

# Cherwell

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# Change to Rowing Clubs' Rules of Racing for transgender athletes sparks backlash

## Gareth Lim elected Union President for Michaelmas 2026 in re-poll

CHERWELL NEWS

**G**areth Lim has been elected Oxford Union President for Michaelmas Term 2026 at a re-run of the election.

Lim received 299 first preference votes, by a margin of 80 votes over Liza Barkova, who received 219 first preferences. Hamza Hussain and Victor André Marroquin also contested the election, receiving 66 and 61 first preference votes respectively. Six hundred and forty-six valid votes were cast, well below the 1787 votes cast in the original poll, with Lim receiving a majority of 327 votes including second preferences.

Speaking to *Cherwell* following his election, Lim said the victory shows that “the Union is able to unite around a non-political figure; that the union believes in something that’s much greater than politics”. He thanked his “good friend” Katherine Yang, President for Hilary Term, among others, and described his supporters as a “very large coalition”. He said this election had “no slates”, meaning “people were far more able to vote [with] their conscience”.

Gareth Lim first ran for President for Michaelmas Term 2026 at the end of Hilary Term, coming in third place behind Catherine Xu and Liza Barkova. He acknowledged to *Cherwell* the difference between the two campaigns, his first as a “guerrilla campaign” and his second which “had the support of a lot more traditional political figures within the Union”, proving that people “can unite behind something brilliant”.

In a victory speech in the Union bar, Lim expressed his appreciation for the other candidates for their campaigns, and those who had backed his campaign. He told the assembled audience in the Union bar that “this

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### SOPHIE HAYES-HOYLE

**A** change to Oxford University Rowing Clubs’ (OURCs) Rules of Racing means that only athletes assigned female at birth may now row in a Women’s boat. This applies to boats entered in both inter-collegiate and university-level competitions.

Several student boat club captains have condemned the new rule change, made on 26th April. OURC’s Captains’ Meeting minutes highlight that issues were raised about the process for verifying athletes’ gender identity, with students particularly raising privacy concerns: under the new rule, claims could be brought against athletes regarding gender verification. To bring a claim against an athlete, complainants would be required to submit evidence, likely involving private information about the complainee, to OURCs, where findings could be seen as ‘outing’ individuals.

Towards the close of the Captain’s Meeting, an informal vote was proposed

to gauge support for the changes to the Rules of Racing. Forty-nine votes were cast against the new rules, whilst only one vote was cast in their favour. Five of those present abstained from voting. Another informal vote asked captains whether they were comfortable competing in an event under the newly imposed rules. Twenty-four votes were cast against this informal motion, with only eight votes in favour of competing under the new rules.

Multiple boat clubs have since released official statements opposing the rule change. In a statement on Instagram, Wadham College Boat Club described the changes as “disproportionate, discriminatory, and impossible to enforce”, adding that they will continue “to fight for the previous rules to be reinstated”. Somerville College Boat Club similarly wrote that they were “deeply saddened by the recent rule change... which threatens our long-standing values of inclusivity and friendship”. Multiple students also told *Cherwell* of plans that Somerville Boat Club has to encourage all colleges

to wear LGBTQ+ wristbands at this term’s Summer Viiiis, the University’s four-day intercollegiate regatta.

The rule change has also faced strong backlash from Oxford’s broader student body. On Instagram, the President of Oxford University LGBTQ+ Society released a statement on the topic: “I am personally investigating the matter, and it is my top priority to resolve it by whatever means necessary.” The President also told *Cherwell* that “no contact was made with OULGBTQ+ prior to the change” with all meetings held “after the change was decided”. The President, who also holds the part-time role of LGBTQ+ Officer at the Student Union (SU), was not contacted in their SU capacity either.

However, a University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “The University has met with and engaged with the LGBTQ reps several times throughout the process to facilitate boat clubs meeting their obligations in relation to law & governing body requirements.”

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## Students encounter issues with voting registration during local elections

HATTIE SIMPSON

**M**ultiple students across Oxford reported being turned away from polling stations during the 7th May local elections after discovering they were not listed on the electoral register despite believing they had registered through the University’s enrolment system.

Students across several colleges, including St Anne’s, Somerville, Worcester, and Pembroke, said they had opted in to share their information with the electoral register during online enrolment through the University’s Student Self Service system at the beginning of the academic year, only to be informed on polling day that they were not registered.

A student at St Anne’s told *Cherwell*: “I’m really frustrated that I couldn’t vote today, especially because I’d talked directly with the candidate I was going to vote for, put up posters in my window, and tried to spread the word. I’d gotten very involved, and now it feels a bit like it was for nothing. I also find it frustrating and concerning that my registration for the county council elections last year did not carry over this year.”

In a statement to *Cherwell*, a University spokesperson said: “The University takes its responsibilities to support student electoral registration seriously and has an established process, developed in partnership with Oxford City Council, to help students register to vote through the University enrolment system.” The spokesperson added that the University was “aware that a small number of students reported difficulties or confusion

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## Access to Canvas temporarily suspended by University following cyberattack

MERCEDES HAAS and HATTIE SIMPSON

Access to Canvas, the virtual learning platform used by the University of Oxford, was temporarily suspended by the University last week as a precautionary measure following an external breach of Instructure, the third-party supplier of Canvas.

ShinyHunters, a criminal hacking group, claimed responsibility for breaching the platform and threatened to release sensitive data, including “students’ names, their personal email addresses and messages sent between teachers and students”, unless ransom payment demands are met by 12th May. In an email sent to all students by the University, it was confirmed that “some Oxford user data is affected” and that this “may include names, email addresses... and messages exchanged between users within Canvas”.

In the email, sent on 6th May, the University said that students could “continue to use Canvas”. On 7th May, “Instructure briefly placed Canvas in maintenance mode while it dealt with the second incident; service was restored overnight”, according to a University spokesperson.

In a comment to *Cherwell* regarding the current suspension of the platform, a spokesperson for the University said: “The University has temporarily suspended user access to Canvas, its virtual learning platform, including Panopto recordings accessed through the platform, as a precautionary measure. The decision follows notification from Instructure, the third-party supplier of Canvas, of two incidents of unauthorised access affecting many universities internationally.

“Instructure is investigating and the University is working closely with the supplier. There is no evidence that University authentication systems, University accounts or Panopto itself have been compromised. The University recognises this disruption will be of concern to staff and students, particularly during the examination period, and is exploring measures to support access to teaching and course materials. As a precaution, staff and students are advised to remain vigilant for phishing or scam emails and to report anything suspicious to the University’s Information Security team.”

Access to Panopto, the platform which shares lecture recordings, was also suspended. However, in the notice placed on the Canvas login page by Oxford, the University emphasised that “there is no indication that University systems or Panopto have been compromised”.

The suspension had a significant impact on students across the

University, especially for those who are almost entirely reliant on Canvas to access all materials for their course. An Engineering student told *Cherwell*: “Being only a week away from exams is quite frustrating, since I no longer have access to the past papers.”

A Material Sciences student told *Cherwell*: “It’s literally preventing me from doing any degree work as all my tutorial sheets, lecture recordings, and reading list are all exclusively on canvas”. They added that they have yet to receive any communication from their faculty regarding plans to mitigate the impact on students.

A PPE student added: “Given the pressure of a weekly deadline and the heavy reliance on Canvas for certain elements of the course, being unable to access content for several days has created needless stress.”

Some faculties contacted their students to warn of the temporary suspension, but many remained affected and without contact. In the email sent by the History faculty to undergraduate students, they told students that “the University is putting in place measures to support access to teaching and learning materials and will seek to restore access as soon as it is appropriate to do so”, but did not expand on what these measures would involve or how long the suspension is expected to last.

The hack affected universities across the world, with ShinyHunters listing more than 8,800 educational institutions affected, across 10 different countries – including Harvard University, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania. ShinyHunters also claimed that it has 275 million individuals’ data from across these institutions. Instructure has yet to release an official press release confirming these numbers. WIRED has suggested that never before has “a cyberattack against a single software platform so thoroughly disrupted the daily operations of thousands of schools”.

On Monday 11th May, a University spokesperson confirmed that access to Canvas had been restored following “further investigation and monitoring over the weekend” and “fresh security assurances” from Instructure.

The University told *Cherwell* there remains “no evidence that University authentication systems, accounts or Panopto itself have been compromised”, but advised staff and students to remain vigilant for suspicious emails or messages. The spokesperson also acknowledged the disruption caused during the examination period and said that users had been “directed to welfare and academic support”.

*Image credit: Emiliano Compassi for Cherwell.*

## Gareth Lim elected Union President for Michaelmas 2026 in re-poll

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victory belongs to all of us who voted for me”. He promised to “take back the Union” and change the “conduct” of the institution.

During his campaign, Lim focused heavily on, what he described to *Cherwell* as, restoring “intellectual rigour”, arguing that recent terms had become dominated by controversy and internal disputes. He called for a broader range of debates and speakers, suggesting the Society should place greater emphasis on areas outside politics and international affairs.

Lim also raised concerns about the Union’s disciplinary culture, claiming that candidates had become “incentivised to use the Union disciplinary procedure as a replacement for campaigning”. He added that the Society had become “over-reliant” on disciplinary

processes and criticised what he described as a wider “culture of fear” within Union politics.

The election took place in the context of ongoing backlash surrounding the Oxford Union’s invitation to several high-profile figures, including Carl Benjamin and Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, also known as Tommy Robinson. Speaking to *Cherwell* after his victory, Lim repeated that he would not have invited Yaxley-Lennon to the Society, but said the Union should “stand by [its] decisions” and said incumbent President Arwa Elrayess had “done a pretty good job” at deciding who she wanted to invite. He said Elrayess was considering changes to the debate format to “ensure that people like Tommy Robinson answer the questions” and that it will be “only after we see the debate” that we could judge whether the invitation to

Yaxley-Lennon was “the right thing to do”.

Runner-up Liza Barkova ran for the position of President for the third time this academic year, previously running for President-Elect in Michaelmas Term 2025 before campaigning for the same position in Hilary Term 2026.

The re-run election was triggered after President-Elect Catherine Xu was found guilty of electoral fraud by a Union Tribunal. The Tribunal concluded that Xu had orchestrated a scheme to impersonate legitimate voters during the original election, held in Hilary Term 2026, by distributing Oxford Union membership cards to individuals not entitled to vote and instructing them to cast ballots in other members’ names.

*Image credit: Ned Remington for Cherwell.*



## Students encounter issues with voting registration during local elections

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regarding their polling location or registration status on polling day” and said it was “looking carefully into those cases.”

Oxford City Council also told *Cherwell* that “a handful” of students who registered through the University were not picked up during the registration process. It added that, where students were able to confirm they had applied via the University, “all were able to vote on May 7th.” Multiple students affected told *Cherwell* that they were not informed of this by the polling station. Some were encouraged to call the Council’s electoral services, yet upon fully explaining the situation, were told, as one student put it, “to register through the government website next time, but nothing about being allowed to vote this time”.

The issue affected at least one student council candidate. Harry Morgan, a student at Pembroke College and candidate for Osney and St Thomas, told *Cherwell* that he was unable to vote because he wasn’t listed on the register despite applying via the University. “I saw my name on the ballot papers, but they didn’t give me one”, he added.

Former St Anne’s college student and successful Green candidate for Holywell, Alfie Davis, told *Cherwell* that they had experienced a similar issue whilst a student after assuming the University had registered them correctly.

Other students were registered to vote by the University under their specific accommodation block rather than their college address, including for on-site accommodation, which also caused further confusion at polling stations. A student at Somerville explained how students in her accommodation building were initially turned away because polling station staff searched for

them under the college address rather than their block. She told *Cherwell*: “It’s the kind of technicality that would have made me think the mistake was on my end, if it hadn’t happened to literally everyone in my building.”

In a statement to *Cherwell*, the University spokesperson noted that some students were registered at their specific term-time accommodation address rather than a “central college site”, which “may have led to confusion about the correct polling station”. Several students were ultimately able to vote after contacting electoral services and confirming they had been registered under their accommodation block rather than their college site.

Multiple students at Somerville said when they contacted electoral services, after being prompted by election workers at polling stations, they were informed that students living in halls are removed from the register annually because of “high turnover” of accommodation.

A student at Worcester told *Cherwell* that she’d successfully voted in Oxford in last year’s local elections and had opted during University enrolment to have her details passed to the Council again this year. However, she attended her polling station only to be told she was not on the register. After contacting electoral services, she said staff informed her she had likely been removed from the register because students are routinely removed annually. She told *Cherwell*: “I thought the registration through the University would be sufficient as I hadn’t changed address. Maybe this was supposed to be common knowledge, but I couldn’t find anything online. I do feel the information about this was insufficient.”

In a statement to *Cherwell*, Oxford City Council confirmed that removing students from the electoral register

is “normal practice” and said it had done so “for decades”. The Council said students living in university accommodation are typically removed from the register during the annual canvass in autumn, usually around October, on account of the complexity of student registration and the high turnover of addresses. It added that the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014 meant Electoral Registration Officers in university towns were expected to “delete students from the register and require them to re-register”. The Council added that it works closely with the University and Oxford Brookes during the annual registration process, including receiving lists of eligible students living in halls and contacting those who have not registered independently.

However, *Cherwell* found that Oxford City Council’s ‘Register to vote and the annual canvass’ webpage does not explicitly state within its student registration guidance that students living in halls must re-register annually. A link on the page directing users to Electoral Commission student guidance was also non-functional at the time of publication. Whilst moving addresses is listed as a requirement for re-registering, this does not highlight that moving between on-site college accommodation buildings constitutes a change of address requiring re-registration.

Guidance published by the Electoral Commission and the National Union of Students similarly refers to students needing to re-register if they change address, but does not make clear that students will be removed from the register on an annual basis.

The University spokesperson told *Cherwell*: “We are reviewing how information and guidance can be made clearer for students in future elections.”



# Tommy Robinson Union invitation sparks controversy across University

BEATRIX ARNOLD and NED REMINGTON

The Oxford Union has invited Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who identifies as Tommy Robinson, to speak at a Week 5 debate on the motion “This house believes the West is right to be suspicious of Islam”. The invitation has generated backlash from University societies, senior Union officials, and Stand Up to Racism UK.

Yaxley-Lennon’s invitation has provoked censure from national organisation Stand Up to Racism, which posted a joint statement on social media with Oxford Against Discrimination to condemn the invitation “in the strongest possible terms”. They also called on Oxford Union President Arwa Elrayess to confirm that the invitation has been rescinded; “issue a public statement apologising for extending the invitation and promising full transparency with speakers’ events”; and “acknowledge the harm” caused to students by the decision. Stand Up to Racism has organised a protest to take place outside the Oxford Union on the 28th May, the day of the Week 5 Debate.

Several University societies condemned the decision, with Oxford African and Caribbean Society (ACS) telling *Cherwell* “granting Robinson an academic stage at a time of increased far-right activity confers a degree of respectability to ideologies that have historically marginalised our communities.” It Happens Here (IHH) accused Robinson of using sexual violence cases “to advance anti-Muslim sentiment”, and said his presence at the Union “signals to survivors that their experiences are being instrumentalised, instead of taken seriously”.

Oxford Student Greens told *Cherwell* that “there is no space for the kind of inflammatory, hateful rhetoric”. The Oxford Labour Club published a statement on Instagram saying it was “disgusted” by the invitation, writing that while “free speech is important... that does not mean that Tommy Robinson, a far-right extremist convicted of assault

and harassment, should be platformed by the Union”. The Student Union (SU) published a statement recognising that “many students may be concerned about recently announced, upcoming high-profile speaker events in Oxford”. The SU expressed “support and solidarity” with any students affected, “particularly those from marginalised groups”.

Condemnation has also come from senior Oxford Union officials. *Cherwell* understands that Prajwal Pandey, Oxford Union Librarian for Trinity Term, criticised the decision to invite Yaxley-Lennon in a speech before the Week 2 debate at the Union. A petition to call for a vote by Union members on the invitation to Tommy Robinson was circulated online by the Overheard at Oxford Instagram account.

*Cherwell* has also seen a letter of resignation by Shermar Pryce, formally Chief Advisor to the President, in response to the decision to invite Yaxley-Lennon. Pryce cites his displeasure at what he dubs a “clown show”, and accused the Union of “appealing to malformed conceptions of ‘free speech’”: “To not rethink this invite, after members of all backgrounds and dispositions have expressed their concerns and fears, borders on malicious.” The letter further alleges that the decision was made without the knowledge of the majority of committee members.

The reported invitation comes within the context of longstanding accusations against Yaxley-Lennon of Islamophobia and intimidation. He was a co-founder of the English Defence League in 2009, whose supporters have repeatedly targeted Muslim communities and mosques across the UK. He has also been convicted on multiple occasions, including for contempt of court in 2018 after livestreaming defendants accused of sexual exploitation outside a trial in Leeds, in breach of reporting restrictions. He was jailed for 18 months after admitting to the charge.

Yaxley-Lennon has faced further convictions for assault and harassment, and has been widely criticised for his rhetoric, accused of fuelling anti-Muslim

sentiment. His public statements have included describing Muslim refugees to the UK as “fake refugees”, a 2011 threat to “every single Muslim watching...the Islamic community would feel the full force of the English Defence League” if another Islamist terror attack were to take place, and a 2018 admission that he “doesn’t care” if he “incites fear” of the UK’s Muslim community.

He previously warned members of the press: “If you’re a journalist and you think your office or your home is a safe space...it’s not”, and referred to a female BBC journalist as a “slag” after Yaxley-Lennon was questioned by police over an alleged assault of a man at London St Pancras Station in 2025. Yaxley-Lennon was not charged over the incident.

Defending her decision to invite Yaxley-Lennon in an article in *The Telegraph*, Elrayess wrote: “For more than 200 years, the Oxford Union has existed to host debates – not to platform views uncritically, but to subject them to the most rigorous scrutiny. You do not invite a speaker to endorse them: you invite them so that their ideas can be

examined, and their claims tested.”

Elrayess also appeared on right-wing television news channel GB News to explain her defence of the debate and the invitation. She addressed concerns about the security risk raised by the event, and called it “a shame that we can’t even debate these topics anymore without the feeling of things crashing down.”

A spokesperson for the Oxford Union previously told *Cherwell* that the Union gives “members the opportunity to challenge...a broad range of speakers” and “only host[s] speakers who agree to be challenged”.

Oxford’s Turning Point UK society also defended the invitation. Their President described Yaxley-Lennon as “a culturally relevant figure in British politics” and that “the debate is of incredible importance”. They called the event “the perfect opportunity for those who vehemently disagree with Tommy Robinson to put his ideas to the test”.

Stephen Yaxley-Lennon was contacted for comment.

*Image Credit: Callum Darragh / CC PDM 1.0 via Flickr.*



# Change to Rowing Clubs Rules of Racing for transgender athletes sparks backlash

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They did not specify that these consultations occurred prior to the change. Ahead of Summer VIIIs, Oxford University Rowing Clubs have been required by the University to align their policy on competitive eligibility with British Rowing, after previously only being encouraged to do so: in an update to University policy, introduced on 16th March 2026, the Director of Sport informed OURCs via letter that University policy now required clubs to align with NGB policy and asked that OURCs comply as soon as was practically possible.

Whilst OURCs has been aware of its requirement to update the Rules of Racing to align with national guidance as soon as practically possible, following a letter from the Director of Sport on 16th March 2026, the Captain’s Meeting minutes state that there had been an internal understanding between OURCs and Sports Federation that, should any changes be made, they would be done at the end of the academic year, after the competitive season was over. However, on 24th March onwards, a deadline for the rule change of 31st March was communicated to OURCs by the OURCs Senior Member, on behalf of the Proctors and Pro-Vice Chancellor for Sport.

Given a number of OURCs’ constitutional clauses, holding that OURCs is bound to organise inter-college rowing competitions, conduct all activities in line with University equality policies, and conduct events within the bounds of conditions that the Proctors

attach to the running of the event, OURCs has been required to make the rule change to fulfil its constitutional objectives. Summer VIIIs could not proceed without compliance with the rule change, given the club’s reliance upon the insurance provided by the University for the event.

Subsequently, OURCs introduced a new power in the Constitution, authorised by the Proctors, permitting the Director of Sport to require changes to the Oxford University Rowing Clubs (OURCs) rules in compliance with the University of Oxford’s Diversity and Inclusion policy. OURCs is a student-run organisation which serves as a federation for the Oxford University Boat Club (OUBC) and all 36 Oxford college boat clubs.

Since September 2023, British Rowing policy has been that only people who are assigned female at birth will be eligible to compete in the Women’s category, whilst trans, non-binary, and all other individuals will be eligible to compete in the Open category.

Previously, OURC’s Rules of Racing stated that, “trans people should be permitted to participate in their affirmed gender identity” at “less competitive levels”, including college-level rowing. Since January 2019, OURCs has allowed for self-identification in all divisions of Torpids and Summer VIIIs.

On 8th October 2025, the Sports Federation updated its eligibility guidance, mirroring Cambridge University’s guidance update in September 2025, to advise sports clubs to align their Trans eligibility policies with

their relevant National Governing Body. At this time, OURCs chose to delay alignment as British Rowing’s policies, which were (and remain) under review. This was possible as OURCs events are not run under the auspices of British Rowing.

Cambridge University Boat Club required oarspersons to self-declare their gender identification to their Captain before entering any Women’s Crew or Mixed Crew into a CUBC event. If they did not meet British Rowing Women’s Category eligibility criteria from British Rowing’s “Trans and Non-Binary Competition Eligibility Policy and Procedures”, their captain must amend their entry to an event before its first heat (including the Getting on Race), removing and replacing any individuals who have declared that they are not eligible. This rule remains under review in accordance with British Rowing’s policy. According to minutes from the Oxford Captains’ Meeting, “it was made clear...that there was no choice but to comply with the request [made by the University to change the rule, in line with national guidance] and that failure to do so would result in OURCs’ deregistration as a University sports club and inability to run competitions, effective immediately”.

British Rowing’s policy claims that it is fully committed to “ensur[ing] Trans people can continue their participation in rowing whilst and after transitioning”. Their 2023 Competition Eligibility and Procedures policy, now being enforced by Oxford University Rowing Clubs, proposed two categories alongside the

Women’s: an Open Category, where all individuals are eligible to compete, and a Mixed category, offered at any level of competition, providing 50% of the crew are eligible from the women’s category stated above. British Rowing encourages trans and non-binary participants to take part in “recreational activity” (non-competing) in the gender they identify with.

Above college-level rowing, decisions regarding athlete qualification for Varsity competitions have previously been handled on a case-by-case basis, with joint input from both Oxford and Cambridge Directors of Sport. Registered University sports clubs and colleges’ sport organising committees are required to align their policies with the approach and criteria used by the relevant National Governing Body.

The Student Union has stressed that it is essential that the University create an environment where all individuals “regardless of their gender identity, expression or sexual orientation, feel safe, welcome, and empowered to participate in sports and physical activities”.

A spokesperson for the University told *Cherwell* that it “remains committed to being an inclusive university”. They also added that regarding competitive sports, “registered sports clubs and committees are required to follow the policies and eligibility criteria set by the relevant national governing body” as “this is necessary to ensure alignment with competition frameworks as well as compliance with the law”.

*Image credit: Stan Smith for Cherwell.*

## NEWS SHORTS

### Teddy Hall alumnus set to lose job

Speculation is continuing to swirl around the future of a Teddy Hall alumnus, following reports of growing unrest amongst his team. The graduate faces mounting pressure after a series of difficult weeks, though *Cherwell’s* Deputy Editors would like to politely request clemency if, by the time this goes to print, “mounting pressure” has become “formal resignation”.

### Off the face of the Earth

The Earth briefly disappeared from St Anne’s Ball over the weekend after the 3m inflatable planet vanished from the quad in the early hours of the morning. Ball committee members tracked the globe’s journey as the culprit boarded a train to Paddington, before an Instagram appeal prompted its swift return by first-class post – complete with an apology note.

### Brick by brick

Oxford’s newest residents may be tiny plastic people. Hundreds queued at Westgate on 7th May for the opening of Oxford’s first LEGO store, with seven-year-old Xavier, and five-year-old Herbie cutting the ribbon. The 250sqm shop is LEGO’s 22nd UK store, bringing 25 new jobs to the city.

### Stick with it

The 2026 Pooh Sticks World Championship will be held at Sandford Lock, just south of Oxford, on Sunday 24th May. The event is free to watch, whilst plopping in your own pooh stick costs £5 per go, with most of the funds going to charity. The event pays homage to the fictional game invented by A. A. Milne in his 1928 book *The House at Pooh Corner*.

## CROSS CAMPUS

### Follow the money

*The Guardian* has revealed that Cambridge University donor and fellow Christopher Harborne of Downing College gave a £5 million gift to Nigel Farage before his decision to stand as an MP in the 2024 General Election. The Thailand-based crypto billionaire’s undisclosed gift formed part of a £22 million donation by Harborne to Farage’s political parties over the last seven years.

### Let them eat lunch

After a student union organisation survey revealed that 48% of university students in France had gone without food as a result of financial difficulties, universities across France decided to expand their €1 three-course meal programme to all students. The scheme was previously only available to students from low-income backgrounds, and roughly converts to 86p in Great British Pounds.

## Oxford researchers trial non-invasive diagnostic scans for endometriosis

MELISSA EDDON

Researchers led by University of Oxford academic Dr Tatjana Gibbons have successfully trialled non-invasive scans to diagnose endometriosis.

Published in *The Lancet* Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health, the study involved 19 individuals with either strong signs of "pelvic or thoracic endometriosis", or who had already received a diagnosis. The non-invasive scan was carried out after the intravenous administration of an imaging agent that binds to tissue, and makes endometriosis growths visible on screen.

The study demonstrated 100% specificity, meaning no false positives were reported. As such, the scan offers a viable alternative to the existing invasive diagnostic procedures. Dr Gibbons told *Cherwell*: "This imaging method could support patients getting an earlier diagnosis and could help diagnose endometriosis subtypes that can't be reliably seen non-invasively."

Endometriosis is an inflammatory disease, in which cells similar to

those found in the uterus grow in other parts of the body, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes, but can also spread to the bladder, bowel, and chest. Symptoms such as heavy periods accompanied by severe pain and pain during sex are triggered when endometriosis growths break down but cannot leave the body.

The condition affects an estimated 10% (190 million) of women of childbearing age. The causes of endometriosis are unknown, though some research has connected it to immune system dysregulation. The disease can also have significant impacts on fertility, with 25-50% of infertile women having endometriosis.

At present, there are no known cures for the disease.

Typically, diagnosis requires invasive laparoscopic surgery, which involves directly observing tissue or taking samples for examination. The complexity and expense of the procedure often lead to delays in treatment and the continuation of suffering for the patient, with one study by the charity Endometriosis UK suggesting wait times have

reached an average of nine years. Currently, around 40% of surgical procedures produce negative results. Gibbons hopes the study will tackle these waiting times, and "empower the development of new therapies". She added that the next step for the pilot study is a larger clinical trial, which she hopes will validate the team's findings.

Oxford Women in STEM Society told *Cherwell*: "The pilot scheme is a positive step, but it also highlights how delayed progress in this area has been... Conditions like endometriosis have been consistently underfunded and dismissed, which has led to real harm."

The society hopes that the study will not only improve treatment timelines, but also "force a shift" in attitudes towards women's pain by healthcare companies and professionals.

The Oxford study has made national news, and was featured in an episode of *Saturday Night Live UK*. As part of the "Weekend Update" skit, the study was used in a joke about the pain that has come to be associated with female health procedures.

## Oxford Labour defies national trends at city council elections

NED REMINGTON and HATTIE SIMPSON

The Labour Party defied national trends in the Oxford local elections yesterday, with their seat count in the City Council dropping slightly from 21 to 20, against a national backdrop of major losses for the party. Multiple students at Oxford University stood unsuccessfully as candidates in wards across the city.

The Labour Party remains the largest party on the council. The Green Party gained four councillors, raising their total count to 13. The Liberal Democrats remained steady on a total of nine seats. The number of Independent councillors dropped from nine to six, with four now representing the Independent Oxford Alliance and two representing the Real Independents Group. The Conservatives and Reform UK still have no representation on the City Council.

A total of 24 councillors were up for election this year, with one councillor elected in each of the city's 24 wards. Oxford City Council elects half of its councillors every two years, with each ward represented by two councillors overall. The Council remains under no overall control, meaning no party holds a majority. Labour previously held a majority on the Council for 13 years until the 2023 resignation of ten councillors in protest of Labour's policy on the war in Gaza.

Holywell ward, the City Council ward with a majority student population, was held by the Green Party, with recent Oxford graduate Alfie Davis elected with an overwhelming majority of 622 votes over the Labour student candidate, Awab Kazuz.

Davis told *Cherwell* that the result in Holywell represents "a profound rejection of Labour" by students and a new form of "politics for the people". Reflecting on the significance of the result for young people, Davis added that students represent a "unique social community... that is recognised very little". However, they highlighted that their key takeaway from the Oxford results was the "ridiculously high" turnout, over 40% in most wards, describing this as a "real sign of young people showing interest in local elections".

The results come amid major losses for the Labour Party in local councils across England, as well as projected losses in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd. Speaking to *Cherwell* after his loss, Labour candidate Kazuz, a first-year student at St Edmund's Hall and a member of the Oxford Labour Club Executive Committee, said he was "really proud of the campaign that we ran" and noted that the party was holding "marginal seats". Kazuz rejected any suggestion that the night had been a "drumming" for Labour in Oxford, telling *Cherwell*: "We're doing better than a lot of people expected us to do." He also said he was "rooting for Alfie so that they can do the best that they can for the people of Holywell".

Student candidates also stood in the Carfax and Jericho ward – Harriet Dolby for the Conservatives, and Vittorio Cuneo-Flood for Reform UK – with a candidate ultimately elected from the Green Party, replacing the incumbent Labour candidate. Student Harry Morgan stood unsuccessfully for the Liberal Democrats in Osney & St Thomas, Zelalemawee Asheber stood unsuccessfully for the Green Party in

Walton Manor, and Indigo Haynes stood unsuccessfully for the Green Party in Blackbird Leys.

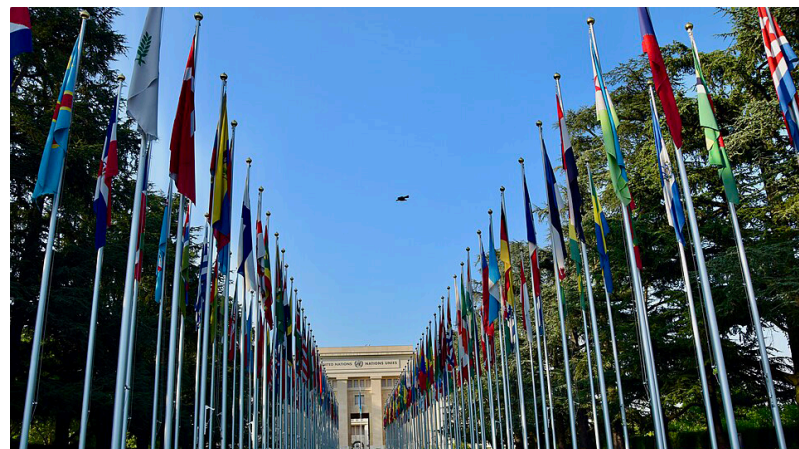
Speaking to *Cherwell*, Morgan, former President of the Oxford Student Liberals Organisation, highlighted the "disconnect between the University and local elections generally", adding that students have seemingly been more engaged this year. Addressing the wider national result, however, Morgan warned of the rise of Reform UK for students, saying: "They don't really believe in the climate crisis. I don't think they have housing solutions. I don't think they have the deep thinking to deal with any of the problems that are going to affect us."

Reform UK has made gains in councils across England. Whilst no seats were won by Reform in Oxford, they increased their vote share across the city, and came second in three wards, all of which were won by the Labour Party.

Reflecting on the results of the night, Councillor Susan Brown, Labour Leader of the Council prior to the election, told *Cherwell*: "I feel we have listened to local residents. We have given a very positive program to the people of Oxford. And so I'm pleased and proud that at the end of tonight, we ended up as still very much the largest party... It seems to me that people are relatively happy with what we are putting forward."

Brown acknowledged that it had proved "very difficult... to communicate directly with students", particularly in the Holywell ward, and recognised that Labour continued to lack a majority (25 seats) in the Council, telling *Cherwell* she was "always happy to work in partnership and collegiately" with other parties.

Image Credit: Txlxt Txlxt, CC-BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



## Oxford and UN launch peace and security fellowship

GAVRIELLA EPSTEIN-LIGHTMAN

The University of Oxford and the United Nations have launched a new Peace and Security Fellowship.

The fellowship was established by Oxford's Department of Politics and International Relations in partnership with the UN Department of Peace Operations. It brings serving UN practitioners to Oxford to undertake research on peacekeeping and conflict prevention.

The programme, which began on Monday 27th April, lasts eight weeks. It sees ten fellows from diverse professional backgrounds working on individual research projects and presenting their findings in a closing seminar and final paper.

Professor Richard Caplan, the director of the Fellowship, and Professor of International Relations, told *Cherwell* the topics the fellows are focusing on are "very varied but they all speak to critically important issues for the United Nations today". Focuses vary from strengthening the rule of law and accountability mechanisms in conflict

and post-conflict environments, to exploring how UN peace operations can adapt to the evolving geopolitical order.

Professor David Doyle, Head of the Department of Politics and International Relations, told *Cherwell*: "All of the Fellows [sic] work on the frontline of peace and security for the UN in some of the most challenging contexts in the world." Doyle explained that "this is an opportunity for them to take a step back and to conduct research, in an academic context... yet informed by their extensive practical experience".

The Fellowship is being launched at a time of undeniable geopolitical volatility. Caplan highlighted to *Cherwell* that it is "precisely because the geopolitical situation is in flux, [that] it is imperative to think beyond traditional UN approaches to international peace and security". He added, in this context, that "it is a fitting time to be re-examining how UN peace operations and related tools can better address today's challenges". He also emphasised that the University of Oxford will benefit from "the insights the fellows can offer into the work of the United Nations and multilateral organisations more broadly".

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

## Think tank publishes report calling for centralised Oxbridge admissions

DANIELA BRAW-SMITH

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) has published a new report advocating for centralised admissions procedures for applications to the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, arguing that the current collegiate system increases the opacity and complexity for applicants and their teachers.

Charlotte Armstrong, author of the report, told *Cherwell* that the collegiate admissions system "can place a significant burden on teachers and advisers trying to support students, and risks discouraging capable applicants who may see the system as confusing or inaccessible". In the report, Armstrong pointed to several factors complicating the admissions process, such as variation in outreach funding, fragmented outreach provision, and poor institutional coordination.

HEPI's report specifically noted the impact of the huge wealth disparity between colleges: In 2024, Christ Church College's endowment (£758 million) was around 17 times that of St Anne's College (£44 million). According to the think tank, these differences prevent there being a consistent level of support and connection, with some colleges budgeting up to twelve times more on widening access than others. Armstrong told *Cherwell* that "this risks creating an uneven landscape where a student's exposure to Oxbridge – and the guidance and support they receive – can depend on their geography, and which colleges happen to have been

allocated to their area."

In its application guidance, the University describes how "while it may look different from applications to other universities, each part of the process has a clear purpose and guidance to help you understand what to expect." Applications to Oxford involve an earlier deadline for UCAS personal statements and references, choosing between applying to a specific college or an open application, a potential admissions assessment and/or submission of written work and at least one interview, all before the main January deadline for UCAS has passed. HEPI's research identified Oxford's additional application requirements and earlier timelines as another factor limiting students' and teachers' ability to navigate the admissions process.

In response to these barriers to transparent and accessible admissions procedures, HEPI has recommended a multi-stage approach, culminating in full centralisation of Oxford applications. The proposed first step would be to develop a more consistent approach to interviewing to establish a more level playing field for students and teachers.

Under a fully centralised application model, applicants could be interviewed by academic staff from several colleges before being allocated to a college through a ranked preference method. This system would, as Armstrong told *Cherwell*, "reduce the risk of strong candidates missing out because of where they applied and make the system clearer, more transparent and fairer from a student's perspective".



## Trading one elite school for another: Inside the finances of Oxford's visiting student programme

CHERWELL INVESTIGATIONS

When a Princeton student was accepted into the University of Oxford's visiting student programme at Worcester College, one of their first concerns wasn't about housing or tutorials – but money. “At first, I wasn't sure how much exactly Princeton would cover”, the student told *Cherwell*. “You have to make a budget proposal to them, itemising expenses like tuition, room, and board for your study abroad program”.

“Thankfully”, the student told *Cherwell*, they could afford it. “They actually gave me more than I needed”.

Unlike course fees paid by matriculated students – centralised by the University at £9,790 for home students and between £37,380 and £62,820 for overseas students – visiting student fees are determined independently by colleges. According to Freedom of Information requests by *Cherwell*, at least 24 colleges offer places for visiting students, five more than the 18 listed on the University's website, which notes that the information is “indicative only” and “subject to change”.

As of 1st December 2025, 585 students were listed as “visiting, recognised or other” under the Visiting Non-Matriculated Programme, about 2% of Oxford's total enrollment. Students with this status can attend lectures and use University libraries, and have full privileges at the colleges they attend, including joining the JCR.

### Programmes offered

Many of Oxford's visiting students come from direct partnerships or memoranda of understanding with other universities. Worcester, for example, has direct partnerships with Harvard, Princeton, Swarthmore, and Wellesley.

Most partnerships are with private American institutions, including Ivy

League universities such as Yale and Dartmouth, and liberal arts colleges such as Sarah Lawrence College and Williams College – schools where the total cost of attendance can exceed \$98,000. A few American public universities also have partnerships with colleges, alongside universities outside the United States, such as Tsinghua University and the University of Hong Kong. Some universities, like Sciences Po, also have partnerships with the University itself or affiliated departments, which assign colleges later.

For students whose home institutions lack direct partnerships with Oxford, the only opportunity to enrol as a visiting student is through a study abroad provider. For North American students, three main providers operate in Oxford: Arcadia Abroad, Institute for Study Abroad (IFSA), and Oxford Study Abroad Programme (OSAP).

“*Among all colleges with Arcadia and IFSA programmes, tuition fees range from \$49,850 to \$78,645, while food and accommodation fees range from \$7,790 to \$20,375*”

Both Arcadia and IFSA offer placements at Herford, Lady Margaret Hall, Mansfield, St Anne's, St Catherine's, St Edmund Hall, and Worcester, while IFSA also offers additional placements at Regent's Park and St Hilda's. OSAP has partnerships with Magdalen and New, alongside “associate member” options at New,



Oriel, and Trinity.

The Oxford Prospects Programme, meanwhile, offers year-long visiting student programmes for students from Chinese universities at Blackfriars, Mansfield, Pembroke, Regent's Park, St Anne's, St Peter's, and Worcester.

Visiting students – both those from direct partnerships and study abroad providers – stay in Oxford for varying amounts of time, either for one or two terms or the full year. Hertford, Lady Margaret Hall, and St Anne's also offer extended fall programmes that begin in September to align with some universities' semester systems.

Among all 23 colleges with visiting students, the number varies. In 2025, St Catherine's had the most visiting students listed with 55, or about 5% of the college's total enrolment, having hosted 366 total visiting students since 2021. Corpus Christi, on the other hand, offers the fewest places: just one student per year from the University of Missouri.

### Cost of attendance

In general, visiting student fees – for students coming from direct partnerships – are broadly comparable to overseas fees, which range from £37,380 to £62,820 in tuition costs. However, the cost of attendance varies by college, subject, and home institution.

For instance, some colleges, like St Edmund Hall, adjust fees on subjects, charging students between £50,391 and £63,381 per year, including food and accommodation. Other colleges have a flat fee regardless of course, such as Mansfield, which charges students £46,000 per year.

There is no central register of what colleges charge. The University's website notes that “fees are set and published by each individual college”, and many direct partnerships involve their own financial agreements. Several colleges withheld fee arrangements from *Cherwell* under Section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, citing commercial sensitivity, meaning the cost of some programmes is not available through legal disclosure.

Still, a student's financial situation might affect actual costs. St Edmund Hall, for instance, offers a scholarship fund for American students and one for students from UNC-Chapel Hill. Students may also receive additional funding from their home institution.

For example, the Princeton student at Worcester told *Cherwell* that Princeton – where they are on full financial aid –

covered all tuition and accommodation costs, as well as an additional stipend for living costs. “I was surprised by the leeway they gave me”, the student told *Cherwell*, though the student added they are “not sure if they do this for all students on full financial aid”.

For visiting students enrolling through a third-party provider, the costs are higher still.

At both Arcadia and IFSA, the fees paid differ both by college and the program. For instance, the total programme fee at Arcadia ranges from \$73,995 at Mansfield to \$87,995 at Worcester. IFSA, meanwhile, ranges in price from \$69,095 at Regent's Park to \$81,085 at Worcester, with premedical students at St Anne's paying \$90,505.

The breakdown of fees into tuition, food, and accommodation also varies among colleges. For example, Arcadia students at Mansfield pay \$53,705 in tuition and \$20,290 in food and accommodation, while the same visiting students at Worcester pay \$77,155 in tuition and \$10,840 in food and accommodation. Among all colleges with Arcadia and IFSA programmes, tuition fees range from \$49,850 to \$78,645, while food and accommodation fees range from \$7,790 to \$20,375.

“*£21,569,358 in visiting student tuition fees collected across eleven colleges between 2021 and 2025*”

For both Arcadia and IFSA visiting students, the price remains higher than direct partnerships or applications to Oxford. For example, Mansfield costs \$73,995 for Arcadia students and \$70,225 for IFSA students. Converted to roughly £54,200 and £51,500, the price is more than what regular visiting students at Mansfield pay, set at £46,000 per year.

OSAP's fees are higher again. Registered visiting students pay \$89,400 per year, with an additional \$6,000 surcharge for certain STEM subjects. Even associate members – who have fewer privileges – pay \$23,700 per term, leading to a yearly cost of \$71,100.

For visiting students coming through

third-party services, one reason for the higher cost is the additional support and opportunities the organisations provide. For example, a spokesperson for IFSA told *Cherwell* that “all IFSA students receive a bespoke 3-day orientation from IFSA in Oxford” alongside other benefits, like health and safety support, private insurance, an IFSA staff member in Oxford, and the transfer of academic credit.

One visiting student who enrolled in Oxford through IFSA told *Cherwell* that financial arrangements have been “fairly straightforward” with IFSA acting as “a middleman”. “I can imagine how, if I were dealing with this directly through Worcester, I would be incredibly frustrated,” the student added, “since they have made it so difficult to get anything done”.

### Total revenue

Across colleges that disclosed figures in response to *Cherwell's* Freedom of Information requests, visiting student fees have generated substantial and growing income.

St Catherine's collected more income from visiting student tuition fees than any other disclosing college, earning £5,050,436 from 2021 to 2025. During the same period, Mansfield took in £4,292,528, while Pembroke collected £2,483,222.

Income collected from visiting student tuition fees has also grown at several colleges over the last few years. For instance, St Peter's earned £233,101 from visiting student fees during the 2021-22 academic year, compared to £573,760 in 2024-25. Meanwhile, St Hilda's income rose from £200,292 in 2023-24 to £500,730 in 2024-25 – a roughly 150% increase.

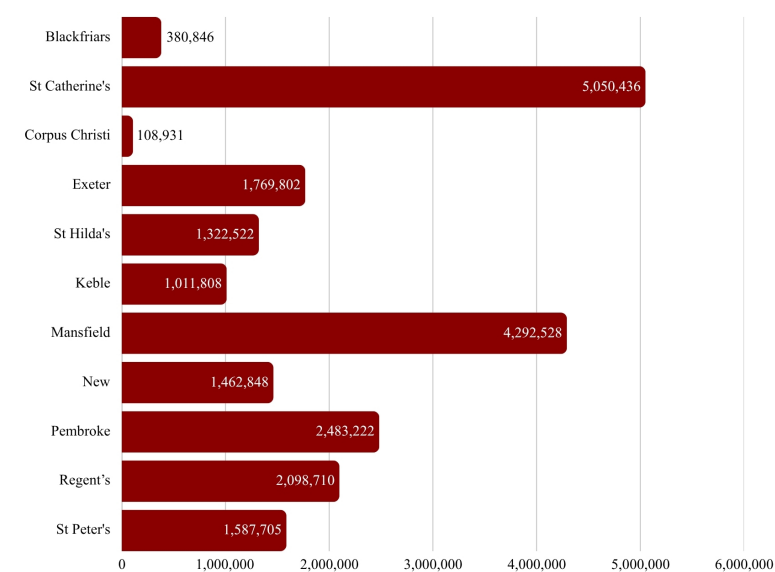
Across the eleven colleges that disclosed figures, the total income colleges received from visiting students from 2021 to 2025 amounted to £21,569,358. As a number of colleges withheld total figures, this figure likely underestimates the actual amount earned by Oxford colleges.

Still, one visiting student from a European university told *Cherwell* they found the fees they were paying their college “disproportionately high”. “I find it lamentable”, they added, “how visiting students have ... contracts which are clearly motivated by colleges' interest to earn more money”. Arcadia and OSAP were contacted for comment.

Graph credit: Oskar Doepke.  
Image credit: Ruby Barenberg for *Cherwell*.

### Total income from visiting student tuition fees

Based on *Cherwell's* analysis of Freedom of Information responses from 2021-2025



\*Data excludes at least 13 colleges that withheld income data

## Oxford needs a women's college

LUCY POLLOCK

Naturally, I loathe to say that Cambridge does anything better than Oxford, but I can't deny that there is one thing I will always respect them for: Newnham and Murray Edwards (and, up until 2021, Lucy Cavendish).

In the 1970s, mixed colleges were the way forward. They embodied a progressive attitude, aiming to increase the number of female undergraduates. As Florence Smith showed, the admission of women to Hertford, Brasenose, Jesus, St Catherine's, and Wadham was complex – amid the progressive ideology, a misogynistic and unequal reality remained. Crucially, the biggest consequence of men-only colleges admitting women in 1974 was that, five years later, former women's-only colleges St Anne's and Lady Margaret Hall admitted men. By 2008, there was not a single women's-only college left.

Mixed colleges are a wonderful thing. Having been at an all-girls school for seven years, I don't think I would have accepted an undergrad offer from a women's-only college. We can all agree that it is healthy for men and women to socialise, and for women to understand and participate in environments which aren't exclusively female. However, single-sex spaces, especially for women, and in particular women's colleges, are important. Research has concluded that girls do better (academically) at single-sex schools. It would be unsurprising for this to continue at university level. I'm sure many female readers can relate to the experience of being spoken over by a male tutor partner at least once in their time at university.

Women's colleges can also provide funding to women. Despite women often outperforming men at undergraduate level, academia in Western nations has a significant gender gap, particularly in STEM, and a significant barrier to academia is funding. Cambridge colleges provide not only places for women, but also funding, awards, and prizes. For further study in History at Oxford, an MSt will cost around £17,000, whilst a DPhil will cost around £14,000 annually (roughly £42,000 - £56,000 for the full degree). Women's colleges help address this gap.

I believe that my own college (Somerville) is a progressive place, and I'd argue it has retained its values and principles better than any other former women's college. Yet I have heard plenty of sexist 'jokes' in the college bar. Casual sexism is something almost every woman is forced to confront; a women's-only college would give women a reprieve. Somerville is the only college to have had only female principals – something I was very aware could change when our principal stepped down in 2025. Female principals are often one of the best examples young women have for a woman in a position of clear authority, particularly in an institution like Oxford, which for so long was associated with only masculinity. Whilst I do not advocate for total feminist separatism, I believe that there is real value in women's-only spaces. Having spoken to women who attended former women's colleges in Oxford for my undergraduate thesis, the difference in atmosphere is almost palpable. Women's-only colleges were often described as empowering places of learning and guidance. I love my college, and indeed I love Oxford, but I think that that atmosphere has faded.

When Somerville went mixed, former Principals Catherine Hughes and Daphne Park justified the change by arguing that they had always taught women

to be feminists; now they were doing the same for men. If that was the goal, they failed. Men who identify as feminists, and men who fight for women's rights exist within Oxford, as they do everywhere, but this is not because of any college environment. Women's colleges were once a place in which women could learn to take on a male-dominated environment; though various environments have remained male-dominated, the safe space for women created by these colleges, a space in which women could exploit every and any opportunity, has been lost.

Women's colleges don't appeal to everyone. When the first five colleges went mixed, they admitted 100 women. How many more applied? There was a real demand for a mixed-sex environment – rightfully so. There are real advantages to coeducation – and also to cohabitation between the sexes. There were plenty of women at LMH who were delighted about the arrival of men, and many went on to marry the men they met at college. But others missed out. There are plenty of reasons women might need – not just want – a women's-only space. I know plenty of women who chose to attend London universities – or not attend university at all – because London universities would allow them to live at home while studying. Some women also preferred this because they did not want to live in mixed dorms with men on campus, due to their religious beliefs. Colleges in Oxford do try to be accommodating for the most part, but a mixed college will never be as good at providing spatial separation as a women's college.

It's not about whether mixed or single sex colleges are better. It's about having the ability to choose. Perhaps instead of a new graduate college every five years, Oxford could reintroduce a women's college. It wouldn't do the University any harm, but it would be of colossal benefit to its students.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Blast from the past

Mercedes Haas and Beatrix Arnold's curated reflection on the history of *Cherwell* ('From the archives') was an insightful glance back into the colourful history of Oxford's oldest independent newspaper. With excerpts selected from a diverse range of world events, World War 2 and Pink Floyd alike, a sense of continuity was captured by the writers that sums up what *Cherwell* is all about. This piece particularly struck a chord with me in terms of the perseverance of young voices; too often it can feel like our insights are overlooked in favour of those with more life experience to offer. But it is clear from the archives that longevity of life is no match for fresh perspectives when it comes to journalistic creativity. The long-standing tradition of student journalism just goes to show that in trying times, both locally and globally, publications like *Cherwell* should not be afraid to ruffle some feathers and let their opinions be heard. As encouraged by Mercedes and Beatrix, *Cherwell* must keep on embracing unruliness!

Freya Robson, French and Philosophy, *Hertford College*

### Dating in the digital age

I think Jessie Jukes' "If he wanted to, he would" and other fairy tales" highlights a truly important issue with dating in the digital age - there is an overwhelming amount of ideas about what a relationship should/shouldn't look like, which can destabilize our trust in our own feelings and exacerbate our doubts. For example, I'm currently in a happy long-distance relationship, but according to one Instagram reel I saw, "long-distance creates longing, not love", so, my bad, I guess all long-distance relationships are doomed and I should disregard my own experience (please read this with heavy sarcasm - but also know I spent a week being anxious before common sense kicked in). The situation was even worse when I was trying to figure out whether I liked this person, and my algorithm seemed to switch between 'if he's not Mr Perfect, don't even try' and 'isn't falling in love amazing?' Even the content about 'good' relationships can be troublesome, as we compare ourselves to those couples, thinking, "They seem so in love all the time" - well, yes, because the 'dull' moments of a relationship are rarely good content! Dating is already a world where we have to be terrifyingly vulnerable and confront the unknown - adding in hundreds of other perspectives to that mix, especially such reductive ones, is extremely unhelpful. My advice for anyone dating? Stop taking other people's advice!

Jemima Freeman, Classics, *Merton College*

## THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

Hate speech is not free speech, it is verbal violence ('Student societies condemn reported Oxford Union invite to Tommy Robinson')

Deanna McHugh via *Facebook*

Fork found in kitchen ('Union President-Elect found guilty of electoral fraud by Tribunal')

cartea\_jaimungal via *Instagram*

\*invites a convicted sex offender to home\* 'there's no evidence i even knew the man, maybe someone else invited him' bffr ('The Oxford donors in the Epstein files')

zaraaaaak via *Instagram*

I am not sure that anyone with half a brain would want to get involved in party politics these days. (James Marriott on books, broadsheets, and a changing Britain)

Glenn Calderwood via *Facebook*

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Image credit: Archie Johnston for *Cherwell*.

## The Oxford Union has a far-right problem

ARUN LEWIS

The Oxford Union is no stranger to controversy. From the 1933 'King and Country' debate, which the Union, now, looks back on with pride, to the fracas surrounding comments on Charlie Kirk's assassination, its financial model rests primarily upon attracting attention, a trade of its credibility in return for meagre profits. It is on those fumes of attention that YouTube revenues and each year's membership drives rely. There is nothing particularly objectionable about the Union seeking speakers who will ignite that public debate and draw attention, a hard task in the modern media landscape.

However, its invitations of controversial YouTuber and former UKIP candidate, Carl Benjamin, and to EDL founder and former BNP member Tommy Robinson, crossed a line. Benjamin's invite has now been rescinded, but to invite one of Britain's leading reactionaries, opposed to both feminism and Islam, to the Union offered him nothing more than a chance to vent his views, gaining credibility from the Union's reputation. It took Benjamin five years to apologise to Jess Philips, an MP who has been a vocal campaigner against violence against women and girls, for saying he "wouldn't even rape her". This is evidence he is not some right-wing thinker, some intellectual heavyweight, but a provocateur, willing to sacrifice the well-being of others for the advancement of his own, narrow aims. Few have done more to promote the creed of anti-feminism online than his channel, Sargon of Akkad, and at a time when Oxbridge faces a reckoning with its own failure to protect students, his presence would be a detriment to the University community. The Union's invite thus drew deserved

backlash.

When contacted for comment, Carl Benjamin stated that, "my views are nothing more than the common-sense views of the average Englishman," and that he, "appreciate[s] the flattery of the radicals who oppose me".

The invitation of Tommy Robinson is even more worrying. Robinson has been part of the steadily increasing right-wing movement in the UK, targeting Muslims and immigrant communities. His rap sheet of criminal offences is long, and he was a prominent figure in the 'Unite the Kingdom' rallies held last year, where Elon Musk stated: "Violence is coming," and "you either fight, or you die". This came after 2024's protests in the wake of the Southport stabbings, for which Robinson publicly blamed immigrant and Muslim communities. His list of political affiliations is a who's-who of the far right in the UK, from the BNP to UKIP, and now Advance UK.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the Union inviting right-wing or controversial figures; it retains public prominence. But there is a double standard playing out in British public life, which the Union as a centre of elite opinion perpetuates. Extremist right-wing voices, who actively promote intolerance and hostility towards whole groups of people, are welcomed into these spaces with little challenge. Comparative figures on the left, those who might challenge them, draw less attention; they don't bring the same viewer counts. The Union was happy in 2007 to welcome Nick Griffin, the then-leader of the BNP, and David Irving, one of the UK's most notorious Holocaust deniers, and appeared happy to roll out the red carpet again.

The acceptance of such radicals into respectable

institutions like the Union gives them a thin sheen of legitimacy, under the guise of 'debate'; anyone who has watched a Union debate knows there is little chance of these men experiencing a Damascene conversion on the Union's benches. They are simply there to spout their rhetoric, receive polite applause from the besuited ranks of Oxford's students, and further their dangerous, damaging and divisive campaigns.

Some free-speech warriors might argue they are simply speaking – that there is no need for the student body, or wider public, to consider what they say. But history would disagree with this blase stance – which could only be held by someone who isn't part of a group targeted by such intolerance. Just a year ago, Robinson whipped up right-wing fury to attack hotels holding asylum seekers, inspiring a broader climate of fear for the UK's BAME communities. Robinson founded the EDL, the spiritual successor to the National Front accused of terrorising BAME communities in the 1970s and 1980s. My own family were harassed by the National Front, my grandfather knocked to the ground whilst out shopping with them. The Union might be a forum of free speech, but this self-serving myth of free speech serves only to deny that it has any role in defining the boundaries of debate in society. To the Union, the lives of working-class communities, of BAME communities, are fair game for a debate, for something to list on their executives' CVs.

In a decade, these students will likely not remember the debate, but those who shelter at home, afraid of the baying mobs on the street, or who feel like they have committed a crime simply by being born with a skin tone below sepia, will remember. Their wellbeing will be sacrificed for views, career advancement, money and attention, as the Union continues to chase the clout of divisive, hateful figures.

# Oxbridge's admissions process is inherently classist

AMALIA LARSSON NEGI

Oxbridge has long been the playground of the elite. The children of the aristocracy, heads of state, CEOs, and leading figures from across the world have made it their stomping ground. We cannot deny that an Oxbridge education is the 'golden ticket' that sets one up quite nicely. Over the past few decades, however, there have been shifts to diversify the student body. Now there is, allegedly, ample opportunity for all gifted students. Doesn't meritocracy always stand victorious? Yet this is a delusion.

Earlier this year, Cambridge's Trinity Hall stated that they aim to recruit students from elite private schools in their admissions – once again, Britain's ever-present class and opportunity struggle rears its ugly head. The new admissions approach is rooted in fears that standards are slipping, implying that elite schools produce, and will provide, the most capable students. The reality is that state-educated students have always been underrepresented at Oxbridge.

Class seeps into every aspect of life in Britain; it is the core way our world is stratified. While class lines are no longer completely rigid, many bright and capable people never flourish in our education system. Admission to an elite university like Oxford is one of the best ways to secure access to the education, status, and social circles that will almost guarantee upward social mobility. It hands one the connections, opportunities, and experiences that are genuinely impossible for many working-class people.

In terms of education, you will be taught by the leading figures of the day, and the most respected and recognised scholars in the field. Socially, you'll meet people who are like-minded, high-achieving, and well-connected. This is why it is important to ensure that bright, talented, and capable working-class students have their well-deserved chance of studying here; it is the best way, for many, to achieve their true potential. Oxford has made significant strides in fixing the inequality in its admissions; gone are the days when the entire cohort overflowed with cocaine and cash-fuelled Boris Johnson types (although you can easily find them today if you so dare). Yet the subtleties of class inequality mean that there are still issues in admissions that have been dismissed or not fully addressed by the University; these are not just the failures of Oxford, but of the country as a whole.

I realised how disadvantaged state-school students were when my initial Oxford rejection sent me into a spiral of trying to comprehend the Oxbridge admissions process. I tried to understand why I had

failed, receiving feedback that indicated my submitted written work and test scores were above average. My interview scores were not. And here is where my issue with the admissions process lies.

For me, the purely academic aspects of the process were manageable. The personal statement, the admissions test, and the written work went smoothly. Prospective Oxford students from state schools are more than capable academically, despite working with much fewer resources, but the culture of state school education is one of its biggest drawbacks. In the interview process, demonstrating confidence and articulating your academic ideas is crucial, yet the majority of state schools struggle to, or simply choose not to, instil this life skill in their students. The "private-school confidence" is something I have now become all too familiar with, whether that be with an insufferable tute partner or a charming acquaintance.

Confidence is embedded in the very structure of private schools; it's nourished by the way they operate. Private schools have smaller discussion-based classes, which encourage students to contribute their opinions. Some of the most elite schools enjoy etiquette and elocution classes, ensuring students can articulate and hold themselves well. Despite my good grades and interest in my education, I did not once put my hand up and voluntarily contribute to class discussions. I was absolutely mortified by any academic success I had; being openly smart or outspoken was not cool, and there was absolutely no environment of academic competition or ambition. I undersold my abilities and stayed quiet. In a class of 30 students, a fifth of them had the teacher's devoted attention, which usually consisted of teachers arguing with one group of students about their poor attempt at uniform, or hushing loud banter and conversations in the classroom. This is not the case for most private school students, who enjoy small classes and a push towards academic success and discipline.

I left school with a limited ability to articulate my opinions and no confidence in my academic skills. This was a direct result of the neglect inherent in an under-funded state education system. By the time I applied to Oxford, I had never had a one-on-one discussion with a teacher about any academic interest I had. This is the case for so many state school students. If you have been through years of education in large and disruptive classes and no encouragement or verbal interactions with academics, how are you expected to talk at length with academics in an Oxford interview? The interview process is what trips up so many bright state school students. For me, it

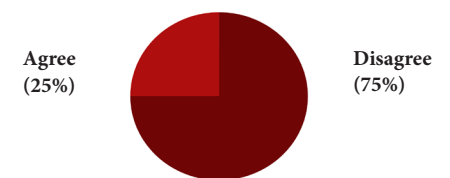
was the very first time I had ever discussed anything of academic interest with an adult for an extended period of time, or been challenged on an idea. Most teachers at my school barely knew my name, let alone tried to dedicate time to developing my ability to communicate my ideas about what we learned.

Private school students are much more equipped to exchange ideas and be confident in their claims. They are therefore able to handle the demands of the interview. This is inherent in having more resources, an ambitious academic culture, and on top of this, dedicated teachers for preparing for Oxbridge admissions, as most private schools do. Many teachers at these schools went to Oxbridge, allowing insider knowledge of how it works and demystifying it. Most state-school teachers do not have this level of education or ability to prepare their students. I remember the horror of my first few interviews; they consisted of adrenaline-fuelled rants spat out at my hapless interviewers, intermittent with brain fog and blank stares. My poor performance was largely due to my discomfort in that setting, and my consequent lack of confidence was abundantly apparent.

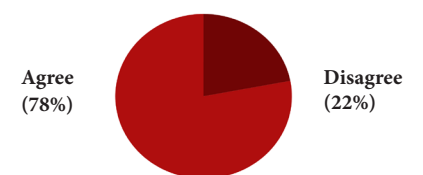
There should be more consideration of the cultural context of state schools when assessing the interviews of state school students. There should be dedicated resources for these students, so they can learn how to operate in this alien academic context. The wider issue is that state schools are under-funded; there is limited equality of opportunity, despite attempts to counteract the clear disadvantages of state education. At face value, anyone can apply to Oxbridge, but the culture and experiences that many working-class students encounter put them off from even trying. And if they do, they will already be steps behind everyone else. Many bright students slip between the cracks simply because they were born into a certain socio-economic class. State schools should have programmes that nurture gifted students and encourage Oxbridge applications, and there should be more resources given to guide these students through the daunting process. The unique perspectives of these students are so important in academia, and this diversity is vital in encouraging nuanced and interesting angles in thought, exchanging ideas, and learning. Since our experiences shape so much of how we view the world, work that comes from the stereotypical, well-off Oxford student becomes stale and uninteresting if it's all we are exposed to. Gifted students, regardless of where they come from, should be given the same opportunities to access elite university education and the opportunities present there.

## THE VERDICT

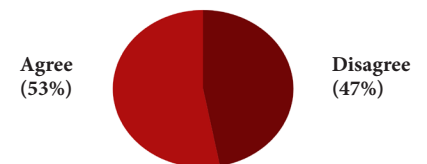
Oxford needs a women's college



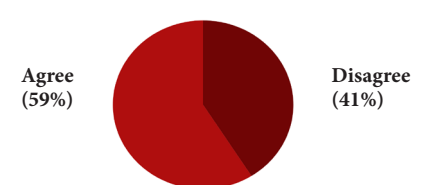
The Oxford Union has a far right problem



The Oxbridge admissions process is a meritocracy



Oxford is overly aestheticised



\*According to over 400 Instagram respondents

# Oxford is not an aesthetic

ELIZABETH MILLETT

My social media algorithm has successfully tracked my profile closely enough to have figured out where I study. To my regret. For every now and then, I'll be confronted with yet another bird's-eye view of central Oxford glistening at sunset, or an edit of a glorified study session in Duke Humfrey's library.

I often find my feed accosted with these montages of Oxford life, with the formal dinner being a classic. A short clip will introduce a carefully crafted montage of a candle-lit dining hall, proudly gowned students, and the evening's luxurious menu. A recent video featuring Keble Hall encouraged the viewer to "imagine walking into a hall so long you can barely see the end of it. Candles everywhere, everyone in black robes. The waiters looking like they've been doing this since 1887". They are paired with statements such as 'come with me to the fanciest dinner ever', or worse yet, framed as a 'POV': "POV: you are studying at the world's second oldest university" or "POV: Oxford students on a Wednesday night". These captions are followed by the same sequence of an ornate room full of chatter, clinking glasses, and tailcoats, all set to a trending audio to polish off this curated atmosphere. It frames life in Oxford like a film reel, where every interaction is one of intellect, and every evening one of extravagance.

“  
It frames life in Oxford like a film reel, where every interaction is one of intellect, and every evening one of extravagance

I suppose it sounds enticing, especially to those who do not attend Oxford. Does it feel completely

familiar? Not at all. These videos desperately lack any kind of nuance, especially in how they project student experience. They contain dregs of truth amongst what is mostly a fabricated existence, abandoning any personal insight in pursuit of the same generic presentation of Oxford's 'hallowed halls'. The content drools over the 'aesthetic' of academia or what it would feel like to be an esteemed guest at these exclusive dinners; they are snapshots that glorify opulence, venerating what they and the viewer romanticise as the peak of sophistication.

This leads to a particular grievance of mine, which is the Oxford 'influencers' – those who create content that thrives and capitalises on a purely idealistic version of the institution they study at. Accounts such as @observingoxford chase after this 'aesthetic' in their endless snapshots of Radcliffe Square and the Bodleian Libraries, making out that every moment, every walk down the street, every study session is made of magic. These content creators participate in a strange kind of tourism of their own lives. When I see Meagan Loyst's edit of Christ Church ball, I can't help but feel that the 1.1 million people who have liked the post have been done an injustice. It presents an enchanting evening of ballgowns and bubbles, all set to Michael Buble's 'Feeling Good' for a little extra dose of (what is perceived to be) perfection. Yet there is something forced, and dare I say cringeworthy, about filming yourself and self-consciously documenting your experience for the viewer. Having attended this ball myself, I am again struck by how little personality or actual insight brought to these representations in favour of this imaginary world.

The effect of this illusion is confirmed by the awestruck comments that idealise Oxford as their dream university. I would go so far as to say that an injustice is done to the University itself, reduced to an image that compacts its wealth of history, beautiful architecture, and impressive events (as well as the reality of admissions and its reputation as a world-class centre of teaching and research) into this 'aesthetic'. These viral videos feed off this perceived perfection, and even assume the viewer's desire to one day attend themselves.

I do not mean to say that Oxford is not full of incredibly unique experiences, traditions, and



opportunities – it is an undeniably special place. Perhaps my sentiments stem from my impartiality towards my own experience of Oxford. I never romanticised Oxford when applying, and now that I'm here, I often find it to be a beautiful yet self-satisfied and overwhelming city. As much as I've tried to feel at home here, I find it impossible to be constantly enamoured or consumed with wonder – if I were to be so, I would have to remove myself from my experience of the place. I feel guilty when people back in London question me about Oxford and assume it must be glorious. The reality, however, is that, at least for me, the city of Oxford is a place I've taken a long time to grow used to and still am not fully able to give my heart to. I greatly appreciate studying here, yet I have never found it to be a place where I feel at peace. I can't, nor do I desire to, discard my personal preferences and blindly throw my affection towards where I end up studying; prestige changes nothing. Crucially, I don't think a student's experience should be one that buys into this generic 'aesthetic' or an expected all-encompassing love for Oxford, but rather a compromise between lived experience, individual personality, and all that Oxford has to offer.

Perhaps I'm too harsh. Perhaps these influencers merely perceive Oxford differently from me, and I should appreciate their apparent overwhelming adoration. Perhaps their experience is different

to mine, given that most of these influencers are postgraduates. Yet I still can't help but wince at the all-consuming *My Oxford Year* taint to it all. I would expect their attitude to be that of a tourist, or a film director – not of a student. Surely there's more to their time here than this – how can one produce such unnuanced content of their own lived experience? Surely they don't still see Christ Church as the "Harry Potter hall", or gowned students matriculating as a fantastical procession – it does Oxford's much more interesting reality an injustice.

My stance is not one of pessimism, but actually a plea for the individuality of student experience, both in our own attitudes and social media content, to be championed. The holistic nature of one's personal journey in Oxford is largely unspoken about. Students' lives here should comprise both the individual and the institution, and there is a beauty to this that is much more captivating and of true value than living in this 'aesthetic'. In fact, if we play this game of stereotyping Oxford, surely the plethora of endlessly intellectual and individually minded students that it's renowned for can do more than just generically idolise where they study. Otherwise, there's a danger of becoming just another faceless figure in a tailcoat, sipping champagne behind a phone screen.

Image credit: Giuseppe Milo, CC-BY-3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

## 24/7: College porters and the Oxford night shift



*Experienced college night Lodge staff on mental health support, the pandemic, the collegiate Lodge system, and student safety*

JIAYUE SHI

**Y**ou return to your college at night, after anything between a day of work and an evening of cavorting. The view admits the welcoming glow of the porter's lodge and the reassuring presence of a porter behind the reception desk. Past the gates, you enter the secluded safety of the inner-college dark, smelling now of grass and early summer cold. The perfect picture of an Oxford homecoming.

Late one evening, I paid a visit to John, Somerville College's night porter of 19 years. As he let me through the gate, he was curious about the article. "We don't get much attention, us night porters", he explained. The warmth of the lodge fanned my face. His colleague was out patrolling the premises. Between the two of them, they are responsible for everyone on site from eleven at night to seven in the morning. The students, engrossed by their term-time miseries, appreciate their presence only occasionally: when they stumble into the lodge bleary, intoxicated, tearful, or lacking keys. For many, the night lodge exists as a background certainty, noticed chiefly in moments of crisis, vulnerability, or inconvenience.

Most Oxford colleges and accommodation sites have porters on duty around the clock. Since March 2025, every college with a porter's lodge manned overnight is in the University's Safe Lodge scheme, providing support and ensuring safe return for any student seeking help at night, regardless of their original college. So for a majority of college residents, 24/7 lodge availability is a matter of course. Colleges like Somerville, Hertford, and Oriel employ permanent night porters, while at others, porters work variable hours on a rotating day-or-night

shift system. St John's College told *Cherwell* that it keeps Lodge staffing under regular review, seeing to both staff wellbeing and effective operations.

“*For many, the night lodge exists as a background certainty, noticed chiefly in moments of crisis, vulnerability, or inconvenience*”

Overnight staffing is neither universal nor standardised across colleges. Working hours vary, and pay is not centrally regulated by the University, in a city currently ranked amongst the most expensive in the UK to live in. Some lodges see eight to nine-hour night shifts, which John at Somerville describes as relatively comfortable compared to his previous employment, as compared to the weekly twelve-hour shift rotations at colleges like St John's and Worcester. A number of colleges offer porters a Grade 3 to 4 salary, some with an additional monthly night workers' allowance. Regent's Park College, which employs casual evening porters on select days of the week, lists in 2025 hourly portering rates of £12.60 (lower than the 2025-26 Oxford Living Wage, at £13.16) with holiday pay and meal allowance. The college's night porters are available from Wednesday to Saturday, with junior Deans on call on the remaining nights of

the week. When asked about the particulars of the night security system, the College declined to comment. These disparities reflect a broader feature of Oxford's collegiate structure: welfare and security systems often depend on the budgets and priorities of individual colleges.

What happens in a night? A shift at the lodge involves more than dealing with late-night mischief and drunken mishaps, and tending to students who have accidentally locked themselves out of their own rooms. The role combines security work, customer service, emergency response, and informal welfare provision. Night porters are first responders to any emergencies that arise, from fire and security alarms, to medical emergencies, calls for assistance, and emotional distress. First-aid training is usually mandatory or provided by the college. Front-of-house business proceeds as during the day, for any student or guest arrivals. Like John and his colleague at Somerville, night porters working in pairs take turns carrying out random security patrols, though for his first 13 years, John was the College's only night porter. Some night porters are also asked to clear litter while doing site checks. Inside the lodge, they are vigilant of anything out of the ordinary as they monitor the CCTV screens.

Students often most clearly notice the integral role of night porters when they are no longer there. After University College removed its overnight lodge staffing on the grounds of financial limitations in the 2021-22 academic year, JCR condemnation and further discussions with the college's Governing Body brought it back in 2024. The common perception remains that the overnight lodge is the staple feature when it comes to feeling safe at Oxford.

John drew attention to the fact that colleges'

increasing emphasis on mental health in recent years is reflected in night porter duties as well. This means that porters are instructed to stay attentive to signs of distress among students and follow set procedures if anything raises concern. "If a student is having a mental health issue, there's 100% support there. If we spot a student not looking too happy or a bit tearful, maybe didn't want to speak to us, we could refer it on to the welfare team".

“*The role combines security work, customer service, emergency response, and informal welfare provision*”

Especially during exam time, many students pass through the lodge visibly struggling with stress. Porters ensure the lodge is a grounding, approachable space for the student body, and that, when needed, the appropriate resources are provided, and wellness information is relayed confidentially. Night porters are among a number of out-of-hours workers at Oxford who provide welfare support to people at their most vulnerable. In practice, they frequently act as students' first point of human contact during moments of panic, loneliness, intoxication, or distress. Colleges without permanent overnight staffing at the lodge often choose to raise awareness of the local Samaritans and Safe



Manager and Domestic Bursar and are embedded into the College's administrative structure. There has long been a push, however, for all colleges to formally extend the same protection and wage standards to their sub-contracted staff employed in housekeeping, catering, maintenance, and events – arrangements that vary depending on the wealth and policy of individual colleges. The lodge, therefore, sits within a wider conversation about invisible labour at Oxford: the workers responsible for maintaining the University's daily operations often remain peripheral to its public self-image.

“  
You could work here for 13 years, and no one knows you,” he says, recalling how a tutor who had been at the College for many years had come in one morning, greeted him brightly, and asked if John was new

As the sky grows light and early risers trickle out into the streets, the night porter hands over the shift and goes home to family, or into a routine slumber with blackout curtains. Through personal and collective crises, the lodge and the porters are always there. Meanwhile, the collegiate system remains a patchwork of rota structures, pay scales, budget limits, and levels of transparency. “Everything together works”, as John says. That clockwork constancy depends on labour which most students rarely see, but routinely rely upon.

Image credit (left): Sophia Yvonne Hall for Cherwell.

Image credits (right): Mercedes Haas, with permission (top), and Ruby Barenberg for Cherwell (bottom).

Haven service, and the Oxford Nightline, run by student volunteers.

Recounting notable incidents in the past, John found that they had been rare enough during his 19 years at Somerville to list with ease. The college encountered a burglar only once, who broke in by scaling one of the walls, and managed to go as far as the principal's lodgings before the night porters caught him. In another episode, an abusive boyfriend had to be forcefully removed from college grounds. He had been acting aggressively towards his girlfriend and her friends, and grew violent while being escorted out. John got punched, and had to punch him back. Other than these, the occasional intoxicated student needs to be talked down. Some return to the lodge the next day, embarrassed and apologetic.

But overall: “19 years, I don't think that's too bad!” Generally, troublemakers among a new cohort of students can be identified within the first three weeks. The porters concentrate on easing them into the way the college works, and after about five to six weeks, “It's all happy families again. College life goes on”. John said the priority is simple: to keep the place secure and everybody safe. “You deal with it, thinking on your feet, and it gets you and the College through the night”.

More than burglaries and abusive boyfriends, the COVID-19 pandemic stuck in John's memory as the most difficult event in all his time working as Somerville's night porter.

“COVID was just a nightmare... It really was hard work.” It's a well-documented experience for many non-academic staff at Oxford. In 2020, roughly half of Keble's non-academic staff were furloughed, and the College went into consultation on a redundancy programme as a result of major pandemic-induced revenue losses.

Across Oxford institutions, frontline staff found themselves responsible not only for enforcing emergency rules but also absorbing the frustration and hostility those rules produced. In early 2022, Oxford University Hospitals (OUH) introduced body cameras for its staff after a 125% rise in violent incidents during the pandemic, launching the ‘There's No Excuse’ initiative in a call for the respect and protection of hospital workers.

The unhappy pandemic-year undergraduates faced by the porters had the excuse of being denied their promised university life. “The

COVID intake of freshers was horrendous”, John recalled. The students were resentful of being confined to their ‘bubbles’. The policy was put in place as part of the College's social distancing measures, and enforced by porters who often bore the brunt of that resentment. Students sometimes grew even more unruly when porters reminded them it was against the regulations to mix outside their bubbles. “They were very rebellious students... They didn't seem to think it was a risk”. But John, after years of shepherding Oxford's blithely demanding youth, is sympathetic.

“It was sad because those students never really got the experience of the Oxford University situation, as their predecessors or the ones that followed on afterwards, because everything was so restricted. I felt sorry for them, and I could understand the way they were reacting. But it just went on for a whole year. They tried to rule the roost... but of course you couldn't let them do that, there were things in place for a reason”. And once the pandemic had passed, “It was like they were different students completely!”

As a porter who only works nights, John is candid about the relative invisibility of his role. “You could work here for 13 years, and no one knows you,” he says, recalling how a tutor who had been at the College for many years had come in one morning, greeted him brightly, and asked if John was new.

Still, grappling with dissatisfied young people and distracted teaching staff on a regular basis, John says that he feels well-supported by the college institution, and is happy working here. “You get so many people from different nationalities... and it works. Everything together works”.

“Apart from that COVID situation”, he adds. “That will stick with me until I die”.

St John's College states that it keeps Lodge staffing under regular review, seeing to both staff wellbeing and effective operations. Considering the reactive and ad hoc nature of much of their work, porters are “trained appropriately and aligned to the responsibilities they may encounter in their roles. They are also supported by wider, well-established welfare provisions, including on-site student welfare advisors and an on-call system, ensuring that any situations beyond routine duties are managed safely and appropriately”.

College porters, typically hired directly by the College as permanent staff, report to the Lodge



# Raising refugee rights: Oxford STAR and Campsfield House

*Oxford STAR on bridging the town and gown divide, collaborating with the Coalition to Close Campsfield, and improving the rights of refugees*



MARY HUAN

CW: Death, suicide, racism.

The Coalition and STAR are quite unique in the emphasis on trying to bridge the gap between students and the community. This is how Faye, the President of Oxford Student Action for Refugees (STAR), the University branch of an organisation that describes itself as “[t]he national network of students building a society where refugees are welcomed”, characterises the society’s support of the Coalition to Close Campsfield. Caught within the often insular Oxford bubble, where student concerns are easily geared towards their colleges, the existence of Campsfield House has seemingly been erased from the map.

## A student campaign for the rights of refugees

“I think students at Oxford can be quite myopic at times”, said Faye. She wishes more of them would get involved with local causes, focusing on matters beyond student-related issues: “I think sometimes people can get caught up in trying to improve conditions in this kind of very narrow sense, for themselves and other people in their degree, rather than thinking about how we are in such a place of incredible privilege.” Students face additional logistical barriers: the eight-week terms and academic workload mean missed meetings and protests. But members of Oxford STAR have put their books down in favour of active participation. With 39 groups across the country, Student Action for Refugees filed a joint petition with City of Sanctuary, VOICES Network & SolidariTee for university students, and staff in response to the Illegal Migration Bill.

As a student society, Oxford STAR brings unique advantages to the refugee rights movement. The society has been unafraid to exert pressure on the institution’s actions. Recently, they released an open letter condemning the University of Oxford’s Centre on Migration, Policy & Society (COMPAS)’s invitation to Sean Donnelly, Editor in Chief of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and Eddy Montgomery, Senior Director of Enforcement, Compliance and Crime at the Home Office.

These events are a part of the “Immigration Enforcement in Practice” seminars convened by Rob McNeil. Written by a group of “current Oxford students and alumni, migrants’ rights campaign groups and academics”, they highlight the “much-needed critical commentary on border enforcement in the EU and UK” that is missing in COMPAS’ series of events. The intervention reflects a broader willingness among student activists to challenge not only government policy, but also the University’s relationship to institutions involved in border enforcement.

Awarded the University of Sanctuary status in 2023, Oxford joined a group of 25 Universities of Sanctuary. Founded by the City of Sanctuary UK, “this network has been developed through the integration of Article 26 Project resources with City of Sanctuary UK, and collaboration with Student Action for Refugees, Refugee Education UK, and others”, with the aim to “develop a culture and a practice of welcome within institutions”. Oxford appears proud of its University of Sanctuary status and its City of Sanctuary Organisation Pledge. The University “is committed to being a place of welcome

for people who have been forcibly displaced around the world, and supports students and academics who have been forced to flee conflict or persecution.”

To satisfy the minimum criteria for a University of Sanctuary award, the institution must “support the establishment of a student-led awareness group on campus (such as a STAR group)”. On the University website, explicit support is indeed given to Oxford STAR: “We encourage our students to learn about sanctuary and to create an inclusive culture of welcome. As part of this, the University supports the Oxford branch of Student Action for Refugees in recruiting new members for the academic year.” In order to demonstrate sufficient support to “student-led awareness group[s]”, a member of the university must be in contact with the head office team at STAR. Examples listed on the application form include types of logistical support, including the facilitation of meetings and financial assistance. This empowers Oxford STAR, Faye argues, with an “institutional leverage over the university where we are able to sit in on University of Sanctuary subcommittee meetings and talk to people in the university who are involved with the award.”

In the context of a growing far-right presence in the city, Oxford STAR has used their “pathway in the University” to focus on exerting their influence on the institution: “We do try to focus more on things that the University is doing that we can address, because we think that’s the advantage that we have as a student organisation, so that includes things like any kind of departmental talks that platform voices which we think are quite anti-immigration and contribute to this toxic environment.” St George’s and Union Jack flags erected by Raise the Colours Oxfordshire around St Aldates and the Headington roundabout, alongside protests by the Oxfordshire Patriots, speak to this “broader rhetoric and environment” that Oxford STAR resists.

Despite the society’s influence, there is a careful move to make space for the experience and three-decade-long history of the Coalition movement by the students: “I think by having this campaign that is led by local community members and having students kind of support them, rather than trying to lead the campaign themselves, I think that helps make a difference.”

Bill, a founding member of the Coalition in 1993, extends the same appreciation to the students who he deems are “more integral to the coalition than they have been in the past”. One example of the “energy and new ideas” of students includes public, visual statements. He recalls, for instance, in 2009, “when the statues of emperors’ heads outside the Sheldonian were masked to show how people in detention were silenced.”

Protest safety is another area where students can bring fresh perspectives and contribute to the Coalition. Just a few years ago, Faye remembers feeling “fairly safe” when volunteering to support refugee rights, but a more antagonistic climate has spurred growing anxieties.

Protesters at Campsfield are now more frequently met with counter-protests by far-right organisations: “There’s more cases where there’s threats of far-right protests right outside the centre”, observes Faye. “I’m an international student myself and a lot of other international students are involved in the protests... it’s just a more precarious situation where we don’t want to lose our student visas through protesting”. For international students in particular, political participation can carry risks extending beyond arrest or disciplinary action, including apprehension

around immigration status and visa security.

Even with these fears, she emphasises the significance of “individual participation and contribution” that “makes movements like this so powerful”. Faye recognises the impact of introducing protest strategies – such as masking up and hosting protest safety workshops – to local campaign members: “I think there’s been one quite big contribution from the student side, bringing this kind of protest safety to the Campsfield movement as well.”

This is particularly relevant to the shifting dynamics with the police. A current obstacle, Bill explains, facing the Coalition involves the location of their demonstrations: “There is an issue at the moment about our right to demonstrate at the gates of Campsfield as opposed to the road away from Campsfield, and we are trying to reestablish our right to demonstrate at the gate.” He stresses the non-violence of their action: “We’re quite happy without [the police] being there because we’re not actually cutting the fence... we’re just expressing an opinion.”

A spokesperson for Thames Valley Police told *Cherwell*: “We have a legal obligation to facilitate peaceful protest, but this must be balanced against the rights of others and the need to maintain access and safety. We will continue to work with partners and the local community to manage this appropriately.”

## History of Campsfield House

As a former youth detention facility, Campsfield House was established in 1993 as an immigration detention centre. Despite its name, Campsfield was far from a ‘home’. Here, asylum seekers and children have been held, immobilised within the secured walls, in a limbo of indefinite and uncertain detention. While immigration detention is often imagined through the imagery of U.S. border enforcement and ICE facilities, Campsfield represents a distinctly British system of confinement operating on Oxford’s doorstep.

Nearly 30,000 migrants were detained in Campsfield House before 2018. A history of resistance and abuse marked the centre’s 25 years before it closed. What was widely reported as riots and arson at Campsfield in 2007-08, alongside the escape of 26 detainees, exposed an internal history of revolt.

A language of criminality tainted the reporting of Campsfield House; yet, most detainees have committed no criminal offences. Between 2023-24, there were 834 cases of unlawful detention, forcing the Home Office to pay nearly £12 million in compensation. Although immigration detention is an administrative process rather than a criminal justice procedure, the conditions behind the barbed-wire fence were uncannily similar to those of a prison. The contradiction remains central to criticisms of the detention system: people are confined in prison-like conditions without a criminal conviction or a fixed sentence.

Condemned for its treatment of detainees and deplorable conditions by human rights groups, the centre’s history is marred by hunger strikes and suicides. In 2005, more than 30 Zimbabwean detainees went on hunger strike. With no judicial oversight, a man who had been denied bail and detained for over four months died by suicide in the same year. Under the threat of deportation to Iraq, further hunger strikes were undertaken by 13 Kurdish asylum seekers in 2008, which escalated to 60 participants. The same pattern continued in 2010, where over half of the centre’s inmates went on hunger strike over the inhumane conditions. A second suicide occurred in 2011, a man was found dead in the shower. Between 2012 and 2013, a 16-year old-child was held in detention for 62 days. Facing an unfixed sentence of detention, migrants in Campsfield House existed in a prolonged state of uncertainty and suspension.

Campsfield House has been under the management of Mitie, a private-for-profit company, whose aim is “to treat those in our care with dignity, decency and respect, delivering a safe and healthy establishment which stands up to public scrutiny” since 2011. Although 80% of the detainees found most staff were respectful, 41% of the detainees reported “feeling unsafe” in the centre in an inspection carried out in 2019. Further reports of use of excessive force and unsanitary conditions colour

the centre’s history under the company.

## The reopening of Campsfield House

“We thought it was a victory for us and the national movement against detention”, explains Bill, a founding member of the Coalition to Close Campsfield, when the centre was shut down following more than two decades of campaigning and monthly protests.

But when Boris Johnson announced an expansion in the government’s use of immigration detention facilities in 2022, this triumph proved to be temporary. Under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which facilitated the Rwanda Plan, the Home Office increased its use of detention centres. On 28 June 2022, they announced their decision to reopen Campsfield House.

The Home Office’s plan was met with fierce opposition. In a statement by AVID, Keep Campsfield Closed, and Border Criminologies addressed to the former Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, 50 organisations were represented with 82 signatures. Such condemnation has also been expressed on an international level: the UN Refugee Agency is a vocal critic of the widespread use of immigration detention facilities, echoed by the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner. Opponents of Campsfield’s reopening, therefore, situate the issue within a broader international debate over the legality, ethics, and effectiveness of immigration detention.

The upwards trend of the detention of migrants since 2021 reflects an increasingly expansionist and hostile policy, fuelled by the Illegal Migration Act passed in July 2023. In 2025, 22,661 people were detained, a figure up by 17% when compared to the previous year. When Campsfield reopened, Mitie received a new six-year contract worth £140 million. With plans of expansion, adding up to 400 new beds in the centre, Campsfield symbolises the national shift in immigration policy. For campaigners, the reopening is not an isolated local development but part of a wider hardening of Britain’s border regime.

Phase 2 of the development of Campsfield will be facilitated by a Crown Development Order. “This is a huge issue with central government overriding democratic procedure”, Bill explains. By using this order, the government bypasses local opposition, preventing the decision to be made by the local planning authority, Cherwell District Council. Demanding a public inquiry, this application is more than just an expansion strategy but also serves as “a challenge to democracy”, according to Bill.

Over time, the Coalition has in many ways become a unifying force. Bill told *Cherwell*: “It’s become much more, in some ways, deep-rooted.” The collaboration between Oxford STAR and the Coalition appears to have brought town and gown together. “The stance of opposition to Campsfield has spread throughout the community” to the students behind the limestone walls and spires.

Despite Oxford STAR’s work, Faye reminds us that “left-wing student organisations are vastly under-resourced in terms of just the kind of institutional capacity that [they] have”. Yet, “fruitful collaboration”, such as the creation of Oxford Student Social Action Coalition, uniting Turl Street Homeless Action (TSHA), Food Rescuers, and New College Curry Runners, can multiply the resources available. In spite of these barriers, Faye urges students to think beyond their colleges: “What I do hope for is that more students do try to engage with these kind of things, rather than staying limited within their colleges or their specific student societies, [so] that they do try to engage with these broader, local and potentially regional, national issues, and offer their efforts where they can.” It took 25 years of internal and external resistance and over three hundred demonstrations to close Campsfield House for the first time. All hope, however, has not been lost: “You’ve got to be hopeful, haven’t you? So I’m hopeful”, Bill told me.

There were 82,100 applications for asylum in 2025. By the end of 2024, over 123 million people were forced to flee their homes. As global conflicts increase, the need for student organisations like Oxford STAR is indispensable. “It is quite inspiring to see that there are still so many students every year who are willing to get involved”, Faye said. “I think that is something that keeps my spirits up.”

*Image credit: Mercedes Haas for Cherwell.*

# Cherwell

## TT26

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# John Evelyn

The president-elect is dead, long live the president-elect! A glimmer of hope has struck the Union as 33 Reasons Why was unceremoniously replaced by the Master Debater. As a non-hack, it is no wonder that the Presidential Puppy heard a shout of "heel" and dragged out at least a third of the votes for him.

Despite this glimmering future, controversy has not yet abated us. Forgetting to send the OppStooge a term card exclusive shot Absent and Uninvolved in the foot. Nowadays, their requests for comment now haunt the PO. Perhaps this is the real identity of the ghost that President Peace and Love swears she's spotted in the library. I did tell you all to keep an eye out for "literally any newspaper", but with this many articles, maybe we've been cursed.

The invitation of Large Steven has doomed us to an era of warring factions, each faction pretending to be less involved than they actually were for PR Good Boy Points. On prompting from Dachshund and Reduced-Aisle Royalty, Joey Essex decided it best to formally decry Large Steven before the debate. This went alongside denunciations of several speakers he himself invited, but of course this detail was left out, because we at the Union believe in accountability! Some are dubbing this the largest stroke of political genius since Machiavelli's *Prince*. Or since



he narrowly avoided a 51(a) at May Day.

It's not as if any other hack is faring any better. The Presidential Puppy may find himself a "Prince" as well, as his presidential candidacy was recently snaked by Flat White and Iced Latte acting in cahoots. Flat White's newfound (and surely not forced) love for woke has driven his slate insane, particularly given his "close associations". Even Iced Latte has had a rough time recently, as the tribunal struck YoungSeccie Never Running Again from his slate.

Still, at least none of us lost three presidential races in a row this week, right?

## Editorial



### Mercedes Haas Editor-in-Chief

#### Trinity

There are, I have learned, only two kinds of articles: the ones that get published, and the ones that don't. Before this year, I thought journalism was mostly about production. You write something, edit it, publish it, move on. What I did not anticipate, especially thinking back to previous terms, was how much of this job would instead revolve around fruition: the strange process by which an idea either becomes real or quietly dissolves somewhere between intention and publication.

Some things never make it. Not because they are bad, often quite the opposite. Sometimes they're too unfinished, legally precarious, too late, too early. Sometimes they simply miss their moment. Journalism tends to present itself as fixed in ink, or perhaps in pixels. In reality, newspapers are shaped as much by restraint. Every publication is also an archive of absences.

Journalism is full of alms. One of them was called 'Dear Telegraph'. It was written during one of those Oxford weeks when the national press briefly rediscovers the University and descends upon it with grotesquely theatrical enthusiasm. Multiple days were spent reporting on election fraud and speaker controversies. The stories broke because student journalists cared enough to do the work properly. A day later, national newspapers arrived to explain Oxford back to itself. The unpublished piece was undoubtedly angry. But beneath the anger is

a deeper frustration with the way Oxford is so often reduced to a symbol, a caricature, or the word that makes my English tutors momentarily lose faith in humanity: content. The University appears in the national imagination less as a place where actual people live to suffer the consequences of current events than as a backdrop onto which broader political dramas can be projected.

The irony is that student newspapers understand performance, too. *Cherwell* has survived for over a century, partly because Oxford generates stories with staggering reliability. However, it is also constrained in a way that national journalism is not. We continue living here after the story ends and sit in tutorials with the people we report on. The distance between subject and reporter collapses, which can make it uniquely difficult, but also very human.

Most of what we do is fleeting. By next week, many of the stories we treated as existential crises will already feel distant. But one of the privileges of this work is that occasionally, some things do work out, and an article lands exactly when it should. A piece genuinely matters to someone. And that, to me, is enough.

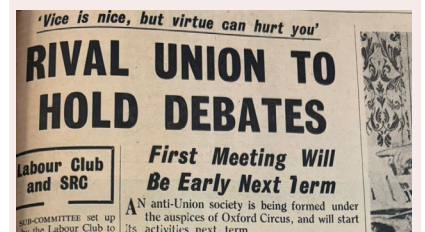


### Hattie Simpson News Deputy Editor

News is a fast-moving section and this past week has been a good example of that. Local election results followed by union drama turning into yet another election to cover; new controversial rowing regulations; and Canvas suddenly going down. Each of them has demanded our attention at the expense of our degrees.

## ARCHIVES

### State of the Union



1962

For better or worse, the *Cherwell* news feed over the past week or so has been inundated with a deluge of Union-themed drama. Nor does this come as a particular surprise. For more than a century, *Cherwell* and the Oxford Union have coexisted in a kind of quasi-fraternal, symbiotic, love-hate relationship, which both parties like to delude themselves into considering of equal importance to that between the BBC and Downing Street. Over the years, *Cherwell* has dutifully, and with no small degree of satisfaction, shone an unflattering light on the Union's tribulations and controversies. In turn, the society have responded with varying degrees of flaming ire (sometimes literally).

In the late 50s and early 60s, the Union, on numerous separate occasions, hosted Oswald Mosley as a speaker (the one and only time that they would ever deliberately invite an unapologetic fascist, of course), generating much protest from the larger student body. Amid widespread disillusionment with the Union, in 1962, *Cherwell* reported on the formation of an "anti-Union society", a rival to the venerable institution whose avowed aims included "enjoying life and acting against careerism", and, above all, providing an alternative to "Union formality, size, politics, and rat race". The society was to feature no celebrity guests, since "they might turn debates into floor shows". Naturally, no one would seek to apply such an absurd characterisation to the practices of the Oxford Union today, which, far from catering to any form of sensationalism, remains committed to upholding the principles of rigorous intellectual debate.

It's not clear what became of this anti-Union society. But if the modern reader is seeking a lighter alternative to throwing themselves into the internecine intrigues of the debating institution, *Cherwell* can recommend a date with a PPE student, a night trapped in the Glink, or a gun to the head as preferable activities.

It's rare, as a result, that we actually get a chance to stop and think about it all, as the exhilaration, adrenaline, and countless energy drinks do seem to carry you through and create a sort of selective memory of events (not that I would quite compare covering a union election to the pains of childbirth). But this week, I spoke to a group of Year 7-10 students at a mini graduation ceremony about the importance of reflection. In my speech, I spoke of my personal tradition of writing letters to my future self each year – a practice I've kept up for coming on five years – and how strange it is to look back at something you wrote in a completely different headspace and recognise yourself in it anyway.

*Cherwell* print does something similar in a strange way. When working on the day-to-day news coverage, it's easy to view each story in isolation and get slightly lost in the details and processes. But every fortnight, Ned and I lock ourselves away in my kitchen or the New College JCR and devote ourselves, for inevitably far too many hours, to pulling our news pages together. Alongside our brilliant news team, we get to chat through what we've covered, what we have coming up, and generally take a bit of a step back. I think that's why I love the strange ritual of print production so much. Each print creates a strange sort of snapshot, like the letters, capturing not just the stories but preserving the feeling around them.

# PROFILES

## Meghan Campbell on women, poverty, and why international law still matters

*‘Women have been fighting for their equality for a really long time. You’re part of that baton race’*



ANGELINA MIRRASLAVSKA

There is something quietly disarming about the way Meghan Campbell traces her path to becoming one of Britain’s foremost human rights lawyers. You might expect a story steeped in early idealism, perhaps a childhood injustice, a formative mentor, or a precocious sense of vocation. Instead, she laughs and says it was television.

“I watched a lot of *Law and Order* one summer and thought the lawyers looked really cool”, Campbell tells me. “I’m like, well, that sounds fun. I think I could do that. So really, it was *Law and Order*, not *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” She had written the latter on her university application forms, admitting that “it sounded like the right answer”, but the truth is rather more honest, and rather more human.

Campbell is a Reader in International Human Rights Law at the University of Birmingham, where her research centres on women’s economic inequality: the structural, legal, and political forces that keep women poor. Her two monographs, *Women, Poverty, Equality* (2018) and the recently published *Hanging in the Balance* (2025), have established her as a leading voice in the field. She has advised the International Labour Organisation, the World Health Organisation, the Council of Europe, and the UK Cabinet Office. She is the Deputy Director of the Oxford Human Rights Hub and

hosts their RightsUp podcast. She is, by any measure, formidably accomplished.

“*I watched a lot of ‘Law and Order’ one summer and thought the lawyers looked really cool. So really, it was ‘Law and Order’, not ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’*”

Campbell grew up in Canada, raised by parents who wanted her to be a pharmacist, thinking it would be a better route to economic security. She had other ideas: “I didn’t love math and science as much as I loved the idea of getting to play around with words and construct an argument and figure out how to be persuasive. That was very, very appealing to me.” After graduating from the University of Manitoba, the only law school in the province, Campbell completed her articling year with the Manitoba government and was called to the bar. She then worked as a criminal barrister, putting in 15 or 16 trials. She went to the Court of Appeal. She wore the robes. She stood in a beautiful old building and argued a sentencing appeal for a

sexual assault case, and she loved every second of it.

“It’s very thrilling to cross-examine somebody, to put a witness on the stand”, Campbell tells me. “After you’ve done it, you feel like you could just jog up and down Everest, such a high.” As a Junior Crown attorney, she was carrying five or six hundred files at a time – DUIs, house party assaults, drug offences – learning how to read a case, how to negotiate, how to build an argument from almost nothing. The technical rigour of DUI cases alone, she says, was excellent training: strict rules around self-incriminating evidence, precise timelines, no margin for error. “It’s a very good area to practise because you have to make sure you’re getting your ducks in a row.”

The criminal bar gave her something else, too: a set of questions she couldn’t stop turning over. She could see, from inside the system, how structurally incapable it was of addressing the things that actually troubled her. Criminal law sees each case as an individual event: did this person commit this offence? It cannot look up and ask the harder question. Why is it always trans women being murdered? Why, in Canada, is it always indigenous women?

“The criminal law isn’t meant to solve those larger societal patterns about why certain types of women are more vulnerable to violence”, she says. “And there’s still quite strong critique that the criminal law system revictimises victims of

violence because its processes are not victim-centred. When you put a criminal trial in, it’s the Crown that puts the case in. The victim, they’re not in charge of how their story gets told.”

“*It’s very thrilling to cross-examine somebody, to put a witness on the stand. After you’ve done it, you feel like you could just jog up and down Everest, such a high*”

Campbell was 23 years old. She told her boss she was going abroad for a year to Edinburgh, for a master’s, and would come back. They held her job. Instead, halfway through her master’s, she decided to apply for a doctorate at Oxford. She went for it, she says, because “you only live once, take the big swing, see what happens”. Many months later, they said, you are accepted: “I was like, what now? I could not and I still cannot fathom why.” She was baffled by the college system (“they all look

the same to me”), and ended up at Pembroke entirely by chance. The next several years of her life were dedicated to trying to answer the question that had been gnawing at her since that junior posting in Winnipeg: why are women so disproportionately poor? And what, if anything, could international law do about it?

“*If you are a woman who is poor, it’s almost inherent that your rights are going to be violated*”

Her doctoral research, which became her first book, focused on the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is, she explains, the leading international legal instrument on women’s rights, ratified by 189 countries. And it says almost nothing about poverty. “There’s no kind of obligation on states to tackle the gender dimensions of women’s economic deprivation”, she explains: “And so, obviously, that’s a massive source of rights violations. If you are a woman who is poor, it’s almost inherent that your rights are going to be violated.”

The examples she reaches for tend to be both simple and quietly devastating. In the UK, before 1946, when a couple received social welfare benefits, the payment went directly into the man’s bank account. If the relationship was abusive or simply unequal, the woman might never see that money. “The way the law is structured, the delivery of benefits perpetuates women’s economic dependence on men. Those are the state’s structures that are keeping women poor.”

Take the care economy. Most unpaid care of children, of the elderly, of whoever needs looking after at home, is still performed by women. That work takes time and energy. It limits the hours available for paid employment, the ability to develop skills, and the capacity to take economic opportunities as they arise. And almost every benefit system in the world, she argues, is built around a model that simply does not see this. “What it recognises as work tends to ignore the things that women do as actual work every day. That’s incredibly demanding of their time and energy.” She explains that women are told that they have to find work in the formal market, but when they explain they are burnt out from all the unpaid care work at home, caring for children, parents, in-laws, they are told “that is not work”.

CEDAW, she concludes, does important work. It is progressive, wide-ranging, it even addresses climate change, noting that when disaster decimates public services, it is women who absorb the unpaid care work the state can no longer provide. But Campbell believes that it could be bolder. She says it needs to tell governments: “Your benefit levels are just too low. This is not enough money.”

Throughout our conversation, the current political climate lurks constantly in the back of our minds. Trump’s second term. Farage in ascendance. ‘Gender-critical’ campaigns spreading across Western Europe and North America. Campbell does not minimise any of this. But she also does not panic, which is either a sign of deep faith in the long game or of habitual sangfroid, or possibly both.

“*Law is not a perfect answer. It’s not the total solution. Looking to the law to solve all the problems of inequality will make people frustrated. But it’s a very powerful tool*”

The systems, she acknowledges, are struggling. International institutions were built on the assumption that all states were operating in good faith, committed to a shared cosmopolitan ethos. “If you have actors who are now hostile to those systems”, she says, “it becomes very challenging, because the remedial tools these organisations have are often quite soft.” The UN can express concern. The Council of Europe can make recommendations. Neither can compel.

Yet, if right-wing groups are working actively

to defund and delegitimise these bodies, she points out, it must mean they perceive some threat in them. “If they were completely irrelevant, you would just ignore them. Law is not a perfect answer. It’s not the total solution. Looking to the law to solve all the problems of inequality will make people frustrated. But it’s a very powerful tool.”

The work being done by the manosphere, the ecosystem of online figures and movements trading in hyper-traditional gender norms, is, she agrees, its own kind of threat. She has been researching comprehensive sexuality education, which is one of the arenas where this reaction is most visible: campaigns to roll back curricula that teach gender diversity, that tell girls their sexual pleasure matters, that dismantle the idea that men and women are fixed and opposite types.

“*Not everyone is going to be rewriting constitutions. But you have the power to not engage, to stand up to these things when you see them happen in everyday life*”

“These norms that men in the manosphere are articulating might not seem connected to your day-to-day life”, she says, “but they create an enabling environment that legitimises retrogressive and conservative policies. These larger cultural norms are filtering into all different parts of our lives, and they will start to be reflected back in laws and policies.” She is not, she is careful to add, suggesting that engagement is the answer. Quite the opposite. “Not everyone is going to be rewriting constitutions. But you have the power to not engage, to stand up to these things when you see them happen in everyday life. And that’s all part of a larger project.”

Campbell quotes something Carol Sanger, a scholar of American abortion law, said on the podcast RightsUp, which Campbell hosts for the Oxford Human Rights Hub. The point of anti-abortion laws, Sanger told her – the waiting periods, the parental consent requirements, and the mandated heartbeat screenings – “is to make you feel ashamed that you got pregnant”. Campbell pauses: “That line just made me really rethink: if we had shame-free abortion laws, it would give us so much autonomy and decision-making to women.” Then, more quietly: “But for most people, they don’t live under that kind of law.”

“*Real scholarship is not just one format*”

This is what the Oxford Human Rights Hub exists to do. It takes the gap between what the law says and what it actually does to people’s lives and holds it up to the light. Blogs, podcasts, journal articles, documentary films: all freely available, all rigorous. “Universities are not well funded, and access to journal subscriptions is so expensive. We can create free resources for people who can’t afford access to them. But at the highest quality. Asking the hardest questions.” The Hub’s podcast was built on a specific frustration: that headlines about landmark cases tell you what happened and nothing about what it means. “People love podcasts, and they have time for podcasts,” she says. “Academia is sometimes snobbish around which mediums are the right mediums, where real scholarship lives. I don’t want to get bound up in those debates. Real scholarship is not just one format.”

But asking the hardest questions means sitting with hard answers. Working in human rights, particularly on women’s poverty, is taxing. After a hard day, Campbell does the things anyone does: spends time with friends, gardening, wine bars, working out. She gets angry. She talks it through. She tries to figure out how to make things better. “You recognise it’s a marathon, not a sprint. Women have been fighting for their equality for a really long time. You’re part of that chain, like a baton race. It’s not your job to solve it completely. But it’s your job to keep trying to push the baton forward.” She says it without grandiosity. The way you might, if you had spent 20 years actually doing the running.

*Image credit: The University of Birmingham, with permission.*

# OXFORD SPOTLIGHT



*Beatrix Arnold and Stanley Smith speak to Dan Hicks about Rhodes, racism, and the Pitt Rivers*

Professor Dan Hicks is a man at odds with his surroundings. Tucked away at the back of the Pitt Rivers Museum, his office is like that of many Oxford academics, stacked with books, several his own. Looking around, you spot the names of the various universities where he has taught: Oxford, Bristol, Freie, Boston, Stanford. Hicks himself, however, is not your typical Oxford don. Whereas other professors might offer you a drink or a look at a rare book, his form of hospitality is to give us two stickers: one displays a kiffeyeh under the words “Stop BP!” and the other reads: “Non una di meno: Fight Patriarchy”.

Hicks is a Professor of Contemporary Archaeology at the University, a curator of World Archaeology at the Pitt Rivers Museum, and a Fellow of St Cross College. He describes his work as an examination of the enduring role of colonialism in the modern world through the framework of the “four As” – archaeology, anthropology, art, and architecture. His book, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution* (2020), brought him international attention for his scathing criticism of British museums and their refusal to return looted artefacts. We speak to him as he’s gearing up for a tour to promote the new paperback of his latest monograph, *Every Monument Will Fall: A Story of Remembering and Forgetting* (2025), a list of engagements that will take him all around the UK, Ireland, Europe, and as far as Canada.

It’s with this that our conversation starts. *Every Monument Will Fall* is an intervention into the raging debate about what to do with the statues, buildings, and museums dedicated to colonial figures. It’s a sweeping narrative that is both local and international. “The book uses Oxford as a point of departure for a wider set of conversations that have importance here in Oxford, in the University, in the museums, but actually across Europe and around the world”, Hicks explains.

He takes the reader on a kind of walking tour of the physical reminders of the city’s colonial legacies, from the statue of Cecil Rhodes that commands a domineering view from Oriel College to the museum at which he works. But it also examines efforts to reckon with the legacy of the Confederacy in the American South and the toppling of Rhodes’ likeness in Zambia and Zimbabwe in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, situating the modern debate within the context of a much older, global anti-racist struggle.

“All these movements”, Hicks explains, “whether it’s about objects in museums, whether it’s about statues in the streets – from Edward Colston to the unfallen Cecil Rhodes here in Oxford – whether that is in the seminar rooms and the libraries and the reading lists of the universities where the the call has been to decolonise or to shift the citation practises, are responding to a single historical entity”. He has coined it “militarist realism”: a term he uses to describe a political movement in the arts and culture in the 1870s-1920s which set out to celebrate the “great men” on the imperial project, upholding in pedagogic contrast a supposedly civilised Britain against primitive colonial cultures.

“This isn’t a culture war”, Hicks says. “It’s a war on

culture with a very long history. It’s a history of the weaponisation of culture, the taking of objects from the battlefields and the putting of them on to display in museums, or the putting up of images of the colonisers and the enslavers.” Hick argues that, if we recognise that these monuments were erected, not in an effort to accurately document history, but in an attempt to bolster a political agenda which sought to consolidate colonialism, it alters the fundamental nature of the modern debate about what to do with them.

“The book is not called ‘All Monuments Must Fall’”, he points out. “It’s a statement – every monument will fall – of archaeological reality. We hold on to a historic built environment, memory culture, if we choose to maintain it and conserve it. People say: ‘Oh, you’re cancelling history.’ No, this is about the democratic right to choose who is remembered and who isn’t; who is centred and who’s taking up space.”

*Every Monument Will Fall* is manifestly the product of a career spent participating in the debates around the memorialisation of Britain’s colonial history. After completing his Bachelor’s in Archaeology and Anthropology at St John’s College, Oxford, Hicks studied for a PhD at the University of Bristol, where he would later work as a lecturer. It was here that he witnessed the local campaign for the removal of a statue of Edward Colston, the 17th-century slave-trader. As Hicks tells it, Colston was a case of the unmistakable will of a community to overhaul the monument undermined by bureaucracy and vested interest – particularly by the organisation the Society of Merchant Venturers, the guardians of Colston’s endowment to the city.

So when Hicks moved back to Oxford in 2007, he felt that “it was my generation that failed to remove that image of Edward Colston”. Soon, he witnessed a parallel local struggle: the Rhodes Must Fall Oxford movement, beginning in 2015. Taking its cue from a similar campaign at the University of Cape Town, the initiative sought the removal of the statue of Rhodes on the Oriel facade. In the face of backlash from both the national media and the University, however, Oriel College could not be persuaded to take action.

Then, in 2020, the murder of George Floyd in the United States and the subsequent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement reignited the public debate around monuments and the glorification of slave traders. In Bristol, the statue of Edward Colston, immovable during Hicks’ time there, proved fallible when it was toppled and pushed into the harbourside.

As Hicks tells it, it looked like that might be the moment when progress would begin to be made in Oxford: “There were protests... and a vote at Oriel College, who said they were going to relocate the statue in the summer, shortly after Edward Colston’s image had been removed. That decision was reaffirmed a year later in 2021.” He pauses: “And then, very slowly, nothing happened. So it’s the unfallen status of the Rhodes statue that makes the writing of this book possible. How is it still there? Why is it still there? What is the process?”

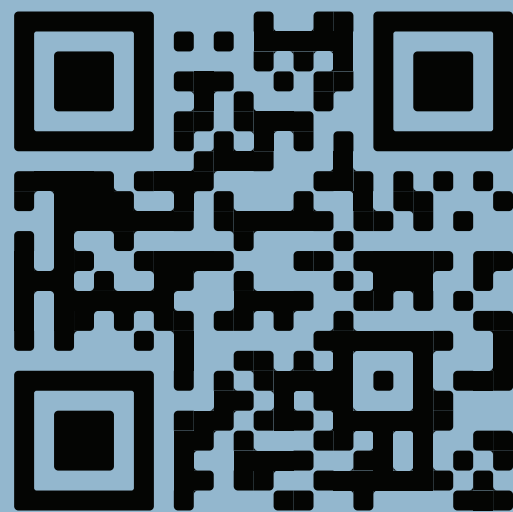
**Read the full article at [cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org)**  
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## Mamet's 'Oleanna': An imperfect but gripping watch

*Ian Coates considers nuance, power, and performance in Boulevard Production's rendition of 'Oleanna'*



This is one of those plays which could likely get banned from certain spaces on account of its sheer nuance. And given that nuance has these days been put on the IUCN List of Endangered Species, it brings me great joy to see plays like this still being produced. An open-ended message hidden behind layers of mystery, upon which one actually requires concentrated thought to base an opinion, is bound to be unpopular for many; and for that reason, I cannot but respect Charlie Lewis for directing such a fearless rendition of David Mamet's 1992 classic.

The story follows the increasing tension between a student, Carol (played by Laura Boyd), and her university (sorry, 'college') professor, John (played by Alec Greene), over the course of three meetings. Given that it is a two-person play, I feel that Boyd and Greene should be the main recipients of my scrutiny; and so, let us begin with Greene. His charisma was astonishing, keeping me hooked to his performance even at John's worst moments, and pairing well with Boyd to bring out the character's concurrent charm and creepiness. What's more, he did so whilst utterly convincing me that he was a middle-aged man (and no thanks to the makeup department – that dusting of grey in his hair was ineffectual). He

showed impressive range, too, gradually losing his composure over the course of the play, and becoming rather terrifying by the end.

“*Greene's charisma was astonishing, keeping me hooked to his performance even at John's worst moments, bringing out the character's concurrent charm and creepiness*”

And as for Boyd, she nailed the part of the nervous victim. Her instability was contagious, and even had me gasping for air a little during the first scene. My only issue with her performance is that it was a little one-note: no matter the occasion, she seemed to be simultaneously scowling and hyperventilating. It worked at first but became grating over time, and also seemed somewhat out of place in the scenes where the power swings in her favour. By the end of the play, Carol is flaunting her power, which comes across strangely if she looks terrified. But on the other hand, one might argue that this delivery



preserves the nuance of these scenes, allowing the audience to persist in their view of her as a victim should they choose to. Whether or not her slightly frustrating performance was intentional, and whether the aim of a play should be to preserve its nuance or to entertain the viewer, is up for debate. At the end of the day, one thing is certain: I will remember her performance, and probably even more so than Greene's. She made me reflect on Carol as a character, and all the while deeply aggravating me.

“*The performances and direction ended the play with a bang*”

The only major issue with this production is its problematic staging. John and Carol seemed to be in a competition for who could show more of the audience their back, and frankly, I think they both won. As a fortunate resident of the centre front row, I got the full experience, but my friend who sat in one of the right-hand seats said that

she could never see both characters' faces at once. And compelling as it may be to see the back of Greene's shirt, the audience in the left and right wings paid considerably more for tickets than I did (mine cost me a crisp £0.00) and deserved the same experience I had. I will sympathise, however, that the New College Long Room is a pretty crap place to stage a play.

To wrap up my review, I will end on a high. The stage combat was brutal and effective, and left me legitimately winded as I walked out of the show. Besides two silent kicks, which fell flat, the headbanging and choking were both terrifying to witness, especially from my front row seat (I did not feel so fortunate for my position as John throttled Carol a mere few inches from my face). The performances and direction ended the play with a bang, and had me thinking about it for the entire ensuing day.

Boulevard Productions' *Oleanna* leaves something to be desired, but what it lacks in production value it more than compensates for in audacity; so much so that David Mamet would be proud, had he not completely lost his mind in recent years (see his article: 'Why Charlie Kirk was a modern prophet').

*Image credit: Anders Hei with permission.*



## Hidden gems: 'The Storytellers' at Worcester College **ART**

WILLOW JOPP

I was recently given the opportunity to attend the press view of Worcester College's new sculpture exhibition, *The Storytellers*. Set in the College's breathtaking gardens, the exhibition, expertly curated by Iwona Blazwick and Katie Delamere, is a journey through contemporary figurative sculpture, mostly from the 2020s. It is also a rare example of an exhibition whose setting complements and transforms the artworks. From the first moments, *The Storytellers* feels unusually thoughtful, generous, and alive.

The exhibition, which is free of charge, covers a lot of ground, both literally and figuratively. Despite its breadth, though, *The Storytellers* is one of the best-curated exhibitions I have seen in a long time. Covering a large area of the College's gardens, *The Storytellers* is split into five 'acts', each named after a line from Shakespeare, in an homage to the Buskins, the college's student drama troupe. These acts cover far-reaching themes: "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin" (from *Troilus and Cressida*) shows sculptures which morph the human with the vegetal, while "Thou, Nature, art my goddess" (from *King Lear*) delves into cultural tradition with its depictions of totemic deities. This kind of structure could easily have felt forced, but instead it gives the exhibition a theatrical logic.

There was clearly a lot of thought put into the curation of this exhibition, as combined with

their intrinsic meaning, each sculpture's location fits with its aesthetic appearance. Artworks emerge from hedges, sit beside water, or contrast against the college architecture. This makes for a cohesive, engaging, and visually interesting experience, in which every artwork is perfectly and poignantly placed, rewarding both close attention and casual wandering.

“*The exhibition makes for a cohesive, engaging, and visually interesting experience, in which every artwork is perfectly and poignantly placed*”

The artists featured are greatly varied, with 14 artists coming from all over the world, all with something vastly different to say in their work. Despite this, *The Storytellers* doesn't feel as though it is spreading itself too thin – I found that the overarching theme of 'human in conversation with nature' binds together all of the pieces, despite their differences in material, scale, or mood. The artworks vary in quality from 'nice' to 'beautiful', with no real lowlights, and there are

enough highlights for something to resonate with anybody who visits.

“*As new flowers blossom in the late spring, and the sun re-emerges, the pieces will take on new meaning*”

For me, it was Daniel Silver's duo of sculptures, *Fly With Me and Me*, found in the main quad, that were the most striking. Silver has said that he wants to create "something you can look at and feel looked back by", and these works achieve precisely that. By having all of the sculptures be of figures, the exhibition allows the viewer to engage in dialogue with the artworks, and in Silver's figures, the reciprocal gaze is palpable.

As if that wasn't enough, the exhibition is checkpointed by various works of performance art. The first, performed by recent Ruskin graduate Jarad Jackson, was a mesmerising piece of postmodern dance, bringing movement and bodily presence into conversation with the stillness of the sculptures. The second, performed by Lorna Ough, Hazel Dowling, and Lauren Dyer-Amazeen, created a delicate acoustic soundscape against the backdrop of the gardens. These performances felt less like decorative additions than extensions of the exhibition's central

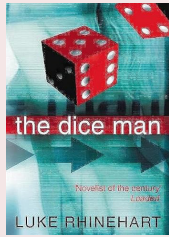
concern of the relationship between bodies, stories, and place, and they helped make the exhibition feel like a living encounter, rather than a static display.

However, the star of *The Storytellers* is, of course, the gardens themselves. Though I have visited them before for an afternoon stroll, this exhibition made me appreciate the beauty of Worcester College's natural scenery in a way I never did before. As I travelled across the quads, around the lake, and through the orchard, I felt totally at peace, even on the cloudy day on which I saw it. The sculptures appeared as figures emerging from the setting, rather than objects simply placed there. *The Storytellers* is an exhibition which is completely dependent on the natural environment around it, and this is one of its greatest strengths. As new flowers blossom in the late spring, and as the sun re-emerges from the clouds, the exhibition will change, and the pieces will take on new meaning. Shadows will fall differently; surfaces will catch the light in new ways; the gardens themselves will become part of the storytelling. Few exhibitions make such persuasive use of time, weather, and place.

I therefore find myself strongly encouraging readers to visit this exhibition this term, before it closes on the 5th July. If not for the sculptures, which are as varied and thought-provoking as they are nice to look at, then for the gardens, which in the coming few weeks will only get more beautiful. At its best, the exhibition does what outdoor sculpture should: it changes the way you look at the space around it. *The Storytellers*, for me, is one of Oxford's hidden gems this term.

# BOOKS

## What's Oxford reading?



William at Worcester recommends *The Dice man* (1971) by Luke Rhinehart:

*"A cult classic black comedy, I couldn't help myself from laughing whilst reading this. The absurdity of what ensues when a psychiatrist decides to let a die decide his actions everyday offers a fresh take on the (to me) tired themes of nihilism and anarchy."*



Anne at Merton recommends *American Dirt* (2021) by Jeanine Cummins:

*"It's about the journey from Central America into the USA by illegal migrants – it's really humanising especially given the anti-migrant rhetoric at the moment."*

Image credits: 'The Dice man' and 'American Dirt' via Amazon.

# Booksmaxxing: The illusion of being 'disgustingly educated'

*Victoria Corfield criticises the latest reading trend for its promotion of overconsumption*

If you are as chronically online as I am, then it is more than likely that you will have come across the trend where people proclaim their desire to become "disgustingly educated" or "disgustingly well-read". Content creators don their finest pair of reading glasses to affirm to their audience that they are indeed 'intellectuals' and display stacks of books to show off their seemingly never-ending academic reading lists. At a first glance there isn't anything explicitly 'wrong' with this content. After all, wouldn't we want to promote education in an age where school attendance, and young people's interest in learning more generally, is in steady decline?

However, once you've encountered a few videos of this type, a pattern emerges. This content presents the pursuit of knowledge as an identity rather than a practice, much like the speakers' glasses. Beyond the parading of intimidating reading lists and displays of intricately annotated pages of classic novels, there is often little engagement with the intellectual substance of the works themselves. Education becomes something to perform rather than something to participate in, something which feels dangerous in an age where a reasonable attention span and deep thinking are coming to be our most valuable assets as humans. It is more aesthetic to have a perfectly organised reading list, than to read said works.

Through this avoidance of actually doing the very work they promote, they ironically forgo the most important part of educating oneself: the act of learning. Learning itself is far less Instagrammable simply because learning any new skill comes with failure. Everyone will undoubtedly feel stupid at times (something which is only exacerbated in adulthood), but this is essential because learning requires mistakes. Hence, these displays of being "disgustingly educated" are less about the acquisition of knowledge than about the flaunting of interest; it is not about what the book means to you, but more what the book says about you.

This privileging of display over depth can perhaps be best observed in the world of BookTok, a popular sub-community on TikTok focused on literature, with creators often sharing reviews and recommendations. Notably, its emergence was one of the first instances in which a social media subculture had real-world impact, with BookTok influencing publishing trends and sales. However, in recent times the focus of BookTok appears to have shifted

away from celebrating a love of reading, towards an approach to literature which casts reading as a competitive sport.

There is an increasing amount of content in which people take on reading challenges, using timers and setting targets for how many books they aim to read. The most extreme form of this intellectual performance is a trend referred to as 'booksmaxxing'. This is an approach which centres on maximising personal growth and intellectual capital through reading an obscenely high volume of books. The very name of the trend establishes it as a response to the popular 'looksmaxxing' culture on social media, which prizes the pursuit of physical attractiveness, often through extreme measures.

Whilst their approaches and methodologies may vastly differ, the principle behind them is the same. They both centre on the performance or adoption of a particular characteristic as a means of social elevation. In the same way that 'looksmaxxing' is about the improvement of physical appearance as a means of asserting superiority, in 'booksmaxxing' this is translated into a performance of intellectual capital. It is less about reading for personal enjoyment and self-betterment than it is an imposition of a quantifiable framework onto personal intellect. In the same way that "looksmaxxing" marks a distinction between 'high-' and 'low-value' individuals on the basis of physical appearance, 'booksmaxxing' enacts this through the display of how many books you've read, implicitly suggesting intelligence. In this sense 'booksmaxxing' is not a rejection of shallow online culture but simply its intellectual rebranding.

A further dimension of this phenomenon becomes clear when we consider how easily it translates into comparison culture online. What we are seeing on social media is a glorification of a performative intellectualism in which attention becomes power and the apparent acquisition of knowledge becomes decoration. It becomes a means of asserting your superiority over others, which raises questions about privilege and access. It is crucial to explore the role which class and privilege play in discussions surrounding education and intellectual culture. Whilst we are fortunate enough to live in an age where education is universally accessible in this country, this performative intellectualism is inherently tied up with displays of privilege.

If you are flaunting the fact you can read over

200 books each year as a means of social elevation, then what you are in fact saying is that you have the time and financial capital to devote to such endeavours. Furthermore, the subjects which are often foregrounded in these pursuits toward being "disgustingly educated" are often niche subjects that one wouldn't typically encounter in a secondary school curriculum such as philosophy or art history. In an age of ever-rising university fees, to be able to invest this level of time and money into such subjects is a privilege.

I want to make it clear at this point that by no means am I seeking to devalue the arts. I am an English student myself and I believe that the decline of the arts in universities is a tragedy and that they are essential to our understanding of the world around us, but I simply mean that these degrees do not lead to the same kind of linear graduate career that studying a trade at college would. What is framed as intellectual ambition then begins to look less like the pursuit of knowledge and more like who can afford to have access to such education.

Ultimately, the central issue is not that people want to be 'well-read'. After all, education is a key tool for self-betterment, as well as social mobility and liberation, and if trends such as BookTok or 'booksmaxxing' encourage more young people to pick up books and put down their phones then of course this is not without value. The danger arises when reading becomes something to be seen doing rather than something enriching in and of itself. Knowledge is not a costume you can put on for an audience, nor is it something quantifiable by stacks, timers, or yearly totals.

Perhaps the more positive alternative lies, not in abandoning these online reading communities altogether, but rather in reshaping them into spaces that encourage genuine engagement with literature. A kind of digital book club culture so to speak, centred less on how many books you can consume and more on the experience of reading itself. A community that fosters 'real' learning, one which is rarely neat or aesthetically pleasing; the chapter you have to read three times, the definition you pause to Google mid-sentence. If these online spaces can move beyond performance and towards discussion, they may ultimately succeed in doing something genuinely valuable: making reading feel exciting, accessible, and worth sharing.

# Galliano for the masses (on the Zara sales rack) **FASHION**

VICTORIA CORFIELD

The fashion world is mourning the loss of John Galliano. Not a literal death, but something closer to a fall from grace. The designer, who defined an era at Dior, has entered into a two-year partnership with the fast fashion giant Zara. For some, this is a cause for celebration, a Robin Hood-esque democratisation of his genius, so to speak – after all, Galliano's archival pieces remain some of the most sought after by celebrity stylists and Vinted warriors alike. However, for others, this feels like a betrayal: my initial reaction was admittedly one of shock and a sense of disappointment. God knows I have a weakness for a Zara sale, but surely, even in the current economic climate, Galliano didn't have to end up here.

Galliano's work has long existed within the realm of artistry rather than mere design, famously describing "the joy of dressing" as "an art". His legendary tenure at Dior, spanning from 1997-2011, was known for its theatrical runway shows, with the catwalks being transformed into a stage upon which he paraded fantastical works oozing whimsy and fantasy. He drew inspiration from everything from Ancient Egypt and chinoiserie, to the indulgence and excess of Paris in La Belle Epoque, as can be seen in the pageantry of his Spring/Summer 1997 collection, metamorphosing the runway into a debutante ball at its most dreamy. Put simply, Galliano walked so Carrie Bradshaw and her Dior saddle bag could run. Bringing the same level of creativity to Maison Margiela as to the high street could, in theory, be seen as a kind of fashion egalitarianism. Nonetheless, I would argue that the mixed

response to this partnership suggests something more complicated is at play. Galliano is far from an unproblematic figure, facing prosecution for antisemitic comments which ended his tenure at Dior in 2011. Yet I feel as though his appointment is not an isolated incident, but rather representative of a shift in the wider perception of fashion itself. What was once an art form has become about consumption and profit – art equals transaction in this capitalist economy.

“Offering the illusion of participation whilst simultaneously undermining the craft and permanence that once defined fashion as an art form”

The rise of fast fashion lies at the centre of this tension, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, brands like Zara were the first to replicate the trend-led styles of the runway, making them accessible to a broader socioeconomic audience than ever before. On the other hand, it comes at a significant environmental and ethical cost, one that is becoming harder to ignore in an age of climate awareness and with the increased prevalence of alternatives such as second-hand shopping and conscious consumption.

The very speed that makes Zara's model accessible also depends on overproduction and disposability, with garments designed for short-term wear as opposed to longevity. In this sense, what is initially framed as democratisation begins to look more like a dilution, offering the illusion of participation whilst simultaneously

undermining the craft and permanence that once defined fashion as an art form.

Perhaps most interesting is the announcement's wording, which seems to implicitly frame Galliano's involvement as a form of fashion egalitarianism. After all, the collection's stated purpose is to bring high fashion and dramatic design to a broader audience through the combination of Galliano's couture process with fast-fashion capabilities.

This isn't the first time that Zara has dabbled in the world of high fashion, collaborating with other acclaimed designers such as Narciso Rodriguez and Stefano Pilati, even releasing a capsule collection with Kate Moss. However, this new partnership – between a designer once shunned from his creative industry and a fast fashion giant – speaks to the changing idea of luxury in fashion. These kinds of high-low collaborations have become commonplace in the fashion world since H&M launched its first designer partnership with Karl Lagerfeld in 2004, building an entire business model upon the merging of luxury appeal and mass-market accessibility. This underscores how the industry is rethinking value, access and who gets to buy into trends. Exclusivity is no longer the sole marker of value, with access and immediacy becoming equally important, fundamentally reworking the idea of who gets to participate in fashion and at what cost.

And yet, for all my reservations, I can't entirely reject the appeal. This is the contradiction at the heart of modern fashion, a growing awareness of its ethical failings, paired with an undeniable pull towards accessibility and trends. Fast fashion no longer thrives on ignorance, but on a kind of covertly conscious complicity. Consumers understand the environmental and ethical costs and yet are still drawn in by the immediacy and affordability. Frankly, if you're telling me I can stroll into Westgate and buy Galliano without having to forfeit the entirety of my student loan, I'd be lying if I said I wouldn't be tempted.

Image credit: Ajay Suresh, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



# The Devil is Sponsored by Dior

Rüya Oral on how 'The Devil Wears Prada 2' turns satire into promotion

Anyone who has been to the cinema at all in the last couple of years will have found themselves asking the question: "Why does everything look like that?" This feeling is especially palpable when you're watching the exact same scene from 20 years ago, desaturated. *The Devil Wears Prada 2* opens with Andy (Anne Hathaway) brushing her teeth in the mirror, a perfectly unsubtle reflection of the first seconds of the original film. The only marked difference is the colour grading and the quiet hum of Andy's electric toothbrush, signalling the decades that have passed, given that Hathaway's poreless face certainly tries to deny it.

The original *Devil Wears Prada* was a film that took a major Hollywood gamble. Being an adaptation of the roman à clef of the same name, the production team were backed into a corner in terms of how to finance and market the film, given the sharp and overt satire of the woman who owned the entire fashion industry. Anna Wintour was still, by and large, the most powerful person in fashion when director David Frankel was fighting to create an accurate representation of the fashion industry in his film. Patricia Field, the costume designer, sourced approximately \$1 million worth of clothing on a \$100,000 budget through her personal connections outside of the so-called 'Wintour ecosystem'. Intuitive filming locations like the Met, MoMA, and Bryant Park all had board members associated with Wintour and thus could not be used as sets. The film implicitly argues that this is a story worth telling, even if the industry it claims to be intimate with is intent on boycotting it. For an almost tiringly self-aware sequel – yes, we know that a million girls would kill for this job, and an early scene warps the Meryl Streep cinematic universe by featuring an Instagram post that uses a screencap of Miranda from the original film – *The Devil Wears Prada 2* doesn't seem to recall the conditions of production in 2006 at all.

From its earliest scenes through to the very end, *The Devil Wears Prada 2* is functionally an unskippable ad. The sponsorships that the film took are displayed in a very obvious and sometimes tacky manner – though I could see it coming from a million miles away, the shameless Starbucks promo made me wince and sink into my seat a little further. Whilst the coffee cups can be ignored to some

degree, the brand partnerships are unfortunately also integral to the plot.

We find out early on that Emily (Emily Blunt) now works in the advertising department of Dior. Andy, Miranda, and Nigel (Stanley Tucci) must appease her after it is revealed that a puff piece published by *Runway* praises a brand that uses sweatshop labour. Emily leverages this against the *Runway* executives in order to secure a five-page layout for the new Dior flagship, which Andy is assigned to write. In her interview with Andy, Emily speaks glowingly of how designer brands have essentially made themselves inaccessible for the average, middle-class consumer.

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From its earliest scenes to the very end, *The Devil Wears Prada 2* is functionally an unskippable ad

According to Emily, the shoes you wear, the bag you carry, speak to who you are and what you care about. Andy scoffs at this because she knows what the audience knows, too: your Dior purse only tells the world that you have too much money and not a clue what to do with it. The frustrating part is that she is functionally not at liberty to say anything else. The iron-clad partnership with Dior means that Andy, a character who we know to value principles over fancy dress, must change her tune. Patricia Field securing a Chanel wardrobe for the cast out of thin air is essentially what Nigel does for Andy in the first film – an important part about her transformation is that she has not actually risen in status, she has just made good friends in high places. In the second film, her new position as features editor at *Runway* earns Andy enough money to buy a luxury flat in central Manhattan. Maybe scoffing shows the true extent of her desire to retaliate.

Though a big budget was undoubtedly necessary to secure the returning cast who are now all firmly on the A-list, I can't help but partially blame the – pardon my French – late-stage capitalist slop on my screen on the rise of streaming services. This story, like all other scripts of the 2020s, has died

a sad death; its eulogy will simply be the tudum sound. This is apparent even in the beigeness of the opening scene and Hathaway's blemish-free face. Netflix has operated under a tiered subscription system for the last decade, wherein you can pay the difference to unlock 'Ultra HD' streaming. You can also, of course, pay to stream without ads. The luxury brand scheme that Emily describes is the same financial model that has taken hold of the film industry, causing the decline of cinema attendance and poisoning blockbuster-scale productions. Those who truly want it, the ever-growing roster of streaming services tells us, will pay for it. The rest of us must suffer.

It's not all bad, though. I am definitely not high and mighty enough to claim myself indifferent to nostalgia bait, especially when it objectively makes a pretty good attempt at regenerating the buzz of its predecessor. Upon rewatching the first film with my friends to refresh our memories, one of them exclaimed: "There's just so many scenes to queen out to!" This is what the sequel gets right – the focus is still largely on girls and gays, their fun, campy outfits, and of course, a musical number performed by Lady Gaga. Despite its glowering flaws, the film still makes for two hours spent smiling and bobbing your head along to the soundtrack.

However, the funniest part about the whole film is how it postures as self-conscious in a comically "maybe the real Prada was the devils we met along the way" manner, and still manages to be completely dense in other aspects. The 2003 novel *The Devil Wears Prada* was written by Lauren Weisberger after she spent a period working as Anna Wintour's personal assistant. Andy is literally given the option to take a \$350,000 book deal to write what would have probably been a "goosey" (as Emily accurately characterises her) depiction of the Prada-clad HR disaster that she works for, by Miranda herself, and she still turns it down. "This could hurt Miranda", she whispers in a trembling voice when she refuses her publisher friend Talia's (Rachel Bloom) offer for the book, to which Talia rightly responds: "Which is fine, because Miranda is atrocious!" To Andy, it's more complicated than that, and maybe this is an acceptably humanist approach, but one thing is certain. In the world of *The Devil Wears Prada 2*, there is one thing that could have never existed: *The Devil Wears Prada*.

## FILM AND TV

### What's Oxford watching?



#### The Sopranos

Eoin at Somerville recommends *The Sopranos* (1999-2007):

"I've rewatched *The Sopranos* almost too many times to count now, but, every rewatch I gain more and more appreciation for it. A show full of subversions, depth, and surprisingly so much humour. It's considered one of TV's greatest shows for a reason!"



#### The Silence of the Lambs

Emma at Merton recommends *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991):

"It's such a classic that I can't believe I hadn't seen it before. Freaky, well-made, and made me completely lose my appetite."

Image credits: 'The Sopranos' and 'The Silence of the Lambs' via [imdb.com](https://www.imdb.com)

# SNL UK and the tradition of British sketch comedy

VANISHA KARNA

The arrival of *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) to the UK has been met with a mixed reception. While the episodes themselves have experienced some success in viewership, its introduction to UK screens has been regarded as yet another unnecessary Americanism, and perhaps a sign of the UK's waning cultural influence. On top of this, the advent of *SNL UK* has led to some doubting the success of sketch comedy as a format, with many regarding the inconsistent quality of *SNL* in America as reflective of the genre as a whole. To dismiss sketch in this way, however, would be a mistake. *SNL UK* provides a ripe opportunity to explore our own distinct tradition of sketch comedy.

Sketch as a format was first developed in Britain. In the mid-19th century, music hall was a growing form of popular entertainment, where a variety of acts would be performed, including singing, dancing, and brief sketches. Later in the decade, burlesque shows began to gain currency. In this context, to burlesque something meant

to parody it, and these sketches would often take the form of short mockeries of traditional Greek myths or Shakespeare plays. By the early 20th century, revue theatre emerged as a site of influence for sketch comedy. Unlike burlesque, which would focus on one scene, revue's more topical humour helped shape the structure of sketch into what it has become known to be today.

When considering traditional comedy in Britain, Monty Python is what comes to mind for many. Running from 1969-73, *Monty Python and the Flying Circus* was the beginning of a troupe which was to become a bastion of British surrealist comedy. With Terry Jones and Michael Palin meeting right here in Oxford, and later performing with Graham Chapman and John Cleese from the Cambridge Footlights, their beginnings were typical of many who grew to be huge names of British comedy.

Their enduring popularity and influence, however, come from their innovations in the form of sketch and their surrealist humour. Monty Python was known to often break away from the concept of a punchline altogether, with

self-aware sketches ending in acknowledgement of their own absurdity. This departure from the traditional form of a punchline is something that *SNL* can perhaps take lessons from, with a forced punchline of little comedic value becoming all too familiar. The brilliance of the Pythons meant that their influence was felt not only in Britain, but across the world, with comics such as Steve Martin and Robin Williams citing them as amongst their greatest influences.

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This tradition of experimentation is often where British comedy is at its best, as it wryly challenges institutions and their hapless bureaucracy. *SNL UK* could very easily learn from this practice

Returning to Oxbridge, Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie are two other names which come up frequently when considering our own tradition of sketch. Meeting as undergrads at Cambridge, their sketch show *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* gave the genre a new dimension as they performed as a comedic duo, instead of as part of a large ensemble. This reliance on a duo and the comedic tension between them meant that they were constantly required to innovate, whereas in ensembles, a larger range of characters often swallowed the humour. The lack of ensemble meant that it intensified, leading to comedy which was sometimes surrealist and always highly entertaining.

Fry and Laurie, however, are also

representative of the dominance of Oxbridge and middle-class backgrounds within British comedy. By contrast, comics in America are often discovered through more accessible institutions such as improv troupes like Second City in Chicago or stand-up circuits. Programmes such as *SNL* in the US play a key role in facilitating a more socially varied pipeline of talent, and therefore an institution such as *SNL* in the UK could play a similar role in creating a more egalitarian means for new talent to be discovered.

Incisive commentary on current affairs is often where comedy shines its brightest, and *SNL* is no exception, with its Weekend Update often giving way to the most consistent laughs of the night. Such a tradition is pre-eminent in the UK, with sketch shows such as *The Day Today* and later satirical mock-news programmes like *Brass Eye* showcasing the genre at its sharpest. These shows demonstrated how sketches could move into biting media criticism and explore the absurdities of modern journalism and public panic, playing into a culture of widespread commentary.

This tradition of experimentation – moving beyond the quick-laugh genre of impressions which dominate *SNL* – is often where British comedy can be at its best, as it wryly challenges institutions and their often hapless bureaucracy. *SNL UK* could very easily learn from this practice found in our comedy and eclipse its American counterpart in making genuinely incisive political commentary through humour.

*SNL UK*, therefore, should not be seen as purely an American influence but be viewed in the broader context of our own rich tapestry of comedy tradition. Originating as a form with mass popular appeal, sketch comedy remains a relevant form today because of its adaptability and sharpness. While *SNL* in America certainly has its shortcomings, its arrival to the UK could take an entirely different direction if it is able to learn from the strengths of what came before it.

Image credit: Eduardo Unda-Sanzana, CC BY 2.0 via [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org).



## MUSIC

## What's Oxford listening to?



Viv at The Queen's College recommends *The Slow Rush* (2020) by Tame Impala:

"Whilst *Currents* remains a firm fan favourite, and 'Dracula' enjoyed widespread success, this album will always be special to me. It's Tame Impala at its best, whimsical but always grounded in strong beats. And did you know it's just the one guy?"



Alfie at St Hugh's recommends *Hellripper* (2026) by Coronach:

"The fourth full-length effort from one-man Scottish blackened speed metal sensation doesn't disappoint. Expect 45 minutes of light-hearted metal mayhem with plenty of witches, devils, and of course a few goats."

Image credits: 'The Slow Rush' and 'Coronach' via Spotify.

## On Geese and the ghosts of authenticity

VAL MICHAEL

When I first planned to write about Geese, I was far more interested in their newly emerging influence upon the indie rock scene, especially the way they have skyrocketed in UK circles as much as they have in the US. Back in March, all five of the shows they played here sold out, even after being upgraded to larger venues as the fanfare accelerated. Their name has been on everybody's lips. Great statistics could be drawn up about how often men in Oxford will want to talk to me about Geese.

Of course, there were always detractors. While their fourth album, *Getting Killed*, was hailed by many as a year-defining sensation for the genre when it dropped last September, a decent number of people also couldn't seem to get behind them for a variety of reasons. Claims of pretentiousness, "industry plants", and, as is always typical, Cameron Winter as a "nepo baby" (for the record, his mother is a writer and his dad is a composer – well-off enough, but not famous) have been thrown around, honestly to death.

Winter is a charismatic frontman, that much can be said with absolute certainty; on his solo album, *Heavy Metal*, released in 2024, it felt as though his lyricism was going through a period of experimentation, shifting into something dark and lamenting that can also be felt on the Geese record. His unique vocal abilities capture something both youthful and eternal, reminiscent of many of his rock predecessors. I think the Jim Morrison comparison is the most fun; ambiguous enough that it can be the highest praise or the greatest insult, usually the precise phrase one wants to sit as a good frontman. It can certainly be argued that an eagerness for something fresh and more musically interesting, when our palettes are simply aching for the unconventional, is part of Geese's success. Their work feels surreal and astute, not something that would be fed to you by an algorithm. Which is why the controversy they've ended up in over the last month has been so fascinating.

At the end of March, Billboard interviewed

Jesse Coren and Andrew Spelman, from the digital marketing company Chaotic Good, who revealed their methodology for making songs go viral in an age of short-form content. This involves studying previous examples of viral songs and "simulating a trend" by attempting to make the same thing work but for less palatable tracks. They also claim to focus on online "discourse" by creating narratives around the people they work with, essentially feeding off the natural desire for storytelling that weaves its way into artists' campaigns.

“*The idea that people can rise to fame without even having any real initial backing is haunting stuff*”

Part of this is about creating social media accounts that will post about the musicians and do their campaign work for them, as well as making TikToks or reels with the songs in the background, in order to simulate greater interest in the work. Geese are affiliated with this company, but so are Zara Larsson, Alex Warren, Sombri, Oklou, and Dijon. If you spend enough time online, none of these would be particularly surprising.

This has led to significant controversy. The idea that people can rise to fame without even having any real initial backing, their fans only ghosts of the internet, is haunting stuff. This can especially seem inauthentic if an artist has "come out of nowhere" and suddenly amassed popularity. Somehow this has been particularly concentrated in the case of Geese, which seems odd, as they wouldn't exactly be the shoo-in when it comes to obvious success on the basis of a singular song or narrative. Chaotic Good then took down any mention of the artists they

are affiliated with off their website, which only fuelled the fire. Their statement was that they did this "so our artist partners don't get wrapped up in false accusations or misconceptions about how their music was discovered". Genuine or not, it could be useful to know who is reliant on fake fanbases to generate interest in their music. Though I err on the side that, normally, you can kind of tell?

And, well, everything on the internet is fabricated, and music right now is running on viral marketing moments. We all already live and die by algorithms. People will form the entire basis of their being around content they've seen, to the point where everybody is just an amalgamation of their interests, the things they "endorse". Is it so unreasonable that we would be at the point where musical hype would also be fabricated? Geese also seem like maybe the least egregious case, so why jump on this train with them in mind specifically? To a lot of people, their music was already inaccessible, and despite filling up spots at major festivals this summer, interest in the band still seems to be heavily concentrated in specific demographics. The rock fans who like them love them, and are the same people who would pay money to see them live, while most people probably won't give them the time of day. Unlike some of the other clientele of Chaotic Good, they're not exactly receiving radio play. They haven't even cracked two million monthly listeners on Spotify; most "major" artists sit somewhere upwards of ten. This still isn't a massive band by any stretch of the imagination.

It is also undeniable that there is something alluring about the band, and about Winter more specifically. Is it so much of a reach to assume that a post-punk band of 24-year-old Brooklynites wanting to provoke and intrigue would be so successful among the exact demographic they belong to?

Everything seems to live in extremes. Not only does everyone need to only love or hate something in the cultural imagination, but also invent a justification for that opinion. Sometimes, it is just enough to say that something isn't for you and move on.

## Who gets to speak? The rise of the male podcast epidemic

AMY LAWSON

With Trinity in full swing, and the mornings finally getting light enough to justify a pre-8am wakeup, I've started running earlier in the day (in spite of the pollen count's mission to decimate anyone brave enough to stray into Oxford's green spaces). And, as those runs have grown longer, so has my need for something to fill them, particularly since my carefully curated Y2K playlist is wearing thin. No stranger to the world of podcasts, but definitely someone who has largely remained firmly on the fringes of that particular corner of the internet, I decided it might be time to swap my beloved playlists for something different.

As a staunch fan of *Dish* – a food podcast hosted by Angela Hartnett and Nick Grimshaw, which interviews celebrity guests on their favourite dishes and relationship with food – and very much a creature of habit, I found it hard to branch out. Perhaps it's because of sheer saturation: on their website, the Podcast Index reports a total of 4,671,900 podcasts 'registered' with them (each one required to have at least three episodes, and at least one of those to be over three minutes long), and such high numbers make innovation within the genre challenging. It's hard to make your mark in the podcast scene when it is, format-wise, literally just people talking, making reliance on the entertainment value of a particular topic imperative. Or maybe it was simply my fried attention span, which struggled when confronted with 50 minutes of chatting.

I couldn't help but notice, however, that one of the reasons for my disillusionment with the genre was likely the glaring gender imbalance, often when it came to the most successful, well-known podcasts. A quick glance at the top ten in Spotify's UK Podcasts Charts is telling, with the chart dominated by podcasts written and produced by men, with the exception of *The Rest is Entertainment*, co-hosted by Marina Hyde and Richard Osman, *The Rest is Politics US* with Katty Kay and Anthony Scaramucci, and *The News Agents*, featuring top journalist Emily Maitlis. It is interesting, though, that when women's voices do appear in this top ten, they are often present as part of an ensemble. This is not to downplay the importance of their voices, or what they have to say; however, the lack of representation of standalone female voices in

this high-profile list should ring alarm bells.

Similar numbers can be seen beyond Spotify. A 2025 study from Sounds Profitable suggests that twice as many men create podcasts as women. This is not to say that women don't produce or host successful podcasts – and in fact, the same study informs us that female creators show better retention once they're established – but when we consider, for example, the average UK listener on a homeward commute, their exposure to female-produced content is considerably less than it ought to be.

There is also the fact that male-produced podcasts have increasingly become assimilated with the voices of the far right. Andrew Tate gained fame partly through his official channel, *Tate Speech* on the platform Rumble, where his 'Emergency Meeting' episodes provide discussions on legal situations and media debates. Right-wing public figures such as Ben Shapiro dominate top charts for conservative shows, and *Infowars* with Alex Jones has served as a long-standing platform for conspiracy theories and anti-globalist narratives since 1991, before its closure earlier this year (and, in an ironic twist of fate, it is set to be taken over by satirical newspaper *The Onion*).

“*Dangerous narratives are bounced around in an echo-chamber soundproofed by authoritative male voices*”

This is the dark side of podcasting. Requiring little more than decent recording equipment and access to the internet, it becomes a platform for anyone willing to talk for over three minutes, where personal opinions are laid down as fact and dangerous narratives are bounced around in an echo-chamber soundproofed by authoritative male voices. It is easy to write off some of these 'manosphere' podcasts as meaningless prattle, and they have certainly been subject to parody – even four years ago, *Saturday Night Live's* 'Podcast Set' sketch, centring on a fired employee who is gifted a Fisher-Price 'Podcast set for white guys' at his leaving party, was right on the money – but the rhetoric used by many of these men

often gains currency outside of the podcast sphere. Indeed, the business model of many podcasts is such that, in order to avoid one-dimensionality, brand deals, spin-offs, live shows, and Patreon subscriptions, promoted on social media, build an ecosystem that reaches far beyond the recording studio.

There is, I hasten to add, no shortage of high-quality, creative female-and-queer-produced podcasts around. And they are often highly successful – *My Therapist Ghosted Me* has sold out multiple nights at Dublin's 3Arena for its live shows, whilst *The Log Books*, a podcast on LGBTQ+ history, won Best New Podcast at the British Podcast Awards in 2020. But it is not simply the presence of women's voices in the podcast industry which is important – it's the sense of intimacy which is often created. Listening to the same voices each week, often in the same, strangely personal settings – like my runs around Oxford, or washing dishes after making dinner – establishes a kind of companionship, which is part of what makes the medium so persuasive.

But not all forms of conversational intimacy are made equal. Podcasts such as *Dish*, with its rotating

guests and easy cohost dynamic, feel balanced and genuinely dialogic, where conversation serves to exchange perspectives rather than consolidate authority. Other podcasts, however – not only those in the 'manosphere', but also those in its orbit, or those who parody it so closely that the distinction begins to collapse – rely on a different dynamic entirely. In these cases, the performed casualness of the medium can conceal something more ominous. When a lone voice speaks, at length and unchecked, confidence soon begins to resemble expertise, and this is the hallmark of many of these popular male-produced podcasts.

The issue, then, is not that men occupy these intimate listening spaces, but that the podcasting industry seems to reward the performance of masculine certainty within them. In a medium built on this relationship between listener and speaker, the voices we spend hours listening to will inevitably come to shape the way we understand the world. As such, it may be time to listen a little more closely.

Image credit: Johann Hamza, PDM via Wikimedia Commons.



# WHAT'S ON

### STAGE

*Jerusalem*  
Magdalen College  
19th - 23rd May

*Ulster American*  
Burton Taylor Studio  
19th - 23rd May

### MUSIC

*Guy Johnson Cello*  
Holywell Music Room  
24th May, 11am

### FILM

*Dreamers*  
Ultimate Picture Palace  
23rd May, 4pm

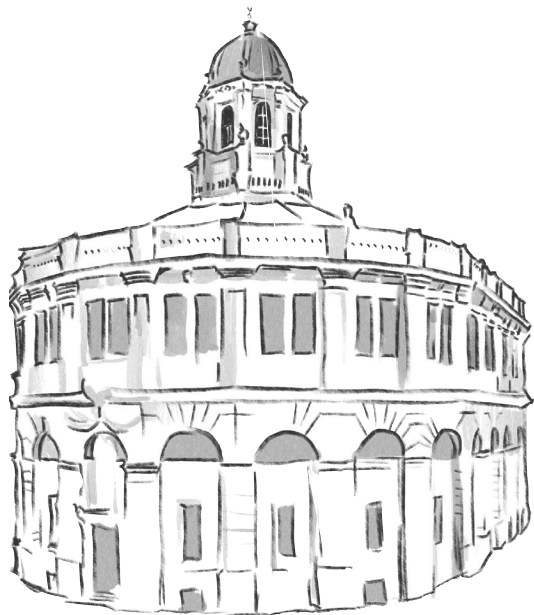
### LITERATURE

*Daisuke Yomsumi LET GO*  
Blackwell's  
23rd May, 3pm

### ART

*Kira Freije: Unspeak the Chorus*  
Modern Art Oxford  
23rd May - 16th August

*Ashmolean Now: Soma Surovi Jannat*  
The Ashmolean Museum  
Until 1st November



# The Source Sunday

That Sunday could arrive first-class,  
Wrapped in tissue and stickers with minimalist logo.  
Sent anonymously (from a fan?).

It will be a crisp, sunblushed Sunday.  
The first in months without rain or  
Export tariff.

Sunday, with speechless morning  
and an afternoon  
of step-counts exceeded.

Inside, there will be boutiques browsed,  
with flat whites from  
an independent coffeehouse, where we know the owner.

We could unpackage this Sunday  
Share it and save the tissue  
For Christmas giftwrap.

We might get workaday Mondays, Milky-white Tuesdays,  
dreary Wednesdays, Thursdays with dinner parties,  
Two-for-one Fridays, and dancey Saturdays.  
It hasn't quite left the depot  
Though,  
And you won't be in to answer the door.

**RORY MAGUIRE**



OXFORD AND  
CAMBRIDGE  
— CLUB —

## WELCOME to your Club

For nearly 200 years alumni have chosen to take up membership of a spacious and elegant private club in the heart of London. The Oxford and Cambridge Club in Pall Mall is the perfect place to meet for a drink, entertain friends and colleagues in magnificent surroundings, play squash, take a break, host a party or just find a quiet corner to prepare for a meeting. A thriving social scene, sports facilities, a lively calendar of events including talks, tastings, dinners and balls, an exceptionally well-stocked library, extensive wine cellars and more than 40 bedrooms mean our members use their club for recreation, relaxation and business - and now you can too.

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[www.oxfordandcambridgeclub.co.uk](http://www.oxfordandcambridgeclub.co.uk)  
or call 020 7321 5110

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## Too much, yet never enough: Is burnout real?

ALICE SANDERS

**B**urnout is a word I have heard one too many times at Oxford. Once you have heard something enough, it becomes just a senseless humming in your ear – a buzzword that loses all significance. The mere existence of such a term validates an experience previously dismissed, and thus can only add kindling to this frenzied obsession. Once named, burnout becomes an inescapable reality. The medal that comes after having worked ‘hard enough’ is complete and paralysing exhaustion, watching your tea grow cold while intentions swirl aimlessly on its surface.

There have always been moments when I have taken myself too seriously, but, amid the deluge of essay crises and reading lists, it can at times feel impossible not to. In Oxford, life can so easily slip away into a to-do list, a time-blocked schedule perfectly coloured in your Google Calendar. Yet even in those line breaks, every conversation becomes a self-assessment against a productivity scale, achievement measurable in hours studied, marks received, and flashcards reviewed. The weeks of term being so few in number only serves to further contribute to the need to be constantly in motion, constantly productive. A society event, that one night out: everything becomes pressurised, everything has a deadline.

Tiredness is one consequence, but one distinct from the inherent exhaustion of burnout. Perhaps this is what leads to the disillusionment which some feel towards the phrase. You can hear it in every library after dark, in every coffee shop dotting the High Street. There is hardly a moment in which it isn't breathed, from welfare emails to the depths of the mid-afternoon doomscroll, when even the fluorescent carousel of Reels begins to push you towards a clear and convenient answer. In its proliferation, ‘burnout’ can lose its

potency. It becomes an excuse, a mask that is worn by laziness, paraded about by a culture of self-improvement.

“  
*It is easy to denounce burnout as a masquerade if you have never watched a candle burn itself out*

It is easy to denounce burnout as a masquerade if you have never watched a candle burn itself out. Every wick has an end, and it is quite satisfying to see the flame eat away at it, the wax dripping and melting, reforming in a puddle on the table below. It is a mess to be admired, a sculpted proof that you used everything you had – that is, until you try to light the candle again, and there is nothing left to burn. Melted wax seals and stays. It is this stasis that defines burnout: a sense of complete exhaustion and detachment, against which every best effort to resist is insufficient.

However, despite intimate knowledge of this, I am often fooled by the scepticism towards this costume. Perhaps it is impossible not to be. The World Health Organisation labels burnout as solely an ‘occupational phenomenon’, not applicable to other areas of life. This definition neglects the academic, social, and emotional contexts: those especially pertinent to students. It is this pattern – one that rejects the reality of being overwhelmed – that encourages us to dismiss burnout as a fiction, a self-pitying justification for poor discipline.

When we contribute to this dismissal of burnout as defeat, an excuse to avoid responsibility, we only feed the destructive culture in which we live. Modern values tell us that success

equates to productivity, busyness is equivalent to happiness, and entirely disavows difficulty. So it remains an obligation to continue to show up, to meet deadlines. Obligation, though, comes to engulf every facet of existence. Waking up in the morning (if only after the ninth alarm), attending any social event (if only to sit in silence, unhearing), becomes as burdensome as the original stressor, completely overrun by apathy.

In the self-contained environment of university life, which preoccupies itself with productivity and attendance, admitting to this exhaustion seems synonymous with defeat. Comparison is oppressive and wholly inescapable. All those around you become a measure of what you should be doing. Anything else is not enough. Yet, when it is simultaneously too much, how can we accept that we just have less capacity to work than those around us, writing the same essays, sitting in the same classes?

This is perhaps where I concede, because I cannot pretend to have these answers. I am always the first to revert to blaming my own ‘laziness’, to see

exhaustion as merely a product of sufficient work. It is a cynical tendency to roll my eyes at the usual chain of uniform advice – “take a walk, take a break, just get it done” – but one that I maintain all the same. It is easier to lie in bed, to listen to the alarm ring, than to face it. Accepting this wake-up call, the necessity to change, is a daunting prospect. It involves acknowledging that our limits are not boundless, that our attention is finite, and that rest should never be a luxury. Burnout cannot be resolved not by forcing down the brakes, but by fixing patterns, remoulding the wax, and guarding the flame more steadily this time.

It may not be possible to deny that our perception of burnout has been intensely coloured by its ubiquity, but this does nothing to undermine its reality. Burnout is not a convenient excuse, a means of slacking. You may believe it to be, for all I care. But there is no shame in naming your struggle. There is no need to ask for permission to rest.

*Image Credit: Jove decadent, PDM via Wikimedia Commons.*



## Hospitable cultures exist because women exist

SABA AHMADZADEH NOUGHANI

*I dedicate this piece to my maternal grandmother, to her tired eyes and overworked hands.*

**W**hen guests and families sit, talk, and laugh, one person is always excluded. The same person who wakes up earlier and sleeps later than everyone else. As someone who comes from a collectivist culture, cooking, breaking bread, raising each other's children, and caring for the elderly are embedded in our way of life. In our individualistic Western society, this is rare, hence I'd distinguish this part of my identity by how generous and welcoming my hospitable Eastern culture is. But I've come to realise that all this hospitality does not come from culture. It comes primarily from women. In most households, from one woman.

Let's think about every hospitable home that we've eaten and slept in, including our own. Who cooked for us? Who cleaned the house before we arrived? Who made sure that we were served and had everything we needed? Who laid the table? And most disappointing of all, who was given the last seat on that table?

I'm ashamed to say that, like many others, after benefiting from the unpaid labour of the women in my household, I'd instead credit and praise my culture for our family's hospitality.

However, it is women who are the reason why our hospitable cultures

have survived. They are the reason why culture, at all, has survived. National dishes and homemade remedies can be traced back to women's hands. Cultural attire with distinct embroidery and symbolism can be traced back to women's hands.

Songs sung to children, fables, poetry and folklore surviving generations, can be traced back to women narrating and teaching them to their offspring.

But it is much more than this; we don't just owe the survival of our culture to women, but our very own survival. Every homemade meal, tender embrace, wiped tear, wrapped gift, handwritten card, wise word of advice, and lullaby has raised and nourished us. With regards to the hospitality that defines our collectivist cultures, it comes with a huge sacrifice of time, energy, effort, and labour, which is almost always paid by our mothers, grand and great. They continue to make this sacrifice unpaid, unappreciated, and unnoticed.

If roles were reversed, and a man were to prepare the home, welcome, cook for, and serve guests, we all know he'd be praised, called progressive, exceptional. His wife would be called “lucky”. So, when women do this daily, how often do you even say thank you? How often do they receive thanks from every single person who sat at the table she laid and ate the meal she prepared?

University was the first time I moved away from home. It was my mother with whom I was on the phone throughout the term. It was my mother who would text to see if I had eaten when I was

away. It was my grandmother who always had a meal ready whenever I'd visit home. It was my mother who would drive me to and from Oxford, again and again, even though I could have taken the train. Before my year abroad, it was my grandmother who taught me how to cook (a proper meal, knowing I could no longer rely on college dinners. When I came back from my year abroad, it was my aunt, who, despite having recently given birth, planned a party and ‘Welcome Home’ cake.

While I could easily, and would love to, write an article about men's role in sustaining the family, and the importance of the role fathers play in our wellbeing and development as adults, I write this first. Because while the survival of a family or society depends on both men and women working together, the part that women play is rarely acknowledged or appreciated.

Across time and place, including now, ‘providing’ is considered a masculine role, but, on the contrary, it is not a single role nor one carried out by a single person. It has always been shared, with women providing a great deal by managing the emotional and logistical labour of the household. It is their advice and comfort that provides emotional support. It is their meals that have provided physical support and nourishment. It is their commutes to and from their children's school, clubs, and activities that have provided educational support, and facilitated the lifelong friendships that we have

formed in these spaces.

Still, women continue to provide for and look after everyone, from young babies to elderly parents and in-laws. It is their care that contributes to sustaining our families, subsequently holding wider society together. And despite all this, society continues to perpetuate the narrative that it is only men who provide, and support women.

It also seems to me that most women don't carry all this mental and emotional strain because they want to, like to, or because they just really love guests that much. No, they do so because if they took a break from these daily tasks that keep the family home, and subsequently wider society, running and thriving, it would have consequences. The house would remain unkept, the household would remain unfed. Society has imposed this burden and an unfair sense of obligation solely upon their backs. A woman's value has been tied to her productivity and how much she contributes to her family. God forbid these women take a break, they'd be labelled a failing mother and wife.

It is one of my deepest desires to, even if for just one day, relieve all women, specifically our mothers, from our homes. I don't want to see them cooking, cleaning, serving, or managing. I doubt any family would survive. I doubt any hospitable home that we take pride in would last even 24 hours.

To quote the Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran: “All houses are dark until the mother wakes up.”

## HOROSCOPES



**Aries**

It's time to impulsively sign up for that half marathon.



**Taurus**

A Balliol blue might just be the cure for you!



**Gemini**

Park End is calling your name, how can you refuse?



**Cancer**

There will be no more crash-outs.



**Leo**

You don't need to run for president of the society. You are enough <3



**Virgo**

It's time to let go of that one-sided grudge...

# HOROSCOPES



## Libra

You will be trapped in polite conversation with all of your most hated BNOCs.



## Scorpio

Trini-free for thee but not for me.



## Sagittarius

You will make uncomfortable eye contact with your tutor in Tesco.



## Capricorn

Attend all of your tutorials this week, please.



## Aquarius

Make better choices.



## Pisces

If lounging at Port Meadow were a full time job, you'd probably be employed.

# Actually, Trinifree is a state of mind

*Natalie Tan defends your right to a taste of freedom in Oxford this trinity*

Now is the time for joyhealthhappinessmaxxing”, reads the text I sent to my friends before we moved back in for Trinity. Just over two weeks later, it has proven true. Every time someone has asked how I’m doing, I tell them the truth: it’s my happiest Oxford term yet. And it’s not just me; everyone’s dopamine seems to have tripled. Sure, the beautiful weather is a not-insignificant reason for the drastic mental shift – the other day I stepped out into a middling amount of rain and experienced my first real negative emotion so far this term – but there has to be something more to it.

So what actually characterises a Trinifree? So far, Trinifree is shaping up to be an attitude, not a fact. This, of course, may ring hollow coming from a second-year English student with no exams to speak of, but materially, I’m only juggling slightly fewer extracurriculars than in Michaelmas or Hilary. Nothing significant seems to have changed. So why the sudden happiness, the abrupt joie de vivre, the renewed zest for life? Where does it stem from?

For me, at least, I’ve chalked it up to no longer overcommitting. It sounds counterintuitive to advise scaling back during a term where most of the humanities students you know are the freest they’ll ever be, but take it from me: I didn’t scale back even when I was at my busiest, and it wasn’t pretty. Filling all my time with committees would be enjoyable, meaningful work, work undertaken in the gardens instead of the library, but work nonetheless. I wanted the time to work and play. This time, going into the vac, I signed up for a normal amount of responsibilities for a normal number of societies. I’m very happy to report my quest for a mentally stable Oxford term has so far been a smashing success.

Experiencing Trinifree with a proper “Trinitude” (Trinifree-attitude) means the chance to do things I would have considered unfathomable during the past two terms, like take a nap in the afternoon or resolve to never pull an all-nighter in order to finish an essay. Now I have the chance to relax between lectures and talk to acquaintances I’ve

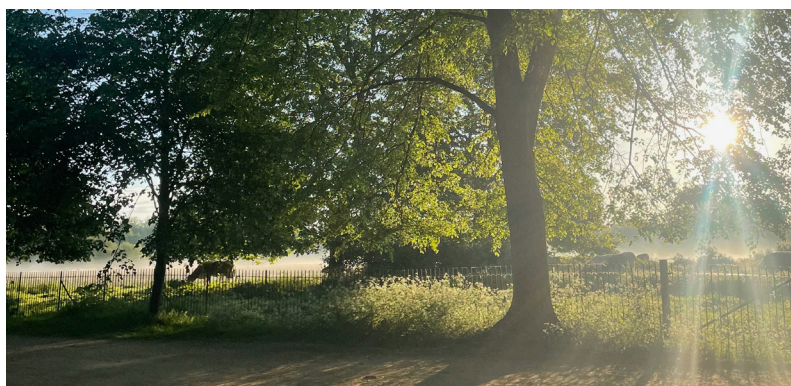
always wanted to be closer to, instead of spending every free moment completing assignments. I’m catching up with old friends and TV shows instead of fitting meetings into my calendar like Tetris blocks, or resorting to a meal deal because I have no time to head back to college (my current meal deal count this term stands at a whopping zero).

Michaelmas was characterised by miserably cold days, Hilary by miserably wet ones. By those standards, anything would be an improvement. But the change isn’t just good relatively, it’s objectively an upgrade. My most convincing anecdotal evidence is how my dreams have shifted from Matt Damon telling me I’d been rejected from all my internships to my current ones about my football club losing the league.

To clarify, for those wondering: yes, you can be both locked in and Trinifree. Its namesake freedom isn’t about being free of exams or academic commitments; it’s about being free to be spontaneous, to host a podcast, cook a meal that takes more than thirty minutes to make, try new sports, or actually read the books for your essays. Even to sit down and write articles like these. Last week, I did extra reading beyond the starred compulsory items and was astounded by how good it felt to be on top of things, to have the time to do things because you want to and not because you have to. I’m undeniably Trinifree; I’m also undeniably locked in, even if that locking in doesn’t necessarily happen in the library every day.

So take heart. It’s not impossible to be Trinifree if you have exams; it’s just a little harder. What defines a Trinifree is the resolve to not let anything consume your life, whether it’s revising for exams, summer applications, or society work. It’s a commitment to finding ways to enjoy each day, even if you enjoy some more so than others. All of this begs the question: Is Trinifree timeless? Can one have a Freechaelmas, or a Hilafree? Well, insofar as one can be Trinifree shivering in their puffer on a rainy walk to lectures, I suppose so – although maybe there’s a reason those don’t roll off the tongue quite so smoothly.

*Image Credit: Hattie Miles for Cherwell.*



# AGONY AUNT

*Dear Agony Aunt,*

Recently, I’ve been feeling so out of place at uni. I don’t feel like I’ve made many proper friends in my first year, and I’m struggling to connect with anyone inside or outside of college. Where can I find people in Oxford and how do I get better at socialising?

*Sincerely,  
Miss Aligned*

# CHERWELL-FED

## A mini-guide to the Italian restaurants of Oxford

CHERWELL LIFESTYLE TEAM

Oxford is home to a great variety of Italian restaurants – from casual chains to quieter independent businesses, there are options for everyone. The *Cherwell* Lifestyle team decided to combine our forces and put together a mini-guide to the Italian restaurants to suit all of your needs.



### Bbuona – ideal for a light, social meal

Bbuona is an independent café on the edge of Gloucester Green, whose speciality is the oval-shaped ‘pinsa’: a Roman-style pizza alternative which uses a mixture of flours to offer a lighter and more digestible option to the traditional Italian favourite. Bbuona’s sourdough is indeed light and airy, and although somewhat smaller than a traditional pizza, I found made for a very filling meal.

The service is extremely friendly, and the dining experience feels closer to sitting in an authentic Italian deli than in the centre of Oxford. The price of a pinsa varies between £9.95 and £17.95, depending on the toppings (all of which consist of a combination of high-quality deli products). There is also a (multi-person) option to try all the toppings for £25pp. I opted for the parmigiana, a pinsa deliciously infused with the tastes of aubergine parmigiana. The table next to us was all sat in their sub fusc and sporting red carnations, and I reckon that with the combination of fresh, filling Italian food, and a chilled aperol spritz on the side, they might have found the perfect post-exam ritual.

### Gusto – a cosy upscale dinner

The atmosphere was cosy, with flickering incandescent light. The menu was surprisingly extensive, creative too. There are interesting takes on classic dishes, like their signature starter: dough petals. It’s set at a reasonable price point, given that the portion sizes are generous, but not massive. However, it is certainly pricier than more student-friendly options. Perhaps one to opt for when family visits and can pick up the bill. The food comes out quickly, almost too quickly. There is hardly any time to digest in between courses.

We ordered five dishes in total: two starters and three mains. I had the garlic rosemary focaccia first. The flavour was subtle and light, but the bread was fairly dry. My grandmother reported that her Caesar salad was excellent. The romaine was crisp, and the dressing was rich and flavourful. The salad itself needed to be chopped up a bit more, as it was hard to eat.

My pollo arabiatta was particularly delicious; the chilli was light and sweet.

It was not spicy at all, which I was not expecting, but the flavours more than made up for it. My grandmother’s sea bass was excellent as well, with a non-traditional red sauce, a combination of pine nuts and roasted peppers, creating a unique flavour profile. The fish itself was good, tasting quite like a branzino, flaky and moist. It was cooked perfectly. Finally, my grandfather had lasagna. Once more, the sauce was a unique take on traditional lasagna – closer to a penne alla vodka pink sauce. An unusual, but excellent take on a classic dish.

### Zizzi – a reliable, casual spot

While Zizzi is a chain restaurant, it is not to be overlooked. We left satisfied, full, and happy. The restaurant is very large and open, with lots of dining space, and so we definitely didn’t feel rushed. The service is very friendly.

The menu is quite large, and we choose to try two ‘rustica’ pizzas with some fries. These pizzas are much larger than average, stretched by hand to form a thin, crispy base. The ‘primavera’ had an array of fresh vegetables, with delicious Genovese pesto – a lovely vegetarian option for those wanting a change from the basic Margherita. The pepperoni campagna was, as described by my table-mate: “a beautiful blend of two classic pizzas”; the pepperoni worked wonderfully with the mushroom and ham. Both pizzas tasted even better with a generous drizzle of chilli oil. The fries were some of the best we’ve tried – deliciously crispy without being too greasy.

We appreciated their small touches, like the complimentary paprika pasta crisps we were offered while we waited for our meal, and the small cup of hot chocolate that arrived with the bill. Prices are perhaps higher than other restaurants of a similar standard, with pizzas ranging from around £16 to £18, though there are many offers available (use your Tesco Clubcard points here). I would recommend Zizzi for those looking for a delicious Italian meal, though there are perhaps similar standards of food for a better price.

*Image Credit: Rebecca Bushee for Cherwell.*

*Dear Miss Aligned,*

Trinity can be a depressing time: the run-up to Prelims, the fracturing of friendships made in Hilary, the sudden college marriages (and divorces), and seeing people running around in the sun when you’re only able to go out alone.

The first step is a bit of self-positivity: What are your hobbies? What makes you interesting? What can you talk to people about? The second is to make small efforts to socialise with people: pluck up a conversation in Hall or when you’re in the kitchen, try and sit next to someone on their own in the lecture theatre. And don’t worry if it’s weird or awkward, most people will appreciate the effort. And the third is to get out there: people won’t find you if you can’t find them first!

Don’t get stuck in your room in the evening; rather, get out to some societies, join committees, try and put yourself out there. There are plenty of people around Oxford in your situation, it takes just a couple of moves to find them. Don’t give up hope!

*In friendship,  
Agony Aunt*

# Is there such a thing as a break-up season?

*Emma Baltzer considers the way that a relationship, and what we want from it, changes with the seasons*

I think that, in our own minds, and with our intimate knowledge of the people closest to us, it is easy to zoom in, to overanalyse the incompatibilities, circumstances, and personal factors of all the break-ups we experience and observe. However, when we step back to see these turbulent, seemingly singular occurrences within the wider context of the lives of people we might only brush against, I believe a pattern arises that warrants the consideration of a break-up season.

While the word 'season' is used figuratively, I think we can see a direct correlation between romantic or relational seasons and the seasons of the year. The seasons correspond to the growth and harvest seasons of crops, or the dry and wet seasons of tropical climates, migratory patterns of birds, hibernation of mammals. They dictate the behaviours of the natural world, to the extent that humans have even personified them as gods. And although it can be easy to think that we humans are not at the mercy of these forces, with man-made inventions often allowing us to live a consistent life year-round, there is much evidence to the contrary.

Seasonal depression is a commonly recognised disorder of the colder months. Across the UK, the collective shift in mood when the sun illuminates every street, when the warmth allows us to shed the smothering puffer and adorn ourselves in colour and flowy fabrics, is so profound and so predictable, that we might secretly be solar-powered creatures. It is not such a leap, then, to say that this fleeting happiness has a domino effect, and in the warmer months we are more open to new connections and to seeing the beauty which was always there, but perhaps lay dormant or buried during the winter. Along with the nature which surrounds us, we ebb and flow under the sway of the seasons.

Autumn has a reputation for being the season of introspection. As our summer openness begins to draw in, so too do we begin to turn away from new things to relish the warm familiarity of what we know. This reputation is, of course, founded in autumn's natural significance – that of harvest, reaping the results of the past two seasons of growth, before the ground hardens (and later freezes). This evokes a nostalgia for what was growing, now that the time to cut it down is upon us. This synesthesia between

seasonal, sensory experience, and our emotional understanding of our personal relationships, is also reflected in music. A song we often associate with autumn is 'Sweater Weather' by the Neighbourhood, which expresses the vulnerability and tenderness brought on by the cold. A song explicitly set in autumn, which continues these themes, is Taylor Swift's 'All Too Well', a break-up anthem, referencing falling leaves, and describing the fragmentation that occurs after parting ways with a lover.

“  
In the warmer months we are more open to new connections and to seeing the beauty that was always there, but perhaps lay dormant or buried during the winter

One reason I believe SZA (mistakenly) declared cuffing season as winter (in her 2022 SNL skit song 'Big Boys'), is that the cold and the darkness, which make us retreat indoors are mellowed, even thawed, by the close presence of a lover or a friend. However, this desire for closeness is at odds with the cold, which, after months of exposure, seeps into our very being. We don't stay out as late, plans become less spontaneous – teeth chattering and full-body shivers aren't exactly conducive to the wide smile and gracious small talk that meeting new people and making first impressions requires. The highlight of the season is Christmas, an occasion centred on family, and which might indirectly overlook a need or desire for romance or friendship (though any Scot will tell you the latter theme is brought to the forefront come New Year's).

As we move into spring, there is a conscious step towards optimism, and a newfound potential for growth after the inactive winter. Just as the blossoms begin to bud, and everything seems just that bit greener, so too are we encouraged to

venture out of our own shells, and dare to go to that event or party. It helps that any sorrows are immediately cushioned by the longer, warmer days, and the ever-present pint prerogative. Saint Etienne's 'Spring' makes the important distinction between spring and summer, which is also often identified as being a happier season. It represents spring's inherent whimsical energy, which is perhaps born from the transition from winter, the beginning stages of our metamorphosis into our full social potential. As a result, spring is a time for social opportunities: first dates which go nowhere, interesting people you meet once and promise to meet again. Yet somehow three weeks go by before you realise that you are so focused on how the life you already have is blooming, that you neglect the chance to further expand your garden.

Summer, of course, is the much-anticipated, most glorified time of year. How can you be anything but giddy when it is 20 degrees, and you can feel the sun's warmth radiating through the air? I would argue, though, that the social and relational mood of your summer is largely dictated by your spring. Conversely to winter, where companionship acts like a safety blanket, in summer, we are empowered

and happy, and this feeling is reinforced by our everyday surroundings. We don't need to rely on the comfort of a relationship for happiness, because all of a sudden, what we have is bathed in gorgeous light. We are delightfully open to new people in all sorts of ways, simultaneously allowing for more frivolity and freedom in general.

While the new connections of spring flourish further, I think in this time of year (especially in the splendour that is Trinity in Oxford), we are less like plants and more like bees. We derive pleasure from both the comfort of the hive and the undertaking of pollination, dashing around, diversifying our days, and conversations.

I write this coming up on a year of being in a relationship, which began to sprout and bud in May last year, and so one could say that this is simply an outsider's view of the cycles of love. But to that, I would ask you to look around, as we exit the abundance of spring to launch into the joy of summer. Don't you see a culture of friendliness and positivity thriving, as we throw caution to the wind and jump into the river once more?

Image Credit: Steve Daniels, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



## OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

I love you and I don't think I show it enough. I remember watching camcorder footage that I hadn't seen in so many months, footage of a time I wouldn't otherwise remember.

I love you and I wish I showed it like I did back then, when my eyes were bigger and you wore different glasses, and we still had the old lounge carpet, and I looked up at you from beside the mantelpiece.

When we call and I see your face, I think of that footage; I think of your chocolate biscuit smile, hidden in a memory of a memory, and feel safe in the knowledge that you know I love you too.

Jude Wood, Lady Margaret Hall

## CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

We might be able to guess who did most of the talking...



### Mr Verbose

#### First impressions?

She was standing outside the building next to OXO rather than OXO itself, which is definitely a positive sign. Reserved but not awkward. Open-minded.

#### Did it meet your expectations?

It exceeded them. I wasn't sure what to expect from the type of person that signs up for a blind date, but I thought it would probably be an hour of stale, one-sided conversation. It was a lot better!

#### What was the highlight?

Asking and being asked questions that I wouldn't think of otherwise. We had an interesting chat about literature and the differences in what we enjoy in the writing style of sci-fi novels. It helped that we were both quite earnest (I think!) throughout our conversation.

#### What was the most embarrassing moment?

Dropping both my bike lock and helmet in quick succession when unlocking my bike afterwards.

#### Is there a second date on the cards?

No.

### Miss Nonchalant

#### First impressions?

He was shorter than me to be honest.

#### Did it meet your expectations?

I didn't go in with huge expectations so I had a good time just chatting.

#### What was the highlight?

Talking about books that we had both read.

#### What was the most embarrassing moment?

I didn't really feel embarrassed at any point but it was a bit awkward at the start because I wasn't sure how to identify him when I was waiting outside.

#### Is there a second date on the cards?

Not sure, but I wouldn't say no if he asked me.

# SPORT

## The Roger Bannister mile and its modern legacy

*Tim Herd reports on the day of racing in commemoration of Bannister's record*



The legacy of Roger Bannister and his famous sub-four-minute mile is etched all over the Iffley Sports Centre. This year's celebration marked the 72nd anniversary of Roger Bannister's achievement, and was set to be particularly special. Accompanied by perfect conditions, Olympic silver medallist Laura Muir, former world champion and current Commonwealth champion, came to grace Oxford with a stand-alone performance in the elite women's race. With Muir's personal best in the mile standing at 4:15.24, there was little doubt that she might renew Sonia O'Sullivan's 2004 track record for the women's mile, currently standing at 4:27.79. Hopes were also high for the elite men's race, with top athletes aiming to challenge the four-minute mark.

On 6th May 1954, Bannister ran the mile in a time of 3:59.4. This athletic accomplishment marked a turning point in running; previously, it had been thought impossible for anyone to run a mile in under four minutes. Then, after Bannister's achievement, it was only a matter of weeks before his feat was replicated by John Landy. In the summer of 1954, during the Commonwealth Games, these two top runners both ran sub-four-minute miles in an exhilarating final. Bannister took the victory.

Established in 2024 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Bannister's world athletic record, Bannister Miles is an annual event, building up to its 75th anniversary in 2029. The Bannister Miles celebration is open to all. In the morning, a community mile sees members of the public run from St Aldates Road to the Bannister track at Iffley. Later in the day, elite athletes try their luck on the famous track, pushing their limits and hunting down rapid mile times while going head-to-head with the Bannister legacy. Throughout the day, Iffley Road hosted an exciting atmosphere, serving food and drinks in the build-up to the elite races.

The atmosphere reached a crescendo around 5:45 pm; Muir's race was set to begin, the first event on her 2026 calendar. Ready to challenge Muir were some of middle-distance running's young elite, including

English Schools champion Kiera Brady-Jones and one of Oxford's finest, BUCS 800m gold medallist Charlotte Buckley. The cheers of the crowd testified to the excitement of watching a world-renowned champion compete with some of the sport's rising stars.

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*Years on, these races still show us just how extraordinary Bannister's achievement actually was*

Setting an infernal speed, the pacer was adamant to lead Muir to a new track record. This strung the race out, so tactics went out of the window. Muir quickly separated from the rest of the field. At the halfway point, when the pacer dropped off, a track record was on the cards. Muir found herself alone at the front of the race, with no pacers or competitors to spur her on – a truly daunting position. Nevertheless, previous experience allowed Muir to maintain the pace: spurred on by the crowd, she was able to put further time between herself and the rest of the field. Finishing in 4:34.06, ten seconds ahead of her competitors, Muir delivered an impressive feat – a strong start to her Commonwealth campaign. Buckley, Oxford University's star, crossed the line in a narrowly contested third place, having held on to silver for the best part of two laps.

The main event was the Bannister Mile. A race around the same track, at the same time of day, during the same time of year as the famous achievement. Every year, runners compete not only against their competitors for first place, but also against the clock. At 6pm, the race began. The pacer set off perfectly, with the first lap completed in 59 seconds. The others followed, bunched up, three abreast along the track. This race produced not only a fast pace, but tactical

interest: after lap three, the runners were exactly on pace. Some athletes made early bids, accelerating in an attempt to break down their other competitor, a physical and mental game. The race was decided down the final stretch, with a four-way sprint for the line. This was won by 17-year-old Freddy Rowe with a startling time of 4:00.88. Tantalisingly close to replicating Bannister's achievement, Rowe promises a record-breaking future.

This year also brought back steeplechase miles. Being a relatively new discipline, specialists were expected to challenge the world's best times for the steeplechase mile. Two former winners, Will Battershill and Mark Pearce, were to go head-to-head. From the beginning, it was clear that these two athletes were going to produce an excellent race, as the rest of their competitors steadily fell behind. Battershill and Pearce proved especially adept at clearing all the barriers, particularly the tricky water jump. Coming into the final 200 metres, Battershill strove ahead to open up a decisive gap. With a time of 4:20.40, the athlete achieved a new world best in the relatively new category of the steeplechase mile. Pearce finished only a second later, separated from the third-place chaser by over ten seconds. A thrilling spectacle, the steeplechase mile proved deserving of long-term establishment in the Bannister Miles celebration for years to come.

These results demonstrate how difficult mile running truly is. Muir and Rowe showed exceptional talent to win their races, despite falling slightly short of pre-race fantasies. The event is celebrated as a massive step beyond the bounds of human limitation. While the mile world record of 3:43.13 hasn't been broken since 1999, other historic records continue to fall. In the recent London Marathon, the first and second ever official sub-two-hour marathons were run. This marathon record was another 'impossible' barrier in distance running, now shattered. Years on, these races still show us just how extraordinary Bannister's achievement was, and why it is deservedly celebrated 72 years later.

*Image credit: Sophi Hayes-Hoyle for Cherwell.*

## SHOE THE TABS

Mixed bag for Oxford University Cricket Club in Varsity Matches

On 7 May 2026, Lord's Cricket Ground witnessed a showdown between Oxonians and Tabs in the T20 Varsity matches. Captained by Hannah Davis, the Oxford Women's Team fought a closely contested game, bowled out after scoring 51 runs in 17.5 overs. Cambridge managed to chase the target within 14.2 overs, winning by 4 wickets. On the Men's side, victory ensued: Oxford surged to victory, scoring 137 runs in 20 overs and winning the match by 13 runs.

## BUCS BLUES

Oxford University Yacht Club sail smoothly into national rankings

From 12th-15th April, Oxford University Yacht Club (OUYC) competed in the BUSA National Yachting Championship, finishing 13th in the coastal race and 11th in the inshore series. The crew, almost entirely new to the club, were awarded Half Blues. Following this, Oxford Yachting placed 11th overall in the British Universities Sailing Association National Championship under skipper Jean-Guillaume Magre on the boat Faux Pas, securing an inshore net score of 73.2 and a total of 87.2.

## TOWN VS GOWN

Oxford Cross Country Club speed through city centre

Sunday 10th May saw runners take to the streets for the annual Town and Gown Bidwell 10k. Leading the charge, a win was in store for Oxford University Cross Country Club's Alex Bampton, completing the course in 31:23 minutes, whilst Jocelyn Kelley stode to 3rd in the women's race with a time of 38:11, followed closely by Sophie Glencross of OUCCC in 7th place, clocking a time of 38:55.

## ON THE RIVER

Oxford crews put up a strong showing on the Great Ouse

Bedford Amateur Regatta saw entries from several Oxford colleges this year. Amidst tough competition between the colleges and the several high-quality rowing school crews entered, the Wolfson VIII that competed in the College VIII's section rowed well, with strong victories against Cambridge colleges Selwyn and Pembroke before a narrow loss to Gonville and Caius. Univ's Womens VIII also produced some great racing in their second band, narrowly beating a Bedford Modern crew before losing to Pembroke College, Cambridge.

## UPCOMING

### Sailing Cuppers

Saturday 16th May  
Farmoor Reservoir  
Secretary: James Knight

### Blenheim 7k

Monday 17th May  
Blenheim Palace

### Varsity Athletics

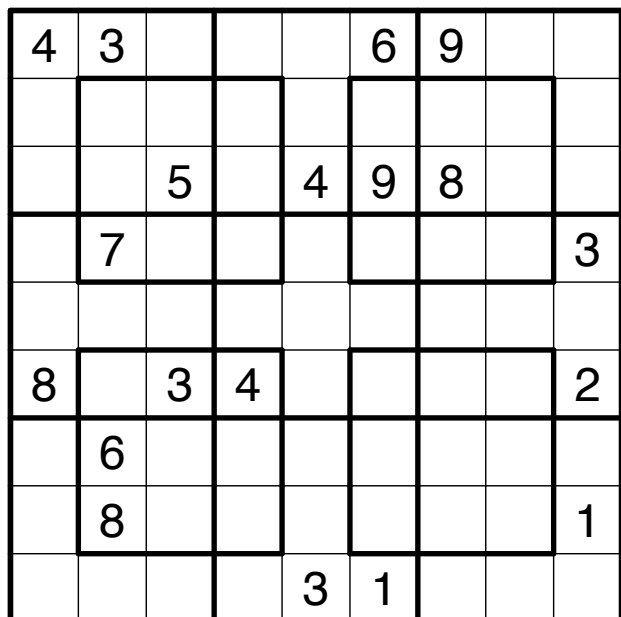
Saturday 23rd May  
Iffley Road Sports Centre  
President: Natalie Groves

*Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?*

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

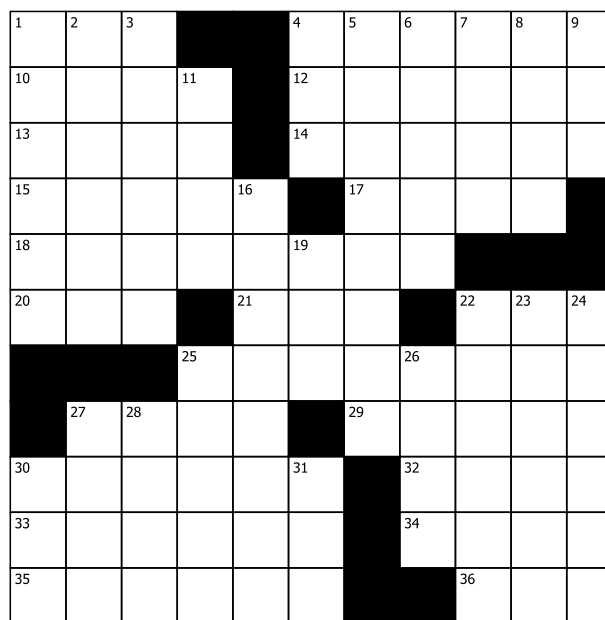
**Editor's note:** The Cherwell Puzzles Team are currently in the throes of exam revision (good luck!) which means this week it's all me, and I've not held back on the difficulty! Readers can submit puzzles to [puzzlescherwell@gmail.com](mailto:puzzlescherwell@gmail.com) so I don't have to do this again...

## Sudoku!!! by ZOË MCGUIRE



I heard people missed the square regions last time, so to make up for it, here's thirteen of them. Normal rules apply.

## Crossword: Right of Way by ZOË MCGUIRE

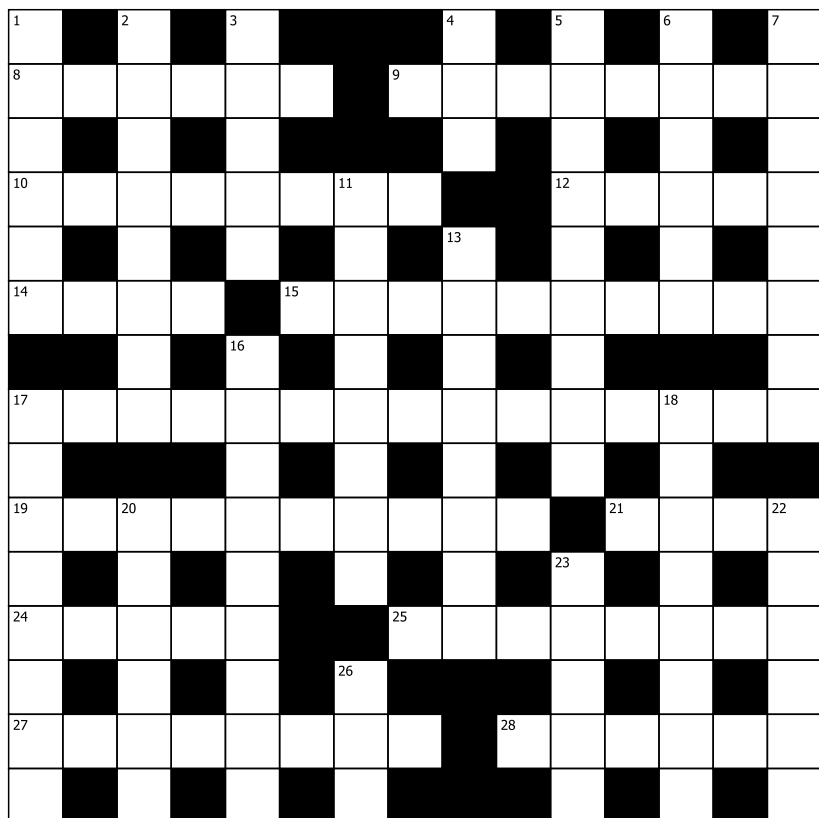


- ACROSS**
- 1) Half of a cheerleader's equipment
  - 4) Family Guy miscreant "Sneakers"
  - 10) CORNMARKE  
-> 32A
  - 12) Like some angels, perhaps
  - 13) Northern point on the Isle of Man
  - 14) Expression of approval
  - 15) Country singer Rimes
  - 17) Certain list
  - 18) GEORGE -> ST GILES
  - 20) Feminine pronoun
  - 21) Soviet strong-armers
  - 22) Breaking Bad antagonist Fring
  - 25) WALTON -> ST GILES
  - 27) "Virgin" opponent, to the chronically online
  - 29) Al \_\_\_\_ (pasta order)
  - 30) Crescent, gibbous, and full moon, to name three
  - 32) BROAD -> HIGH
  - 33) Emits radiation, perhaps
  - 34) Medical author Gawande
  - 35) Lower leg joints
  - 36) One of a pirate's seven

- DOWN**
- 1) Job follower?
  - 2) "Is that so?"
  - 3) Desert deception
  - 4) One \_\_\_\_ kind
  - 5) Organ that's sensational
  - 6) "Sunset Boulevard" actress Nancy
  - 7) Swanky television type
  - 8) Former late night TV host Jay
  - 9) Tolkein's treefolk
  - 11) Hang in the balance
  - 16) Reference point when describing the zoom of a microscope
  - 19) LaGuardia airport code
  - 22) "Feel free!"
  - 23) Fabricated
  - 24) Wife-beater, colloquially
  - 25) Fundamental
  - 26) Zuckerberg company
  - 27) Most common surname in Taiwan and Singapore
  - 28) Unoriginal writer
  - 30) Workplace wooing
  - 31) Snake sound

## Cryptic Crossword: More than a Feline by ZOË MCGUIRE

**Difficulty: 4/5**



- ACROSS**
- 1) Cross's bottom found in graveyard (6)
  - 2) Repair tools for plot with kitten (5, 3)
  - 3) Briefly jab sheep with large rock (5)
  - 4) Chaser to mouse: "There's no use escaping" (3)
  - 5) Transformers reconfigure Roman ship (9)
  - 6) Shocking mouse to nibble on some bread, we hear (6)
  - 7) Marine hellhound (5, 3)
  - 11) Si or Am is vile, twisted; time to clean up (4, 4)
  - 13) Fish to handle hungry feline (8)
  - 16) "Mumtaz", one translated into Aztec (9)
  - 17) Revolutionary's employee in Northwest county (8)
  - 18) Warning to cover up return of potentially dangerous activity (5, 3)
  - 20) Girl or fellow TV chef (6)
  - 22) Smear small dirt? Good point (6)
  - 23) Label on Purina or Royal Canin, for instance (5)
  - 26) Consumed later, leaving crusts (3)

- DOWN**
- 8) Lion, perhaps, less frequently eating duck (6)
  - 9) Lose one's marbles, gain one's rattles (2, 6)
  - 10) Catch of the day: Emilia Clarke drops make-up company, gets fired (8)
  - 12) Brief period of energy from Japanese rice cake (5)
  - 14) Japanese musician says hello to floor (4)
  - 15) Located around lost lair, north of last competition stage (5, 5)
  - 17) Jazz musicians left the pocket, the jig is up (3'1, 3, 2, 3, 3)
  - 19) Like many entries in this crossword after death, the idiomatic drinking limit persists (5, 5)
  - 21) Palm Springs houses as offerings for the needy (4)
  - 24) One every second? Sounds painful (5)
  - 25) Challenge is your idea if it goes wrong! (1, 4, 3)
  - 27) Perhaps pet ran out of mice to bite tails off of and spar (4-4)
  - 28) Not getting enough credit, like swear words on radio edits (6)

### Week 1 answers:

**Crossword: Across:** FATHER, ESC, ORIOLE, ANON, ERASES, TILE, SPATS, VOX, INSOLENT, SOCO, HOLY, UPPER LEG, SIT, SOLID, ERIE, UPCAST, RIOS, I'M A TOP, TNT, GOMEZ. **Down:** FOE, ARR, TIAS, HOSPICE, ELEANORS, RESTS, EAT, SNIVEL, COLONY, NEXT, SO HELP ME, LOGICAL, SPIRIT, OPTION, USER, LOUIS, DATE, EST, SON, TPA.

**Cryptic: Across:** PAPERWORK, WIMPY, PIER, LOYAL, ZERO, ASPIRE, NARRATOR, FALSE, EMU, FRESH, LOCKDOWN, OYSTER, YAWN, SKINT, DUPE, LIVER, GENERATOR. **Down:** CABINS, NEAR MISS, PRAYING MANTISES, PIAZZA, SPURIOUS, WALLET, BLURB, AROMATIC, RESIDUAL, MOUSE, LOATHE, KENNEL, EMPLOY