiative and REACH, “a research team improving water security for vulnerable communities”.

The Bodleian Libraries told *Cherwell* that sitters were selected by a “panel representing the University community, including students, colleges, and divisions, and the editor of BJP”. This panel included senior University officials and Richard Ovenden, head of the Bodleian Libraries.

The shortlist of sitters was selected using criteria that included recipients of internationally recognised honours between 2024 and 2025, those shortlisted for the Vice-Chancellor’s Awards

2024/25, and individuals whose work has pushed the boundaries of their discipline, regardless of field or specialism, including through interdisciplinary approaches. Priority was given to work that makes a generous contribution to society and improves lives across a wide range of settings beyond academia.

The series was created by three photographers, Alys Tomlinson, Francis Augusto, and Leia Morrison, with diverse photographic and artistic approaches.

A BJP spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “We were looking for photographers who could offer different perspectives, both visually and personally, to create

a rich collection of work and a broader understanding of the collective contribution of the sitters.”

The project was funded by the Guy and Elinor Meynell Charitable Trust, which provides grants to charitable organisations for projects related to the arts. The portraits will first be displayed at the South Parks Road Reader entrance of the Weston Library. ‘Catalysts’ will also be exhibited to the public and members of the University at several events this year, with more details to be announced soon.

*Image credit: Leia Morrison, with permission.*



# Oxford study links 3% of NHS England costs to temperature



LILY GAGE

A new study conducted by researchers from the University of Oxford reveals that an estimated 3% of NHS England’s primary and secondary care budget is spent on the health impacts of temperatures outside a mild reference range (18°C to 21°C), with the cold “driving 64.4% of this burden”.

Dr Patrick Fahr, a senior health economist at the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences and a leading author of this study, told *Cherwell*: “This is potentially on the order of billions of pounds per year.”

The study analysed 4.37 million patient records from 244 GP practices in England, along with daily temperature data to estimate the relationship between temperature and healthcare.

Fahr told *Cherwell*: “The study sits within the Oxford Martin School’s Programme on the Future of Cooling, which examines how rising temperatures and extreme heat are driving growing demand for cooling, and how societies can meet cooling needs without worsening climate change.

“While a substantial body of recent work has focused on heat-related mortality, there has been comparatively less evidence on morbidity and what temperature exposure means for day-to-day healthcare utilisation and costs.”

The authors’ aim therefore was to “quantify how temperature affects the clinical chain of care, and what this implies for NHS resource use and spending in England”.

The study argues that climate change’s broader impacts on healthcare systems have been largely ignored by researchers, leaving substantial gaps in our knowledge of the relationship between suboptimal temperatures and healthcare, making the new findings extremely valuable in the field of climate-related health.

The findings also show that colder days

(on average between 0°C and 9°C) were “associated with cumulative increases in consultations with general practitioners, inpatient admissions, and deaths”, whereas hotter days (above 23°C) were associated with “sharp same-day surges in A&E attendances and prescriptions”. Older adults were consistently the most vulnerable group to temperature extremes throughout the investigation.

As these extreme temperatures become more frequent due to climate change, more people are suffering adverse health effects, which demonstrates the need for further research on the topic and a greater allocation of resources to healthcare systems during extreme-temperature events.

The study found that total daily healthcare costs per 1000 individuals increase by £114 at colder temperatures of 0 to 3°C, and by a steep increase of £486 per 1000 individuals for temperatures exceeding 23°C. There is also an average increase in daily costs of £84 per 1000 individuals for temperatures outside the reference range of 18 to 21°C.

The authors of this study constitute a highly multidisciplinary team, comprising researchers working in the fields of engineering and social sciences, which, according to Patrick Fahr, “the work greatly benefited from” and “helped shape the framing, interpretations, and connect the results to the wider Future of Cooling agenda”.

These findings could inform resource allocation and aid healthcare systems in adapting to the ever-increasing burden of climate change. Patrick Fahr told *Cherwell* that this work “provides an evidence base to support year-round service resilience planning... [and] can also help inform adaptation measures, including cooling and heat-protection strategies, by linking them to measurable health-system impacts”.

*Image credit: Stanley Smith for Cherwell*

## NEWS SHORTS

### Oxford locals go full samurai on crime

In Littlemore, Oxford, residents are fighting crime... with wooden clappers. Reviving a centuries-old Japanese tradition, they bang sticks at night to scare off thieves. Police remain skeptical, but locals swear it works – mostly by terrifying joggers, cats, and anyone who just wanted a quiet stroll. Samurai spirit achieved.

### Oxford’s Christmas Quiz loss adds salt to Durham wound

Oxford’s Keble College took on Durham University’s alumni in the BBC’s Christmas University Challenge, only to lose to Durham’s quiz squad. It’s a bitter pill for Oxford after Durham also beat them in The Times & Sunday Times 2026 university rankings. Oxford students are reportedly consoling themselves with mulled wine and frantic searches for “how to reclaim national superiority via trivia or magic”.

### Long-lost Flemish masterpiece

A previously overlooked painting, Christ Blessing by Flemish artist Quentis Massys (1500AD) has been rediscovered at Campion Hall, after National Gallery staff spotted it while overseeing another work. The artwork has now been placed on long-term loan at the Ashmolean Museum, allowing a wider audience to appreciate its historical and spiritual significance.

### Harwell scientists ‘beam’ with pride for 80th anniversary

Scientists shot a spectacular laser into the Oxfordshire sky, “The Beam”, visible for miles and 2.2 million times more powerful than a regular laser pen. From its origins as the UK’s first nuclear lab to hosting seven thousand scientists across 250 organisations today, Harwell has been illuminating breakthroughs in HIV, cancer, and COVID-19 research.

## CROSS CAMPUS

### Cambridge college criticised for private school push

Trinity Hall, Cambridge, has drawn criticism for approving a new policy that targets elite private schools such as Eton and St Paul’s Girls in its recruitment. Critics warn the policy risks entrenching privilege, undermining years of widening participation, and sending the message that access to top universities depends more on schooling than potential.

### Edinburgh University chief draws ire for backing student fees

Professor Sir Peter Mathieson, principal of Edinburgh University, has attracted criticism for advocating for the introduction of tuition fees for Scottish students. Edinburgh student leaders were quick to point out that Mathieson, one of the highest-paid university officials in the country, is hardly in a place to talk about making tough financial choices.



# Worcester College Provost made Labour Peer in House of Lords

BRYN MOLLET

Worcester College Provost David Isaac has been appointed to the House of Lords as a Labour peer. He is among 34 new peerages created by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, 25 of which are Labour, 5 Liberal Democrats, and 3 Conservatives.

Isaac has been Provost of Worcester College since 2021. He was previously chair of Stonewall, beginning in 2003, a UK human rights charity advocating for LGBTQ+ equality. Under his leadership, the group successfully lobbied for the abolition of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which had restricted the visibility of homosexuality in public life, and for the introduction of civil partnerships in 2004.

Isaac also chaired the Equality and Human Rights Commission from 2016 to 2020. During his tenure, the Commission dealt with issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, Windrush, Grenfell Tower, immigration policies, and

allegations of antisemitism in the Labour Party.

In a statement to the press, Isaac said: “It is an honour to have been appointed to the House of Lords, and I’m grateful to the Prime Minister for the opportunity to make this contribution to public service in parallel with my commitment to Worcester College, Oxford.”

Isaac studied Law at Trinity College, Cambridge before completing an MA in Socio-Legal studies at Wolfson College, Oxford. As well as being head of Worcester, Isaac is the Chair of the University of Arts London and Chair of the Henry Moore Foundation, a UK-based arts charity. He is also the first Provost to keep bees at Worcester and occasionally sells their honey around college.

Among those joining Isaac in the Lords will be Matthew Doyle, a former 10 Downing Street Director of Communications, and Richard Walker, CEO of Iceland Foods. Isaac is not the only new peer with a background in education. University of Surrey Pro Chancellor,

Dame Anne Limb, and University of Exeter Chancellor Sir Michael Barber also received peerages, alongside other academics.

The House of Lords is the UK’s unelected upper chamber of Parliament, composed of mostly life peers alongside a smaller number of hereditary members. Life peers are appointed from a broad range of professional and public backgrounds and use their expertise to scrutinise policy and conduct in-depth inquiries through committees. They also receive a £371 daily allowance on top of income from their other positions.

Following the new peerages, and along with the planned abolition of hereditary peers, Labour will increase its representation in the Lords from around 25% to 30% by the end of the year. This comes amid growing frustration within the party over delays to government legislation in the House of Lords, such as the Employment Rights Bill, in which ministers were forced to make some concessions.

# Oxford town hall flies Palestine flag for Ramallah Mayor visit

ARCHIE JOHNSTON

Oxford City Council flew the flag of Palestine from the Town Hall in December to mark an official visit from the Mayor of Ramallah Issa Kassis. During the visit, Mayor Kassis met with Oxford’s Lord Mayor, Councillor Louise Upton, and City Council Leader, Councillor Susan Brown. The Palestinian Ambassador Husam Zomlot, who went to university near Ramallah, was also in attendance.

Ramallah, a city in the central West Bank, has been twinned with Oxford since 2019. Members of the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA), which campaigned for 17 years to twin the two cities, invited Mayor Kassis to a committee meeting in the course of his visit. ORFA co-ordinates youth exchanges, educational visits, and trade union collaboration between the cities, amongst other ties.

Mayor Kassis said: “We are truly grateful for the historic friendship

and partnership between Ramallah and Oxford, grounded in mutual respect and solidarity. It was an honour to visit Oxford and strengthen the ties between our cities and explore how we may continue working together in the spirit of solidarity and shared values.”

Mayor Kassis also met with local faith groups and councillors at the Rose Hill Community Centre, which displayed the Ramallah Municipality flag to mark the occasion.

An ORFA spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “We were very pleased to partner with Oxford City Council in welcoming Mayor Issa Kassis to Oxford. Over 60 people attended a celebratory reception at Rose Hill Community Centre.

“Civic events of this type are invaluable in developing supportive bonds between our cities. We hope that Oxford can be a beacon for the promotion of mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation between UK [sic.] and Palestine.”

Councillor Louise Upton, Oxford’s Lord Mayor, said: “It was a pleasure to welcome the Mayor of Ramallah to Oxford. Our two cities share a long history of friendship, formalised when we became twin cities in 2019. This visit was an important opportunity to reaffirm our connection and explore new ways to work together at a challenging time in Palestine’s history.”

Oxford City Council has passed a number of motions in support of Palestine in recent years. This March, the Council passed a motion in support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Inspired by the movement against South African apartheid, BDS aims to challenge “international support for Israeli apartheid and settler-colonialism”.

Several scholars from Gaza arrived in Oxford last October. They had been given fully funded scholarships through the University of Oxford’s Palestine Crisis Scholarship scheme.

*Image credit: Oxford City Council.*



# Ellison Institute of Technology Global President Santa Ono elected senior research fellow at Worcester College

OSKAR DOEPKE

Worcester College has elected Professor Santa Ono – the current Global President of the Ellison Institute of Technology (EIT) and President of EIT Oxford – to a senior research fellowship.

A former biomedical researcher, Ono has previously served as President of the University of Michigan, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Cincinnati. A member of several academic bodies, such as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he now also leads EIT – an Oxford-based commercial research organisation focusing on AI, clinical medicine, generative biology, and sustainable energy.

Regarding his election, Worcester told *Cherwell*: “Professor Ono’s stellar research career, his research plans and role at EIT Oxford, as well as his track record of university leadership and commitment to music, made him an excellent addition to the Worcester fellowship.”

Worcester added that Ono, as a research fellow, will “play a key role” in supporting the college’s “thriving research community”, contributing to its research strategy and wider academic life. Although Ono will not be based full-time in Oxford for the foreseeable future, the college said it is still “excited about

the research and other insights that he will bring.”

Ono’s affiliation to both Worcester and EIT may also open further opportunities for “strong ties” between the two institutions, according to the College. EIT, founded by Oracle co-founder and centibillionaire Larry Ellison, has already launched several projects at the University, including a £118 million investment in AI vaccine research.

However, there are indications that Ellison’s financial commitment to the Institute is being scaled back. Ono’s predecessor as EIT President, Sir John Bell, left his role in September after clashing with Ellison over his “downgraded vision” for the project.

Ono told *Cherwell* it is “an incredible honour” to be awarded the fellowship, and that he is “very much looking forward to getting to know the faculty, staff, and students there”. He added that the fellowship, alongside other connections between the EIT and wider university, “will only strengthen what I see as a powerful and genuinely synergistic relationship”.

Looking ahead, Ono told *Cherwell*: “I hope to have a positive impact by sharing my experiences with students, and by doing everything I can to support faculty at Worcester College and throughout the University.”

*Image credit: Ellison Institute of Technology, with permission.*

# Faculty of Music announces new DPhil scholarship

ALICE RUBLI

The Faculty of Music has announced the creation of the new Nigel Nettheim Scholarship for Schubert Studies, for one DPhil student joining in the 2026/27 academic year.

The scholarship is funded by Australian musicologist, Dr Nigel Nettheim, who told *Cherwell*: “For about sixty years I have enthusiastically studied Schubert’s music. In an attempt to continue this work beyond my life I included a bequest in my will.”

Franz Schubert, an Austrian composer of the Romantic period, produced an enormous body of work during his short lifetime; as well as opera, symphonies, and chamber music, he is particularly well-known for his work in the Lieder genre, art songs typically written for one person accompanied by the piano. The DPhil student will explore Schubert’s extensive work to “throw new light onto his compositions”, following on from Dr Nettheim’s research.

Dr Nettheim told *Cherwell* that he was “first drawn to Schubert’s personal character via a biography. I then found, to my delight, that his music truly reflected that personal

character”. Dr Nettheim hopes that the scholarship will allow “insight into how Schubert’s amazing mind worked. The main evidence is contained in his scores, whose comparative analysis can contribute to building up the sought-after picture of his otherwise-hidden mental activity”.

Dr Nettheim decided that Australia, his home country, “has many attractive features but it is probably less suited to this research than is, for instance, the UK. Hence the Oxford scholarship”.

The award will cover the full DPhil course fees at the home rate and a living stipend for three years.

During their time in Oxford, the DPhil student will reside at Wadham College, an apt home for a music student due to its proximity to the Holywell Music Room and an active music-making culture amongst Wadham students.

Also available to the student will be the facilities in the new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, where the Faculty of Music is housed. The incoming DPhil student will be able to make the most of the facilities and performance spaces, including practice rooms and a recital hall.



# INVESTIGATIONS

## The opaque charity funding St Anne’s new scholarship

*Continued from Page 1*

The Tikvah scholarships are jointly administered by St Anne’s and Leg-Up Charity for Kids (LUCK), which lists its charitable purpose as “the advancement of education of students” and “relief of those who are in need by reason of their youth, age, ill-health or disability, financial hardship/other disadvantage”. It has a very limited online presence, with no website or social media pages.

LUCK was established in December 2021 and has more than doubled its assets in two years, going from £199,000 in 2023 to £449,000 in 2024, in most part due to £210,000 received in donations during the period. However, it has only distributed a handful of education grants since its founding – just £2,830 in the last financial year, and a single school scholarship in the North East of England the year before.

In 2024, it distributed £5,901 in donations, amounting to less than 1.5% of its total assets. It is unclear whether the donation income came from St Anne’s alumnae, as the college suggests, or whether LUCK plans to increase its grant amounts in the future. LUCK did not respond to *Cherwell’s* request for comment.

The address where the LUCK charity is registered in London is home to over 52 companies, including 3 in liquidation and 17 dormant ones – a dormant company is a registered business which does not actively conduct business activities, and which has limited filing obligations to HMRC. The same address is shared by the accountants that certified LUCK’s accounts in 2024.

**1.5%**  
*of the charity's assets were allocated to grants in 2024*

### College trustee involvement

*Cherwell* has also found irregularities in the charity trustees’ dealings with St Anne’s College. The same individuals running the charity that finances the Tikvah scholarships are also in managerial positions – and one a company director – at Alfreton Capital.

LUCK has three trustees, who are individuals that run the charity and are legally responsible for it. Two out of three trustees at LUCK, Andrea Morall and Natalie Abraham, are in leadership positions at Alfreton Capital - respectively as CEO and Director. The company is an investment management firm for long-term endowments and charitable foundations, which offers internships for students at St Anne’s.

Since *Cherwell* initially contacted St Anne’s regarding the scholarships in August, the college has removed all references to the Alferton Capital internship scheme from their website. Other internships that are currently available retain their page on St Anne’s website, so it is unclear whether the internship scheme has been discontinued since August.

St Anne’s told *Cherwell*: “Annually the information on the College website is updated as a matter of course to show the internships available that year.” However, other discontinued internships are still

publicly advertised, stating that they are “unfortunately ... no longer available”.

A spokesperson for St Anne’s told *Cherwell* that the scholarships are “unrelated to other programmes or internships” and that there are “no conflicts of interest” involved. The scholarships are awarded by a panel of College trustees with no external involvement in the selection process.

“*Two trustees at LUCK are also in leadership positions at Alfreton Capital, which offers internships for students at St Anne’s*

### College alumnae

The Tikvah page states that “St Anne’s alumnae and others have generously donated to LUCK to establish these scholarships”. However, a Freedom of Information (FOI) request made by *Cherwell* demonstrates that St Anne’s had no involvement in the fundraising process for the Tikvah scholarships.

The College’s response to the FOI stated “that there are no communications sent by the College to alumnae that mention The Tikvah Scholarship scheme or opportunities to donate via Leg Up For Kids (LUCK)”. It is therefore unclear how St Anne’s alumnae would have been made aware of the opportunity to donate to LUCK given the charity’s lack of online and public presence.

St Anne’s declined to share correspondence between the College and LUCK, or any records of agreements between the two parties, citing concerns that it would “inhibit the free and frank provision of advice” under section 36 of the FOI Act.

St Anne’s later told *Cherwell* that “donations to LUCK were made independently by alumnae and others through their own networks and were not solicited by the College”.

### Lobbying from a Tory MP

According to St Anne’s the scholarships came to be as a result of individuals supporting LUCK and asking the College to establish these programmes. The College spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “When the scholarships were first proposed by LUCK, a number of individuals wrote to the Principal in support of the proposal, including Oliver Dowden.”

Dowden wrote in an opinion piece for *Jewish News* that “[h]aving lobbied Helen King QPM, Principal of St Anne’s College to back them, [he] was absolutely thrilled to see the recent announcement”. Dowden is not an alumnus of Oxford University. *Cherwell* approached Dowden for comment.

Dowden is a former Conservative Deputy Prime Minister, who voted against ceasefire in Gaza and claimed he was worried about Lammy pledging to comply with the ICC arrest order for the Israeli

Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. He claims to “stand firm against the scourge of antisemitism” by campaigning to “ban public bodies from imposing divisive [BDS] campaigns against foreign countries, which invariably target the state of Israel”. LUCK is based in Dowden’s constituency of Hertsmere.

Alongside Dowden, Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA), a charity “dedicated to exposing and countering antisemitism”, said in a public statement that it is “proud to have advised the charity that is financing [Tikvah Scholarship]”. CAA has faced criticism in the past from Jewish groups for conflating criticism of Israel’s actions with antisemitism.

A number of MPs have previously raised concerns about CAA’s political activity, and it was under investigation by the Charity Commission for “political partisanship”, though the case was dropped in 2024. Baroness Hodge, a Jewish and Labour parliamentarian, accused the CAA of being “more concerned with undermining Labour than rooting out antisemitism”. Charity regulations state that “an organisation will not be charitable if its purposes are political”.

### Reactions

On its launch in August last year, former Principal of St Anne’s Ruth Deech came out in support of the scholarships. Deech served as head of college until 2004, and is currently chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC). She told *Cherwell* that “the new [scholarships] at St Anne’s fill a gap left by many [other] scholarships in colleges”.

Deech is a patron of UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI), an organisation that campaigns to “support Israel, Israeli organisations, Israelis, and/or supporters of Israel against BDS and other attempts to undermine, attack or delegitimise them”. UKLFI faced criticism last year when its Chief Executive Jonathan Turner suggested that Gaza starvation may “increase life expectancy by reducing obesity”. Its charitable arm is currently under investigation by the Charity Commission.

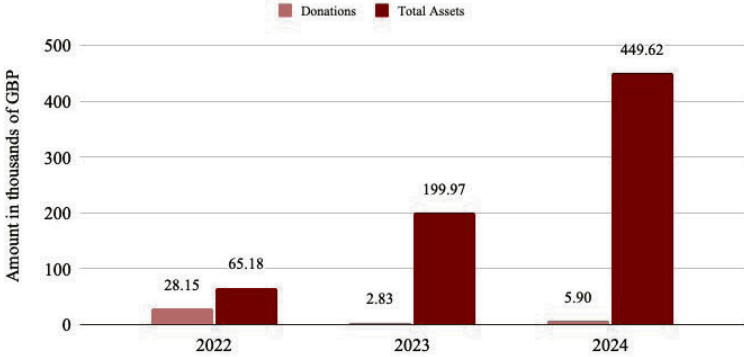
Regarding Deech’s involvement, Anne’s College spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The decision to proceed was made independently by the College’s trustees in accordance with its established processes. Baroness Deech has not been involved.”

Speaking about the scholarships, a student at St Anne’s told *Cherwell*: “I think the most relevant thing I can say is that I am Jewish, so I would have qualified, and really could have used the money, but I chose not to apply. I thought about [it] and couldn’t, in good conscience, take that money... It’s a statement more than anything – and a statement I don’t want to be a part of.”

In 2024, over 100 students signed an open letter expressing disappointment in the Principal of St Anne’s, Helen King, for signing a University statement on pro-Palestine protests. She was one of only three college heads to sign the statement, which she did in her capacity as Chair of the University Security Subcommittee.

### Donations and Assets of the LUCK charity

*Total of assets and donations made by the charity for the 2022-24 financial years*



Then in June 2024, St Anne’s JCR passed a motion condemning “the ongoing genocide within Palestine being carried out by the Israeli government” and expressing support for the Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P) encampment. It demanded that the University and College make “progress towards full divestment” from companies and institutions with ties to Israel.

In response, over 60 alumni signed a letter criticising the motion for “the absence of any condemnation of Hamas”, and calling on the College to release a “public statement highlighting that this motion reflects the view of the voting members of the JCR only and does not reflect the view of the College or alumni... college members hold a range of views... Israeli and Jewish students are welcome at St Anne’s”.

The Oxford Jewish Society, the Jewish Student Solidarity campaign, and OA4P were approached for comment.

“*A Freedom of Information request made by Cherwell demonstrates that St Anne’s had no involvement in the fundraising process for the scholarships*

### Other scholarships

Individual colleges and the University offer a variety of scholarships for students based on characteristics such as nationality and religion. A spokesperson for the St Anne’s told *Cherwell* that the scholarships are designed to “signal clearly to prospective applicants from all backgrounds, including Jewish and Israeli students, that they are welcome at St Anne’s”. They added that “the scholarships will only be awarded after the commencement of a course of study and will have no bearing on admissions decisions”.

According to St Anne’s, the scholarships were designed to avoid conflating

Jewish and Israeli identities. A College spokesperson told *Cherwell* that they are “open to, for example, students of Israeli nationality who may be Muslim, Christian or non-religious... It is precisely because Jewish and Israeli identities are not inseparable that the eligibility criteria have been elaborated in this way”. Reuben College also offers another scholarship for Israeli graduate students, established by the Reuben Foundation.

**£5,000**  
*the scholarship amount received by students*

Oxford also runs the Palestine Crisis Scholarship scheme, which provides full graduate scholarships to students displaced by the war in Gaza and the West Bank. Several scholars from Gaza arrived in Oxford in October through this scheme. This occurred after a protracted struggle to acquire visas for the scholars, after the only UK-authorised biometric centre closed in October 2023 following the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza.

The scheme faced criticism from a member of OA4P who worked with the University on the scholarships, arguing that its postgraduate criteria “does not support students who never had the chance to go to university, or undergraduates whose studies have been interrupted”.

*Cherwell* recently uncovered a University scholarship tied to Russian shell companies, with around ten scholarships per year handed out even since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Hill Foundation scholarship, which has supported 56 graduate scholars over the past 5 years, states in its eligibility criteria that students should intend to leave the UK upon completing their degree.

A 2024 *Cherwell* investigation also revealed that the University continues to offer a scholarship requiring its recipients’ “support of the leadership of the Communist Party of China”, despite multiple other universities cutting ties with China Scholarship Council’s schemes.

*Image credit: Gaspard Rouffin for Cherwell.*

*Graph credit: Gaspard Rouffin.*





# OPINION

## Who cares about college politics?

EVE RICHARDSON

A self-righteous model citizen since as long as I can remember, it is little surprise that I quickly became attached to the bureaucratic rituals of General Meetings (GMs), committees, and elections when I entered my college community. It is also equally unsurprising that few others seem to share my enthusiasm. I’ve found myself part of a small core of my college who still care about JCR politics – those who fulfill a minimum requirement of simply turning up to things. Needless to say, the bar is low. Of this committed few, the majority are existing or prospective members of the committee, with just a handful of non-committee members practising consistent engagement with the business of the JCR, let alone engaging with it at all.

The committed core comprises a group of politically engaged individuals who instinctually feel the gravity of civic duty and positive change through political institutions, even those institutions as seemingly low stakes as a college common room. We joke self-consciously about our own prominence in the political fixtures of the JCR, and uncomfortably reflect that the democracy we purport to be sustaining does not feel very democratic at all.

I witnessed this crisis of participation, in my JCR’s committee elections for the coming year. There were no candidates for key welfare roles such as international, LGBTQ+, and disabilities officers, leaving us with glaring vacancies in our committee. It is easy to take them for granted, but committee officers perform vital roles for their JCR, frequently tending to issues like housing, sports, access and admissions, reimbursement for health and hygiene products, and organising BOPs – issues and events affecting us all.

Poor attendance of GMs is a second manifestation of the participation crisis, caused by a much broader disengagement across JCRs. Last term, I was shocked when my JCR failed to attract enough attendants to meet quorum for a meeting needed to pass an important motion about housing which would impact the most of the student body. The convenience of online voting means that even GMs with an apparently high turnout have much lower genuine in-person attendance. When only a fraction of those voting are actually present, the purpose of the meetings seems to be eroded: discussions are short and sparse, and the resulting decisions often feel arbitrary.

I will concede that the ordinary business of JCRs is scarcely revolutionary and far from thrilling. GM agendas are usually filled with a predictable mix of funding requests for student plays and JCR amenities, with the odd constitutional tweak on the table, or occasionally a statement to be made online. Admittedly, JCRs have very little de facto power within their own domain, and even less political impact on the wider world. It is not difficult to see why so many students view college politics as a pointless activity, and perhaps it is for this reason that they do not consider it worth their time or energy to get involved.

Political disillusionment is also a phenomenon

which is well-documented beyond college walls. The nation seems to be tending towards apathy in unison – arguably the strongest point of consensus in an increasingly divided society. That this sentiment should pervade student politics too is only natural; in a world where many of us feel a lack of agency, politics can begin to seem fruitless on any scale.

In spite of this, the cycle of apathy can be broken. To do so, it is important to recognise the great things which college politics do have the potential to achieve. Search past *Cherwell* headlines for the word “JCR”, and you will find a plethora of instances of JCRs coming together to challenge controversial University policies and critique the misconduct of college leadership. Whistleblowing powerful institutions is an essential undertaking, and students are in a uniquely advantageous position to hold their college or the University accountable. JCRs also have an exceptional capacity to make tangible improvements to student life as a result of their often close relationships with college administration, from negotiating housing prices down, to advocating for underrepresented individuals, and providing peer welfare support.

So whilst I can easily understand the view that college politics affords little reward for the time it demands, I do not think it is a pointless pursuit. Let’s not pretend that JCR politics is designed to reach far into the politics of the outside world, but instead acknowledge the meaningful impact it can have on a local scale, improving the everyday lives of their students. In summary, allow me to moralise: do not overlook the work our committee officers do for us, nor underestimate the power of a well-argued GM motion. Our active participation is the essential ingredient in breaking the cycle of political apathy, and we owe it to each other to keep looking to the future.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Oxford’s roots in religion

Your recent article (‘We must separate Church and University’) rightly challenges Oxford to examine whether any of its Anglican structures or culture still carry exclusionary force or create unnecessary problems. I also agree about questioning the right of a Bishop to determine the governance of a modern college and have no objection to the idea of freeing up Bishops to focus on their role within the Church itself; my point is simply that their historical involvement should be understood in context rather than dismissed as inherently oppressive. Much of it is simply the residue of the University’s origin as a place where the pursuit of learning was understood as an aspect of Divinity, and those roots shaped the intellectual environment so valued today. The principle of reform is right, but we should also remember figures like John Wycliffe who, along with many others, contributed to an intellectual culture in which critique, inquiry, and the widening of access to knowledge became defining features of the University of Oxford and education more broadly.

**Hugh Barne**, *former student at Wycliffe Hall*

### To politic or not to politic

I enjoyed the entertaining piece written by a PPE student who demonstrates disdain for the vicissitudes of politics (‘The Luxury of Political Ignorance’). The writer argues that Oxford students should “frolic around, blissfully unaware, in your ivory tower” and take a step back from the day-to-day freneticism of politics. I, too, was once one of those nerdy policy wonks in secondary school, zoning out of my classes to obsessively read every single article on the websites of the *New York Times* and *The Atlantic*. Missing an article was tantamount to a sinful transgression. The difference between me and the author? I haven’t changed.

**Gavriella Epstein-Lightman**, *History, St Hugh’s College*

## THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

I’m all in favour of the Vice-Chancellor being paid this much – it’s a tough & competitive role! – but they’ve surely got to see the irony in paying her £666k lol (‘Vice-Chancellor’s pay package rises to £666,000, among highest paid in Russell Group’)

**oliver.haythxrne** via *Instagram*

Surviving OUCA is an achievement in itself. (‘Jeremy Hunt on OUCA, Silicon Valley, and the post-war world order’)

**Glenn Calderwood** via *Facebook*

Have they considered paying their tutors any money at all (‘Vice-Chancellor’s pay package rises to £666,000, among highest paid in Russell Group’)

**ornitho.lo.gy** via *Instagram*

I’ve known Irene since 1985. Maybe she’ll lend me a quid? (‘Vice-Chancellor’s pay package rises to £666,000, among highest paid in Russell Group’)

**Sophie Grace** via *Facebook*

Maybe England will soon have Sharia Law and she won’t go to a university at all. But at least she won’t have to worry about Christianity. (‘We must separate Church and University’)

**Melanie Beason** via *Facebook*

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Image credit: Puskas.daniel92, CC BY-SA-4.0, via Wikimedia Commons..

## Livin’ la vida Lidl

MORWENNA STINCHCOMBE

Ok, I admit it. I am a food snob. My favourite film is *Julie & Julia* (2009), in which a put-upon, do-it-all young woman obsesses over Julia Child, who introduced suburban America to French cooking. I have consigned beans on toast to the days when the sertraline just doesn’t hit right, and opted last Christmas to make homemade gravy.

This is not to say, though, that I am too good for a bargain. Though I still have reservations about milk from Lidl – I swear it tastes different – and the eggs from Aldi look to me dull and pale, I can put aside these quibbles and admit to the allure of a £1 bag of courgettes. All this to say: Oxford’s city centre needs a discount supermarket.

In the period 2022-2024, approximately 90% of the UK admissions to Oxford were from England, whose students receive, at most, £10,544 per year. Most of us do not receive that much. Immediately, we can subtract however many thousand your college charges for rent, and then we are likely left with a meagre sum which barely supports a life of simple pleasures. That is, if we are forced to shop at Tesco or Sainsbury’s in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.

Aldi, Lidl, or ASDA would make a fine addition to Oxford’s supermarkets. It would be nice to walk out of a shop and not feel spiritually drained because good, worthwhile food costs so much; to not have to think, “well, the overdraft is doing its job”. It would be nice to live up to the expectation of students and be a little more cavalier in our spending, able to splash out now and again. But our budgets are limited and the greatest cost, apart from rent, is food. The options for the median Oxford student are as so: shop and eat well, and commit oneself to a life of moderation, never leaving Oxford during term-time and going out at most once a week, or allow oneself to be hedonistic whilst subsisting on a diet of pot noodle and porridge, backed up with the odd multivitamin. I do not think this fair; university is an escape from the humdrum of home life, the start of adult responsibility.

Now, I appreciate that the targets for my ire really should be the government for letting down students from England, as well as the University for pretty consistently leaving those who Theresa May classed as the “Jams” (Just About Managing, i.e. lower-middle class) with the limited support their parents can afford, and very little in the way of scholarships or bursaries. But these are long-term issues which, given cuts to funding for universities and Rachel Reeves’ insistence that difficult decisions are ahead, nobody is really in the mood to deal

with. Instead, a discount supermarket could be up and running within the year, if they realised what a cushy profit they could make from the city’s vast student population.

So why are our nearest Aldis just at the ring road? Consider who, apart from us, uses the city: the odd resident of the city, who in 2024 had a median salary of £41.2k and therefore may opt instead for Tesco or Sainsbury’s; and tourists. Tourists are coming on holiday, to buy the overpriced, gaudy tourist tat. They do not need to buy food with a mind to cooking. Oxford is not built to sustain those who gulp when they open their banking app. It’s built for those with a bit more cash to splash.

What a difference it could make! Instead of relying on cheap loaves of bread which taste like cardboard, we could enjoy the delights of a somewhat high-quality loaf, baked in-store, for less than £3. Getting all the ingredients for a recipe from *The Guardian* need not lead you to questioning whether you can substitute chilli powder for fresh chilli. For once, we could really indulge. We could snack without interrogating the cost per kilogram of a nice bar of chocolate as a reward for an essay well done (or even just completed). We would not need to go to a formal to delight in something approaching haute cuisine. People think Oxford is the high life, and with a discount supermarket, it could be.



# Why you need to talk to your scout

*Oxford students rely on unseen labour, yet rarely acknowledge those behind it*

TARANA VERMA

Quite apart from our academic work, students at Oxford University lead a life very different to that of students at other institutions, a fact which some of us seem more aware of than others. Porters who are available 24/7, kitchen staff who not only cook but serve food multiple times a day, and scouts who clean your rooms are not regular parts of the university experience, however hard it may be for some to imagine fitting scrubbing the bathroom floor into their daily schedule. For many, both from outside and within the University, this system is just another reason to regard Oxford students with a certain degree of moral distrust, and it's not hard to see why. Surely, being treated like overprivileged boarding school children will only lead to the production of entitled students lacking in the ability to take responsibility and look after themselves, exacerbating such traits within those who have already been raised in this way.

Indeed, the system of services provided by the University was embedded exactly for the kind of people such critics would hold in disdain. The Oxford cohort of the 19th and early 20th century was almost entirely made up of men from the landed gentry and clergy; it was therefore necessary that the services provided by the University matched those that these young men had been accustomed to during their childhood. Cultural depictions of Oxford life before the 21st century, such as in Evelyn Waugh's classic Oxford novel *Brideshead Revisited*, show these men in all their self-assurance, lording it over the menial labourers who are so clearly seen as belonging to a different world. Luckily, most of us have now moved away from such reprehensible treatment of those who work for our colleges, and from such discreditable attitudes towards class division. Do we then have nothing to learn from the past as regards the University's workforce?

While I don't pretend to harbour much nostalgia for the English culture of previous centuries, I do believe that we miss something when we view our changing treatment of our staff as merely another part of an abstract social progression. The fact is that the standard relationship between the Oxford student and the staff they interact with on a regular basis is still riddled with problems, despite the greater levels of respect, politeness, and appreciation we hopefully hold ourselves to. Fundamentally, this is because there is really no relationship at all. How many of us know the names of the kitchen staff, porters, or scouts of our colleges? And no – knowing the names of the people who run your college bar in an attempt to curry favour does not count. These staff, so deeply integral to the running of our communities, often slip into the

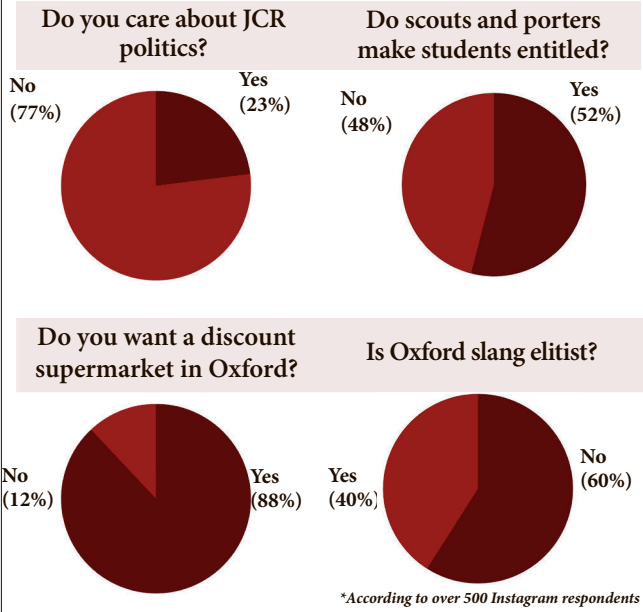
cracks of both the everyday and the incidental. A friend who had a slight mishap with her dinner recently after a night out, for example, had to discuss her actions only with the college dean, and did not have to apologise to or even acknowledge those who had to clean up after her, a clear display of the blatant disregard we often show for our responsibilities towards our staff.

At the same time, not only do we owe something to those who serve us, but we often forget what they can do for us, outside of what we consider to be their jobs. Maybe we shouldn't think only about the fact that we are provided with people who cook our food, deal with us losing our keys, and tidy our piles of paper, but more about the resource of being surrounded by those who might genuinely understand the specific problems of every-day Oxford life. These people have truly seen it all, and do not deserve to be treated as outsiders; they might be the biggest insiders around. When it comes to the staff who enter our rooms, I believe we can in fact learn something from stories of old, both the real and the fictional.

“  
*We miss something when we view our changing treatment of our staff as merely another part of an abstract social progression. The relationship between the Oxford student and the staff is still riddled with problems*

An article published by the University of Cambridge titled ‘The Bedders’ Story’ interviews Lilian Runham, a veteran ‘bedder’ (the Cambridge equivalent of the Oxford scout) who describes the motherly relationship fostered by the regular visits to a student's room and by the relaxed rules and regulations that were once a part of the system. For Runham, this consistent contact created a high degree of comfort and intimacy between bedder and student. Bedders would often be the first to notice signs of stress, illness, or homesickness, and the students she helped would often talk to her about their problems. On the other side, 20th century books such as *Brideshead Revisited* may not quite depict relationships of affection,

## THE VERDICT



but the interactions between students and staff, such as the frankly expressed irritation of Charles's scout regarding his behaviour and the state of his room, sometimes seem preferable to the culture of boundaries we find ourselves so accustomed to. True, we might object to the idea of institutional moral policing that is betrayed in Lunt's comments to Charles, but this practise is at the same time suggestive of a culture that admits that the staff around us are enough a part of our community that they might help and guide us just as much as our friends or our family back home.

I am not suggesting that you befriend those in the practise of talking to their toy bear, fall in love with two siblings, or in any other way emulate Waugh's Oxonian protagonist, but I am asking that we all question the limited number of interactions beyond pleasantries that we have with the workforce of this university. This is, or should be, a community, but it cannot be until we treat every member of it as if they are truly part of our lives, and learn to remember that we are a part of theirs.

# Criticisms of Oxford slang aren't really about language

*What seems exclusionary is actually a shared sociolect that reflects centuries of history and belonging*

AARON BUTTERS

Sub fusc, college marriages, BOPs, sconcing, Prelims, the Bod: Oxford boasts a unique catalogue of words and phrases. Some would critique them as elitist and exclusionary. Doing so sadly misdirects such critiques, and fails to see the important role that Oxford's language plays. It's a uniquely complex, ever-changing system that we should be proud to call our own.

The eclectic vocabulary referred to as Oxford's 'language' is a sociolect. This is a distinctive way in which language is used by members of a particular group, which necessarily reflects the social soil from which it sprouts. To use the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's terms, what we have in Oxford's slang is a series of signs referring to various signifieds. The signs are arbitrary, and no amount of criticism of the sign will do anything to affect what is signified. Even if I manage to weed out the term "sub fusc", so long as academic dress exists there will always be a new word to spring up and take its place, because the signified concept is still present. If I wanted to eradicate Oxford's slang, I would have to render it obsolete, by removing what it refers to. We can't direct our anger at the words themselves. But I don't think we should be burning sub fusc in any case, because from such traditions comes our Oxford sociolect, and sociolects serve important social functions.

The most important thing to realise about sociolects is their ubiquity. Oxford has a sociolect; Durham has a sociolect; Southampton has a sociolect; your town and your school have sociolects. Whenever a new social group is formed, a unique sociolect won't be far behind. We can even see sociolects within sociolects, like college slang. An example from my college, St Peter's, is the words used to refer to parts of the library. The college library itself is the plib (Peter's + lib-rary). This pl- prefix appears to have then been used to create plungeon, which is the very bottom level, and pleaven, which is

the very top. Sociolects aren't necessarily elitist or exclusionary, and that we all speak many of them.

What is unique about Oxford's sociolect, however, is that it was once spoken exclusively by the upper, ruling classes who were educated here. This is no longer the case. It's not to say that Oxford no longer produces the 'ruling classes' – 75% of judges, 66% of private secretaries, and 54% of MPs were educated here or Cambridge. However, the process that produces this 'ruling class' is far more meritocratic today than it ever has been. Oxford is no longer a feudalistically gated university, with over 60% of its UK-domiciled students coming from state-educated backgrounds, and with active efforts made year on year to increase the proportion of underrepresented groups that make up its student body. The memory of Oxford having been exclusionary still persists, but the diversity of people who now speak its sociolect demonstrates that it no longer is.

“  
*Sociolects aren't necessarily elitist or exclusionary, and we all speak many of them*

Sociolects promote social cohesion and foster a sense of group identity. Oxford's is no different in this respect. In fact, Oxford's sociolect is much better equipped to achieve this purpose than others because its greater age and vocabulary size gives us more in common with each other, leading to closer feelings of camaraderie and connection. The unpaired uniqueness of Oxford, rooted in its history and its traditions, is completely capable of existing without classism or elitism. Its language is a sign of not just of those traditions, but also of its proud and enthusiastic student community today. We should feel proud to be Oxford students without descending into



some kind of superiority complex. To assume that Oxford's language is forever going to be exclusionary suggests that we aren't capable of re-evaluating what it means to be an Oxford student. But we are.

Sociolects are always changing. This means that new members of Oxford's social community, be they freshers or international students, are as much capable of influencing its development as anybody else. As Oxford has become more open and representative, those new members have been able to leave their mark in its language when opportunities for new coinages arise: for example, the opening of the new Schwarzman Centre this year. Already it's been shortened to the Schwarzman, the Schwarz, and even (perhaps rather tongue-in-cheek) the Schwozzy C. As a fresher myself, from a state school, mostly non-

university-going background, I do not feel excluded by Oxford's language. I feel intrigued, and proud that I get to be a player (and rulemaker) in this idiosyncratic language game.

To conclude, to call Oxford's language 'exclusionary' is to misread its place today. It is to allow yourself to be haunted by top-hat wearing, moustache-twiddling, RP-talking ghosts who no longer swarm its streets. When we strip away its antique garbs, we find a sociolect like any other. And, thanks to, not in spite of, those antique garbs, Oxford's sociolect is uniquely adept at creating a shared group identity, reminding everyone who speaks it that they belong to this University, in which we should all be able to take pride.

Image credit: Aayan Riaz for Cherwell.



# FEATURES

## 15 minutes of fame: the legacy of Oxford's traffic policy protest



*The protests over 15 minute cities in Oxford may have gone away, but they are a powerful testament to the worrying role conspiracy theories play in our post-COVID politics*

EDEN SMITH

When students stepped outside their colleges on 18th February 2023, a strange sight may have confronted them. They might've seen someone in the guise of Karl Schwab (head of the World Economic Forum) and another of Greta Thunberg wearing an East Berlin border guard uniform. Or maybe their attention was caught by people carrying placards reading "No to Subversion, Surveillance and Control!", "There is NO climate emergency" and "15 Min City communism – we do NOT consent". These were the scenes of a protest against the City Council's proposed traffic policies aimed at alleviating the city's chronic traffic issues; making Oxford more like a 15-minute city.

### What is the conspiracy theory?

The 15-minute city was originally an urban planning concept devised by Carlos Moreno, a professor at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Its aim was to have all key amenities accessible for residents within a 15-minute walk or bike ride. In Moreno's own words, the driving force behind the concept was to "improve the quality of life for inhabitants", ultimately "changing our traditional lifestyle based on long distances". Oxford City Council endorsed this in their Local Plan of September 2022. When the council later introduced new traffic controls in November 2022, conspiracy theorists conflated the two plans, fashioning the Council's approach

as a governmental ploy to restrict the freedom of movement – effectively, following the months of COVID-19 restrictions, a lockdown 2.0.

Professor Peter Knight, from Manchester University, has written extensively about conspiracy culture both in the United States and Europe. He told *Cherwell* that the conspiracy theory emerged at first from isolated blog posts by climate deniers. One online blogger wrote: "Oxfordshire County Council yesterday approved plans to lock residents into one of six zones to 'save the planet' from global warming. The latest stage in the '15-minute city' agenda is to place electronic gates on key roads in and out of the city, confining residents to their own neighbourhoods...Under the new scheme, if residents want to leave their zone, they will need permission from the council who gets to decide who is worthy of freedom and who isn't."

Following this, the theory was taken up by anti-lockdown activist groups and subsequently amplified by an existing web of conspiracy influencers. Knight explains: "Traffic control was reframed as a restriction of personal liberties. An existing network of anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx activists, as well as culture warriors tapping into conspiracist fears, pivoted towards traffic control schemes." The BBC even reported that Emily Kerr, a member of Oxford City Council, was confronted by local residents about whether the measures were an attempt to curb personal freedom. Kerr said: "People have come up to me and said 'is it true that we're not going to be allowed out of our houses, that it's

“Traffic control was reframed as a restriction of personal liberties. An existing network of anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx activists, as well as culture warriors tapping into conspiracist fears, pivoted towards traffic control schemes

going to be just like the coronavirus lockdown?”

It wasn't all fringe conspiracy theorists though – the fear even got airtime in the House of Commons. Then Conservative MP Nick Fletcher called the 15-Minute City in February 2023 an "international socialist concept" during a parliamentary debate. According to Fletcher, the step threatened to "take away personal freedoms".

Mathew Barkun calls umbrella conspiracy theories like these "superconspiracies". The 15-minute city conspiracy theories endorsed by those who protested in Oxford are part of a much larger paranoid narrative known as the Great Reset. The Great Reset was, in fact, the name given by the World Economic Forum to its agenda during COVID-19. It was a document

setting out a new approach towards a fairer, greener version of capitalism. Conspiracy theorists saw it differently. To them, the Great Reset was a plan to use different forms of surveillance to keep people enslaved. For them, this included using technologies like digital cash, biometric facial recognition, and traffic cameras. During the pandemic, conspiracist ideas and protest became more widespread and that energy, Knight tells me, has been repurposed to new causes. Climate change is presented as a hoax intended, again, to keep the masses subservient.

It's worth recognising that such concerns about the "globalist plots" are not just populist expressions of resentment but also a regurgitation of historical antisemitic myths about who secretly pulls the strings. Antisemitic conspiracy theories such as the *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which claimed to expose a Jewish global plot but were quickly revealed as fraudulent (and later plagiarised), still influence discourse on certain pockets of the internet. These tropes reared their head in the slogans of some of those at the Oxford 15-minute city protest, a worrying reminder how concerns over something as innocuous as traffic policy can be exploited by those with more sinister agendas.

### The Protest

Tensions over the Oxford City Council's decision came to a climax in February 2023. Conspiracists from all over the UK took to the streets of Oxford, chanting, carrying placards,





and even livestreaming the event on their social media accounts. Annie Kelly, journalist and reporter at the protest, told *Cherwell* about what she observed on the day. On the one hand, she recalled the “lively, carnival atmosphere” and the “strong sense of community” between campaigners where “lots of people knew each other”. On the other hand, though, the protest was poisoned by aggression and polemic rhetoric. Kelly described a cameraman from the BBC who was heckled by protestors. They shouted: “Shame on you!”. Members from Patriotic Alternative, the far-right group described by *The Times* in 2023 as “Britain’s largest far-right white supremacist movement”,

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*The protest was poisoned by aggression and polemic rhetoric. Kelly described a cameraman from the BBC who was heckled by by protestors. They shouted: “Shame on you!” Members from Patriotic Alternative, Britain’s largest white supremacist movement, were also present on the fringes of the protest*

were also present on the fringes of the protest. Big names on the conspiracist scene appeared too. Piers Corbyn, the conspiracy theorist brother of Jeremy Corbyn, and Lawrence Fox, the ex-GB news host, were amongst those who took to the stage. The former proclaimed that all forms of traffic zoning have “the same aim” – “to control you, to cost you, and to con you into believing in the man-made climate change

story”. He linked the new Oxford measures with those in London: “Break ULEZ and break Sadiq Khan.” One of the most circulated videos online from the protest was that by Katie Hopkins, the right-wing culture warrior. In a video published on her YouTube, Hopkins speaks to the camera on her way to the protest. She appears incensed by the media who want to “smear the people who are going to protest locking down a city into fifteen-minute zones”. When at the protest itself, Hopkins films the supposedly high numbers of police, taking their presence as evidence that the council’s decision was about more than just traffic controls. She wonders if “they’re practicing for when there is a low traffic network and they have to catch criminals”.

**The demographic**  
The divide on 18th February was, unlike so many of those in Oxford, not a tale of town versus gown. Both locals and members of the University were united by their absence at the protests. Some protesters showed frustration at this, feeling abandoned particularly by the students. One woman said to Kelly: “I had hoped that the students would come and support us.” Here we see the tension between the right and higher education that so dominates our politics today.  
In fact, the vast majority of campaigners travelled into Oxford for the event; they neither lived in nor were from the city. Kelly said: “If it had of [sic.] only been locals, it would have been a much smaller protest.” Out of all those whom Kelly interviewed, only two were from Oxford. They were “very much a rarity”, also anomalous for their lack of knowledge about or investment in the conspiracy theories driving the protests. One of these local women said to Kelly: “We’re not anti-COVID... We’re just nice normal people.” She even clarified to Kelly that she had gotten “all of [her] jabs”. As a mobile hairdresser, she opposed the congestion charge not because she thought it a ploy by the global cabal to subjugate humanity, but because of the impact it would have on her access to her clients.  
Yet the political demographic of the protesters can be hard to decipher. It’s hard to pin down the varying politics of some of the conspiracy theorists. A concern over sovereignty can lean in

different directions: national sovereignty can lean right, heightening tensions over immigration, for example, whereas bodily sovereignty can lean left, towards new age spiritualism. The political scientists William Callison and Quinn Slobodian call this ‘diagonalism’. They write: “Born in part from transformations in technology and communication, diagonalists tend to contest conventional monikers of left and right (while generally arcing toward far-right beliefs), to express ambivalence if not cynicism toward

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parliamentary politics, and to blend convictions about holism and even spirituality with a dogged discourse of individual liberties.” The author of *Doppelganger*, Naomi Klein, calls this situation “a conspiracy smoothie”. She laments how the “far right” have become bedfellows with the “far out” today.  
**What now?**  
Today, some of the much lamented traffic regulations are now in effect. They began on 29th October 2025 with a temporary five-pound daily charge for motorists driving at certain times without a permit. The tax applies to only six

roads in Oxford, including Hythe Bridge Street, St Cross Road, St Clement’s Street, Thames Street, Marston Ferry Road, and Hollow Way. It seeks to both ease the city’s chronic congestion and help alleviate the climate crisis.  
There has been some backlash to the new measures. Open Roads for Oxford is the main organisation leading this. Their concerns are rooted not in conspiracism but rather the economic efficacy of the scheme and, according to their website, “the disproportionate impact on particular groups, including vulnerable people”. In their view, the congestion charge threatens to impact workers in low-paid sectors who offer mobile services and therefore often rely on their own transport for their livelihoods. Consequently, Open Roads for Oxford issued a legal challenge to Oxfordshire City Council over the scheme on 7th October 2025. It was, however, rejected by the council on 4th November 2025.  
Yet from the conspiracy theorist groups themselves, no protests have followed those that took place in February 2023. The movement has dispersed, morphed, and shifted focus. Kelly said: “The movement is still around but more diffused than it was a few years ago... There is still very much a community but without the animating force of something like COVID it has slightly loosened over the years.” Now, without the animating force of COVID, supporters have moved onto other “passion projects”; seemingly innocuous concerns about 15-minute cities can easily be radicalised and spun into a wider narrative about the “globalist agenda”. For some, according to Kelly, this entails “branching off into educational co-ops”. For others, this involves the endorsement of the anti-vaxx agenda. Though this ideology has a long history, it has been given new vitality by the appointment of Robert F Kennedy Jr. as US health secretary and his Make America Health Again campaign. Conspiracy theories always evolve. They are like a hydra – you can slay one head, only for two more to appear.  
And so, when you step out of your college on 18th February this year, the streets should be free of Karl Schwab and Greta Thunberg impersonators – providing there isn’t another global pandemic.  
*Images credit: Annie Kelly, with permission.*





# £17,000 on grass, Netflix dollars, and 250,000 parcels: *Cherwell's* Freedom of Information review



GASPARD ROUFFIN

Here at *Cherwell*, we take our job very seriously. A big part of what we do is Freedom of Information (FOI) requests – which allow us to ask for information on any topic (yes, any!) to public authorities, for example the University and colleges.

*Cherwell* handles a lot of data, but unfortunately, not everything can make it into our fantastic print editions. So, dear reader, we thought we would treat you with some of our best finds from 2025, curated by our excellent investigative student journalists.

## Expensive grass

Do you think that the University has its financial priorities straight? At *Cherwell*, we're not always so sure, so sometimes we simply ask them how much they spend on things! Recently, we wanted to check how much it cost to refurbish the lawn outside of the Radcliffe Camera last September.

That amounted to an eye-watering £17,854.40, which – according to the University – “included labour, topsoil, and turf”. In their defence, the grass did look really good, but maybe they could have saved a bit of cash and done without the squiggly lines.

Following the OA4P encampments outside the Natural History Museum and around the Radcliffe Camera in Trinity term 2024, the University had spent £44,699 and £19,771 for each site respectively on grounds maintenance and turfing. Compared to the Vice-Chancellor's £666,000 pay package, perhaps it's not that bad – at least students (and tourists) get nice lawns out of it! The University said that “repairs were carried out to a standard appropriate to the damaged property”.

## Schrödinger's CCTV footage

One of the contentious points of the University's controversial disciplinary proceedings against the protesters that broke into the Wellington Square offices in Trinity Term 2024 was the CCTV footage of the reception. The University claimed that the recording proved that an activist assaulted the receptionist, which OA4P vehemently denies and claims instead that the footage “disproves the false allegation that acts of violence took place”.

Thames Valley Police did not pursue the charges against the protesters, and the University's case was ultimately dropped on procedural grounds.

“An eye-watering £17,854.40 spent refurbishing the lawn outside the Radcliffe Camera last September

*Cherwell* journalists tried to obtain this CCTV footage, used on multiple occasions during disciplinary hearings according to our sources, but hit a brick wall. Or rather, a shifting, moving, vanishing brick wall, Diagon Alley style.

The University responded with an exemption on 14th November 2024, admitting that it held the data but refusing to disclose it on the grounds that, after grouping the FOI requests together, locating the information would be too time-consuming. On 3rd March 2025, they told *Cherwell* that they didn't hold the footage anymore, which had been deleted “in line with the retention provisions in the University's CCTV code of Practice”.

However, on 27th May, the pivotal evidence magically reappeared! Responding to an FOI request, they once again declined to disclose it, claiming this time a personal data exemption. So, do they have it or not? The University told *Cherwell* that “an error was made in good faith in the March response, [and] there was no pretence by anyone”.

## Bezos on top

You didn't know that you needed this information, but you're getting it anyways. *Cherwell* made some unlucky porters compile lists of the number of parcels received by each college, as well as a breakdown by courier. Unsurprisingly, Amazon comes up on top – with around 38% of all parcels being delivered courtesy of Jeff Bezos.

On average, colleges received around 3,000 parcels in Michaelmas terms, and around 2,000 in Hilary and Trinity. Blame the freshers ordering room decoration online? A clear outlier was Worcester College, ordering over 6,000 parcels per term on average last year. Either Worcesterites are online shopping addicts, or their lodge has a logging issue.

All in all, based on data from 12 colleges – the others did not comply or did not hold the data – *Cherwell* estimates that Oxford students receive on average over 250,000 parcels a year.

## My Oxford Year, Their Netflix Cash

This summer, while everyone was busy mocking *My Oxford Year* or letting their anger out on Oxfess, the *Cherwell* team decided to ask every public authority in town how much they received from Netflix for the shooting of the film. But (surprise surprise), they're not telling us.

The University took over twice the statutory deadline (20 working days) to get back to us, refusing to disclose the information and claiming it would take them too long to find. *Cherwell* appealed the decision, with the University's response being overdue for over a month at the time of writing. Magdalen College also refused to disclose this information, claiming that it would “prejudice [their] commercial interest”, while the Oxfordshire County Council simply did not respond to our request.

The ones that did revealed that the filming was not as lucrative as you might expect: Hertford college made £2,160 renting a room to the production team, and the City Council made £1,365 from filming inside of the Covered Market. Given how abysmal the film was, we'd hope they would have made a little more than that!

## You wouldn't steal a car!

If you weren't too hungover, you may remember your college Dean or Bursar trying to threaten you during Fresher's Week with potential fines if you were caught streaming or downloading content illegally on Eduroam. In the spirit of scientific discovery, *Cherwell* went myth-busting – and we debunked them.

In total, 15 colleges reported issuing fines to

“There were at least 59 instances of students being caught illegally streaming in 2023-25. The fines ranged from £60-100, but no disciplinary action was taken

students for illegally streaming or downloading copyrighted content on University networks, primarily through torrenting software. This amounted to at least 59 cases over the 2023-25 period. There were no cases of staff being caught doing this – either tutors know how to behave, or they haven't quite figured out torrenting just yet.

The vast majority of colleges reported less than five instances, with Green Templeton being the clear outlier with eleven cases. One individual at Wadham was found streaming copyrighted content four times within the same year – you'd think they would have learned their lesson the first time around!

The standard fee applied by the University IT services and passed on to students through colleges is £60, though a few colleges add administrative fees, the most expensive being St John's College at £100. *Cherwell* understands that no disciplinary action was taken against students for this. With the speed of Eduroam, good luck trying to stream or download anything anyways!

## Welcome to 2026

That's it from us! FOIs are at the heart of what *Cherwell* does, and we even asked the University how many they receive each year. In 2024, it received 1,093 requests – fully complying with only 566 of them and partially complying with 307. The University did not supply the information for 170 of the requests and did not hold the information for the remaining 50.

Despite the delays, hurdles, and redactions,

“FOIs are at the heart of what *Cherwell* does, we even asked the University how many they recieved each year. In 2024, it received 1,093 requests – fully complying with only 566 of them

*Cherwell* keeps on investigating. With FOIs being one of our main tools to make sense of how decisions are made behind closed doors and to uncover what the University is up to, we will keep on asking, (probably) much to their displeasure.

Regarding Professor Dutta's appointment, a University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “Sexual harassment has no place at Oxford. Our sympathies and thoughts are with anyone who has experienced harassment or misconduct. We strive to ensure that Oxford is always a safe space for all students and staff. We take concerns seriously, applying clear, robust procedures. Support for those affected is a priority, and we take precautionary and/or disciplinary action where justified.

“We reject any suggestion that the University tolerates harassment or does not prioritise people's safety. While we cannot comment on individual cases, we are committed to continuous improvement and have strengthened our approach over recent years. Our Single Comprehensive Source of Information sets out our approach, support and training. We encourage anyone who has a concern to raise it.”

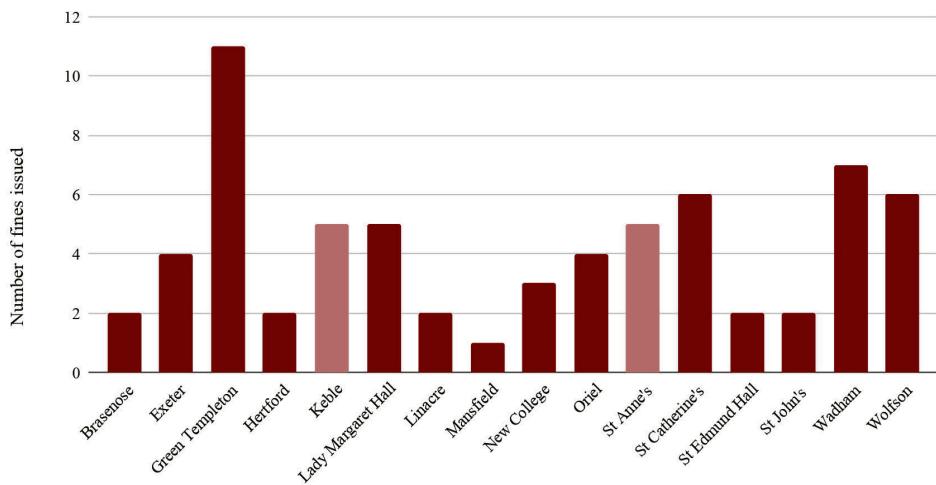
With special thanks to Amelia Gibbins, Laurence Cooke, and the *Cherwell* Investigations team for their FOI contributions.

Image credit: James Debanks, with permission.

Graph credit: Gaspard Rouffin.

## Number of fines issued by college in 2023-25

Keble and St Anne's did not disclose the exact number of fines, but it is less than 5









## PROFILES

# ‘The power of cooperation is slow but relentless, it’s how things get done.’

## Neil Kinnock on his political career



## HATTIE SIMPSON

Neil Kinnock’s office in the House of Lords is small and tightly packed. One wall is entirely covered with books; the others are crowded with photographs, posters, and fragments from his political life. Besides his armchair hangs a photograph titled ‘Lord Kinnock makes his maiden speech’, taken during a family holiday where he delivered a mock address as part of a sketch. Besides that, hangs a poster labelled ‘Guide for Kinnock Drafters’, written by a senior civil servant when Kinnock moved roles at the European Commission – a satirical response, he explains, to his habit of rewriting the speeches drafted for him by officials. He insists he was never criticising the quality of the writing, only that “they weren’t Neil Kinnock, so they weren’t talking like I talk”.

Throughout our conversation, Kinnock is funny, self-deprecating, and visibly uncomfortable with any suggestion of grandeur – despite his numerous achievements as Labour Party leader, Vice

President of the European Commission, and titan of Welsh politics. When I jokingly apologise for the difficulty of my questions, he laughs and says they might be better suited “to my psychiatrist maybe, if I ever had one!”. And when we turn to reflecting on his achievements, he adds quietly, “I think... that, that’s pretty good”. Humility is not a pose, as with so many politicians, but rather appears innate to his belief that progress is the responsibility of any politician, not something to be celebrated.

“*You think about regret way more than you think about success*”

This attitude appears to be deep set and so the natural start of our conversation is to ask how he got into politics. His response, characteristically humorous, is to pull out the list of prepared questions I’d sent and say “much easier than any of these”.

He grew up in Tredegar in the 1940s, in what was then the South Wales coalfield, and understood early on how his community worked. As a child, he noticed that “all good things in our community... were all collectively provided at a standard no one could afford to pay for themselves, but because everybody chipped in a little bit these remarkable facilities were available”. Cultural experiences, education, leisure – these weren’t luxuries reserved for the few but shared achievements. By 14, he had read widely thanks to the local library and listened to orchestras, not because of personal wealth but because, as he puts it, “Tredegar, like a lot of working-class communities, had enormous cultural aspiration”.

The lesson was straightforward: “The general wellbeing of communities, enjoyed by individuals, came from collective contribution and organisation.” Politics followed naturally. “To me it was obvious that more needed to be done...that the only way to get those improvements was to organise and that meant joining the Labour Party”. He joined on the 1st January 1956, three months

before his 15th birthday, having been granted special permission.

At Cardiff University, organising was the natural next step. He joined the socialist society and helped build a membership of around 700 in a student population of just over 3,000. Leafletting one day, he met Glenys Parry; they went on to marry a few years after graduating. After university, he worked as a tutor for the Workers’ Educational Association before being selected, to his astonishment, as the Labour candidate for one of the safest seats in the country. He was elected to Parliament in 1970 at just 27 years old. With characteristic bluntness, he reflects that it “wasn’t attribute to my brilliance...it was just pure bloody luck”.

“I never regretted it”, he says, “but I did think, when we had a very young family, whether it was sensible”. It was Glenys who made it possible. Because of her, “I was able to sustain a very high level of constituency and political activity while she effectively brought the kids up... I couldn’t have done much without her, yeah”. He says the last words slowly, after a long pause.



His election at 27 made him one of the youngest MPs in the House. When I ask what he wishes he'd known when he first stepped foot in Parliament, he answers honestly: "What do I wish I knew? A lot!" Eventually he replies, "I wish I'd realised when I got in here that it is worthwhile becoming a master of procedure and really comprehending the opportunities". He describes discovering, years in, that requesting funding early in the financial year made approval more likely – "I had more pelican crossings than anybody else in the United Kingdom!". Later, he also realised that "if I allied myself with the benefit officers in my constituency...I could always nudge a little bit extra by pleading individual cases. "I wish I'd known it from the day I arrived."

“*I didn't marry you because you're handsome, obviously, but you've always been interesting*

This attention to process – to the particularities of how institutions work – underpins what he considers his most meaningful achievement. When I ask what he is proudest of, he answers immediately. Contrary to what one might expect, it's nothing to do with his time as Labour leader: "I think probably getting the international maritime organisation conventions turned into European Union law." These reforms "transformed the quality of shipping" and contributed to the "safest seas in the world". He then lists car crash testing regulations; transport treaties with Switzerland; and reforms within the European Commission. "You never see the words European Commission and scandal in the same sentence... because of the reforms we made." He pauses, "I think that, that's pretty good".

Some decisions linger longer. "You think about regret way more than you think about success." He pauses again before turning to his decision to campaign against remaining in the Common Market in the 1975 referendum: "I've thought about my decision to back the campaign quite a lot, yeah. How things might have been different." He laughs briefly, "Christ, this is fifty years ago – more than twice your age!". At the time, he says, backing the other side would have seen him dismissed "as an eccentric leftist".

But he is careful not to frame this as uncertainty over the European Union itself – in fact, he is arguably the most pro-European leader in the history of the Labour Party. What interests him though is what the issue reveals about political attachment: "On issues like that, what begins as policy stances can become issues of almost religious devotion – they grow deep roots." Shifting the party's position on Europe whilst serving as leader in the 1980s was not a matter of decree or discipline, but persuasion: "You can't do it by any arm twisting or wrist breaking." The work was slow, incremental, and to do it properly, he recalls, took almost six years. After "a religious fight", as he describes it, the Labour party "became the most pro-European party in the United Kingdom".

This idea – that progress is incremental and collective – sits at the centre of his politics. "The power of cooperation is slow but relentless", he tells me, "it's how things get done. How good things get done". He describes himself as holding "the values of a democratic socialist" and insists that compromise is not weakness: "People with deep convictions are never worried about making compromises, because they know that progress is incremental."

That belief was clearly a shared one. We are speaking two days after the second anniversary of his wife Glenys' death, after almost 60 years of marriage. When he speaks about her, the shift is

immediate – quieter, slower, more deliberate. He recalls watching her work as a Member of the European Parliament – "and a very effective one". "She used charm whilst other people used tanks." He remembers seeing her smiling in conversation with a group of Christian Democrats, later explaining that she had secured their agreement to an amendment on international development. When he dismissed them as "German Tories", she replied that she believed in "getting half a loaf and then going back for another half until I get the whole loaf". He recalls teasing her in response, "so, you're not in favour of compromise", to which she replied, "why should I [be], I married you". He smiles at the memory and then adds that she once told him, "I didn't marry you because you're handsome, obviously, but you've always been interesting". There is a long pause. "She was brilliant, yeah she was." He quietens and for a moment our conversation stops altogether.

When he speaks again, it's to return to his cooperative values. His anxiety about contemporary politics is rooted in the abandonment of these. "What worries me most of all is populism", he says, calling it, "the mobilisation of ignorance, by the manipulators". He is blunt about figures like Farage and his associates. People must "realise just what a bunch of sharp operators" they are, "they're wrong on every count... they are sensationalists, they are the Brexiteers, they are the rejectors of global responsibility and yet they blather on about global Britain".

Still, he believes there's hope: "Oh yeah, we can beat them," he says – but "we've got to beat them on our terms not theirs", through accomplishment, exposure, and serious scrutiny.

“*What worries me most of all is populism – the mobilisation of ignorance, by the manipulators*

He has hope too for young people and his advice is characteristically unvarnished: "Be yourselves. No one else is inherently better or worse than anyone else; you prove yourself by hard work and good deeds, and if you do that you're going to have a lot of fun along the way." He jokes about having worked very hard at being a clown at school – "a lot of fun" but "bloody awful" in terms of achievement.

My final question turns to the bookshelf in his office when I ask what one book he would read for the rest of his life. He instantly reaches for R.H. Tawney's *Equality*. Flicking through it, he finds amid the pages notes from a speech and then begins to read aloud from the opening page: "Matthew Arnold observed that in England inequality is almost a religion. He remarked on the incompatibility of that attitude with the spirit of humanity, and a sense of the dignity of man as man, which are the marks of a truly civilised society. 'On the one side, in fact, inequality harms by pampering; on the other by vulgarising and depressing. A system founded on it is one against nature, and, in the long run, breaks down.'" "This is the basis to it all", he says.

We finish with him still holding the book with a sort of reverence. By the end of our conversation his politics feels unmistakable – not rooted in gesture nor rhetoric, but rather patience, organisation, and an insistence that progress is something made together. In a political moment increasingly dictated by urgency and spectacle, Kinnock's convictions feel almost unfashionable. But sitting in his quiet office, his steadiness cannot be mistaken for nostalgia.

*Image credit: European Communities, CC*

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*Banner image credit: Christian Lambiotte, CC*

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# OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



## Anastasia Bukhman spoke to Sophie Price about funding a cure for Type 1 Diabetes

In 2025, the University of Oxford announced a £10 million gift from the Bukhman Foundation to establish the Bukhman Centre for Research Excellence in Type 1 Diabetes, dedicated to improving diabetes treatments and finding a cure. *Cherwell* spoke with Anastasia Bukhman, co-founder of the Bukhman Foundation, about philanthropy, academia, and the vital role of investment in medical research.

***Cherwell:* What inspired the Bukhman Foundation's focus on Type 1 Diabetes research, and why do you believe now is the pivotal moment for accelerating innovation in this field?**

*Bukhman:* We have a familial connection to Type 1 Diabetes (T1D), first through our parents, and then our daughter, who was diagnosed with T1D when she was little. In the years since, we have learnt a great deal about all the daily challenges faced by people with T1D and their families.

When it comes to timing, innovation never really stops, it just keeps moving forward. The progress in the last few years has been truly incredible. Exciting new treatments are being developed, like beta-cell transplants. With a simple blood test, we can now screen entire populations, helping us detect T1D early and delay the need for insulin – one such drug was even approved in the UK just a few weeks ago. A full cure isn't here yet, but it feels like we're right on the edge of real and lasting change.

***Cherwell:* Looking back, was there a defining moment when you knew you wanted to create a foundation of your own?**

*Bukhman:* There wasn't really one defining moment. Neither Igor nor I come from privileged backgrounds, so we understand that when you are fortunate enough to have the means, using it to support the world around you, the society around you, is the very least you can do, and through the foundation we hope to do that and maximise the impact that funding can make.

***Cherwell:* What have been the most significant lessons or challenges in setting up the foundation?**

*Bukhman:* In many ways, having a foundation like ours is a constant exercise in learning. You

start out with a rough framework of aims and ideas, but it keeps evolving in small ways all the time and will likely continue to in the future. We believe that you have to be flexible to be able to make a difference: listen to expertise, hear new voices and perspectives.

And then, of course, there is the question of focus. You cannot solve all the world's problems at once, so there is also a process of deciding where to focus funds to make a difference in the short and medium term as well.

***Cherwell:* How do you approach working with medical professionals and determining which areas to invest in?**

*Bukhman:* So, first of all, we know that we cannot do any of our philanthropic work in isolation, and for anything we look to support through the foundation, our first goal is to surround ourselves with experts in the field. But something that we think is of vital importance is to have a plurality of expertise and experience. For instance, when it comes to medical research, one side of the card is the pure, academic, medical research – but the other side is the human, the everyday, the realities of implementation.

You can have the smartest, cleverest academic breakthroughs, but if it cannot be efficiently translated to people day-to-day, it has failed. You have to take a multidisciplinary approach to things to stand the best chance of success. This is why we are so excited about the leadership of this initiative at Oxford, because it really brings together the best of a multidisciplinary world.

***Cherwell:* How do you foresee the role of philanthropy in medical research shifting in the future, and what responsibilities come with being a major donor?**

*Bukhman:* Philanthropy is only ever one part of the puzzle when it comes to addressing any cause. You need governments, private investment, NGOs, universities, community groups, and a hundred other elements to be successful. In that sense, there will always be a part for philanthropy to play in medical research.

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

*Image credit: Bukhman Foundation, with permission.*

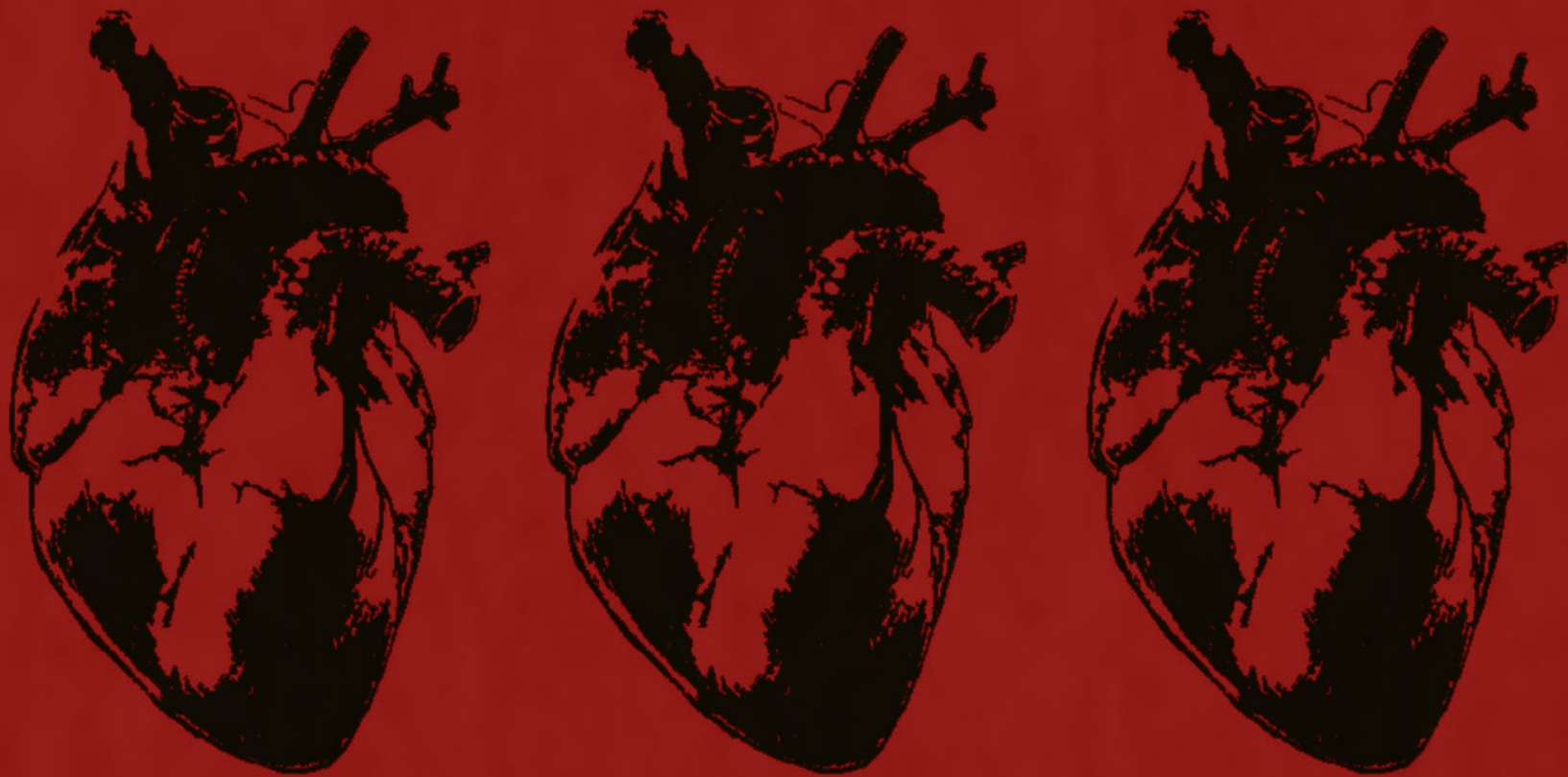


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## ‘Beautifully we may rot’: ‘Madame La Mort’ in review

*A performance harnessing French symbolist theatre to explore modern themes of psychosis, subjectivity, and mortality*

BEATRIX ARNOLD



CW: *Suicide*

In a small, black-painted room on the top floor of a pub in Islington, known as The Hope Theatre, *Madame La Mort*, a play by Labyrinth Productions and Full Moon Theatre, directed by Rosie Morgan-Males, was staged for the public for the first time, after a collaborative and, by all accounts, intense writing process.

The production is derived from a 19th century French symbolist play of the same name by Rachilde, the narrative of which is embedded within a 21st century plot. The protagonist, Juliette (Esme Somerside Gregory), suffering mental breakdown, uses the character of Rachilde’s Paul as a framework to cope with her neurosis, until she can no longer differentiate her own identity from his.

Despite the sparse and rather small set, the production makes innovative use of the space, projecting handwritten words on the back wall, which become more and more confused as the play progresses. Strobe lighting for a scene set in a club, and a soundscape of recorded voices are likewise highly effective devices. In the midst of her psychosis, Juliette imagines her apartment as a decadent French salon. There is a sense of sustained irony as the stage and its props become the *mise-en-scène* of Juliette’s constructed reality; she parades around the set with glassy childish glee, engaging in a procession of kitsch that draws attention to its own artificiality. Yet overall, the play uses a minimal amount of props, facilitating the audience’s immersion into the landscape of the mind.

The production seems to delight in experimenting with form, swiftly switching between contrasting scenes that become more disorienting in line with the process of Juliette’s neurotic desubjectification. The feverish pace of the play, hurtling from one scene to the next, is pulled up short by moments of stillness, when it lunges and lands in the exploration

of an image – a still lake, toast crumbs, the colours of a sunrise. One such extended pause comes with Juliette’s monologue, which is where Somerside Gregory, who wrote the passage herself, really excels. Her delivery was engaging and evocative, monopolising the audience’s attention with compelling intensity.

Juliette’s narrative is propelled by a psychology of paranoia, whereby the self is threatened by its own unaccommodated residues, and dissolves in a web of uncomprehended forces. A concatenation of short scenes traces Juliette’s self-disintegration as a result of the pressure from outside – the impersonal intervention of the therapist (Rohan Joshi), the anguished concern of her girlfriend, Lucie (Thalia Kermisch) – and paranoid fantasy from within. Lucie maintains a stubborn rationality in the face of her partner’s neurosis, as the prosaic clashes with the poetic. The intransigence of Juliette’s therapist is a source of frustration, as he, in the face of her breakdown, can only repeat *ad absurdum* the phrase: “We’ve talked about this.”

Juliette’s secure bearings in the world are eroded, as she is precipitated into a final and catastrophic decline, her subjectivity disintegrating under the pressure of her nightmarish delusions. The play’s emotional matrix is an acute claustrophobia, an oppressive sense of imprisonment, which, as the narrative progresses, extends from Juliette to the audience. There is no scope for distantiating here; the audience is immersed increasingly into Juliette’s psyche.

Themes of psychosis and suicide are difficult to portray with subtlety and sensitivity, particularly through the visual medium of theatre. As a result, the production, leaning as it does towards abstraction, tends to fall back on a vague romanticisation of its more hard-hitting concerns, which, although not handled without nuance, comes across at times as a little hackneyed.

The script, the product of a “writers’ room”, is an amalgamation of translation from the original French – a florid, baroque style – and modern insertions, creating “a polyphonic translation”,



according to the programme. At times, this sits in uneasy juxtaposition, particularly when Lucie switches from her colloquial, doggedly rational idiolect to a more archaic form of beseeching speech. The heavy-handedness of several of the narrative jabs – the drug-laced cigarette, the figuration of death as a woman in a black dress, the suicide note – are likewise the result of appropriation from the source material, and have the potential to point up the convoluted nature of the play’s conceit.

The limitations of the set, and the run-time, although doubtless frustrating for the production team, ultimately work in its favour. Productions of this kind, encroaching into the realm of the abstract, often veer towards self-indulgence. Restricting the play to a vignette serves to concentrate its thematic and symbolic resonance, although one does get the sense that, hyper-aware of this restraint, they are attempting to pack too much into it.

Morgan-Males insists that it is still a “work in

progress”; by the time of its scheduled Trinity term run in Oxford, and, looking further ahead, its staging at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the play may appear entirely different. In fact, the script was subject to heavy revision just days before this week’s performance. Its fluctuating nature as a piece of media grants it the ability to explore and incorporate varied angles on its themes, while retaining its core focus. As if to reflect the content, the very form of the work plays upon the spectacle of chaos and multiplicity.

*Madame La Mort* is a highly evocative piece of writing, creatively staged, and, on the whole, well-performed, if slightly let down by the contingency of its literary strategy. The script will, no doubt, develop and mature with revisions – it is this resistance to stasis that supplies the play’s appeal. Even if French accents are not really your thing, its commitment to innovation makes this play one worth watching.

*Image credit: Freddie Houlahan, with permission.*

## ‘Songs, skits, and a third thing beginning with S’: In conversation with Jack McMinn

REBECCA HARPER

If there’s one thing I believe Oxford’s theatre scene is missing, it’s a button-down-shirt-wearing ex-zoology student with a penchant for writing songs about Pret A Manger. Thankfully, Jack McMinn exists to fulfil my very specific niche.

I was lucky enough to sit down (on my couch and engage in an Instagram DM exchange) with Jack, to discover all there is to know about his new solo show, sperm-related songs, and the seductive power of Magdalen Street Tesco.

Some come out of the womb singing, but Jack seems to have started even before that. His first comedy song was “an entire parody of ‘Tik Tok’ by Ke\$ha from the perspective of a sperm”. Since then, his life has been a busy one. Perhaps to avoid litigation from Ke\$ha’s team, Jack immersed himself in academia and committed to the Cambridge-Oxford double bill, having recently

graduated from his DPhil. A recurring member of the Oxford Revue and resident musician in the Oxford Imps, he also worked towards curating the Oxford Comedy Archive. The mammoth project details the careers of Oxford’s own comedy legends, icons such as Rowan Atkinson and Michael Palin, to more recent rising stars like Sophie Duker – and undoubtedly soon, Jack McMinn.

“Some come out of the womb singing, but Jack seems to have started even before that

Jack spent the summer at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe – as all the best comedians and *Cherwell* reporters do – gigging in the city’s oddest locations. He reminisced on his favourite moment

from the month: performing in a “beautiful two-storey Georgian vault. The inside basically looked like a castle complete with nooks, crannies, and an enormous vaulted ceiling – which is just as well because it sucked away any kind of atmosphere for comedy whatsoever”.

The location for Jack’s upcoming solo show, Curio Books and Culture, may lend itself better to McMinn’s brand of sharp musical comedy. Located below student favourite Common Ground, not a lot of people seem to know that Curio hosts regular book events, poetry readings, and shows like Jack’s. In fact, there are a whole host of little-known (or at least, little-reported on) cabaret comedy venues – Jack shouts out *Hot Rats* (based in The Library Pub, Cowley) and *Undercover Comedy* (in the Jolly Farmers) as two of Oxford’s alternative comedy essentials. He also founded the *Live & Peculiar* variety nights, often hosting them himself. *Live & Peculiar* certainly fulfils both of its

titular adjectives – one eventful show ended with “a stand-up comic, an old woman drag act, and a burlesque performer post-strip, all sitting quietly in chairs onstage around some guy sitting on the floor playing a Greek lute”. As per.

When asked if we could expect another *Live & Peculiar* show any time soon, Jack commented: “You’re allowed to! I can’t stop you!” I suppose he’s right. His focus has undoubtedly turned to his other numerous projects. Fresh off the back of appearing in Channel 4’s *The Piano* and singing his way to second place at the 2025 Musical Comedy Awards, Jack is back in Oxford to spread a bit of cheer — lord knows we need it.

The tone of Jack’s solo show is illustrated perfectly by the poster graphic: a photo of McMinn in a suit atop an overflowing bin holding a tiny blue ukulele. The set will include, I’m told, “an hour of songs, skits, and a third thing beginning with S”.

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



ART

# Falling out of Louvre: Paris' most overrated attraction

*Beatrix Arnold discusses the shortcomings of the Louvre, and why it's a 'must-skip' on your Paris agenda*

Paris is internationally renowned as a hub of creativity, inspiring artistic pursuits throughout its history. Its many galleries, like the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie, bear testament to its artistic credentials. Yet it is the Louvre that takes first place in global renown, with a firmly entrenched status as a 'must-see' on any trip to Paris. It was, in the end, the fear that we would be doing the city a disservice, as well as perhaps an inclination towards masochism, that led us to include a visit to the Louvre on our agenda.

In spite of recent events, the expected heightened security was nowhere evident, making one doubt if they've got round to changing the video surveillance password yet. I wasn't planning to pull an Arsène Lupin, but it's nice to know I could have if I'd wanted to. The apparent scarcity of staff in general meant that not only were swathes of the museum closed to the public, but there was no one to offer a guiding ball of string as we traced our way through the labyrinthine layout of the endless Ancient Greek section.

The Louvre has the dubious privilege of housing a vast treasury of objects, particularly antiquities taken from Greece, Italy, Egypt, and the Middle East. Yet the curators of such a wealth of alluring artefacts seem to have taken the bold creative decision to not curate them at all. Far from imposing any hint of organisational design, the approach was rather to indiscriminately pile every single object in the collection into unmarked display cabinets. The only reason that I was able to get anything out of the homogeneous stretches of ancient artefacts was because I already knew about them. When an Oxford education is a prerequisite to understanding exhibitions, what precise purpose does the museum serve? Such a blatant refusal to explain the origin, design, or significance of these objects signifies more

than indolence. It perpetuates the notion that art, and its comprehension, is the preserve of the elite – if you know, you know, and if you don't know, we're certainly not going to help you out.

Museums are, in their very conception, the only place where most people will be exposed to such recondite objects as Cycladic figurines and Persian bas-reliefs. It should not have to be spelled out that it is, therefore, their obligation to act as mediator, to translate the geographically and temporally inaccessible into the idiom of the present day. Yet the Louvre, in its refutation of accessibility, seems to follow the doctrine of Schopenhauer, that art must remain a sealed book to the dull masses. Most visitors, who missed the memo about the required pre-reading, will leave the museum no more enlightened about Ancient Egyptian society than when they entered. This approach exacerbates the issues caused by these objects' contentious status: not only are they removed, often illegally, from their country of origin, they are not even dignified with a description. In the hands of curators, storied artefacts, interpretative keys to historical and cultural understanding, are reduced to lumps of metal and clay.

“*When an Oxford education is a prerequisite to understanding exhibitions, what purpose does the museum serve?*”

Putting aside the *Mona Lisa*, which is visible only momentarily, submerged behind an undulating barricade of iPhones, the keynote of the museum's artistic programme appeared to be the spirit of French national pride. The highlights tour consisted mostly



of portraits of French kings (ironic for a country that makes so much of its revolutions). You would never know that the Louvre housed such works as *La Mort de Marat*, *Lady Macbeth Sleepwalking*, and the paintings of Boucher. I found out that these were part of the collection only when I saw the postcard display in the giftshop. Not that I would have been able to fully appreciate them – the paintings were, for the most part, poorly lit and tersely labelled.

In the last month or so, the museum has sunk to even greater depths of incompetence with the unveiling of a new exhibition, the *Galerie de cinq continents*, with the avowed aim to “tell the story of humanity in all its diversity and richness”. This amounts to various figurines from disparate parts of the globe, primarily from Africa and Polynesia (unsurprisingly), sporadically dotted around in display cases like floating islands. The room, oppressively clinical in its

blankness, was punctuated by vacuous paragraphs descanting on such profound topics as ‘belief’ and ‘authority’, the verbal glue inexpertly applied to manufacture a sense of coherence.

The main takeaway of the exhibition was the comprehensive failure to acknowledge France's colonial past. Even where the origin of an object was specified, the legality of its acquisition was obfuscated by words like ‘collected’, as if it were an ASOS parcel. This *laissez-faire* approach was likewise applied to the display's inclusion of actual human remains, with no attempt to contextualise or justify the curatorial choices. Its half-hearted effort to create a storybook tableau of global unity came across as patronising, and ultimately affirmed, rather than undermined, an implicit sense of colonial dominance.

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

*Image credit: Beatrix Arnold for Cherwell.*

## How a visual impairment changed the way I see art

EMMA HEAGNEY

How do you study art if you can't see? In 2025, I was suddenly faced with this question, not out of curiosity, but the simple fact that half of my vision suddenly and significantly deteriorated. Perhaps it's ironic that this strange period of my life began after an art exam (thank you, Mods). Health concerns aside, I suddenly had a huge art-shaped problem on my hands: I couldn't see the works I was meant to be studying.

I would be lying if I said I knew exactly what happened to me, and to this day I'm still somewhat of a medical mystery to the Oxford Eye Hospital, which has quite frankly seen enough of me this year. The only certainty was that my eyes had changed. One was white, one was red. One was in constant pain, one was unaffected. One had 20/20 vision, and one could barely read the first row of an eye chart. As this malady set in, I was transported back to my 16-year-old self, plagued by completely different eye issues which demolished my self-esteem and threatened my health. Medical anxieties came flooding back. Was it something serious? Keratoconus, corneal dystrophy, or meibomian gland dysfunction? Would it leave scars? Would it last forever?

How do universities, and specifically art-related courses, accommodate for visual impairments? On a good day, the remedy of glasses, strong eye drops, and several compresses may have made my experience more bearable. But on a bad day, being presented with an

undeniably beautiful image of a Greek sculpture on a computer screen only produced sharp pain and a blurred picture. Instances like these point to the absolute necessity of handling art in person, which I was fortunate enough to be able to do. Instead of being exposed to harmful screens, I could see objects in person and feel them to ascertain their shape, size, and texture. Yet, these opportunities certainly aren't available to all, especially to those at universities with smaller endowments and archives. Likewise, while audio guides and large-print descriptions are available at some major galleries, such as the National Gallery in London, this is not a uniform policy across all British galleries. Some only provide audio guides for certain exhibitions, including the Ashmolean.

Art is anything but restrictive, and we can enjoy it with all of our senses. This is exactly what I sought to do once my sight began to falter. Far from the ‘immersive experiences’ in tourist-hell London, I found multi-sensory art in every walk of life. Cooking with Greek herbs transported me to the very land from which those blurry but beautiful statues originated. Musical accompaniments to exhibitions, like Art of Noise's deliciously opulent *Moments in Love* complementing Tate Modern's Leigh Bowery showcase, threw me headlong into pure artistic bliss, somewhat making up for the endless amount of squinting.

I also found art in what at first seemed mundane. The John Radcliffe Hospital, a short bus journey away from any of the University's

colleges, should have been a place for my eye-related anxieties to come to a head. Tense waiting rooms, uncomfortable operations, and news that can change your life in an instant. But, in my four-hour wait for an emergency ophthalmologist appointment, I found comfort in the art I came across unexpectedly. Enter NHS Artlink, the endeavour of Oxford University Hospitals to use the visual arts to reduce those same anxieties I had while nervously biting my nails in the JR. From floral wall-paintings by Angie Lewin in the Ambulatory Assessment Unit to Lisa Milroy's *Hands On* drawing exhibition in the Emergency Department, the hospital is coloured with works by local artists, designed with the purpose to instill hope, even for just a moment. My often-frequented spot, the Eye Hospital waiting room, bears landscapes painted by Nicky Hirst and inspired by the Ashmolean's Turner and Constable collection, reproductions of which juxtapose her paintings. I still couldn't see them as well as I ought to, but comparisons to the familiar originals certainly helped.

“*Art is anything but restrictive, and we can enjoy it with all our senses*”

The hospital's main artistic attraction, however, is the Corridor Gallery. It functions as a mini-gallery itself, with temporary exhibitions held throughout the year. The curation is

sensitive and speaks to the visitors of the hospital: recently, artist Marysa Dowling's exhibition titled *What We Carry* showcased the experience of those with chronic pain, as channeled through photography and storytelling. In one photo series, we see joyful pet cats contrasted with polaroids of pillboxes and MRI machines. The neutrality of the display and the nostalgic sheen of polaroid certainly emphasises the constant presence of chronic pain.

Until 17th January, the Corridor Gallery is also host to Oxford-based artist Claire Venables' collection of oil paintings titled *Looking at Glass*. This exhibition is similarly one of contrasts, as Venables explores the relationship we have with everyday objects, from fruit and flowers to conical flasks. Each painting employs a blue-dominated colour scheme, complementing each other greatly, and once again speaking to the uncomfortable normality of illness in our everyday lives. In a state where I couldn't see clearly, I saw truth in these paintings. My visual impairment wasn't something I could turn off, or even forget about for just a moment, constantly faced with it until I shut my eyes at the end of the night.

A year later, and after a long treatment of steroids, my vision has fortunately recovered, but the anxiety remains. I often think of the other patients who continue to endure the four, five, even six hour waits for appointments at the Eye Hospital, riddled with the same anxiety. I only hope that the art dotted around the JR brings them as much hope as it did for me.



# Looking back to look forward

*Willow Jopp on the films of 1976, and their resonance for society 50 years later*

Films are, essentially, artefacts. The history of film is a cumulative record of what people have wanted to say, show, and create, not only for their contemporary audience, but for audiences of the future. The films of past decades do not just exist in the here and now, but act as reminders of the there and then. These artefacts, however, only survive if we in the present know how to see ourselves in them.

As we enter this new year, 1976 is now 50 years ago, and while it is easy for us to use its films as a way to escape backwards in time, tucking ourselves comfortably into a nostalgia for an era that feels so far removed from our own, this should not be their sole purpose. Films are as much records of the past as they are guides for the future, and the films of 1976 feel uncomfortably instructional, shaped by anxieties that still resonate with a student in 2026.

## Network, Sidney Lumet

In this satire, news anchor Howard Beale's gradually deteriorating mental state causes his ratings to rapidly increase until he becomes a modern-day prophet, spouting galvanising diatribes to an entertainment-obsessed America.

It goes without saying that our lives, more than ever, are filtered through screens. We cling to media personalities for guidance. We are hungry for anything that can alleviate our boredom, in the hopes that somewhere amongst all the mess, we will find some kind of wider truth. Media executives respond accordingly and prioritise narratives that prompt emotional engagement, favouring entertainment over facts. This concern within our media culture existed in 1976 much like it does now, and is the underlying theme of *Network*. Viewers, then and now, are victims of media systems which

seek to turn emotion into profit, to the extent that our outrage is their desired product. Howard Beale embodies this attitude, as his ethical rhetoric is absorbed into spectacle and his sincerity is irrelevant as long as it is beneficial to the Network.

## Canoa: A Shameful Memory, Felipe Cazals

Eight years prior to the release of this film, five employees of the University of Puebla, Mexico, were victims of a lynching by a mob of villagers, incited by a manipulative right-wing priest who claimed that they were communist students. This story is chillingly reenacted in Cazals' *Canoa*.

Ideological manipulation. Religious fanaticism. Mass violence. These themes transcend Mexico, 1968, and 1976, and map onto today's world with unsettling precision. We are constantly navigating discourses about who is considered 'dangerous', and bombarded with ideologies which thrive on fear, emotionally charged social narratives, and unverified claims. These narratives aren't merely abstract, as they shape how people act, whom they trust and whom they are willing to harm. What this film teaches us is that violence is present long before an act of violence is committed. It can be found when fear, haste, and confusion replace rational thinking.

## Cría Cuervos..., Carlos Saura

Filmed in the dying days of Francoist Spain, *Cría Cuervos...* paints the portrait of Ana, an eight-year-old orphan, and her sisters. Often retreating into memories, she grapples with the death of her parents and the legacy of fascism within her family.

For children living in any time or place, politics is not something you opt into willingly.

Authoritarianism conditions people emotionally, through fear, habit, and silence, long before it asserts itself through law. Politics can be a spectacle, but it is often something more atmospheric, embedded in social relationships, and absorbed into our private emotional lives. It is no surprise, therefore, that so many of us experience burnout, as political issues that started long before our time increasingly feel like our responsibility. In *Cría Cuervos...*, Ana inherits emotional damage she does not understand: a historically produced fatigue. Through her we learn that the fatigue we may be feeling is not the result of personal inadequacy, but is instead shaped by the emotional inheritance of unfinished histories.

## News from Home, Chantal Akerman

Filmmaker Chantal Akerman, after leaving Belgium to live in New York, reads letters from her mother, who remained in Brussels. Accompanying this are elegant but alienating shots of Manhattan, creating a minimalist meditation on dislocation, estrangement, and familial disconnection.

During my first year of university, I rarely and reluctantly called my family. I considered their protectiveness unnecessary as I searched for independence somewhere new. However, as many of us spend more and more time alone, it is important to treasure the humble domestic elements of home that we so often take for granted. As in Akerman's film, these moments do not resolve distance or uncertainty, but they make them more bearable. Amidst the constant circulation of crisis-driven news and opinion, and the exhaustion that follows from it, it is in the small things that true human connection and fulfilment can be found.

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

# FILM AND TV

## What's Oxford watching?



### Wake Up Dead Man

Esme Thomson at Keble recommends *Wake Up Dead Man* (2025):

*"A subversive murder mystery that grapples with the dangers and relief of faith."*

You can watch *Wake Up Dead Man* on Netflix.



### The Ascent (Восхождение)

Although it's a foreign-language black-and-white film, Beatrix at Wadham didn't pick *The Ascent* (1977) just to be pretentious:

*"Shepitko's innovately shot film is a harrowing portrayal of wartime conditions in the USSR, with anguish in every frame. As far as propaganda goes, this is the kind that would work on me."*

You can watch *The Ascent* on Amazon Prime.

Image credits: 'Wake Up Dead Man' and 'The Ascent' via [imdb.com](#).

# Streaming superpowers and the future of the theatrical release

NORA MILES

December saw the announcement of Netflix's \$72 billion deal to acquire Warner Bros. Discovery. What followed was a veritable moral panic amongst cinephiles, and I count myself as one of those who fear for the future of the theatrical release. I have therefore set out to better understand my loyalty towards the cinemas that have the nerve to charge £20 or more per ticket, and dive deeper into the possible future complexion of the film industry.

I get the impression that the question of streaming as an existential threat to the cinema industry has become somewhat tedious. Is the movie theatre destined to keep bouncing back as a cultural pillar? And does the perpetual sink-or-swim narrative play

a role in driving people to see a film on the silver screen? I for one am always convinced that my ticket purchase is going to single-handedly save cinema.

To avoid exaggerating, we ought to turn to what Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos has said on the matter: "My pushback has been mostly in the fact of the long exclusive windows, which we don't really think are that consumer-friendly." You'll have to forgive my scepticism about the altruistic capacity of the CEO of a company worth \$413 billion, but I take issue with this statement. Firstly, if cinema ticket prices continue to increase, will anyone be able to justify trips to the cinema to see films that will be available for free (or at least, it feels that way) 30 days later? This is not an exaggeration: according to film blog *Dark Horizons*, theatrical windows now average a length of just 32 days. Furthermore, I worry about a future in which, after having established something

of a monopoly on films available to watch on streaming, Netflix continues to price-gouge the consumer. This profiteering was made even more abundantly clear by the introduction of geographic limits to Netflix accounts. Considering this is the same company that once, on Valentine's Day, tweeted: "Love is sharing a password", you have to acknowledge the hypocrisy.

“  
*Is the movie theatre destined to keep bouncing back as a cultural pillar?*”

Another defence of the cinema worth exploring is its ability to bolster our attention spans in a culture increasingly dominated by short-form content. While the opportunity to pause a film and make a cup of tea is always appreciated when watching at home, the more general possibility of distraction, far less so. I don't think the time has yet come for a full-scale "it's those damn phones" moral panic, but we do need to think seriously about safeguarding a hobby that forces you to focus on one thing for a couple of hours. In the spirit of exemplarity, I hereby promise to resist the temptation to start drafting my Letterboxd review before the film has finished.

It may well be that we're obsessing over new releases when the saving grace of cinemas lies in rereleases. Perhaps inspired by the Netflix model of a constantly changing catalogue, both chain and independent cinemas are increasing the number of classic films they show. Distributor Park Circus' CEO Doug Davis cited research from Gower Street

and Comscore which shows that box office returns in the UK for classic films grew by 133% in 2023 compared to the pre-pandemic average between 2017-2019. I can personally attest to the mental health benefits of going to see *It's a Wonderful Life* the week before Christmas with a glass of white wine included in the ticket price.

The adventures of the film's protagonist George Bailey also represent something fundamental and necessary about the cinema experience: "Remember, no man is a failure who has friends." The same can be said of going to see a movie, however terrible it turns out to be, amongst people you love. There's joy to be found in sitting and laughing through a film rather than DNF-ing it on Netflix and choosing something else. The shared act of viewership provides something inexhaustibly exciting to the cinematic experience.

At its most extreme, this sense of communality can spark a wider cultural phenomenon of cinema-going. I think it's possible that dressing up in a suit to watch the *Minions* movie reignited a love of cinema-going amongst at least a handful of teenage boys. I certainly don't think either *Barbie* or *Oppenheimer* would have achieved such box-office returns if they had been released straight to streaming. This seems to suggest hope for the future of the movie theatre, and I certainly appreciate the whimsical and sentimental illusion of social unity that such trends create. I enjoyed crying through America Ferrara's *Barbie* monologue about girlhood while sitting in a row filled with my girl friends. Sue me.

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

Image credit: Motacilla, CC BY-SA 4.0, via [Wikimedia Commons](#).





MUSIC

What’s Oxford listening to?



Evelyn at Lady Margaret Hall recommends *Lux* by Rosalia:  
*“Lux is a complex, deeply considered, and creative album, which encourages its listeners to engage with it thoroughly, whilst remaining very listenable, bringing a fresh vivacity to the music scene.”*



Ruaridh at Wadham recommends *Getting Killed* by Geese:  
*“Geese’s third album shows a maturation within their musical identity, moving away from their alt/indie rock roots and developing a much more experimental, avant-garde sound, with Cameron Winter’s haunting vocals comparable to those of Thom Yorke.”*

Image credits: ‘Lux’ and ‘Getting Killed’ via Apple Music.

# Does streaming undermine the value of music?

RUARIDH MCEWEN

The 21st century has seen the rise of streaming services in both visual media and music, heralding the predominance of monthly fees over outright ownership. Although physical media has recently made a comeback through a surge in popularity of CDs and vinyl, their price has significantly increased since their original use. The cost of watching live performances has also drastically increased in recent years. Corporations such as Ticketmaster raise prices, with recent controversy over their ‘dynamic pricing’ system which inflated prices of Oasis tickets based on public demand.

Whilst music in the 21st century is accessible through streaming platforms, this convenience has come at the cost of music’s perceived value. Rather than owning music, listeners pay a relatively small subscription fee to access vast catalogues advert-free, with services such as Spotify and Apple Music dominating the market at £10.99 and £12.99 per month respectively, or just £5.99 for students. In contrast, physical formats such as vinyl, typically priced at £20 or more per record, alongside the expense of a turntable and speakers, require a far greater upfront investment that is often unrealistic for students amid the rising cost of living. However, this unprecedented affordability and accessibility of streaming undermines the price of music itself; for less than the cost of a single album per month, users gain access to almost all recorded music. As a result, the most pressing issue facing the industry is not that music is inaccessible, but that its value has been drastically reduced, leading to artists receiving

minimal financial compensation for their work. Thus artists often rely on sales of physical media and concert tickets in order to make a profit.

In comparison to the prices of physical media just under two decades ago, the sharp increase in costs is remarkable. The average price for a vinyl record was “\$6-\$10 fifteen years ago to \$15-\$30 now” according to Discogs. Naturally, inflation is in part responsible for this gulf, but the key driving factor in this price increase is due to increased consumer demand from those who wish to outright own their music or simply want to support their favourite artists. Looking even further back in time shows how much the price of records has increased. I have been lucky enough to have been given my parents’ collection of vinyl, some with price stickers still on the covers with costs of as little as 99p for David Bowie’s *Hunky Dory*.

“*This convenience has come at the cost of music’s perceived value*”

Although previous generations often paid significant sums for new individual albums, even when accounting for inflation, their spending was tied directly to ownership and a clear valuation of music. By contrast, the contemporary streaming model offers near-unlimited access for a minimal monthly cost, fundamentally altering not only affordability but also who music culture is marketed towards and how its value is perceived. Vinyl’s resurgence has often been framed as a nostalgic or

‘premium’ experience, aimed at collectors rather than casual listeners. Limited pressings, coloured vinyl variants, and exclusive releases all drive prices higher, turning music into a luxury product rather than a shared cultural good. While this may benefit artists and independent record stores to some extent, it inevitably excludes those who simply cannot justify the cost, particularly students.

Streaming, while initially appearing to solve this problem, introduces its own barriers. Monthly subscriptions may seem affordable when compared to vinyl, but considering the growing number of digital services people tend to pay for films, television, or gaming, the cost quickly accumulates. For those with less disposable income such as students, even a £10 monthly fee can be difficult to prioritise, particularly when free tiers are increasingly limited by adverts, restricted features, or reduced audio quality. I remember using the free version of Spotify before shelling out some of my maintenance loan – I wouldn’t recommend it. What’s the point of having access to a range of music when there’s adverts playing every 30 minutes and no shuffle feature? Music becomes something you rent rather than own, and once payments stop, access disappears entirely.

There is also the question of artistic value. Streaming platforms pay artists notoriously low royalties, meaning that despite listeners paying more over time through subscriptions, the musicians themselves often see little financial benefit. This creates a system where consumers pay repeatedly, artists struggle to sustain careers, and large corporations reap the majority of the profit.

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

# Breaking free from the Pinterest board

VICTORIA CORFIELD

Over the Christmas vac I was lucky enough to attend an exhibition on one of my favourite designers, Vivienne Westwood, at the National Gallery of Victoria. Rich in archival treasures, the display visually narrated Westwood’s career in all its exquisite technicolour, serving as a true testament to her commitment to non-conformist aesthetics.

Alongside the clothing, one of the most memorable aspects of this exhibition was the selection of quotes by the designer weaved amongst the mannequins, primarily the one displayed above the entrance: “I never look at fashion magazines. I find them boring.” This sentence encapsulates Westwood’s disdain for the social politics and conventionality she deemed characteristic of the fashion industry. A notorious pioneering figure of the punk movement, founded in its immovable notion that fashion should be born from individuality, Westwood’s designs are the product of her belief that fashion is rooted in originality, a creative medium for the outward expression of the individual. Her disdain for the hyper-consumerism rampant in the fashion industry – “I don’t feel very comfortable defending my fashion except to say that people don’t have to buy it” – reflects her enthusiasm for reworking what you already have, rejecting the idea that to be fashionable is to constantly be consuming and conforming. For Westwood and her punk contemporaries, there is no such thing as to be ‘fashionable’, and if that is what you are aspiring to then frankly you’ve missed the point entirely.

This exhibition inspired a great deal of reflection on my own attitudes to fashion and how I dress. As someone who likes to consider herself somewhat ‘fashionable’ (or at the very least someone who takes an interest in fashion) I feel as though this individuality which Westwood posits as so central to personal style has become lost, muddled by the rise of visual social media, which allows us to access trends, and thereby adopt them, at an ever increasing rate. Fashion is no longer primarily a medium built on originality, nor on individual expression. Contemporary fashion, by which I refer to the manner in which fashion is consumed by the masses (not strictly runway nor editorial fashion) has become a careful act of self-curation. Our clothes and outward appearance contribute to a narrative which we wish to convey to the world, about us, our status, our intellect, and our person. It is driven by a kind of aesthetic cohesion, one which I think can be best observed in the compartmentalisation of fashion into countless ‘aesthetics’ and ‘cores’.

Don’t get me wrong, defined styles with their own aesthetics have always existed, Westwood herself found affinity with the punk movement which can be viewed as its own ‘aesthetic’. An identifiable visual code has long been a core part of countless sub-cultures and minority communities for whom fashion becomes much more than frivolity, rather aiding representation and articulating a desire to be seen. However, what I am observing now is less an allegiance to a sub-culture than what I deem to be a kind of binary categorisation, one which is driven by this age of fast fashion and excessive consumerism which demands us to be always chasing the latest trends.

In an age dominated by visual forms of social media, it is no longer entire cultures nor corporations who curate a kind of personal brand image, it’s now individuals. We face a compulsive desire to turn our lives into uniform and aesthetically pleasing Pinterest boards. This is killing our creativity. Personal style is built upon plagiarism. In any other art form, making a carbon copy of another’s work and branding it your own is almost always frowned upon, and yet in fashion it appears to be rebranded as ‘inspiration’. We are living in a time where the development of a personal style is less an act of originality, or of learning to sharpen our perception to distinguish our likes and dislikes and establish parameters of taste, than it is built upon imitating the fashion of those we deem ‘cool’ or conventionally attractive.

When confronted with this warped notion of ‘style’, defined by the next ‘aesthetic’ that

the internet will try to shove down our throats I am inclined to return to Westwood’s words of wisdom, that you do not always need to be consuming to be fashionable. There is no obligation to keep up with this insatiable trend cycle, now moving at a previously unprecedented speed, with the average ‘micro-trend’ cycle in 2025 lasting just three to five months. To be truly fashionable is to be both intentional and original, knowing what suits you and what you are drawn to, while being innovative and experimental. I feel like Oxford is an environment which fosters this kind of experimentation. In a city which embraces defined senses of personal style, where individuality is valued, what’s stopping you? Go digging in your wardrobe, and try looking at things in a different way, because you never know what treasures you might find.

Image credit: Mtaylor84, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.





# Reflections on the Booker Prize

Charlie Bailey discusses the theme of damaging detachment in the Booker Prize shortlist

This Christmas vac, I made up my mind to get out of my reading slump. I find that the best way to do this is to choose a book that isn't necessarily about a topic I know I'll be interested in, but is a book recommended by critical consensus. And so I turned to the shortlist for the Booker Prize. I went into this without preconceptions, normally choosing books outside of my degree for their 'easy reading' value (Emily Henry is talented in her own way). I picked the winner, *Flesh* by David Szalay, and then randomly chose *The Rest of Our Lives* by Benjamin Markovitz.

This randomness turned out to reveal a much-observed theme across the Booker Prize shortlist: toxic masculinity. This reflects the rise in discourse around issues specific to men, partly due to the need to create positive role models to counteract those preaching the messages of the manosphere.

The books weaved this theme into their narratives in different ways: the key moments in the life of Ivstán, Slazay's protagonist, are framed as his sexual experiences. They seem to define him. In his teenage years, a twisted relationship with an older woman leads to him spending time in prison, and a whole chapter records him taking a friend to a hotel, where he tries and fails to sleep with her. Later, he begins a relationship with Helen, a married woman bored with her life with her older, wealthy husband, marrying her himself after her husband's death from cancer. Towards the end of the book, he begins to perpetrate sexual violence against his housekeeper, whom he sleeps with after his wife's death.

In *The Rest of Our Lives*, the theme is directly described, as the protagonist Tom Layward is placed on leave after refusing to add his pronouns at the end of emails, and supporting the case of an NBA player accused of racist and sexist comments. His situation

is in many ways a reversal of Ivstán's – twelve years ago, his wife Amy cheated on him, and he vowed to leave her once his daughter Miri leaves for college.

Both books started in a way that was pretty alienating – I'm not sure I would have persevered if it wasn't for their critical acclaim. The blurb of *Flesh* markets the book as a story about the aftershocks of a warped relationship the protagonist experiences with an older woman when he is a teenager. This doesn't mitigate the difficulty of reading the sections in which she repeatedly beckons him to her house, and coaxes him into destroying his innocence. *The Rest of Our Lives* opened with a different kind of tough read, the voice of a middle-aged man moaning about the state of his marriage. In his words, his marriage is locked at the status of 'C-minus' ever since his wife's affair. He has a vague intent to leave her, which, as the novel progresses, the reader realises he will never act upon.

I put each book down unsettled. Both main characters crumbled. Ivstán lost his money and his relationship, the only two things he had, and Tom is diagnosed with a tumour that will likely kill him, trapped in hospital with his wife, any talk of leaving her now irrelevant. What frustrated me the most was the lack of emotional depth the men experienced. They weren't particularly likeable characters. This is of course not a new idea in literature – I recently had a conversation with a friend about how a good book should put you inside the head of a character whose decisions you disagree with. As you're forced to live their reality, you find yourself, through understanding their psychology, endorsing their decisions in a concerning way. That works if there's an explanation of the characters' own rationale for their actions, however twisted. The unsatisfying aspect of these novels for me was that it felt like the

characters had no idea what they were doing.

The strongest parallel between the books that stuck out for me was the men's complete detachment from the circumstances of their own lives. They both seem to know that they were unsatisfied, and getting things wrong. It was like shouting at a screen because a character in a movie can't see what's right in front of them. In the midst of his relationship with his housekeeper towards the end of the novel, Ivstán vaguely considers if he is a bad person, then leaves the thought alone. I disagreed with some reviewers' suggestion that the reader's empathy towards him increases as the novel goes on – bluntly, he disgusted me throughout. Any sense of affection towards his relationships manifested in a delayed way – only after his wife Helen's death does he acknowledge the impact she made on him, the fact that he thinks in certain ways only because of her presence in his life.

Markovitz's character Tom was likewise frustrating because of his total lack of direction. This was literalised in the road trip he embarked upon to avoid his own life. He displayed a chronic inability to act on his thoughts. Leaving one's partner is a difficult choice, but one that he had been harbouring for twelve years, remaining bitter without making a decision as to whether he could proceed with Amy. This was made more jarring when he encountered an old girlfriend, met her friends, and left her behind as if nothing had occurred. All the while, lurking in the background was his deteriorating health condition which, in typical fashion, he ignored, refusing every single offer of support from his family members. He, too, looked at his past life in a detached way: he describes his former relationships without much fanfare, in a long internal monologue about how he reached his unsatisfied state.

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

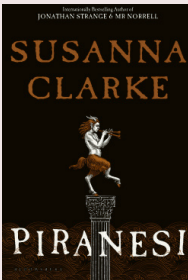
## BOOKS

### What's Oxford reading?



Beatrix at Wadham recommends this 2014 novel by Nobel laureate Han Kang:

*"A graphic portrayal of the 1980 student uprising in South Korea, and the aftershock of the massacre. Han Kang explores the complexities and distortions of memory and community with nuance. A poignant read now, and at every stage of human history."*



Lucy at Keble recommends *Piranesi* (2020) by Susanna Clarke:

*"A gripping narrative of a writer losing his mind in a liminal space as he seeks to find out the truth of his betrayal and abduction, written in beautifully evocative prose."*

Image credits: 'Human Acts' and 'Piranesi' via waterstones.com

## WHAT'S ON

### MUSIC

January New Music Weekend  
Jacqueline du Pré Music Building  
16th-18th January

Folk night  
The Half Moon  
18th January, 8pm

### STAGE

The Oxford Imps  
The Jericho Tavern  
19th January, 7:30pm

### FILM

Sentimental Value  
The Ultimate Picture Palace  
11th-22nd January

Hamnet  
Phoenix Picturehouse  
11th-18th January

### LITERATURE

'Orwell Life and Legacy' with Dominic Sandbrook  
Blackwell's Bookshop  
22nd January

Short Performances of Jane Austen's Emma  
Weston Library  
18th January, 12-2:30pm

### TALKS

Educating women under the Taliban  
Trinity College, de Jager Auditorium  
20th January 5:30pm



## The Source

### Sonnet on a common condition

There is a grey and wiry hair that I  
Can search out with a pointy knobbled finger  
That's soon to be arthritic. And one eye  
Can see a little better than the other.

The doctor says my handbag has to go.  
The twang between my shoulder blades agrees.  
The way I drank last night has made me slow;  
Each night it seems I'm slower by degrees.

New glasses, ergonomic backpack, then!  
Maybe later hair dye like my mother.  
And I suppose I'll keep my grip on pen  
And pint and book and still eat butter.

Time keeps marching on like a band  
But what an easy resolution I've found.

NIAMH DURNIN



## Why you don't need a 'winter arc'

*This trend on social media celebrates discipline, productivity, and quiet transformation – but how helpful is this?*

AMY LAWSON

Congratulations, you've made it through another (calendar) year at Oxford. You've endured the delight of start of term collections, May Day, and hiding hangovers in tutorials; then exam season, and camping out in sweaty libraries. You've watched the newly matriculated Freshers make their way in droves to Magdalen boat house, kitted out with bottles of prosecco and gowns that haven't yet experienced the post-trashing scent (which seems to linger no matter how many times you wash it). You've experienced Oxmas and delirious Christmas dinners with friends, that frantic sprint towards the end of term; being weighed down with a room full of overdue library books and barely-packed suitcases. But if you thought the grind was over, you're far from correct.

What I'm referring to is not degree work – we hardly need reminding of the Sisyphean rock that is the deadly weekly essay-and-tutorial combo (or tute sheet, if you are so inclined) – but a different kind of journey. It's one that invites you to look inwards, to transform yourself into a master of self-discipline and, all in all, become entirely unrecognisable. This is the "winter arc", a trend brought into our vernacular by Instagram and TikTok, those two behemoths which increasingly shape our conception of the world around us (or at least, the neat little categories we think it can be placed into).

The winter arc asks us to reevaluate the way we view our habits, diets, careers, fitness, and even relationships. No area of life seems to be free from its self-actualising iron grip. It asks its disciples to cheat the winter blues and

the post-Christmas malaise in favour of meditation, working on a side hustle or, somewhat predictably, training for a half marathon. There's no time for hibernation when you've been tasked with living the key montage of a coming-of-age film.

The idea is not to change yourself entirely, but to rebrand into a version that is optimised, operating on maximum efficiency; an elevated self that is somehow simultaneously self-aware, mindful of destructive behaviour patterns in both oneself and other people, yet also self-transcending. It demands that we place aside things that are deemed trivial, unsuitable for personal development: doomscrolling, overspending, and overeating. Overindulging in anything, in fact, is frowned upon. Not very festive, if you ask me.

Another key element of the winter arc is its promotion of progress under the radar: the "stealth grind", as it were. Silence is golden when you've decided to use it to work on yourself, your investments, your side hustle. The winter arc is portrayed as a path you walk alone – quite literally, since a Pinterest search for the term throws up endless isolated images of individual runners in idyllic landscapes, a desk with a single lamp and notebook and a lone figure sitting and reading a book. We're encouraged to "lock in" and "maximise productivity" without talking about it, and in a way that produces astonishing results.

This is perhaps the key problem with the idea of the winter arc: its inherent performativity. Delivered to us on a silver platter by the algorithm, with consumerism predictably hiding in its shadow, it's easy to see the trend as just another aesthetic to aspire to. Yet there is nothing silent about the

kind of behaviour it encourages, which often borders on the problematic and the toxic: there's a reason why ads for intermittent fasting and tips for "eating clean" are peppered amongst these vision boards. It's hard to shake the sense that impressing others – at whatever cost – is one of the ultimate motivations.

It's easy to imagine how the kind of habits and self-discipline lauded by staunch believers in the winter arc might find a ripe breeding ground at Oxford. The intensity of the environment here can certainly give way to extreme behaviours, with 11-hour shifts in the college library not being an uncommon occurrence. That said, the community that college offers might be the best antidote to the self-isolation the winter arc demands. It's difficult to 'grind in silence' when your friends are yapping to you about the disorganisation of their course, or how they messed up in their tutorial last



Friday, and rightly so.

One of the things I love so much about this place is the fact that we're all growing alongside each other and, in many ways, your friend's wins feel like your own. From your tute partner reassuring you that your argument actually did make a lot of sense, to helping your friend practice a presentation about seals, the community is a constant reminder that (contrary to what Instagram and TikTok might be keen to tell you) progress doesn't always happen in isolation. Holding each other accountable, or just holding each other when the going gets rough, is one of the best ways of building healthy habits.

So by all means, get up at 6am, abstain from Reels and eat only boiled chicken and rice – but don't forget that sometimes, the most radical act of self-improvement can be simply going to hall or the college bar with your friends, and chatting absolute nonsense. If that's my winter arc, I'm locking in.

Image credit: Christian David Gebauer, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons.

## HOROSCOPES



Aries

Yes, everyone is *desperate* to hear about your ski trip.



Taurus

New year, new you: go and get that buzzcut!



Gemini

Revising for collections isn't everything.



Cancer

Invest in a warm pair of gloves and a good bike lock.



Leo

Commit to Bridge Thursday. It only comes round once a week.



Virgo

2026 is your year. Don't share it with anyone else.

## Going analogue: Exploring the aesthetic of curation

MAYA RYBIN

If you've been paying attention to fashion, culture, or the images plastering magazines and movies in the last few months, you'll have noticed it already. Digicams hanging from wrists like accessories. Wired headphones peeking out of coat pockets. iPods, flip phones, scratched CDs, bulky MP3 players reappearing not as relics, but as aesthetic choices. The next trend, apparently, is "going analogue".

Of course, no one means actually going analogue. Digital technology gives us speed, storage, and infinite access. But it has also reshaped how we pay attention to what we consume and what we value. This isn't a mass rejection of Wi-Fi or a return to VHS tapes and landlines. What's being signalled instead is a desire for the feeling these things create: slowness, tactility, a sense of limitation. In other words, a softer relationship with technology that resists the hyper-optimised digital world. Like most trends, it's framed visually first – grainy photos, boxy devices, imperfect sound – but beneath the aesthetic is something deeper.

Growing up, analogue media was never foreign to me. CDs and radios weren't dusty objects belonging solely to my parents; they were part of my everyday life. There was something grounding about choosing a CD, placing it into a player, listening through an album without skipping every 30 seconds.

But as I got older, the internet pulled me away from that world. Not because CDs felt obsolete, but because digital platforms offered something intoxicating:

freedom. The ability to explore entire genres, cultures, and scenes instantly. Spotify felt like liberation – an endless library that allowed me to build my taste without borders. I didn't abandon my CDs; I was drawn outward by possibility.

That balance shifted when I got to university. Between lectures, deadlines, and constant low-level exhaustion, convenience became king. Spotify began to compete with my CD collection in a way it never had before. Streaming won, not because it was better, but because it was faster. Music slipped into the background, filling silence while I walked between buildings or ate rushed lunches.

For a long time, the tension sat quietly at the back of my mind. I could feel that something in my relationship with music had shifted, but it remained vague, easy to ignore. I kept listening, kept saving songs, kept letting sound fill the gaps of my day.

Suddenly, the way I consumed music felt uncomfortably familiar. It mirrored how I scrolled through Reels or Shorts: fast, fragmented, disposable. My 100-hour "liked songs" playlist had swallowed thousands of hours of artistic labour, compressing it into background noise I barely registered.

What had once felt like liberation was exposed as false freedom: infinite choice repackaged by corporations into content streams optimised for algorithms, convenience, and profit. Albums and artists were flattened, and music – something I had once approached with curiosity and care – had become a filler. I wanted to slow down, to choose deliberately, to listen with intention

again. I didn't want to consume; I wanted to curate.

So, I dug out my old MP3 player. I started downloading music again, one album at a time. Choosing carefully. Listening fully. This is where the distinction between consumption and curation becomes clear. In the last few years, minimalism encouraged us to shed physical possessions for the sake of simplicity – books replaced by e-readers, DVDs by Netflix, CDs by Spotify. But in exchanging objects for platforms, we inherited a different kind of excess. Subscriptions multiplied. Notifications accumulated. The clutter didn't disappear; it just became invisible.

A consumer scrolls, absorbs, and forgets. A curator chooses, maintains, and returns. Analogue systems naturally demand this care because they are finite. You can't own infinite CDs. You can't skip through every song ever recorded in seconds. Limitation, I realised, isn't a flaw – it's what makes engagement possible in the first place.

This logic doesn't stop with music. Increasingly, news, political ideas, and cultural debates are encountered the same way songs are: through feeds, snippets, and autoplay. When information is delivered through systems designed to maximise engagement, we stop seeking it out and start absorbing whatever surfaces first. Here, the difference between consumer and curator becomes more than a matter of taste – it becomes a matter of thought. Passive consumption is no longer harmless. Algorithms reward speed, outrage, and familiarity, not nuance or reflection. Over time, this

flattens discourse and erodes our ability to think critically. When corporations quietly decide what we see, what repeats, and what disappears, control over ideas shifts away from people into profit-driven systems.

As "going analogue" re-emerges as a cultural moment, I hope it's more than surface-level-nostalgia dressed up as style. There's irony in a trend that seeks to reduce consumption, eventually becoming another thing to consume, but that irony may be unavoidable. Even so, the impulse behind it feels sincere: a collective longing to slow down, to feel friction again, to resist the constant pull of the next thing.

That desire has reshaped how I move through digital spaces too. Not by abandoning them entirely, but by treating them with intention. Just as I chose albums over playlists, I stripped platforms back to their essentials – turning YouTube into a long-form-content library by removing Shorts, letting Instagram exist primarily as a place for messages rather than endless scroll. These weren't grand gestures or declarations of disconnection, just small acts of resistance against systems built to dissolve attention.

In that sense, "going analogue" isn't really about objects at all. It's about boundaries – about deciding where attention begins and ends. Whether this impulse lasts or is eventually folded back into consumption is still uncertain. But even a brief return to deliberate use – a pause within a culture built on infinite access – feels quietly radical.



# HOROSCOPES



Libra

Try the discount code  
LIBRA-10 when paying your  
Battels.



Scorpio

What? You haven't been to  
Plush all year!?



Sagittarius

Try 'dry January': no shower-  
ing for the whole month.



Capricorn

Within the chaos of an  
Oxford term, find time to  
procrastinate.



Aquarius

Meet at the Bridge of Sighs.  
Friday. 11am.



Pisces

This is going to be the best  
year of your life.

# The 'ick' factor

*'Ick' may be the term on everyone's lips recently: but  
does the concept go deeper than we might think?*

AVA LIFTON

**H**e wore flip-flops... to dinner!" The girls around the table nod knowingly, as we dissect the night, instantly recognizing this near-universal ick as irredeemable, foreclosing any possibility of a second date. But flip-flop offenders are only the beginning. In their wake trails a lengthy catalogue of other icks, ranging from the seemingly innocuous – wearing skinny jeans or using an umbrella in the rain (one should simply evade the water) – to more substantial character flaws, such as disrespecting restaurant staff or lacking basic communication skills.

Not all icks are created equal, and of course, they shouldn't be treated as such. In this respect, the term "ick" is something of a misnomer: traits like bravado, poor communication, and abrasiveness are not trivial turn-offs but genuine red flags. While there are no hard-and-fast rules about whether these qualities warrant a breakup or maybe just a difficult conversation, they undeniably speak volumes about the person you're with.

Still, a dilemma remains at the heart of ick culture. Can fashion *faux pas*, alongside being rude to waitstaff, really be classified as an ick? Although the word "ick" has earned its place in the dating lexicon, the idea is highly subjective in both definition and consequence. So what do we do when the ick reveals itself? Do we quietly file it away in a mental checklist and press on, or does the ick itself justify a breakup? While established relationships tend to relegate icks to the periphery, those still in the talking stage often choose the latter. Once an ick takes root, it becomes so firmly ingrained in the mind that no amount of contrary evidence can fully redeem the person in question.

This culture is only magnified in Oxford, where social circles are demarcated by college friend groups with limited crossover between them beyond shared classes. As a graduate student, I've drawn a personal distinction between Oxford's clubbing scene (predominantly undergraduate territory) and its pubs, which offer an alternative but equally viable social landscape and have since become staples of my weekly routine. The result is that I inevitably see the same people again and again.

So after fielding my mother's weekly phone calls asking whether I've "found a boyfriend yet", I started examining Oxford men under a microscope. Perhaps this is merely the unavoidable consequence of attending a university in a small city. When you encounter the same faces day after day, even the most carefully constructed facade begins to fray, and any potential ick becomes magnified. Jumping over a large puddle? Ick. Sending a barrage of inexplicable emojis? Ick. Some people (my mother, the self-appointed ringleader) would call this picky. Preposterous, even.

Writing someone off for some

objectively trivial offence may seem an act of self-sabotage, a tailspin of masochism, which only narrows the already limited dating pool. And, whilst I agree that this reflex should probably warrant some self-reflection, it's equally possible that TikTok-induced ick culture (Ick-Tok?) is simply giving language to female intuition. That inexplicable knot in your stomach when a guy looks perfect on paper, yet something deep in your gut remains unconvinced.

And yes, it may have become a hackneyed phrase, but female intuition is rarely wrong. Maybe icks are simply a manifestation of the intuitive sense that you don't like someone, even when you can't point to a single, tangible reason why. I once went on a first date with a guy who did everything right: he opened the car door, paid for drinks, and asked thoughtful questions. Yet when I debriefed the night with my older sister, I found myself enumerating a series of small icks. I conceded that I was probably being immature, but she reframed it in a way I hadn't considered before.

If I actually liked him, I wouldn't scrutinize his behavior so closely. This insight gets to the crux of ick culture: sometimes it's difficult to admit you don't like someone who has done nothing wrong. Instead, we latch onto minor quirks or habits and label them as icks, allowing us to justify that feeling without having to name it.

*"The debate  
surrounding the ick  
reflects a much older  
pattern of casting  
women as dramatic*

The whole debate surrounding the "ick factor" reflects a much older pattern of casting women as dramatic, overzealous, overly emotional. In fact, we've been socialized to distrust our gut reactions, in case they are dismissed as irrational or excessive. What emerges is ick-culture, cloaked in TikTok trends and viral language, functioning as a proxy for intuition. Rather than relying on an abstract gut feeling to end a relationship or forgo a second date, we point to specific behaviors, however trivial, to legitimize our decision. Ironically, this reliance on surface-level flaws often reinforces the very stereotype it's meant to counter: that women are too dramatic. In the end, it's a zero-sum game.

So perhaps the discourse around the ick and the readiness to label women as hypercritical deserves deeper scrutiny as yet another incarnation of a misogynistic script. And maybe it's not the flip-flops themselves that provoke such disdain, but the accumulation of micro-signals leading up to them, with the footwear being merely the icing on the cake. That said, flip-flops at dinner should still be absolutely avoided.

# AGONY AUNT

I'm a fresher, and my mates have their first exams in Week 1. I think I'm supposed to buy them flowers or something? Help! Please tell me how the carnation system works and where to get them from!

*Sincerely,  
Floral Freakout*

*Dear Floral Freakout,*

Carnations have a long tradition at Oxford, but they usually only appear in Trinity term. We use them to mark our progress through Prelims or Finals. At the end of the year your college parents will buy you three carnations: white, pink, and red – to wear on your gown during your exams. White signifies your first exam, red your last, and pink any in between. Friends might offer their peers big bouquets of flowers at the end of their final exam, as well as Prosecco if you drink, and coloured confetti if you want to experience Trashing (another post-exams tradition). These traditions are in no way obligatory, but seeing others wearing the same carnation as you can help formalise the experience and reinforce solidarity with your peers, as you step into the Exam Schools.

However, as I mentioned, carnations are usually only used in University exams at the end of the year. If your friend is having exams now (poor them!), this may be a college exam, and therefore I would ask your college parents for your specific traditions. But of course, nothing is stopping you from buying flowers for your friend. This Agony Aunt always encourages whimsy!

Lots of love,  
Agony Aunt

# CHERWELL-FED

In defence of the default order:  
The Alternative Tuck Shop



LUIS PRENNINGER

**T**here is no place in Oxford that my muscle memory takes me to more reliably than the Alternative Tuck Shop. This happens regardless of my state – still half-asleep, perhaps slightly hungover, or already late for class. I order by default, nodding or mumbling, somehow conveying that I have, once again, come for my usual: a Salmon Cream Cheese Bagel (£4.50).

If you're a regular at the Alternative Tuck Shop but don't have a standard order, I don't trust you. If you do, I am more than happy to ignore whether you are punctual or dress well. I will judge you by your sandwich order. Dear reader, try this next time you're at the Tuck Shop: while waiting outside, listen closely to the orders that are called out. And make note of the judging looks that follow the cry of "Roast Beef, Brie and Mushroom with horseradish on Olive Ciabatta" (£5.60). If you witness the embarrassed, awkward silence this choice receives, consider how much it exposes the person behind it. This mild ritual of public humiliation is integral to how the place works. You queue. You order inside. You are pushed back out again, left to declare your allegiance when the time comes for you – that is, your sandwich – to be called out.

The workings of the Alternative Tuck Shop revolve around efficiency – even though its atmosphere romanticises the place. Stanchions outside organise the masses of customers. In fact, if it gets any busier next term, I wouldn't be surprised if they hired a bouncer. At peak times, at least four people assemble sandwiches, equipped with an enormous, weapon-like contact grill each. After all, the Alternative Tuck Shop offers – trust me, I counted – 113 different sandwich options, accounting for cross-possibilities between

fillings and carriers (baguettes, paninis, bagels and ciabattas). But there is more: samosas, Cornish pasties, flapjacks, and the aggressively glazed, donut adjacent yum yum (£2.90). There's also coffee. Personally, I appreciate the honest ignorance with which the flat white (£3.10) has been degraded to a white Americano. Unlike those specialty cafés, any coffee here is just dangerously hot, with milk added in haphazard amounts.

For the purposes of this review, I betrayed my usual order, trying the Chicken Tikka and Mango Chutney Panini (£5.00), and the Pastrami Swiss Cheese with Grain Mustard Baguette (£5.40). Both were great. But frankly, I do not think that matters too much.

## Menu

Salmon cream cheese bagel (£4.50)  
Roast beef, brie and mushroom olive ciabatta (£5.60)  
Chicken Tikka and mango chutney panini (£5)  
Pastrami swiss cheese baguette (£5.40)  
White Americano (£3.10)

*The Alternative Tuck Shop, Holywell St*

The Alternative Tuck Shop is one of the last places that is quietly doing what it has always done – a stronghold of simple, small business against the expansionism of Taylor's, or the multinational sameness of Subway or Pret. When I asked how long they'd been open, they shrugged and said something like 20 years, possibly 25. As long as they keep turning out sandwiches, I'll keep ordering my Salmon Cream Cheese Bagel, just the way I always have, without thinking about it too much.

*Image credit: Zoë McGuire, with permission.*



Discovering neurodivergence: The realities of late diagnosis

Ella O’Shea discusses her experience of late diagnosis, and how it impacted her Oxford experience

I think I always knew that I was a bit of a peculiar child. Yes, I had my quirks – completely losing it at the sound of a hand dryer at someone’s baby dedication, sleeping with dolphin books under my pillow, and being able to speak at one and a half, but not being able to jump until the age of five, to name just a few. But I was deeply surprised when, in sixth form, a friend with an autistic brother, who was seeking diagnosis herself, suggested to me that I might be autistic.

Initially, I had written off the idea, as I didn’t see myself in my autistic peers or in media representations of autism. I had friends, albeit a precious few, and I struggled to talk to most people. As a student, I was a “pleasure to teach”; because breaking rules was unfathomable to me, I had passionate interests, and I could hide my exhaustion until I came home and crashed. But, as I began to research, I came to understand that autism spectrum condition is, indeed, a spectrum. People have different needs, and their traits present differently. It became clear that I could, in fact, be one of those people.

The subsequent highlight of my rather unglamorous gap year was eventually being diagnosed with autism by the NHS, aged 18, after over a year of waiting. But the surprises didn’t stop there: the psychiatrist assessing me also suspected ADHD. 16 months afterwards, aged 20, it was signed off that I did have combined-type ADHD.

“

*A lot of people fail to understand that disabilities do not materialise when a doctor gives you a piece of paper*

And then, in a bitterly amusing buy-one-get-two free deal, my brain decided to have a spectacular flare of what I now know was lurking OCD, which had been quietly but brutally waxing and waning since my late tweens. I thankfully received proper treatment for this for the first time aged 19. But it was, and is, a lot to take in. It might be easy to

assume that I’m “hopping on a trend”. This idea seems to be gaining traction of late in the media – I had the misfortune of reading a particularly venomous article about “quirky” late-diagnosed Oxford students during an especially rough week of symptoms last term.

“

*Having a label is useless if we still punish people for existing differently, or show them that their needs don’t matter*

But I think a lot of people fail to understand that disabilities do not materialise when a doctor gives you a piece of paper with a word on it. Our issues are constant, whether or not we have the right language to describe them. And if we don’t have helpful language, we will resort to the only language we can find, which is often much less kind. In the 18, 19, and 20 years before I was diagnosed with autism, OCD, and ADHD, I saw my social communication differences, graphic intrusive thoughts and struggles with executive function as ‘weirdness’, ‘creepiness’, and ‘laziness’. Despite those who may urge us not to “label ourselves” by avoiding diagnosis, we can unfortunately do a pretty good job of doing so anyway.

I am therefore so incredibly grateful for the shift in self-perception that my diagnosis has afforded me. Just having the language to make sense of my challenges has been life-changing. It has also opened up access to communities of people with similar challenges and experiences to me. Official diagnosis also meant that I was able to access university support. I still remember how shocked I was after taking an exam with official accommodations: for the first time, I wasn’t worrying about processing things too slowly or experiencing sensory overload, thanks to my extra time and a small-group exam sitting.

But diagnosis also isn’t a magic pill that solves all our issues. And it’s often not an easily accessible one, thanks to long NHS waiting lists, steep private costs, or ill-informed doctors whose understanding of this condition is somewhat



limited to particular people. Even post-diagnosis, the odd tutor will still not quite understand that lateness doesn’t mean a lack of care. Some people may still glance and smirk if I ‘mess up’ socially. I am still often overly harsh on myself when I struggle to take care of my basic human needs in term-time. And just having a diagnosed disability can still be hugely stigmatised – so many people shy away from even just using the word “disability”.

If there’s anything late diagnosis has taught me, it’s that it can’t be the only thing we rely on for acceptance. It can be a critical piece of the puzzle, but what is even more important is how we as a society think about disability. Having a label can feel a little useless, even painful, if we still punish people socially for existing differently, expect

constant productivity from them, or show them that their needs don’t matter. And this is especially important for the countless people who are trapped in unfavourable narratives about the way their bodies and minds exist. Do they not deserve understanding too? Didn’t I, when I was younger?

Being kind and assuming the best of those around us – be that a ‘fussy’ flatmate, a ‘flaky’ friend, or an ‘awkward’ lecturer – may seem like small gestures, but they can be totally revolutionary in creating a space where disability and difference are accepted and accommodated by default. A little more gentleness, community, and compassion would help us all, disabled and non-disabled alike, when we’re struggling.

*Image credit: Pixabay, CC0, via Pexels.*

OXFORD

TINY LOVE STORIES

As the early morning fog rouses itself from a night’s slumber, the glisten of the frosted spiderwebs atop the string of hedges catches my eye. My hand reaches for yours, gently guiding you towards the scene. The first break of dawn shepherds our wanderings, spilling through the gaps in the foliage, and slowly warming our clasped hands. Suppressing another gust of breathless laughter, our cold noses touch, fitting against one another like the waxing and waning of the moon. You cup your hands over my ears and a soft muffle envelopes every sound. I know this is what love feels like.

Abigail Christie, Christ Church

CHERPSE.

Oxford’s blind dating

A cosy evening at the White Rabbit. Did Cupid finally get it right?

Miss Chivalrous

First impressions? That she had deep eyes, was composed, and so pretty! Her steampunk earrings were also sick.

Did it meet your expectations? It actually went beyond them. This was my first date with a woman, and my first blind date, so I was nervous about the many ways in which it could go wrong.

What was the highlight? Our niche interests were weirdly similar – Cherwell matched us well...

What was the most embarrassing moment? I had to ask her to repeat sometimes. Pubs are so noisy and hard to focus in, so I don’t think I’ll go on a date there again.

Describe the date in three words: Serendipity, calm, warmth.

Is there a second date on the cards? Yes!

Miss Star Student

First impressions? I was greeted with flowers, which is always lovely, but left me feeling shamefully empty-handed!

Did it meet your expectations? Yes, the conversation was fascinating and the vibe was really nice all night.

What was the highlight? I learned a lot about rocks.

What was the most embarrassing moment? When my phone refused to scan the QR code for the menu, which, cosmically, is not that embarrassing.

Describe the date in three words: Chatty, interesting, and vivacious.

Is there a second date on the cards? Fingers crossed for Hilary!



# SPORT

## You, too, can ski: at the cost of your ego and bank balance

*Sophia Shade takes us behind the scenes of Varsity Ski 2025*

SOPHIA SHADE

Whoever decided that a week of physical exertion was exactly what 3000 burnt-out Oxbridge students needed after eight weeks of academic rigour was...onto something? For most freshers, 6th December signalled home time – much-anticipated and well deserved. I, however, found myself on a flight to Geneva at 5pm that afternoon. The reason? Varsity Ski 2025, a no-brainer for the seasoned skier, but a trip I barely knew existed until early November. Coming in at £400 base, I was told this was a “proper bargain” for a week of skiing and my arm was twisted. Fleeces and flights were soon purchased in quick succession – what on Earth could go wrong?

By 11pm on Saturday of eighth week, the last bunch of us were herded off our flights, left to fend for ourselves in the mess of customs, and onto a fleet of coaches that proceeded to precariously scale the French Alps for the next three hours. The view we were met with in the morning, though, made it all worth the wait.

For the never-ever's of us, casting our eyes out two-star hotel windows to be met with rolling hills of snow was the closest we've been to reaching euphoria this Michaelmas. Reality hit again in the hour-long queue to pick up our ski equipment, but from there on out it was onwards and upwards. Quite literally. I somehow ended up on my first chairlift not too long after.

For beginners like me, the first few days were a hit to the ego. Most of my friends – and it seemed the majority of the Varsity cohort too – were well-acquainted with the slopes; I couldn't help but feel like an ugly duckling amongst a flock of graceful swans, both in style and skiing.



Learning how to ski is, as I learnt, not for the faint hearted. The green slopes – the easiest and the flattest – soon became repetitive after my friend and I stuck strictly to them for the first few days. In a moment of weakness, we agreed to take on a blue – slightly prematurely. Your friends tell you it'll be fine, but you almost take them out before hurtling down the slope, as you, your two poles – actually, never mind, you dropped them halfway up the mountain after your first fall – and sheer unjustified confidence miraculously make it to the bottom unscathed. Time for *après*?

This was all, thankfully, sorted out by six hours of beginner lessons. Nathalie, our instructor, was, despite all stereotypes, a helpful and encouraging French woman who soon helped us find our feet. So, while making it back from the first night of *après* in the dark proved a slight challenge, completing a blue slope with our egos pretty much intact became more than doable by the end of the week.

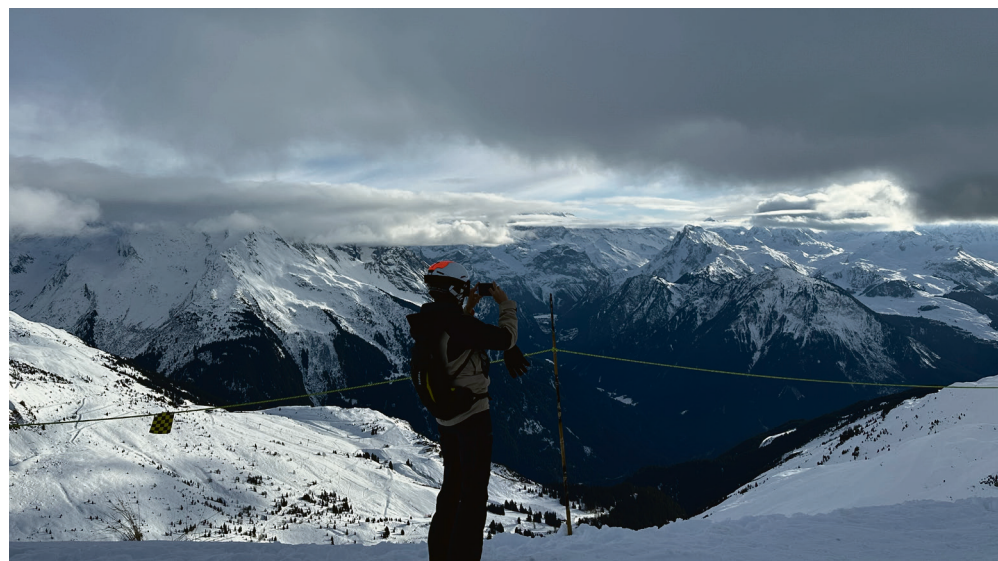
While you may not need much talent to ski, there is more to the financial aspect of Varsity than meets the eye. It's billed as the “cheapest university ski trip in the country” – but this statement alone doesn't make it affordable for the average student. The £400 base price mentioned earlier only includes your lift pass for the week and basic accommodation, while necessary “add-ons” such as ski equipment and clothing hire, airport transfers, and lessons bring the total closer to £800. With flights, events, and grocery shops – food isn't included in the base price either – on top of this, my expenses for the week ended up totaling £1200. Though it's true that Varsity is more affordable relative to what other, external ski trips would set you back by, it isn't cheap by any stretch of the imagination.

“Varsity isn't cheap by any stretch of the imagination

This isn't to say I'm not looking forward to returning to the slopes next year, but rather to make an important note that Varsity, despite being marketed as such, isn't accessible to everyone. Most students have to think twice before dropping more than a grand on a week's trip.

For anyone thinking of making the trip next year, though, if you have the financial means to do so, Varsity Ski isn't a trip you'll regret – some of my fondest memories this term are of face-planting in the snow off-piste while my friends laugh in the background. December 2026 can't seem to come around fast enough.

Image credit: Terje Sollie, CC BY 1.0, via Rawpixel (top) and Natalie Tan for Cherwell (left).



## MATCH OF THE VAC

A resounding success in the mud for Oxford Cross-Country

In the 50th year of Women's Varsity, the Women's Blues did Oxford proud by coming out on top for the third year in a row, and doing so in exceptionally dominant form with five of the top seven finishers hailing from Oxford. Hanna Andrejczuk and Ella Davey finished first and third respectively. Despite fielding a much younger team than the year before, the Men's Blues clinched a team victory, topping it off with an all-Oxford podium (Chris Parker, Alex Gruen, and Tom Wood) for good measure.

## MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

DPhil Rosie Thorogood clinches team victory for the Turtles

Rosie Thorogood managed a critical 6th-place finish for the Women's Cross-country 2s. With the competition being done in a six-to-score format, her timing was crucial in order for the Turtles to secure the win, with teammates Anissa Alloula and Rose Sheppard finishing individually 1st and 3rd as the cherry on top. The Turtles, along with their male counterparts, crushed Cambridge underfoot to sweep wins across all but one category in an impressive show of dominance.

## HALL OF SHAME

Bazball leads England to an absolute battering

The end of the vac also brings with it the end of one of England's most disappointing Ashes tours in recent memory. The team never quite recovered from the first Test's astonishing two-day implosion in Perth, and surrendered the series at the earliest possible stage by rapidly losing the next two. Though hampered by injuries to key players, a loss of form, and reports of heavy late-night drinking on tour, the squad and the management will both be under significant scrutiny ahead of the T20 World Cup.

## SHOE THE TABS

It's all uphill from here: Oxford Ski and Snowboard secure victory over Cambridge at Varsity Ski

The Oxford Men's 3rds took home a win at Val Thorens on 10th December. Caspar Tyser clinched a win for Oxford in the Men's Grand Slalom, whereas Charlotte Wagniez, club president, did the same for the women in the same discipline. Andrew Mckimm also picked up bronze in Men's Slalom.

For the uninitiated, Varsity ski has two disciplines: Giant Slalom and Slalom. The former has a greater emphasis on balancing control with wider turns and higher speeds, whereas Slalom requires greater technical control due to the sharper turns and tighter course.

## UPCOMING

### Town vs Gown

Amateur Boxing  
Saturday 31st January  
Iffley Road Sports Centre  
Captains: Patrick Ashmore and Gabriele Lukoseviciute

### Triathlon-Duathlon

Saturday 7th February  
Eton Dorney, Windsor  
Captains: Bobby Clark and Dorottya Nagy

### Powerlifting

Saturday 7th February  
Cambridge  
Captains: Gwen Marsden and William James

Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

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



Puzzles

Sudoku by ZOË MCGUIRE

A Note from the Editor:

Alright, we heard you. Never let it be said that the *Cherwell* Puzzles Team doesn't care about its fans. You want us to bring back the Sudoku, you can have it. But, honestly, there is no auteurship in a 9x9 grid of numbers. A Cryptic can be a beautiful tool of self-expression. Custom logic puzzles can give you an insight into an author's mind. But to make this puzzle, I put some digits into boxes. So you can have your Sudoku. You can have ONE. But please, for the sanity of your puzzles team, stop asking us for the Sudoku to come back.  
*At least until Trinity.*

			9	6				3
					7	6		
			5				4	
			8				1	
5		2						8
7			4				6	
		7					3	5
1	2			7				
	6			4	5			

eldroW by NAT ELDER

O			I	
C				M
C		E	E	
	E			
	U			N

Can you fill this grid to give a valid Wordle game? All six entries are linked by a common theme.

Quiz by ZOË MCGUIRE

- Gary Numan's 1979 album *The Pleasure Principle* takes its name from a painting by which artist?
- What adjective ultimately derives from the Latin for "to paint red", originating from the use of red pigment to outline small drawings in manuscripts?
- In 1928, with a time of just over 573 hours, Cherokee runner Andy Payne won the Bunion Derby, the majority following the length of which road?
- The musky rat kangaroo and the numbat are potentially the only two marsupials to not exhibit what behaviour?
- Which mythological creature gives its name to both a part of the brain and a moon of Neptune?
- Roughly one fifth of a calorie is ingested when performing what postal-related action?
- Designers Louis Wells and Marie France developed a "diagonal fly" for which musician's trousers?
- Approximately half of the GDP of Macau comes from what industry?
- Which brass instrument was named for an American bandleader?
- Structures with "geometrical frustration" can exist in multiple different forms in what technically unachievable condition?

Cryptic Crossword by ALESSANDRA EDWARDS Difficulty: 2/5

1		2			3	4		5		6		7		8
9				10				11						
12										13				
								14						
15														
														16
	17	18		19						20		21		
22														
23								24						
								25						
26										27				
28												29		

ACROSS

- Dot-eating man ends ghost to form alliance (4)
- Good man holds in urine while he is next to painting of darling (5,5)
- Setter enters hell in Minecraft? Both are not the case (7)
- Some hummus I call harmonious (7)
- Ambiguous language from north, east, west, south, and the top (8)
- Name-dropping a vegan alternative for honey (5)
- Corrupt officers hug over piss - but not literally (6,2,6)
- Viennese disc is spun with uncertainty (14)
- Sinister - to remove cap off beer, that is (5)
- Shrub waiter served is consumed (8)
- It's quarrel after quarrel with bird (7)
- Answer: ground salts contain oxygen - mystified (2,1,4)
- Sounds like week with William and Edward being spineless (4-6)
- Kind of average aim (4)

DOWN

- What's mightier than the sword and blade? A pocket tool (8)
- "Inch bananas," women watching sport natter (7)
- I croak and howl wildly - always at the desk (10)
- Muppet trading egg for trees (4)
- Restrain deer with garden tool - that's a prisoner (7)
- Old car finished with a stylish covering (7)
- Restlessly alert, guarding king who likes 2D (6)
- Beyond part of trophy, perhaps (5)
- "Adopt donkey" - white rabbit's cry over setter (10)
- Killer bums are fashionable (8)
- Nina took control of rubbish VAR - bliss! (7)
- Take a look at brother with facial hair (7)
- Cutting next raise is over the top (5)
- Nobleman honored on the side of the head (7)
- Playground equipment spot was turned away (6)
- Gone missing? That's a new low (1,1,1,1)

Quiz Answers:

- It's René Magritte, a portrait of the poet Edward James.
- Surprisingly, this is where "Miniature" comes from!
- Route 66.
- All other marsupials are nocturnal!
- Hip-pocamp(us).
- Licking an envelope ingests around 0.17 calories.
- Prince.
- Gambling.
- The Sousaphone, after John Philip Sousa.
- Absolute Zero.

Michaelmas Week 7 Cryptic Solution:

Across: UNCLOTHING; CRUX; GRINDR; FLAMENCO; CHEESE; NUMEROUS; PLETHORA; RHYTHM; STORMS; EPIPHANY; ARROGANT; PASTRY; DAFFODIL; SPIRAL; USER; PERSERVERES  
Down: NARWHAL; LENIENT; TORPEDO; GRAMMAR; CLEARLY; UNCOUTH; FUNDAMENTAL; THREADS; ROOT FOR; STAND UP; IMPASSE; HOSTILE; NARRATE