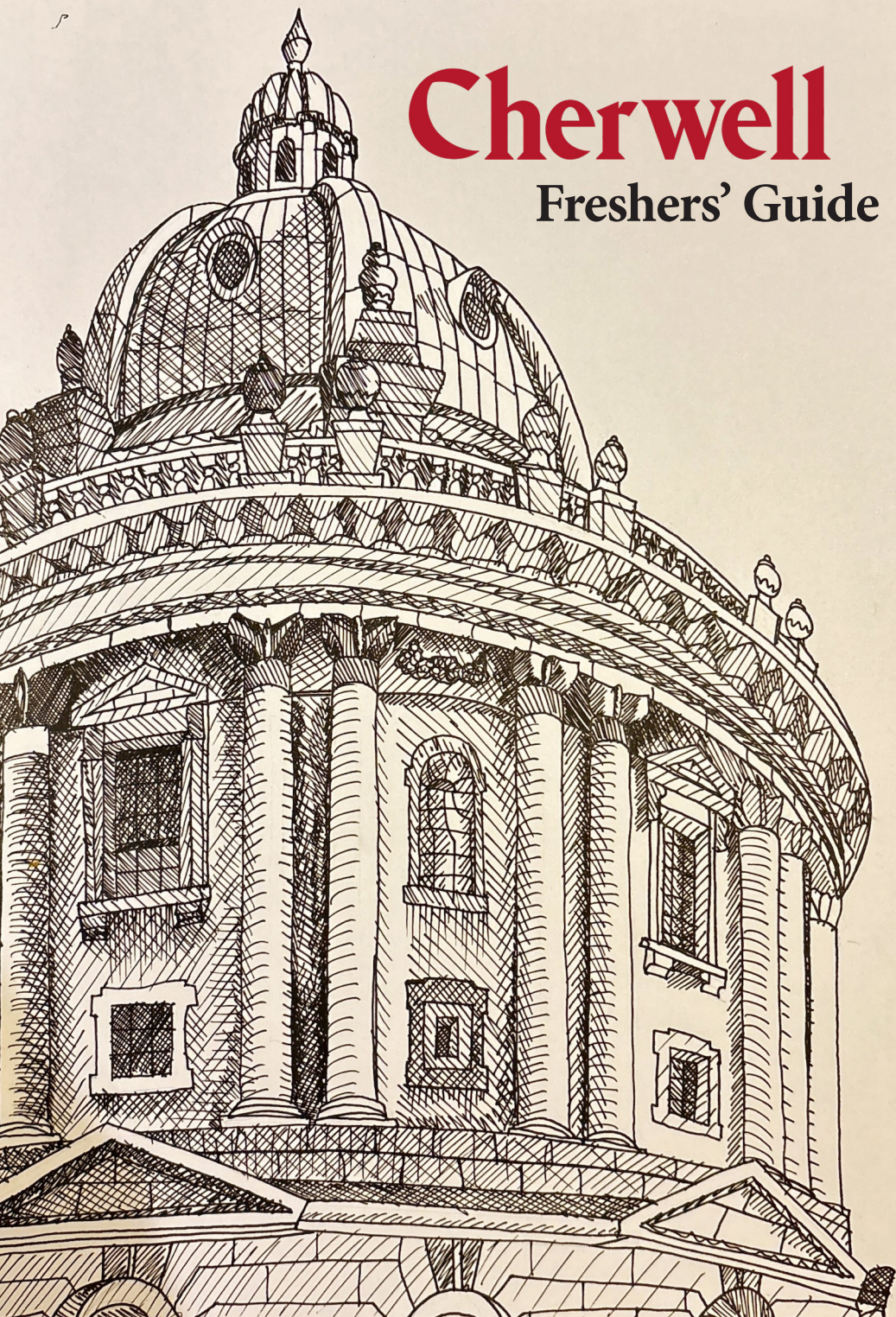


Cherwell

Freshers' Guide



Editors' note

**OSKAR DOEPKE and
EMMA HEAGNEY**

Welcome to Oxford – and congrats! You've made it to the best university in the world, and, according to The Times, the fifth best in the UK. As you begin a transformative three, four, or even six years, your emotions may be running high. Whether you're raring to go or battling a pit in your stomach, this guide should put your mind at ease and prepare you for an amazing first term at the University of Oxford.

With so much about to change, it's completely normal to feel clueless or overwhelmed. You will probably have more independent work than you ever did at school, and your sleep schedule may not survive late nights dancing at the Bullingdon. But amid the stress,

hangover mornings, and Pot Noodle dinners, you will come to appreciate the small moments that make this University so special – and there'll be plenty of big ones too, from formals to college balls to garden parties.

In this Freshers' Guide, we'll be sharing our hard-won knowledge, from the best pubs in Oxford to surviving your first deadline. The writing, editing, and design of every page wouldn't have been possible without our wonderful Deputy Editors, section editors, and creative team – expect to see more of their fantastic work in our fortnightly print editions, available from your JCR or Lodge.

This term, Cherwell is headed by a second-year with the joie de vivre that only comes with being fresh out of Prelims, and a fourth-year all too used to the regular ebbs and flows of Oxford

life. Sharing our perspectives in these pages is what makes Cherwell such a relief in a tightly packed term, and there are plenty of ways for you to get involved this Michaelmas.

Fancy yourself as a writer? Email us a pitch, and you could see your byline online or in print. If you're looking to edit others' work as well as write your own, you can apply to join our enthusiastic team of section editors.

Cherwell could be your first step to a fulfilling career in journalism – just look at our alumni, including Evelyn Waugh, Christina Lamb, and Baroness Hogg (no pressure). Before you know it, you may be writing your own Editor's Note in the 2027 or 2028 Freshers' Guide. In the meantime, relax, enjoy yourself, and keep off the grass!

Image credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.

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A short introduction to Oxford's history

ABI CHRISTIE

If you wander into Blackwells on Broad Street in Freshers' Week, you will be greeted with rows upon rows of books that explore the history of Oxford, and the University's place therein. What you might not find in these various histories of Oxford, however, is how very much alive and breathing the past is. It will only be as you explore the city, and become acquainted with the nooks and crannies of your college, that you will realise how the history of this university is quite the opposite of dead and buried. In fact, it will jump out at you from the centuries-old cracks in the pavements; it will envelop you as you walk through libraries and colleges, and peer down at you from the portraits in the dining hall. This very short introduction will sketch an outline of the University's history and highlight how thoroughly intertwined your time here is with it.

The city itself dates back to an Anglo-Saxon settlement known as 'Oxnaforð', positioned between two rivers, the Isis and the Cherwell. Being situated here, on a low-lying plain, has meant that Oxford has flooded for centuries – a delight you will undoubtedly experience during the coming winter months.

When exactly the University was founded is unclear, but historical evidence suggests that teaching began sometime in 1096. The lack of evidence makes it difficult to understand how teaching took place in this embryonic period. Henry II's pronouncement in 1167 that English students should not attend the University of Paris seemed to open up greater opportunities for development in Oxford. In 1188, Gerald of Wales gave a public reading of his work in Oxford, and the men who made up his audience – university dons, lecturers, and doctors – offer a clearer picture of the University's emerging structure.

Oxford's 'curriculum', across its eight centuries of existence, has undergone many changes. Teaching originated as informal discussion and debate, with no specific subject matter to follow. By the Late Middle Ages, we can identify a series of disciplines offered; students could study the arts, theology, canon law, civil law, and medicine. The 'schools' that can be seen on the ground floor of the Old Bodleian's Old Schools Quadrangle once housed lectures and examinations for such subjects – the size of these rooms indicate how much the University has grown since.

The collegiate system we are familiar with today came into existence in the 13th century, with the establishment of Oxford's first colleges (Balliol, Merton, and University College have all jostled for the title of 'the oldest', and you will find the students of each loyally defending their college's claim). Colleges, of which there are now 32, continue to be created today – the most recent being Reuben College in 2019.

The first recorded conflict between 'town and gown' dates to 1209, when townsfolk murdered two students and scholars subsequently fled to Cambridge, founding the rival university there. Tensions were brewing in Oxford due to the privileged legal rights the University's scholars held within the city. The St Scholastica Day Riot in 1355 marked the culmination of this, when a bloody three-day brawl ensued after an argument broke out between students and locals. This relationship is (thankfully) a lot more bloodless today, but is also one that continues to evolve as the city grows and the University expands.

A kaleidoscopic array of architectural styles is visible in the historical university buildings across Oxford. If you look up at the exterior walls of the three colleges on Turl Street, you might notice – despite the iconic sandy-coloured

stone – how very different the architectural embellishments are. The medieval battlements that once fronted Exeter College were removed in the 20th century, whereas battlements were added in the 19th century to the exterior of Jesus College. Such stylistic features took shape across many centuries and are far from relics of bygone eras; rather, the continual desire to invest in the past and revitalise for the future has allowed for such incredible longevity and diversity.

Oxford University existed for eight centuries before it began to permit women to study here. It was only in 1878 that Lady Margaret Hall was established as the first academic hall to admit women. Most former women's colleges – like St Anne's College or St Hugh's College – are situated further out of the historical University centre of Oxford.

Despite this, it took a further 40-odd years, in 1920, for the University to officially admit and recognise women as full members of the institution. Then only in 1974 did the first group of men's-only colleges allow women to study there. In the face of this history of discrimination, it remains imperative that current students continue to strive towards greater opportunities for all at Oxford.

This whistlestop historical tour only brushes the surface of the vast and incredible history that makes up Oxford University. As a student, you inherit this history and take on a pivotal role in shaping its future. As you settle in and begin to make Oxford your home, the history of this university will become more personal. Whether you spend your time memorising every detail of your college's history (guilty), or find yourself absentmindedly nodding along to the hundredth 'J.R.R. Tolkien' walking tour in Radcliffe Square, Oxford's history will become as much a part of you as you will of it.

Making the most of Freshers' Week

**ROSA BARUCH
HARRISON**

I can still picture it. A month and a half (ish) had passed since the fateful results day, and suddenly October rolled around. You arrive in Oxford, by plane, train, or automobile, and if you are lucky, the autumn air still hangs warm from the dregs of the summer heat. You arrive at the porter's lodge of your college to collect your room key and, subsequently, haul your luggage up three flights of ancient stairs – no lift in sight. You try to unpack and introduce yourself to your staircase neighbours, the first of a million names you will try not to forget. I can imagine that most incoming students have this fairly romantic view of their arrival in the 'city of dreaming spires', and I can assure you that this is pretty accurate – up to a point.

I ask that you are not naive as you enter potentially one of the most intense weeks of transitioning, socialising, and, for some, drinking that you have experienced so far. I recommend that you follow the mindset that 'health is wealth' and 'wealth equals a strong grade average'. Granted, I may sound like your mother when I say this, but take on all vitamins available (supplements, oranges, etc.), in tandem with enough sleep, so that you may make it out of Week 0 with an intact immune system. 'Freshers flu' really is no joke, and were you to ignore such advice, I fear an early morning trip to the John Radcliffe may be on the cards. Even something as simple as a day, afternoon, or hour to yourself could be the reset you need to power through and avoid Week 1 blues.

One thing you should not fear, however, is boredom. There are an overwhelming number of freshers' events on offer, from the university-wide Freshers' Fair held at the Examination Schools to college-level drinks mixers and familiarisation trips around the city. The Freshers' Fair is a great place to start if you are interested in literally anything, and it can be a springboard to taster sessions and joining sports teams or



societies. I can assure you that, contrary to general assumption, you won't be spending all your time buried in the library nurturing your inquisitive young mind – there will be time for the activities you crammed into the final few lines of your personal statement. Whether you want to try biohacking, historical reenactment, or Australian rules football, your passion will be represented, and you can use these clubs as a fantastic opportunity to cast the net beyond the hallowed walls of your college quad.

Freshers' Week may well be the best week of your life, but I sincerely hope that it is not. View it as a starting pistol for a vibrant and perhaps challenging marathon of a year, and you are on the right track. Health conservation and simply getting stuck in stand as my top pieces of advice for enjoying the week as much as possible. But do not be afraid, as the fun does not stop there. Your first Michaelmas is filled to the brim with exciting Oxford traditions to look forward to, starting with Matriculation and ending with various Oxmas celebrations. Finally, as overwhelming as this all may sound, I hope that you try to take it all in. As before you quite realise it, the date will be late June, the sun will be shining once again, and you will be walking out of your final Prelim, wondering where on earth all that time went.

Image credit: David Iliff, CC BY 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Green spaces in Oxford

—FREYA ROBSON—

University Parks: If you're in need of sprawling fields and winding paths, then look no further than Uni Parks. It's full of plenty of trees to sit under while chatting with friends as you can trick yourself into thinking that you get your reading done outside!

Christ Church Meadows: An idyllic space to wander round and see everything that Oxford has to offer: punting on the river, the beautiful Christ Church exterior, and more than a handful of bright-eyed tourists.

Botanical Gardens: Free to enter with your Bod Card and just across the road from Magdalen College, the Botanical Gardens are a slice of the serene that every student should explore at least once. Fans of *His Dark Materials* in particular should look out for Lyra and Will's famous bench!

Hinksey Park and Port Meadow: Slightly further out from the centre in either direction, both parks are bustling during the sun-soaked months with students swimming in the lakes to cool in exam season.

Finding your niche: Oxford societies

PRIYA BURROW

At the start of my first year, my approach to the Freshers' Fair could generously be described as pathetic. Rather than seizing the chance to explore new interests and unfamiliar hobbies, I focused on which stalls were giving away free Domino's and spent an embarrassing amount of time considering paintball for £12 (it was discounted, after all). With hindsight, I can attribute my apathy at least partly to sheer overwhelm: the almost surreal experience of being surrounded by societies for every possible interest, whether burgeoning or long-held.

Nothing captures this better than the array of niche societies on display at Oxford. Colleges offer brilliant, ready-made sanctuaries and social backbones, but they can quickly become claustrophobic. Societies disrupt that structure. They can offer something unusual or hyperspecific, or simply bring together a group of students you would never otherwise encounter. Finding something niche at Oxford might just be one of the best ways of finding your place in your first year. And at Oxford, there is no shortage of niches to fall into.

Oxford Pole Sports challenges every stereotype you might expect of a typical Oxford sports club. Open to all abilities, it offers a clear pathway to progress, including the chance to compete at varsity level. Its recent performance at the Museum of Natural History, alongside collaborations with Sapphic Sounds and T-Time Socials, shows that the society stretches well beyond training sessions and varsity competition (despite recently becoming a Half Blue sport). There is something uniquely bonding about being equally terrible at something for the first time, and pole turns that initial vulnerability into part of its appeal.

A particular favourite of last year's Pembroke College freshers, the Salsa and Bachata Society, offers another all-abilities activity that is inherently social. For anyone already exhausted by the Freshers' Week cycle of 'name, college, subject', dancing offers the relief of having something else to do. Here, learning a new skill with several new partners a night gives you something to interact through, and the society's lively socials provide a different kind of occasion altogether. Whether you are a seasoned dancer or have never tried a single step, you may well

find your niche just by showing up.

If you have already found your niche, Oxford's societies give you licence to indulge it unashamedly. There are probably few places where an intense enthusiasm for a 19th-century playwright can constitute an entire social life, but Oxford is happily one of them. No society illustrates this more clearly than the Oscar Wilde Society. Whether it is watching an Oscar Wilde garden play or attending an open mic night, you will find your fellow committed Wildeans – or simply people who share your love of literature, queer history, theatre, and aesthetics.

Perhaps the best evidence that Oxford has not yet exhausted every possible niche is that students still find new ones. The newly launched Mahjong Society welcomes complete beginners alongside experienced players, and its fortnightly sessions combine competition and casual play with an opportunity to share Chinese culture. Its arrival is also a reminder that Oxford's niches are not simply inherited traditions, and sometimes finding your niche means making one yourself.

So, as you weave your way through what feels like an endless line of freshers' stalls, try to find the one that makes you stop. Maybe you already love Wilde or have always wanted to try dance. Maybe you have no idea how to play mahjong, but your friends implore you to join anyway. Or maybe you walk past pole sports and think, why not? Finding your niche is not about finding something obscure or unusual. It is about finding something specific to you. Beyond your college, Oxford can feel huge and overwhelming, but a small group of people enthusiastic about the same oddly specific thing can make it feel manageable.

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



A guide to blades, bumps, and boathouses

TI-JEAN MARTIN

I write this having just returned from a sweaty hour at the gym. What was I doing? Moving back and forth on a strange contraption whilst staring at a wall, or, as rowers call it, erging. If you'd asked me what that meant in Freshers' Week, I'd have had no idea.

Rowing can seem like a sport full of this unique combination of effort and jargon, especially to those of us not fortunate enough to have learned to row beforehand. But, whilst another *Cherwell* piece was perhaps correct to describe it as "undertrained, overly confident students making a complete pig's ear out of what can be a beautiful sport", there is something uniquely Oxonian about rowing – something that makes the 6am outings and wall-staring sessions more worthwhile than they might initially seem.

During whichever Freshers' Week club night precedes your first taste of rowing, you will probably feel larger-than-life. This will not be how you feel when you first get in a boat – when I got the posture wrong, a more experienced rower said: "Maybe he just can't do it". "Maybe I just can't do it" will probably be what you say after an hour in an eight-person boat.

But you might also feel something that'll make you want to come back. And if you commit, you'll be thrown into the world of novice training, where everyone is as clueless as you. As Michaelmas goes on, you'll build up to the Thames Regatta, a side-by-side race for novices. Training will get more frequent, earlier (due to the unfortunate schedules of Oxford life), colder, and wetter (due to the unfortunate schedules of Oxford weather). But you'll be in a proper squad for the first time, and a win is almost better when you're completely soaked from waiting around for the start!

Thus ends the novice period, and you become a 'senior', or full member of your college's Boat Club, unsuit and all. Do expect, however, that Oxford weather will come back to bite you. There's

a very high chance that your first term as a senior might be completely outing-less, drenched by the Isis' propensity to swell to incomprehensible proportions at the first sight of a rain cloud.

If your college doesn't have access to a non-Isis training stretch, Hilary will be a term of endless erging, sessions in the indoor tank, and probably one (or more) 2k test(s). These are truly gruelling, and you will ask yourself why they even exist. In an ideal world, this training would prepare you for Torpids, the first of the intercollegiate bumps races. Because the Isis is a wuss, however, last year saw the tournament run 'half divisions', which meant that most new seniors went a whole term without touching a boat.

If it's the same for you, you'll get your first taste at Summer Vllls or 'Eights', the most famous bumps tournament. And what you'll taste is quite something – the mad dash of a crew to bump or be bumped. Rules differ between Torpids and Eights, but if you qualify, you'll be trying over a four-day period to gain as many positions as possible by hitting/passing/forcing a concession from the boat in front, and avoiding the boat behind doing the same to you. If you manage to bump up every day, Blades glory will be yours, and if you do the opposite, getting Spoons is just as fun.

This can, of course, be dangerous, but Eights is what rowing is all about. Summer outings are a far cry from the wet and cold of late Michaelmas, and when you're bombing it down the river with a crew you've spent an intense few weeks training with, all the trials and tribulations suddenly become worth it.

Hopefully this will have persuaded you to give it a shot, or if not, to be amongst the crowds that line the Isis in the last week of May, cheering the boats on with questionable signs and slogans, washed down with a healthy serving of Pimm's. An honourable mention to coxes here – crews would be nowhere without them. If you don't want to row, be a cox!

Image credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.



Glossary

Blade: Otherwise an 'oar', what you and your crewmates use to propel the boat.

Blades: Bumping up every day of a tournament.

Boathouse: The building from which boats are launched. Most are located on Boathouse Island at the bottom of Christ Church Meadows.

Bow seat: The front of the boat, though of course facing backwards.

Bow side: The left side of the boat from the rower's perspective, starting with bow seat, and ending with seven seat (all of the odd numbers).

Bumps: A unique form of racing where you bump, 'row over', or are bumped.

Cox: Short for 'coxswain', the person who shouts from the back of the boat and can see forward.

Eights: Intercollegiate bumps tournament in Trinity.

Erg: Short for 'ergonometer', a dry-land rowing training machine.

Feather: To flatten the end of the blade.

Gut: An S-shaped bend in the middle of the Isis course, usually the location of a dramatic bump.

Headship: Victory in a rowing tournament, achieving 'Head of the River' status.

Regatta: In this context, a type of competition in which boats race side-by-side to complete a course.

Torpids: Intercollegiate bumps tournament in Hilary.

2k: Hell.

'Pint?': The best and worst of Oxford pubs

MAIR ANDREWS

When your day is either in your room or your library, a third space is essential. Pubbing is a crucial part of British culture and Oxford's offerings are some of the best. Though "work hard, play hard" is the Oxford student motto, it's worth noting that Oxford pubs are a great environment, whether your plans are to get drunk or to relax for the evening. No matter where you are in the city, the drinks are not cheap, so use this guide to make sure that you are spending your money in the right places.

Some key points to remember: everywhere sells non-alcoholic alternatives, everywhere is expensive, and most places are card-only.

The Lamb and Flag: Affectionately called 'flam' by the locals, *Cherwell* readers have voted this pub as their preferred venue for two years running. Nestled between Keble and St John's (and even home to some students in the rooms above), it is the epitome of the Oxford pub: down a cobblestone street lit by a singular lamp, students often stand outside with their drinks (often, also, in black-tie). Throughout the month, they host folk-music events and even book clubs! The pub has always been worth the hype, but new merch ranging from sweaters to scarves means that it's getting the public recognition that it deserves.

The Four Candles: Oxford's preferred Wetherspoons, according to *Cherwell* readers. This is more to do with its central location than quality of pint (it is a Spoons, nothing more). Make sure you have your ID because they always check at the door. Often flooded with students, so be prepared to be cramped and even wait outside.

The Swan and Castle: The other Spoons. Less queuing, less atmosphere, longer walk. Choose your fighter.

White Rabbit: Did someone say pizza and pints? Tucked away behind Tesco, this pub offers food and beverage at a reasonable price and with the friendliest customer service in Oxford. here is one order you must try: The Mad Hatter is



a surprise where the chef chooses the toppings for you. Even their outdoor seating area has heaters, so it is perfect for all terms.

Turf Tavern: Under the Bridge of Sighs, there is a sign directing you down a little passage labelled "An Education in Intoxication". Though it is only a Greene King, it is a rite of passage in your first weeks at Oxford (even if you never go back). Despite being remarkably average and lacking in atmosphere, being one of Oxford's most touristy pubs means that they accommodate something rare in the city's pub scene: seating.

King's Arms: One of Oxford's most atmospheric pubs, but it comes at a cost depending on what you are drinking: stay away from spirits and stick to beer if you are on a budget. Despite the range of seating available indoors, students spill onto the benches outside - and even onto Parks Road - to enjoy their evening with an iconic view of the Sheldonian Theatre.

The Bear Inn: Home to *Cherwell*'s termly Editor's Drinks and one of Oxford's oldest pubs, The Bear Inn is one of Oxford's liveliest venues with events each week, including jazz performances. Seating is mainly outdoors, but it is well-covered by heaters and a roof. From most colleges, it involves a walk past stunning Oxford sites: not far from the spires of Merton, Christ Church, or Lincoln Library, and you can often stumble past the Radcliffe Camera on your way home. What more could you want in an Oxford pub?

The Chequers: If you can find it down a small avenue on the High Street, The Chequers is a versatile stop. Their seating accommodates big groups and two-person catch-ups. Various college crests on the walls make it feel incredibly student-y despite being in the centre of town. Near the entrance is a stack of different board games, making it a good place to go for an evening's entertainment when your essay has taken all the words from you.

The Head of the River: Once upon a time, this pub was home to *Cherwell* News Meeting socials before the editors realised how expensive it was. Yes, this pub is objectively expensive. If you have visiting parents, however, it is perfectly placed: a beautiful view of the river (and the *Cherwell* offices) means that you can watch rowers training and enjoy a walk through Christ Church Meadows on the way home. A good splash of Oxford.

College bars: In theory, drinking at college bars should be cheaper than going to the pub. In practice, this varies by college. Certain bars are notorious for their drinks: Balliol Blues (or Reds, or whatever colour they cook up), St Peter's Cross-Keys, and Merton Power Pints.

Your mission: Later this term, *Cherwell* will be conducting its annual Intoxigation of Oxford's drinking habits - take the tour, have a pint, and help out.

Image credit: Jim Linwood, CC BY 2.0 via Flickr.

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Wednesday 14th October:

Ballroom & Latin (6pm),
Salsa (8pm), Bachata (9pm)



**Catholic
Chaplaincy,
St Aldate's.
OX1 1RD**

The first deadline



STANLEY ARLIDGE

There will come a time in Freshers' Week when, head still pounding from Bridge the night before, you look with dread at a first essay or problem sheet. When you meet this inevitable challenge, here is a list of dos and don'ts to bear in mind.

Don't treat it as the be-all and end-all. It does not matter what happens in your first piece of work. Your tutors, however much you may want to impress them, are not expecting the world from you in your first week. If they were, there would be no point in teaching you! You should not expect A-level-like praise-filled feedback, nor should you want it.

Don't overwork yourself. Whisper it quietly, but the first few weeks at University (even at Oxford) are about getting to know the new people you will spend the next three to four years with. You will never be exploring Oxford for the first time with friends in Freshers' Week again. Don't waste this opportunity by spending too many hours in the library. Work, yes, but remember that when you look back on your university experience, it will not be the first problem sheet that you recall fondly. Instead, it will be the memories of signing up for a club or society where you made your best friends.

Don't be tempted into an all-nighter. You do not want that habit. It's much better to be sharp for the tutorial, the actual learning, than half asleep with an essay or problem sheet that somehow seems much worse at 9am than it

did at 4am in the morning.

Don't use AI. Please. There is no point in working so hard to get to Oxford only to ask a robot to do your work for you.

Do ask for help. There is no shame in not knowing how to approach the first piece of work. Your personal tutor, your tute partners, and your college parents can all help. Working through the first reading list or problem sheet together is a fantastic way to get to know your subject mates.

Do get to know the new software you will be working with. Oxford is full of platforms (Solo, Eduroam, Panopto) that will be critical to how you work at university; make sure that you get the hang of using them. Use the first piece of work to explore these powerful tools; it will save you a lot of time later.

Do remember that this is the whole point. The great thing about Oxford is the freedom you get with your work. Tutorial essays are an opportunity to play around and explore a subject. Reading lists are long, not because tutors want to see you bury yourself in a pile of books until your eyes go limp, but because they want to see you dive into different parts of the topic. One of the great privileges of Oxford is that most essays you write do not count and are, instead, a chance to explore areas you are interested in.

To sum up, the first deadline is important, but not that important. When the moment of dread hits you, remember this is the start of an exciting journey. Try your best, remember your tutors are ordinary people, and it will all be fine.

Image credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.

A guide to Oxford's libraries

—OSKAR DOEPKE—

Grappling with an essay crisis? Need to run away from your friends? Well, worry not, as *Cherwell's* got you covered with a guide to Oxford's best libraries.

Law Library: If you care about getting a first, the Law Library is where it happens. A brutalist building with enough sockets, desks, and impostor syndrome to go around, this is where the magic (of the reading list) happens.

Gladstone Link: Known as the 'Glink', it's a two-storey underground library connecting the Radcliffe Camera and Bodleian Library. Although slightly eerie, nobody will ever find you here, and maybe that's a good thing.

Radcliffe Camera: I mean, it's famous, and for good reason. Get there early, grab a seat under the dome, and enjoy it.

Taylorian: Or, as Emma calls it, the 'Slaylorian'. Upstairs, you'll find the grandeur of an 'Oxford' reading room – natural light, built-in bookshelves, ornate corvices, and (of course) a chandelier – but on the lower floors you'll find backroom-esque spaces, best for the lock-in. With Najar's just outside, the Taylorian has everything you'll need.

KB Chen China Centre Library: Calm, undercrowded, and with everything a library needs, the KB Chen China Centre Library is way too underrated. It's even got nice bakeries nearby to sort out your post-study snack!

Oxford Westgate Library: Bet you haven't heard of this one. Public libraries might not be fancy enough for the typical Oxonian, but where else can you pick up some Smiggle stationery on your way out?

All in all, Oxford has no shortage of libraries: whether you're chasing a first or just some quiet, there's a library with your name on. Use this guide as a starter, then find your favourite among the 100+ we're privileged enough to have access to.

The 'work-life balance' myth

ALICE SANDERS

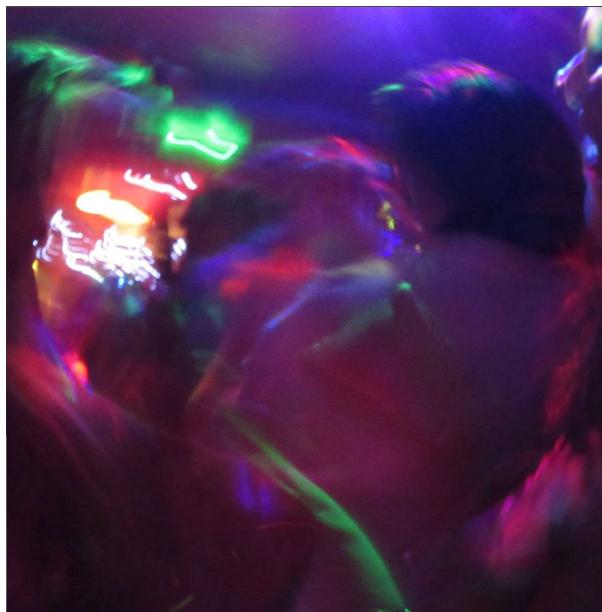
When you mention to someone that you are about to begin a degree at Oxford University, the responses are generally fairly formulaic: "you must be so smart!", "sounds like hard work!". Although neither of those answers is exactly refutable, they make blindingly obvious the general assumption about studying at Oxford: that it engulfs you in a constant, unattainable level of work.

The reassurance from current students, along with the University's own advertising, is always plastered with the term 'work-life balance' – that elusive, almost mythical concept, whose meaning is quite difficult to grasp. For most, there exists little binary opposition between 'work' and 'life'. Is not 'life', after all, comprised of all its elements: leisure, chores, work, and everything in between?

The term itself, though perhaps more of a shiny veneer to conceal a general disillusionment with the concept of 'work', does contain an essential truth: life can never be entirely 'work'. The notion of a 'work-life balance' is one that is ultimately self-destructive in its complete unsustainability, not to mention the encroaching pressures of burnout. Building a life at university that embraces all aspects of living can be a challenge, and often feels like an impossible juggling act, where the responsibilities of your studies never sit evenly on the scales with the other elements of your day-to-day existence. However, as an Oxford student, there is no better opportunity to work on weighing your time and priorities.

Big workloads undeniably accompany an Oxford degree, but that is far from saying that the work is all-consuming. While the balance of the scales constantly shifts, it is possible to learn to move alongside this continuous readjustment.

One of the main tools that life at this University offers



to support this balancing act is the plethora of welfare and social opportunities accessible through it. Whether it's college events, internships and career events, social spaces in the city, or the almost endless range of societies, there are constantly chances to engage in activities outside of your degree, at any level of time and commitment.

Though I would by no means claim to be an expert in 'work-life balance', my first year at Oxford has taught me more than anything that it is a theory to be experimented with. I definitely learned this concept the hard way, in moments of indecision between whether a movie with friends is more or less pressing than my current essay crisis. What is most significant to note in these moments is that, for everyone, 'work-life balance' will look entirely different. Whether you choose the 'work' or the 'life' at any given time is a personal choice, varying entirely by situation and priorities, all of which are entirely valid. The correct choice is one often learnt by trial and error, so only

by disturbing the balance can you notice where equilibrium sits.

In my own decision-making, I have found commitment to be the greatest asset to balance. Just as essay deadlines are set, a commitment to social events, societies or any other responsibilities can be a deadline in itself, and I use this mentality to enforce my own standard of balance. This is by no means fixed, and, in fact, many prefer social flexibility to counteract protected working time.

Whatever means of managing your time you choose, perhaps the most important thing is not to create a stark divide between 'work' and 'life'. In such a divide, a sense of priority is instilled – that work is something that should be constantly pressing and urgent, and that life is what you use to balance it. Instead, try to see 'work' as an element of life, an important one, of course, but merely one composite part of your life in Oxford.

Image Credit: Anne Irving for Cherwell.

What your subject says about you

FREYA ROBSON

After being referred to as 'French and Philosophy Freya' by strangers and friends alike over my first year at Oxford, I have discovered that what you study is not simply a matter of how you fill your days, but is an inextricable part of your identity that becomes your shadow. So before entering the inevitable Freshers' Week cycle of introducing your name and subject to each new friendly face, you may find yourself wondering – what does my subject say about me?

Firstly, there's the character analysis that revealing your subject seems to set in motion. PPE is only studied by PMs-in-the-making. Computer Science is just for those plagued by social awkwardness, and Classics, of course, is reserved for students blessed with generational wealth. But do all English students really performatively read soliloquies

aloud in their college gardens? The odd few, perhaps, but certainly not all. Whilst these basic caricatures are funny between friends – and may in fact be true of the past – it is key to keep in mind that they are caricatures nevertheless. The greatest thing about university is the range of perspectives that you encounter. There are so many impossibly exciting things to discover about the people you meet along the way, so make sure not to make your mind up about someone based on whether they read Kant or Darwin in their free time.

Next come the presumptions about your approach to university life. STEM students versus humanities students, problem sheets versus essays, six contact hours per day versus one tutorial per week; the age-old debate of which is 'easier'. And for those unfortunate E&M students, dubbed 'Easy & Manageable', any hopes of being able to complain about your

workload are quickly dashed by eye rolls and comparisons. However, once again, it seems we need a wider perspective. As one of the top universities in the world, what unites all Oxford students is passion for their subject, and a willingness to put in the work to build on this. You can work as much or as little on your degree as you wish (though your tutors would prefer the former), whether you're a historian, chemist, medic, or linguist.

So after all this, what does my subject say about me? In reality, not much. During your first weeks at Oxford, you'll meet a seemingly endless number of people, and nearly all of your conversations will start with the classic (if not slightly formulaic) introduction: name, subject, and hometown. But once you've ticked this box, make sure to delve a little deeper. Because after all, it doesn't matter what you're studying – all that matters is that you love it!

College marriage, and how to find the 'one'

OSKAR DOEPKE

A few weeks into my first Michaelmas, I came home and talked to my mom, among other things, about not knowing who to marry. My friends were getting married left and right – proposing at formals, the college bar, and Bully Boiler alike – and I was still, admittedly, rather single.

My mom, unsurprisingly, became a little concerned – not having expected her freshly 18-year-old son to come back from university worried about, of all things, marriage.

Now, of course, I'm not talking about real marriage, to my mom's relief (and perhaps, my grandparents' dismay), but 'college' marriage.

College marriages are what other universities might call a student ambassador scheme, just a little more informal. In the year above, your college parents are there to welcome you to Oxford – likely planning a get-

together during Freshers' Week and are people you can turn to for advice, whether on personal issues or how little of the reading list you can get away with. Next year, you and whoever you marry will become parents yourselves.

Most of that, I assume, you'll have worked out by now. What you might have on your mind, however, is how to find your very own college love.

I am now, I'm pleased to report, happily married, and what I would say first is not to rush. The person you are closest to now in Week 0 won't necessarily be someone you're friends with by Trinity, and you don't want to subject your children to a messy fallout (I, as a child of divorced college parents, can attest to this). The same goes for romantic partners.

Who you marry is something you have full choice in, and as college marriages are, at their core, mentorship programmes, you should prioritise someone

you see as a good co-mentor. To that end, marry someone you like not only as a best friend, but someone you can depend on – and someone who will be there. Do check that at least one spouse won't be on their year abroad, unless the single-parent lifestyle calls to you (my apologies, language students).

And if you're feeling risqué, why not go for a three-person marriage (or four people, if your college allows it)? The more parents, after all, the more advice for your college children, I suppose.

But for now, enjoy being a child, and enjoy finding your 'one'. Spend time with your parents, stage an elaborate proposal, and host a wedding in your college chapel, walking down the aisle to Taylor Swift's 'Love Story' before reading your vows. For next year, it'll be your turn to, as my college dad put it, spill "all the top-secret tips and tricks" to your own college children.

Student meals which don't sacrifice flavour

EMMA HEAGNEY

Not all college kitchens are made equal. For those of you with recently refurbished accommodation, this may be the year that you become the next Anthony Bourdain or Gordon Ramsay. If, however, your college opts to provide you simply with 'tea points', or the infamous single-capacity 'kitchens', the title of

'microwave maestro' may soon be yours.

Fear not, young fresher. Whether big or small, old or new, there is no reason for your kitchen to leave you without great-tasting meals. Welcome to Cherwell's top three essential student recipes, which are low on cost but big on flavour.

Image credit: Rhianna Pike for Cherwell.



JAMBALAYA

Cost: £5

Prep time: 45 minutes

This Louisiana classic packs spice and simplicity into one excellent meal. Jambalaya is a very adaptable option that can be as flavourful as you prefer, cooked together in one pot – forget about a separate hob for rice!

Start by browning a few sausages in a large pot, together with an onion, red or white. Then add a bell pepper, or multiple if you are looking to cook in bulk – as a student, you should.

To add the signature kick, chop a chilli into the pot, or substitute with chilli powder. Then season the dish with salt, pepper, and paprika. The best part comes next: cook the rice with the other ingredients, rather than on its own. Add about 300g of dry rice before pouring in a tin of chopped tomatoes.

If the chilli and paprika were not enough for you, you can add a light drizzle of Tabasco at this point. Last but not least, add a cube of vegetable stock mixed with hot water. Cook for half an hour with the lid on, checking periodically to ensure nothing sticks to the bottom. Jambalaya has it all: rice, spice, and everything nice. With just one pot, you can make plenty.



MASSAMAN CURRY

Cost: £7

Prep time: 45 minutes

With a pot of massaman paste setting you back roughly £2.25, this Thai dish goes a long way with only a few ingredients. In its simplest form, still delightful to taste, you can make a massaman curry by frying a white onion in a large pot until soft, then adding the massaman paste and heating it for about a minute. Add as much chicken breast as desired, and stir until it is seared and coated with the rich paste.

At this point, add a potato, cut into small chunks, and a tin of coconut milk. Stir and simmer with the lid on for about half an hour – this should cook the chicken and potatoes through. In the meantime, boil a portion of rice, as you usually would, 20 minutes before the curry is due to be ready.

This filling dish will provide enough food to last several days and can be easily adapted for a vegetarian diet by substituting the chicken for extra potato. More ambitious chefs may want to add a bay leaf and roasted peanuts, or even attempt to create their own paste.

BANH MI

Cost: £5

Prep time: 1 hour

Don't have a hob? Look no further than the Vietnamese banh mi: a delectable sandwich filled with umami, pickled flavours.

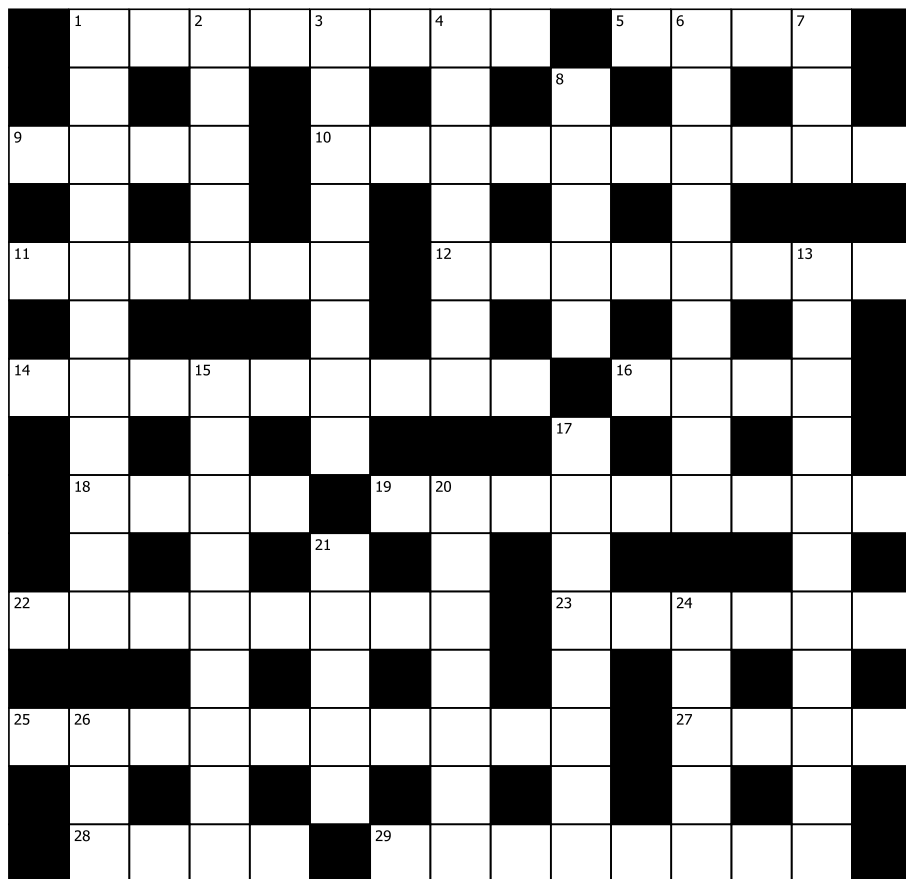
Begin with a crispy baguette as a base. Then, thinly chop a carrot into matchstick pieces, and finely peel a cucumber into ribbons with a vegetable/potato peeler. After this, slice a green chilli and some coriander. To pickle the carrots, mix sugar, salt, and rice wine vinegar with hot water (from your trusty tea point) until the sugar and salt dissolve – pour this mixture over the carrots and leave to pickle for an hour.

To compose the sandwich, cut the baguette in half and scoop out some bread to make room for the filling. Spread mayonnaise and Maggi seasoning (available at Tesco) on each side of the bread to enhance the flavour. Before adding the vegetables, including the drained carrots, add some cold cuts. There are unfortunately few options to buy Vietnamese cold cuts in Oxford, so feel free to substitute this ingredient with any cooked ham/pork slices you have. Shredded chicken is also a good option, and you can add any spices that you prefer. Slice the sandwich in half, perhaps to give your college spouse a pick-me-up after a long day of lectures.

Image credit: Emma Heagney for Cherwell.

TwoSpeed Crossword

— ALESSANDRA EDWARDS, NAT
ELDER, and ZOË MCGUIRE —



Across:

- 1: For a comedian, site of many bad jokes
5: Off-shoed rowers (we wish)
9: Folklore foe
10: Dinner which could be gownned
11: Like some caravans
12: Scout's targets
14: Gave way
16: Hilary, to 5A
18: Initiation costume for some classicists
19: Option to bring to a 10A
22: Owners of bulldogs?
23: Obtuse, as text
25: Embassy employee
27: Slang term meaning both good and bad
28: Magdalen resident?
29: Event which might adhere to International Drinking Rules

Down:

- 1: Afterparty adversary
2: Certain English flower?
3: Flexible limits

Across (cryptic)

- 1: Papa's Eton corruption lacks a place for lists (5, 3)
5: Flip at bullshit browser pages (4)
9: Captured by Apollo, Greek monster (4)
10: Algorithm corrupted without git, entering crash in fancy meal (6, 4)
11: Abruptly vomit after swallowing junk in place (6)
12: Boomers surprisingly have 500

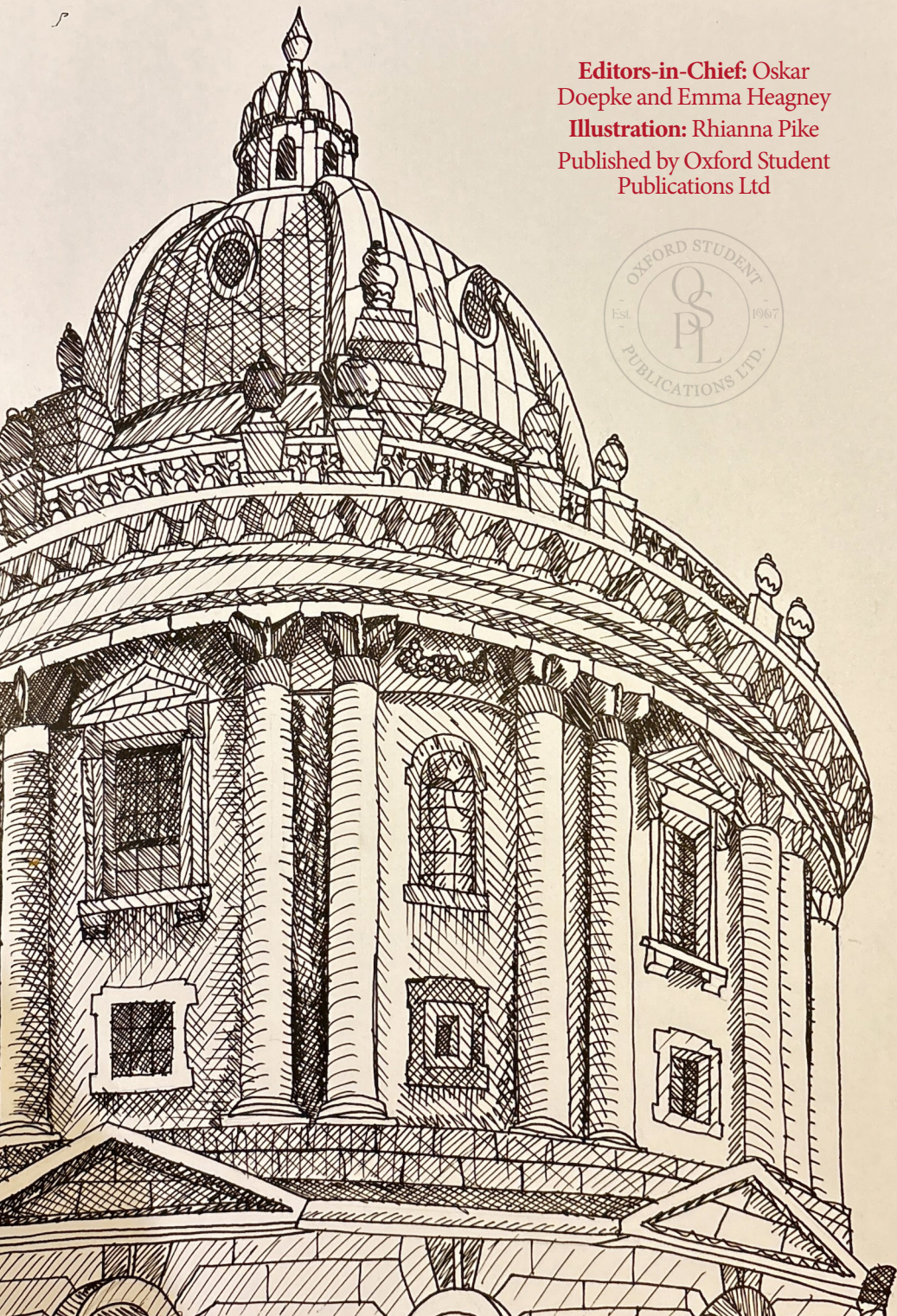
Down (cryptic):

- 1: Almost time to wine and dine, ending with run to late shift doorman (5, 6)
2: Shelter surrounds first rapid of

river (5)

- 3: Often skipper is aboard ship with hats (4, 4)
4: Pub returns in pallid story (7)
6: Stash mole and exhibit in museum (9)
7: Spanish star is incredibly large (3)
8: Man welcomes first and sixth of attendees to party (5)
13: A matier cult assemblies for ceremony (11)
15: Oxford alley leads to lost collegian (5, 4)
17: Soon to come to extra short argument (8)
20: Snitch, revealed by one nerd, is thrown out (7)
21: Setter welcomes Oxford University's rodent (5)
24: A-ha feature record by prominent individual (5)
26: Month and day of law exam (3)

Find the answers in
Week 0 print!



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